

THIS TIME WE MEAN IT:

Michael Murphy – vocals

Gary Richrath – lead guitar

Gregg Philbin – bass

Neal Doughty – keyboards, synthesizer

Alan Gratzner – drums

Produced by Allan Blazek

Executive producer: Bill Szymczyk

Remastered in 2010 by Andrew Thompson at Sound Performance, London

Reprographics by CLE Print

R.E.O.:

Kevin Cronin – vocals

Gary Richrath – lead guitar

Gregg Philbin – bass

Neal Doughty – keyboards

Alan Gratzner – drums

Produced by John Stronach

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R.E.O. SPEEDWAGON

This Time We Mean It/R.E.O.



DIGITALLY RE-MASTERED

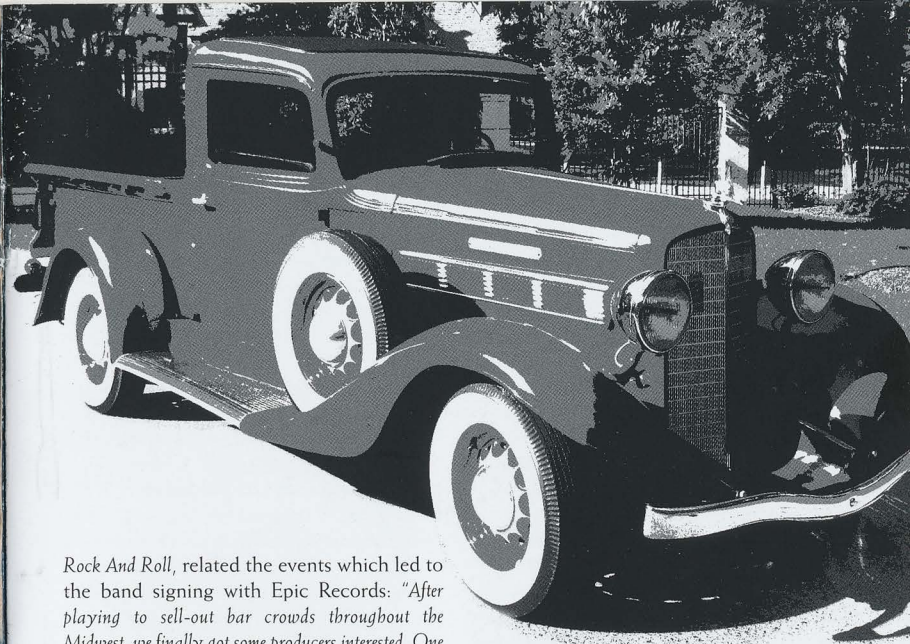
NOWADAYS regarded as an AOR powerhouse thanks to their mastery of the power ballad, R.E.O. Speedwagon have established themselves as an American rock institution. Starting life as a College covers band, some 40 years later they still rock as hard as ever. Prior to their national breakthrough with the album *High Infidelity* and its worldwide smash hit singles 'Keep On Loving You' and 'Take It On The Run', R.E.O. Speedwagon was a Midwest best-kept secret. Along with Styx and Kansas, R.E.O. were part of a Midwest trio of rock bands who worked their way to national recognition through relentless touring and recording, all the while amassing a dedicated following.

The band was named after a motor vehicle – the 'R.E.O. Speedwagon'. The "All Experts" website states that an "R.E.O. Speedwagon is a flatbed truck, first built in the early 1900's. It was very high-speed and heavy duty for its day, and was considered a milestone in the history of transportation. It was sometimes outfitted as a fire engine". The letters R.E.O. are the initials of Ransom Eli Olds who designed the truck and went on to create the Oldsmobile in Lansing, Michigan. The name came to keyboard player Neal Doughty while he was sitting in a "History of Transportation" class at the University of Illinois in Champaign in 1968; seeing the words "R.E.O. Speedwagon" written on a blackboard inspired him to use it as a band moniker.

