

They Would Have Been The Simians

The untold story of the lads who auditioned to become the world's first made-for-TV-band...and failed!

A little known story has it that between autumn, 1964 and summer '65, television producers Jerry Kaspar and Quinn Taylor III pitched a concept hoping to capitalize on the phenomenal popularity of The Beatles. Taking their cue from the antics of “the Fab Four,” Kaspar and Taylor envisioned four wholesome All-American boys—and *American* was key to the pitch— “who just want to have fun” while playing catchy pop music and chasing cute girls (and having cute girls chase *them!*).

Everyone knows the rest of the story. Talk about “Daydream Believers,” rival producers Bob Rafelson and Bert Schneider beat Kaspar and Taylor to the punch by conceiving, producing and winning the pop culture jackpot with their wildly successful TV show and top 40 hit-making machine, The Monkees. The rest is history. And history, as they say, is written by the winners.

Though Kaspar and Taylor’s daydream was shattered by The Monkees’ runaway success, the two producers survived their humiliation and went on to long and reasonably stable careers producing infotainment videos for pharmaceutical products advertised on late-night cable TV.

The four lads who auditioned for Kaspar and Taylor’s failed TV pitch however, were not so lucky.

The Original Simians

Tommy Groton, lead vocals, tambourine (“the cute one”). Born 1946, Fall River, Massachusetts. Immediately following the botched Simians TV show pitch Tommy dropped all musical aspirations. His real gift was his head-turning good looks which

he successfully parlayed first into a sales rep position with Narcissus, a men's cosmetics brand hugely popular for a brief period between 1979 and 1981 until consumer complaints led to an investigation by the USFDA that revealed the company was using discarded human placenta as one of their base ingredients.

Years later, the impossibly handsome Tommy Groton was discovered by a talent scout for a nascent porn cottage industry in El Cerrito, California.

A brief spurt—pardon the pun—in the burgeoning XXX Adult video market, saw Tommy's popularity skyrocket, particularly within the gay niche market, winning enthusiastic reviews for “consistently presenting a heretofore unseen heartwarming naturalism onscreen.” Sadly, Tommy died of AIDS on 28 February, 2012.

Vinnie Fontanarosa, bass (“the goofball”). Born 1943, Hoboken, New Jersey. No one—not even Vinnie's parents—were surprised to hear that Vinnie enrolled in clown school when The Simians TV pilot fizzled out.

“Yeah, there's actually a school for clowns,” Vinnie said, “look it up. In fact, there's a bunch of them. They've sprouted up like mushrooms after a monsoon, and I'm here to tell you they're all a ripoff! Total scam. I paid fifteen-hundred smackers for one semester and baled. I could see it was totally bogus...Those clowns actually think a red rubber bulb on your nose, white greasepaint and orange fright wigs are still—if they ever were—funny. Funny is Frank Zappa! That's where genius expresses itself humorously.”

Stu Wilkes, drummer (“the scary one”). Born 1946, Waco, Texas. Died 1981, self-inflicted wounds*. (*The coroner who conducted Mr. Wilkes' autopsy reported a massive amount of licit and illicit drugs in the troubled musician's bloodstream, ranging from alcohol, cocaine, amphetamines, PCP, MDMT, ketamine and nitrous oxide, but the decisive cause of death was attributed to the exploded stick of TNT impacted in the drummer's rectum which was found detached from the remains of

Mr. Wilkes' exploded torso.)

Timmy Finnerty, singer-songwriter, rhythm guitarist (“the quiet one”). Born 1943, Battle Creek, Michigan. Finnerty’s response to the hand of fate was to sell everything he owned, pack his back-country hiking gear and set off for the road—the global road, third world, fourth world, wherever fate drew him. His “troubadouring” across India in 1969, he says, is considered one of his peak life experiences, and shaped the remaining path of his life.

Finnerty discovered “the depth of my wandering soul” the years he drifted from Dakar to Java, Estonia to Yemen, Peru to Siberia. Listening, recording, cataloguing, archiving indigenous musical traditions from the last remote, undeveloped areas of the earth.

Having finally settled in Vienna, Austria in 1984, Mr. Finnerty has lived what he describes as a “monkish life far outside the orbit of public performance.”

Rumours of Revival

In 1985 there were rumours of a reunion, a final tour. When contacted by TootSweet Media, Don Zsapresky, The Simians former manager, was characteristically blunt regarding the rumors: “What’s the point? Nobody knows them guys. A final tour of a bunch of nobodies who never toured in the first place? Forget about it.”

“Decades later,” Vinnie says, “some guy got in touch with me, said he wanted to make a documentary about our experience called, *They Would Have Been The Simians*. He said it would be one of those ‘almost-could-have-been stories.’ I thought that might be kind of cool but when I asked Timmy about it he said the director, Nicky Perspekopolous, specialized in making documentaries about losers, pathetic hacks who failed miserably in life but kept deluding themselves to keep their hopeless dreams alive. He made a doc on some schmuck who did a Neil Diamond tribute act. The guy tried to play in Reno but only ended up on the street corner,

a sad and destitute busker.

