

Look Who's turned his life right around!

Barry Quinn left Tyneside for Canada at the age of 21, disillusioned and with no prospects – and a bad perm! He returns to Tyneside in a few months as a “hooligan”, of sorts. And he’s proud of it, as he tells Showbusiness Reporter GORDON BARR



FRONTMAN – Barry is the Roger Daltrey figure in tribute band The Wholigans

ANYWAY, anyhow, anywhere, Barry Quinn just knew he had to get out of Wallsend. A disaffected youth, he went from one dead-end job to another. He had no money, no prospects, no goal in life. No one would have been surprised had Barry become a hooligan. And he did – after a fashion. Barry, in fact, left for Canada, and turned into a Wholigan, a member of one of America’s most popular tribute bands. The group will soon make its Toon debut at the Newcastle Opera House – and he can’t wait. Despite leaving Tyneside as fast as a plane to Toronto could take him, he’s eager to play the famed Opera House stage. “I am coming home to play the same stage as my childhood heroes, such as Lindisfame and Eric Burdon. It’s unbelievable,” says Barry, now 44. And he’s hoping his story will help other youngsters who feel their life is stuck in a rut to follow their dreams. “I thought it might be interesting for the younger ones with no direction as to where to go, and inspire them and show that there is always a way out with their lives,” he says. “You just have to explore every possible avenue and don’t be scared to leave your ‘comfort zone.’” So what is the Barry Quinn story? How did the disenfranchised youth from Battlehill, Wallsend, end up playing Roger Daltrey in a Who tribute band? “Growing up in Wallsend in a divorced family since the age of seven or eight, I never had the luxuries others had growing up,” he explains. “But I survived, as people do, and come the age of 16 in 1975, I left Willington High School with no prospect of a job. “The shipyards were laying people off, and



PROUD – a young Barry with his mum Jennie

there wasn’t much else – this was no computer age for the general public to benefit from. “Life looked gloomy and I spent a good part of those years, like others, on the dole and in and out of the bookies and the bars. “I had a couple of odd jobs here and there, but struggled to keep my flat and to stop the council from taking my furniture for not paying the rent. “Times were not good, so at one point a cousin who was over from Canada said, ‘Why don’t you come over here?’ but I really didn’t pay it that much attention until later. “I approached my dad with the idea – keep in mind I have no money, no job – and he was cool as a cucumber. “He said OK, but that I’d have to go working with him painting for a while. He knew at that point in time there was nothing there for me. “So I did and a few months later, when I was 21, I left England for Canada with a suitcase, a terrible brown suit, a bad perm and £500! Barry’s family had originally come to Britain from Canada when he was a young child. But he had few memories of the place. “I ended up in Toronto. It was beautiful, big, but I at first found the size of it quite scary.” Barry got a painting job within two to three days, but it wasn’t long before the rock bug took hold. In 1981, the Wholigans were born.



IN TUNE – mum watches Barry practice

“When I first left England for Canada in 1980 I knew I wanted to rock but The Wholigans and The Who were not even occupying any part of my brain, it really wasn’t my thing,” he reveals. “I was into Black Sabbath, Ozzy, Judas Priest, UFO, Status Quo, Budgie and Thin Lizzy. So I joined a band in Montreal called Nouveau Riche and we played originals, very 80s metal. “One day on the train to Montreal someone mentioned my passing resemblance to Roger Daltrey, to which I shrugged and said, ‘Thanks, I think’. “Well, after playing for a while, we added some cover songs – just a couple of Who tracks – which I really wasn’t familiar with, and after I sang them, people came up and said how much they liked it, so we added a couple more. “That went down well and the guitarist closely resembled Pete, so things were eerily falling into place. None of this was planned. The word ‘tribute’ was not around then in connection to bar bands, at least not as predominantly as it is today.” The band then upped sticks and moved to Toronto, changing their name to The Wholigans and staying at Barry’s pad most of the time. There were a few line-up changes, and as the fan base grew, so did Barry’s affection for Who songs. “I went from merely singing the songs to really enjoying singing them,” he says. “The



HAPPY FAMILY – Barry with dad David and brother also called David

audience feedback was a big help and I found myself being consumed by ‘Orribli Oo!’ and loving it.” There were some more line-up changes, and just like Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend from The Who, Barry and guitarist John Walsh (“a mini Pete”, says Barry) did not get on off-stage. “But on stage it was a beautiful thing and we both knew it,” recalls Barry. The band became hugely popular throughout Canada and the USA in the 80s, but after more line-up changes, the band split and in the early 90s Barry moved to Florida and took a seven-year hiatus. “I found myself itching to play again. I auditioned tons of Who wannabes, and, let me tell you, that was rough.” So four years ago The Wholigans were resurrected, with not one, but two new line-ups – and with Barry in both. One of the line-ups plays Canada, the other the USA. “So I have a southern Wholigans and a northern one,” he laughs. The groups, he feels, are stronger and better than ever. “I can’t wait to get back to Newcastle,” he says. “I did follow my dream, I got out of that dead-end existence. It shows that if you really put your mind to it, you can do it.” There is one sad and unexpected twist to Barry’s homecoming gig in September, though. His mother died a few weeks ago. “She was planning on coming to the show. Life’s funny that way,” he sighs.

