

The Remarkable Return of GUNHILL ROAD

After a 40-year hiatus, one of the most interesting but almost forgotten bands of the early seventies launches an unlikely return in 2014 with a stunning, timeless 19-track album titled "Every 40 Years"

In the world of CHR radio, they are remembered as a one-hit wonder ("Back When My Hair Was Short"); in veteran AOR radio circles many consider them to be one of the great bands of the golden era with several turntable hits that simply fell through the cracks...

By Mike Kinoshian
RadiolInfo
Managing Editor



NEW YORK — Potentially negative underlying tones are associated with "one-hit wonder," a longstanding term in the radio industry lexicon.

Paramount to that point is that the individual artist or group is forever defined as only having one hit. In a bizarre sort of way, a potentially punishment-perceived label becomes fastened to what is actually an exemplary accomplishment.

Down a bit on the negativity ladder with that expression is a possible play on words such as one hypothesizing how a certain artist or group was capable to achieve even one hit record.

Furthermore, there is the entire debate of what constitutes a "hit." Is an authentic "one-hit wonder" an artist or group whose one piece of recorded success soared all the way to #1, or could that solitary "hit" have landed somewhere – anywhere – on a published chart?

"Fuzzy" territory indeed and we have encountered a group that makes matters even muddier; happily though, it is in a warm and "fuzzy" way.

Fame is fleeting

First though – and changing the mood dramatically – few wars or military conflicts are ever "popular": The United States is heavily engaged in an unpopular one a world away with an enemy of whom we know little.

No – this is not present-day Iraq and/or Afghanistan, but the late-1960s/early-1970s and the locale is South-east Asia.

Programmers at that time continued airing the top contemporary tunes, later discovering straightforward titles were actually protest songs. Others, of course, are obvious like Edwin Starr's "War," a #1 record in 1970, whose main lyric straightforwardly inquires, "What is it good for?" Without hesitation comes the simple reply, "Absolutely nothing."

Dozens of songs were war-related or had some such overtone. Even *attempting* to create a representative list would be an exercise in futility. More than occasionally, they were by mainstream artists who made a direct plea, such as Freda Payne's "Bring the Boys Home," which reached #12 in 1971.

Common from that era was some positively stellar songwriting with lyrics that not only penetrated, but also have remained relevant and top-of-mind 40 years later.

How many songs today, for example, would dare to begin with, "Itemize the things you covet as you squander through your life?" One powerful, brilliantly-crafted sledgehammer after another pounds away at the solar plexus in Ray Stevens' circa 1970 "Mr. Businessman" ("where the smiles are all synthetic and the ulcers never stop"), a song he wrote in just his late-20s.

Given that in addition to "Mr. Businessman" – which peaked at #28 – Stevens had "The Streak," "Everything is Beautiful," "Misty" and about a dozen others, he is anything *but* a one-hit wonder.

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Conversely, GUNHILL ROAD is (at least from the top 40/CHR perspective – album rock is another story), and its three members are indicative of the human element behind the oftentimes-fleeting element of fame. Those who have ever “wondered” whatever happens to artists after they have achieved their, as the late Andy Warhol would say, “15 minutes of fame” in pop culture will find the GUNHILL ROAD story especially fascinating.



GUNHILL ROAD in the early 1970s

Thanks a million

Ubiquitous adult hits outlets such as “Jack-FM” boastfully tout in their on-air and marketing imaging that they play “what we want.” Equivalent philosophy though was for all intents and purposes present in 1972 when WNEW-FM, New York City morning drive personality Mike Harrison enjoyed the luxury of airing music he felt would strike a nerve and resonate with his audience. “We *knew* what was good and did not pay attention to charts or sales figures,” recounts the *RadiolInfo* publisher now known professionally as *Michael* Harrison. “The DJs were gurus at WNEW-FM and we were ‘mu-

sic directors.’ Nothing needed approval beyond the respect of our on-air station-mates. We were hired and paid to have a certain sensibility of musical taste and represent the interests of our highly knowledgeable audience in playing our selections.”

Minimizing that he was “not one of the biggest stars” ever to be on the station, Harrison was, in fact, WNEW-



GUNHILL ROAD today

FM’s wakeup talent in 1972/73 and did it “in the heart of its golden days” – between the historic reigns of Pete Fornatale and Dave Herman in that shift. WNEW-FM- Whenever a label person gave Harrison a record to play on the air, the *quality* of that product needed to be justified as much if not more than all other measures, especially if it was recorded by an unknown or unproven act. On WNEW-FM “The New Groove” in his early-20s, the enthusiastic young DJ took notice that GUNHILL ROAD was “finding poetic meaning on the same streets” on which he was walking in Manhattan. “Their song ‘42nd Street’ was great and many album rockers played the heck out of it, but it just got lost out there in the world of top 40. They were a quintessential example of obscure acts that could have easily gone all the way but for any number of combinations of circumstances and luck only enjoyed a flicker of big-time-commercial success. They were also the kind of poetic, whimsical, intelligent rockers that the four 20-something personalities on the station at that time – Richard Neer, Dennis Elsas, the late, great-Pete Fornatale and me – identified as resonating with our target audience.”

