



"BABY BLUE" & BADFINGER: THE AMAZING SAGA OF A BAND

By Alan Chrisman

Badfinger has always been one of my favorite bands. Badfinger was a Beatles-produced band in the early 70' who had 4 albums and 4 top singles on the Beatles' label, Apple Records.

Amazingly, one of my favorite songs by them "**Baby Blue**" had a resurgence in 2013, as it was chosen for the final episode of the popular *Breaking Bad* TV show, and it ended up back in the charts at no. 14. Some people may not know they also wrote the song, "**Without You**" which Harry Nilsson had a number one hit with in 1972 and Mariah Carey in '94.

Originally called The Iveys, they were the first non-Beatles band signed to their new Apple label in 1968. They changed their name to "Badfinger" after an incident when John Lennon had

hurt his finger playing what was later to be the Beatles' song, "With A Little Help from My Friends". Paul McCartney wrote and produced their first big hit, "**Come And Get It**", which was on their first Badfinger album, the soundtrack to the Peter Sellers movie *Magic Christian Music*, produced by Tony Visconti, later David Bowie's producer. Their next album, "No Dice" had the afore-mentioned "Without You" and "**No Matter What**" hits released in 1970. Their 3rd Apple release was the solid "*Straight Up*" LP with "Baby Blue" produced by Todd Rundgren and "**Day After Day**", produced by George Harrison.

The four members of the band were originally from Wales and Liverpool (Pete Ham, guitar, Tom Evans, bass and Mike Gibbons, drums, Joey Molland guitar). Molland even looked similar to McCartney. They all four wrote songs so catchy that people often took them for the Beatles and their harmonies. They also played on several Beatles' solo albums like Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* and Ringo's single, "It Don't Come Easy". And they played at Harrison's Bangladesh Benefit Concert in '71 and Ham with Harrison for his "Here Comes The Sun" duet.

But then fate was to turn on this storied band, for the Beatles broke up in 1970, just at the height of Badfinger's success, with their record label in lawsuits and Badfinger's money too tied up for years afterward. They released their final album for Apple, *Ass*, in 1973, with their goodbye song "Apple of My Eye".

Afterwards, they got a deal with Warners Bros label, and released two decent albums *Badfinger* and *Wish You Were Here* in 1974. But they also met an unscrupulous new manager and he disappeared with the advance money the record company had given them and that put them on the financial hook for his actions and wouldn't publicize their albums or release any future ones. . They went back in Apple's studio one last time to record *Head First*, but it wasn't released until 2000. And it was only the beginning of their troubles, for their main songwriter, Pete Ham, was found hanged in April, 1975. The remaining members tried to carry on in various bands and solo projects for the next several years. Molland and Evans recorded a "comeback" album *Back on The Airways* for Electra in '79. It's actually, one of their best, I think, besides their Apple releases, with several quite good songs on it like the title rocker and the Beatlely ballad single, "Love Is Gonna Come at Last"; I recommend it if you can find it.

I actually met the remaining members and got their autographs when they played Ottawa, Canada's Barrymore's Hall in the early 80's. They released another decent album "Say No More" in '81. But soon they fell apart again and at one time, there were two rival touring bands, one led by Evans, one by Molland, both claiming to be Badfinger. This led to more lawsuits and money woes and tragically, in Nov. '83, Tom Evans

also committed suicide, still evidently despondent over his earlier bandmate, Pete Ham's, death eight years before.

Thus Badfinger's story became more known for its tragedy than its music often, unfortunately. All the members had recorded various solo projects that were finally released over the years: Pete Ham's *7 Park Avenue* ('97) and *Golder's Green* ('99); Tom Evan's *Over You: The Final Tracks* ('95) and Molland has 4 albums *After The Pearl* ('85), *The Pilgrim* ('92), *This Way Up* (2001) and *Return To Memphis* (2013). Badfinger fans are advised to check them out for they all contain some well-written songs. I met member, Joey Molland, again at the Connecticut Beatles' Convention in '94 and he signed my beloved original Apple album *Straight Up*. Goldmine collector's magazine said that *Straight Up* was the most requested out-of-print album in 1988 their subscribers wanted released again. Under pressure, Apple Records did re-release their Badfinger albums on CD, as *Come And Get It: The Best Of Badfinger* in 1995 and the *Very Best Of Badfinger* in 2000.

Finally in 2013, the surviving member of Badfinger, Molland, (drummer Gibbons died in Florida in 2005) and the other members' families got their royalty payments settled in court. Pete Ham's song "Without You" alone was worth over a half million dollars for his in '94, when Mariah Carey had hit again

with it. With Breaking Bad's re-hit of "Baby Blue, 42 years after its first release, there would be no doubt more to come.

So the amazing story of Badfinger was to be fated both good (produced by and played with The Beatles) and bad. Dan Matovina's book, *Without You: The Tragic Story of Badfinger* was written in 1998 and re-issued in 2000.

But to me, what's important is their great music, that's stood the test of time and I was lucky to get to meet them and hear them play their songs. Badfinger remains one of my favorite bands and their songs have proven to last. One of the bands I managed, played "Baby Blue", especially for me, at the Ottawa Beatles' Conventions I organized. For You, Baby Blue.

2014

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