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Gary U.S. Bonds shown performing at the Stone Pony in Asbury Park. Photo by John Cavanaugh.

Back In 20!

by Gary Wien

*1st studio record
in 20 years*

It's been twenty years since Gary U.S. Bonds has recorded a new studio album, but he's logged hundreds of live shows around the world in that time. Bonds, one of the few performers to have hit records in both the '60s and '80s, is quietly celebrating five decades as a recording artist. Only this time, Bonds didn't have to go very far to record.

"I just went downstairs," laughs Gary U.S. Bonds. "That was pretty cool. I got me some stuff in here and I decided to toy around with it for a while. And so we just came down here and started hacking around and stuff until it was like, 'Hey, this is not too bad. Let's go make some more songs so we can finish the album.'"

A little over two years ago Bonds says he began setting up a digital recording studio in his basement with his daughter, Laurie. They put in the latest equipment and moved furniture around to get the best possible sound setup.

The result became, *Back In 20*, which will be released on M.C. Records on June 1st. Gary will be holding a CD release party at the Stone Pony in Asbury Park on May 30th and two more release parties at B.B. King's Blues Club in New York City on June 17th and 18th.

Back In 20 includes several guest stars lending their support. Bruce Springsteen plays guitar and adds backing vocals on "Can't Teach an Old Dog New Tricks," which also showcases Southside Johnny on harmonica. Johnny also

hell of a guitarist that I think he'd fit on anything. Which he did. I said, 'Dickie work with them, do some magic' and he was cool. And Phoebe (Snow), I've always wanted to work with because she's such a sweet lady."

The record has a bit of a bluesier feel to it. "It's stuff I was singing down in Norfolk before I ever had a record out," explains Bonds. "We used to sing those songs at little clubs when I was making 5-10 dollars a night to sing. It'd be "Fannie Mae" and stuff by Otis and James Brown. Whatever gets you through the night."

Southside Johnny, who plays on "Fannie Mae" (a song he's recorded himself) is one of the Jersey Shore artists that have become part of the Gary U.S. Bonds inner circle. He has frequently jumped on stage with Gary for a song or two at clubs like the Stone Pony. In fact, the Stone Pony has sort of become the home away from home for Bonds.

"It's (the Stone Pony) probably one of the last real rock and roll joints in the world," said Bonds. "It's too bad it's gonna go the way of most of the others. But as long as it's there, I'm gonna keep rockin' in it man. Cause it's a real 'from the heart' kind of place. You go there and can do whatever you want as long as it's respectable and they're gonna love it because they know you're there to rock."

About two years ago, Gary U.S. Bonds was inducted into the Norfolk Walk Of Fame. Gary (born Gary Anderson) moved to Norfolk from Jacksonville, Florida when he was young and

sings co-lead vocal and plays harp on the blues classic, "Fannie Mae" and adds his harp to the song "Take Me Back." Legendary former Allman Brothers Band guitarist Dickey Betts lends his talents to two tracks: "She Just Wants to Dance" and "Bitch/Dumb Ass," which also features a blistering duet by Bonds and Phoebe Snow. Other cover tunes on the new CD include Otis Redding's "I've Got Dreams to Remember," Keb Mo's "She Just Wants to Dance" and "Every Time I Roll the Dice," a song that's been previously recorded by Delbert McClinton. The rest of the songs are originals, written primarily by Gary, his musical director Mark Leimbach, and his daughter, Laurie "Li'l Mama" Anderson, who also co-produced the album.

Bonds met Bruce Springsteen when the artist jumped on stage with him during a show in New Jersey in the late '70s. Springsteen was unknown to Bonds, but his band and the crowd certainly knew who he was. The meeting led to a friendship which brought Gary back to the studio for the records *Dedication* and *On The Line*. Both were produced in the early '80s by Springsteen and Steven Van Zandt and led Bonds back on to the charts.

"I met Dickey Betts on the golf course," said Bonds. "I saw him at a tournament and asked if he'd be interested in doing something on the album with me and he said yeah. I just picked a couple of songs because it's a whole different kind of music that I do, but I thought he's such a

stayed there until his music career took off.

"It's a weird town," explains Bonds. "It's a Navy town, so there's a lot of transit... a lot of movement. People are there for a minute and then they're gone. So, you don't get to keep a lot of love in towns that are like that. There were a few connections there but not enough to hold me there."

Bonds jokes that the last time he was in Norfolk, the people wanted to either hang him or put him in jail. Forty years later, they were honoring him as one of the inaugural inductees with other artists like Pearl Bailey, Ella Fitzgerald and Bruce Hornsby.

He still remembers the day when he first heard "New Orleans" - his debut song which became a top 10 hit in 1960. That was not only the first time he would hear himself on the radio, it was the first time he would hear the name "Gary U.S. Bonds". That name was created by his manager without ever letting Gary know about it.

"So when the guy said, 'We've got a new record coming out, it's a young man from our town right here. Let's hear it for homeboy Gary U.S. Bonds' - I'm like what the hell is that. Somebody stole my crap already man. I didn't want to be called Gary U.S. Bonds - you might as well call me Alice! But after that first check everything was fine. It's not such a bad name after all!"

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