

BILLION DOLLAR BABIES

By BOB RYAN

Look out! With plenty of hype and a million promo bucks behind them, this band might have a hard time showing off their more than competent musical skills. Here comes the teenie nations new heavy metal heroes!!

The Billion Dollar Babies are: Dennis Dunaway (bass), Michael Bruce (guitar), Neal Smith (drums), Bob Dolin (keyboards) and Mike Marconi (guitar). Formed from the remnants of the Old Alice Cooper group they are also an exciting rock and roll machine that will grab you where it counts. We spoke to them in a strange rehearsal hall located in the deserted Capitol theater in Port Chester, New York.

2:30 p.m.

Neal Smith: Dennis and I are going to an antique car show in Darien on Sunday. [*Weird electronic sounds in the background*]

Dennis Dunaway: This sounds great in stereo, this Stockhausen tape. We might be able to use a part of this, it's really different.

Michael Bruce: Whatever we use I don't want to. . . .

D.D.: No, no, this is so different.

M.B.: I know, that's what I mean. If we used an orchestra and stuff.

D.D.: Well, this isn't that dramatic, that's why I think it will work. You have to imagine it setting up our songs.

Bob Ryan: What is this?

D.D.: It's Stockhausen, he does a lot of electronic stuff.

M.B.: We're trying to find something to fill in on stage while we make some technical adjustments.

N.S.: Will you be able to hear on the tape?



B.R.: If you turn that down, yeah.

M.B.: Do you want us to sit together so you can take some pictures?

Tanda: (photographer): Why don't you just sit there?

B.R.: Are you shooting color or black and white?

T.: Color, for now.

B.R.: Why don't you do the black and white over here?

T.: Yeah, it would probably be better.

B.R.: Save the color for later.

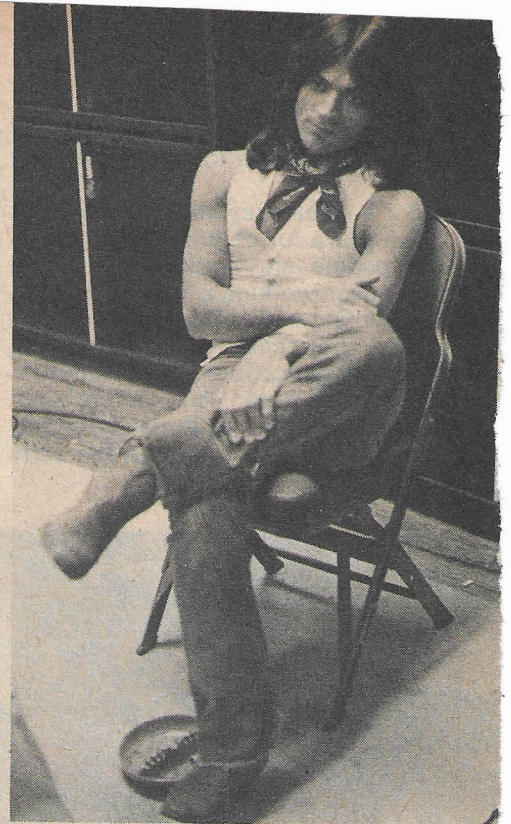
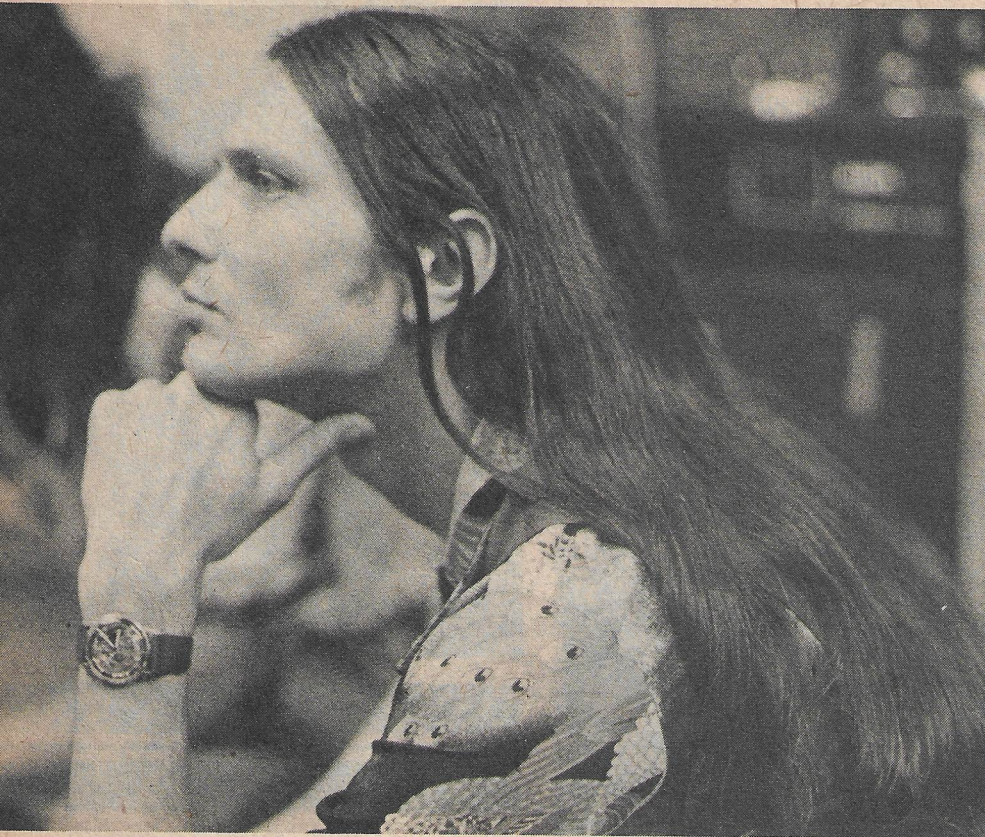
B.R.: How long are you guys going to be rehearsing here?