Then at the fabled “New Groove” less than one year, Harrison championed GUNHILL ROAD for playing what was in his estimation, “the typically great 1972 style and caliber of music.” As a token of their appreciation, the band rewarded him with a homemade gold record. “They took their single – ‘42nd Street’ – and sprayed it with gold paint,” recalls Harrison who had never met anyone in the group until the day they un-



WNEW-FM, New York in 1971 (l-r): early 20s DJs Dennis Elsas, Michael Harrison, Richard Neer and Pete Fornatale. Photo courtesy of DennisElsas.com

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expectedly stopped by the station and presented it to him. "They put it in a frame and made the inscription, 'To Mike Harrison, hearing you play 42nd Street on WNEW-FM means a million to us.' I consider myself very fortunate to have played a role with it at WNEW-FM. They were big among our listeners with two albums full of outstanding tracks, but they never went on more than that one hit single."

Pop chart purists, however, would be absolutely correct to fume that GUNHILL ROAD's "one-hit wonder" status is for "Back When My Hair Was Short," which peaked at #40 in 1973, rather than the uncharted (as far as pop is concerned) "42nd Street," which naturally is not to be confused with the musical of the same name.

Eerie coincidence

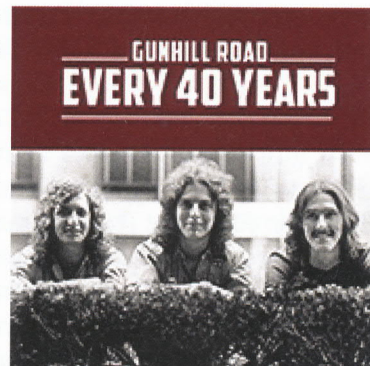
Over time, approximately 100 RIAA gold or platinum plaques would comprise Harrison's collection, but that "unofficial" homemade trophy was his first, so therefore, he always felt it was uniquely special. Somewhere in his stockpile is a platinum record for Fleetwood Mac's "Rumours" and Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run"; however, Harrison – believed to be the first to have aired Led Zeppelin's eighth studio album 'In Through the Out Door' (he did it at Los Angeles' KMET) – no longer has any of his gold records plastering his office walls. "I kept the one from GUNHILL ROAD in the forefront of my mind and heart," he fondly remarks. "Many of the gold records I received fell into a state of disrepair as the frames fell apart, the glue got dry and the records fell off."

Approximately eight months ago while rummaging through his radio memorabilia, Harrison noticed the GUNHILL ROAD souvenir was hardly holding together, so he thought he would discard it "as an attempt to begin cleaning up all the 'stuff'" he had been hoarding over the course of a 48 year career in the business.

Seemingly a pedestrian fact, but it is actually a precursor to an amazing coincidence, as Harrison several weeks later mentioned the sentimental significance of

the GUNHILL ROAD gold record in casual conversation with his son – *RadiolInfo* vice president-associate publisher-general counsel Matthew B. Harrison who was but a twinkle in his father's eye during his WNEW-FM days. Less than a week after Harrison had that father-son chat, he received an email from GUNHILL ROAD, whose members – Glenn Leopold, Steve Goldrich, and Paul Reisch – are now in their mid-60s.

Other than a Pete Fornatale-emceed charity event in Montclair, New Jersey three years ago, the group has not played together in four decades but the three band-mates decided to make an album. A documentary film produced/directed by Steve Goldrich's son Eric is being shot on their reunion and Harrison was invited to write the liner notes for the "Every 40 Years" CD, which is officially being released this week. "I swear the album sounds like something that would have come out in 1972 in the same league perhaps as the Bee Gees, Lovin' Spoonful, Joni Mitchell, Simon & Garfunkel, Cat Stevens, or Seals & Crofts," he declares. "The lyrics are poetic; instrumentation is organic; and the harmonies are sweet. As I listened to it, I became teary-eyed. It is that same, straight-forward, earnest style – but, in so many ways, even better. They sounded – and now sound – of that time, but were not, and still are not, imitative of anyone."



Cover of the new
GUNHILL ROAD album

The formation of GUNHILL ROAD

At one point, Glenn Leopold thought he would be a novelist, but songwriting was more interesting to him because, "I like music and I love to sing," he affirms. "Songs are short but you can still express yourself through the emotion of the music. I have always been a verbal guy and the songs carry the message."

Among the compositions singer-songwriter Leopold penned when he majored in journalism at the University of Missouri was "Tall Towers," recorded by a group with the dubious name of The Clan. Nothing ever happened with "Tall Towers," but it was the first record that had his name on it as a songwriter, and Neil Diamond's

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producer, Tom Catalano, wanted to sign Leopold as a songwriter.

Sounds like a plum opportunity until Leopold ascertained it was for the vastly sum of \$100 a week. Not only that – a clause in the contract read if Leopold – who transferred from the University of Missouri to New York University (NYU) – arrived to the recording session late, he would be docked the \$100. “I wanted to be in advertising or something creative,” he comments. “I still liked writing songs.”

That summer, he went to see Chip Taylor whose songwriting credits include two diversely different music genres, “Wild Thing,” #1 for The Troggs in 1966, and “Angel of the Morning,” a top 10 country flavor song by Merrilee Rush in 1968, and later done by numerous other artists including Juice Newton, whose version made it to #4 in 1981. “I played a bunch of songs for Chip and he was very nice,” Leopold notes of actor Jon Voight’s brother.

From that meeting came a momentous turning point, as it was Taylor – the producer of Neil Diamond’s 1968 “Brooklyn Roads” LP - who suggested that Leopold go to New York City’s well-known club, The Bitter End, to see if he could get someone interested in his songs. “My mother drove me there and I asked her to park out front because I didn’t think I would be there very long,” jokes Leopold, who cannot remember what he sang, but Bitter End owner Paul Colby liked it.

