

LIGHTNING NEVER STRIKES TWICE

OR

HOW TO APPEAR ON *THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW* AND HAVE YOUR THUNDER STOLEN BY A LOUNGE SINGER

Two years before The Beatles stormed the American beachhead, two small labels in Upstate New York released a slew of singles. These records disprove the cliché that nothing was happening in American rock & roll before The Beatles washed up on US shores and THE THUNDEBOLTS were undoubtedly the best of the bunch.

🌀 WILL SHADE tells the whole story. 🌀



Rondack & Empire

Collectors still cherish the 45s on Empire and Rondack that streamed out of Plattsburgh. At least three-dozen singles were issued between 1962 and 1968. A handful has shown up on CD collections, but most of them are still uncomped.

Be that as it may, the majority of the bands on the two aforementioned labels recorded one original per single. However, one outfit, Mike & The Ravens, issued nothing but originals from the pens of singer Mike Brassard and rhythm guitarist Stephen Blodgett. Lead guitarist John “Bo” Blodgett, drummer Peter Young and bassist Brian Lyford rounded out the quintet. Empire’s founder, DJ Peter Guibord of WIRY in Plattsburgh, New York signed

the band in April 1962. The Ravens – Vermont natives – relocated to Plattsburgh, gigging regularly at the Rollerland skating rink. Between May 1962 and January 1963, The Ravens recorded at least twenty originals, releasing six of the songs on three Empire singles. The songs revealed a startling degree of originality that showcased Blodgett as a staggering talent in the rough. Most impressively, he was only 17. Unfortunately, by late 1962 the quintet was in its death throes. A few members decided it would be hilarious to substitute rock & roll records for the hymns that would greet Sunday morning churchgoers over a steeple’s PA. Said hi jinx found the boys spending two days in jail. “I wasn’t there when it happened. I heard about it on the car radio. They didn’t identify who it was, but I just knew it was my band!” Brassard said, chuckling.

Upon their release, peeved parents decided that enough was enough. No more rock & roll for you, young men. Off to college you go. Mike Brassard returned permanently to Vermont and found a willing henchman in guitarist Bob Lavigne. A reconstituted Ravens played throughout the state over the coming weeks.

Plattsburgh, meanwhile, was hopping. Said community was a small city of barely 10,000. In addition, Plattsburgh was home to a large air force base. The military community brought in a large number of musicians to the area, many of who hailed from rock & roll’s birthplace, the American South. Plattsburgh is located barely 30 miles from the Quebec border and a 15-minute ferry ride across



he was spinning discs at WIRY in Plattsburgh. He was dubbed "Never Rest" Everest on air since he broadcast during the graveyard shift.

45s were common currency amongst teens. Long before CDs and iPods, vinyl singles were the universal language. Kids swapped 'em, heard 'em on WIRY and pumped nickels into jukeboxes to spin 'em.

In 1961, The Thunderbolts met with Everest. They were aware that he had some type of connections within the industry and hoped he could get them a recording contract. Everest approached an industry A & R man, Danny Davis. "We took a demo that we'd recorded at Channel 5 (a local television station) to MGM in New York with Ben," lead guitarist Bruce Danville said. "They turned us down." As they discussed matters, Everest and the boys decided it would be easier to just record on their own. Voila, the birth of Rondack Records! DIY 15 years ahead of schedule. They returned to New York City. "So, we went down to 1650 Broadway to record our first single at Delphi," Danville reminisced. "We drove down in a VW bus that had no brakes. We had to use the emergency brake to stop."

In keeping with '61, their debut comprised two instrumentals albeit both originals. "We recorded 'Blending' as an instrumental even though I used to

Lake Champlain from Vermont. With a drinking age of 18, the Plattsburgh area was a magnet for Vermont and Quebecois youth. With so many teens flocking to the area, there were numerous venues for groups to play. As a result, dozens of semi-pro outfits played gigs at various locales, including Brodi's, Noah's Ark and Rollerland.

One group, The Thunderbolts, ruled the roost. The Thunderbolts – lead guitarist Bruce Danville, rhythm guitarist Marshall Blaise and drummer Karl Costin – were the first band signed to Rondack Records. "Rondack was what inspired me to start Empire," Peter Guibord explained. The Thunderbolts released three singles between 1961 and 1963 (using the name "Shawn and The Sunnys" on one). As the first professional outfit in the area, the trio was regarded with a certain amount of reverence by future garage gods. "Everybody wanted to be like The Thunderbolts," remembered Falcon bassist John Kains, author of the legendary snot nosed anthem "I Gotta See Her."

