



ANGEL is: **Barry Brandt** (drums), **Mickey Jones** (bass), **Greg Giuffria** (all keyboards, string ensemble), **Punky Meadows** (guitars) and **Frank Dimino** (vocals)

Produced by **Derek Lawrence** and **Big Jim Sullivan**. Engineered by **Peter Granet**. Remastered in 2006 at **Sound Performance** by **Andrew Thompson**. Reprographics by **CLE Print**.

(Helluva Band:) Tape operated by **David Gertz**. Mastering by **Allen Zentz**. Recorded at **Wally Heider's** in Hollywood. All arrangements by **Angel**. Moog programming by **Don Wyman** and **Jim Cypher** at **Sound Arts**. Photography by **Barry Levine**.

Original art direction by **Jeremy Railton**. Original graphics by **Gribbitt**

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# ANGEL

Angel/Helluva Band



DIGITALLY RE-MASTERED





THE World Wide Web is a wonderful and strange thing. Consider this, if you will: American hard rock band **Angel**, who, in their original incarnation, made an album a year between 1975 and 1980, have more references to their name on the internet in relation to the controversy surrounding a song called 'Punky's Whips', recorded by **Frank Zappa & The Mothers Of Invention**, than to their own career. 'Punky's Whips', originally scheduled for inclusion on the live album 'Zappa In New York' – concerned Zappa's drummer of the time, **Terry Bozzio**, and the apparent lurid sexual fantasy that Bozzio had developed regarding a promotional photograph of **Punky Meadows**, lead guitarist of Angel. Back then (1978), Zappa's parent record label, Warner Brothers, balked at the inclusion of the song for fear of potential litigation that may ensue. The label felt that Angel, who were regarded by Warners as 'big players' back then, would be likely to seek legal redress, and sat on the album's release for a long while, before eventually putting it out and deleting the track from inclusion altogether. Most fans of rock music will no doubt be familiar with Frank Zappa – but why have Angel been hidden from history?

Well, in partial answer to the not-entirely rhetorical question, the Zappa farago didn't help, ultimately, but the other issue that helped hamstring their search for world domination was their frankly ludicrous image – one critic described their look as "one of the silliest ever, despite stiff competition". Their record label, **Casablanca Records**, was also home to **Kiss** (of which more later), and their (now-deceased) label chief, **Neil Bogart**, who had cut his industry teeth with the **Cameo-Parkway** label in the 1960s (home to a real motley bunch of acts, from **Chubby Checker** to **? (Question Mark) & The Mysterians**) saw Angel as a kind of Kiss in reverse – where they favoured black costumes and kind of Kabuki theatre make-up, Angel were uniformly dragged up in white spandex, with outrageously bouffant hair-dos (apparently, Punky Meadows secured a product endorsement deal with a hairspray company!), more cosmetic make-up than **Joan** and **Jackie Collins** put together, with a resultant look that was as camp as a field full of bivouacs. As their career moved on, Casablanca even ran a much-derided

campaign that featured a soft-focus picture of the band in their all-white finery, and the legend, "mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the prettiest band of all", which massively undermined their critical standing. The label also marketed them, later in the 1970s, at a *Sixteen* magazine audience, and highlighted their wholesomeness in direct contrast to the 'bad boys' of Kiss. Of course, the reality was that Angel liked to party and indulge in the usual rock band after-show shenanigans as much as any other act – their image ultimately became an ever-tightening straitjacket that would imprison them and limit their audience, especially when the tougher realities of post-Punk music kicked in at the end of the decade.

It's a shame that the image would distract from their frequently (and surprisingly) very fine music. In purely playing terms, Kiss couldn't live with Angel – Kiss operated at a much more visceral, basic level, and, indeed, when **Ace Frehley** left Kiss in 1982, Punky Meadows auditioned and got Frehley's gig – which Meadows turned down to pursue his own career. Angel weren't the only act who suffered – another of Kiss manager **Bill Aucoin**'s stable of acts, the frequently awesome **Starz**, similarly could whip ass on Kiss in a musical sense, but suffered the same underachieving fate as Angel. Whatever, Angel fans are a select bunch, but those familiar with the band's music recognise them as one of the finest, if under-achieving (sales-wise) combos of the seventies and eighties.

