



# JOHNNY

## DRUMMING FEROCITY

Usually when one is called on to do an interview with an important artistic individual from the not so distant past (the swinging '60s, nonetheless!), there is a tendency to nostalgically look at one's earlier career with a reverence and sadness reminiscing on the glory of the years gone-by. However, the uniqueness of interviewing this particular individual is that Johnny Bee Badanjek is very much a man and artist of today! Even though he has accomplished so much as a major drumming force with many of the world's top bands on many number one hits, Bee is a man that truly believes that his best work is ahead of him. As an artist totally committed to his craft, Bee is constantly striving to push the musical (and artistic) envelope in every project that he touches. After witnessing Bee play last weekend with his new band, JACK LORD, it is hard to argue with this. This guy is an absolute monster behind the drums that possesses the heart and soul of a warrior! His unmistakable talent and passion behind the drums truly must be witnessed to be appreciated.

Johnny "Bee" Badanjek, cut his musical teeth at the tender age of fourteen on Mitch Ryder and The Detroit Wheels' first number one hit, *Jenny Take A Ride*. By the age of sixteen Bee was credited with starting a unique style of rock drumming indigenous to Detroit, Michigan known as Rock 'n Soul. Since then, Bee's brilliant drumming career has spanned over forty years as he has worked and toured extensively with Mitch Ryder And The Detroit Wheels, Edgar Winter, Dr. John, Alice Cooper, Ronnie Montrose, The Rockets, Albert King, Bob Seger, Nils Lofgren, and The Romantics, to name a few. Most everyone has heard Bee's work yet isn't aware of the prolific nature of this artist's vast repertoire. To his contemporaries, Johnny Bee Badanjek is a drumming force to be reckoned with! Bee is no mere venerable drumming veteran. He is a drumming virtuoso with the most tenacious attack coupled with a swiss precision meter. To quote author/drummer Bob Cianci in his acclaimed book, *Great Rock Drummers of the 60's*, "Johnny Bee Badanjek must be hailed as one of the most uncompromisingly ferocious drummers to ever lay sticks on a drum set. I mean we are talking real high energy here."\*

Make no mistake about it, this man is a drummer and artist to the bone! With every fiber of his being, Johnny "Bee" Badanjek is a drummer first, second, and third! Bee's career is a story of inspiration to anyone of us that has the talent, grace, and wherewithal to survive the ravages of the top levels of the music business for over forty years. After conducting this interview it became intuitively obvious that this man was put on this earth to play the drums!

\*Cianci, Bob. "GREAT ROCK DRUMMERS OF THE SIXTIES" page 177. Copyright 1989 Third Earth Productions and Hal Leonard Publishing. Milwaukee, WI USA

# "BEE" BADANJEK

BORN & RAISED in DETROIT, MICHIGAN U.S.A.

by Steve Badalament

cover photo by Bruce Geffen

Photos courtesy of Steve Badalament

**SFB:** How did you get into drumming Bee?

**JBB:** I got into drumming because of a brother of a friend of mine who lived down the street from our house had a snare drum on a stand that he wanted to sell. It was an old faded white marine pearl Slingerland snare drum. I bought the snare drum and started taking lessons in school.

**SFB:** How old were you at this point?

**JBB:** I was 12 years old in the sixth grade. I started playing drums and took to it like wildfire. Very soon thereafter somebody called my mother and said that they needed a drummer. So, instead of having a paper route, I started playing in this wedding band. My parents would drive me to these gigs and I worked regularly. I was making no less than \$50.00 per gig. Many times I earned \$100.00 a gig. That's one hell of an allowance for a twelve year old.

**SFB:** What year was this Bee? What is your birthdate?

**JBB:** I was born on June 2, 1948. This all happened in 1960. It was an exciting time in American history. John F. Kennedy was just elected President and there was this "can-do" attitude that pervaded our society. For me, the New Frontier of the Kennedy Administration was the discovery of rhythm and music!

**SFB:** You grew up in suburban Detroit, didn't you?

**JBB:** Actually, I grew up in the city of Detroit.

**SFB:** Was your Father happy that you were becoming a drummer?

**JBB:** Yes! He was a great guy. He came from a family of farmers and toolmakers. He was happy that his son was involved with music. The teacher at school informed my

parents that I had a real "knack" for rhythm and music. This pleased both of my parents to no end. So, at my school music teacher's suggestion I started studying drums privately at the Americana Music School in Hamtramck, MI. After ten weeks of lessons my parents were informed of my "amazing" progress as a drummer. They were persuaded to buy me my first drum kit.

**SFB:** What was your first drum kit?

**JBB:** It was a red sparkle Slingerland drum kit. It was a 5.5" x 14" snare drum, a 9" x 13" tom, and a 14" x 22" bass drum. I think Slingerland called this the Windsor Outfit.

**SFB:** So, Bee, you had professional drums from the beginning, right?

**JBB:** Yes! It was a brand new beautiful kit. I got this big wooden Hi-Fi set and would blast out these old 45's. I played along with Sandy Nelson, Gene Krupa, and Buddy Rich. There was this one album that was really great for drums called Persuasive Percussion. It was swing music. It was heavy drums. I don't even know who played on these albums, but the guys were masters of the instrument. Great drummers!

**SFB:** So your original drumming frame of reference was swing drumming?

**JBB:** Absolutely! But, keep in mind that we were playing many different kinds of music. We were exposed to so many different musical styles.