Based in Champaign, Illinois, they were formed originally by keyboard player Neal Doughty, drummer Alan Gratzner and Gregg Philbin on bass with singer/flautist Terry Luttrell joining later. They played obscure

covers by underground bands such as Cream and The Doors in beer and sawdust bars like The Red Lion and Chances R. These bars were home to dozens of local Champaign rock groups but in 1970, when guitarist Gary Richrath from Peoria, Illinois joined the founder members, R.E.O. emerged as the most popular band in town by far. Gary was not only a great lead guitar player and a flashy performer, but he was also a songwriter. Little by little the band begun to sneak "originals" into their set among the cover tunes, and by 1971 they had enough of their own material to get the attention of Epic Records A&R man Tom Werman. Werman, who would later produce Cheap Trick, Molly Hatchet and Ted Nugent among others, was impressed enough to get them a contract with Epic Records.

Alan Gratzner, in the liner notes for the R.E.O. Speedwagon compilation album *A Decade of*



Rock And Roll, related the events which led to the band signing with Epic Records: "After playing to sell-out bar crowds throughout the Midwest, we finally got some producers interested. One of them, a guy named Paul Leka who owned a little eight-track studio in Bridgeport, Connecticut, came out and saw us that day in Peoria. It was an outdoor date and it was pouring rain. We didn't want to go on, but the group felt that if this guy flew all the way out here from Connecticut, we might as well go on. We played four songs in the thunder and lightning and we felt we were going to get killed. Believe it or not, the people

wanted an encore. So did the producer. Leka dragged the boys back to Connecticut along with their new manager, a young University of Illinois chemistry major named Irving Azoff".

This led to R.E.O. Speedwagon cutting their first album, the eponymously-titled R.E.O.

Speedwagon, in a studio in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1971. Chock-full of R.E.O.'s trademark high-energy riff rock and produced by Paul Leka (who also produced Jimmie Spheeris' classic debut album *Isle Of View*), *R.E.O. Speedwagon* was a raw, vibrant slice of American bar room rock and roll etched with progressive influences and socially-conscious lyrics on songs like 'Anti Establishment Man' and 'Five Men Were Killed Today'. Musically the band sounded like a cross between The Faces and the Jeff Beck Group, with Gary Richrath's guitar prominent in the mix (similar to Jeff Beck's in his *Rough And Ready* album also issued that year) and Neil Doughty's bar room jazzy-style boogie-woogie piano playing. Add some Jethro Tull-like pyrotechnics on 'Dead At Last' and the recipe for a commendable and powerful debut album was sealed.

The tension generated by the opening track 'Gypsy Woman's Passion' and the 12-bar boogie shuffle (and R.E.O. anthem) '157 Riverside Avenue' was powerful and raw enough to capture their live exuberance. Terry Luttrell's gruff vocals suited the hard-rocking style of the early R.E.O. but a change was coming, and after the debut album was released and the associated tour played, musical differences hastened his departure. He

would later re-emerge as vocalist with another Midwest band, Starcastle, recording for Epic Records between 1976 and 1979.

However exciting the recorded evidence, R.E.O. Speedwagon excelled in a live setting. They elicited a crowd reaction of frenzied proportions at their concerts across the Midwest, and at one show their PA system had to be turned off so the crowd could regain composure. The R.E.O. philosophy was simple – "bring joy to the people and let them be part of the performance" – and is one they have adhered to through the decades. They pride themselves on a work ethic borne of hard work and dedication to building their audience, and for years, while reaping some commercial successes chart-wise, they continued to pack halls and stadia in the Midwest beginning in St Louis and working onwards from there. Preferring the title of 'Working Musicians', to this day they epitomize the blue collar work ethic.

Terry Luttrell's replacement was a young singer/songwriter named Kevin Cronin. On the north side of Chicago there was a vibrant folk-rock scene in full bloom, with coffee houses such as the Earl of Old Town, the Quiet Knight and It's Here providing a setting for local singer/songwriters to perform for

attentive listeners. Cronin was a product of this Chicago scene and while initially an unusual replacement for a gruff rock and roll singer, he soon acclimatized himself within the R.E.O. Speedwagon line up. Only 21 years old when he joined R.E.O., his pre-R.E.O. experience was with a high school band called the LD's, then another band called Fushia when he started college.

