

Guess Who? Guess new! It's that old name again

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The Guess Who, a rock name which earned more than a few people a first-class ticket to ride, is being resurrected to see if the magic is there one more time. In 1975 when singer Burton Cummings folded The Guess Who, which had become his band, it seemed the name was dead and gone for all time.

Now, three years later, like dozens of other rock 'n' roll legends, The Guess Who monicker is being dusted off and tried out for comeback power. Bass player Jim Kale is an original. Guitarists Kurt Winter and Don McDougall are two of the four guitarists who played with the group after Randy Bachman left. Gary Peterson, the original drummer, opted out of the reunion plan and was replaced by Vance Masters who spent six months of the last year touring with none other than Burton Cummings.

Jim Kale explains how it all came about: "Last November a friend got Donny, Kurt, Gary Peterson and myself together for a one-shot studio session for a CBC radio show. You know, the old Guess Who back together, so we had some rehearsals and did the session and even though it wasn't very good it was better than the music any of us were making separately, so we decided to go ahead with playing together."

Kale is a staunch anchor for the new enterprise and his innate interest in running the business of the band is an invaluable asset at this stage.

"We've contacted a couple of record companies who are keen on hearing what we can come up with and the best booking agent in Canada assures us that there's lots of work." He laughs as if he can hardly believe it himself. "I'd just like to have some records on the radio again."

At midnight in the recording studio where they've been holed up for three days the air is thick with cigarette smoke. The "closed session" sign is down and there's all kinds of chatter from friends and hangers-on who are here to listen to the playback of four new songs by an equally new Guess Who. The contrast between this scene and the ones that went down during the times when any of these veterans was flying high is incredible. They're all so apprehensive, so self-deprecating, robbed of the swaggering self-assurance that success in the rock game brought them. The band, obviously worn with the tension of three long days of creation, become immediately wrapped in the music which punches out of the playback speakers at a velocity few living rooms could stand.

The sounds are more than vaguely reminiscent of the various periods of The Guess Who captured on about a dozen RCA albums. Four radio-length



Photo by Gerry Cairns

The Guess Who. Left to right, Don McDougall, Jim Kale, Kurt Winter and (on the floor) Vance Masters.

pop-rock songs picking different musical flavors from here and there just the way the old band did. Quaintly phrased verses and pining choruses about lost love and found fun with high choirboy-gone-bad vocal harmonies. They don't sound like instant hits but they might be after you hear them for the hundredth time.

You have to consider that what they're up to is possibly as simple as exploiting the old name. Four guys over 30 pushing their way back into a scene that's notorious for offering only one chance. If they'd wanted to avoid the tag they could've taken their shot under some other banner.

"You can say that if you want to," Kale shoots back, "but why shouldn't we? Even Cummings has said that, with us, at least it's real former members of the group instead of one guy trying to cash in. We're together because we want to play together. We're going to be doing some old Guess Who songs but just the ones that Kurt or Donny or myself had a hand in writing, maybe six altogether."

On the other side of the coin it's surprising that nobody has tried to

resurrect the name before now. Pop music is not an area of endeavor known for its moral ethics. If they don't come up with anything worthwhile, then this newly reconstituted Guess Who will be just another bunch of lounge-rockers providing pinpoints of pop nostalgia, and what's wrong with that?

These depressed times have spawned a corporate record company policy that makes musical unemployment endemic compared to other sectors of the economy. Coming out of Winnipeg with a pop music group is no longer a very good bet for a step up on the ladder to fame and fortune but this Guess Who are an experienced lot and chances are you will be hearing them on the radio again.

Unlike a lot of other little bands trying to plug their way out of the prairie pub circuit, they've been through the whole turn of the wheel before, and ended up hungry enough to try knocking on the doors of the musical power-brokers once more. Businessmen are sure to respect the tenacity. If they like the sounds on the new tape these old musical dogs may yet howl again.