So much so that Leopold went out and told his mother, it was okay for her to find a parking space.

A hoot to play with others



Through an association with Leopold’s stepbrother, he had come to know a young piano-player, Steve Goldrich. “I played guitar and sang; Steve played piano; we got a bass player; and – as a trio – we played ‘Hoot Nights’ at The Bitter End,” points out Leopold, whose numerous influences include the Beatles, Bee Gees, Everly Brothers, Gerry & The Pacemakers, Hol-

lies, and the Searchers.

Being in a group – rather than as a solo act – appealed to Leopold: That way he would not feel alone on stage. “Paul knew all the record connections and he tried to find a record deal for Steve and me.”

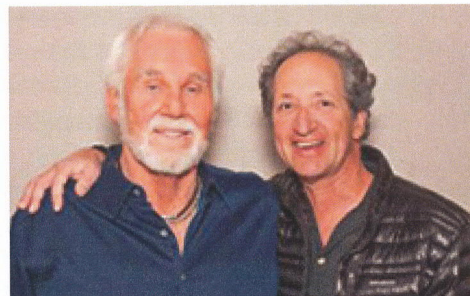
Eventually, they landed a Mercury Records contract, and among the top priorities was to establish an identity. One subway stop from Mount Vernon, New York was “Gunhill Road” in the Bronx and as Leopold jests, “It sounded like a better name for us than ‘Mount Vernon.’” Artists identifying themselves as “Chicago,” “Boston,” and “Kansas” certainly flourished, so this was not a particularly uncommon tact.

“Gun Hill Road” was the way the group was referenced in their 1971 debut album “First Stop,” but on the second, they put it all together as “GUNHILL ROAD.” As 1970 NYU grad Leopold states, “We liked that better and it is how it came to be.”

Heavy hitters

Nuances exist in the *two separate* Leopold-written (words and music) “Back When My Hair Was Short” versions, although both the 1972 *FM* and 1973 *AM* renditions contain overlap. “Seeing three concerts a week, an honest-to-God hippie freak, too busy eating to speak, except about love,” for example, are lyrics from both.

Subtleties, however, include, “I was into a heavy scene, reading *Screw Magazine*” (FM), versus, “Drank



Kenny Rogers and Glenn Leopold

till my eyes were red, hid *Playboy* ‘neath my bed” (AM). Regardless of shades of difference in what would be their signature song, the group departed for Los Angeles, where they would record that track and nine others for their Kenny Rogers-produced album. For context, Rogers was then known for his late-1960s/early-1970s association with The First Edition (“Just Dropped In,” “Ruby, Don’t Take Your Love to Town,” “Something’s Burning,” “But You Know I Love You,”

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and "Ruben James"). Solo career smashes "Lucille," "The Gambler," and "Daytime Friends" – among many others – would come several years later. Also involved in the project was Buddah Records head Neil Bogart, who in turn, brought in Kenny Kerner and Richie Wise – pivotal in discovering KISS.

Prognosticator Bogart – later the founder of Casablanca Records – believed "Back When My Hair Was Short" would be a hit; it indeed was promoted/released as a single.

Dead ends and disappointments

Follow-ups to "Back When My Hair Was Short" – "Ford Desoto Cadillac" and "She Made A Man Out Of Me" – in Leopold's word "flopped" and that was pretty much it for the group. "The last concert Steve and I did as GUNHILL ROAD was in 1976. I went to Los Angeles again to see Tom Catalano who was no longer producing Neil Diamond but had his own label, Tomcat Records, a subsidiary of RCA. I reconnected with him and played some songs."

Optimistic he was going to be signed to a solo contract as a singer-songwriter, Leopold only came to realize Tomcat was "in two million dollars of debt. Steve and I had been through so many dead ends trying to get record deals."

Nothing ever materialized from their countless demos. Extremely frustrated, they were unsure of their next move. "The only thing we were doing was griping about things with each other on the phone," Leopold admits. "Over the years, I would still write songs and bang them out on the piano. I actually went in and recorded some stuff with studio musicians."

Various, occasional small jobs and performances at Los Angeles' Improv were Leopold's source of income. "I don't write-to-order, such as Carole King, Gerry Goffin, or Barry Mann. In that sense, my songs might not have been commercial enough."

Even so, he persevered and went on auditions.

K-Tel royalties from "Back When My Hair Was Short" generated enough cash for Leopold to purchase his only real California possession. That royalty check was the biggest one he ever received and he not so shock-

ingly explains, "I ran out and bought a car."

Don't drink the water

Similar to how Chip Taylor's advice kick-started aspiring singer-songwriter Leopold's career, he would benefit from knowing a secretary of children's programming at ABC, who got wind of a mailroom job at animation icon Hanna-Barbera. "They needed someone to change water bottles," Leopold matter-of-factly remembers. "I was still going on interviews for songs but I didn't have any money and was living at a friend's house."

Working in the Hanna-Barbera mailroom afforded Leopold the opportunity to look at some of their scripts on weekends. "I thought I could write that kind of stuff and began submitting some ideas."

Affixed to the glass water bottles, which weighed nearly as much as he did, were tongue-in-cheek Leopold-written notes that read, "Please do not drink the water as it causes hair loss and halitosis." Method behind the madness was simple: "I didn't want the workers to drink the water too fast because I would have to change the bottles," the affable Leopold proclaims. "This was before computer animation, so I had to three-hole punch animation paper as well."

Interesting work, at times, but mostly mind numbing to Leopold, who one day looked up in disbelief as he saw Bill Hanna checking expiration dates on fire extinguishers. "This multi-millionaire had to have something better to do on a Saturday afternoon."

