

Missing Persons: lost and found

by Philip Bashe



Singer Dale Bozzio (above) is a former Playboy bunny. Husband Terry drummed for Frank Zappa.

“It's like *Sex Myung Moon's Guide to Rock & Roll*,” Terry Bozzio is explaining to much laughter from the other members of Missing Persons.

“It's the same technique you'd use if you were trying to brainwash someone: Don't let them keep regular hours, don't let them depend on anything...”

The drummer's ranting about the nine months Missing Persons have spent on the road is in reality good natured; the entire band is in fine spirits, in fact, having just learned that its debut LP *Spring Session M*, has gone gold, capping one of the great Cinderella stories of recent years.

Bozzio has had high expectations for Missing Persons ever since January 1980, when he, his wife Dale and guitarist Warren Cuccurullo (like Bozzio, a Frank Zappa alumna) decided to end their days of playing “esoteric music that was beyond the comprehension of the man on the street.” Their new sound meshed '80s pop with '60s instrumental technology and was thoroughly commercial. They solicited the major record labels, expecting to procure a deal. Bozzio recalls drily, “with-in three weeks.”

All they received were rejection letters and a slew of fatuous appraisals like “It'll never get copy,” “You look like a disco band” and the laughable

Missing Persons (l-r) Patrick O'Hearn, Dale and Terry Bozzio, Chuck Wild and Warren Cuccurullo.



advice that Dale should dye her pink-streaked blonde hair black in order to avoid comparisons with Debbie Harry. Missing Persons didn't listen.

First the band concentrated on developing an unorthodox stage act. Dale, whose haircraze, Betty Boop singing was novel in itself, began fabricating her own homemade costumes. The first one, the former Playboy bunny recalls in her thick Boston brogue, “was made from a poster that I'd ripped off a wall in our living room. I cut it in strategic places, punched holes in it, tied it with tubing and put it on.”

With his wife looking like Jane Fonda in Barbarella, Terry took to creating equally bizarre—but economical—stage props. “We'd go into a club in our leasy clothes, set up our equipment and then completely transform the place. We'd cover the whole stage with plastic, hang the lights, get into our costumes, scribble on the makeup and the haircraze; and go out and do the show—once, in front of just six people in a club in Albany, New York.”

“Then we'd reverse the process after the show,” says Cuccurullo. “We'd all stand around and fiddle up the plastic; it became this incredible ritual.”

Missing Persons also pressed up a four-song EP which they distributed themselves. Dale and keyboardist Chuck Wild would sell them out of the trunk of their car and hawk them to radio stations, and eventually the group sold 10,000 copies in its home base of Los Angeles. Capitol Records—one of the conglomerates that initially rejected them—signed Missing Persons and issued a slightly altered version of the EP. This one sold over 250,000 copies—an industry record for a debut act—and convinced Capitol to finally allow them to record an LP which quickly went Top 15. Bozzio could be gleaming now, but instead he's admirably charitable. When it's suggested that record companies' artistic sensibilities are as poor as the quality of their vinyl, he offers a gentler observation: “The record companies don't have any imagination; they can't conceive of a new band being up there with Fleetwood Mac.”

Besides a hit album, Missing Persons' intensive effort to prod record companies' imaginations has given them confidence (“We haven't even begun to tap all the influences in this band,” Bozzio says excitedly) and a strong sense of togetherness.

“We look after each other,” says Dale. “We're like a family.”

“Yeah,” Cuccurullo adds, as the others laugh appreciatively, “we all ride the city bus together.”