



Robert Gerver was looking and feeling groovy when he and his band performed in June at the Maria Regina Parish Family Festival. ■ Video at newsday.com/act2

THE BEAT GOES ON, AND ON

Tribute band,
rocking for
45 years,
draws in new
generations

BY DANIEL BUBBEO
daniel.bubbeo@newsday.com

Robert Gerver's students at North Shore High School in Glen Head, where he taught for nearly 40 years, thought he rocked. Then in 2012, when the longtime math teacher brought his drums and the members of his band Just Sixties to perform at the senior prom, they realized

that he really did rock.

"We had performed at the prom once before in 1979. But the one a few years ago was hysterical. It was like Beatlemania, and when we went on, we could see about 50 screaming girls run to the stage," he says.

Gerver, who lives in Kings Park and retired from teaching last month, is used to playing before adoring fans with the '60s tribute band that's been a part of his life since he co-

founded it 45 years ago. This month alone, the group will be taking audiences for a trip through the psychedelic '60s four times, including a gig at the Smithtown Outdoor Concert Series on July 28 (see box).

"We can go from 'Yummy Yummy' and 'Sugar Sugar,' which is about as bubble gum as you can get, and then Cream's 'White Room' or Jimi Hendrix's 'Fire,'" Gerver

says. "Then, Janis Joplin's 'Piece of My Heart' and 'Me and Bobby McGee' might be followed by Gary Lewis and the Playboys and Herman's Hermits."

Also on the playlist are protest songs; classics by Simon and Garfunkel, The Mamas & the Papas, The Doors and other chart-toppers. They're all songs he and his

See **JUST SIXTIES** on E22



Still rocking to that



Phil Carollo, left, with Ed Bowe. Carollo has played with the band on and off since 1973.



Michael Gerver is Robert's son.



Donny West with Lisa Vetrone, who

JUST SIXTIES from E21

bandmates are well-acquainted with and perform at venues all over Long Island, from bars and clubs to town parks, to the Dix Hills Performing Arts Center. The trick, he says, is keeping each show fresh.

"We're always changing set lists. We have a two-hour show, but we have enough songs for six hours," says Gerver, who has a Ph.D. in mathematics. "We always want to pick the ones people want to hear. When you play a song like 'Build Me Up Buttercup' for 40 years, you can't inject the fact that you might be a little tired of it. I think we're pretty smart about that. It's all about the audience having fun, not about you indulging yourself."

But the audience members aren't the only ones feelin' groovy, says Just Sixties vocalist Lisa Vetrone, 22, a North Shore High graduate, though

she wasn't one of Gerver's students.

"He has the best time on stage," says Vetrone about Gerver. "It's like looking at a little kid."

And just like a kid, Gerver and his fellow rockers take pride in not taking themselves too seriously on stage.

"I think that's what makes this so much fun," he says. "The fact that we don't overdo it and it's not a career where the money you're making is what you're counting on eating with. That serious part of it isn't there, so you don't have to take everything to heart so much."

A BAND IS BORN

Gerver, who grew up in Floral Park, can best be called a natural musician, one who has never had a music lesson.

"It was the '60s and because of The Beatles, everyone had to have a guitar and a drum set," he says. "So I bought a guitar in the sixth grade and

me and my brother would just hack through it." He got a book on how to play the guitar and furthered his musical education by listening to AM radio. In no time at all, he was strumming along to the music.

Throughout high school, Gerver was never a part of the school band, but the thought of starting his own musical group was appealing.

"In the early '70s, the bar scene on Long Island was booming. On every corner there was a little bar that had seven nights a week of music," he says. "There were so many opportunities to play."

He and some school friends came up with the idea of starting a cover band in 1971, one that would specialize in recent hits as well as songs going back to the early '60s. They named the group Kivetsky, as a nod to one of Gerver's pals. In 1982, they came up with the more straightforward moniker Just Sixties and decided to

focus exclusively on songs of that decade.

