

L i v i n g

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A band for the ages

Longest running sixties tribute band calls Smithtown home

By MATTHEW CUDAHY

The country's longest running sixties tribute band is based right here in Smithtown, covering the the biggest rock, pop and folk hits from one of the most important eras in music history.

Just Sixties has been playing together under the same name since 1982. But the band's story starts way before then.

In the spring of 1971, Robert Gerver and his two friends, Bruce Smith and Dave Jacobson, started a band called Kivetsky. Their first gig was at the Martin Van Buren High School talent show in Queens. They played three songs; Empty Pages by Traffic, Country Comfort by Elton John and Homburg by Procol Harum. From there, the band took off.

"We were huge on the Island, one of the biggest bands out here in the 70s," Mr. Gerver, founder and band member of Just Sixties, said. "We played a bunch of the big clubs and bars out here, a lot of people got to know us."

One of the band's biggest highlights was opening for Jay and The Americans at New York City Hall on March 29, 1974. Except, they didn't just open. There was a blizzard that night, and Jay and The Americans didn't make it to the venue, so Kivetsky played the whole show.

As the decade went on, though, the band changed its configuration a few times, with some members moving away and new people filling their spots. In 1980 the group officially took a break.

"I left Kivetsky in 1980 because I had a job and a bunch of the other guys did too, one of them was in dental school. You grow up and you become busy," Mr. Gerver said. "But a couple years later, in 1982, we started Just Sixties."

Being a sixties tribute band was an easy decision, Mr. Gerver said. For one, Kivetsky already had a sixties-heavy setlist, and secondly, the music from that decade was incredibly distinct and impactful, even only a little more than a decade removed.

"We all grew up on it, it was just great music, and very diverse music.

From the songwriting to the sound, you had The Beatles, The Beach Boys, Jimi Hendrix, The Temptations, Sonny and Cher, The Doors," Mr. Gerver said. "And in the 70s, it was disco. Disco was really popular and we weren't fans, it was just a horrible chapter of music. And I think a lot of people agreed, they just liked the sixties music better."

Most of the band members, including Mr. Gerver, who became a math teacher, continued to work their day jobs and played with Just Sixties on the weekend. They played gigs like weddings, reunions, proms, indoor and outdoor concerts, fairs and festivals.

"I think the big key for us was that it was never our full time thing," Mr. Gerver said. "It was always an aside, a passion that we enjoyed doing. We weren't doing it for the money to try to make rent or to eat. We did it because we liked it. And I think it really comes through in our performances."

After twenty years of being based in Queens, Mr. Gerver and the band moved to Smithtown in 1991, where they have rocked out since.

Today the band is made up of six members—Mr. Gerver on drums, Mike Gerver, Mr. Gerver's son, on keyboard and guitar, Donny West on keyboard and guitar, Ed Bowe on bass, Phil Carollo on guitar, and Lisa Vetrone on vocals and percussion. They continue to play local events and, most importantly, do it for the love of the music.

For Mr. Gerver, who retired from teaching in 2012, the band is still a hobby. But, as the years have gone on, he has begun to look back at the impact of the band on his life.

He met his wife at a show at the now-closed Rum Bottom's in Seaford in 1979. One of the the band's guitarists met Mr. Gerver's sister through the group, and is now Mr. Gerver's brother-in-law. Mr. Gerver's son, Mike, who has been going to shows since he was a toddler, has become an integral member of the band. And now, Mr. Gerver's grandson, who just turned eight-months-old, has already seen his fair share of Just Sixties concerts.

"The band has been responsible for a couple marriages and many friendships," Mr. Gerver said. "And I



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will say, the feeling of going on stage with my son is different than anything, it just makes you want to bust a gut. It's hard to describe, it's just so cool."

In addition to the family connections, Mr. Gerver said the memories he has made with all of the band members over the years will last a lifetime.

Right now the band is gearing up for a busy spring and summer schedule, which will kick off Sunday, March 1, at My Father's Place at The Roslyn Hotel at 3 p.m.

My Father's Place is actually a special venue to the band as it was one of the first major places Just Sixties played together in 1984 under their new identity.

"It's a very famous place. Bruce

Springsteen, Madonna, Aerosmith all played when they were young," Mr. Gerver said. "We played in 1984, and now we're playing 36 years later without ever breaking up. I'm pretty sure we're the first band to ever do something like, stay together for that long and come back."

Mr. Gerver said the band is also excited to unveil their new setlist entitled, 2020: The Sixties turn Sixty. The show will travel in chronological order, from 1960 to 1969, exploring the changes in music, culture and politics throughout the years.

"The early 1960s was still kind of like the fifties, then in the mid-sixties things started to get serious, there

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Record run for sixties band

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was a lot of protest music against the Vietnam War, and then Jimi Hendrix came and the heavy stuff and Woodstock,” Mr. Gerver said. “It really went from very light, lovey-dovey things to heavy topics and music. It is really interesting to see it unfold.”

While playing big shows at storied venues in front of paying fans, like My Father’s Place, the original festival site in Bethel, New York for the 45th anniversary of Woodstock and the Cradle of Aviation Museum for the 50th anniversary of the moon landing, is exciting for the band, Mr. Gerver said the best shows are the small, intimate community concerts where friends and family can attend and have a good time.

“Playing the town shows, some of them have a hundred people, some of them have a thousand people, it’s just nice,” Mr. Gerver said. “People are dancing and singing along. Those

shows are fun.”

The band also makes a point of incorporating charitable efforts into their shows as much as possible, playing a handful of gigs for the Veterans community every year, doing educational performances for local libraries and participating in Hungry for Music to provide unwanted and unused musical instruments to kids in need.

For those interested in catching one of Just Sixties’ upcoming shows, including in Kings Park and Smithtown, visit justixties.com.

“It’s just fun. Everyone knows the words to the songs, whether you’re eight-months or 88-years-old you know Sweet Caroline,” Mr. Gerver said. “A lot of tribute bands focus on just one artist or group, but with us you get the Mamas and the Papas, Jimi Hendrix, The Beatles, The Monkees, and it’s just more interesting. There’s something for everybody.”