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The Real Deal

I knew from the very beginning that if the title of the book was going to be “The Heeey Baby Days of Beach Music,” Bill Deal would have to be a significant part of the book or the title would ring hollow for many. I did not know Bill personally but I knew I needed to make contact with him and was surprised at how accessible the legend appeared to be:

Email from Bill Deal August 1, 2003:

Hi Greg -

Bill Deal here - I cannot ‘open’ the file you sent but would be delighted to be a part and be helpful if possible. I’m afraid you’d have to send it the easiest way imaginable - HA!

Thanks for thinking of us - Bill

After I completed my first draft of “Ain’t No Bill Deal”, I sent Bill a copy.

I had no idea what to expect but I knew that anyone that answers emails with “CHEERS” had a sense of humor. After all, the story poked fun at Bill & The Rhondels in the latter days of the Disco age. I had pointed out in the story that Bill & the Rhondells were discoing in the 70’s, and “YMCA” was on their play list. What horror I thought back then, a great name like Bill Deal doing disco. How would Bill react to my story?

Email from Bill Deal Aug 7, 2003

this is GREAT stuff!! Thanks for including us!

You can reach me at 757 - 425 - 7776 or bdx6@aol.com

CHEERS! and BEST of luck!!

THANKS AGAIN!

bd

When I went to Bill's Web site and saw "We should have been arrested for wearing those suits", I knew Bill was the real deal. A couple of months later, I emailed Bill and asked him to write a story for the book, he replied immediately:

Email From Bill Deal November 11, 2003

Absolutely - will be happy to do a narrative for "The Heeby Days"

Thanks for asking :)

Bill

I was so proud to have one of the great stars of the greatest era of music to write a story for the book. When I got the story a few days later, I was so pleased. Wow! This is really good, some inside stories for "The Heeby Baby Days of Beach Music" written by one its greatest stars. I immediately thanked Bill.

Email from Bill Deal: November 20, 2003

glad you liked it - ha (great therapy writing it)

probably can find a white suit or 2 on our website

CHEERS!

Bill

www.billdeal.com

e-mail: bdx6@aol.com

I did find the white suits on the web site are they're included with the story, "Ain't No Bill Deal." The play on words with the chapter's title certainly did not mean to portray Bill's sudden death, because it is certainly a very big deal not to have Bill Deal with us anymore.

God Bless Bill Deal!

Written by Bill Deal on November 20, 2003 for publication in "The Heeby Baby Days of Beach Music."

