

When did you start playing the drums?

As long as I can remember, I was tapping out rhythms and making up songs. I can remember riding around with my Mom taking my brothers up to University School making up my own little songs. I was like 4 or 5. Around 1964, when the Beach Boys came out with the album SURFIN U.S.A., I put some metal pieces from an erector set in an old, metal Gilbert Chemistry set box. The erector set pieces vibrated so that was my snare drum. I had an old wooden Chinese drum that was my brother Sterling's. I put these together next to our stereo and played along with SURFIN U.S.A., MEET THE BEATLES, and THE BEATLES SECOND ALBUM. I still have the tom-tom!

My dad had a custom built stereo (his design) so the sound was beautiful. In 1965 I got the most beautiful pearl finish snare drum for Christmas. Then we got a set of silver sparkle Ludwig drums like Mitch Mitchell (Hendrix) and Ginger Baker (Cream). These drums sounded and still do sound great. I have two sets of Ludwigs. The white one I play has been with me at virtually every show I have played since 1975. A great kit!!



Was there music in your house?

Music runs in my family. My great grandfather led the town band in Berlin Heights, Ohio back

in the 1890's. He taught many of the members how to play their instruments and wrote the music for the band. Some years ago I went into the attic of the old family home (1818) and found all of their sheet music and a picture of the band.

My childhood home was full of music. My dad had a large record collection, so I grew up hearing a lot of classical, Bach, Prokofiev, Stravinsky. Jazz: Art Tatum, The Dorsey Brothers, Benny Goodman, etc. We had Bluegrass, Blues, Boogie Woogie and one of my favorites, Burl Ives. My Dad was also into what they now call World beat. We had music of the Caribbean, African tribal drumming and that sort of stuff.

Where I lived east of Columbus on McNaughten Rd. was all farm land in the late 1950's. I remember being put to bed in my crib and hearing the sounds of the countryside, crickets and bullfrogs (in our pond), and Prokofiev's Lt. Kije, or Stravinsky's FIREBIRD as I went to sleep. I would have been 3 years old. My cousins, two of whom lived with us, had lots of the popular 45's, of the day, which was like 1958. In the early 60's, we bought a piano and my brother Sterling and mother would sing Bach Cantatas and other religious works.

What was the first record you bought?

When I was 4 or 5, my cousin's bought me ITZY BITZY TEENIE WEENIE POLKA A DOT BIKINI, which I loved. Then in 1964, we made a trip downtown, which was kind of a big deal, as there were no malls back then and we were out in "the sticks". I bought the Beach Boys WHEN I GROW UP TO BE A MAN, 45. It was very exciting, the record had a picture sleeve with them standing on a ladder.

How Did you learn to play the drums?

Playing along with records. I played to records all the time. The Beatles, SGT. PEPPER, Jimi Hendrix, LIVE AT MONTEREY, Cream: WHEELS OF FIRE, were among my favorites to drum too. It was a lot of fun because we had a P.A. system from my brother's band (The Grays), so we could crank the music up loud!!! I also drummed with my hands to lots of classical music, Beethoven, Stravinsky Etc. These guys would bend and alter rhythms in many wonderful ways!!

What bands did you play in before the Danger Brothers?

My first and short-lived band was the BOB PAAS BLUES BAND. We played about 7 originals and had nothing after that! We played a couple of times at the Cracked Cup Coffee House, which my dad ran, at The first Congregational Church.

Then there was THE LOAD, a trio with my brother Sterling and Danger guitarist, Dave Hessler. We started in 1973, after Sterling left OSIRIS which was left over musicians from J.D. Blackfoot. We recorded three albums worth of music. One album came out in 1977, PRAISE THE LOAD. At the same time the band formed, so did a recording studio OWL RECORDING. We became part owners in the studio and had the luxury of learning to record at our own pace. The music we played was kind of "Left field". Organ, clarinet, and two mini moogs, is what my brother played. Dave built a double-neck guitar, with a bass on the bottom and a six string on the top. The concept of the band was to play music that we liked. That was it. These days they called this music "Progressive Rock".

All of the music we recorded as the Load is out on CD on the Lasers Edge label. It has sold well in Japan, Korea, Portugal. I have reviews written in languages I can't read!! We would be in a similar to King Crimson and Emerson, Lake and Palmer, I suppose. We played Mr. Browns and Moonshine co-op. (for all you OLD Columbusites). Opened for Bob Seeger, Rick Derringer and Michael Stanley. We were fairly popular. We also played with Danger Keyboardist Bill Bendler and his excellent band STRONGBOW in Cambridge, Ohio and the Ohio Theater.

In 1977, The Load, Sterling Dave and I moved to Los Angles with about 5 other musicians, lighting people, and assorted wives and girlfriends. L.A. was lots of fun. About 8 of us lived in one room on the beach in the half basement of a plush apartment building at Venice beach. On 27th Ave. for those familiar with Venice. The first 3 months we didn't know anybody. We would get up on a typical weekday, and go to the beach and hang. Quite Idyllic.

