The Offbeats

On Sunday, November 29, 1961, Kenny Neigh, Johnny Moses and I formed what came to be called The Long Lost Trio for a talent show organized by music teacher Gloria Hill at Scarsdale Junior High School. During the next two years, singing folksongs by The Kingston Trio, Brothers Four, Peter, Paul & Mary and the Everly Brothers, we appeared at the Snow Ball and Sayonara dances, but my musical focus had always been the cello.

By 1964, Johnny switched to electric guitar and, with Donny Fitzwater and G.V. Rapp, formed The Offbeats. As with many garage bands of the era, the Offbeats began as an instrumental group, covering the usual surf standards: *Walk, Don't Run, Pipeline, Penetration* and *Wipe Out.* Johnny and Donny played Gibson Melody Maker guitars through Gibson Skylark amplifiers, with Tom Delahanty occasionally playing a Sears Silvertone bass owned by the band.

While the British invasion in early 1964 was hard to ignore, it wasn't until the spring of 1965 that the music of the Beach Boys, Byrds, Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan on a.m. radio began to reflect my own emerging attitude. In July, I heard the Barbarians at the Atlantic House in Provincetown, and in August I saw the Zombies and the Searchers in concert at the Pittsfield Boys Club. When I returned to Scarsdale at the end of the summer, I hadn't cut my hair in five months. Just walking into school I knew I was making a statement.

On September 22, 1965 Johnny asked me to sing at the Offbeats' practice after school. The band was rehearsing in Rapp's basement on Jefferson Road with G.V. on drums, Johnny and Donny on lead and rhythm, and Bailey Spencer now on bass. They ran through the few songs I knew the words to. Liz Klein advised, "Sing from the gut," to save my voice. She was right, and I became the Offbeats lead singer.

We began rehearsing several days a week, alternating at each other's houses so that our parents wouldn't become too annoyed. One October afternoon we carried the drums and amps to the flat roof of my family's house on Fountain Terrace and played the extent of our repertoire. Chris Kelly heard us on Donellan Road, 5 blocks away. We stopped the Edgemont cross-country team in their tracks, while domestics danced in the Hartsdale train station. Early practice tapes were wisely erased. As homework, I heard the Signets at Lynn Seacord's open house October 29, and the Pebbles at St. James on the 30th. By October 31, rehearsing at Rapp's, Tom Pernice and Ray Strohmeier of the Del-Rays, the established working band in Scarsdale, came to check out the competition.

On November 5, my sister Laurie and I performed Vivaldi for the Scarsdale Village 50th anniversary concert. The great Northeast blackout of 1965 occurred November 9. Veteran's Day, two days later, was a school holiday. I went to Manny's on 48th Street to buy a tambourine and then accompanied my father to work at NBC's Avenue M television studios in Brooklyn where he played cello in the Hullabaloo orchestra. The Rolling Stones appeared performing *She Said Yeah* and *Get Off of My Cloud.* Keith Richards asked me for a light (I didn't smoke) and showed me the guitar on which he recorded *Play With Fire.*

The next night, I hauled a massive, vintage Magnecord PT-6 tape recorder to SHS to tape the Del-Rays at a dance in the old gym. Robbie Harper's attitude added grit to the Del-Rays polish, and the equally fabulous Jeanette Matta and Lynn Seacord's go-go dancing, glamour. On November 26 The Offbeats went to hear the We Five, Bo Diddley, Paul Revere & The Raiders, and The Byrds in concert at the County Center.

The Offbeats were hired by Alison Remy and made their debut at a sorority party on Garden Road on Saturday, November 27, 1965 covering not just Top 40 but also lesser-known album tracks and "b" sides. We were paid $10 each. Part Mod, part Rocker, the Offbeats' quirky irreverence had broad appeal and Monday morning in school we discovered we were celebrities. We dressed in corduroy jackets (with ties) and Wellington boots and hung posters inviting classmates to "Take an Offbeat to Lunch." The new Beatles and Stones LPs, *Rubber Soul* and *December's Children,* became more important than schoolwork. Our business card advertised "The Sound That Rates."

