

"The word 'blues' makes me think of women..."

"Women sing the blues, women inspire the blues and women can cure the blues." – CAROLYN SILLS.

An interview with Carolyn Sills

By Paul Bondarovski

IRONICALLY NAMED AFTER THE INFAMOUS WILLIAM MARCY TWEED (AKA "BOSS TWEED"), AN ICON OF political corruption of the late 1800s, this Brooklyn, New York-based trio blends rockabilly, soul and downhome blues with a flavor of uptown jazz lounge vibe. The voice of the band is Carolyn Sills – "part Billie Holiday, part Sade," wrote Michael Dregni in *Vintage Guitar* magazine. "Her vocals resonate with a throaty anguish, torch songs sung straight from the heart."

P. B.: Carolyn, your band's website is entirely turned to your present day and to the future, not a word about your past. How did you and other band members get started in music?

Carolyn Sills: The three of us have been playing music all our lives, in very different ways. Gerard was classically trained on violin at a young age before taking up the guitar in grade school... He discovered a passion for the blues as a kid and was self-taught through old recordings of his heroes... He played in a slew of high school and college bands before really coming in to his own in New York City, where he started getting into rockabilly, surf and country.

Eric grew up in New Orleans and was playing in bands with guys triple his age since he can remember.

I was educated by 50s rock and roll, blues and Motown on my father's radio, which gave me a real ear for harmony, melody and songwriting. I started writing original music and singing in bands in my late teens... Eventually I was tired of letting the guys

have all the fun during practice, so I picked up the bass.

P. B.: Many American bands, some playing for 20 to 40 years, are only dreaming to tour Europe. How did it happen that Boss Tweed has already played in Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Poland, the Netherlands? And how it was?

Carolyn Sills: We were fortunate enough to open for a great band, The Hi-Risers, in New Haven, Connecticut, one night, and they recommended their European tour manager to us... He thought there would be a market for our new spin on classic American music, so he took a chance on us and booked a month long tour. Luckily, we were able to deliver, selling out all our merchandise and playing great shows to appreciative audiences. It was fantastic! We loved every minute over there, seeing cities for the first time and meeting wonderful people.

We are currently planning our next tour in the spring of 2008, hopefully hitting more countries and being out for a longer period of time.

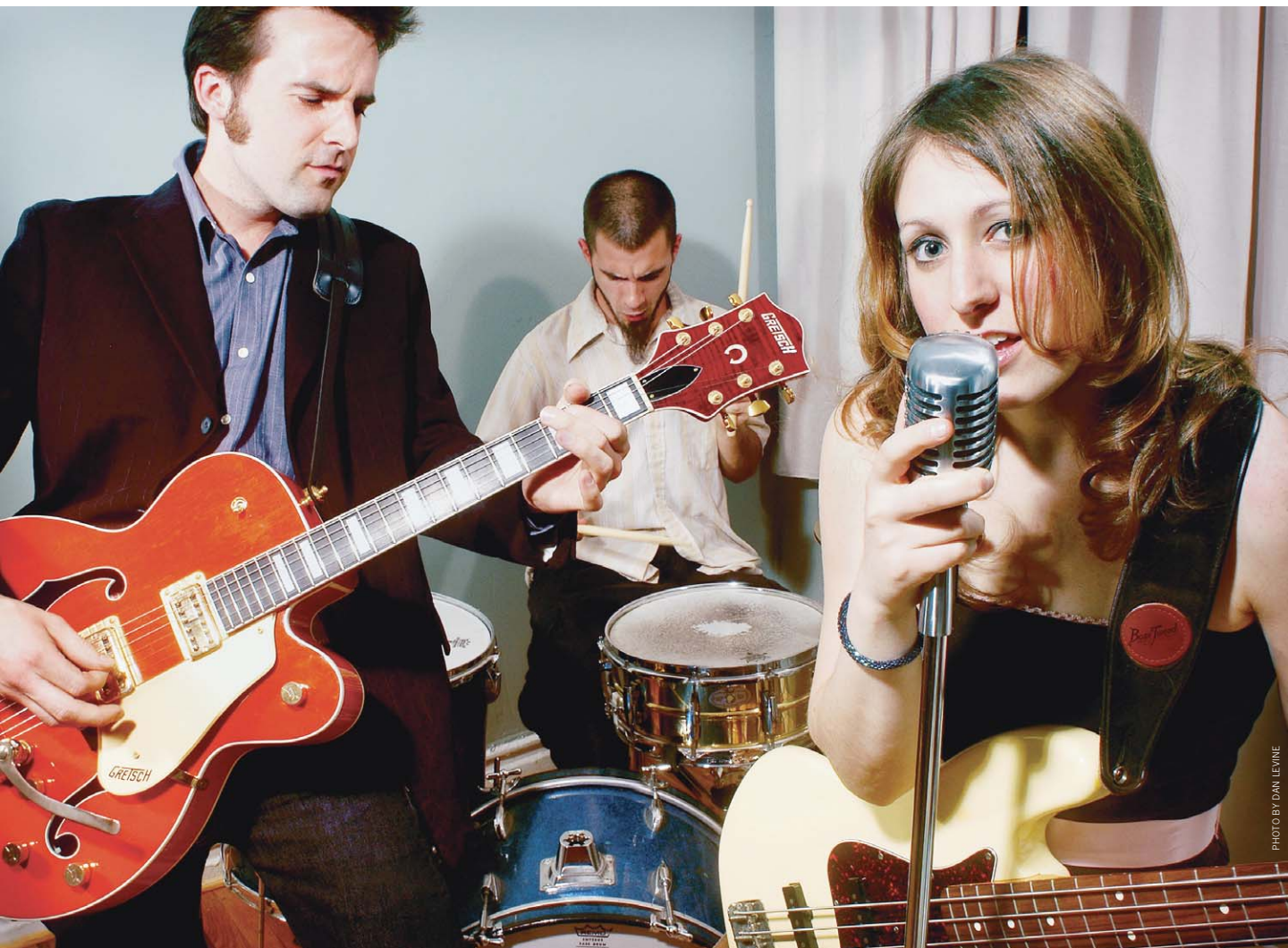
When not fronting Boss Tweed, Carolyn can be seen fronting her Patsy Cline tribute, Carolyn Sills & the Poor Man's Roses.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAROLYN SILLS