Thunder Head

Ben Everest of Clintonville, New York had the rock & roll flu bad. Born in 1940, he harbored a passion for radio, rock & roll and music in general. As a youngster, he became enamored of radio to the point where he would wait up for his father to get home from work at 4 in the morning, listening to a local station through the wee wee hours. Everest began DJ'ing steadily in 1955 at 15-years-old. A year later,



The Thunderbolts with Ben Everest in 1961. L-R: Bruce Danville, John LaPlante, Everest, Karl Costin, Marshall Blaise

THUNDERBOLTS DISCOGRAPHY AND RECORDING LINE-UPS

Blending (Danville)
 Performer: The Thunderbolts
 Producer: B. Everest
 Recorded: June 1961 at Delphi Studios, New York City, NY
 Released: Rondack #4-7546
 Instrumental

Thunder Head (Danville/Everest)
 Performer: The Thunderbolts
 Producer: B. Everest
 Recorded: June 1961 at Delphi Studios, New York City, NY
 Released: Rondack #4-7546
 Instrumental



Blending (Danville)
 Performer: The Thunderbolts
 Producer: B. Everest
 Recorded: 1962 at Ace Recording, Boston, MA
 Released: Rondack #6-9768
 Vocal

I'm Sorry (Ram)
 Performer: The Thunderbolts
 Producer: B. Everest
 Recorded: 1962 at Ace Recording, Boston, MA
 Released: Rondack #6-9768
 Instrumental

Wild (Danville/Blaise)
 Performer: The Thunderbolts
 Producer: B. Everest
 Recorded: 1962 at Ace Recording, Boston, MA
 Released: unreleased
 Instrumental

Twista (Danville/Blaise)
 Performer: The Thunderbolts
 Producer: B. Everest
 Recorded: 1962 at Ace Recording, Boston, MA
 Released: unreleased
 Vocal

sing it when we played live,” drummer Karl Costin said. “Blending” b/w “Thunder Head” charted regionally and moved cartons of vinyl locally, but without the means to break it, the trio of Blaise, Danville (who played bass in the studio in addition to his lead guitar work) and Costin giggered relentlessly in an attempt to garner more exposure. A residency at the Riverview Hotel in Quebec found Blaise displaying another facet of his artistic talents, painting the walls behind the stage with lightning bolts and caricatures of the band. The Thunderbolts, with the addition of sax player John LaPlante, hit Vermont as well.

Rondack’s next release, recorded at Columbia Studios in New York City on December 26, 1961, was a piece of nascent Merseybeat, “Why Do You Cry” by The Monterays. These first Rondack 45s piqued Peter Guibord’s interest, prompting him to found Empire as already mentioned.

The Great Escape

In the autumn of 1962, The Ravens were foundering on the shoals. Refusing to go down without a fight, Brassard cast about for more rockers. A new Ravens coalesced with the arrival of drummer Marc Chapman and bassist Jim Ricker. Chapman was a free spirit, having spent a summer hitchhiking and riding a BMW motorcycle around Europe. While on walkabout, he ended up as an extra on the set of the classic WWII movie, *The Great Escape*. “Charles Bronson was very down to earth. He would talk to you just like one of the guys,” Chapman recalled. Next time you watch *The Great Escape*, pay attention during the Christmas carol scene. You’ll spot Chapman next to the guy who is directing the singing.

Music was his first love, though, not cinema. Back in America, Chapman jumped at Brassard’s invitation to join The Ravens. “Bobby Lavigne was playing with



Mike already,” Chapman said. “Jimmy Ricker and I came on board. We used to play The Cave in Burlington, Vermont, which was kind of our version of Liverpool’s Cavern. People would be lined up outside.” The new quartet traded upon The Ravens’ reputation, booking gigs. A natural showman, Brassard was still the focal point of this group as he had been in the original version. “Mike was a great front man. He didn’t wear underwear and one night as we were playing a song called ‘Oobie Doobie Do’ he did splits on stage and ripped his pants right open,” Chapman howled.

Brassard remembered vividly. “My balls were hanging out. Somebody in the audience threw me a sweater. I ended up finishing the set with the sweater tied around my waist like an Indian,” he chuckled.

In January 1963, both incarnations of The Ravens traveled to Ace Recording in

Boston, Massachusetts to lay down some tracks with engineer Herb Yakus (most famous for co-writing Sam Cooke’s “Chain Gang” as well as engineering Freddie Cannon’s “Tallahassee Lassie”). The session found both versions of the band playing mix and match on the songs. They tackled three Stephen Blodgett originals. First, the stomping “Goodbye To Mary Jane,” which showcased three guitars in the arrangement. Drummer Peter Young broke loose, surging through the tune as Bo Blodgett’s crisp leads impersonated an ice pick before Bobby Lavigne erupted into a lead solo. “Goodbye To Mary Jane” would be the ‘A’ side of their last single for Empire. “John Blodgett was the most unique guitar player I’ve ever seen. Everybody sounds like somebody. Not John. He had his own style, especially live. He moved in a jerky manner, but everything came out so smooth,” Bob Lavigne said.