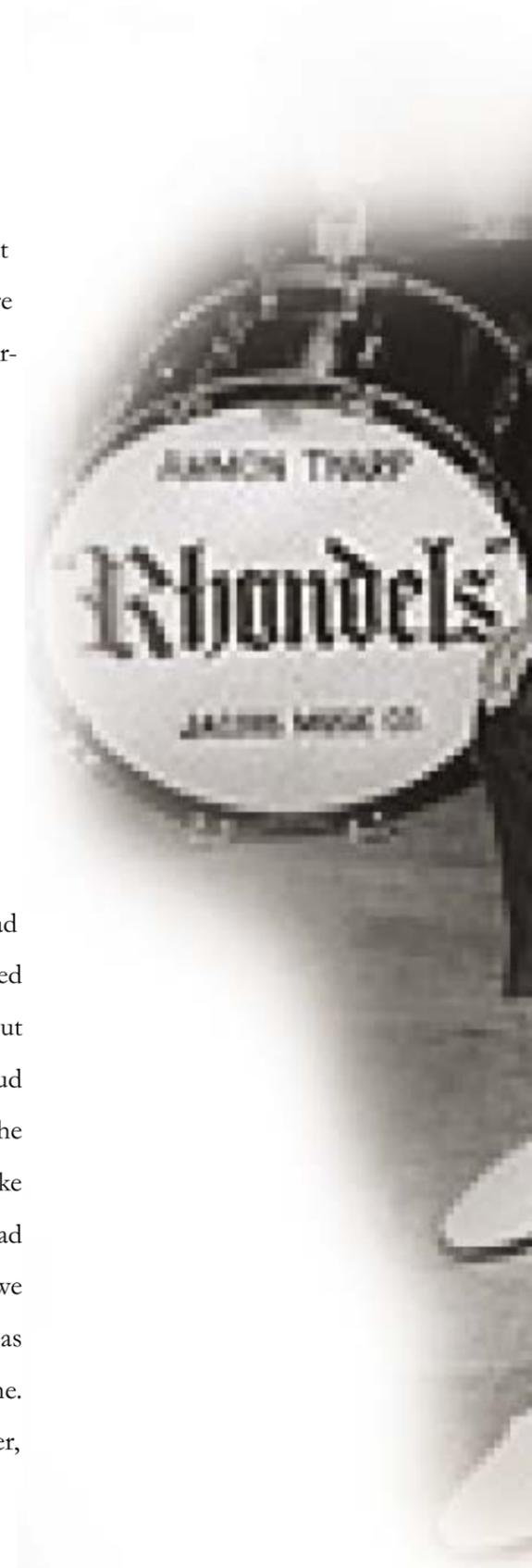
Remembering the 60's by Bill Deal,

Bill Deal & The Rhondels

During the summers we would perform in the afternoons - Sat/Sun - at the Peppermint Beach Club for what was called the Jam Session. We were huge fans of the Motown group the Temptations. This particular Sat. afternoon we were very much aware that later that night at the Dome - Va. Beach's Convention Center that hosted all the R&B and Rock Shows, the Four Tops were part of a Dick Clark Caravan of Stars show. Line-ups included not only shows like Dick Clark's Caravan of Stars but a room completely surrounded by every policeman available, protecting Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones from the most overly-excited and out of control fans I had ever seen.

Up to the front door rolled a long black Cadillac - only one person in it - a tall black stranger with SUNGLASSES painted on each front fender and the name 'David Ruffin' scripted beneath the shades. We thought perhaps it was one of the Four Tops that had dropped by to see what these 'kids' were doing on a Sat aft. I whispered to Ammon that I KNEW he was David Ruffin - HAD to be Ruffin - but the Tempts were not in town - just the Tops. We started "Ain't Too Proud to Beg" and the man who had been leaning on the cigarette machine at the end of the dance floor, BOLTED across the dance floor - took the mike and as our mouths dropped in disbelief - entertained as no one we had ever seen before. Of course he did "My Girl" and ANYTHING else we knew by the Temptations. He ran off stage and drove away as quietly as he arrived. Our lives were changed that day by another moment in time.

It was early 60's and there was no one - not one patron, not one dancer,





nor a 3.2 beer customer in sight when an entourage of folks came in to see what was going on. The small crowd boasted about the talent and new single recording of this little boy - who was blind - said his name was Little Stevie Wonder and that he was performing that night at the local Convention Center known as the Dome - the Alan Shepherd Convention Center where all major shows would eventually play here in Va. Beach. (Yep - we had famous astronauts, too!) Quite fortunately or as fate would have it, we had JUST DAYS EARLIER learned this most exciting song by Little Stevie Wonder - it had taken the country by storm - "Fingertips" sides A and B - was one of those rare exciting songs this country and the world would come to know. Having no proof that this brand new artist, a child - really - was who the folks said he was - but doubting not at all - we started the song and he was lifted to the stage. He couldn't have weighed 60 lbs., harmonica and all. It was one of those most amazing moments in time - lives would change from the influence of this purely genius child. The moment would never be forgotten. Little Stevie Wonder and his harmonica WAILED for 7 - 8 minutes - one of the most incredible moments I have ever witnessed. He went on to do his sell-out show that night at the Dome for WGH radio and Gene Loving of AGL Productions - a company founded by Gene and Dick Lamb, with whom I later became a partner. That partnership took us to many shows as promoters, put us at the helm of Alpha Recording Studio in Richmond, VA all the while developing the East Coast's #1 Night Spot - Rogue's Gallery on 17th St. - host to The Four Tops, Temptations, Franki Valli and the Four Seasons, Clarence Carter

and countless others on each Thursday night, known as 'Star Night' at Rogue's.

Following a sellout show in Knoxville, Tenn. with Neil Diamond and a host of other hit makers, we had a huge group of fans swarming the limo that was taking us to the airport. There, while the folks cheered us on, each guy in our group ran out to the private plane. The moment was exciting. No one gave it a 2nd thought that something VERY FUNNY was about to happen. We'd run out, hustle up the steps and veer off to the right - the rear of the plane - wanting to sit together of course, and to wave at the onlookers. As the last Rhondel boarded and turned right, waving regally to the fans, the plane ever so slowly dipped down - yep the tail hit the runway, the stairs were cock-eyed hanging out awkwardly as if only Martians could get on or off - and as the crowd watched and laughed, a tractor came to the rescue. If that wasn't embarrassing enough, we had to get OFF that plane and board a fresh aircraft - the tail had been damaged!! HA! So much for THAT 'big-time' moment :)

We were sharing the bill with Marvin Gaye and Tammy Terrell at one of our favorite Va. colleges, Hampdyn Sydney - when Ms. Terrell collapsed in Marvin Gaye's arms - They were singing "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" - I remember it as if it were yesterday - Sadly; Tammy never regained consciousness from the coma that subdued her that night. Marvin Gaye held her in his arms as he completed the performance of that song. Assistants removed the ill-fated Tammy and Marvin completed the show, not knowing what the future held for his wonderful and beautiful singing mate.