**SFB:** Did Frank Tucci teach you how to read music?

**JBB:** Yes. I was learning how to read music and music theory. I became a very good reader. I would come in for lessons and there would be a set of drums at one end of the room and a F.I.P.P.S. (Frank Ippolito Practice Pad Kits) at the other end. The lessons were always on the pads. If I had a good lesson, I would be allowed to play something on the drum kit at the end of the lesson. As the word got out about "Little Johnny" (as I was known back then) I was asked to compete on a locally televised talent show in Detroit. It was televised during the intermissions of a show called Rita Bell's Prize Movie. I played on many of Rita Bell's televised talent shows. About this time my father bought a bar, a little beer and shot joint



Earl Elliott, Gene Krupa, and Bee at the Metropole

strategically placed between all of the auto factories. There was this guy that came in and started talking to my father. His name was Mr. McCarty. They got to talking and my father told Mr. McCarty that his son John was a drummer. Then Mr. McCarty told my father that his son was also a drummer.

**SFB:** How old were you at this point?

**JBB:** I was thirteen. So, both my father and Mr. McCarty agreed that both of their sons should get to meet one another. This would be the beginning of one of the most profound and significant musical and personal relationships in my life. It is a relationship that continues to this day. For, Mr. McCarty's son was none other than the great rock 'n roll guitarist Jimmy McCarty. I was thirteen and he was fifteen and about to get his driver's license. Jimmy had studied drums a lot longer than I did. He was in a very successful wedding band called the Debonairs. The wedding band that I was in was called the Starliters. Jimmy and I were playing weekends and were bringing in anywhere from \$50.00 to \$200.00 per weekend. That was a lot of money back then.

**SFB:** What did a thirteen year old do with all that money?

**JBB:** The first thing I did was get a matching Slingerland 16" x 16" red sparkle floor tom. Then I went to The Drum Shop, when it used to be upstairs in the building on Broadway in downtown Detroit. I let George Hamilton drill a hole in my bass drum to get that second mounted tom on my bass drum. All the hot drummers coming to town had two mounted toms and I had to have one as well! Then I went and got a couple of new Avedis Zildjian cymbals. Man, I was stylin'!

**SFB:** Were they all Zildjian cymbals?

**JBB:** Absolutely! I've never played anything but Zildjian Cymbals. They are the finest cymbals ever made. They are a huge part of my sound!

**SFB:** So, you were hanging out with Jimmy McCarty at this time?

**JBB:** All the time! Jimmy was a fine jazz drummer and he was really into the great Be-Bop drummers like Elvin Jones, Max Roach, Art Blakey, and Jimmy Cobb. At this time Jim started studying the guitar. We would jam a lot with Jim on guitar and me

on drums. When I wasn't working, Jim would start taking me out with his wedding band, The Debonair's. When they played jazz oriented tunes Jim would play drums. When they would play rock oriented tunes I would play drums while Jim played guitar. I still remember Jimmy's white marine pearl Slingerland Gene Krupa Deluxe outfit! I remember how serious Jim was (and still is) about great jazz drummers. He exposed me to so much that I wouldn't have known about. Just as Jim became a world-class guitarist, he was a great jazz drummer in his own right.

**SFB:** Jimmy McCarty started out as a drummer and taught himself how to play the guitar, right?

**JBB:** Yes. Jimmy and I started playing together all the time and we decided to form our own band. Then we started to jam with a friend of mine that played the bass, Earl Elliott. Earl had his own band but the three of us started playing together.

**SFB:** Were you still 13 at this time? How old was Earl?

**JBB:** Earl was my age. Earl and I were 13. Jimmy and the rest of the guys were about three years older than Earl and myself. We were playing together and we decided one night to go the Michigan State Fairgrounds on 8 Mile Road. Massimino's Music had a cool display at the State Fair called the "Teen Hang Out". Massimino's Music (which still exists

to this day) had a beautiful musical instrument display with a new set of drums, guitars, amplifiers and a PA system. So we got up and started playing. Everyone crowded us and all the attention shifted to us. There was a guy there called George Williams III, that approached us to manage us! We all looked at each other and said that it sounded like a great idea and that we should all get together and talk about it. George Williams wanted to take us out and expose us to the hot entertainment that was happening in downtown Detroit. So we went out to an area club in downtown Detroit called "The Village".

**SFB:** Where exactly was "The Village"?

**JBB:** Right around Woodward Avenue and Warren Avenue, around the Wayne State University area. The Village was owned by Gabe Glance and it was a beatnik type of place. They had a lot of black groups performing there like Nathaniel Mayer, Lee Rogers, and some members of The Temptations. It was a very strange scene and, at the same time, a very hip place. We were just kids. To say that we were overwhelmed would be an understatement. Then, there was this kid from the suburbs, Billy Levis, singing with this black group The Peps. They had a great house band at this joint. It had a great jazz guitar player Pat LaRose and some other heavy sidemen. Well, George Williams arranged for us to get up and play. We played and the place just got excited as hell. After we played, Billy Levis approached us and said that he loved our sound and was interested in forming a band.

