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Making Music

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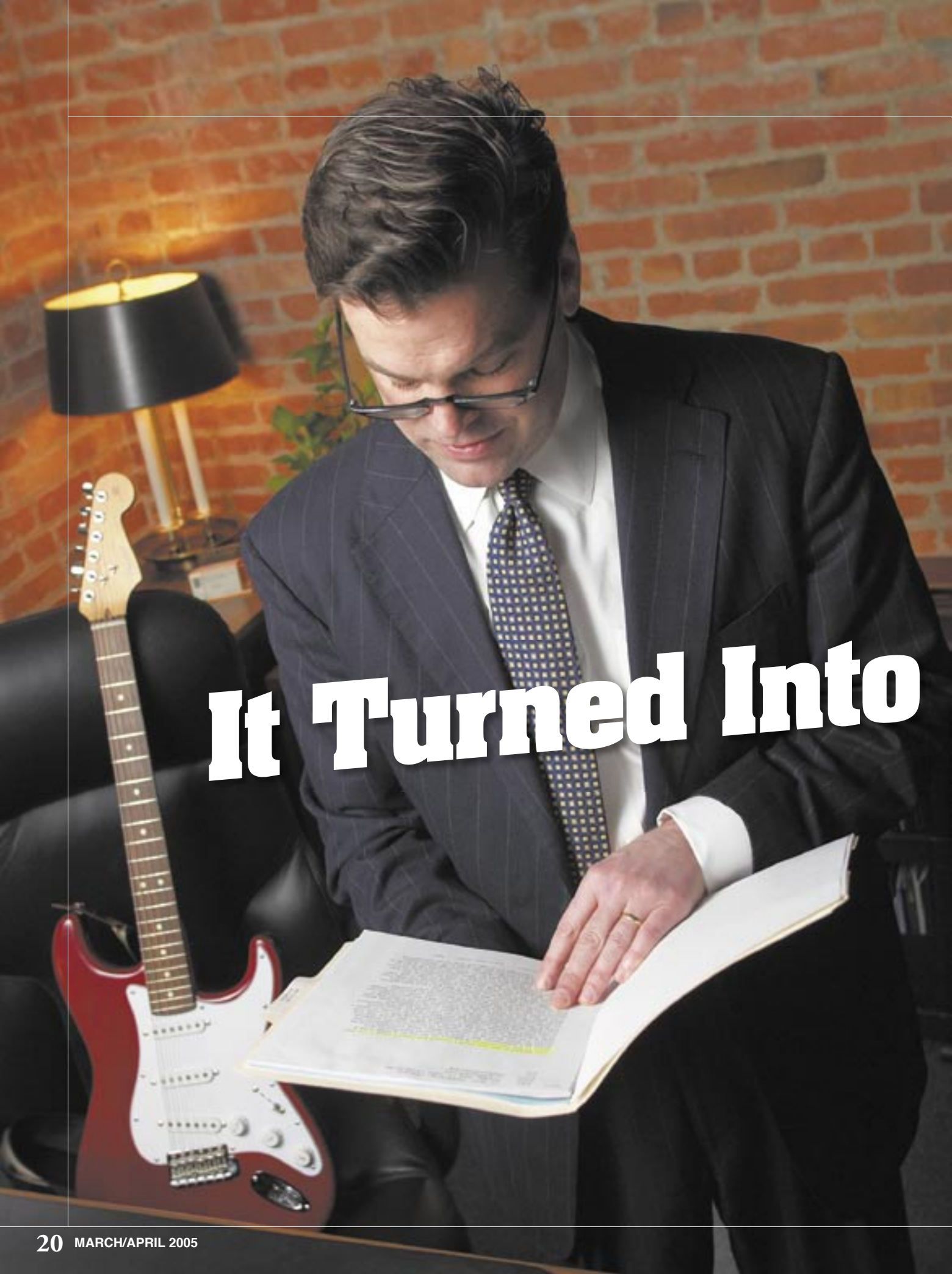
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YOUR LOVE OF LEARNING

March/April 2005



It Turned Into

a **Boardroom**
Blitz

BY MARTIN WALLS

There was a time when company socializing meant weekend golf at the country club, a bowling team, or playing softball with colleagues. But times have changed. Those long-haired interns and junior employees who, in the '60s and '70s, were climbing the corporate ladder by day and jamming with garage bands at night are now looking for ways to stay active and engaged in their careers. Many are picking up their instruments again, making music as a way to get a new lease on corporate life.

“We’re getting a big bang out of doing this.”—John Shiely

STRICTLY FOR FUN

Company bands are cropping up all over the country. There’s even a tailor-made competition for them, the *Fortune* Battle of the Corporate Bands, the finals of which are held every October at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio. But if you thought working for a company with rock and roll on the social calendar is all play and no work, think again. Members of these bands report that making music with colleagues makes them better employees, it boosts morale, it relieves stress—and it offers a win-win when the company does charity work.