Cronin's introduction to R.E.O. Speedwagon came through an ad for a musician's referral service which he had set up to get work. Gary Richrath came across a flyer for this service in a music store and on contacting Kevin Cronin he recommended someone who would fit the bill – himself! "Gary noticed one of my flyers at a downtown Chicago guitar shop and we got together that day at my apartment in Rogers Park. Acoustic guitar in hand, I sang a few of my songs as well as my favourite Elton John song, 'Holiday Inn'. As luck would have it, it was Gary's favourite too, and I was the only person he had ever met who had even heard the song before. We bonded on the spot, and he invited me to join the band on that basis. Now I had heard that R.E.O. Speedwagon was a great hard rock band, but had never actually heard their music. So when I went to the Joilet Roller Rink in early 1972 to see them play, I was impressed by their power and showmanship, but was unsure just where I fit in. There they were, up on a huge stage with screaming stacks of Marshall guitar amps, wearing tight

jeans and Beatle boots, and here I was in my Hush Puppy shoes and corduroy pants, strumming sensitive love songs in tiny Chicago coffee houses".

R.E.O. Speedwagon encamped to Nashville, Tennessee to record their second album for Epic, *R.E.O. T.W.O.* Nashville, the home of country music, was an unusual place for a Midwest rock band to record in and at that time R.E.O. were the only rock group ever to make a record at the famous Columbia Record Studios, home to country music greats such as Merle Haggard and Marty Robbins. They even had sax legend Boots Randolph joining them. The band had already worked up such future R.E.O. classics as 'Golden Country' and 'Like You Do', and Kevin, inspired by his new gig, wrote a few rockers like 'Music Man' and 'Let Me Ride'. The combination of R.E.O.'s rock base and Kevin's folk-rock song styling blended cohesively. Kevin loved the mix: "I loved the combination of my little folk songs and R.E.O.'s powerhouse rhythm section. The marriage of our radically different styles came together very naturally in that studio, and R.E.O./T.W.O. remains one of our favourite albums to this day".

By the early '70s the band's unrelenting drive, non-stop touring and recording jumpstarted the burgeoning rock movement in the Midwest. It carved a path eventually

followed by Styx, Kansas, Cheap Trick and more. Their heavy work schedule was punctuated with recording their next album, the platinum-selling third album *Ridin' The Storm Out*, which garnered their first US chart success and helped blaze the trail with their gargantuan live work schedule.

But by the time *Ridin' The Storm Out* was released, Kevin Cronin was no longer in R.E.O. Speedwagon. In his notes for *The Essential R.E.O. Speedwagon*, Cronin relates his abdication from R.E.O. Speedwagon thus: "During the recording of our third album *Ridin' The Storm Out*, I accidentally spilled a glass of wine on producer Bill Halverson's wife's white carpet... bad move by the new kid. After a few rough weeks at Wally Heider Studios in Hollywood, the band decided they needed some new blood. They fired me so I showed them - I quit." He returned to solo work, but in a quirk of fate would rejoin the R.E.O. ranks in 1976.

In the meantime, the band began working with another local performer, Champaign native Michael Murphy, who joined on guitar and lead vocals. Originally from Sterling, Illinois, Murphy discovered his true passion for music in grade school when he performed 'Jingle Bells' at a Kindergarten

Christmas production. He studied classical piano for 13 years and cites the classical masters, along with Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin, as his early inspiration. Michael Murphy featured on both *Ridin' The Storm Out* and its follow-up *Lost In A Dream* (issued in 1974), both produced by Bill Halverson.

In 1975, R.E.O. Speedwagon went to Criteria Studios in Miami, Florida to cut their next album, *This Time We Mean It*, with Alan Blazek producing and engineering. *This Time We Mean It* had ten tracks, nine of which were original compositions and the sole outside work coming from none other than Glen Frey and Don Henley from The Eagles, another band managed by Irving Azoff who was managing R.E.O. at the time. This track, 'Out Of Control', featured on The Eagles' second album *Desperado*, which was recorded in Olympic Studios, London and produced by Glynn Johns.