Then, the various members recorded a tune called “Living In A Dream.” A vintage example of American rock & roll circa ’62, this beautiful ballad would be the flipside of the 45. To some ears, it presaged both the British Invasion and folk-rock. Brassard caressed the lyrics as Chapman’s delicate mallet work added extra texture. Another ballad, “I Turned And Ran,” was also caught on magnetic tape. The gem of this last session was “Oobie Doobie Do,” a song that was never released at the time. The off-the-cuff original was one that Brassard and the new Ravens had been playing live at The Cave. With less than 15 minutes of studio time left, the band tore into the song with Brassard spouting nonsensical lyrics. “It was like Gertrude Stein singing rock &



Bob Lavigne and Jim Ricker of The Ravens in 1963

Summer Song (Coviello)
Performer: The Thunderbolts
Producer: B. Everest
Recorded: 1962 at Ace Recording, Boston, MA
Released: unreleased
Vocal

She's My One And Only Girl (Castaine)
Performer: Shawn & The Sunnys
Producer: B. Everest
Recorded: 1963 at Rondack Studios, Plattsburgh, NY
Released: Rondack RO6-9769
Vocal

The Fisherman (Cammy)
Performer: Shawn & The Sunnys
Producer: B. Everest
Recorded: 1963 at Rondack Studios, Plattsburgh, NY
Released: Rondack RO6-9769
Instrumental

Living In A Dream (Blodgett)
Performer: Mike & The Ravens
Producer: P. Guibord
Recorded: January 1963 at Ace Recording, Boston, MA
Released: Empire E-3
Vocal

Oobie Doobie Do (Brassard/Chapman/Lavigne/Ricker)
Performer: Mike & The Ravens
Producer: P. Guibord
Recorded: January 1963 at Ace Recording, Boston, MA
Released: previously unreleased
Vocal

Something That You Do (Chapman/Lavigne/Ricker)
Performer: The Thunderbolts
Producer: The Thunderbolts
Recorded: 1964 at The Colony, Burlington, VT

Released: previously unreleased incomplete demo
Vocal

There Was I (Lavigne/Chapman)
Performer: The Thunderbolts
Producer: L. Vallins
Recorded: January 1965 at Stereo Sound Studios in Montreal, Quebec
Released: Allied AR-6337
Vocal

roll,” he said, guffawing. Frenetic screams and handclaps punctuated the confines of 1 Boylston Street. The walloping rhythm section of Chapman and Ricker stapled the song to the floor as Lavigne’s Jazzmaster ran amok through his Super Reverb amp like a rogue elephant on a unicycle. “It was insane. The kids loved it when we played it live,” Lavigne said.

And that was it. The original Ravens went off to college while Brassard and his new mates stayed the course for a short time. The single, “Goodbye To Mary Jane” b/w “Living In A Dream” received regional airplay throughout the northeast, but went no further. “The Empire singles were played in Albany, Boston and Hartford, but that was about it,” Brassard said. “We tried to push them by playing universities up and down the East Coast.” The Ravens previous 45s had met with the same fate. Both Empire and Rondack lacked the means to break a record nationwide, being deficient in that most critical of elements in the recording industry: distribution. One must keep in mind, though, that both of the labels’ founders, Ben Everest of Rondack and Peter Guibord of Empire, were barely older than their charges.

The latest version of The Ravens didn’t last much beyond spring anyway. Brassard wended his way to New York City, hoping for the break that never came. Brassard would hook up with Stephen Blodgett again as Fire & Brimstone in 1967, releasing the excruciatingly rare and claustrophobic psych Decca 45 “Underground” b/w “I Could Hear The Grass Growing,” which is not to be confused with the similarly titled Move song. The ‘A’ side is a gem, what with a nagging organ riff and discordant cello. “It’s ‘Black Is Black’ done with a shuffle beat instead of 4/4. Not the music,” Blodgett said. “But the repetitive chords.”

As for The Ravens, Ricker and Lavigne also opted out. Empire’s Peter Guibord waited patiently for close to a year before signing his next act – “Wild” Bill Kennedy & The Twiliters, who would record the first North American version of “Shakin’ All Over.”

The Thunderbolts

In the interim, The Thunderbolts added Fred Tusa, formerly lead guitarist of The Stratatones, and keyboardist Al Roberts of The Rockaires. The Thunderbolts loomed over the boondocks like a fire watchtower on the Adirondack ridges. With the demise of Mike &



The Ravens, The Thunderbolts had the North Country of northern New York, northern Vermont and southern Quebec at their feet.