The Angel line-up for their self-titled debut album was **Frank DiMino** (vocals), **Mickey Jones** (bass), **Gregg Guffria** (all keyboards), **Barry Brandt** (drums, percussion), and the aforementioned **Punky Meadows** (guitars). Although this was their first album, the band was by no means without a provenance, and the story of how they eventually came together is well worth the telling.

The Angel story begins on February 6th, 1950, with the birth of one **Edwin Lionel Meadows**. Meadows grew up in the same, predominantly black Barnaby Terrace neighbourhood that also spawned such guitar greats from the DC area as **Danny Gatton**, **Roy Clark** and







**Link Wray.** Legend has it that at the age of nine, Meadows was soundly thrashed by his mother for having nipped out of the family home on the sly to see an **Elvis Presley** movie. Known as Punky to his pals (apparently, it was a 'Southern' thing, according to Meadows), young Lionel was clearly in thrall to rock and roll, and it was soon after that he took up the guitar, and began playing with a variety of local outfits in his Washington base, the first being **The Intruders**, who made their debut at his school, Hart Junior High. According to a recent interview with Meadows, every last piece of their electrical equipment was plugged in to his Silvertone amp – with reverb: "It was pretty hip", he recalled. Meadows avowed ambition was to be a rock and roll star. He was a swift learner on the guitar, and played nightclubs and watering holes in the Georgetown area of Washington on a nightly basis, when most of his contemporaries were still looking forward to High School. By the time of his sixteenth birthday, he lined up with an Anglophile combo from the US capital city named **The English Setters**. Like many of their contemporaries, they were hugely influenced by the 'British Invasion' bands that came over to the USA in the wake of **The Beatles**. They opened for the likes of **The Yardbirds** (Jimmy Page era), **Neil Diamond** and **The Young Rascals** at the local Alexandria Roller Rink. **Jay Nedry**, a local nightclub owner, first laid eyes on Meadows at Springfield's American Legion Hall. "This was the summer of '67," says Nedry. "The English Setters were in full English regalia, Beatles boots and grey jackets. They did a good chunk of Sgt. Pepper's. They had the look, the attitude, the whole nine yards."

But as times changed, so did the band, and by the time flower power hit D.C., the English Setters had abandoned their mod finery and changed their name to the more psychedelic **Cherry People**. ("Pick Kelly, our bass player, came up with the name, but he wanted to go with **Perry Cheeple**," recalls Meadows. "We were tripping at the time.") A visit to New York in the summer of 1967 gave Cherry People their first real exposure to the Big Apple's music business: impressed by the band's summer residency at the Cafe Wha? in Greenwich Village, the independent **Heritage Records** label signed Cherry People to a recording

contract. Their eponymous album for Heritage, released in May 1968, was a generic, Psyche-pop affair, which bore little resemblance to the band's onstage performance. Few of the band sang on it, let alone played on it, but they still managed to notch up a National hit single – 'And Suddenly'/'Imagination', which made number forty-five in the Billboard Singles listings, in July, 1968 and a subsequent single, 'Feelings', which under-performed, reaching a lowly number one hundred and thirty four. Heritage marketed Cherry People as a kind of "poor man's **Monkees**," Meadows recalls, complete with pre-packaged personalities. As the "wacky one," Meadows, according to his official bio, was supposed to have made such ludicrous statements as "I love soap operas, man...I'm having a special guitar made with a transistor TV built in so I don't miss anything."

On the album, only two of the songs featured were written by members of the band, and neither of those credited Meadows. The whole experience ended sometime after Heritage sent the band on a surreal cross-country tour – an appearance on **Dick Clark's American Bandstand**, a weeklong stint at Caesar's Palace, and a showcase at a San Diego bowling alley. Besides, says Meadows, the boys in the band were still haunted by the unearthly sounds made by an obscure black guitarist they had seen back at the Cafe Wha? "We realized we didn't want to be the Monkees," he says. "We wanted to be **Hendrix**."

