

# Bands put on great show despite apathetic crowd

ROCK continued from 9

Vacancy left the stage.

Despite a now much smaller audience, Hey Mike! from Ventura, Calif., confidently claimed the stage and played their hearts out in an upbeat, pop-punk rhythm interjected with comic relief from the lead guitarist and bassist. Hey Mike! played as a team - their music did not heavily rely on the pres-

ence of their lead singer, unlike many bands. Each band member was absolutely on target, and added a whole new strength to the overall sound.

The group was passionate, fast and catchy, and played as though they were playing in front of hundreds - even though the crowd had dwindled to less than half of what it was. The band proceeded to inform the audience that they were "as broke as shit, but it's cool." Bassist Josh

McDonald attempted to auction off one of their CDs, "Embrace Your Hooks," from Takeover Records. The begging, "Do I hear \$70? Maybe \$75?" was met with laughter, and gave a richer personality to the musicians. The biggest fiasco of the night - other than crowd indifference - was when an Aquafina spilled on stage mid-song, but it was no big deal; a loyal fan mopped it up and the show went on. With much jumping and carrying on, the guys on stage just had fun, and as lighthearted as their mood was, the end result was an extremely professional concrete sound.

Eric Wittlin, part of the street team for Capitol Records, helped promote Hey Mike! at the event. Hey Mike! is touring from Nov. 11 - 27 with Yellowcard, of Capitol Records, and the Starting Line.

Last, but certainly not least, the Commercials took the limelight as the music started to come to a close. Self-described as rock and roll, with influence from punk, hardcore and indie rock, the group has played with several familiar bands, including the Ataris, Taking Back Sunday, and the Starting Line. It was like watching a music video in the middle of campus, only without the lip-syncing and cheesy back-

drops - plus the addition of real, true blue talent. With a good sense of humor and a constant flow of energy, the Commercials put on a great show.

As enthusiastic as the music was, the crowd was just unmotivated. Ryan Billheimer, pharmaceutical marketing major, is a friend of band members from the Commercials, and described the band as "emo-punk, it's rock with emotion." He was disappointed at the turnout. "I had no idea they were playing here," said Billheimer. "I go here but I didn't find out about it here, I found out from the band."

After the Commercials played their last song, everyone was hungry and eagerly headed to the Midnight Breakfast. The musicians that ate said they really appreciated the food. Suddenly, the once sparse crowd grew as many people randomly showed up again for the free food, even though many present did not even attend the show.

Despite a largely apathetic audience, there was a sense of togetherness at the very end of the night between the remaining few that stayed from the beginning to the end. Those that stuck it out were invited by the Commercials to karaoke with them in Lemoyne after the show.

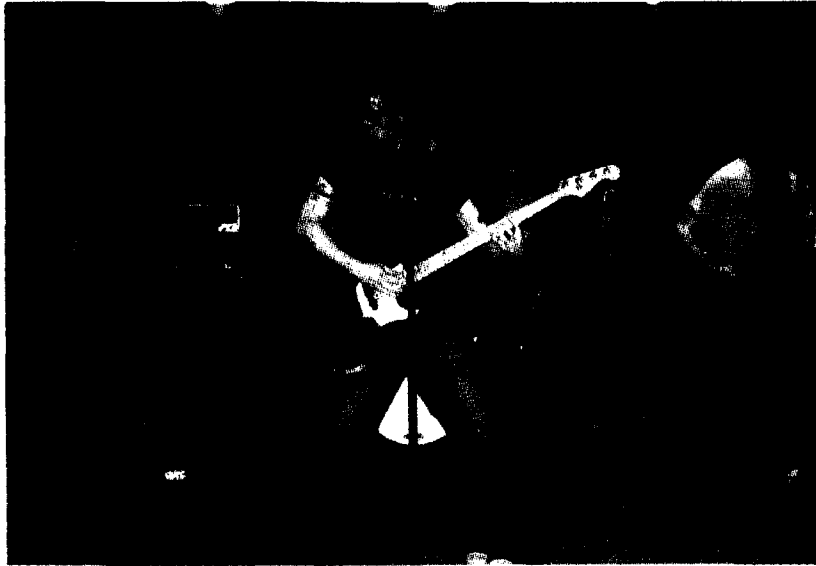


Photo by Corey Barbush

From left, The Commercials' Tony Bavaria, Drew Teague and Tom McGrath finished the night with a good sense of humor and their energetic sound. The band has been playing locally for about eight years.



Photo by Sharon Furfaro

Steven Neufeld, Hey Mike! lead guitarist, sang catchy lyrics as the band's pop-punk melodies filled the stage and surrounding food court in the Olmsted building.