**SFB:** Billy Levis would later become Mitch Ryder, right?

**JBB:** You've got it! Billy informed us that he was going to Florida with his friend that played guitar. So we all agreed to meet at my house upstairs in "The Studio"! Everyone loved coming up to my studio because every bit of ceiling and wall space

## We agreed right there to form a band and the name of the band was Billy Lee and The Rivas.

was covered by the sleeves of my huge 45 RPM record collection along with my loud Hi-Fi system. Girls used to love coming up to the studio at my house. They would see all these really hip record jackets on all four walls and we had a lot of privacy up there. So Billy Levis came to my house and brought his friend the guitar player, Joe Kubert. We jammed all day and we were just on cloud 9! We agreed right there to form a band and the name of the band was Billy Lee and The Rivas.

**SFB:** This is the beginning of Mitch Ryder and The Detroit Wheels?

**JBB:** Yes. We started playing around Detroit and the band got real popular. Within a

year we were playing five to six nights a week at the Walled Lake Casino and other hot Detroit (and surrounding) venues.

**SFB:** You were playing at casinos at the age of fourteen?

**JBB:** The Walled Lake Casino wasn't really a casino as we know it today. It was a large dance hall attached to an amusement park. These were the large dance halls that were really big in the 1930's and 1940's made popular during the Swing era. These places eventually became rock'n roll palaces. They still exist today and are prevalent throughout the Midwestern states of Wisconsin, Iowa, Michigan, and Ohio. These venues would easily accommodate four thousand people. We are talking big stages with no dressing rooms. No place to change our clothes. The most significant thing is that we were exposed to such incredible talents like Smokey Robinson and The Miracles, Little Stevie Wonder, Chuck Berry, Ray Charles, and countless other Motown and Blues acts. We actually shared the bill with these incredible artists!

**SFB:** Were you guys kind of out of place with such giants as mentioned above?

**JBB:** Absolutely not! You have to understand the time frame we are talking about. We are in mid 1963 and we were playing a set a night. We were developing our own following. Then the Beatles had just come out and this even made us more popular. There really was a musical "changing of the guard" when the Beatles came out. There was a hot demand for Beat Groups and we were just developing our craft and writing new songs all the time. We were working constantly. The kids would scream and we would sign autographs. We were all wearing the same Beatle-type matching suits and boots. Billy Lee and The Rivas was one hot band. In fact, I would love to get my hands on any of our filmed performances as Billy Lee and The Rivas IN FACT, IF ANYONE OUT THERE READING THIS INTERVIEW HAS ACCESS OR KNOWS OF ANY ACCESS TO ANY OF THESE FILMED PERFORMANCES OF BILLY LEE AND THE RIVIERAS, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH THE EDITOR AND/OR PUBLISHER OF VINTAGE DRUMMER MAGAZINE!!!



*Original Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels release photograph*

**SFB:** Were you playing original songs at this time?

**JBB:** Initially, no. We were playing covers. We were playing Beatles, Animals, Kinks, James Brown, Smokey Robinson, and the like. However, since we were exposed to all of the Detroit Soul Music, we put a Detroit/Soul twist on everything we played. Even Billy's musical interpretations were Soul interpretations. Our sound was a Rocking-Soul sound that was unique to Billy Lee and The Rivas. Detroit couldn't get enough of us. We started having more television appearances like on 1270. These were shows that were in black and white television. Dave Prince was the host of one of these shows and Robin Seymour had one show in Canada called Swinging Time on CKLW. We were doing these shows with the Four Tops, Stevie Wonder, The



*Bee with Smokey Robinson and Detroit Wheels bass player Earl Elliot circa 1965*

Temptations, The Isley Brothers, and Marvin Gaye. We were exposed to all of these incredible black artists and they were our teachers. I am talking about an untouchable level of genius. It's such a pure and beautiful approach to music and we were constantly listening and learning. We would play at The Village in Detroit and we tape recorded every other act on the bill with us and we listened and learned. Our musical style was evolving before our eyes.

**SFB:** Did you guys actually realize that this process was taking place?

**JBB:** We didn't have time to even think about it really. It was bigger than anything we could quantify or get our hands on. However, WE WERE A PART OF IT!!!

We were growing and becoming artists in our own right. Then we went down to the Fox Theater in Detroit to see this new artist named James Brown. All the lights went down and then "Bang"! The lights went on and there was this 25 piece band with two drummers playing all this incredible rhythm with James Brown moving like a man possessed! It was INCREDIBLE! We were speechless. Everybody was scared of the raw talent and authenticity of James Brown. I mean everyone. Even Mick Jagger was frightened of James Brown. And his drummers! Clyde Stubblefield and Jabo Starks were in a league of their own. You've never seen so much concentration between two drummers and their leader James Brown. These guys had to be ready to stop and start "on a dime". Incredible doesn't describe the effect that this performance had on us all!

**SFB:** Did you guys ever meet Barry Gordy?

**JBB:** Naturally yes. Barry was always looking for artists to sign to his label. He was really putting his Motown label together and he wanted to sign beat groups but didn't have the correct label together until 1967. I think that this label was later called Inferno. We recorded a few songs on the Inferno label in 1968. The band that really scored with Barry's label was Rare Earth. Anyway, we were playing out with many of Barry Gordy's fine artists all the time. I remember that we really got to know the great Smokey Robinson and his band the Miracles. We worked a lot with The Miracles.

**SFB:** So Billy Lee and The Rivieras was playing on television, at casinos, private parties, radio stations, college fraternity parties, and Dave Prince from Television 1270 got you in touch with Bob Crewe in New York City?