They returned to the recording studio, journeying to Ace Recording in Boston to record a vocal version of “Blending” b/w with “I’m Sorry.” Costin sang lead and Marshall Blaise’s wife, Pat, and a friend, Josie, provided the backing vocals on the former. The Thunderbolts also recorded three other songs at this session that were never released. A 78 pressed by an engineer showed the most promise. Entitled “Wild,” Tusa blazed through some rockabilly licks as Blaise chortled the catch phrase ‘wild’ before dissolving into lunatic laughter. Said tune was not deemed worthy of issuing as a 45, which is a shame. Simply put, “Wild” is a magnificent ode to youth, testosterone and high spirits, i.e. a perfect rock &

“We used to get mobbed all the time. I remember being chased into a subway by a horde of girls. They thought we were The Beatles because we had long hair.”



roll record. The Rondack single that was released comes across as slightly disconcerting to modern ears. To the youth of ’62, though, it was revelatory. The song became Rondack’s biggest seller and received airplay throughout the northeast as well as garnering a favorable review in Billboard. If you’re a garage fiend, “Blending” probably isn’t for you. However, if you’re a fan of pre-Beatles pop music, step right this way, friend...

Finally, Ben Everest built his own studio at 35 Clinton Street in Plattsburgh. He’d tired of the long drive to New York City not to mention the expense of recording at Columbia, Delphi and Ace. With electronics whiz Bob Rabideau (drummer for The Monterays) building a mixing board from scratch, Bruce Danville, Marshall Blaise and others wielded hammers and toted lumber. Rondack Records now had its own facilities. On a technical note, Everest’s recording techniques were remarkable, especially for a small label far from the epicenter of the music world. Everest took extra care in the studio to place a microphone on the bass drum to achieve a fuller sound. Many recordings from this era lack a noticeable bottom. The Rondack sides are significant for the presence of drums in the mix. However, it was his ability to capture the bass with just the right tone that stands out four decades after the fact. This is most evident on his subsequent singles by bands like The Persuaders (with future Falcon bassist John Kains) and The Fugitives.

In August 1962, Karl Costin joined the Army. As the heart and soul of the band, Costin’s departure was greatly lamented. “He played his last gig with us at Sunny Hollow in Vermont,” Fred Tusa said. “It was very emotional. He cried at the end of the show. We all cried. What a singer. Karl was as good as Roy Orbison.” Costin’s replacement on drums was Dean Fesette. Fesette and Blaise had grown up together in Keeseville, New York. On a side note, Fesette’s rock & roll roots reached back to the late ‘50s. He had played with Southern boy Sam Dunuvan, most famous for a ludicrously glorious 45 of Space Age Dixie-billy called “Rocket Ship.”

Anyway, The Thunderbolts recorded one more song for Rondack, using the name Shawn & The Sunnys. The ‘A’ side, “She’s My One And Only Girl,” was a nice ballad that displayed Fesette

<p>Without A Song (Youmans) Performer: The Thunderbolts Producer: L. Vallins Recorded: January 1965 at Stereo Sound Studios in Montreal, Quebec Released: Allied AR-6337 Vocal</p>		<p>A Taste Of Honey (Marlow/Scott) Performer: The Thunderbolts Producer: E.F. Auchter Recorded: January 1965 at Stereo Sound Studios in Montreal, Quebec Released: V-22158 Vocal</p>	<p>In My Room (Usher/Wilson) Performer: The Thunderbolts Producer: L. Vallins Recorded: January 1965 at Stereo Sound Studios, Montreal, Quebec Released: unreleased Vocal</p>
<p>Heart So Cold (Chapman/Lavigne/Ricker) Performer: The Thunderbolts Producer: E.F. Auchter Recorded: January 1965 at Stereo Sound Studios in Montreal, Quebec Released: V-22158 Vocal</p>		<p>Bandstand (Nash) Performer: The Thunderbolts Producer: L. Vallins Recorded: January 1965 at Stereo Sound Studios, Montreal, Quebec Released: unreleased Vocal</p>	<p>There's No Other Like Your Mother (St. John) Performer: The Aches 'n Pains Producer: Hugo & Luigi Recorded: 1966 Released: PRE 501 Vocal</p>

and Blaise's sweet vocals. Regarded as a novelty at the time, the flipside was actually the highlight of the original group's recorded legacy. A bizarre tune called "The Fisherman" was buoyed by Roberts' majestically cheesy organ as Tusa cackled manically about tuna throughout the proceedings. A minor jewel for those who like their surf music with a hefty dose of nitrous oxide. Tusa is puzzled by the song's contemporary appeal. "I thought it was just a throwaway," he said.

The Circuit

With the demise of The Ravens, Chapman soldiered on for a time using the moniker. Brassard was long gone as were Ricker and Lavigne. Dispensing with the counterfeit band shortly thereafter, Chapman hooked up with The Thunderbolts. By this point, the original Plattsburgh outfit had changed members like so much soiled underwear. "They approached Bobby Lavigne and I and asked us to join while we were still in The Ravens," Jim Ricker explained. Founding Thunderbolt Danville was in the process of forming the short-lived Blue Diamonds with Fred Tusa. The band was short-lived and Danville and Tusa formed a new version of The Thunderbolts back in Plattsburgh. Talk about confusing! Two bands with original members using the same moniker. The Plattsburgh Thunderbolts consisted of Danville and Tusa as well as George Wagner and Robin Canelli. This version began playing often at the legendary Rollerland, playing their own sets as well as backing up headline acts like Brian Hyland. The band didn't last. Danville would then go on to play lead guitar with "Wild" Bill Kennedy & The Twiliters. Fred Tusa relocated to Canada, where he joined The Beau-Marks (the original incarnation of the group had a massive hit in Canada and Australia called "Clap Your Hands"). Tusa would play on a Beau Marks 45, "So Fine" b/w "Be Bop A Lula." With bassist Mike Robitaille singing lead, "So Fine" is incessantly cheerful. Tusa, in particular, glistens on guitar. The Gene Vincent cover is quite strange. While the fast tempo doesn't suit the song's inherent sexuality, Tusa and drummer Deane Trombley spit-shine the piece with Everly Brothers styled vocals, adding a different dimension. In addition, Tusa's off kilter leads lend the tune a sense of skewed fascination, thoroughly redeeming it.