# 'Kings of Crank Calls' heavily imitated

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Crank phone calling is an institution without accreditation. There are no high-esteemed professors or media gadflies keeping score. Accordingly, this deviant pastime is comparatively more vulnerable to theft of intellectual property than other more legitimate professions. Just ask the thieving Bart Simpson. Among other things, Bart is well known for his own crank calls to bartender Moe on Fox's *The Simpsons*. Surely Hollywood wouldn't pump out derivative dribble and pass it off as a heavily labored original work for us eager, naive, and spoiled consumers to blindly enjoy. If you believe that, then poor genetics is probably the reason for your lack of cynicism. In truth, the majority of Bart and Moe's antagonistic telephone dialog has been copied verbatim from Jim Davidson and John Elmo's infamous "Tube Bar Tape."

Known as *The Bum Bar Bastards*, Jim and John began recording their crank calls to a Jersey City bar owner named Red in 1975. The product of these calls to Red's establishment, *The Tube Bar*, were stolen and re-spun by the writers of *The Simpsons* and later imitated by *The Jerky Boys*.

Although achieving infamy through the mass distribution of their bootleg recording over the last three decades, Jim and John have struggled constantly to receive the credit that would be due to pioneers in any genre of art. Jim spoke with me openly about the history of their notorious recordings.

Like most red-blooded American adolescent males, Jim says that he and John started making crank calls in their mid-teens. "We used to walk past all these gin mills," says Jim. "In those days in Jersey City and Hoboken, there were bars every 20 feet. We would hear these guys from inside going on about anything and everything. So with the aid of our sick little minds, we decided to turn their rowdiness into our favorite entertainment pastime."

It wasn't too long after they began their crank call careers that Jim and John called *The Tube Bar* and heard Red's

uniquely rugged voice for the first time. Jim talked about the genesis of this history-making chance encounter. "We started to call Red in 1975," said Jim. "We called him on and off for approximately two plus years. On the day we first called him we were having a terrible day. We weren't getting any good calls at all. We were all set to wrap it up when I remembered passing the Tube Bar and always seeing someone being thrown out into the alley, or hearing all kinds of yelling and commotion coming out of the place. When I think about it, we came close to not ever calling the place. So I guess that says a lot for doing things 'just one more time.'"

Jim revealed his first impression of Red. "THE VOICE," exclaimed Jim. "No one, before or since, has had a croak like that! Was that a human on the other end? We thought we were talking to the fuckin' missing link! And of course we were thrilled with Red's dogged determination to call out every name we asked for, no matter how idiotic or unbelievable they were. The idea of just hanging up the telephone never entered what passed for a mind with Red. The most involved work we had was that we had to make up names that he would mutilate properly. Mike Hunt. Al Kohallic. Mike Oxmall. Stan Dupp. Sid Down. Stu Pitt. 'Pepe' Roni. Bill Loney. Sal Lammi. Etc, etc. We pretty much knew from the beginning that we had hooked a world class moron. Albeit, one who would have slit our throats with out batting an eye if he could, but yeah, we knew we struck gold; the mother lode."

In a 1992 MTV news segment in which Kurt Loder was then covering the recent *Jerky Boys* phenomenon, Jim first found out that his crank calls to Red had worldwide appeal. When Jim heard Kurt Loder wrap up his segment with "These (The Jerky Boy's) calls are not to be confused with the infamous Tube Bar Tapes," he was understandably stunned. "Kurt Loder was on television equating the content of our calls in Rock N Roll terms to Black Sabbath, and *The Jerky Boys* to *The Archies*. We had no idea whatsoever that the bootlegged calls had become a cult classic heard by hundreds of thousands around the world."

This sudden taste of infamy was quite shocking for a guy who only recalls playing the recordings for friends at parties and fellow employees. "We still don't know exactly how the bootleg got out," said Jim. "But as near as we can figure, it was when both John and I worked for Warner Bros Music. We played the tapes at work, mostly for a few select people who knew of them, but inevitably word got around and before we knew it, 30 to 40 people would be listening and falling all over themselves laughing.

we met. I auditioned for his band, and by having to repair our equipment and hook up various speaker configurations and by knowing what gets hooked into where. It was no stretch to figure out how to wire a connection directly into the old rotary phone we used. So that was it, a guitar jack directly from the phone into the tape recorder. No need for suction cups or any of that crap, which by the way is what they would try and sell you at the audio store back then and produced terrible quality. But I have



Picture courtesy of www.bumbarbastards.com

The Bum Bar Bastards first began prank calling to a Jersey City bar owner in 1975.

Many people who worked there had access to Warner's recording equipment in the studios. This theory makes sense because of the way the calls were mentioned on so many Rock albums. Even Walter Cronkite and the New York office of the F.B.I. got a hold of them and became lifetime fans. So we guess that somehow someone managed to nail a copy of our stuff and thus the birth of a BUM BAR BASTARD BOOTLEG BABY! We guess that makes us daddies and the person who did it a motha-fucka!"

