

in late 1964 and early 1965 in Charleston, South Carolina, and Olsen was also familiar with the group, which likewise came from Minnesota; he would, in fact, be married to Sheri Holmberg for a few years starting in the mid-'60s. The Ragamuffins most likely formed around the end of April or the very beginning of May 1965, as Dotti Holmberg's book *The GoldeBriars' Story*: "What-

ever Happened to Jezebel?" includes a diary entry for May 1, 1965 stating that Ron Edgar had just left the band to form a new group with Sean Bonniwell and Keith Olsen.

What set the Ragamuffins aside from most similar musicians making the leap from folk to rock, however, is that what resulted was not folk-rock in the classic Byrds/Mamas & the Papas/Lovin'



THE RAGAMUFFINS, 1965. L to R: Keith Olsen, Ron Edgar (top), Sean Bonniwell.

Spoonful/Simon & Garfunkel style. Instead, it was hard, dark garage psychedelic rock with little obvious influence not only from folk, but few obvious precedents in *anything*, though some echoes of British Invasion bands like the Rolling Stones, Animals, and Zombies could be heard. The change was so swift and sudden as to be nearly inexplicable. Even the four 1965 Ragamuffins demos that have escaped onto release (on the *Ignition* CD compilation) seem to be bypassing the folk-rock combination to something different altogether, though there's a bit of lingering folk influence here and there (especially on "Chances"), and the sound isn't nearly as heavy and ominous as it would be on the first Music Machine recordings.

When I put this to Olsen, he admits "I haven't been asked a question like that, it seems, [for] like a hundred years," but does offer these thoughts: "Folk music was so simplistic, and we wanted to do something with more power. There was trouble on the streets in the LA. There was all this stuff looming around, socially and politically. And we figured that the media was the message, and the [more] power that we could wield, that better off we'd be. That was kind of the emphasis behind it."

More prosaically, as Keith adds, "playing electric bass, geez, it was much more fun than playing standup." And once he'd plugged in, there was no turning back: "Folk music was ending. Everybody knew it was ending, because *everything* started getting bigger. It was all about a time when there was a lot of change going on."

While the details of just how the band evolved in the year or so between the Ragamuffins' formation and the Music Machine's first recordings for Original Sound Records remain a little indefinite, everyone's agreed one thing: the band rehearsed seriously and rigorously in Bonniwell's San Pedro garage, much more so than even several of the top groups of the era. "We decided right then and there that we were gonna rehearse and we were gonna rehearse until we were so tight that everybody knew and felt that everybody else was gonna do in the band," declares Olsen. "Every paradiddle that came out, everything that [Ron] played, everything that I played—between the two of us, we were rock-solid." Fascinatingly,

GOLD TURNS TO BLACK

Dotti Holmberg of the GoldeBriars talks about the Music Machine connection

Interview by Mike Stax

From 1963-65 Dotti Holmberg-Waddell, along with her sister Sheri, was a member of the GoldeBriars, the esoteric folk-pop group led by Curt Boettcher. The group recorded two albums for Epic Records and was in the process of recording a third, with Ron Edgar on drums, when they split up.

UT: When did you realize that the folk music movement was fading and that it was time to change direction?

DH: We were told by Epic that the Peter, Paul & Mary folk song movement was on the decline and a new fad would be around the corner. We were hoping it would be the GoldeBriars' sound, which was always progressing due to Curt being a pioneer of innovation; he was always pushing the envelope sound-wise.

UT: By the end of 1964 a lot of folk musicians were beginning to make the transition from folk to rock. One of them was Sean Bonniwell of the Wayfarers. When did you first meet Sean and what were your impressions of his personality?

DH: We met Sean Bonniwell when the GoldeBriars played the 300 King Street nightclub in Charleston, South Carolina, which was owned by the Wayfarers. We were the first group to perform in this new club. We almost didn't arrive on time to perform the first night as we had car problems (which was common for the group). We were met by the Wayfarers, who were very eager to see us finally show up! We didn't even have time to clean up before hopping on stage. Sean had a magnetic personality and he loved being in the spotlight, like he was born to be on stage. He lived in the attic of 300 King Street in a place referred to as "The Pad."

UT: Was he already talking about forming a rock & roll group?

DH: Once the Wayfarers broke up, Sean was very eager to move out of the folk song scene and into a more commercial vein. I think the GoldeBriars were very much an inspiration for him, as our music really had no category—just a mixture of folk-pop and rock. I didn't know Sean's

dreams then about what music he was trying to create, only that he showed he was eager to spread his wings musically.

UT: Did it come as a surprise when Ron Edgar left the GoldeBriars to join up with Sean and Keith Olsen? How was the news received by the rest of the band and Curt in particular?

DH: Of course, we didn't want Ron to leave; he was great to work with and, as you know, extremely talented.

But the GoldeBriars were moving ahead so fast that we (including Curt) didn't have time to dwell on it much—only to replace him.

UT: When I interviewed Ron in 2000 (UT#18), he mentioned that Sean and Curt were like "oil and water" personality-wise. Bonniwell's comments over the years also indicate that he and Curt did not get along. Why do you think this was? Was it artistic rivalry or something more personal?

DH: There was artistic rivalry going on—especially, if when they were both in the hotel room creating a song at the same time. Sometimes the tension indicated that they were touchy about having some of their creative ideas perhaps winding up in each other's new song. Personality-wise, they were total opposites and could never have been in the same musical group together.

UT: Although their music was totally different, the Ragamuffins (and subsequently the Music Machine) adopted a similar image to the GoldeBriars, with the dyed black hair and black clothes. Was there any resentment from any of the GoldeBriars about this?

DH: When the Music Machine used the GB's "black image" there wasn't a problem because the GoldeBriars had already disbanded.

UT: Did you ever see the Ragamuffins or the Music Machine play? If so, what were your impressions?

DH: I saw both groups perform. They were awesome...beautiful songs with great arrangements and their sound (both groups) ran like a fine oiled machine. The Music Machine was just a bigger machine with more oil than the Ragmuffins group.

UT: You later sang background vocals on a Music Machine session for "I've Loved You." What do you remember about that?

DH: On the same day Curt, Sheri and I did vocal background on "I've Loved You," my brother, Gary Holmberg, and his friend Ray Molina recorded in the same studios on their one and only single for 20th Century Fox. Curt arranged the vocal background for Gary and Ray's single ("Why" and "Meaning of My Mind") and Sheri, Curt and I sang the vocal background. I'm sure Curt arranged the vocal background for "I've Loved You" and Sheri, Curt and I sang the vocal background on that single, too. Both of the recording sessions were coordinated to be together so we could do vocal background on both sessions. •

For more on the GoldeBriars see page 190. Also check out www.goldebriars.com