**JBB:** Yeah. Bob Crewe was a famous producer in New York City that used to be a popular singer in the 50's. He sold a lot of hit records. So Dave Prince did a lot of work with Bob Crewe and after talking with Bob, he wanted to hear a tape that was representative of Billy Lee and The Rivieras. Billy's dad paid for us to record a single at Specialty Records in Detroit. The name of this song was *You Know*. This recording got a lot of plays around town. Bob Crewe loved Billy's voice and he liked the feeling of the band. He sent for the whole band to come to New York.

**SFB:** This all happened in 1963?

**JBB:** This went down in late 1963-early 1964. I had just turned fifteen and we were getting ready to hit *The Big Apple*!

**SFB:** How did it all work out initially with Bob Crewe?

**JBB:** Initially, Bob was only interested in Billy's voice. He really wasn't interested in the band. He brought the band into his studio. By the grace of God, Charlie Colello, the world famous arranger/songwriter for Bob Crewe and also arranger of the *Name Game* (by Shirley Ellis), heard us play *Shake a Tail Feather* and went absolutely ballistic. Charlie told Bob that he had a hit band on his hands and that he would be out of his mind if he only signed

Billy and not the entire band. So we started working right away in the New York clubs.

**SFB:** So Bob really was not initially interested in the band and if not for Charlie Colello's intercession there may not have been a band at all?

**JBB:** That's right. But, it became obvious that the band had a chemistry by our response in the New York Club scene. The first thing that Bob Crewe did was change the name of the band because there was another band from California named the Rivieras that had a couple of hits. So Bob suggested that since the band was from Detroit, Michigan that it would be cool to call the band the Detroit Wheels. Then Bob picked up a Manhattan telephone book and started looking at names and found a guy in Manhattan with the name of Mitch Ryder. Thus, the band was now called Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels. Initially the band hated the name. Then we started playing the serious New York clubs like The Metropole, Trudy Heller's, Ondines, and the Eighth Wonder.

**SFB:** What bands did you work with?

**JBB:** We worked with some great black groups like Carl Holmes and the Commanders. Man did they have a great drummer. This guy's nickname was Moose. This guy play the drums! He was such an inspiration. Then we played with Jimmy Castor Quartet. A lot of the guys that played with Jimmy Castor played with James Brown, The Isely Brothers, or Chuck Jackson. It was just unbelievable!

**SFB:** Was New York the next step of your musical evolution?

**JBB:** Oh God yes! It was an evolution both musically as well as socially. We played shows with one of my true heroes, Gene Krupa! Then we would go to the Apollo Theater to check out James Brown as often as possible. That band just took us all "hook, line, and sinker!" We were all just young kids of fifteen to eighteen years of age. It was just indescribable! James Brown was like a God to us all. We would be one of the few white groups that would go to the Apollo Theater regularly to check out all of these great acts.

**SFB:** Was the fact that you were from Detroit an issue that gave you all a certain kind of credence and credibility among the great black musicians of the time?

**JBB:** You bet it did! We weren't just a Rock 'n Roll band. You could hear the influence of Soul music in everything we did. You can hear Detroit in every note we played. In fact, the way we played was termed Rock 'n Soul. Our style garnered us a lot of respect because it was unique and authentic.

**SFB:** So when did you guys actually start recording an album?

**JBB:** Remember, Bob Crewe was really interested in Mitch (as he was now known). He took Mitch and Jimmy McCarty into the studio with many New York studio musicians to record a song Bob wrote called *I Need Help*. The song went absolutely nowhere. We were all really miffed. Then Bob got the whole band into the studio and that's when we recorded *Jenny Take a Ride*.

**SFB:** When did this happen?

**JBB:** Early 1964. The record broke in Philadelphia and it really caused a stir. It immediately broke the Top Ten list. Then we started touring with major recording acts. We would back up many of the acts that we toured with. We backed up the Orlons, the Angels, Chuck Berry, and Johnny Tilliston. From there we would drive to Virginia Beach, Virginia. I remember this trip so well. Chuck Berry was the headline act. We had one quick rehearsal in the afternoon with Chuck Berry and that was it. Chuck would come up to me and say, "Drummer, do you see my foot? When I put my foot down just break!" We already knew a lot of Chuck Berry tunes because he was one of our heroes. Chuck Berry would



borrow Jimmy McCarty's Gretsch Country Gentleman guitar and make it sing.

**SFB:** So Mitch Ryder and The Detroit Wheels was a serious act that was being booked on major television shows and at important venues?

**JBB:** Yeah. We were booked for six weeks at the Metropole. The first three weeks we were booked with the Gene Krupa Band. We would alternate sets. Gene Krupa would play his Jazz set and we would play our Rock 'n Soul set. Then the next three weeks we were booked with Dizzy Gillespie. It was a great learning experience.

**SFB:** What other acts were you touring with?

**JBB:** We started touring with Simon and Garfunkel, The Yardbirds, and Leslie Gore. We even backed Leslie Gore.

**SFB:** Did you get to meet all these people? Did you get to meet The Yardbirds?

**JBB:** Absolutely! Jeff Beck was the lead guitar player for The Yardbirds back then. Keith Ralph was the vocalist. Great bunch of guys. Real characters! Then we were really tight with Jay and the Americans and Lou Christie. We started doing all of the television shows like *Shindig*, *Hullabaloo*, *Where The Action Is*, and *Dick Clark and The American Bandstand* tours. We played on the *Dick Clark's American Bandstand* quite a few times with Paul Revere and The Raiders. As long as the hits kept coming we were in hot demand. We were doing tours with The Young Rascals. We were really knocking 'em dead!

