

Syndicate Of Sound 8/1/13, San Jose



Dates: August 1, 2013

Location: Santa Clara County Fairgrounds, San Jose, CA



At the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds (San Jose, Calif.) the legendary '60s garage impresarios still managed to, ahem, impress. Special guest: the vocalist from fellow Cali rockers The Count Five.

BY JUD COST

Long before the rise of Silicon Valley, these guys put San Jose on the map. In the spring of 1966, a five-man combo called the Syndicate Of Sound, assembled by a pair of Camden High grads, singer Don Baskin and bassist Bob Gonzalez, released a number called "Little Girl," one of the most lethal put-down songs of a runaround girlfriend ever committed to wax.

The Santa Clara County Fairgrounds at one time hosted rock royalty to the tune of international stars like the Doors, Jefferson Airplane, Cream, the Lovin' Spoonful and Buffalo Springfield. But the dusty old venue has fallen

upon hard times, of late. Tonight, playing to a hardcore group of a hundred of their staunchest fans, the Syndicate decides to re-invent themselves. *A la* recent excursions by the Kinks' Ray Davies and Roger McGuinn of the Byrds, Baskin spins a few yarns in between songs that help the devoted recall such hallowed local venues as the Bold Knight, Loser's South and the Continental Ballroom.

"Welcome to the survivors, because that's what we are," says Baskin, referring not only to the band but the hardy souls who have braved 75 degree weather to make it to the first set at 6:00 pm. A new wrinkle, something they should have been doing years ago, finds the Syndicate playing not only their own stuff but letter-perfect versions of '66-'67 Tex-Mex smashes like Sam The Sham's "Wooly Bully" ("Let's not be L-7," that's a square to the squares) and "She's About A Mover" by the Sir Douglas Quintet. The salsa-laced numbers were so lovingly performed, they had Texas Music Hall of Famer Freddie Steady Krc dancing in the aisle.

The boys follow their own gem "Mary" with "Lies" by the Knickerbockers. "When that came out," says Baskin, "it was so good everybody thought it was done by the Beatles under an assumed name." Then they blow up the joint with an explosive run-through of Jr. Walker's "Shotgun," with skinsman Pat Hennessy's double-barreled attack possibly topping the original in vocal intensity. And it gives Baskin a chance to scream like his idol King Curtis on the tenor sax. Baskin prefaces the Seeds' chart-topper "Pushin' Too Hard" by recalling the night Sky Saxon & Co. came onstage with loaded pistols strapped to their haunches. Why, nobody knows.



The two young dayglo-frocked go-go dancers, possibly named Cindy and Marcy, work hard to a Gene Clark-penned Byrds nugget, "Feel A Whole Lot Better," dominated by the jingle-jangle of Jim Sawyers' Rickenbacker 12-string. Baskin surprises everybody by announcing: "Right after we hit the Top Ten in the national charts with 'Little Girl,' we were followed by another San Jose group, the Count Five, with another monster hit. And here's their lead singer, Kenn Ellner, to help us with 'Psychotic.'" The Yardbirds-inspired mojo of "Psychotic," with Ellner's paint-peeling vocals and demented harmonica work, is the perfect segue to set-closer "Little Girl."

Baskin snarls (rather than sings) the lyrics: "Little girl thought she wouldn't get caught, you see/She thought she'd get away with goin' out on me." The final line "Too bad little girl it's all over for you" is punctuated by the "I'm OK" death knell to this two-timing floozy, a brief "Heh, heh, heh!" laugh to send her on her way. Add Sawyers' hypnotic circle of fifths fretboard work to Gonzalez' shingle-busting bass, the savvy keyboards and rhythm guitar of new-boy Robert Berry and Hennessy's pounding drums, and you've got a fivesome that sounds as exhilarating right now as they ever did in their glory days.

[Photo via the band's [Facebook page](#)]