"Our first job was in 1972 at a benefit concert for the Queens College Speech and Hearing Center at Martin Van Buren High School in Queens," he says. "Tickets were \$1 apiece. There were over 1,000 people in the audience, and they had never heard of us. The audience reaction was terrific."

During the '70s, Just Sixties played at clubs all over Long Island, such as Tabard's Ale House in Wantagh and Rumbottom's in Seaford. The latter gig served as a blind date for Gerver and Linda, his wife of 30 years. "We met at the pizza place next to Rumbottom's. We're still friendly with the person who introduced us. She and my wife worked at Burger King, and she told my wife you have to come out and see this band," Gerver recalls.

These days, the six-member group does more shows at

beaches, parks and libraries, which Gerver says he prefers. "The parks are fun because if you go to a bar now, it isn't attracting people who like this kind of music," he says. "Performing at an outdoor bar on the beach, you want to get people excited with 'Roll Over Beethoven' or 'Woolly Bully.'"

NEW BLOOD

While the founding members of Just Sixties are all about celebrating the music of their generation, the real kick comes from turning on new generations to those songs. Within the past two years, the group has added two members who weren't born until three decades after The Beatles even came to America — Gerver's son, Michael, 22, a graphic designer, and lead singer Vetrone.

Michael's entry came when the keyboardist left the group and Gerver asked his son, who was then a student at SUNY

'60s vibe



CHRIS WARE

says the band has become like family.

Geneseo, to take his place for a gig at the Dix Hills Performing Arts Center in February 2015. The weekend of the show, Michael had to drive six hours from school in a snowstorm, but he was happy to do it. "We're like best friends. He really got me into music," Michael says of his dad. "He got me taking piano lessons at an early age. When you're a kid, you kind of look at it as a chore, but when I got to be 11 or 12 and started writing my own stuff, I was so glad that he made me stick with it because I can't imagine my life without playing music. When I was little, I'd go to see the band and he was in it. So it was kind of like a dream come true getting to play with them."

Vetrona, a singer-songwriter, got recruited after Gerver heard her perform at a show at the Port Washington Library. She said she "dug it" when Just Sixties performed at the 2012 prom, so saying yes to Gerver was a no-brainer.

"The joke is that everyone tells me I'm always hanging out with 60-year-old men, but they really are my family now," she says. "I've learned

so much from him [Gerver] about setting up the stage and what works and hearing harmonies. I had worked mostly as a solo performer. When you're in a band and working with other people and having to trust them, you realize how good of a time you can have."

Rounding out the band are guitarists Donny West, 61, a piano tuner from Plainview; Ed Bowe, 52, an accountant from East Meadow; and Phil Carollo, who has played with the band on and off since 1973, at one point leaving to do a stint in the Navy. "I always hoped in the back of my mind they would call me back," says Carollo, 61, a quality assurance engineer from Medford. "It's like family getting back together again. We're all of the same mind set. We were never big partiers, we're all very family-oriented."

Over the years, Just Sixties has really become a family affair, especially when the group does library shows, which also features slides from commercials and TV shows of the era and narration by Linda, 55, and Gerver's sister, Barbara Weinstein, 58, who is married to West. (On occasion, Gerver's daughter, Julie, 26, has been a guest narrator.) All of which has made the music sound so much better, Gerver says.

"Having my relatives, especially my son, on stage, it's euphoric," he says. "We sing a lot of songs together, and it's a pretty cool thing."

Catch the band

Want to pick up some good vibrations of the Just Sixties band? Here are some free concerts in July. For more dates, go to justsixties.com

Oyster Bay Cruise Night Car Show
WHEN | WHERE 6 p.m. July 19, Audrey Avenue, Oyster Bay

Shorefront Park Bandshell
WHEN | WHERE 7 p.m. July 23, Smith Street, Patchogue

Smithtown Outdoor Concert Series
WHEN | WHERE 8 p.m. July 28, Smithtown Library, 1 North Country Rd.

Stony Brook Village Summer Concert Series
WHEN | WHERE 7 p.m. July 31, Stony Brook Village Green

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