On his daily rounds, horror movie aficionado Leopold would talk to Hanna-Barbera senior vice president Louis "Deke" Heyward, formerly the head writer of "The Ernie Kovacs Show" and later director of overseas production for American International Pictures. AIC was doing Vincent Price movies in England, such as "The Abominable Dr. Phibes" and "Dr. Phibes Rises Again."

When it came time to start an apprentice program to develop and hire new writers, Heyward submitted Leopold's name, for which Leopold has "always" been grateful. "I had already sold an idea for one of their cartoons, but did not write the script because I didn't exactly know what I was doing."

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Spinach leads to plentiful green

Transitioning from songwriter to scriptwriter was “weird” for Leopold, who along with another apprentice, wrote material for Hanna-Barbera Productions’ “Scooby-Doo, Where Are You,!” originally broadcast on CBS-TV from 1969 to 1976, and then on ABC-TV until 1986.

An hour-long animated H-B-produced “All New Popeye Hour” series debuted on CBS’ Saturday morning lineup in 1978. The first idea Leopold submitted was “Spinach Fever” and it featured Popeye’s nemesis Bluto wearing a white John Travolta suit. “Quite vividly,” Leopold describes, “I remember the big hook at the end, which was that a can of spinach went on the turntable and the needle opened the can so Popeye could eat the spinach.”

Network personnel liked that episode and it led Leopold to submit other suggestions, including numerous puns for a “Popeye’s Treasure Hunt” segment.

While the other apprentice program participants faded away, Leopold ignited his Hanna-Barbera career by writing 13 “Popeye” episodes. Several years later, “The Smurfs” came along and Leopold wrote episodes for the show’s inaugural year. That series ran on NBC-TV from September 1981 – December 1989 and Leopold would put in approximately 20 years at Hanna-Barbera. “It is a good job if someone will pay you money for making up stories,” he concedes. “I made more money writing for shows like ‘The Smurfs’ than I ever made in music.”

Having the distinction of being the last staff writer to leave when H-B was bought by Turner – and later by Time Warner – Leopold freelanced there as a story editor. “Seth MacFarlane and I had the same agent and we were both pitching ideas to Bill Hanna, but he did not take any from either of us; I never got a meeting. The next thing I knew, Seth had a \$4 million dollar-deal at Fox and ‘Family Guy’ was running after the Super Bowl.”

Discussion about doing a “Scooby-Doo” movie became reality and Leopold devised the notion to age the kids – Fred Jones, Daphne Blake, Velma Dinkley, and Norville “Shaggy” Rogers. Despite relatively low expectation, 1998’s “Scooby-Doo on Zombie Island” sold three million copies for Warner Brothers Home Video.

“It turned out being a pretty amazing thing but I found out they had hired someone else to write the next one,” Leopold laments. “I didn’t even get a chance.”

Six months later, Leopold received a call from a producer friend of his. Apparently, the sequel script was un-boardable, so Leopold re-wrote it in six days and inserted songs into it.

Couldn’t hurt

Catalyst for the GUNHILL ROAD reunion was a concert for their former manager Paul Colby. Three years ago, Leopold heard from a New Jersey friend who was aware that Colby was the group’s manager, but was perplexed why GUNHILL ROAD would not be among those participating at Colby’s Outpost in the ‘Burbs tribute.



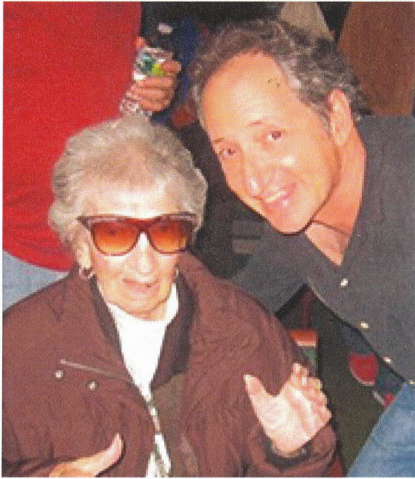
Paul Colby

Elementary answer was that nobody had asked them. “Steve and I were in contact off and on, so I called to see if he was interested,” Leopold recounts. “He was, so we picked out some songs we wanted to do. Steve and Paul [Reisch] began rehearsing without me and then I went back east. When we started to sing, it was as if we had not been apart for all those years. We ended up on the bill with Peter Yarrow and Noel Stookey of Peter, Paul, & Mary. There were others as well who played in the tribute which benefitted a local food bank. We were not the headliners by any means.”

Wheelchair-bound Colby was about 94-years-old at that time and had an oxygen tube. “My mother was there and saw us as we went on second,” Leopold discloses. “Steve’s sons had never seen him play before. It was like a love-fest – everyone was thrilled about doing it. We connected with people we had not seen for ages.”

Shortly thereafter though, the health of Leopold’s mother deteriorated. In the hospital, Leopold was playing “Sailing” off the group’s Kenny Rogers-produced 1972 album while his mother had her little hands on the bed railing. “As we were singing the song, I thought to myself this is like a bad movie – my mother is in the

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**Glenn Leopold with his mother
Audrey Leopold**

bed dying and we are singing. It was all just so strange. I mentioned that maybe I should get together with the guys and record again."

