

THE TURTLES

Biography

Very few rock performers have remained as vital through the 1960's, 70's, 80's and 90's as have **Howard Kaylan** and **Mark Volman**. Initially they made their mark with the Turtles, then they joined **Frank Zappa's Mothers of Invention**, and then they glided into their own **Flo & Eddie** persona, dishing out records that have encompassed a multitude of personalities.

They've always been smart enough to have responded to the latest worthwhile trends in a fashion that has yielded an abundance of quality records, and more than their share of hits. This history will attempt to add a depth and perspective to Kaylan's and Volman's unique musical journey, one that, perhaps encapsulates the post-Beatles rock era like no other. This text was originally a companion piece to Rhino's exquisitely packaged, executive version of "The Turtles Greatest Hits" (RNLP 160).

Let's pause just for a second to make the totally subjective case that the Turtles were the closest America ever came to having a Beatles. Others, like the Lovin' Spoonful, Rascals and Beach Boys, certainly had as many hits, but the Turtles hits were better conceived and arranged and, like the Beatles, transcended so many styles: from the outright protest rock of:

"It Ain't Me Babe"
"Let Me Be"
"You Baby"
"Can I Get to Know You Better"
"Happy Together"
"You Showed Me"
"She'd Rather Be With Me"
"Elenore"
"She's My Girl"
"You Know What I Mean."

The Rascals lacked the heavy guitars that were the sound of the day; the Spoonful were limited in approach, and didn't last that long anyway; and the Beach Boys were too square for too long, and somehow seemed tied to a pre-Beatles era.

Suffice to say that, even the Turtles more minor hits, the ones which failed to make it onto "The Turtles Greatest Hits.", all sound like first class records.

This will provide a necessary primer for understanding Kaylan's and Volman's crazy world, so you'll be better prepared when the duo hit you with their next record, as their "history" continues.

Two guys from Westchester. The one with the curly hair and glasses, and the other with the beard. That's how Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan (AKA Flo and Eddie) refer to themselves. Two slightly bewildered kids thrust into the fast lane of rock 'n' roll stardom - hits, fame, national tours, hanging out with the Beatles, joining the Mothers of Invention, acting in the "200 Motels" movie, and on and on ... Two guys from Westchester.

THE TURTLES

Biography

Despite its extremely boring, middle-classness, the Los Angeles suburb of Westchester bears some insight. A frequently fogged-in area slotted next to Los Angeles' International Airport, in the late 1950's/1960's the community thrived due to its proximity to Hughes and other companies that were instrumental in America's galloping let's-catch-up-with-the-Russians space program.

This bred a generation of kids who were slightly smarter than the bulk, and Westchester High during these years used to place right up there scholastically among the city's schools. (Sad to say that, with the coming of the 1970's, Westchester's potency was severely sapped as the bucks for the aerospace industry dissolved, and the airport started grabbing more territory; laying waste to nice tract homes and turning the area into the remains of a holocaust; in essence, ruining all that was. Howard later fantasized about the possibility of buying the now-deserted junior high school he once attended.

Westchester was devoutly conservative, had no teen night clubs of its own, and was so far out of the happening Hollywood area (12 miles) as to strip it of all means of convenience to acquire that hipness comfortably. It was in this cultural wasteland that the partnership of Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman was formed.

Howard Kaylan (changed in 1965 from Kaplan, because that's how he always wrote his name) was born June 22, 1947 in the Bronx, and spent his first eight years in Manhattan before his father took a job with General Electric in Utica, New York. After the family moved there for a year or so, they moved to the Los Angeles area, settling in Westchester. Mark Volman was born April 19, 1947. After a brief period living in Redondo Beach, his family moved nearby to Westchester.

Little did they know it at the time, but both Mark's and Howard's musical direction was forged by a crusty, old Mr. Ferguson who gave clarinet lessons in a drafty cubicle above the Westchester Music Store. Mark went to Orville Wright Jr. High, while Howard went to Airport Jr. High They didn't know each other, but they both pursed their lips around clarinet reeds for Mr. Ferguson, who ran them through the gamut of "Deep Purple" and "Anapola, My Pretty Little Poppy".