WHEW!! - That's just a small portion of the many many events that were life-changing to the younger Bill Deal and the Rhondels. Hope this is helpful in putting things together. Anxious to see it!

Well we'd FINALLY MADE IT to Madison Square Garden, NYC where our song "May I" was nearing the top 10 and "I've Been Hurt" was already in the top 40 - that's the way things were done back then - take no chance on losing your popularity!

Exactly how this happened, we never could figure out - the ingenious management of Jim Tatum, Rick Abramson and Jerry Ross, our MGM rep/producer at work in the shadows?

What had HAPPENED was - as we approached the marquee at Madison Square Garden, we noticed without prior notice that WE WERE AT THE TOP OF THE LIST - TOP BILLING! They called it - and under us was Deep Purple, Neil Young and Crazy Horse and a few others - figure that mix out - hmmmmm - SHOWTIME!!! We were used to 'hydraulic rising stages' - yeah, had just done that at Disneyland, CA - worked GREAT! Band's playing and here they come!

We did the usual thing - got in position behind the huge curtain - all decked out in white suits (Travolta hadn't even arrived yet) and the revolving stage was about to 'take-off' and we would be welcomed by the enthusiastic crowd as we opened with one of our hit records - should be in FULL SWING by the time the stage makes its spin to the front.

Unfortunately, we hadn't thought about the wires that were hanging from the stage that would be cut in half as we turned - so that all that could be heard was Ammon on the drums and the horns - well, we DID have plenty of horns - good thing - but we had never tried to play without keyboards, bass and guitar - HA!

Yeah, it was a mess.

You guessed it - the stage kept spinning - went right on by where it was supposed to stop - made a full circle until the very embarrassed band was able to RUN FOR COVER!! I think there are more chuckles but I'll keep them for our 40 copy seller - ha! CHEERS!

Bill Deal

Ain't No Bill Deal

I didn't care about the hockey game, basketball game, or girls' grits wrestling contest that could have been the main event at the OMNI that night in Atlanta. The old OMNI has now been torn down and replaced with the spectacular Philips Arena. The old OMNI was really not that old, not even 20 years in age but it looked like an egg crate which is very appropriate because most of the teams that played there always seem to lay eggs.

This particular night, they had scrambled up something that caught my attention. Beach Night at the Omi, I think it was billed. It was an after-the-whatever concert featuring two of the best known groups in the world of Beach Music, the Catalinas and Bill Deal and The Rhondells. I went primarily because of Bill Deal & the Rhondells because I never knew when I would be run over by an eighteen wheeler.

I had seen virtually every prominent band or group that performed what most consider Beach Music but I had never seen Bill Deal & the Rhondells.

No group did more to keep "The Heeey Baby Days of Beach Music" alive than Bill Deal & the Rhondells. As the 60's were winding down and the heavy music was about to infect everything and everyone, here comes a horn & party band from Virginia Beach, Virginia trying to counteract the pervasive and relentless march of guitar man and his garden. The Medallions had first countered the movement with a snappy horn version of "Hey, Baby" and here came Bill Deal with three Top Forty Songs in the span of a year that temporarily had everyone back up front near the band stand. For the promoters who were still expousing the virtues of R&B, it was welcomed but unfortunately it was not enough. It did however place an exclamation point behind our premise: The Heeey Baby Days of Beach Music party was enjoying its finest hours when the sounds of brass were blasting the air.

That's why on this particular night back in the late 70's, I was hoping to once again stand up front close to the band stand. On two previous occa-

sions, I had seen the fabulous Catalinas, a very smooth tight band from Charlotte, N.C. Their "Summertime" "Calling Me" was one of the great songs from the 70's, There were others like "Ms. Grace", "Smoke From A Distant Fire", but not nearly the quantity or quality of the nuggets generated in the 60's. And in the late 60's, Bill Deal & the Rhondells were on fire. Three great covers of Beach Classics included a strong brass component of which the group was so noted.