Like any good Jewish mother would, Audrey Leopold asked Glenn, "Why not?" and that April 2012 incident stuck in Leopold's mind; Audrey passed away three months later. "I was

not writing animation anymore and I was wondering what my third act was going to be," ponders Leopold. "The death of your mother is a traumatizing event because you are next in line on the conveyor belt. I emailed Steve to see if he wanted to record and he wrote back asking me if I was serious. We found a studio where Matchbox Twenty recorded. I stayed at Steve's house and we began rehearsing the songs."

Several days later, they went into Sweatshop Studios where they remained ensconced for the next three weeks. "We didn't know if we were getting senile, but when we listened to what we did, it sounded pretty good to us," Leopold maintains. "Even though we hadn't done any mixing, it still sounded like it was popping."

Their previous producer-aided albums churned out quickly, but this one – done by themselves – proved to be a much longer process. Importantly though, Leopold stresses the three group members were all on the same page. "Paul played bass in our group. He is very low-key and I never knew he played guitar. I mentioned that I wanted him to do a George Benson-type octave and he did it. It was like George Harrison who could play anything tasty. Steve's piano stuff has always been great but suddenly, we have this really good guitar player in the group. What a revelation – we never knew about it."

Strings attached

Super-star power arrived in the person of "Late Show

with David Letterman CBS Orchestra" leader Paul Shaffer, who, according to Leopold, did some "cool organ riffs" on a reggae-tinged tune, "Selling Apples," which will be the album's first single release.



**Steve Goldrich (l), Paul Shaffer (c)
and Paul Reisch (r)**

"American Idol" Season Two 10th-place finisher Julia DeMato drove from Danbury, Connecticut to assist with vocals. "I had never met her before but it was really fun," Leopold remarks. "I felt like she was Dolly Parton and I was Kenny Rogers. Julia has a Dinah Washington type feel to her voice. We did not know if anything would come of it, but Steve, Paul Reisch, and I laughed a lot and had a ball. I hope that carries through to everyone who listens to the album. It has some strings, which we love, but it is also very crisp and punchy."

Releasing an album decades ago was monumental and Leopold doubts if he would want to go on tour. "The business has certainly changed," he acknowledges. "Now artists are out 365 nights a year with two other groups for \$10 admission. Music is given away free. You need to get a song on TV or in a movie; play live; and sell a ton of merchandise."

These days, Leopold prefers going to schools to read for kids. "I liked monster stories when I was their age and I tell them if there are things they like, perhaps they will become marine biologists," he reasons. "If you like what you do, you never have to work a day in your life. Writing a song and then singing is the purest thing. It came from me sitting in a chair and creating it. It was really fun because it was mine."

Fast friends

Insignificant detail aside that they are meeting you for the very first time, Glenn Leopold and Steve Goldrich

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share a common consummate characteristic that you are treated as if they have known you for years. Perhaps that stems from the fact that a then-15-year-old Goldrich instantly "loved" the songs that Leopold, two years his senior, played for him. "I quickly became his biggest proponent," Goldrich asserts of Leopold. "I never saw anyone play guitar the way Glenn did -- he was amazing."

Roughly at Christmastime 1968, Goldrich was playing drums and tinkering a little bit with piano. Not long after Leopold successfully auditioned at The Bitter End, Goldrich followed suit and met Paul Colby. There was a piano in the dressing room, and as Goldrich details, "The next thing I know Glenn and I were playing at The Bitter End. It was a showcase for Glenn -- and I was playing piano for him."

Eight months down the road was Woodstock. Leopold and Goldrich thought it might be fun to go. "Paul Colby said he was going to put us in at The Bitter End as an opening act for the Ace Trucking Company," Goldrich points out. "We didn't have tickets for Woodstock but our bass player, Danny Bloch, said he was going. I remember asking him if he would rather watch someone be on stage or be on stage. It just made no sense to me. Danny decided to go to Woodstock, so we got Gil Roman to replace him; Gil and I played together in high school. We did three weeks opening for the Ace Trucking Company and it was in about April 1969 when we really became GUNHILL ROAD. We were all signed with Paul [Colby] at that point."

It was typical for the group to do frequent "live demos" at recording studios, where they would go to a label such as Columbia in the big studio where Simon & Garfunkel did "Bridge Over Troubled Water." One particular session was with Eddie Simon, Paul Simon's brother.

Another was at Decca with Rascals' founding member/guitarist Gene Cornish. "When we did this, we were young -- hadn't turned 19 yet," Goldrich states. "Paul Colby called us and said we had a live demo audition at Mercury Records. It was like living in another world when Paul said Mercury was going to sign us. We recorded in 1970 and Mercury released the album in 1971. We played at The Bitter End with everybody and anybody. We were a terrific opening act and all we had was one bass amp. There was nothing in terms of

instrumentation."

Comedians Robert Klein, George Carlin, and Lily Tomlin are among those for whom the group has opened.

Nice knowing you

Once the Mercury album was finished, GUNHILL ROAD signed with Creative Management Associates (CMA), which became ICM. "Our agent, Jim Ramos, was married to the daughter of one of CMA's founders and he worked very hard for us," emphasizes Goldrich, who had never been on a plane until the group went to Columbus to play with Poco. "The idea of flying made me very nervous."

Outside of The Bitter End, GUNHILL ROAD played "oldies," which in the late-1960s/early-1970s, would be something like Danny & The Juniors' "At the Hop," songs that were 10 to 15 years old. "It makes me laugh when someone today refers to an 'oldie' as being five years old," Goldrich exclaims. "The first week we played The Bitter End, we got \$100 for the three of us. That was probably over 15 shows in six nights. We were thrilled to get a penny for it. I learned to play guitar and a little bass so we could break it up a little bit."