The puckers soon gave way to wide grins when their friendship formed in the Westchester High A Cappella Choir, which was conducted by **Robert Wood**. Mark was a first tenor, Howard a second tenor. (Wood was so influential that the duo later named a publishing company after him. "Mr. Woods Music.")

It was quite a choir, and won all sorts of city competitions. Look at the accompanying photo and you'll see not only Mark and Howard, but **Al Nichol** and **Chuck Portz**, all standing right next to each other!

In 1963, Al Nichol, Howard Kaylan, and Chuck Portz had just changed the name of their novice surf combo from the Nightriders to the Crossfires. Mark Volman knew them from the Westchester High A Cappella Choir and joined the group (initially as a roadie). Also in the band were **Don Murray** from Inglewood High and **Dale Walton**.

THE TURTLES

Biography

Dale was later replaced by **Tom Stanton**, who in turn, was later replaced by **Jim Tucker**. Ironically, their music was almost exclusively instrumental! Four guys from choir forming an instrumental band? Actually, it wasn't all that surprising. In 1962, the hardest dance music of the time evolved out of **Dick Dale's** concept of the Surfer Stomp, searing guitar solos over a pounding rhythm section. Nichol was one of the very best of the city's surf guitarists....

...The Crossfires adapted their own, original versions of standards like "Money" and "What'd I Say"...

The effects of being in a band had their social consequences. Howard expresses it this way:

*"In B-10 I was socially less than a potato; in A-10 I was like **Fabian** to those kids."*

The pair, along with the rest of the band, were thrust into an Animal House-like existence. Here they were, mere lads of 15, their fingers ripping away at their saxes, playing at fraternity parties. The naive duo were exposed to wild bacchanals, strangely devastating drinks like "Red Death," and all manner of mayhem.

To rise to the occasion, and to keep the frat boys happy to insure the band of even more \$200-a-night jobs (good money for 1962), the Crossfires adapted their own, original versions of standards like "Money" and "What'd I Say" that were laced with the well chosen obscenities that the UCLA party boys loved so much. An ill-timed rendition of those very same ditties at the Westchester Women's Club effectively banned the Crossfires from Westchester, for good.

They set their sights on the adjacent South Bay area (Redondo Beach, Manhattan Beach, Torrance) and quickly found themselves winners of several Battle of the Bands competitions that resulted in a residency at Reb Foster's (a local DJ) Revelaire Club. The group also had a fan club of sorts, "the Chunky Club," whose members made obscene genital gestures with the help of spoons during band appearances. (For more insight into this period, refer to the Crossfires album, Out of Control) It was here that demands were made upon them to learn the various hit recordings of stars like the Coasters, Sonny and Cher, the Righteous Brothers and others for whom they would occasionally become the backup band.

In 1964, the Beatles and the whole English Invasion took effect. Mark and Howard put down their saxes, took up the vocals more ardently (Howard did most of the leads, Mark backups and tambourine) and the Crossfires dropped their entire repertoire of surf instrumentals and grew their hair long. They were so taken with this change of identity, that it was not uncommon for them to show up at the South Bay Bowl, spewing forth English accents and claiming they were Gerry and the Pacemakers. It's a wonder what

THE TURTLES

Biography

one little, properly-phrased order of "white tea please" can bring on in the way of offers of free drinks, food and autograph requests.

Despite this response, and their following at the Revelaire, frustration set in. The members weren't in high school anymore, two were married, and the band wasn't earning enough money. On the night they were submitting their resignation from the Revelaire and about to break up, they were approached by **Ted Feigin** and **Lee Lasseff** who signed them to a brand new, nameless record label, later to be called White Whale.

It was time for a name change as well. The group liked "The Half Dozen," or "Six Pack," but opted for Reb Foster's suggestion, The Turtles (like The Byrds, right?). It was exactly the same band and the same songs - one week at the Revelaire they were the Crossfires, the next week they were the Turtles.

It wasn't long before the release of the Turtles first single, their arrangement of a **Bob Dylan** song, "It Ain't Me Babe." It was an immediate hit - climbing into the Top Five nationally - quickly establishing the Turtles as a force of their own. Their first concert appearance was before 50,000 kids at the Rose Bowl, opening for Herman's Hermits.