■ The Wholigans are at Newcastle Opera House on September 5. Tickets are £10. Ring (0191) 232 0899 for more details.



WORSHIPPED MUSICIANS – the real The Who in a serious pose from back in their heyday



BIG HIT – Barry and the rest of The Wholigans are big in both Canada and America, helping to exorcise the frustration of his early life in Wallsend

ITS Carys’ birthday next week and she is in a state of great excitement about it. Every morning her first question is “How long is it until I’m five?” I tend to tell her how many sleeps it is in the hope that it will make more sense to her. Emma has less patience and will just snap back that its one less day than yesterday which is no help at all. Not that she will have that many presents to open. Sadly my siblings are not very good at keeping in touch and as my nephews and nieces are all just about grown up now my brother and sister have very little interest in my offspring. Carys won’t receive so much as a card which I think is pretty mean so it will be down to us and the grandparents to ensure that birthday girl isn’t left feeling disappointed. Still, she is pretty easy to please. In fact she is a toy manufacturer’s delight. So long as its pink or purple and has Barbie or something equally girly on it she’ll be delighted. However, she’s set her heart on a new bike this year. Raymond doesn’t really want to get her one as Kieran’s old one is perfectly serviceable. Unfortunately Kieran’s old bike is not pink and purple. She has seen and ridden on exactly what she wants when we were buying a new helmet for Emma recently. And now nothing else will do. I would have written out a cheque already but Raymond just does not see the point. I have tried appealing to his love of cars – pointing out that he wouldn’t want to drive a rusty old banger if he could have a gleaming new sports car. This was an extremely bad move on my part as the bigger our family grows the



IMPATIENT Emma



OLD BIKE Kieran



BIRTHDAY GIRL Carys

further our transportation moves away from the nifty little two seater which Raymond covets. It doesn’t help that our childless friends round the corner have recently acquired a red, open top, flashy number whereas we have acquired a demanding new baby and a diesel 7 seater. It also doesn’t help Carys’ cause that Raymond comes from a long line of hand me down thrifty souls whereas I am definitely descended from the profligate spenders race. So I’ve decided to back off and let Carys do the persuading. She’s tried the practical approach – telling him the old bike he holds her heart on a new bike this year. They could be fixed. She tried the aesthetic appeal – the new bike will match her helmet. I could have told her that one wouldn’t work – you can tell by looking at him that matching colours is not something that is important to him! So finally she has done what I would have done in her shoes. Gone for good old female emotional blackmail. Tears, wobbly lower lip and a “You don’t love me, do you?” I still have no idea if its worked, I have put him in charge of present buying but I would put money on Carys’ wily charms working in the end. I’ll let you know the outcome next week....!

Costa Blanca Spain. SWALLOW HOTEL. High West St, GATESHEAD NE8 1PE. Saturday 5th July. 11.00am - 4.30pm. Car parking & Free admission. For further information please phone 01429 221 217

Ups and downs of legendary group

THIS week it was announced that The Who’s Roger Daltrey is planning to record an album with longtime bandmate Pete Townshend in the autumn. Townshend has been writing new songs and the duo will embark on a concert tour later this year. Formed in Shepherd’s Bush, London, in 1964, The Who evolved out of local youth club band The Detours and featured Pete Townshend, Roger Daltrey,

John Entwistle and Keith Moon. The group courted controversial publicity. Townshend’s guitar pyrotechnics were especially noteworthy; the instrument was used as an object of rage as he smashed it against floors and amplifiers. They also exhibited anti-social attitudes and were shunned by major labels initially. Despite their strength as a singles act, the band failed to

achieve a No 1 hit on either side of the Atlantic. They embraced the album market fully with Tommy, an extravagant rock opera which became a staple part of their increasingly in-demand live appearances. On August 23, 1978, Keith Moon died following an overdose of medication taken to alleviate alcohol addiction. His madcap behaviour and idiosyncratic, exciting

drumming had been an integral part of the Who fabric and rumours of a permanent split abounded. But the band resumed recording in 1979 having added drummer Kenny Jones to the line-up. There was a farewell tour in 1982-83 and the band remained estranged until the end of the decade. In June 2002, Entwistle was found dead in a Las Vegas hotel room.

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