Regardless, the latest Thunderbolts lineup comprised Chapman's former band mates Ricker and Lavigne along with founding guitarist Marshall Blaise, keyboardist Al Roberts and drummer Fesette. "I auditioned for the band in Bedford, Quebec," Chapman recalled. Fesette departed and Chapman came on board. At some

point, the quintet set up their base of operations on the other side of Lake Champlain, ferrying from Plattsburgh, New York to Burlington, Vermont. "There was a lot of shuttling going on back and forth between Plattsburgh

Vermont and Quebec. Successful bands would play gigs throughout the region at places like the Riverview Hotel in Bedford, Canada. The quintet performed at many of these venues. Playing numerous shows a week sharpened their chops.

While the British Invasion was just around the corner, The Thunderbolts were still belting out a repertoire consisting of covers of various American acts like The Beach Boys.

Then, The Beatles. Overnight, The Thunderbolts found their set list obsolete. Not to mention their haircuts. Soon, they were delivering "This Boy" on the boards as well as growing out their brush cuts. The boys' stage antics were visually enticing to boot. Marshall Blaise often climbed on Jim Ricker's shoulders during the course of a song. Then, Blaise would clamber onto the organ before leaping to the floor. One night, this didn't go so well. Lavigne remembered what had happened before a show. "Marshall and me had been wrestling. He whacked his ankle really hard on the edge of a metal bed," he said. Al Roberts remembered it totally differently. "Marshall and I were roughhousing and he caught his foot under a couch," he said. Blaise himself chimed in with a third version. "Me and Bobby were wrestling and we fell into the bathroom," he said. "I hit my ankle on the edge of the tub." Regardless, Chapman related the inevitable outcome. "Marshall jumped off the organ that night and landed wrong," he said, hooting. "He broke his ankle and had to wear a cast for six weeks." Blaise was still wearing his cast a few days later when the group played one of their regular gigs at The Cantina in Glens Falls, New York in the winter of early 1964. Right around the corner two other up and coming bands worked the local kids into hysteria. "Tommy James played The Village Inn in town," Ricker said. The Village Inn was also the stomping ground of another famous group. "The Knickerbockers played there a lot. They had a residency. What a fantastic band," Chapman said. Lavigne chipped in. "They were a little annoyed because we siphoned off a lot of their audience," he said.

While performing a show at The Queensbury in Glen Falls, The Thunderbolts were approached by Sandu Scott, a lounge singer. She convinced the band to back her up. A name change was in order and the outfit was dubbed Sandu Scott & The Scotties.

Montreal and New York

The new outfit abandoned Burlington and relocated to Montreal, playing at one of Saul Silver's clubs, the Downbeat, which was a gay bar. "We didn't know it was a gay club. The night we opened, there were all sorts of screams," Al Roberts said. "We couldn't see the audience because of the stage lights. Bobby said,

and Burlington," Ricker remembered. "We were basically in Burlington by the summer of '63 on a permanent basis."

At this time, a circuit ran throughout New York,



Again And Again (Lapham)

Performer: The Aches 'n Pains
 Producer: Hugo & Luigi
 Recorded: 1966
 Released: PRE 501
 Vocal

So Fine (Otis)

Performer: The Beau-Marks
 Recorded: 1965 in Montreal, Quebec
 Released: Quality 1766X
 Vocal

Be Bop A Lula (Davis/Vincent)

Performer: The Beau-Marks
 Recorded: 1965 in Montreal, Quebec
 Released: Quality 1766X
 Vocal



Patty (Prue)

Performer: Freddie & The Freeloaders
 Recorded: 1965 at Sun Studios, Memphis, TN
 Released: Laurie
 Vocal

The Octopus Song (arranged by The Freeloaders)

Performer: Freddie & The Freeloaders
 Recorded: 1965 at Sun Studios, Memphis, TN
 Released: Laurie
 Vocal

Underground (Blodgett)

Performer: Fire & Brimstone
 Producer: Terry Phillips
 Recorded: 1967
 Released: Decca 32297
 Vocal

I Could Hear The Grass Growing (Blodgett/Brassard)

Performer: Fire & Brimstone
 Producer: Terry Phillips
 Recorded: 1967
 Released: Decca 32297
 Vocal



'Boy, listen to them women!' But it was a bunch of guys screaming for us!"