PHOTO BY JOHN CYR





Boss Tweed (l-r): Gerard Egan (guitar, vocals), Eric Reed (drums) and Carolyn Sills (vocals, bass).

P. B.: Your debut album was a big success. A real new band's manifest. Not a single cover, originals only, and every song seems to carry a message. What was the idea of the album, and are you satisfied with the result?

Carolyn Sills: The initial idea of the album was to give our listeners something other than a recorded version of our live show. Our drummer Eric is a skilled engineer and in addition to recording the entire album, wrote a couple of soundscapes to create a unique atmosphere for the listener. We didn't want

any of these songs to be fillers, those you skip in order to get to the hit singles... We pride ourselves on creating music that really paints an audio picture of what the lyrics are conveying, and we're pretty happy with the job we did. Everyone I meet who enjoys the album has a different favorite song, which in my opinion is a great testament to that.

P. B.: For at least one generation vinyl records are something that definitely belongs to the past. And you have released your next recording as a vinyl single. Why?

Carolyn Sills: Well, we initially were going to release it on 8-track, but we couldn't find a manufacturer! Actually, all three of us are avid vinyl collectors, so the initial idea was more of a selfish one, wanting to hear ourselves on a vinyl record. It then became clear that lots of our fans were vinyl collectors as well, and our style of music, paying homage to the sounds of the 50s and 60s, really caters to that classy vinyl sound... We recorded the songs on analog tape, making it sound like a much older recording, so it seemed only natural to release it as it would have been 50 years ago. Record collectors are overjoyed when they see us selling vinyl at our shows... I wouldn't say vinyl is making a comeback, I don't think it ever went away... it's just focused on a more specific sound these days, particularly blues, country and rockabilly.

P. B.: It's evident that your music doesn't fit into one particular genre. For rockabilly fans you are a rockabilly band, and for blues fans you are one of the best new generation blues bands – at Midnight Special Blues Radio your “Then It Hits You” song has been rated five stars by the listeners. How would you yourself define your music style?

Carolyn Sills: Five stars! Good to hear, that's one of my favorite tunes. We've often been asked if we consider ourselves blues, country, rockabilly or a combination... People have trouble figuring out how to label us. One fan calls us “David Lynch meets rockabilly”... But we think the best music cannot be easily labeled, as it simply sounds like itself and not a copy of anything else out there. Rockabilly, country and blues are so much a part of our musical history, and musicians would be foolish to claim they are not influenced by any of these genres... But it seems as though many bands are content to simply repeat the styles of those who came before them and not to create their own, original sound. We love it most when we hear music that moves these genres forward in new directions. That's what we've always set out to do.

P. B.: Your plans?

Carolyn Sills: Boss Tweed's plan at the moment is to keep at it. We are going to tour Europe again in the Spring of 2008, and will be playing more shows in the States until then.

Aside from our excellent European tour manager, we have been doing everything independently, from recording/releasing our album to booking shows, doing promotion and maintaining our website and online

“Record collectors are overjoyed when they see us selling vinyl at our shows.”

sales. It's a lot of work, which requires a lot of time and sometimes gets in the way of what is most important – the songwriting. But for the first time we are ready to begin negotiations with labels and management companies that could take over the business side.

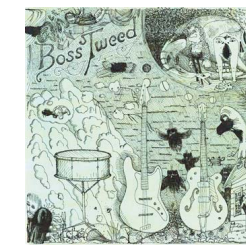
P. B.: You know, this is a special issue of *Blues Rocks the World* magazine in support of a wonderful project called “Women in Blues,” whose 2nd national festival will be held in Downtown Wilmington, North Carolina, on November 2nd and 3rd, 2007. Hence, a special question: what the phrase “women in blues” makes you think about?

Carolyn Sills: Ah... good question. When I think about it, the phrase “women in blues” seems a little redundant to me. Simply the word “blues” makes me think of women.

Yes, men are often credited more for pioneering the genre, but ladies like Odetta, Bessie Smith, Etta James... – they really paved the way for all female performers that would come after them. Women sing the blues, women inspire the blues and women can cure the blues. Quite a beautiful thing, in my opinion.

Website: www.bosstweedband.com

BOSS TWEED DISCOGRAPHY



Buzz Like Houseflies (2007, vinyl single, Silent Stereo Records).



Boss Tweed (2005, self-release).