

The Barbarians

Long-Haired Punks

by Matt Whorf

Were the Barbarians the first-ever punk band? Given that punk as a style has always been as much defined by stance and attitude as by musical sound, the case for the Cape Cod-bred mid-'60s garage-rock band for such a status is quite strong indeed. Among those who suggest yes in answer to the question is one Joe Doissy of the Luxembourg-based Barbarians fan club in his album notes to Rhino Records' 1979 reissue of the Barbarians' self-titled one and only LP, originally released on the Laurie label in 1966.

As one of the most fondly-remembered wildman bands of the '60s, the Barbarians' entire approach was certainly in keeping with the punk essence, to simply say it and do it with no apologies. Nowhere was this approach more evident and effective than on the group's biggest hit single, "Are You A Boy Or Are You A Girl?," which peaked at #55 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart in 1965. That song took head-on the then controversial issue of fashionable long hair on young, white, male rock 'n' roll musicians, and fans, in the wake of the arrivals of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones in America. The lyrics fearlessly mimicked the oft-heard comments of the bourgeoisie, "uptight squares" who pointed their fingers at young rockers, saying, "Is it a boy or a girl?," finally reducing those comments to laughable cliches.

The Barbarians' four members—singers/guitarists Jeff Morris and Bruce Benson, bassist/singer Jerry Causi and drummer/singer Victor "Mouly" Moulton—combined their own Beatle-length hair with Stones-like attitude. Along with "Are You A Boy," the group's other originals, such as "What The New Breed Say" and "Take It Or Leave It," co-written by Morris, essentially and vehemently urged listeners to think and act for themselves, regardless of how they may be viewed by others. Mouly in particular conveyed a personal emphasis on self-determination, having learned to play the drums after losing his left hand in an accident as a teenager and using a prosthetic hook in its place. The group's second and final chart single was his story of making it against all odds—it was titled "Mouly."

Mouly was perhaps the most outspoken of the four Barbarians in their day, both off-stage and on. And if punk attitude is as much no regrets as no apologies, the singer/drummer fits the bill to this day. Despite having experienced the inevitable pitfalls and ultimate limitations of most in '60s rock 'n' roll. Mouly, currently the owner of a successful carpet and upholstery

cleaning business in Abington, Massachusetts, looks back with nothing but fondness and appreciation for his career in the music business.

Born February 24, 1945, Mouly grew up in Provincetown, Massachusetts. His was a musical family, with both of his parents guitar players who occasionally performed live, playing what he describes as "old-fashioned country 'n' western," and a grandfather who also played guitar and piano. Mouly recalls that when Elvis Presley began to hit it big in the mid-'50s, he was a big influence, both musically and personally. Then, as time went on, he became a devout fan of all of the original rock 'n' rollers, including, among a variety of those he names, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, Johnny and the Hurricanes and all of the old doo-wop groups.

Mouly remembers that when he was young, he played guitar and had two bands at different points, but that he had always wanted to play drums. At 14, he lost his hand in an explosion from a homemade lead-pipe-and-gasoline bomb. He then became a drummer when he got his hook hand.

Said Mouly, "Naturally, after my accident when I was young, it was hard. But in those days, I had drive and desire, and I was determined to become a drummer. Not just a mediocre drummer with a hook hand, but a full-fledged drummer. I believe I learned to play reasonably well, though I couldn't improvise. And there were other various things I couldn't do that other drummers did."

Mouly recalls that after learning the drums, he "toyed around with a couple of guys here and there." He also performed occasionally with Caribbean-style steel bands that were popular in Provincetown in the early '60s. While working a day job in Boston in 1962 and '63, he jammed with a number of other musicians at a TV room/rec room at Boston University. One of them was singer/guitarist Barry Tashian, later of another well-remembered Boston area '60s garage-punk group, the Remains. Mouly's life in those years was generally spent working and jamming in Boston during the week and driving back home to Provincetown on the weekends.

The Barbarians story begins in Provincetown in the early summer of 1964. Mouly recalls having a cousin who worked as a bartender at the Rumpus Room, a beachside club in town known for its wildness. His cousin approached him to book him and his band for a weekend performance. The only problem at the time was that Mouly did not actually have a band. Thus, the formation of

the Barbarians began under the deadline pressure of a Saturday night gig which was only three nights away.

Said Mouly, "The Rumpus Room had never had live entertainment. But when I told my cousin I was a drummer he offered me a spot to play there that weekend. So, within three days I called a couple of guys I knew who played guitars and asked them if they wanted to play at the club Saturday night, and I started putting up posters for our gig all over town. It was completely spontaneous. When I had lined up two of the three guitarists I ended up using, I called another guy I knew who played bass. Like the others, he said yes, and then he asked what was the name of my band. And since we didn't actually have a name at that point, I just sort of went, like, 'Ah...the Barbarians.' And just like that, the name stuck."

Mouly continued, "Come Saturday night, we set up at eight for the gig, for no money. By nine o'clock, the whole town was in chaos. Traffic on the street outside was

blocked and it just seemed that people from all over were trying to get into the club which only had a capacity for between 20 and 300. The people included friends, relatives and music fans in general. Nobody had ever seen anything like that in Provincetown."