Undaunted, Meadows effected his departure from Cherry People, ostensibly to join a new combo, teaming him up with a Jazz-influenced keyboard player from the Crescent City, New Orleans, named **Greg Giuffria**. However, Meadows didn't last long with the new band either – seemingly, he liked Giuffria, but hated the rest of them.

Undeterred, Meadows went walkabout for a while, first to Biloxi, Mississippi, and then to Boston where he joined his next band of note, who went by the name of **Daddy Warbucks** (apparently they took their name from a character in the hit Musical, 'Annie'), which they sensibly abbreviated to the snappier **Bux**. Apparently, they hung out with another





Boston bar band of the time, who were called **Aerosmith**. In the Bux line up was one **Mickey Jones**, a bass-playing fellow Washington DC native, and together they returned to DC after their Boston sojourn. Also in the line-up was drummer **Rocky Isaac** (who'd also been in Cherry People), **James Newton** (guitar) and **Ralph Morman** on vocals. Apparently, Bux were making some headway in the DC area, often in competition with the still extant Cherry People, and managed to land a recording contract with the **Capitol Records** label, for whom they duly cut an

album, entitled 'We Come To Play', which remained in the Capitol vaults until finally being granted a belated release in 1976, by which time Meadows and Jones had split the Bux scene, irritated by inadequate management, Capitol's perceived lack of faith, and Morman's growing alcohol problem. Morman would latterly turn up as part of **The Joe Perry Project**, when Perry left Aerosmith, and later still with an incarnation of Brit ex-pat Blues veterans **Savoy Brown**.

Meadows was nothing if not persistent, and both he and Jones wanted to put together a combo that were unified in their vision and desire to crack the

big time. Meanwhile, the aforementioned Gregg Giuffria found that he had a degree of common experience with Meadows, inasmuch as his combo, **David and the Giants**, had also had a bad recording experience with Capitol Records (rumours have persisted that he recorded an entire album and a few singles with the band, also featuring the drumming skills of **Tommy Aldridge**). Responding to Meadows' call, Giuffria threw in his lot with Meadows and Jones. Meadows auditioned a vocalist by the name of **Frank DiMino**, Boston-born, but he turned down their offer owing to the fact that, at the time, they only had "three half-assed songs". Still searching for a front man, the trio saw a band in a DC club who boasted a superb drummer, by the name of **Barry Brandt**. Although up until then, Meadows had never worked with Brandt, he was briefly a member of The Cherry People after Meadows' departure. As luck would have it, both Meadows and Jones knew him - Jones had played with him in a band called **Max** (who also featured Frank DiMino) and he seemed the perfect fit for the fledgling combo. More fortuitous still, when DiMino heard that Brandt had joined up, he wasted no time in finally agreeing to join the band.

Initially, the five piece utilised the name **Sweet Mama From Heaven**, and, apparently, **Foxy** (perhaps a reference to the Hendrix opus 'Foxy Lady?') before adopting the more user-friendly appellation, **Angel**, named after the band's favourite Jimi Hendrix song.

Given their DC pedigree, it was no surprise to find that the band built up a great reputation for their impressive musicianship and their extravagant stage show. Meadows commented, "We were always interested in the entertainment aspect of rock. We put together some stage costumes and really went overboard with the flashpots. We were setting off these arena-size explosions in these small clubs. Beer glasses flew off the bar every time we'd set one off. The owners hated us."