Of the R.E.O. Speedwagon-penned songs, Michael Murphy composed four: 'Reelin'', 'River Of Life', 'You Better Realize' and 'Lies'. The remaining five songs - 'Headed For A Fall', 'Gambler', 'Candalera', 'Dance' and 'Dream Weaver' - were Gary Richrath compositions. Murphy featured on vocals on all tracks apart from 'Dance', on which Richrath sings lead.





Neal Doughty, again in the liner notes for *A Decade of Rock and Roll*, recalled the recording sessions for *This Time We Mean It*: “It was a fantastic, crazy experience. We seemed to spend the whole time playing pinball, basketball and poker with the Eagles who were also recording there”.

While the title sounded like a statement of intent, *This Time We Mean It* solidified R.E.O. Speedwagon's US success record. It was also a watershed album as it saw the departure of Michael Murphy from the R.E.O. vocal position. After he left R.E.O. in 1975, Murphy went to LA to write and record with Joe Walsh on his *But Seriously Folks* record before playing and recording with Billy Vera and Chuck E. Weiss. He also spent time touring with classic artists Johnny Rivers and Seals & Crofts, as well as the Blue Hawaiians. More recently, he's been playing keyboards for two bands: Blues Head with Steve Pierson, and Mason South, with who he recorded a CD called *Three Rooms*. Michael Murphy hasn't done any post-R.E.O. interviews, and declined to be interviewed for R.E.O.'s infamous “Behind the Music” episode. He also declined to participate when the Governor of Illinois proclaimed R.E.O. Speedwagon Day, and the city of Champaign named a street after the band. For him, he views his time in R.E.O. Speedwagon as the past, and wants it to remain there.

Michael Murphy's departure provided a dilemma for R.E.O. Speedwagon as to where they would find another vocalist. Gary Richrath found a potential solution to the problem – a kid from Denver that Gary had seen in Casper, Wyoming. The group brought him to Champaign into a new sixteen-track studio and cut some songs. Gary decided to take him to LA and introduce him to Irving Azoff, but the Bel-Air experience proved too much for the singer. After that they decided to call Kevin Cronin back. The phone rang late one night between shows at a Chicago club where Kevin was performing. On the other end was Andy Green, the group's road manager at the time; Neal Doughty was on the extension. “We were wondering what the

chances might be of your joining the band?” Kevin paused a microsecond and said, “What took you guys so long to ask?” The day after Green's call, Kevin was on a plane to Los Angeles. “We had no idea what would happen”, Kevin says, “So we had a rehearsal. It was very similar to how I joined the band the first time. We rehearsed and it sounded great. Within a week and a half they were back on the road.”

By this time R.E.O. Speedwagon had built a tremendous following in the Midwest. It was also the time for a physical move. One by one, the group packed their bags and moved to Los Angeles just in time to record their sixth album, the enigmatically titled *R.E.O.* Recorded in LA at the Record Plant, the album was produced by John Stronach.

R.E.O. has become known as ‘The Cow Album’ due to its unique sleeve design; the cover art features a cowhide with the initials “R.E.O.” branded on it with a hot iron. The album featured the return of Kevin Cronin, and while it initially flopped when compared to their previous album successes (it reached No. 159 on the *Billboard* 200), *R.E.O.* remains a favourite within the band circles and also a prized possession with fans. “The songs were strong,” says Alan Gratzner, “but [he laughs] it was the artwork and production that did us in.”