From there, the Barbarians began playing at clubs all over their hometown. Two of the players at the original gig were soon found to be too young to play in clubs and were forced to leave the group. They were replaced by bassist Causi. The club date included a regular weekend gig at the Rumpus Room, whose management offered the band members a practically unheard-of well-paying deal for the time, \$80 per member per night clear, Mouly recalls, and \$125 clear if the club sold enough beer. Said Mouly, "Making an average of \$125 a week from our gigs, and living at home with our parents, we were like millionaires."

The Barbarians performed then-fashionable instrumentals such as "Walk Don't

Victor "Mouly" Moulton



Run" and "Red River Rock" and the hits of the day ("Twist And Shout," for instance) at their club gigs. They were also attracting much record company attention, as Moulty recalls. But since the band members felt they did not know any of the people they met from the record companies well enough, they signed with a New York-based management agency. Freedlander Enterprises, led by Buddy Freedlander, who was affiliated with the William Morris conglomerate. Freedlander signed the group with Joy Records, where they released one single, "Hey Little Bird," in September 1964. The record did not hit.

The Barbarians' luck changed dramatically the next year when the band moved to Laurie Records. There they hit immediately with their first single, "Are You A Boy Or Are You A Girl?" The song was co-written by singer/guitarist Jeff Morris and Laurie company songwriter and Barbarians album producer Doug Morris (no relation), currently co-chairman of Atlantic Records. Its raucous spirit and timely subject matter made it a '60s garage-punk classic.

Moulty said, "The basic reason for the song was simply that around the end of 1964 and the beginning of '65, guys were starting to wear long hair. And like that fact itself, the song was just a thing of the times. It had nothing to do with politics, androgyny, homosexuality or any other matters that might have been interpreted from it then or since."

The Barbarians had two more singles, "What The New Breed Say" and "Moulty." Only the latter, the spoken-narrative autobiographical ballad by its title subject, charted, however, peaking at #90. Meanwhile, through 1965 and '66, the group

basked in the excitement of tours with sold-out shows throughout the United States and Canada. There were also frequent TV appearances, including the *Mike Douglas Show*, *Shindig* and *Hullabaloo*. Most significantly, in 1964 they appeared in the concert film *The TAMI Show*, alongside the likes of James Brown, Chuck Berry and the Rolling Stones. Said Moulty of those peak years, "I thought the money would never stop and I'd be rich forever."

Moulty recalls that as soon as "Are You A Boy" became a hit, the Barbarians wasted no time in recording and releasing their self-titled debut album. Originally released, of course, on Laurie and later reissued on Rhino with "Moulty" added, the album is a fascinating period memento of the group's raw, primal splendor in its day. Along with the above-mentioned originals, there are ragged but spirited covers of period rock 'n' roll and R&B hits from "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "House Of The Rising Sun" to "Memphis, Tennessee," "Susie Q" and "I've Got A Woman." The band even had some additional fun with Spanish-flavored guitar instrumentals titled "Marie Elena" and "Linguica."

After the Barbarians missed the chart with their second single, "New Breed," producer Morris had an idea for a spoken-narrative song about Moulty and his story of overcoming his disability to become a star musician. Moulty recalled, "We weren't too crazy about the idea at first and said no. But (Doug Morris) insisted and said, 'Just try it.' So we finally agreed, but I didn't want to use Doug's lyrics that he had at the time and I finally ended up writing my own."

The Barbarians finally recorded "Moulty," helped out in the studio by mem-



Courtesy Victor Moulton

The Barbarians U.S. Discography

Singles	label	record#	title	year
Joy	290		Hey Little Bird/ You've Got To Understand	1964
Laurie	3308		Are You A Boy Or Are You A Girl?/Take It Or Leave It	1965
Laurie	3321		What The New Breed Say/Susie Q	1965
Laurie	3326		Moulty/I'll Keep On Seeing You	1966
Albums	label	record#	title	year
Laurie	SLP 2033		The Barbarians	1968
Rhino	RNLP 008		The Barbarians (reissue with "Moulty" added)	1979

bers of Bob Dylan's then backup band, Levon and the Hawks, later to be known, of course, as the Band. Moulty said, however, that he cannot specifically recall which members of the Hawks were actually on the record. Though the song, much to the Barbarians' surprise and delight, became an instant hit with the group's fans in concert, it began a series of events that finally led to the group's demise.

"We did the session for 'Moulty' and it sounded good," said Moulty. "But we didn't really want the record released. The company, though, without our knowing, released it anyway. And we soon found that in concerts, fans were yelling 'Play "Moulty,"' 'Play "Moulty,"' and we're asking ourselves, 'How do they know this song?'"