Soon the members of Angel, attired early on in white jeans and T-shirts (so enamoured with the colour, they even employed a truck driver named 'Whitey!'), were putting all the money they earned playing at D.C. clubs into their stage show. "We introduced glam rock to D.C.," says Meadows. "Before us, everybody was dressing like the Allman Brothers. Suddenly, everything was lipstick and glitter." Indeed, their reputation stretched as far as New York, where the managerial team of **Leber & Krebs** made enquiries. However, rather than sign Angel, they were actually more interested in signing Meadows and Jones as musicians for a revamped **New York Dolls** line-up. Meadows and Jones were flattered and amused by the offer, but



Greg Giuffria

Barry Brandt

Frank Dimino

Punky Meadows

Mickey Jones







declined, in favour of pursuing the Angel project, which was looking more promising by the day. Fate was to intervene, however, one night in April 1975, when the band arranged a massive showcase event at the DC niterie **Bogeys**. A bunch of A&R and management types were invited along, and Kiss bass player **Gene Simmons** took a look at 'em, too, having just played a gig in Landover, Maryland. So impressed was Simmons that he called Casablanca Records boss Neil Bogart at three in the morning, insisting that he sign the band. The original plan was for Angel to audition at a concert at Anaheim Stadium, as Kiss' opening act. But Kiss nixed the idea, not wanting to be upstaged. According to Meadows, Simmons told Bogart, "No way will Angel ever open for Kiss", proof of Simmons' respect for their powerful stage show. Bogart reacted positively, however, and arranged a New York showcase for them, where they were brought to the attention of a manager named **David Joseph**, who likewise inked their services to a management deal.

The band was put into the recording studio with the interesting sound team of British producer **Derek Lawrence** and renowned British session guitarist, **Big Jim Sullivan**. Lawrence had a bit of a production résumé, having worked with loopy British sound auteur **Joe Meek**, as well as producing early albums by British Rock stalwarts **Flash**, **Deep Purple** and **Wishbone Ash**. Sullivan, even by the mid-1970s, was a seasoned British session guitar veteran, having played on countless records – it was he who played the lyrical, supremely melodic solo on 'The Crying Game', by **Dave Berry**, and he also played the stinging lead break on **Tom Jones'** breakthrough smash, 'It's Not Unusual'. So, the Lawrence/Sullivan production axis was a potentially intriguing combination that could deliver some fine results. The band relocated to Los Angeles, and the album was cut at the famous **Wally Heider** studio there.

The sleeve of 'Angel' the album features the band's distinctive, semi-Egyptian logo. "Not a big deal", you might say, in these days when a band seemingly exists as a registered trademark before they've even released a record. However, Casablanca had first hand knowledge, care


of the massive success they'd achieved with Kiss, of the importance of 'branding' and image, and the Angel logo was undoubtedly visually striking. Casablanca, and the band's management, were shrewd enough to see the merchandising and identity spin-off value. Just as Kiss had a fan club called the **Kiss Army**, Angel named their fan club '**Angel Earth Force**'. The band also put the logo to good use in their stage set, as we'll soon see.

Released in October 1975, 'Angel' may come as something of a musical surprise to fans who boarded the Angel bus later in their career. As the band developed, they became a more orthodox hard rock/pop act, but their debut album is much closer to a Pomp/Prog Rock sound. Although the entire band plays their part, it is keyboard player Gregg Giuffria who puts his distinctive stamp all over 'Angel'; his ferocious playing on the opening epic (all seven minutes of it) 'Tower' is an awesome statement of intent, and defines the band's confident, very musically proficient sound, a genuine Prog-rock tour-de-force, tautly arranged, with a real lung-straining vocal from Frank DiMino. Giuffria runs the old mellotron bath and luxuriates in it, be it on the 'strings' setting (the tremendous second cut, 'Long Time' or the coruscating 'Mariner') using the 'choir' option on the otherwise foursquare rocking of 'Rock & Rollers' (The track is perhaps a somewhat undercooked attempt to write a Kiss-style stage anthem, like 'Rock And Roll All Night' or 'Shout It Out Loud', but where the lyric may underwhelm, there's no doubting the band's distinctive Angelic punch). Giuffria was, however, but one strong component part of a very cohesive musical whole. Meadows weighs in with some powerful riffs and stinging lead work, and the Brandt/Jones rhythm section anchors DiMino's distinctive vocals handsomely. The layered production and meticulously constructed arrangement illustrates exactly what their local reputation was founded on.