In 1975, technology was not necessarily user-friendly when it came to home recording. Jim explained how he and John manipulated this primitive technology to record their cranks. "Aaahhh," Jim said. "How'd we make the recordings using the caveman technology way back then? This has probably been the most asked question down through the years. John and I were both musicians, that's how

we met. I auditioned for his band, and by having to repair our equipment and hook up various speaker configurations and by knowing what gets hooked into where. It was no stretch to figure out how to wire a connection directly into the old rotary phone we used. So that was it, a guitar jack directly from the phone into the tape recorder. No need for suction cups or any of that crap, which by the way is what they would try and sell you at the audio store back then and produced terrible quality. But I have

to say that it was John who actually came up with the idea and implemented it." Hearing your own material performed by someone else, in this case a cartoon character, on television, is enough to bring the most humble of souls to entertain thoughts of resentment and anger. Jim described, somewhat bitterly, the feeling of watching the calls he made in 1975 regurgitated on *The Simpsons*. "It's like a 'Ground Hog Day' scenario," said Jim. "Like waking up every day and being robbed over and over and over again pretty well describes it. We guess it would be hard for the producers of the *Simpsons* to admit publicly that Moe's Tavern is a direct rip off of *The Tube Bar* calls, but we have been told that there is an article floating around somewhere in which Matt Groening DOES admit to this." Jim then immediately petitioned any reader out there who has a copy of the alleged article to kindly scan and email it to his website

(named at the end of this article). A universal truth among crank call purists around the world is that *The Jerky Boys* are imitators to a throne rightfully occupied by Jim and John. Delving further into the topic of crank call impersonators, Jim broods over *The Jerky Boys'* tenacious stance regarding *The Bum Bar Bastards*. "From what we've read about the Jerky Boys, according to them THE BUM BAR BASTARDS are just figments of everyone's imagination and we really don't exist," said Jim. "No, they've never acknowledged us or given us any credit for paving the way for them. So remember folks, all those calls we made, and all those calls you've pissed your pants listing to, never really happened. Just go ask the Jerky Boys!"

After all those pranks to Red, you would think that the boys and Red would have developed some kind of dysfunctional affection for each other. No such luck. Red was known as a no-nonsense type of guy who would have probably pounded the life out of Jim and John if they had made their identities known. I asked Jim if he ever had "the nerve," as Red put it, to go see him face to face. "Yes and no," Jim laughed. "Don't you hate that fuckin' answer? Anyway, no in terms of us actually going down to the Tube Bar and introducing ourselves, although we were in the Tube Bar many, many times, but yes in terms of people telling him that we were calling and recording the conversations, hence the famous "your friends deserted you, they double-crossed you when ya tried to tell 'em you were havin' a lot of fun wit me...so I happen to know who you are. We made the mistake of playing some of the calls at a party where we really didn't know too many people and suddenly we hear somebody saying 'hey, that's Mr. Deutch! Mr. fuckin' Deutch?' We didn't think anything of it until the next time we called and he hit us with the 'your friends double-crossed you' shit. That's a perfect example of why we never let people we didn't know hear this stuff back then. See what too much fuckin' booze does sometimes?"

In 1993, Chris Gore, cult hero and editor of *Film Threat* magazine, directed "Red," a still frame movie which told the story of *The*

Tube Bar tapes through the original recordings. Starring Laurence Tierney in the title role, the movie was perceived by many as an appropriate homage and vindication towards Jim and John who had thus far been only mentioned in the media as a footnote in *The Jerky Boys* saga. Jim has other thoughts. "A fan sent us a copy of the movie 'Red' awhile back," scoffed Jim. "What a fuckin' joke. We had absolutely nothing to do with this mess. And our calls, which incidentally are copyrighted, were used without our permission. This is another example of the rip-off after rip-off conga line that we have been putting up with through the years. But we love the choice of Lawrence Tierney as Red. It's the only good thing about the movie. Too bad he kicked the bucket. Maybe he dropped dead AFTER he saw Red. We'd like to meet the guy, what's his name Gore, who made this crap. We'd like to see him face to face so we can talk to him and spit in his eye."

Jim said that he is in the process of writing a "book/screen play/treatment" of the entire story surrounding the calls and all the things that took place during the making of them. He said that many of the stories behind the calls are more insane than the calls themselves. He hopes to see the fruition of this work in the near future. "A book and movie will be the perfect venues in which to tell our story," said Jim.

Jim did not confirm nor deny whether or not *The Bum Bar Bastards* crank call days are over, but offered sound advice to aspiring young cranksters. "Don't get caught," said Jim. "And if you do get nailed, don't try and tell the cops that you're the BUM BAR BASTARDS. WE'RE NOT REALLY HERE. JUST GO ASK THE JERKY BOYS!"

Jim and John have an impressive new CD/DVD out that includes hours of new audio and video; several previously released full lengths, pictures and more. You can check out *The Bum Bar Bastards* at [bumbarbastards.com](http://bumbarbastards.com), where you can pick up all their merchandise, including the new CD/DVD, and acquire wisdom from the true kings of crank calls.