"I've Been Hurt," "What Kind of Fool (Do You Think I Am, and "May I" by the Tams and Maurice Williams respectively were already southern classics, songs that we had partied to for years. Most of us had already seen them performed by their originators so how much better could it get? It is not a question of better or best but rather the recordings of Bill Deal were a great twist to a great product. It was the horns, the riveting horns, and the faster tempo, that made his covers a hit at the party. They got your feet moving faster than the shag would allow. Bill Deal and the Rhondells charted with all three while poor Maurice sold a million copies of his origi-

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BILL DEAL

AND

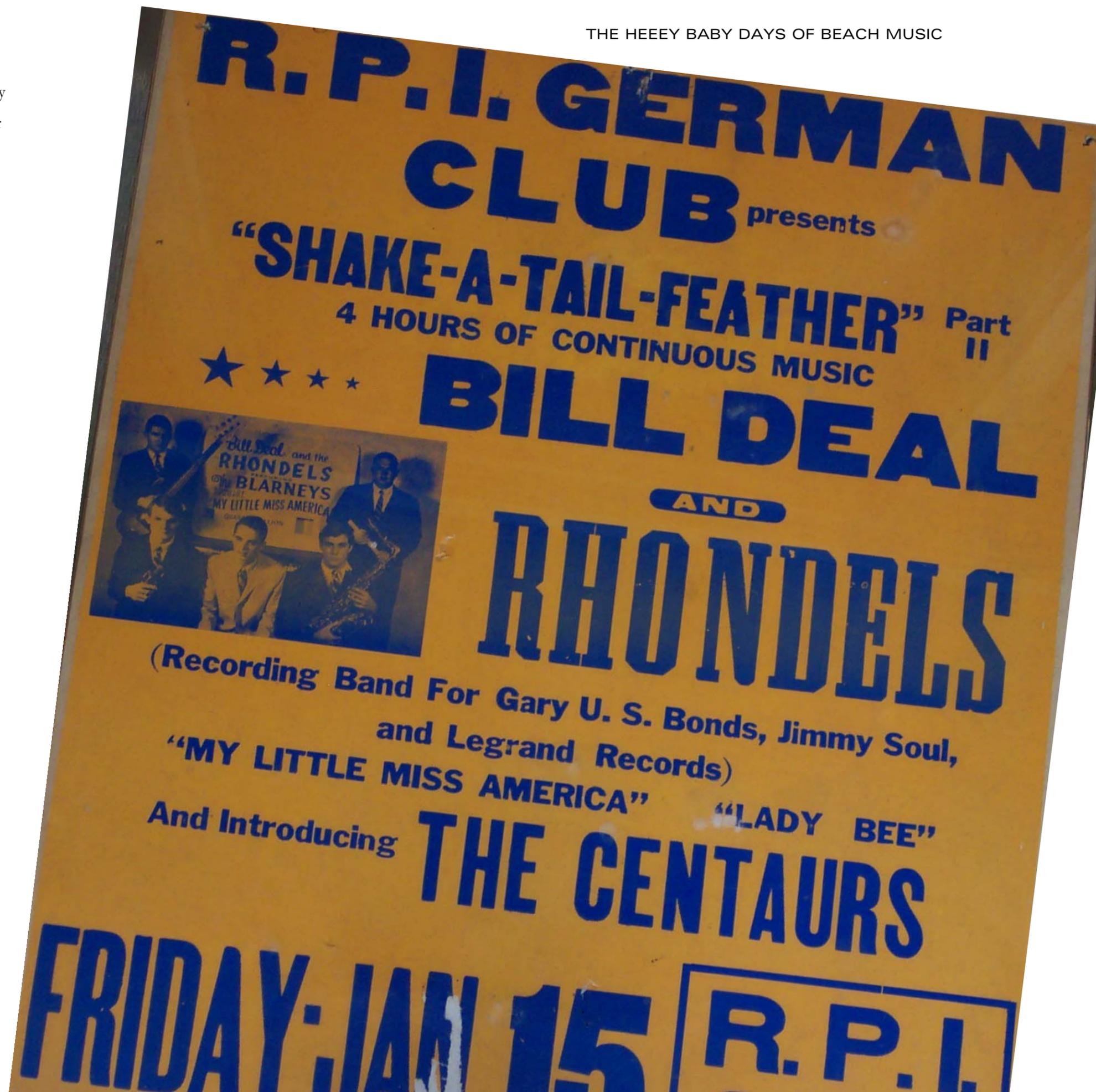
RHONDELS

(Recording Band For Gary U. S. Bonds, Jimmy Soul, and Legrand Records)

"MY LITTLE MISS AMERICA" "LADY BEE"

And Introducing **THE CENTAURS**

FRIDAY: JAN 15 **R.P.I.**



nal “May I”, yet it never found a spot on any chart. It is a great mystery we discuss further in “The Staying Power of Maurice Williams.”

Horns, Horns, Horns, and more horns, their presence at the party of the “Heeey Baby Days of Beach Music” can not be understated. More about “the horniest southern bands of the 60’s” follows “Ain’t No Bill Deal.”