'Helluva Band' (a neat bit of wordplay on the religious overtones of the band name) the second Angel album, was quickly recorded after their first album – Casablanca had realised from their experience with Kiss that it was important to keep feeding the market with fresh product. Kiss had followed up their debut with the second album, 'Hotter Than Hell', about







six months later. Although it generally rocks a goodly bit harder than the first, 'Helluva Band' doesn't quite scale the same musical heights of their first album. Reconvening the Lawrence/Sullivan production axis from the debut, the album cover marked the unveiling of the image makeover that Casablanca had concocted for them.

However, tracks such as 'Feelin' Right' – which features some fine interplay between Meadows and Giuffria, the haunting 'Mirrors', and the Prog mini-masterpiece, 'The Fortune', make 'Helluva Band' a must-have purchase, and make this two-albums CD reissue superb value for the uninitiated. The album; and the band's impressive dedication to solid road work, saw them build up a considerable live following – of course, their association with Kiss, who were by then at their 'Destroyer' era commercial peak, would appear, on paper at least, to be a real plus – however, it ended up being something of a mixed blessing. On one hand, Casablanca's idea to market Angel as the anti-Kiss certainly provided the band with lots of publicity. On the other hand, Casablanca gave the Angel boys free rein to involve themselves in some ill-advised indulgences, especially when it came to their stage sets. With the label wagging an open chequebook, they employed the services of some of Hollywood's finest illusionists – **Doug Henning** among them – to create effects for the band's live show. The result was an extravaganza designed to blow the minds of the teen stoners who made up most of Angel's audience, no doubt an amazing (and amusing) spectacle, but also a huge distraction from the band's musical qualities, and also made them easy meat for a critical mauling. A giant Angel logo would suddenly open its eyes before introducing the band members, who would appear onstage in pillars of smoke. Apparently, their stage intro was predicated upon the notion of the Archangel Gabriel summoning his angels unto him, and imploring them to go to Earth to bring forth the music of Heaven. Like you do. It was great, Meadows recalls, except for the occasional Spinal Tapesque technical difficulty.

"We'd appear every night in these tubes of smoke during our introductions," Meadows says, "and all these outrageously stoned kids in

the audience would go [he makes the universal fingers-to-mouth gesture for smoking a joint], 'That was weird, man...'

"Of course, all we were doing was coming up through trapdoors from beneath the stage," he continues. "Well, one night, the big talking head introduces Mickey Jones, and Mickey isn't there. We're looking at each like, 'Where the fuck's Mickey?' Turns out his trapdoor got stuck. And all those stoned kids are going [Meadows sucks on his imaginary joint again], 'That's REALLY weird, man...'"

Angel's stage show was so over-the-top glorious that even Simmons & Co. borrowed a bit of it here and there. "I was watching Kiss one time and [guitarist] Ace [Frehley] goes like this," recalls Meadows, hitting an air-guitar power chord and then holding his arm out in a sideways U. "Now, that's something I'd been doing for years. Afterwards, I took him aside, and I said, 'Ace, you're copping my moves!'"

So, now that nearly three decades have elapsed since Angel made their ill-starred assault on the rock and roll world, shorn of the hype and picking one's way through the band's absurd image trappings, BGO proudly present the band's first two albums. They aren't the greatest recordings in the history of the world, but they're better than pretty good, and more than worthy of your attention. Any album that boasts the pomp-rock majesty of 'Tower' and 'Mariner' is more than worth the price of admission. Feel free to enjoy.

**Alan Robinson**  
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Acknowledgements: check out this link for a fascinating and revealing interview with Punky Meadows, from where his quotes in this sleeve note are drawn: [http://www.chaoticworks.com/meadows/washington\\_city2.html](http://www.chaoticworks.com/meadows/washington_city2.html)