Ironically it features some of their finest mid-period performances and its clutch of tracks such as the striking opener ‘Keep Pushin’, a Kevin Cronin composition which sounds





vaguely like Thin Lizzy in their 'Boys Are Back in Town' period. Gary Richrath contributed 'Any Kind Of Love', '(Only A) Summer Love', the instrumental 'Flying Turkey Trot' and 'Tonight'. Cronin also wrote '(I Believe) Our Time Is Gonna Come' which, in the wake of R.E.O.'s later worldwide success, sounded prophetic; and two Richrath/Cronin collaborations, 'Breakaway' and 'Lightning' concluded the album. Kevin Cronin handles lead vocals for much of R.E.O. but Gary Richrath features on 'Only A Summer Love', 'Tonight' and 'Breakaway', and with Cronin on 'Any Kind Of Love'. Musically, R.E.O. is powerfully rich and melodic American period AOR and stands among their best (if perhaps least known) studio albums.

1977 was a banner year to the group. "It was the year where everything changed," says Kevin. Bass player Gregg Philbin left the band, and Bruce Hall joined in his place. It was also the year that the group broke away from Azoff's Frontline Management, taking John Baruck with them as their new manager.

With Kevin Cronin back in the R.E.O. Speedwagon fold, the die was cast for their next round of touring and recording. Of course the essence of R.E.O. Speedwagon lay in their live show and the band decided that they would at last record a live album. Material from R.E.O. was included, as were highlights from their previous albums. Some of the shows from the 'R.E.O.' tour in St. Louis, Kansas City, Indianapolis and Atlanta ended up being featured in 1977's live extravaganza 'Live: You Get What You Play For'. This band-produced double album gained R.E.O. Speedwagon national recognition for the first time.

This was to be the final R.E.O. recording with original bassist Gregg Philbin. Long-time friend of the band Bruce Hall, who co-wrote songs on previous R.E.O. albums, was asked to step in to take over bass duties shortly after *Live: You Get What You Play For* was recorded. Gregg Philbin subsequently made a living as a carpenter in Florida, now retired, he still plays occasionally.

With the line up of Kevin Cronin, Gary Richrath, Alan Gratzer, Bruce Hall and Neal Doughty, R.E.O. Speedwagon went on to achieve their biggest successes. After *Live: You Get What You Play For* came *You Can Tune A Piano But You Can't Tuna Fish*, followed by *Nine Lives* and the record-breaking *High Infidelity*. Released in 1980, commercially *Hi Infidelity* was a mega-success and R.E.O. Speedwagon became world famous overnight. Through mid-1982, *Hi Infidelity* and its singles sold over 18 million copies worldwide. The album reached No.18 in Germany, peaked at No.4 in England, and made the top spot in the USA. In the States, *Hi Infidelity* stayed in the charts for 65 weeks, 32 of which were spent in the Top Ten. Impressive also was the success of the singles which stormed the hit parade: 'Keep On Loving You', 'Take It On The Run', 'Don't Let Him Go' and 'In Your Letter'. The most successful single was the Kevin Cronin-written 'Keep On Loving You', which hit Number 1 on the US charts on December 6th, 1980, and stayed another 14 weeks in the Top Ten. Also, the Gary Richrath number 'Take It On The Run' climbed all the way to No.5 in the USA Pop charts, and spent 23 weeks in the Hit Parade.

The band had finally arrived, and followed up *High Infidelity's* success with *Good Trouble*

(1982) and *Wheels Are Turnin'* (1984) which brought more hit singles: 'Keep The Fire Burnin'' and 'Can't Fight This Feeling', with the latter reaching the US No.4 spot. Albums such as *Life As We Know It* (1987), *The Earth, A Small Man, His Dog And A Chicken* (1990), and *Building The Bridge* (1996) followed. Gary Richrath departed for a solo career in 1989 and was replaced by Dave Amato. Today the R.E.O. Speedwagon line up consists of Kevin Cronin, Dave Amato, Bruce Hall, Neil Doughty and drummer Bryan Hitt, and their 2007 studio album, *Find Your Own Way Home*, saw a return to the harder, rockier sounds that R.E.O. pioneered in the mid-70s.

Ironically that brings us back to *This Time We Mean It* and R.E.O. – two very important and rare pieces of the R.E.O. Speedwagon back catalogue. Here they are, re-mastered and still kicking. R.E.O. Speedwagon meant it then and they still do – and that's good news.

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Bibliography:

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