At last! I could mark another off my list of the great horn bands of the 60’s that I had not yet seen as Bill Deal would lead off the evening’s performance at Atlanta’s OMNI.

It was the typical setting for a party of the 60’s, floor and bandstand. I got as close as I could to the stage and found myself standing next to one of the Catalinas who would be coming up next. I watched as Bill Deal started their show with the latest from the Police and it did not get any better. I suppose that was one of the hottest bands going at the time and there were probably more people listening to the music of the Police worldwide than the music of the Tams or Maurice Williams but that was not what I was expecting. Surely I was dreaming this but I think Bill Deal and the Rhondells did YMCA by the Villagers. It would have been fine with me if they had done, “Laugh It Off” by the Village People but their entire repertoire of the evening was not what I bargained for plus I had to watch all those girls swimming in green grits. Oh sure, they sounded good, very professional at all that stuff a band likes to hear but they weren’t playing the music of the “Heeey Baby Days of Beach Music.” I thought to myself this ain’t the Bill Deal I thought I would see tonight and “Ain’t No Big Thing” would probably not be the next tune offered.

“We should have been arrested for wearing those suits” – Bill Deal

The 1976 version of Bill Deal of the Rhondells is the one I am certain I saw at the Omni that night, although it was probably 1978 or 1979. It suddenly occurred to me that night that Kallabash Corporation had not broken up as was previously thought, they had been reincarnated as Bill Deal & the

Rhondells. When all the smoke cleared, Bill Deal and all the Rhondells were still fully clothed.

I turned to my new best friend standing next to me and inquired, “Please tell me that the trip is not completely wasted?” or something to that effect. I was assured that it was not and after a break, the Catalinas came on and delivered an hour of music that included most of the songs on their “Summertime’s Calling Me” album.” Now that was an hour well spent.

So who am I to be critical of one of the most widely acclaimed horn bands in history? I am not being critical of the band; I was just disappointed that they didn’t choose to play the tunes I wanted to hear.

I told my story to Donny Trexler, guitar player for Bob Collins and the Fabulous Five and he immediately came to the defense of the band. “Man, those times were tough for our kind of bands. I think Bill Deal and The Rhondells were probably playing a lot of proms and such at that time and that older music was not what the kids wanted hear, they wanted Top Forty.”

Then I remembered the Steppenwolf offerings by the O’Kaysions back in 1970 at the fraternity’s big spring fling at Jekyll. Donny had joined the O’Kaysions and was playing guitar that night. Now, I understood his comments because he was there, and he probably had long hair as well.

When the Catalinas played with Bill Deal & the Rhondells that night, I just assumed that they were one of the few bands that didn’t get off course in the 70’s by playing all that other stuff. Did the Catalinas also succumb to playing the music of Grank Funk Railroad and Steppenwolf. “You either played it or you didn’t get any work,” long time Catalina Gary Barker recalled.





Author's note: I sure hope fans of those fine groups, Steppenwolf and Grand Funk Railroad will not hold any grudges when I come out with my book on music on harder rock, "The Magic Carpet ride through the Garden of Danny daVincihi."

I realized that my attitude was fairly selfish. I should have been pleased that groups like Bill Deal & the Rhondells, the Catalinas, the Embers, the Medallions, the Band of Oz, Maurice Williams, the Tams, and others had the tenacity to survive the 70's and the ability to adapt musically. Had they not, Beach Music or more precisely, Southern Soul Music would have lost much of its heritage. Those groups are still churning and have successfully entered a new millennium. I'm still trying to get over the shock of the late 60's and early 70's. What Kind of Fool Do You Think I Am?

Interview with Bill Deal:

GH: "Bill, did you and the Rhondels play "YMCA" in the OMNI in Atlanta or was that just my imagination running away with me?"

Bill Deal: "On the advice of counsel..."

Bill Deal took the fifth, which as everyone knows is an admission of guilt, but if you go to his web site, he admits the group should have been arrested for wearing that garb. I agree, but Bill Deal was not the only ones that should have been arrested during that period. Fortunately for the Swingin' Medallions (who were forced to use the name Double Shot Gang during that period of time, the photo below is not so good but you can make out too well their identities but we choose to show pics and not give names.

Potential Cell Mates For Bill Deal:

Double Shot Gang – photo omitted at this time

Peace Core – photo omitted at this time

Author Note: We have many more pictures depicting some of the 60's R&B bands that tried to go the Rocky roll route but threats of laws suits, and such prevent us from using them at this time. However look for them in the book sequel, "The Bad Boys from 'The Heey Baby Days of Beach Music'."