**SFB:** Did other bands recognize the fact that your sound was not a regular Rock 'n Roll sound and that it truly was a hybrid of Soul music?

**JBB:** That's what I was leading up to. I remember one tour in Atlanta, Georgia where we were playing the Whiskey A Go-Go. The Black groups from Atlanta would catch our show and then take us to the Blind Pigs after hours to watch and play with the great Soul artists that you normally wouldn't see.

**SFB:** So did the great Black groups recognize that the sound of Mitch Ryder and The Detroit Wheels being heavily influenced by Soul musicians?

**JBB:** Absolutely! All the African-American

musicians and non-musicians showed us nothing but love and respect. They heard our sound and could relate to it because we were heavily influenced by their sound. It's uniquely a Detroit thing. We spent as much time as possible with these great people going to specialty record shops and buying the best Blues and Soul records. It was a beautiful exchange of ideas that really helped shape our craft.

**SFB:** What drummers were you heavily influenced by at that time?

**JBB:** This is an interview in itself! There are so many. Let me start by saying that at that time not all the drummers that I dug were listed on the albums that they played on. For example, The Isley Brothers didn't list all the musicians in their band. On the *Isley Brothers Live*, they said that the drummer's name was "Spider". Even Motown didn't list all of their musicians until years later. Remember if it was Motown, the three busiest drummers were Benny Benjamin, Pistol Allen, and Uriel Jones.

**SFB:** After *Jenny Take A Ride* was a big hit, what was the second big single?

**JBB:** We did a re-recording of the Righteous Brothers' *Little Latin Lupe Lu*. This song got to number 15 on the charts. Then we had *Sock it To Me*. Then we let out *Devil With A Blue Dress* which got to number 2 on the charts.

**SFB:** What year was *Devil With A Blue Dress*?

**JBB:** 1966.

**SFB:** Everybody, and I mean EVERYBODY, talks about your foot on that song? You were known as the drummer with the fastest, most precise foot. Would you say that your foot is your playing trademark?

**JBB:** Personally, God has blessed me with great hands as well as great feet. To play this instrument well will require more than great feet. Just listen to all the great drummers that have come before and after me. Listen to Elvin Jones and Tony Williams. These guys had entire arsenals in each finger. Tony's hands and feet were unbelievable! Listen to Buddy Rich! His left hand alone is probably more potent a weapon than both hands of most drummers. He had dancer's feet. Buddy never played on his pedals. He was always dancing on his pedals.



*Live with The Rockets in Vancouver, BC, 1972*

**SFB:** So what happened with the band after the phenomenal success with *Devil With A Blue Dress*?

**JBB:** We released *Devil With A Blue Dress* in mid-1966. By 1967 the music was changing at an incredible pace. Remember that by 1967 we are in the Summer Of Love. The Beatles came out with *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The Who and Cream were blazing musical trails. Everything was changing. The British bands were leading the way with this new and uncharted musical journey. At this time Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels were starting to break up.

**SFB:** So they broke up the band in 1967, right? Did Bob Crewe just give the band pink slips?

**JBB:** Well, it's important to note that breaking up Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels was one of the few mistakes that Bob Crewe ever made. Bob Crewe really was a genius. Eric Clapton was once interviewed about what bands really influenced him and he immediately talked about Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels as a major influence. It's amazing (and humbling) that we influenced so many bands. Jimmy Page even said that one of his favorite bands was Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels. We were at our peak when we split up.

**SFB:** You were part of a huge drumming boom in the 1960's. How did that all come about?

**JBB:** It was legitimized by the drummer who did more for drumming than any man ever, the great Gene Krupa! Gene did more for drums and drumming than any

*continued on page 32*

## Johnny Bee Badanjek continued ...

drummer of any era. He not only made the drum kit a solo instrument, but he legitimized the roll of the drummer as a major player in modern music. Before Gene Krupa the drummer was not really even considered a musician. They used to say, "We have three musicians and a drummer"! Imagine that attitude today? If they took rhythm out of modern music you wouldn't even have any music. Today, rhythm is the music! Gene Krupa made that all possible. The 1960's were so significant because the style of music that evolved was centered around and dependant on the drums! The Beatles were the first to really bring the drum beat up in the final mix of the song. Everyone that saw Ringo Starr play drums on the Ed Sullivan Show on Sunday February 9, 1964 wanted to be a drummer. In fact, the most famous Beatle early on was Ringo Starr! After the Beatles, everybody wanted to be a musician. Most of those wanted to be drummers.



Performing live with Ringo Starr & The All Starr Band in June, 1989

**SFB:** Would you say that the British Invasion and the British drummers had a lot to do with the drum explosion of the 1960's?

**JBB:** The drum explosion of the 1960's is a continuum of every evolutionary step of drumming since the beginning of time. I will say that the music of the British Invasion was way more percussive and the drums played a much more important roll in the broad scheme of the entire musical movement. The British drummers catalyzed the ever increasing roll of percussion instruments in music and, thus, the drumming boom of the 1960's. This ever

increasing roll of drums in modern music has continued up to the present music scene. Listen to Hip-Hop, Rap, R & B, Grunge, and modern Jazz. It's all drums! The British Invasion had a large roll in this continuing trend.