Our friend, recording engineer and majority owner of Owl recording, Tom Murphy, landed a job with the beach boys at their studio in Santa Monica. This was an absolute thrill for me,

being a life long Beach Boys fan, I was thrilled. I will never forget my first time in the studio, the hallways lined with gold albums, all of which I had purchased when they were released. I believe I can sing every lyric to every beach boy song!! One Friday, Tom called from Brother studio and asked us to come down and set up so he can learn the studio. The Beach Boys were in Indiana so they wouldn't be around. We set up in their beautiful studio and played. Around midnight, Dennis called and said he was coming down to play. He had chartered a plane from the gig in Indiana. Tom was kind of worried, but I knew my Beach Boy world already, I knew he wouldn't care that we were in his studio. He walked in and said hi, and sat down at the piano and played SAIL ON SAILOR. We sang it together. It was one of the biggest musical moments in my life. Shortly there after my brother was hired to tour with the band, Dave also went out for a tour playing in Dennis' opening act.

Our little group from Columbus got some hot gigs shortly after our arrival. Alex Vertikoff was hired as a second engineer for the Stones sessions that led into the SOME GIRLS album. I actually got to talk to Mick Jagger on the phone, that was a kick. My friend from high school Jon Kiphart was working for Bob Dylan during the time he was recording STREET LEGAL. We had a ball and played Monopoly all the time!!

Dennis Wilson was pretty cool. Mixed up at times, but he was always trying to get us work, and would go out of his way to be nice. One time the Beach Boys were booked for a week at the Universal Amphitheater, this was after Sterling had left the band. Dennis called me, knowing I would be at the shows, and said if I wanted to ride up in the limousine to the show, come up to Christine's house (McVie) and I could ride with he and Christine. He had no reason to do that other than to be sharing his "scene".

Another time in Lexington, Kentucky, after the show, he said he had sent his roadie looking for me so that I could play some tunes but he couldn't find me. Dennis showed up one night at a Load gig in Venice opening for Baron Stewart. Baron sang and wrote some of Dennis' album PACIFIC OCEAN BLUE. During our show Dennis came out as if he were a roadie and scrambled all around Dave's microphone stand moving it up and down, messing with the chord. It was quite funny. I don't think the crowd knew

who he was, and Dave wasn't even singing so the mic was irrelevant to the song. Cool guy, too bad he let drugs and alcohol run his life into the ground. HE WAS HOT DRUMMER!!! I could go on all forever about L.A and also our time in New York, but space will not permit I suppose!!

When and how did the Danger Brothers start?

I moved back to Columbus in late 1979. In the Spring of 1981 Dave moved back. He had called me many times stating he wanted to start a band with Tom Beougher and Mike Thompson and Mike Meyer. This was a merging of Esquires and The Grayps, who were popular in the 1960's around here. I had a friend, Mark Vian, who played with Ronald Cole and the Trillionaires, who wanted to join, so we started it rehearsing, several nights a week. The idea was to rehearse a lot, have a really tight rocking band, go out and play and have fun. None of us had a clue that it would last for 25 years (as of 2006) and become so popular.

Any favorite gigs?

Well, we love to play so every gig is really a lot of fun for us. Obviously Put-In-Bay is an incredible experience. The island, the huge crowds, the Jet & Miller boats, there is nothing like it.

Likewise the Hiney Gate is also incredible. It is one of the only gigs we play where we can see the entire crowd because it is daytime. I remember the first Hiney Gate we played in like 1983. I think we shared the bill with another band and there were probably 500 people there. The Holiday Inn asked us to play every game for the next year and we have never looked back!!!

One year we got to play the Hamler, Ohio Polka festival. That was cool. From the moment we arrived, people told us to keep the volume down, this is while the crew was setting up. The polka bands were backstage playing with Sparky's tail, which they loved. Apparently we were like the first rock band to play the festival since 1969. We went on and played about as loud as the Archies. Soon the whole crowd of 2 or 3 thousand people were on their feet dancing, ages 5 to 85. By the end of the evening the volume was up to rock and roll standards and the crowd loved it. We even had an honest to goodness encore that drowned out the canned music coming out of the P.A.

Another special gig was back in 1994 or so, when we played for 4 hours and 13 minutes straight at the beer barrel on Put In Bay. NO breaks. We had to do it, as Pat Dailey had been on us at his shows for taking breaks, we shut him up!!! It was a gas!!

Tom Smith Discography:

The Load: PRAISE THE LOAD LP/ CD
Recorded 1975-1977 Label: The Lasers Edge

The Load: LOAD HAVE MERCY CD Recorded 1975-77 and 1993 Label: The Lasers Edge

Baron Stewart: TEMPERATURE'S RISING
Recorded 1979-81 Baron Stewart : Piano Dave
Hessler: Bass Stu Cook: Bass Produced by Stu Cook (CCR bassist) Label MCA

ALMOST SUMMER: Movie Soundtrack with the beach boys Label : MCA 1978

The Beach Boys: ENDLESS HARMONY
Soundtrack to the VH1 special Tom & Dave & Sterling on a cut by Dennis. Label: Capitol,
Released 1998 The Beach Boys

ULTIMATE CHRISTMAS ALBUM Tom Dave & Sterling on a cut by Dennis Label: Capitol,
Released 1998

Check www.DangerBrothers.com for all the latest news and fun photos!