By the mid-1970s, even though GUNHILL ROAD had done countless demos, the group was again without a record deal. The last tour was just Leopold and Goldrich, who went to upstate New York as part of a coffeehouse circuit. "Colleges would have concerts in their gyms and we would get booked in places that would hold several hundred people," Goldrich remembers. "After the tour was over, I was working with my father in his business; Glenn was going to move to California. I had written a few songs and I took them to a publisher who could not wait to see me because I had been with GUNHILL ROAD. In a millisecond, you know if someone likes something. He said it was 'nice,' but you do not want to hear that something is 'nice.' When I left, I thought to myself I would never again put myself in a position of having someone tell me if something is good or bad."

Unexpected success source

During its 1980 exhibition season, the NHL's New Jersey Devils used a Goldrich-written theme song. "I played here and there, but nothing much."

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Instead, he became more involved with his business, which he still has to this day. One patent his pharmacist father had was for a penetrating agent used in the subway system; another was for a disinfectant [Steri-Fab]. "We make lubricants, but 'Steri-Fab' has become a very big product," Goldrich proudly boasts. "My parents were middle-class. We did not have a lot of money, but nobody we knew had any money. Everything though was okay. Middle-class was not financial – it was everything else and Glenn came from the same background."

Two months shy of Goldrich's 42nd birthday, his father passed away in 1992. "I had been running the business the last handful of years when my father wasn't doing well," Goldrich explains. "Little by little, it built up and the real change took place with bedbugs. Over the last 10 to 15 years, the business began making some serious money but it was not the type of thing that I thought would happen."

Worth the wait

Folk/rock is the way many classified GUNHILL ROAD years ago, although Goldrich suggests, "That meaning in our time is not understood today. 'Folk/rock' implies something that we are not. We were in a different world and we have a very specific sound. We are obviously reminiscent of the 1970s because we come from that time. Most of these songs were written then."

Phoenix-based Nathan James did what Goldrich describes is "a lovely job of mastering" the group's appropriately-titled "Every 40 Years" CD. "We never understood 'mastering,' which is an ethereal art," Goldrich comments. "Without 'changing' anything, he moved it into the next place where it really sounds like an album."

Some musicians and actors never want to see or hear creative things they have done. "I listen to our stuff as if it is not really me," Goldrich contends. "I have a certain style of playing and am always pleasantly surprised that I can make anything sound halfway-decent. It was beyond nervousness because I thought I would have to be very conscious of being minimal on basic rhythm tracks."

Nearly a year was devoted to the comeback album and Goldrich became increasingly comfortable/confi-

dent. "It is sort of like riding a bike," he analogizes. "On the other side though, recordings are not forgiving. To some degree, technology is but – other than several pitch corrections – we really did not cheat at all. I do not have emphysema but I was so nervous that I just could not extend a few notes, so I doubled my voice for about a bar or two. Other than that – it really is us. Paul Reisch did some amazing guitar work and terrific vocals."

Archive keeper Goldrich puts forth it is "other-worldly" to see some of the group's old videos. "The whole thing is so odd. We were not stars, but beyond involved peripherally in an industry where we were happy just to be in this place. To do that is from another dimension. We did 'American Bandstand,' 'Midnight Special,' 'The National Highway Safety Telethon' with Sammy Davis Jr., and a number of other things. The videos express the *joie de vie* that we had. Glenn and I have always been on the same page. It makes it infinitely easier that way. When we toured, we wanted to know the location of a good restaurant and the used bookstore. We were not drinkers and we didn't do drugs."

Elements of the early-Bee Gees, mid-Beach Boys, (Jimmy) Seals & (Dash) Crofts, and several other groups is how Goldrich perceives the 1969-1971 edition of GUNHILL ROAD. "We certainly write and play what I consider to be very pop-sounding songs. My perspective along with this wonderful ride we are taking is as singular an experience as I believe it could be."

A philosophical Goldrich maintains that, even if GUNHILL ROAD did not reunite three years ago, he can still listen to the group's two early albums. "I have a great life with a wonderful wife I love dearly and I had an amazing time. To have these experiences was beyond comprehension to me and it still is. Getting back together after all this time makes zero sense, but whenever we were in the studio, the time went by so quickly. There was no drudgery or rancor among us. I constantly feel like [screaming in delight]. So many things that have happened in my life have been just so wonderful. I have had sadness like everyone else, but so what. Forty-one years between albums is a little odd; however, I do happen to think we have a terrific one."

Deferential attitude

Anyone desiring a concrete example of the expression “drifting apart” need look no further than GUNHILL ROAD’s Paul Reisch, who succeeded Gil Roman in 1973. After decades of being out-of-touch with each other, Steve Goldrich found Reisch on Facebook four years ago. The two exchanged several email messages and one year later, Goldrich contacted Reisch to ask if he was interested in doing that New Jersey reunion concert.

Moreover, it had been 40 years since Reisch and his other band-mate Glenn Leopold had last spoken to each other so, “It was a surprise to get the invitation but I said they could absolutely count me in for the concert,” Long Island-based Reisch enthusiastically declares. “We spent several days rehearsing for it and – boom – our performance was over in 20 minutes. Glenn returned to California and Steve went back to do his thing. When Steve called about a year later to see if I would be interested in doing a CD, I said I was. They played stuff from their first two albums, which I had nothing to do with – I did not record on those. We went back into the studio and redid ‘She Made A Man Out Of Me’ from the second album.”

