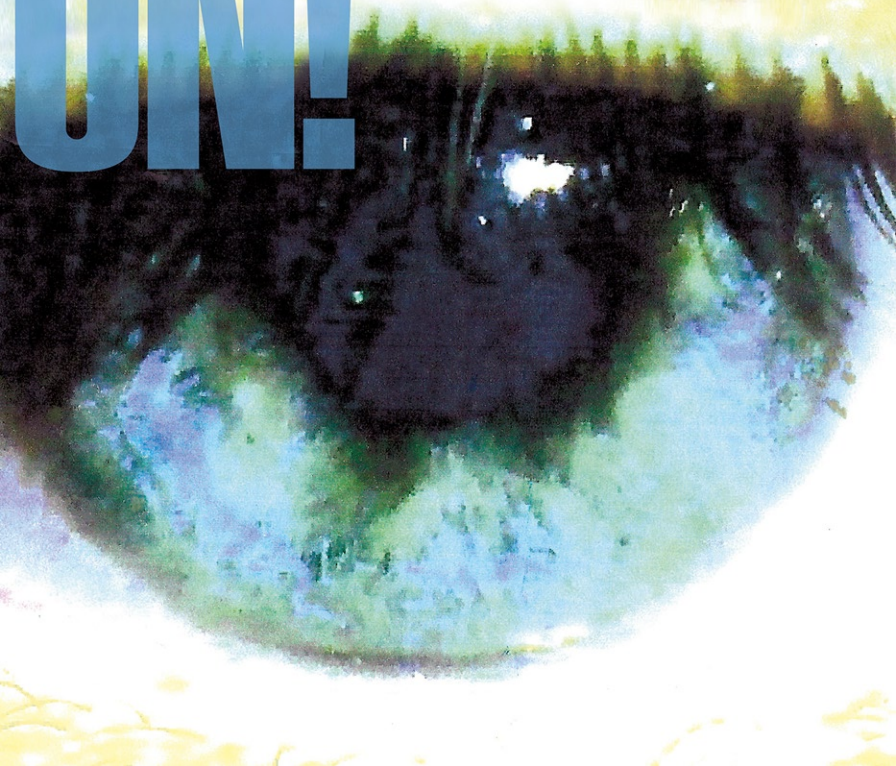


ON! THE OPTIC NERVE



ON!

The album that time almost forgot....

DAVE: Dave Amels (Producer) · **TONY:** Tony Matura (guitar/vocals) · **BOBBY:** Bobby Belfiore (guitar/vocals)
FRANK: Frank Max (misc.) · **KEN:** Ken Anderson (misc.)

Tony: We started getting together again and playing, singing and writing for what were the early seeds of ON! in 1997, I think. Of course, Frank found his way back in! (laughs). We started to record with Frank on drums again before ON!. We had a few sessions in a friend's basement apartment and recorded some songs that ended up being on ON! including "Penelope Tuesday." We didn't have a bass player at this time, so we all took turns playing the bass. Eventually our old friend Mike Linn joined on drums and Tom Ward came back to play bass and that was the lineup that recorded the ON! record.

Bobby: Sometime in the late 1990s Tony and I started getting together again, about once a week, wading through a backlog of accumulated material, with the idea of recording one last album... It was to be for me a last bit of unfinished business before giving up the ghost and leaving New York for good... By this point I was living in a basement on Norfolk Street and together we had worked up a full set of new material which we premiered at the 1998



Cavestomp, a three day garage-band extravaganza hosted by Jon Weiss of the Vipers, at Coney Island High on St Marks Place... We opened for the Pretty Things on the third and final night, and the first person I ran into in the dressing room after our set was Dick Taylor

from the Pretty Things, who shook my hand and congratulated me on a great show— talk about gracious! a priceless moment in time!