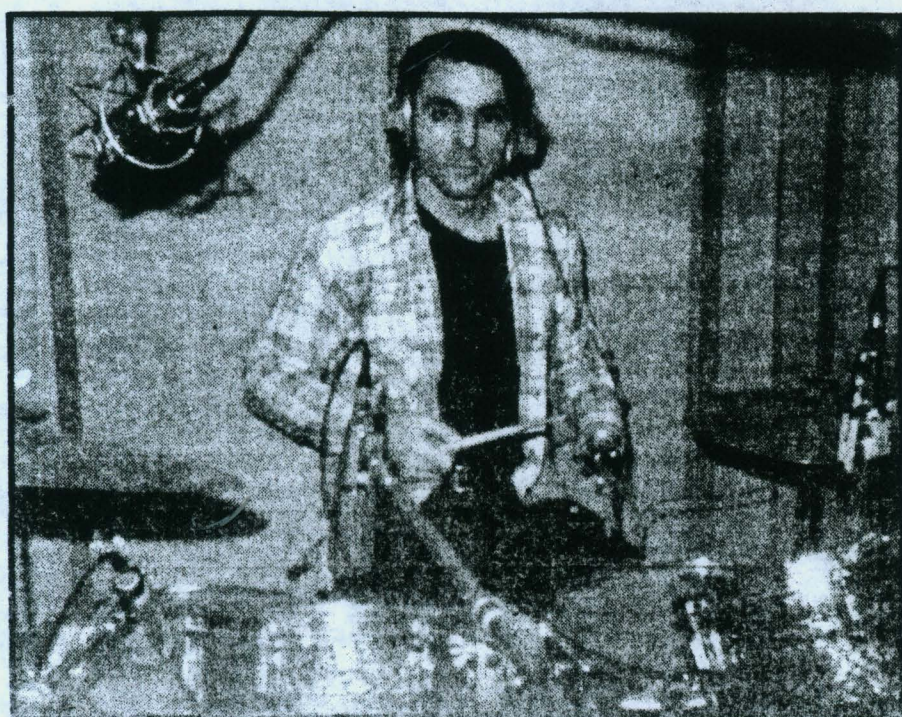
Moulty continued, "For this reason, we got mad at the company, and we decided to leave them. All this time, meanwhile, we were trying to get on the Mercury label. But we still had two years left on the Laurie contract and were in limbo. At one point around the beginning of '67, we had already done the sessions at Mercury for our next album. But because of the legal technicalities with the Laurie contract, which were factors that we had rather fatefully overlooked at the time, Mercury couldn't release our sessions. Finally, we didn't want to swallow our pride and go back to Laurie, and that's pretty much how it all ended.

Moulty has continued to perform off-and-on and even record some since the Barbarians' breakup. Recordings that have been released amount to a 1977 independently-released album and single with a group called Cat's Ass, who would be remembered virtually only by patrons of certain Boston area clubs in the mid-'70s. Moulty had an opportunity to work with Van Morrison in

the mid-'70s, but turned the offer down for personal reasons. He is, however, pleased to note that the Barbarians' original four singles and album have been selling well all over the Netherlands, France and Germany in the last few years.

Moulty also notes recording sessions with a four-piece group in the late-'70s with what he describes as "an oldies flavor." He adds that some people have expressed interest in releasing the sessions on a small independent label, possibly as soon as next year. "We may go to a big company with the session tapes," he said. "But right now we're

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Courtesy Victor Moulton

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trying to figure out what angle of market we can cover in the best way."

Mouly has also worked with gospel groups over the years, in large part because he became a Baptist-type fundamentalist Christian in the late-'70s. His work with such groups has included performances at Christian gatherings and the like. The drummer also earned a black belt in karate and ran karate schools for a time in the mid-70s. He currently lives in Abington, Massachusetts with his wife and three children, including two teenage sons who are also drummers.

What of the other Barbarians? After the slated Mercury album never saw release, Morris and Causi joined late-'60s L.A. punkedelic rockers Black Pearl, who released a self-titled album on Atlantic in 1969. Morris is the only one of the four who has continued to work in the music industry, mainly involved in studio work. Currently, Morris and Benson are closer to their Cape Cod roots, Morris residing in Chatham, Massachusetts and Benson in Carver, Mass., where he works in the construction industry. Causi currently lives in Utah and works for a trucking company.

While Mouly considers the possibilities

of getting back into performing and recording in the near future, he continues to make appearances on oldies shows, radio shows and television specials, mainly on the local level. He also continues to be outspoken, particularly on the subject of the music business of today.

As the drummer said in one recent interview, "If there was a garbage truck big enough, 95 percent of (today's music) should be dumped in the ocean. I'm not saying these kids aren't talented. Here you have groups involved in devil worship, causing followers to do the same. This is a tremendous waste of talent." Mouly also, in the same interview, decried the drug scene connected with today's music business, as well as its ties with the TV and motion picture industries, as "a big money making machine" and a reputed involvement with organized crime.

Another subject on which Mouly is very opinionated is the practice of the fundamentalist Christian faith to which he has been devoted for more than 10 years. He believes, however, in keeping it in the proper perspective. For instance, he matter-of-factly describes the typical bible-thumping born-again Christian as "a horse's ass." But then, all of this may be much in keeping with a former '60s Barbarian reached middle age.

ARE YOU A BOY OR ARE YOU A GIRL

BY DOUG MORRIS and RON MORRIS

Recorded by THE BARBARIANS on LAURIE Records



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