Refreshingly candid, Reisch – who was not on “Back When My Hair Was Short” – downplays his role in the group. “To this day, I consider Glenn and Steve to be GUNHILL ROAD. Glenn wrote most of the music and sang most of the leads; Steve played piano. I was passing through at the time and became part of it. I am a sideman – an accompanist. I play guitar, bass, or fill-in on whatever is needed. I will do vocals when the harmony needs to fill out and I always defer to what Glenn and Steve suggest.”

Rocky Mountain goodbye

Immediately after Reisch heard the Beatles sing “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” he bought a “cheap guitar,” as well as that song’s sheet music, and learned how to play it. “I was in several bands and we performed in bars around Long Island and Queens. I loved all of that early-1960s stuff from the Four Seasons, Dion, Crystals, and Ronettes. It never entered my mind to play guitar though until I saw the Beatles. At that point, I was into the British Invasion. Over the years, I played in every type of band. I must say that I like just about every

kind of music. I played standards, country, and – in the late-1970s – I played in a disco band in south Florida. It all had a fun part to it. All of those little bits and pieces influenced how I play today.”

Not long after Leopold and Goldrich parted company with Gil Roman, Reisch – through a mutual friend – became connected to Bitter End owner/GUNHILL ROAD manager Paul Colby. “I went to audition and spent all day singing oldies and harmonizing; we took it from there,” Reisch recalls. “We did the concerts they had on the schedule for the next year.”

Things tapered off though and Reisch went to Colorado, where he decided to stay. Even though there was no specific reason for him to leave the group in the winter of 1974, Reisch called Leopold and Goldrich to say he was not coming back. “I didn’t want to leave Colorado and they had to move on,” Reisch acknowledges. “There was no bad vibe – life just changes. At that age and at that time, I was trying different things. We parted ways and we didn’t talk again until about four years ago.”

As matters turned out, it was ironic that he did not remain in Colorado very long.

Broadly brushed album

Catching up with Reisch meant that he unplugged from what is now his post-band career – interior painting. “I fell into it and I learned as I went along,” he divulges. “I keep very

busy. My schedule is just that – ‘my schedule’ – I am not tied to anything. It has been fun getting back into the swing of things. “Immersed in the “Every 40 Years” CD project since last November to the point where he has admittedly lost perspective regarding radio’s willingness to devote airplay to it, Reisch cites Fordham University’s WFUV as offering diverse music. “I could hear one or two tracks from this album being played there,” he predicts. “I am not sure if top 40 radio would play it. We do the music and put it out there, but we don’t know what happens after that. It would be very nice to hear it on the radio. There are many musical



Public Radio from Fordham University

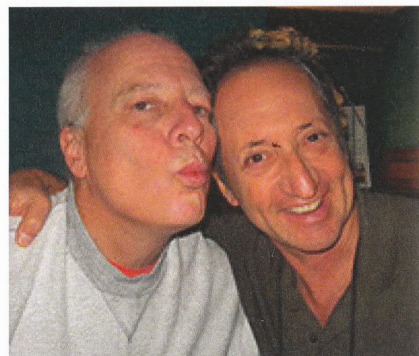
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styles on 'Every 40 Years' so it might be hard to classify it as one particular theme. Without being too serious, a song about growing up, such as 'Everything Passes,' presents something meaningful to me as we deal with the complexities of our lives. I just call it GUNHILL ROAD music – and I like it."

Endeavoring to get beyond thinking whether he could have played something better on the album, Reisch realizes things can be nit-picked to death. "When I am painting by myself, a few tunes from the CD buzz through my head all day long," he mentions. "It was a learning experience – and a tough one at times trying to get things to sound the way

you want. GUNHILL ROAD was a unique experience 40 years ago and a unique experience now. I never get tired of it. As an active participant in the creation of music, I try to look at what we are saying, and how we are saying it." Spoken-word radio is what Reisch generally listens to when he is in the car, although given that he does some wedding reception appearances, he samples CHR as well. "Some songs I like – others I don't," he concedes. "There was a time when I bought 45s and LPs, but I do not buy many CDs. I do not listen to as much radio or records as I did and I miss it. I still have a turntable and a nice collection of music but I just do not get the chance to listen to an album anymore. There is too much going on. In a way, it is good because I am

busy. Late in the day, I will listen to a bossa nova album because it is very relaxing. I like all different kinds of music." Fun was the primary motivation for the three band mates to join forces again, although after the considerable time and effort devoted to recording an album,



**Steve Goldrich (l) and
Glenn Leopold (r)**

they do want people to hear it, of course. "Some GUNHILL ROAD fans are still out there," Reisch strongly advises. "We are not going to be superstars – no one is

even thinking about that. This is a little part of our lives. We enjoy being with each other and we hope there is a fan base who will enjoy the music. This project has kept us in touch – hopefully, it will stay that way."

Uncertain what comes next, Reisch imagines that neither Leopold nor Goldrich do either. "It has been a lot of fun and I am just going with the flow," he observes. "We are enjoying the ride."

Respect for risk-takers

Listening to "Every 40 Years" has been "a joy" for Michael Harrison who, at the time of this writing, had sampled all 19 tracks a multitude of times. "It is as if we opened a time capsule, but GUNHILL ROAD does not sound like anyone else but themselves," he opines. "It is 1972 album 'rock' – a term that was a wide umbrella for lots of styles of good contemporary music back in the day – and it would be able to sit side-by-side with the Beatles, Carole King, Cat Stevens, Jim Croce, Harry Chapin, Simon & Garfunkel, Carly Simon, James Taylor, John Denver, and even Bob Dylan. The album has tremendous diversity. I do not like to play upon the past, but I am willing to do so in this case because they had the guts to invest their money without expecting anything. It has layers of instrumentation and words that are clever... even poetic. They feel like songs from a modern musical – but there is no musical. Hmm, there certainly *could* be."