**SFB:** What drums did you use with Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels?

**JBB:** I had that red sparkle Slingerland Kit until 1967! Boy do I wish I had that kit today! In the recording studios of New York, we used whatever they had in the studio we were recording at. I might bring in my snare drum, my foot pedal or some cymbals, but we all generally used whatever drums happened to be at that studio. I can remember doing a session for three hours and then Bernard Purdie would come in and use the same drum kit on his session. For my own personal use, I was a Slingerland man until 1967. That was a great kit and the snare drum was a solid one ply rock maple Clam-Shell Radio King.

That drum had a beautiful crack and a sonorous body to it. Then I went to one of the early NAMM Shows in Chicago and I was approached by a company that made the world's first compact drum sets called Flat Jaks. They were single headed thin (and light) shallow steel drum shells. They were the rave for a while. This concept of drum compactness has been imitated many times but none of them had the quality of the original Flat Jaks.

**SFB:** What were the drums that you consistently used in the studios back in the 1960's?

**JBB:** I consistently saw Ludwig, Rogers, Slingerland, and Gretsch drums. Those were the big four. Ludwig snare drums were always so easy to get a great sound with. We would get that awesome bass drum and snare drum sound dialed in and the rest was easy. I really have to doff my cap to William F. Ludwig II, for making such a beautiful and wonderful instrument. Everybody, regardless of the make of their kit, was using a Ludwig 400 snare drum and a Ludwig Speed King bass drum pedal.

**SFB:** Did you have an endorsement with any of these drum companies?

**JBB:** Not until the late 1970's. Although I did have an endorsement with the Flat Jaks Compact Drums.

**SFB:** So you said you were a Slingerland man until 1967. What drum company did you go to from there?

**JBB:** Ludwig. I went back to Massimino's Music in Detroit and bought a Ludwig red sparkle kit.

**SFB:** Ludwig didn't give you a professional artists discount?

**JBB:** The great people at Massimino's Music loved me so much that they gave me the entire kit with all new A. Zildjian cymbals and cases for under \$400.00. To me it was a windfall! I still have this kit to this day. I use it all the time and it still sounds great.

**SFB:** You used the red sparkle Ludwig kit until the early 1970's? Then what happened?

**JBB:** Led Zeppelin came out and John Bonham got those huge ambient drum sounds with those great big 26" bass drums. I called Ludwig and Billy Ludwig III sent me an all maple kit with a 26" bass drum. Man did that kit sound incredible. That kit inspired me and I just loved it. I used that kit on Edgar Winter Band's *Free Ride*, the *Detroit Album* featuring Mitch Ryder, Alice Cooper's *Welcome To My Nightmare*, and most all of the Rockets' albums.

**SFB:** Do you still have this kit?

**JBB:** No! It was stolen when we were on tour with Bob Seger in the mid-1970's. In fact, we were playing Chicago (of all places) and our whole semi was stolen. It's still a bone of contention with the band. It's about that time that Carmine Appice officially hooked me up with Ludwig Drum Company in the late 1970's.

**SFB:** So you weren't an official Ludwig endorsee until the late 1970's?

**JBB:** That's right. I just played their stuff. The management of the bands that I was working with got everything that I needed.

**SFB:** Who were you working with at this point?

**JBB:** Barry Kramer, the editor and publisher of Cream Magazine put the Mitch Ryder

Detroit Band together. This lasted for about five years. The Mitch Ryder Detroit Band toured with the Edgar Winter Band. Then Edgar Winter approached me to join his White Trash Band. Edgar's original White Trash Band was breaking up and he wanted to put together a new downsized version of the band. The band consisted of me, Ronnie Montrose, Edgar, Randy Hobbs, and Dan Hartman. Then our bass player Randy Hobbs got sick and Dan Hartman stepped in to play bass. So I went to New York and started doing dates with Edgar and we were in the studio for about six months. In fact, my dear friend, Max Weinberg always remembers that he was in another room at the same recording studio with Bruce Springsteen when we were recording *Free Ride*. To this day Max always reminds me of this session and how much he loved it!

**SFB:** You were now a serious part of Edgar Winter's new White Trash Band. You recorded one of the most played rock anthem's, *Free Ride*, and you were with a really hot band. Did you start a major tour?

**JBB:** We were killin' 'em in the studio and Edgar wanted me to move permanently to New York. This was a really difficult thing for me to do as I had a house and two children in Detroit. At the time I didn't think it was the right thing to do to move my family to Manhattan. It's, bar none, the greatest city in the world but a rough one to raise a family in. We had a nice house with a big (and green) back yard for the kids to play in, and being that I had already spent so many years in New York with Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, I didn't feel that it was the right move for my family at that time.

**SFB:** You seem to be trying to convince me that you made the right decision. Do you have any regrets not moving the family to Manhattan?

**JBB:** Sometimes I do. I feel that I would have had a lot more opportunity in New York or Los Angeles to work with other great artists. I would have had more opportunity as a session drummer in New York or LA than I would have ever had in Detroit. Detroit is a town that is an automotive/blue collar town. It produces phenomenal musicians and lots of great young bands. It's not a town that can sustain a great artist.