Sometimes a company band forms in a spontaneous way. That’s what happened with The Residuals, a combo of finance specialists from Banc of America Leasing of Rhode Island. Chief Operating Officer Bill Kell, the drummer, recalls that he was at a sales convention in Colorado when one of his colleagues thought it would be fun to rent some equipment and have Kell and a few others put on a show before the formal dinner. Kell remembers, modestly, that the performance wasn’t all that good, but it sparked imaginations. “After dinner we just kept jamming, and other people came out of the audience and started playing too,” remembers Kell.

Now six members strong, the band is comprised of Kell; Howard Merritt, a mergers and acquisitions specialist on vocals; Ed Medici, from syndications, who plays bass and rhythm guitar; David Parr, a lawyer, who plays keyboards and guitars; Bob Merrill, an asset manager and tenor saxophonist; and Jeff Johnson, on alto sax. Johnson and Merritt are no longer with Banc of America. Fitting practice sessions around busy work schedules is not a problem, says Kell. “Everyone lives close to my house, where we jam,” he explains. “Business travel sometimes cuts into our practice schedule, and our company is very year-end driven, so we don’t play so much during that period.”

“We mostly play for fun,” he continues. “With us, it’s 95% rehearsal, and 5% gigging.” When The Residuals do play out, they use their talents to help others. In 2003, for instance, the band played at a fundraiser for victims of The Station nightclub fire in Warwick, Rhode Island, which killed around 100 people in February of that year. Also in 2003, the band decided to swap suits for jeans to compete in the Battle of the Corporate Bands competition, which they ended up winning. “We really went into the competition blind, because we didn’t know if we

were any good,” recalls Kell. “But we really nailed it in the finals, and left nothing on stage.” Kell says, in addition to playing well, they chose a set of songs that resonated with judges. “We played ‘So Long Baby, Goodbye,’ ‘Brand New Cadillac,’ and the long version of ‘Black Magic Woman.’ The songs really showed off the band,” he says.

Although winning the Battle of the Corporate Bands is a great incentive for a company band, Kell says one of the most important benefits of making music is relief from the high-pressured, daily grind of work. “The reason why we play in this band is strictly fun,” he observes. “This helps a lot with work stress. I’ve been playing drums a long time, and I still love to go into my basement and play and find a couple of hours have gone by.”

A BIG BANG

“Making music is a big time stress buster,” agrees John Shiely, chairman and CEO of Milwaukee-based engine manufacturer Briggs & Stratton. “Really, I couldn’t do this job unless I had this outlet.” Shiely is known as “The Rock ‘n’ Roll CEO,” partly for his collection of memorabilia (he owns items that belonged to Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, and Stevie Ray Vaughan, among others) and partly for his involvement in music projects (most recently a new release by The Crickets). But Shiely also is the rhythm guitarist in the Briggs & Stratton house band, The Briggs Bluesbusters, named after the 1960s British group John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers.

The Briggs Bluesbusters were founded in 1997 when Shiely was asked to help organize a company band to play corporate and charity gigs in the Milwaukee area. The band, which plays covers by soul and blues-based rock artists as well as the company anthem “Briggs & Stratton Man,” now has 11 members. It is composed equally of union and management employees, with three non-Briggs employees filling out the group.

According to Shiely, the mix of shop floor workers and management is one of the reasons the project is so successful. “The band really does help boost morale at my company,” he says. “The project sounds like it was hatched by a PR company, but the idea welled up from the factory floor.”

Like The Residuals, Shiely says The Briggs Bluesbusters don’t gig all that often, “but when we do, they’re significant gigs.” That’s an understatement. Every year Milwaukee hosts SummerFest, one of the largest rock festivals in the country. The band has played at many of these events, supporting music’s biggest names, including James Brown, Smokey Robinson, Ray Charles, and the Moody Blues. Also

like The Residuals, the band competes in the Battle of the Corporate Bands, and it plays charity gigs, including fundraisers for the local children’s hospital. “We’re getting a big bang out of doing this,” Shiely concludes.

PLUG IN AND PLAY

Another company band getting a big bang out of making music is The Dinosaurs of North Syracuse, New York-based high-tech company CXtec. CEO Bill Pomeroy approached his Regional Sales Director Mike Featherstone, a bass guitarist, about forming a band to complement the company’s contemporary workplace culture. “We recognized the company had a lot of musical talent,” says Featherstone. The talent includes the Taylor brothers, drummer and Cable Specialist Josh and lead guitarist and International Sales Associate Rich. Other members of the band, which reached the finals of the Battle of the Corporate Bands in 2004 playing the music of Tom Petty, The Rolling Stones, and Aerosmith, are Mike Roy, a web designer; and vocalist Jennifer Snide, an account manager.

“Our colleagues at the company really get behind the band,” observes Featherstone. “In fact, the whole atmosphere at CXtec is great, and everyone gets along.” The company supports the band by providing storage for instruments and a space at company headquarters for Saturday morning and after-work rehearsals. In return, the band plays at company “pep rallies,” at United Way charity functions, and it garners a lot of good publicity. “They say good press or bad press is still publicity, but good press is definitely better for our company!” laughs Featherstone. “We owe thanks to Bill Pomeroy for making this happen.”