In light of the fact Harrison is strongly linked to "Album Oriented Rock" – a term he coined during his *Radio & Records* (R&R) days while still serving as PD of the historic album rocker, KPRI in San Diego, it may appear strange that *RadiolInfo* does not have an album chart, but as Reisch earlier confirms, few people have the time and/or patience to listen to an album. "Albums these days are collections of songs," further emphasizes Harrison, who introduced GUNHILL ROAD at the recent, packed Bitter End reunion performance before a wildly enthusiast crowd on a Saturday night (9/13). "There is certainly no such thing as a 'concept' album anymore." Harrison also wrote the liner notes for the new CD – something well-known DJs often did back in the seventies, but seldom, if ever, occurs anymore. Stations in the AOR days made their own hits and Harrison contends programmers and on-air talents did not care if they sold. "We were so instinctive that we created our own universe of music and measurements of

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their appeal to our listeners. Today, the only ones creating the main universe of music on radio are the corporate guys. I was very much into the mode of the singer-songwriters who expressed their feelings and observations of life through the eyes of young adults coming of age. I was very sensitive to the lyrics, words, and poetry that captured the spirit of our generation."

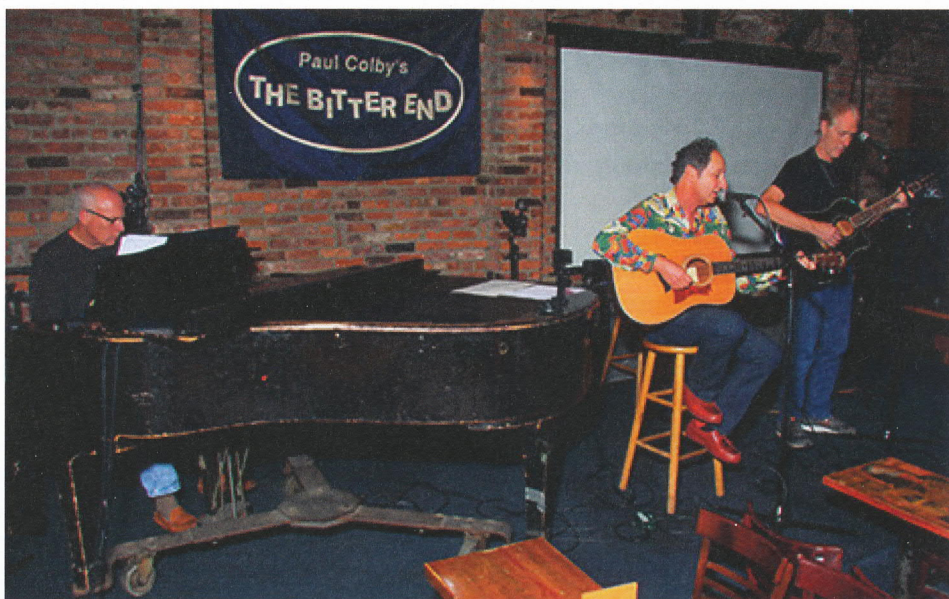
Music reflected that and Harrison believes, "We were smarter back then than kids are today... at least as it was reflected in the popular culture – I hate to say that but we were. It is hard to think someone in their early-20s today would even care to write a song like 'The Dangling Conversation' for people of the same age." In fact, when Simon & Garfunkel's "Dangling Conversation" was released in September 1966, its writer – Paul Simon – was 25 years old; serendipitously, that song peaked at #25. Harrison says, "Big time music and radio are missing the boat by not offering at least a line of product and formats specifically geared to today's smart and sensitive kids. I know they are out there. How alienated they must feel in today's pop culture. Bouncing booties can only go so far."

Powerfully personal endorsement

Album rockers did not focus exclusively on acid rock, they mixed a wide assortment of music together and Harrison insists, "It was amazing. On-air talent expressed their soul, their feelings, and their observations. They talked about how the music connected to what they were thinking. That is why I feel so personal about GUNHILL ROAD coming back."

Strongly recommending that adult alternative stations play cuts from "Every 40 Years," Harrison however grants that he does not think "the group has any expectation of having a hit or being famous."

Nonetheless, the story behind the project lends itself to a potentially powerful attraction for listeners. "They sound young so there is a lot you can do with this," muses Harrison. "There was so much richness to the presentation of music. Every track is interesting. It



GUNHILL ROAD doing a sound check for their recent Bitter End reunion concert

doesn't really fit any current musical genre. Enough people in radio love a good story so this album should get some buzz. I hate to call it 'rock' because that word no longer conjures up anything you can hang your hat on – even if it was at one time nothing more than an attitude."

If it is for no other reason to GUNHILL ROAD than the pleasure of making this album for themselves, that itself is fundamentally a core component of music. "It is art and art is the creation and performance of the product," Harrison asserts. "It is art for the sake of art and that is a wonderful concept."

For his part, Harrison sums it as follows: "I just think this is one of the greatest stories I've ever experienced in my radio career and the new album is a veritable treasure chest of authentic, organic pop music at its best. I'm absolutely delighted to be talking about GUNHILL ROAD and I intend to champion their comeback to the hilt – the guys who gave me my make believe first gold record more than 40 years ago."



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