**SFB:** Was Edgar upset with you?

**JBB:** He was disappointed but he truly understood and we are still friends to this day. He's a wonderful guy and he's still working all the time. I'm happy for him. He's a terrific musician and a great songwriter. I personally loved working with him.

**SFB:** Who took your place with Edgar Winter?

**JBB:** Chuck Ruff. He's the guy that played that great drum solo on Edgar Winter's big hit *Frankenstein*!

**SFB:** What did you do then? Back to the Motor City?

**JBB:** Yes. I went back home and put a band together with Jimmy McCarty called the Rockets. The Rockets worked every night seven days a week. We were playing four sets a night and I was writing the songs, playing the drums, and singing. In fact, I was the lead vocalist until Dave Gilbert joined the band years later.

**SFB:** You wrote most of the Rockets' songs?

**JBB:** Yes. I have written hundreds of songs. It is my sincere contention that every musician should write at least one song. It's a skill and it's a way of life. It's something that you can never get too good at and you are never done learning about. It's kind of funny but I didn't choose this life. It chose me!

**SFB:** Did the Rockets get signed?

**JBB:** Not yet. We were working so hard for so long that we all just burned out. I was playing the drums and singing almost every song. I think that the constant grind combined with exposure to smoke four sets a night, seven days a week had a large part to do with my collapsed lung. We all just decided to take some time off from the Rockets project for our physical and mental well being.

**SFB:** You took a year off?

**JBB:** It was more like a month. Then I got the call from the great producer Bob Ezrin,

to come to Toronto, Ontario Canada to start work on Alice Cooper's album, *Welcome To My Nightmare*. That was a great experience for me. I did the album with Alice and then Bob Ezrin asked me if I wanted to go out on the road to support the album. I told him that I wanted to write and record my own songs. So I went back home and started working again with the Rockets. We started opening for REO Speedwagon, Blue Oyster Cult, ZZ Top, and Heart. We were literally opening for every top act at the time.



*With Mitch Ryder, early 2000*

**SFB:** It seems like the Rockets would work their tails off for a while and the band would take a break from each other. Was this the case?

**JBB:** It's just the way it worked out. Always remember that change is so important to the life of an artist. The Rockets worked incessantly for years at a time. We would go out on the road with a major act and then come back to Detroit and play six to seven nights in a row. Then I got another call from Bob Ezrin to come to Los Angeles to start work on Dr. John's new album. It was crazy!

**SFB:** What Dr. John album did you record on?

**JBB:** *Hollywood Be Thy Name*. After the album was finished I went out on tour for nine months with Mac! It was a great year! Then after the tour I went back home and started working again with my dear musical brother, Jimmy McCarty.



Performing with The Rockets at the Michigan State Fair, 1973

**SFB:** Back to The Rockets?

**JBB:** Yeah. The Rockets were a very talented band. The original band consisted of John Fraga on bass, Marc Marcano on keyboards, Jimmy McCarty on guitar, and yours truly on drums and vocals. The original band lasted seven years. Again, you have to realize that we were a serious working band. When I got back to Detroit after a year with Dr. John, Jimmy McCarty wanted to change the way the band did things. We hooked up with a phenomenal slide guitar player from North Carolina, Dennis Robbins. Dennis played in the tradition of Duane Allman and added another very cool dimension to our music. Also, we started working with a talented young lead vocalist Dave Gilbert. At this point I met this very driven guy that said he could get us a record deal and that he wanted to manage the band. His name was Gary Lazar. Gary introduced us to a very important producer, Don Davis. After Don heard the band he got seriously involved and wanted to produce the band. Between Don Davis and our manager Gary Lazar's dogged persistence, we got signed to RCA on Don Davis' Tortoise label. We started working out of Don Davis' United Sound Studio.

**SFB:** So The Rockets had a viable recording contract? What was the lineup of this incarnation of the band? What year was this?

**JBB:** The final Rockets band was Jimmy McCarty on lead guitar, Dennis Robbins on

rhythm guitar and slide guitar, Bobby Harrelson on bass, Donnie Backus on keyboards, Dave Gilbert on lead vocals, and myself on drums and vocals. This all went down in 1977.

**SFB:** How long were The Rockets around?

**JBB:** All in all, about thirteen years. After we got signed in 1977, we had recording contracts through 1983.

**SFB:** How many albums did The Rockets record?

**JBB:** Seven in all. There was even one bootleg album of a live show that is a collector's item.

Legitimately, though, we recorded six albums from 1977 through 1983. They were *Love Transfusion*, *Turn Up The Radio*, *No Ballads*, *Back Talk*, *Rocket Roll*, and *The Rockets Live*.

**SFB:** What was the most successful album?

**JBB:** *Turn Up The Radio* was the most successful album because we had our biggest success with a remake of the Fleetwood-Mac song *Oh Well*. That song got to number 28. That was a big tune for us. However, we were really an exciting live act.

Everybody wanted us to open for them! We were one of the most high energy opening rock acts ever!

**SFB:** Did you start working with another band after The Rockets?

**JBB:** Many! I started working with Mark Farner (formerly) of Grand Funk Railroad and then I started working with Nils Lofgren. I ended up touring with Nils Lofgren in 1985. In 1987 I got back together with Mitch Ryder and played with Mitch until 1991.