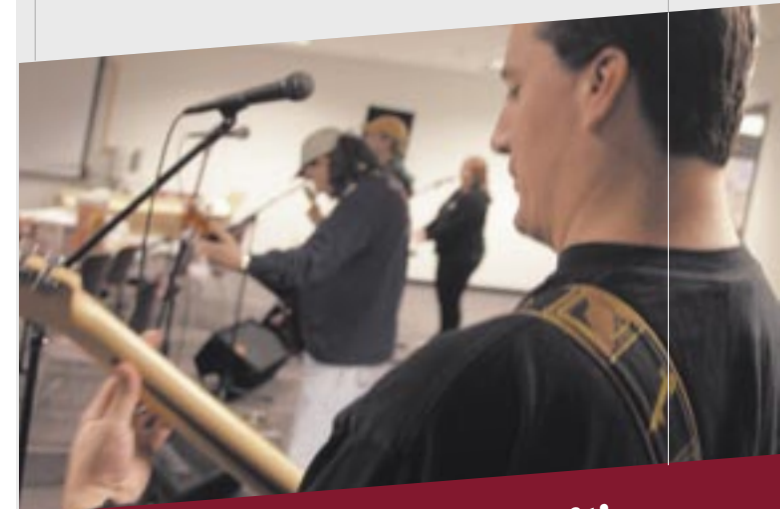
Although Featherstone says The Dinosaurs have begun to get a little more serious recently, writing their own songs and going into the studio, he mainly sees the band as a complement to his career. “I wouldn’t say the band could replace my career, but it’s definitely part of it,” he says. “Playing in a band like this changes your attitude about work, and I’d say I’m better for it. I’m a loyal CXtec employee anyway, but this band has made me more loyal.”

MARTIN WALLS’ WIFE CHRISTINE HAS LET HIM BORROW HER OTHER ACOUSTIC GUITAR, WHICH HE HAS TUNED TO OPEN G SO HE CAN LEARN BOTTLENECK BLUES STYLE.



MAKE IT A BOARDROOM JUNGLE

■ The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum is launching a search for their fifth annual *Fortune* Battle of the Corporate Bands to be held in Cleveland on October 7 and 8. The NAMM-sponsored event is a benefit to help support music education programs and potentially boost some undiscovered music stars’ egos. To be considered for entry, each band must be made up of at least 50% of employees of the same company. The bands also must submit two copies of a three-song CD by April 29, along with a \$200 application fee made payable to the “Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum.” Send one CD copy to Kip Meyer, *Fortune*, 1271 Avenue of the Americas, Room 15-45, New York, NY 10020 and the other to Steve Dobo, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, One Key Plaza, Cleveland, OH 44114. For more information, visit www.fortune.com/bandbattle.



“I wouldn’t say the band could replace my career, but it’s definitely part of it.”—Mike Featherstone



Photos courtesy of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum

ROCK & ROLL

HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

■ Housed inside an appropriately spectacular building designed by internationally renowned architect I.M. Pei, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum's bold geometric forms contain equally remarkable interactive exhibits, films, videos, and priceless and poignant artifacts. The 150,000-square-foot museum also serves as host of the permanent Hall of Fame exhibit. The unique structure is the ideal home for the museum's dynamic presentation of the living heritage of rock and roll and its enduring impact on global culture.

In addition to permanent exhibits, the museum stages a number of temporary exhibits throughout the year, including large-scale expositions that occupy the top two levels of the building. The museum's Education and Public Programs Division produces scores of activities and events each year. From museum tours to major concerts, these programs reinforce the museum's commitment to the study and interpretation of rock music and its roots.

One of the museum's big highlights has always centered around recognizing and honoring the Hall of Fame's inductees. This year's ceremony, held March 14 in New York City, welcomed five new inductees to the museum: Buddy Guy, known as the towering master of Chicago blues guitar; Percy Sledge, nicknamed "The Golden Voice of Soul"; black vocal group The O'Jays; new wave stars The Pretenders; and U2, the legendary Dublin quartet that has displayed an extraordinary capacity to create exhilarating music that continues to change with the times.

Of course, the museum is not only about the Hall of Fame. Other important program content highlights a

broad spectrum of popular music ranging from the blues, country, and gospel of the early 1900s, to the classic rock of the 1960s and the hip hop and pop sounds of today. A variety of formats, including performances, lectures, film screenings, master classes, and conferences, at venues both on- and off-site, help the Museum reach expanding audiences.

Focal points for the museum's educational programs celebrate important dates like Black History Month, while the American Music Masters' series, a co-production of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum and the College of Arts and Sciences at Case Western Reserve University, celebrates the lives and careers of artists who changed the shape and sound of American culture. Featured artists have included a broad range of personalities and musical styles like Bessie Smith, country star Hank Williams, and Buddy Holly. From museum tours to major concerts, these programs reinforce the Museum's commitment to the study and interpretation of rock music and its roots.

The Education and Public Programs Division is also responsible for the development of the museum's future Library and Archives as well as its Oral History Program. Other special projects have included the production of a book series, a documentary film, award-winning radio specials, and CDs.

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum is situated on the shores of Lake Erie in downtown Cleveland, Ohio. For more information, visit www.rockhall.com.