

Norman L. Mayell Biography



Norman L. Mayell - Class of 1960 - b. May 18, 1942 From the EHS Yearbook, the Maroon: “Norm”, - Baseball 2, 3, 4; Wrestling 4; Intramural Basketball 2, 3, 4.

In 1954 I discovered South Side Chicago blues and the three Kings... BB, Freddy and Albert. *Rock with Rick and Jam with Sam* were on my radio from then on.

The first band I played in was the Vesteens (we wore vests and we were teenagers). We played in pubs by the Fox River, at Elgin High School dances, and for our friends' parties. After high school I went to the University of Hawaii to study Philosophy and History in 1960. After a couple of years I returned home and worked for a short time at a restaurant on Chicago's North Side as a manager trainee. I quit and started making sandals at John Brown's Sandal Shop in Old Town where I met Michael Bloomfield and Charlie Musselwhite in 1964. We formed a band called **The Group**, the first all-white electric blues band in Chicago and played at Big John's four nights a week. Columbia Records producer, John Hammond, Sr., had heard a demo of Michael Bloomfield playing guitar and piano and booked studio time for **The Group** in Chicago's Columbia Studios on December 7, 1964. However, no record deal was made. (That recording session was released in 1994 on the *Michael Bloomfield Essential Blues* CD.)

I returned to school in Hawaii and then in 1965 on to San Francisco barefoot and carrying a brown paper bag containing my belongings. I found a room in a three-story Victorian with an unused theater in the basement called the Orb Theater. I obtained drums and set them up on stage and found the musicians that would form the **Sopwith Camel**. Within four months we had a record deal with Kama Sutra Records in New York. We played all the major California ballroom venues and had our first hit record, "Hello Hello," produced by Erik Jacobsen (The Lovin' Spoonful and Chris Isaac). The band toured with the Spoonful along the East Coast, south to New Orleans, and up toward Chicago ending in Canada.

Gathering momentum, **Sopwith Camel** appeared in concerts with the Beach Boys, the Who, the Doors, and opened for the Rolling Stones at San Francisco's famed Cow Palace. We were hired to compose five Levi's commercials in 1967 which we recorded in San Francisco's Columbia Studios. We appeared in a movie entitled *Picasso Summer* starring Albert Finney and Yvette Mimieux, the screenplay written by Ray Bradbury (using the pseudonym of Douglas Spaulding). I moved to Larkspur, California, and bought a house in Madrone Canyon where Janis Joplin and Ginger Baker of Cream also lived.

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After the **Sopwith Camel** disbanded I met **Norman Greenbaum** and began learning his songs. With two other musicians we practiced together for a month and then recorded the album *Spirit in the Sky*, which is still being used today in movies, TV shows and commercials. After the record was released it took a year before the song was noticed on late night radio in Los Angeles. Radio stations reported growing requests which created more airplay which created a fire storm of buying.

Discography

Though touring had its pros, I found studio work more promising and satisfying. In my modest career, I played drums, guitar, harmonica, marimbas, percussion and sitar.

The Group in Chicago's Columbia Studios on December 7, 1964. Recording session was released in 1994 on the Michael Bloomfield Essential Blues CD. Foreword by Al Cooper, **Columbia Records**.

Sopwith Camel released a single "Hello, Hello" in 1967 on the album of the same name, and became the first hit to emerge from the San Francisco rock scene, #26 on the U.S. pop music charts in January 1967 and #9 on the Canadian RPM magazine charts in February. A second release, "Postcard from Jamaica" peaked at #88 in April 1967, **Kama Sutra Records**.

Leonard Schaeffer, *A Boy and His Dog*, 1968. **Warner Bros. Reprise**.

The **Sopwith Camel's** Terry MacNeil, Norman Mayell and Martin Beard formed The Dream Band. Their first song "The Train Song (Southern Pacific) / Mill Valley" (Reprise 0794) was the first song I ever wrote, and released in November 1968. Today it can't be found—LOL! **Warner Bros. Reprise**.

Norman Greenbaum's album *Spirit In The Sky*, 1969, featuring the single "Spirit in the Sky" the greatest one hit wonder in the world, most played song at weddings and funerals. It sold 2 million copies in 1970 alone and has been prominently featured in almost 50 movies, including: Apollo 13, Guardians of the Galaxy, Contact, Oceans 11 and Forrest Gump to name a few. **Warner Bros. Reprise**.

Norman Greenbaum's second album *Back Home Again*, 1970. I played drums on the tracks "Titfield Thunder" and "Lucille Got Stealed" **Warner Bros. Reprise**.

Blue Cheer (the legendary and loudest band) during the years 1969-71, featuring three albums, *Blue Cheer*, *The Original Human Being* and *Oh! Pleasant Hope*, **Mercury and Philips Records**.

Miss Abrams & the Strawberry Point 4th Grade Class recorded "Mill Valley," 1970, **Warner Bros. Reprise**.

The Stovall Sisters (background singers on *Spirit in the Sky*), *Yes To The Lord*, 1970, **Reprise Records, Warner Music Group**.

William Truckaway (my former Sopwith Camel bandmate **William Sievers**), album *Breakaway*, 1971 featuring "Bluegreens on the Wing" and "Breakaway/Send Me Some," **Warner Bros. Reprise**.

Sopwith Camel, *The Miraculous Hump Returns from the Moon*, 1973 featuring "Fazon," **Warner Bros. Reprise**.