**SFB:** What was it like going back to your roots with Mitch Ryder?

**JBB:** It was a lot of fun. We did it right this time. We had a full crew and it was a great

time. Then in 1991 I started working with The Romantics. I toured with The Romantics for quite a while. Then I went on tour with Nils Lofgren again and did a major European tour. It was great because I had three gigs going simultaneously. I was working with Mitch Ryder, The Romantics, and Nils Lofgren. It's important for any artist to work in different musical situations because it makes you a more complete musician. It forces you to think outside of your mind and body. It makes great musicians out of good drummers! Expose yourself to EVERYTHING!



The Romantics at the Palace of Auburn Hills, New Year's Eve, 2000

**SFB:** Let's change gears a bit here. Who were your big influences?

**JBB:** There are so many great drummers that have influenced me. The first drummer that I noticed was Sandy Nelson with *Let There Be Drums*. Of course, there was the great Gene Krupa. I got to know Gene and I have to tell you that he was one of the most beautiful human beings that I ever met in my life. Gene had so much heart and he had a goodness about him that was part of his aura. The great thing is that it was completely AUTHENTIC! He elevated the drummer to the status of a musician and soloist. Before Gene Krupa, drummers were not considered musicians. Gene changed all that.

**SFB:** Any honorable mentions on your list of drumming influences?

**JBB:** Man, there are so many. Hal Blaine was a hero of mine. He was not only a great drummer but he was a studio pioneer. He was the standard by which all other drummers were measured. Another great drummer was Earl Palmer. Earl had great hands and a great meter. These guys were

(and still is) a monster. Man this guy can make chicken salad out of chicken s#@\*! Also, Al Jackson Jr. was incredible. All the Motown drummers were great. Benny Benjamin, Uriel Jones, and Pistol Allen were slammn'! Gene Pitney's drummer, Gary Chester, was a monster. What an unsung hero of our instrument. Don't forget the great blues artists, Muddy Waters,

Baker was no less ferocious. In fact, he was so ferocious that the late Jim Henson (creator of the Muppets) modeled ANIMAL THE DRUMMER after Ginger Baker. One thing's for sure, their importance in the development of our instrument cannot be overestimated. What they did had a lot to do with what's happening now. I am just so proud and blessed to have been an integral part of it all!



*Live with Nils Lofgren on German television, 1993*

literally working around the clock! I remember Jack Sperling was a great drummer that worked with Pete Fountain. Let's not forget Joe Morello, Elvin Jones, Philadelphia Joe Jones, and Buddy Rich. Buddy Miles was another giant that influenced me heavily. It's just ridiculous!

**SFB:** Were there drummers of a particular genre of music that influenced you the most?

**JBB:** They all influenced me. However, the guys that really got to me, deep inside my soul, were the black R & B drummers. They were so magnificent. They were just unbelievable! The stuff they would come up with was sheer genius. To really do this justice I would have to go back through my extensive record collection and pull out the stuff that really blew me away.

**SFB:** For the sake of this interview, let's focus on the 1960's drummers.

**JBB:** Okay. I would say Bernard Purdie was

Howlin' Wolf, James Cotton, Lightning Hopkins, and Otis Spann! All of these great Blues artists had two things in common. First, they were all geniuses in their own right and, second, they all used the great Chicago Blues drummer S. P. Leary! This guy was THE giant of Chicago Blues drumming! Let's not forget Sam Lay. Sam was another Chicago Blues icon. We can never forget Ringo Starr and what he did with the greatest songbook in the history of music. Charlie Watts was another great 2/4 rock drummer that came from a jazz background. In fact, Charlie is still playing with his Charlie Watts Jazz Orchestra. These guys just keep getting better. Also, I have to mention Keith Moon of The Who. He was a whole other thing rhythmically and musically. Nobody played like Keith Moon. Let's not forget the great Mitch Mitchell. Mitch Mitchell was one of the most inventive drummers ever. Listen to what this guy did with Jimi Hendrix. It's just mind boggling. Ginger Baker was another drummer. I get credited for being known as one of the most ferocious drummers ever. Ginger

**SFB:** What modern drummers stand out in your estimation?

**JBB:** So many. The one guy that I really look up to that's hot today is Max Weinberg. What I love about Max is that he has kept the tradition of the past great drumming styles current within the realm of today's music. This is no small feat. Also, to this day, I have never witnessed the sheer guts and stamina of a drummer playing as intensely as Max does FOR OVER FOUR HOURS A NIGHT!!! Nobody does this! This clearly demonstrates that Max has the heart and spirit of a warrior. This is an absolute requirement to be a great drummer. For all of the above, I truly admire my dear friend Max Weinberg.

**SFB:** What do you want to do and accomplish in your career?

**JBB:** Artistically, I still want to play and write songs. This is something I do every single day of my life. I am writing songs that I want to get out to artists. I want to record these songs with great artists. I also want to continue touring. I love the spirit of playing great music with great artists. It's a thrill that I will never get over. I also enjoy painting.

**SFB:** I never had any idea that you were a serious painter. How long have you been painting?

**JBB:** My entire life. I've always been able to draw and paint. I come from a very creative background. It's really all part of the same artistic continuum.

**SFB:** So what's happening today that gives you hope for the future?

**JBB:** What's happening today is proof positive of something that I have known and experienced my entire career. Musically, Detroit is one of the hottest cities, bar none! Detroit is a tough town and it consistently produces great music and great musicians in every genre of music. Oh yeah, always remember to give the drummer some!