

BROOKLINE **TAB** NEWTON TAB

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Photo: Matt Healey

Not so little drummer boy: Harry Sandler, drummer for Orpheus Reborn, and Eric Gulliksen, on bass, jam in the basement of Sandler's Brookline home.

(Re-) Striking up the band

By **Ed Symkus**/ Senior Staff Writer

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You would have to be of a certain age - say, over 50, to remember the term "the Bosstown Sound." The same isn't true of one of the "sound's" practitioners, the band Orpheus, whose 1968 hit "Can't Find the Time" remains a staple of oldies radio.

A regrouping of the band, Orpheus Reborn, featuring four members from the days when they were still performing that song (plus a couple of “newbies”), plays at Johnny D's in Somerville on March 16.

"They saw a demographic," says Brookline resident Harry Sandler, the band's original drummer, of the marketing folks who came up with the Bosstown Sound concept. "There was music here, and they were trying to do something that was premature. It wasn't really a sound yet. They were trying to mirror the San Francisco sound, which was trying to mirror the Liverpool and London scene, but it failed because the bands here weren't mature enough."

He's referring to Orpheus, as well as groups such as the Ultimate Spinach, the Beacon Street Union and Eden's Children.

"MGM sunk a lot of money into it," says Sandler, 59, who is currently a vice president of Newton-based lecture agency, the American Program Bureau. "The Spinach got the most amount of publicity, and they were a good hard-rockin' band, but once you peeled it away, they were very derivative. We, on the other hand, didn't fit at all. No one knew what to make of us. We were a song band; we wrote little pop tunes."

The Bosstown Sound didn't make it, but Orpheus released four albums. In 1967, Sandler was drumming with the surf band the Mods, but was tiring of doing cover songs. A friend of a friend introduced him to the Worcester-based guys - Eric Gulliksen, Jack McKennes and Bruce Arnold - who had some original material, and who were looking for a drummer.

Sandler recalls how the name came about:

"As I tell it, I'm working at Wurlitzer's, thinking I'm in a really cool band, believing we were going to get a record contract. And I was speaking to a guy who was selling [sound] equipment there. The company was called Orpheum. We were going to use their equipment, and I wanted to call the band Orpheum. When I told Eric about it, he said it would be better to call it Orpheus, because Orpheus is the god of music and song and poetry. The name stuck."

That was in July 1967. Then the whirlwind began.

"We met the producer, Alan Lorber, in October," recalls Sandler. "In November, we were in the studio. The album was finished and mixed by the end of December. It came out at the end of January. And in February, we were tracking [on the radio] with 'Can't Find the Time.' In March, we did our first concert, opening for Cream at Brandeis University."

They made a little money, but broke up, as so many bands still do, when the members simply outgrew it. Sandler was the first to leave, which led to a successful solo career in, among other incarnations, the Harry Sandler Circus, which featured his own songs.

But a couple of years ago, McKennes and late-period Orpheus guitarist Stephen Martin bumped into each other at a party and did a little playing. That led to a gig in Scituate, for which McKennes called Sandler and Gulliksen to see if they wanted to sit in. Arnold, settled in California, was unavailable.

"We rehearsed four songs, says Sandler, "then went to Scituate. Steve and Jack started playing, then brought us up for the last four songs. We did 'Can't Find the Time,' and everybody went crazy. After the show we said to each other, 'What do you want to do?' "

What they did was add a couple of members - an old friend of Sandler's, guitarist Bob Dunlap, and Kathi Taylor on percussion and drums - to, as Sandler says, "put some meat on the bone." Since then, they've been practicing in the basement of Sandler's Brookline home almost every Sunday.

Sandler insists that Orpheus Reborn doesn't want to be known as an oldies band.

"We're better musicians now, and we're developing," he says. "We're aware of what we used to do, and we're proud of that. We've tried to take some of those tunes, and contemporize them.

"We do six-part harmonies, and we're still writing," he adds. "We were always a great live band, and we love to be out playing."

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Orpheus Reborn opens for Ten Years After at Johnny D's in Somerville on March 16. For information, call 617-776-2004.