Dave: By mid 2000s, I had some time on my hands and a big

recording studio, Bomb Factory Recording in Burbank. Bobby was still living in New York and he gave me a cassette of new songs and they were every bit as good maybe even better than some of the old '80s songs. So I suggested we all go into the studio and make a record.

Bobby and Tony were joined by a new lineup for that record. Mike Linn, one of the principles of Cryptovision, was in for that whole time period and Tom Ward joined on bass. The trick was having the patience to sit them down and get their music out. But they somewhat trusted the stuff I was doing, so they did not interfere much in the production.

Bobby: The initial lineup included Frank Mamlin, now Frank Max, on drums and the late great Georgie Seville on bass. We had managed to record about half an album's worth of material, in Georgie's basement studio on First Street and First Ave. Georgie was an up and coming club promoter who really lived out the rock & roll lifestyle. Unfortunately,



we eventually abandoned the project when it became clear that finishing would be impossible... on account of Georgie's phone never stopped ringing long enough to get anything done...

Still, Tony and I persisted, eventually bringing Ken Anderson back on board for a year or so before he moved off to Vermont with his wife. Ken's enthusiasm for the Optic Nerve was infectious, and having him back in the lineup was a real shot in the arm! We were accumulating a pile of demo tapes of songs we'd never gotten around to recording, as well as new songs, so that by the time we crossed paths with Dave Amels again in 2004, I had a master tape with well over thirty songs to choose from.

Frank: I would talk to Bobby every other month and he would tell me how he had worked Tom and Ken into the band and even Mike Linn. They all knew each other; we all were all in the scene. They were all good players, really excellent. As long as there was Bobby and Tony's material, things were good.

Dave: We did all the basic tracks at Coyote in Brooklyn, a studio famous for a lot of great records back then. Everybody used to record out there. (We did the Mary Weiss album several months later with the Reigning Sound.)

It was a great recording space and we did the rhythm tracks there, but still weren't done after a few days, so I took the tapes back out to Burbank, while both Tony and Bobby flew out to complete vocal parts, guitar tracks to be redone, etc. I was also working on the solo

record of Dennis Diken from the Smithereens and he offered to co-produce the album ON! with me

Bobby: The lineup for the last record ended up being Tony and me on guitars, with Tom Ward on bass and Mike Linn on drums. Tony suggested we call it ON!, after the band's initials, and Dave picked what he thought was the best material off the master tape. Then on a freezing cold weekend in mid-January of 2005 we all gathered together at Coyote Studios in Brooklyn, by then a home away from home. We decided to just run down the list and record as many songs as possible: starting Friday night, all day Saturday and then Sunday, finishing Sunday night... then add to that, the stress and pressure of having to play a meaningless gig that Saturday night in spite of not getting paid... And still, by the end of the third night, we had recorded basic tracks for fifteen songs and were fired up, rarin' to go and ready for the next big step, the overdubs and a final mix...

Then Dave dropped a bombshell... He planned to mix the whole thing out in LA! Somehow Tony and I cobbled together the necessary funds to fly out that next month for overdubs and mixing, though it would take one final mix in August of 2005 to put the finishing touches on the record. Then Frank Max and I put together the artwork and waited. That was late 2005, early 2006.

Ken: I made a slight contribution to "Here To Stay." If you hear when the drums come in — that was my idea! It just starts with the guitar and then



the band comes in unexpectedly with that chord, like unexpectedly. I love shit like that. Then later on Mike did the same thing, so I am very glad.

Dave: There were also un-credited people on the records. The Optic Nerve wanted to do it in a very '60s way where there was really no mentioning of other people involved in the music. But there were people helping out. Dennis Diken played drums on one song for ON!, for example, and I played a bunch of keyboards there, too, but really the core is them, these are just embellishments. Unfortunately, Tom played an octave too low for most of the album. I questioned that when we first went into the studio and I had him make some adjustments, as I like to hear the attack on the bass and the actual notes. That was one of the only shortcomings, but it is what it is and it's a nice document of those songs regardless of that.

