



"Music is what feelings sound like." ~Anon.

A Blast from The Past: **THE REDCOATS!**

by Kirk Hastings



Randy Bocelle
Backing Vocals/Bass
Guitar



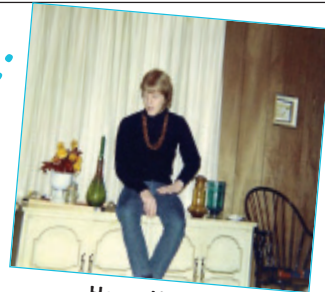
Zack Bocelle
Lead Vocals/Rhythm
Guitar



Mike Burke
Songwriting/Lead
Guitar



John Spirt
Songwriting/Drums



Harry Hastings



The Empires: L-R: Bobby Ansell, Kenny Petrosky, Harry Hastings, Mike Burke Below: George Sloan



The Ran-Dells: L-R: John Spirt, Steven Rappaport



"Billboard" photo is: L-R: Zack Bocelle, Mike Burke, Randy Bocelle, John Spirt

It all started in the summer of 1962: John Glenn had just successfully completed three orbits of the earth, and the satellite Telstar had been launched from Cape Canaveral. Space was really "in". So was rock and roll. Inspired by these two social phenomena, John Spirt (who was 16 at the time) and his cousins, Steven Rappaport (who was 19) and Robert Lawrence Rappaport decided to write a song together in John's home on Central Avenue in North Wildwood. The result was a novelty record called Martian Hop. Shortly thereafter Steven was able to get the song professionally recorded in New York City, with John playing drums and singing background vocals, Robert playing guitar and singing lead, and Steven contributing piano, synthesizer, and background vocals. They called themselves The Ran-Dells, and through a series of amazing circumstances the record was eventually released on the Chairman record label. It charted at #16 on the national Billboard chart, and John, Steven and Robert became local celebrities. They even made an appearance on American Bandstand, playing their novelty hit!

During 1963, two members of the P & O Boys in Wildwood (see the Spring 2010 issue of The Sun for details or visit archives at www.sunbythesea.com), Harry Hastings and Mike Burke, decided that they wanted to start a band too. So they formed a group called The Empires that consisted of Harry on saxophone, Mike on lead guitar, Kenny Petrosky on bass, George Sloan on drums, and Bobby Ansell singing lead and playing rhythm guitar. They played a few local Wildwood clubs like the Macombo in Anglesea, but were soon forced to disband when it was discovered by the club owner that Harry was underage (he was only 16 at the time).

Skip forward to February 9, 1964. . . Ed Sullivan, on his national TV variety show, presented the American debut of a popular new musical group from England, The Beatles. John Spirt had since become close friends with Harry and Mike, and they decided that they wanted to make music like the Fab Four. Shortly thereafter, John and Mike came into

contact with two very musically-talented brothers from Absecon named Zack and Randy Bocelle. The four of them decided to band together as a group called The Redcoats, with Harry as the group's road manager, and all around behind-the-scenes assistant. Steven Rappaport would produce their recordings, much as he had done with Martian Hop. The idea behind The Redcoats was, since The Beatles were four English lads trying to sound American, The Redcoats would consist of four American guys trying to sound English! Because of their superior singing voices it was decided that Zack and Randy would do most of the vocalizing on their recordings. Zack proceeded to sing all his vocals with a "manufactured" British accent!

In the spring of 1964 Steven was able to get the group an audition with Laurie Records in New York, who liked the group. That summer, they recorded seven original songs written by John and Mike. After playing a hugely successful live concert at The Starlight Ballroom on the Wildwood Boardwalk, two of the songs The Redcoats had recorded for Laurie were released as a 45 record: The Dum Dum Song, and, on the flip side, Love Unreturned. The two songs were given a great deal of local airplay by radio stations WOND-AM 1400 and WMID-AM 1340, but they failed to chart nationally because, for some unknown reason, Laurie chose not to promote them.

John soon wrote another song called Suspicions, and because of it the group was subsequently picked up by RCA Records, who released the song nationally as a 45. Though Suspicions only charted at #55, the group (now renamed The Sidekicks by RCA, since there was already another professional group that went by the name The Redcoats) recorded an entire album in 1966, featuring four more original Spirt/Burke songs. Another single from that album, Fifi the Flea, was released, and that summer the group

went on a promotional tour, playing cities like Philadelphia and Detroit, and being billed with acts like Paul Revere and the Raiders, The Four Seasons, Neil Diamond, Smokey Robinson, Dionne Warwick and The Beau Brummels.

Unfortunately, it was not to last. After a final concert at the Philadelphia Convention Center for WIBG radio, the group was forced to disband because of various legal and managerial problems. Mike Burke went on to play for a short time with another national group called The Soul Survivors; then he decided to move up to Canada to live incognito on a farm, retiring from show business altogether. Zack and Randy went on to play with a few other local South Jersey bands, but eventually they also finally gave up on the professional music business. Steven Rappaport ended up in California, where he worked for many years as a recording engineer and a lawyer. Robert Rappaport moved to Florida and got into the hotel management business, where he became very successful.

In April of 2001, thanks to the efforts of Steven, a CD was finally released with twelve of The Redcoats' original recordings, all written by John Spirt and Mike Burke (including The Dum Dum Song and Love Unreturned). The songs were digitally remastered from some 1965-era reel-to-reel tapes that Steven had recently re-discovered. The CD was manufactured by Dionysus Records of Burbank, CA, and sold a fair number of copies nationwide.

After living in the Philadelphia area for a while, John Spirt passed away in 2003. Zack and Randy Bocelle still live in the South Jer-



sey area, and Randy occasionally plays in local clubs with his new band, Sweetwater. Zack writes and records original music, mainly for himself, family, and friends, in a small recording studio he put together himself in his home in Hammonton. After a short illness Harry Hastings passed away in 2004. Steven Rappaport retired to Eugene, Oregon in 2002, and passed away in 2007. Mike Burke still lives on a farm in rural Canada, but he occasionally visits the Wildwood area to see family-including his son, Mike Burke, Jr, who is a professional drummer!

But thanks to their various wonderful recordings, the tune-filled legacy of The Redcoats still lives on!



Zack Bocelle & Kirk Hastings ~ 2003

Kirk Hastings grew up in Wildwood Crest. His older brother Harry was part of the P & O Boys, and a close friend of The Redcoats. Kirk is a freelance writer who now lives with his wife Sally in Somers Point. He is also the President of the Wildwood Crest Historical Society.