At some point during their Quebec stay, a talent scout from CBS appeared. The band snared an audition for The Ed Sullivan Show. The group passed with flying colors, negotiating to appear on an upcoming episode in December of '64, eight months after The Beatles' debut on American television.

The Thunderbolts spent the winter rehearsing and perfecting their act with Scott. In the spring of '64, The Scotties set up shop in New York City, appearing regularly at a famous venue, The Latin Quarter. "We didn't really play our rock & roll repertoire," Chapman said. "We played crap like 'My Bonnie' and other standards." That wasn't the only concession the rock & rollers had to make for Scott's variety show. "It would start with a bagpiper and then we'd come out in our kilts," Chapman laughed ruefully. Roberts provided more details. "The bagpiper would play 'Scotland The Brave' and Sandu would come out and do a highland dance," he said. Gimmick or

not, the New York press ate it up with a shovel. Variety said they were "the blockbuster act of the year." A lot of this must be attributed to Scott herself. While a derivative performer, at 39-years-old she whipped the young band into shape. "She had a great work ethic. She rehearsed us daily," Ricker said.

Meanwhile, Beatlemania was sweeping the States. The Thunderbolts reaped the dividends. "We used to get mobbed all the time. I remember being chased into a subway by a horde of girls. They thought we were The Beatles because we had long hair. We ran from car to car and got off at the next stop. Some of them made it off the subway and chased us up into the street," Roberts chortled. "That used to happen all the time." It wasn't always a case of mistaken identity, though. Female fans found out that The Scotties were staying at the Oliver Cromwell. Crowds gathered outside. Repressed teenage girls bribed their way into the hotel with bottles of wine, making their way to The Scotties' suite. Needless to say, the young men weren't adverse to feminine charms. "There were these two sisters. Hope and Faith. They

were built like brick shithouses," Lavigne pondered wistfully.

The tale gets a bit twisted at this point. Sandu Scott basked in the limelight and attempted to put the band on salary since she was no longer willing to share revenues equally. Chapman, Ricker and Lavigne jumped ship and returned to Burlington. Roberts departed also, but didn't stay in The Thunderbolt fold. Blaise stayed the course. Two unknown New Yorkers, Dino Danelli and Felix Cavaleri, joined, rounding out the new version of The Scotties. Danelli and Cavaleri, of course, would go on to far greater fame with The Rascals and their brand of blue-eyed soul. Lee Greenwood completed the new Scotties.

Ed Sullivan

Back in Burlington, the trio of Chapman, Ricker and Lavigne reverted to the epithet, The Thunderbolts. A power trio would become almost de rigueur in 1967, but in the summer of 1964 it was a daring innovation. No matter. The lush three-part harmonies more than made up for the lack of a rhythm guitarist and keyboardist. To prove the point, the boys won the first Battle of the Bands contest put on by the Burlington Chamber of Commerce that November.

In December 1964, The Thunderbolts returned to New York City to appear on the Sullivan show with their former band mates since Sandu Scott's contract stipulated that she use her original group. Al Roberts also journeyed from the Green Mountain State for the show. Before the outfit appeared onstage, Ed Sullivan read a congratulatory telegram from the mayor of Burlington (who happened to be Jim Ricker's grandfather) on air. "Ed Sullivan was a cool shit," Lavigne said. "I talked to him in a stairwell for about an hour before the show. He was a regular dude." Unfortunately, The Scotties, *nee* Thunderbolts, were unhappy with their experience on the program. They performed "Hello, Dolly!" as the cameras focused on Sandu Scott. The band was positioned 20 feet behind her to boot. Once and Future Thunderbolt Dean Fesette viewed the program from the Mid-West. "I felt bad for the guys," he reminisced. "It was kind of a letdown. You



could barely see the band. It was all Sandu." In minutes, The Thunderbolts' shot at mythic status was over. Scott hammed it up and delivered an excruciatingly over the top performance. The trio of

RECORDING LINE-UPS

The Thunderbolts (Plattsburgh 1960-62)

Marshall Blaise: rhythm guitar
Bruce Danville: lead guitar *
Karl Costin: drums and vocals
Fred Tusa: lead guitar
Al Roberts: keyboards
John LaPlante: saxophone

* bass in studio; switched permanently to bass with addition of Tusa

Mike & The Ravens (Burlington 1963)

Mike Brassard: lead vocals
Bob Lavigne: lead guitar
Marc Chapman: drums
Jim Ricker: bass

The Thunderbolts

(Burlington 1963)
Marshall Blaise: rhythm guitar and vocals
Bob Lavigne: lead guitar and vocals
Jim Ricker: bass and vocals
Al Roberts: keyboards
Dean Fesette: drums