Timmy said this director, this Nicky Perspekopolous guy made the Neil Diamond tribute act guy look like the sorriest loser you could imagine. Like a tick on a dog's scruff, Perspekopolous hung on to unknown performance artists, failed stuntmen, deluded self-proclaimed "entrepreneurs," this was his wheelhouse.

"We even let Perspekopolous shoot a week of video before Timmy warned us he was editing our footage to make us look like total assholes."

"So that's when Stu, our drummer paid a visit to Nicky and told him to hand over all his Simians video footage. Perspekopolous said we already signed a contract so the footage was now 100% his property. No one's completely sure what happened next. Stu said if he told us he'd have to kill us ha-ha, but no one laughed and no one pressed him on it. All we knew for sure is that Nicky Perspekopolous dropped off the radar and was never heard from again.

Look Back in Ennui

Jerry always said, *It's all in the name*. "Next to *timing is everything*, *it's all in the name* is the most important takeaway I have from 49 years in show biz: IT'S ALL IN THE NAME."

Jerry was convinced the name his partner insisted on, The Simians, was the reason their brainstorm went brain-dead. But Jerry's partner, Quinn, was intractable. He insisted The Simians was the perfect name. "It has *panache*... a certain *je ne sais quoi*, it sounds...*urbane*."

"Urbane? Who knows from urbane? We're not shilling the next David Niven, we're trying to make something for the kids, today's kids, not kids when we were kids. No offense Quinn, but aren't you a little long in the tooth to be pitching stuff to a generation you know nothing about?"

"I know The Beatles, I know what sells. It was my idea to use *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!* as the template for The Simians TV pilot."

“Yes, and those were excellent suggestions. But you *insisted* on naming the band The Simians! We even had an idea for a theme song, you remember that? Something poppy like, *Yeah yeah, we’re the simians / people say we simulate sim...ple...tons...*

“Or something like that. OK, so we weren’t songwriters, never said we were. We woulda gotten pros to write that shit. But no, you killed our dream by refusing to drop that idiotic name.”

“It’s not idiotic, it’s a great name. Jane Goodall uses it all the time.”

“Jane Goodall is a little known primatologist, no one knows who she is.”

“Anyone with a high school education knows who Jane Goodall is.”

“Not the high school I dropped out of. Look, I told you back then and I repeat myself now: IT’S ALL IN THE NAME. Why do you think The Simians went nowhere and The Monkees were the biggest thing in pop entertainment for nearly five years?”

“I don’t know, pure dumb luck?”

“No, not pure dumb luck, IT’S ALL IN THE NAME, fool! Why do you think The Beatles were The Beatles and not The Centipedes?”

“The Centipedes?”

“Or The Millipedes?”

“Because between the four of them, those Liverpool Lads didn’t have one hundred, never mind one thousand legs?”

“Oh Lord, grant me forgiveness. What about The Crickets? Ever wonder why The Beatles didn’t call themselves The Crickets?”

“Because Buddy Holly already called his band The Crickets?”

“Yeah, and look where that name got them: every one of them dead in a plane crash! IT’S ALL IN THE NAME, I’m telling you. We could have been the biggest thing in the industry if you had just dropped that shit name, The Simians!”

Afterward

Jerry Kaspar and Quinn Taylor III both retired full-time from the advertising and marketing industry in 2014.

Timmy Finnerty

These days Tim Finnerty may be best known as “the Supramundi Guy,” meaning the founder of Supramundi, the esoteric—and highly respected—record label and purveyor of arcane world music.

“Receiving the honorary award for musical education is the greatest reward in my life,” Mr. Finnerty said after accepting the American Anthropological Association’s Haldiman-Copps Award for “lifetime accomplishment in enriching the field of knowledge of global pan-cultural arts and folkways.”

Vinnie Fontanarosa

It turned out that Vinnie was also a bit of a nomad. Shortly after the Simians fiasco Mr. Fontanarosa drove his purple metal-flake Barracuda out to Vegas where he got a job as a bakery delivery driver.

Side ventures over the years included hosting an all-format open-mic. Gigging as both a stand-up comic and magician, Vinnie did pretty well for himself throughout the relatively prosperous ‘80s and ‘90s.

Hard times came when Vinnie’s mom was taken by cancer. Vinnie went through a period he calls “penitential.”

“I didn’t feel like doing anything...no music...no magic...no stand-up. I dragged on like that for...too long. Then I thought of my mom and what she would have said. She would have said, ‘Get out there and sing! You’ve only got so much time.’ And boy, was she right: We only got so much time!”

Nicky Perspekopolous

After 1965, no one saw hide nor hair of the controversial documentary filmmaker.

His last film, *Daryl Kincaid, Diamond in the Rough: Intimate Portrait of A Super Tragic Loser*, drew unwelcome attention to a critical reappraisal of his work, after which he fell into disfavor, even among his former acolytes.

Ironically perhaps, a student-run film co-op in the Bronx is offering filmmakers a cash prize to investigate through cinematic narrative the peculiar circumstances surrounding the unexplained disappearance of the maligned *auteur* of the rumored but missing documentary, *They Would Have Been The Simians*.

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