Bailey's brother Courtney was working at Mark Century, a jingle house in New York. Courtney turned us on to The Lovin' Spoonful and The Paul Butterfield Blues Band. When he offered to record The Offbeats, we jumped at the chance. We set up a makeshift studio in the Spencer's living room on Woods Lane and recorded five songs, three by the Stones and two by the Barbarians. This raw audition tape resulted in our first jobs - dances, sweet 16s and open houses and a promo appearance at Eddie Sindin's Hartsdale art gallery where I worked after school. The Offbeats and Del-Rays joined forces to play at holiday party at Grasslands Hospital arranged by Tom Pernice's father. I bought a Bogen amp and 2 Electro-Voice microphones from Courtney on time and a Premier reverb unit at Manny's with my first band earnings.

What we listened to defined how 'cool' we were, not just pop radio, but early 'underground' LPs by The Mothers of Invention and The Fugs. We bought clothes in Greenwich Village, and boots at McCreedy & Schreiber on 48th Street. On February 5,1966 we saw Dylan with the Band at the County Center. Liz Klein invited Tom Pernice, Bailey and me to see the Stones live on Ed Sullivan the 13th. After I broke my nose, Alice Jacobson gave

me the first Them album. *Gloria* marked a new direction in the Offbeats' repertoire. Courtney invited the band to come to the city to record at Mark Century on March 6. The playbacks under Courtney's tutelage mirrored our frenetic progress. Jay Lackritz, who played with Joel Sturz, Tommy Degraff, Alex Cadoux and Billy Horan in The Other End, sat in on drums after G.V. suffered a concussion. Billy Moses played rhythm when Donny was away looking at colleges. We lost a battle of the bands in Pelham April 30 against the Odds & Ends from Rye, but it quickly improved our live act. In early May we added the Kinks' *Till The End of The Day,* Love's *Message to Pretty* and Mitch Ryder's version of *Little Latin Lupe Lu*. With these new songs, the Offbeats hit their stride.

But the Moses family was concerned over Johnny's musical focus, and we learned that the following year he would go away to school - to all our dismay. Johnny's final Offbeat gigs were June 17 at the Junior High Sayonara dance, and June 19 when Courtney recorded The Offbeats for a third time.

That summer of '66 I worked at the art gallery and listened to *Aftermath, Blonde on Blonde, Revolver,* and *Pet Sounds.* With $1.40 six-packs from Peggy Ann's deli on Garth Road, I brooded over the fate of The Offbeats. Bailey, G.V. and I went to Maine twice, where both Rapps and Fitzwaters had summer cottages, where we heard local bands The Moon-Dawgs and The Innkeepers. I saw Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels' impressive show in Central Park. Although we were a band in name only, on August 3, Bailey, G.V. and I overdubbed our June 19 session at Mark Century with Courtney. I took the tape to John Simon, producer of the Cyrkle, at Columbia Records, who told me to call him when we had original material. We never did.

In August, I called Ray Strohmeier who had been fired from the Del-Rays earlier that summer. "You're a guitar player without a band," I told him. "We're a band without a guitar player." Ray joined The Offbeats in September and bought a new Fender Telecaster at Sam Ash in White Plains. With the Del Rays (reformed as The Overdue Experience with Don Lackritz) playing every weekend at The Willow Inn in Armonk, the Offbeats, under 18 and unable to play the bars, picked up some of their jobs - although Donny wanted one night a weekend off so he could date. With Ray's brilliant guitar playing the band became more polished. At Eddie Sindin's suggestion we put "Purveyors of Rock" on our new business cards. We added Donovan's *Season of the Witch,* and in conservative Bronxville, pointedly performed *Eve of Destruction.* On December 11 we recorded a fourth session with Courtney at Mark Century including Larry Williams' *Slow Down* (an amalgam of both the Beatles and Rascals versions) and *Dark Side* the "b" side of the Shadows of Knight's version of *Gloria.*

Ray was phenomenally talented, but musical differences and resentments arose. Despite the great music happening in the winter of '66-'67, The Offbeats learned few new songs and rarely rehearsed. We hung out less at the Snack Bar on Central Avenue and more at the 808 philosophizing with Mel Love or at the Candlelight Inn with Don Ogden, and dabbled in the emerging 'head' culture which was now an increasing part of the Scarsdale party scene. The band drove to Maine to play the Waterville High School prom April 8. A tape of an April 28 SHS dance attests to The Offbeats range and power. Despite senior class advisor Emily Dodge having censored the senior class play in rehearsal, during the performance on May 26 it mysteriously reverted to its original script and "P.J. Shulman and the Beatoffs" included a surprise strip tease while screaming through Richard & The Young Lions' *Open Up Your Door.* The year ended with gigs May 27, June 2, 9, 10 & 12. On June 16 in Rye, The Offbeats played their 55th and last job.