Sandu Scott & The Scotties

nee The Thunderbolts
(Montreal and New York City 1964)
Sandu Scott: vocals
Marshall Blaise: rhythm guitar and vocals
Bob Lavigne: lead guitar and vocals
Jim Ricker: bass and vocals
Al Roberts: keyboards
Marc Chapman: drums and vocals

Chapman, Lavigne and Ricker returned to Burlington with the taste of ashes in their mouth. "The less said, the better," Chapman said 40 years later. In comparison to his band mate, Lavigne was humorously philosophical. "Well, it was better than a poke in the eye with a stick," he laughed. Local fans were incensed, with hundreds of Burlington teens signing a petition that they sent to CBS, pleading for an appearance by The Thunderbolts sans Scott. Obviously, nothing came of it. As for Scott herself, various Thunderbolts hold divided opinions concerning her abilities. "She was very dynamic," Roberts said. "Put on a great show." "A complete hack," Chapman countered. "Nothing original about her whatsoever." "I learned a lot from her," Blaise said.

Regardless, the trio of Thunderbolts continued to tear up local venues like The Haunted Castle. On Thursdays, the group appeared at The Haunted Castle in drag, billing themselves as Gurty and The Hogs with one of them playing the "guitolet," a bastardized guitar and commode. "It was the stupidest thing we ever did," Ricker snorted. "But people loved it. We'd pack the place."

Meanwhile, Al Roberts had joined another Burlington band, The Volcanoes, fronted by Fred Prue. The group soon changed its name to Freddie & The Freeloaders and hit the highways to tour and record. The group found themselves spending most of their time on the Southern circuit, gigging throughout Tennessee, Virginia and the Carolinas. "We recorded some songs in Memphis at Sun Studios. The 45 got airplay on a 50,000-watt station in Buffalo. It started out slow and tapered off," Roberts said, laughing. The single, "Patty" b/w "The Octopus Song," was released on Laurie, home to Gerry & The Pacemakers. The 'A' side was a ballad while the flip was a nifty rocker. The group also recorded some other tracks that have yet to see the light of day.

'Heart So Cold'

While the Rondack singles by the original Thunderbolts have not aged as well, the same can't be said for the songs by the trio. In January 1965, The Thunderbolts recorded six tracks for Allied at Stereo Sound Studios in Montreal. Two live favorites, "In My Room" and "Bandstand" were caught on magnetic tape, but neither was released. The other four sides would show up on a clutch of 45s within the next few months. The debut single was released on Allied itself. The 'A'



side was a Lavigne/Chapman original, "There Was I," a lush ballad that would've sent The Searchers into fits of rapture. The 'B' side was a faithful remake of Vincent Youmans' "Without A Song." The 45 went to #2 in the Montreal charts. "The Beatles had the #1 of course," Chapman said.

In the summer of 1965, The Thunderbolts released a follow up to their first 45. Recorded during the same session as "There Was I," their new single would be released independently. Penned by the trio, "Heart So Cold" is simply joyous, a shimmering pop song that smacked of the British Invasion's influence on American garage subculture. The arrangement sported more hooks than a tackle box - Chapman's toms opened the piece before Lavigne's Gretsch Country Gentleman joined in with ringing chords. The yummy flip, "A Taste Of Honey," betrayed this same Mersey delirium. With luscious three-part harmonies, the boys gave the Fab Four a run for the



money on this oft-covered standard. Fans lapped it up. The single charted regionally, climbing to #2. "And once again, The Beatles kept us from #1," Chapman said, smiling fondly.

The 'A' sides were originals as was a fascinating demo by the band, "Something That You Do," which Chapman caught on tape at one of their regular haunts in Burlington, The Colony. The rest of The Thunderbolts' set list was comprised of covers, a state of affairs that Chapman still laments. "I wrote lyrics, but since I wasn't a guitarist I couldn't come up with melodies to write a song," he said. "I desperately wanted us to do more of our own material instead of just covering other people's songs. The potential was there." A Chapman original, "Girls, Girls, Girls," was never recorded, but it could have been the jewel in their crown. Sporting Lavigne's infectious chords, the backing vocalists sang, "Well, it's girls, girls, girls" before the lead singer cried, "I want them to love me." Then the backup singers once again wailed, "Well, it's girls, girls, girls!" as the lead vocalist moaned, "I want them to hate me..."

In November 1965, The Thunderbolts once again appeared at Burlington's Battle of the Bands although they were not allowed to compete, having won the inaugural contest. Plattsburgh's legendary Twiliters journeyed across Lake Champlain to take part in the proceedings. By this time founding Thunderbolt Bruce Danville had been in The Twiliters' ranks for some time, appearing on their second Empire single, a luxuriant original entitled "The Girl From Liverpool." While The Twiliters were rightly deemed the heavyweights on the New York side, until this day they harbor heaps of respect for their cross-lake peers. "Marc Chapman was the best drummer around. I was in complete awe of him," Twiliters drummer Skip Bushey said. "Wild" Bill Kennedy was equally impressed with The Thunderbolts. "Fantastic band with those harmonies and stage presence," he commented.

