



Local News

Hey-la, Hey-la The Angels are back

By Stephen Snyder, Times Staff Writer

August 25, 2002

Rock 'n' roll trio joins other girl groups with stamps of success

Being immortalized on a commemorative stamp can be risky.

Peggy Santiglia Davison found this out recently when she received her advance copies of "The Legendary Girl Groups" collection of the 1950s and '60s, put together by original Supremes member Mary Wilson.

"She told us to get your goofiest, oldest picture," said Davison, lead singer of The Angels - best known for their No. 1 hit "My Boyfriend's Back" - last week from the Pour House Cafe in Westminster.

So Davison and the two other Angels, sisters Phyllis "Jiggs" Allbut Sirico and Barbara Allbut Brown, sent one of their very first promotional photos as a trio in 1963.

"We all had beehives the day of that photo," said Davison. "When I saw [the stamps], I gulped."

The Angels have been around long enough to see many hairstyles come and go (They have performed together continuously in one form or another since 1961.).

Davison joined the group in 1963, just before they recorded "My Boyfriend's Back." Before becoming an Angel, Davison already had recording experience. As a teenager in New Jersey, she formed a group with her high school friends called The Delicates.

Davison grew up listening to "R&B, R&B, R&B." From her home in New Jersey, she could pick up all of the New York radio stations and would sneak her radio under the covers at night. Her other favorite, like most of the girls her age, was Elvis.

"I listened to his breathing as much as his singing," said Davison.

Back then, said Davison, the recording industry was a simpler place.

"We were kids singing in school," said Davison. "There's a much bigger machine at work now. I'm not knocking it. It's great, but it is very different."

The Delicates got noticed by playing hooky one day, hopping a bus for New York City and visiting their favorite deejay, Murray the K. Enchanted, Murray recorded them in his studio. The girls started playing gigs in the New York/New Jersey area - in roller rinks and small clubs - and singing background on various recordings, as well as recording themselves.

Davison met the Allbut sisters while doing backup work.

At the time, the Allbut sisters were already with The Angels and had a few minor hits, the ballads "Til" and "Cry Baby Cry." When The Angels' third member, Linda Jankowski, left, the sisters asked Peggy to fill the vacant lead spot.

The Angels, along with the other girl groups at the time, opened the doors for female acts to come.

Peggy recalled that often The Angels would be the only female group on a tour of all male acts.

"Somehow they thought that the guys would bring in more money," said Peggy. "Women have been much more featured now. There wasn't such a thing as a diva then."

In addition to gaining acceptance for all-girl acts, The Angels and their contemporaries created many of the looks, sounds and attitudes that persist today.

One of the producers on "My Boyfriend's Back," Richard Gottehrer, later used a similar formula to produce the popular '80s girl group, The Go-Go's.

As The Angels continued performing into the '70s, their outfits became more risqué, incorporating the bare-midriff look popular with today's female pop-stars.

"Today you see teenagers with their midriffs bared," said Peggy. "People think nobody did that before Britney Spears."

Though the members work separately on various projects, The Angels never truly broke up. Despite a slump in the early '70s, the girls' careers took off again when nostalgia music or "oldies" became popular. Two of The Angels - Barbara no longer does live shows - still perform regularly on their own and with other '50s and '60s acts, attracting sold-out audiences.

Peggy and Phyllis do various one-night engagements. On Sept. 8, they will perform at the Universal Amphitheater in Los Angeles and then fly back the following day.

"We don't travel nonstop like we used to," said Davison.

Peggy took time to earn a bachelor's degree from Goucher College and a master's in clinical psychology from Loyola College. She has a small life-coaching practice and often substitute teaches in Carroll, where she has lived since 1993. But she still puts most of her efforts into performing.

"I never would have imagined I'd be in my 50s and still doing this," she said.

The stamp collection comes at a time of renewed interest in the early girl groups. Peggy has noticed old Angels memorabilia being auctioned on the Internet site EBay. At concerts, she's seen as many young faces as older ones.

"Some are surprised many of us are not only alive, but working and performing concerts," said Peggy.

The official unveiling of the stamps took place Thursday at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland. It was followed by an informal jam session by the groups featured.

Part of the proceeds from the stamps go to the family of Florence Ballard, one of the original Supremes, who died in 1976.

For The Angels, it was the first time the three appeared on stage since a reunion show at Madison Square Garden in 1998.

Despite the hairstyle, Peggy enjoys being commemorated on a stamp.

"It is a part of Americana that I was part of, we were part of," she said, "and that's special."

Reach staff writer Stephen Snyder at 410-857-7862 or ssnyder@cniofmd.com.

©Carroll County Online 2002