The night we graduated SHS, after hearing Spanky & Our Gang and the Chain Reaction with Steve Tallarico (who became Steven Tyler) at the prom, I went to hear the Nightcrawlers, and then Stanley. That same week, the Beatles released *Sergeant Pepper,* and Jimi Hendrix, The Grateful Dead and Country Joe & The Fish also released their first LPs. The music was changing. We were too. With the draft and the escalating Vietnam War, there was no option after graduation but to continue school: G.V. went to Indiana, Bailey to Colgate, Don to Westminster and Ray stayed on for a 5th year at Scarsdale. I went to Syracuse.

The Offbeats were a creative outlet that helped us deal with family issues (and created some) and a school administration and faculty (with notable exceptions) that was not adapting to the changes of the 60s as fast as the student body was. The band formed friendships that have endured over five decades. These recordings are a time capsule of those 2 incredible, intense years in Scarsdale just prior to the psychedelic explosion that followed.

John Moses is retired from teaching school in Connecticut and continues to play with The Outerspace Band which has been active for 50 years. He lives in South Carolina. Ray Strohmeier lives in Connecticut. Don Fitzwater was a manufacturing executive and lived in Brownsville, Texas. He died in 2022. Bailey Spencer is a software consultant and lives in Alexandria, Virginia. G.V. Rapp was a radio announcer in Portland, Maine. From 1980-2016, I played cello with the Long Island Philharmonic and freelanced, playing at Madison Square Garden with Rod Stewart, backed up the Moody Blues and Brian Wilson, played on John Lennon's *Walls and Bridges* album, and have produced several CDs of my father's music for Parnassus, Artek and Bridge Records.

The Offbeats reunited to perform at the SHS Class of 1967 20th reunion at the Coveleigh Club in Rye in June 1987, and again at our 30th, 40th and 50th reunions at the Shenorock Shore Club in July 1997 and October, 2007 and October 2017. The Offbeats performed at the Scarsdale Teen Center benefits in 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2014.

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THE OFFBEATS – Studio and Live recordings

John Moses, lead/Ray Strohmeier, lead (12/11/66)/Don Fitzwater, rhythm,
Bailey Spencer, bass, G.V. Rapp, drums & vocals/Jay Shulman, vocals

[1] Satisfaction (Jagger-Richard) 3:26
[2] Take It or Leave It (D. Morris-C. Clark) 2:41
[3] Get Off of My Cloud (Jagger-Richard) 3:02
[4] Are You A Boy or Are You A Girl (D. Morris-R.Morris) 1:58
[5] I'm All Right (Nanker Phlege) 3:23
Recorded Sunday, 19 December 1965 at 2 Woods Lane, Scarsdale, NY
[6] Gloria (Van Morrison) 2:36
[7] Tired of Waiting For You (Ray Davies) 2:44
Recorded Sunday, 6 March 1966 at Mark Century, 3 East 57, NYC
[8] House of The Rising Sun (Trad) 3:48
[9] Till The End of The Day (Ray Davies) 2:06
[10] Little Latin Lupe Lu (Bill Medley) 2:01
[11] I Ain't Gonna Eat Out My Heart (Sawyer-Burton) 2:27
[12] Catch The Wind (Donovan Leitch) 1:53 G.V. Rapp, vocal
[13] Play With Fire (Nanker Phlege) 2:08 G.V. Rapp, vocal
Recorded Sunday, 19 June & Thursday, 4 August 1966 at Mark Century, NYC
[14] Slow Down (Larry Williams) 3:07
[15] Till The End of The Day (Ray Davies) 3:04
[16] Dark Side (Rogers-Sohns) 2:49
[17] Little Latin Lupe Lu (Bill Medley) 3:14
[18] Day Tripper (Lennon-McCartney) 2:51
Recorded Sunday, 11 December 1966 at Mark Century, NYC
[19] You Really Got Me (Ray Davies) 3:16 *Live at Leighton's, Ardsley, NY, 15 May 1966*
[20] Open Up Your Door (Brown/Nadler/Bloodworth) 3:05 *Live at Scarsdale HS, 28 April 1967*
[21] Gloria (Van Morrison) 6:18 *SHS 20th Reunion – Live at Coveleigh Club, Rye, NY, 20 June 1987*
Total playing time: 63:02
Courtney Spencer, engineer/Ted Spencer remastered, November 2000/Produced by Jay Shulman

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