The Thunderbolts shared the scene with another mythic Burlington garage band, The Vistas, most famous for their classic 45 nugget, "Don't Know" b/w "She Turns Me On." However, the trio of Chapman, Lavigne and Ricker elicited the most fanatic of reactions from local kids as evidenced by one of their guitarist's reminiscences. "My brother used to cut one-inch strips of my stage uniform and take them to school," Lavigne chuckled. "He'd sell them for 50 cents apiece. My uniforms were in tatters."

At some point in 1965, Marshall Blaise

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<p>The Thunderbolts (Burlington 1965) Marc Chapman: drums and vocals Bob Lavigne: guitar and vocals Jim Ricker: bass and vocals</p> <p>The Beau Marks (Montreal 1965) Joey Frechette - piano</p>	<p>Mike Robitaille - bass and vocals Fred Tusa - guitar and vocals Deane Trombley - drums and vocals</p> <p>The Aches 'n Pains (New York City 1966) Bob Lavigne: guitar and vocals Marshall Blaise: rhythm guitar and vocals</p>	<p>Jim Ricker: bass and vocals Dean Fesette: drums</p> <p>Freddie & The Freeloaders (on the road 1966) Fred Prue: guitar and vocals Al Roberts: organ Bob Dennis: guitar Joe Seta: bass</p>	<p>Dennis Broadbelt: drums</p> <p>Fire & Brimstone (New York City 1967) Mike Brassard: vocals Stephen Blodgett: guitar</p>
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tired of Sandu Scott's shenanigans and extricated himself from her clutches. He returned to Burlington, joining Freddie & The Freeloaders for a short time before forming Marshall & The Deputies. His new band held down a residency at The Colony while just down the road The Thunderbolts played The Haunted Castle. Inevitably, Blaise disbanded his new unit, rejoining The Thunderbolts. After all, Blaise had been the one to name the band all those years ago. A live recording that Chapman made in '65 showcased a quartet covering everything from The Yardbirds' "Heart Full Of Soul" to The Beatles' "Yesterday." Unfortunately for such a talented outfit, no more originals were within earshot. Not that it mattered at this point. Internal friction fractured the band by 1966, with Chapman forming a power trio called The Triads natch. Said outfit never recorded officially.

Aches 'n Pains

Blaise, Lavigne and Ricker added ex-bolt Dean Fesette on drums and relocated to New York City. Taken under the wing of Hugo and Luigi, a Tin Pan Alley type production team, the quartet was assigned songwriters. In 1966, they released another 45, "There's No Other Like Your Mother," which is a sing-along replete with kazoo, banjo and whistle. If you're hoping for a fractured classic on par with The Monks' "Cuckoo," don't hold your breath. "There's No Other Like Your Mother" comes across as a reject



by The Scaffold after food poisoning. "I hated that song!" Fesette exclaimed. 'Nuff said. The flip, "Again And Again," was a tad more palatable, but still not quite up to snuff. "That's the one that should have been the 'A' side," Blaise said. "Jimmy's singing on that was nice." Both tunes show a band going through the motions, displaying none of their hallmark effervescence. Their new label, Press, demanded they change their name to boot. "They said Thunderbolts was too passé," Ricker said. "So we ended up becoming Aches 'n Pains." "No Other Like Your Mother" didn't so much as dent stateside charts. It was released on the Page One label in England, where it fared no better. The band also recorded some other tracks for Hugo and Luigi. These tapes were shelved, though. "We sounded too

much like The Beach Boys on those recordings," Lavigne said.

In 1967, the quartet reverted to their original name, but the handwriting was on the wall within a year. One night, Lavigne stormed off stage, tired of playing moldy oldies. "I wanted to do some wild shit, but nobody would do it," he said. "I left in the middle of a gig when Marshall said we were going to play 'Hang On Sloopy.' I hated that song then. Still do." The Thunderbolts' aches and pains were over. Ricker left as well. "I wouldn't play without Bobby," he said. It would take a few decades for The Thunderbolts to resurface. "Heart So Cold" was included on *Pebbles* during the aftershocks of the initial garage revival. Informed of this, Chapman was flabbergasted. "I can't believe anybody cares about something we did another lifetime ago," he remarked.

The Thunderbolts' first single, "There Was I," shows up on Internet auction sites on occasion, fetching a hefty sum. If you haven't heard either, gentle reader, amends have been made, though. Listen for The Thunderbolts "Heart So Cold," "There Was I," "Something That You Do" as well as "Oobie Doobie Do" by Mike & The Ravens on *Dionysus' Heart So Cold: The North Country '60s Scene!* available on CD and LP. Said collection contains many other lost classics by Rondack and Empire artists like The Twiliters, The Persuaders, The Falcons, The Monterays as well.



The Aches 'n Pains



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