



PHOTO BY LISA HAGLEY

KEITH MONACCHIO
AND THE COMMONS

THE VAN STILL ROLLS ON

The Commons/*American Ghost*

I'm standing outside of The Stone Pony talking with Keith Monacchio of The Commons and the first thing that hits me is that the guy is not only down to earth but funny as hell. We BS about everything, from the local scene to which guitars life would be futile without and other bizarre topics, our cigarettes glowing brightly in the 0-degree weather. We talk about putting the finishing touches on his fourth full-length CD, *American Ghost*. The record should be ready in April or May and contains 11 tracks in all, including "Fast Food Parking Lot," "Gas Huffin Housewife," "Terry 'The Kid' Knox" and more.

Keith is a songwriter who doesn't take life so

serious as to be a narcissistic downer, and he's cool because he goes way back to the Broadway Central Café days and Chris Barry's Broadway Danny Rose style of lineups that happened every Friday night. Matter of fact, listening to some of The Commons' stuff is like taking a trip back to that crazy, eclectic bar and experiencing the excitement that made the place the legendary room it will always be.

Trenton-born, Monacchio leads The Commons along with guitarist Sean Glonek, bassist Tom McDonald and drummer Tom Kale. Their keyboard player recently went his own way, but they're good to go as they are without a replacement. Keith told me that the band has been hard at work on a new record slated for early this spring and from what I've heard from their previous releases, I can hardly

wait to see what's next. The Commons' past releases vary in sound and technique but always seem to tie into Keith's vocals and lyrics with melodic style.

Dirt Waffle has some of The Commons' best work to date. The melodic Coldplay style of "Don't Go On Me" and Elvis Costello And The Attractions' flair of "Back On The Bus" kick in my own weird concoction of David Allan Coe. Giddy up to "The Van Rolls On," which brings you to another great record, the dark and cool *Come On Get On*, outstanding with tunes like "The Outskirts" and "China," both sparse but beautifully bleak Wilco meet Chris Isaak vibes.

With that in mind I got the chance to preview "Hey Josephine" from the upcoming album *American Ghost* and was greatly impressed with the results. Keith's Dylanesque vocal vibe pulls the song into its old-time riverboat gambler meets Levon Helm feel.

The Commons have done some cool things with their career since their 1999 conception and that includes being chosen for the MTV show "8th & Ocean." Several songs from *Dirt Waffle* were selected by MTV to be played on the show.

lucrative pairing, Bob co-wrote the title cut "Edge Of The Century" from the 1990 A&M release of arena rockers Styx. That album featured Burtnik and Burger on the title track and that's what earned him some coveted gold.

Other Burtnik/Burger songs featured on Styx records are "It Takes Love To Make Love," "Little Suzie" (*Styx Greatest Hits [Part 2]*) and most recently 2003's "Killing The Thing That You Love" from *Cyclorama* (Sanctuary Records). Burger has also been involved with HBO and their various media and musical projects.

Bob's live shows are also a magnet Jersey's celebrity greats and at any given show there might be a Bruce or a Jon Bon sighting, or you may even catch Burger backing up the great Gary "US" Bonds on guitar or bass. Burger's big annual show at the Count Basie Theatre is the Rock & Soul review and it's the highlight of the year in Red Bank.

Surprise Party is extremely well produced and chock full of diversity. Okay, when you first hear about his live show cronies and writing credits you could easily dismiss him as another Jersey boy "wannabe" Bruce dude, but it's just not the case.



BOB BURGER

The Commons are also part of another new release, Face Down Records compilation CD *About A Girl*, which will feature rock bands covering the greatest all-time rock-n-roll songs featuring a girl's name in the title and chorus. The Commons have recorded Elvis Costello's "Allison" for the CD. They were just asked to contribute a track to *Dig The Fire*, a tribute to The Pixies coming out on American Laundromat Records, which also includes songs by Dinosaur Jr., They Might Be Giants, OK Go and others.

You can see this busy group at a variety of venues including March 31 at The Baronet Theatre, 205 4th Ave., Asbury Park, with Tony Tedesco & The Damaged Goods, Jon Caspi Band and Karmic Juggernaut. For any further information and CD news, check The Commons' website at the commons.net or myspace.com/thecommonstrenton

Bob Burger/ *Surprise Party*/Big Brave Music

Bob Burger's new record has been out for just a short time and is already garnering lots of attention with its straightforward writing style. The project, titled *Surprise Party*, is the long awaited second release by Burger and it features many prominent area players from the blue collar rock camps of Jersey supergroups and the world beyond. The nice folks over at Phantom Power Productions (thank you Lisa) were kind enough to provide me with some points of interest concerning Bob Burger and his illustrious career.

Burger has an impressive resumé, writing for or with Glenn Burtnik, Styx and Bobby Bandiera, just to name a few. The guy is also one of the few local rockers who can boast of a gold record hanging on the old rec room wall. In a strange but

I was very happy to see that while he plays with these shore icons, he really sounds nothing like them. And that's the key to success in this state of ours. Burger's style is all his own, and if he borrows from anyone it would have to be from more alternative guys like Elvis Costello, Glenn Tilbrook and even John Lennon and Paul McCartney to a degree.

Burger's talent comes across on songs like "Say Hello To Goodbye," which rings with an Adam Schlesinger (Fountains Of Wayne) vibe, and the radio friendly sound of "My Crowning Achievement," which just oozes Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers in the best of ways. It's a sure-fire road to radio friendly airplay land real fast. The ballad "Say Hello To Goodbye," another nugget of radio gold conjures up Chris Isaak's styling draped in reverb drenched Telecasters and smooth haunting vocals.

"Crashing Down" with its John Lennon meets Cheap Trick vibe works well on the disc and is one of my favorite tracks. One of the ending tracks, "Sleep Of The Wicked," is an acoustic building rocker that kicks into a traditional feel along the lines of John Waite and builds to its Richard Marx styled conclusion.

The 13 song disc is well worth picking up and while you're at it, grab his first release, *Cymbals At Dawn*, an album that features renowned players including Jimmy Leakey (John Waite), PK Laven-good (John Eddie), Bobby Bandiera (Bon Jovi, Asbury Jukes, Bruce Springsteen), Joe Bellia (Asbury Jukes), Jerry Gaskill (King's X), Rob Tanico (Highway 9) and Plink Giglio (Glen Burtnik).

Bob Burger is currently out and supporting his latest and you can get both of his CDs on iTunes and CD Baby. For further information, go to myspace.com/bobburgermusic