Tony: So happy this is finally being released after so many years! All three albums at the same time!

Dave: I think no matter how they were recorded, the songs really sell the whole thing because the songs are that good. I can't express enough how the most important thing is the songs; the music. Then everything comes after that. Then you have what instrument you play, how it sounds, how you play it, what microphones you are using. But none of that stuff is really important. If you don't have the music, none of the rest matters at all.

The Farewell Reunion (and resurgences)

Frank: There was a lot of bad vibes between the band members just out of frustration for the ON! album never coming out. That album, ON!, was really Bobby and Tony. Mike and Tom were contributing, but really the material is Bobby and Tony so the fact that the songs never came out was very frustrating for the two guys. I actually did some recordings of those songs prior to the final versions. I wish I was on "Penelope Tuesday," that song is great!

Bobby: For a band to survive in New York City, you need to have something coming out all the time. That's the reason why the band folded after the ON! sessions.

When it became clear that no release date was being scheduled or even up for consideration, there was really no reason to stick around. The entire album was pretty much left to rot on the vine, and since we were scattered more than ever by that point, just getting together was like moving mountains. It was time to give up the ghost and get on with life.

Frank: We played Garage Rage in '95 and that was at Coney Island High with Bobby, Tony, Orin and I. We had great time, we hung out all night, but I don't know if we played another one, like doing two gigs or only one. But we left on friendly terms; that was just life getting in the way with families and jobs to take care of. Which is a real treat now, after all this time, for the ON! material being released, including



the reissue of Lotta Nerve and Forever And A Day. It's great stuff: a whole different mindset and some beautiful songs.

Ken: I re-joined in 2001, but I don't think we recorded – either very little or nothing. We did some of the newer songs which I think Mike Linn is playing on. I tried to be more gentle, more mature and understanding. But I think I still pissed people off, I don't know (laughs). I don't recall why in the end we did not record the final version of those songs. I remember I was also playing with a garage band called the Ultra Five and also a power pop band called the Rooks – a very tight, very clean band. So maybe I was too busy at the time to record with the Optic Nerve.

I think in some ways I may have got on their nerves as I was always trying to get the nice harmonies and to bring out the beauty in their songs. They were much more beautiful songs than most of the garage bands. I do think the most beautiful songs from the garage era in NYC were from the Optic Nerve and the Cheepskares – they also had some amazing songs. I feel honored that I was able to participate, even a little bit. I think even so many years later, so much of this music is quite timeless in so many ways. There was so much happening and the only way to keep it alive is to publish it. I still am very grateful: I wouldn't have taken someone like me! (laughs)

Tony: After that the band didn't get together again until 2015 when we started to prepare to do the Europe gigs in 2016. At first Frank Max (of

course) was going to handle bass duties, but ended up not being able to do it and then we thought, would Orin possibly agree to do it? He didn't cross our mind at first because we had not been in touch and he was living way across the country in Arizona. When he said he'd do it we couldn't believe it, we were thrilled! My old friend Robert Pinnock played the drums in this lineup. It was great to get together with the guys again and we had a blast playing to very enthusiastic audiences!

Interviews coordinated by Matteo Bocci and edited by Matteo Bocci and Mike Stax.

GUERSZEN

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Alcibade Parques, 105 - 25005 Llieda, Catalonia (Spain)
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CL L 409-2021 - 00253 186

ON! THE OPTIC NERVE

side 1

1. lindsey, donna, shannon and me
2. yesterday all over again
3. jamie rowe
4. here to stay
5. everyday sunshine
6. there was a time
7. goin to the moon

side 2

1. penelope tuesday
2. in love again
3. she has a way of making my day
4. melissa and heather
5. sunshine girl
6. alli
7. fancy free with nanci
8. who's loving her now

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MIKE LINN DRUMS

Produced by **DAVE AMELS**
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Back cover & insert photos by **MICHAEL MARCUCCI**