M.B.: Oh, about half an hour.

N.S.: No, about three weeks, then we'll start to tour.

B.R.: It must be an incredible change coming from huge tours like those you did with the Alice Cooper band. I mean, you were one of the biggest bands in the country.

N.S.: We'll realize that more fully when we're on the road again.



of his own now, so I think that's why everybody assumes that he was responsible for the whole thing. **The Battle Axe** (the title for both their new album and stage show) will show that we were all equal parts of a giant thing.

B.R.: What about the breakup? How did it come about?

D.D.: It was a mutual agreement that we had all worked and pushed too hard and too long. Everyone was ready for a break.

N.S.: The results were a little different than what we expected, though.

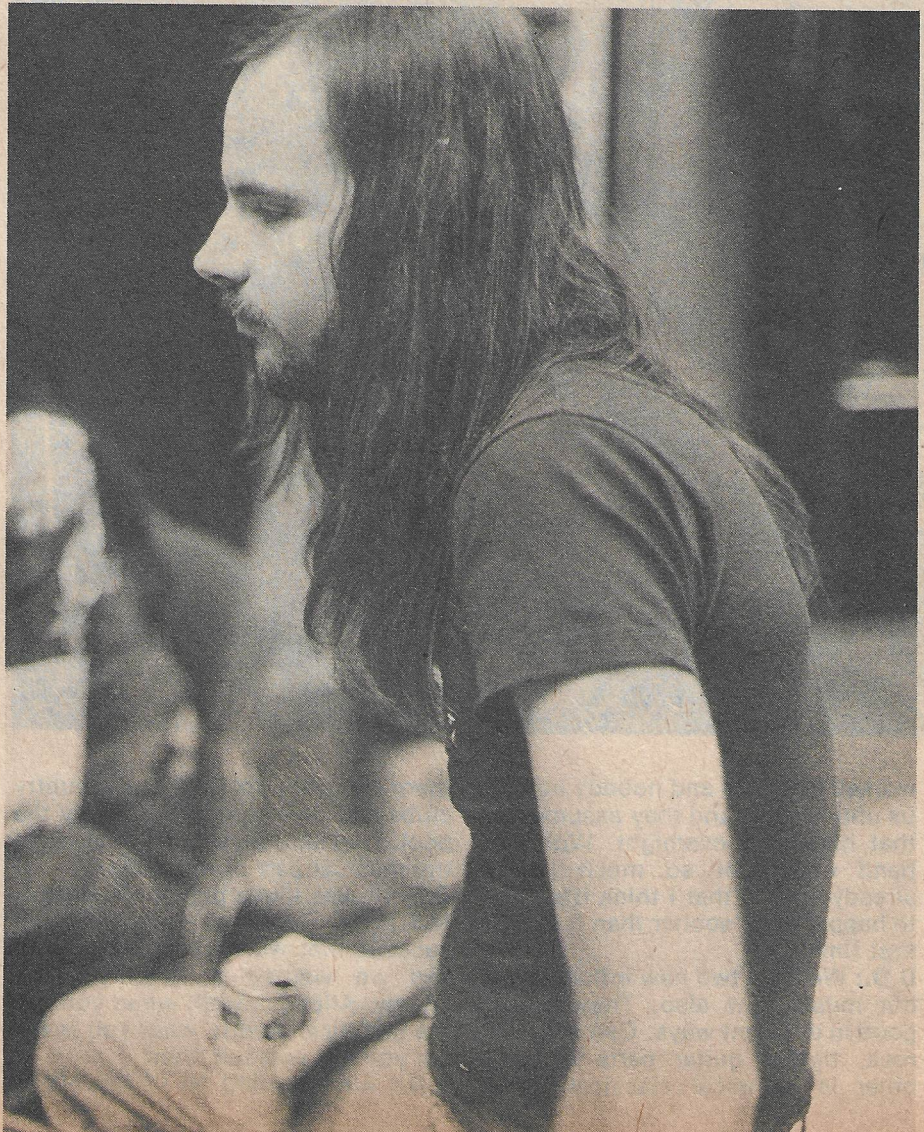
D.D.: That's right. Originally we decided that we needed some time off and then we would get together again.

M.B.: The whole idea was that we would have the opportunity to relax and to work on some individual projects. We didn't set out to break up the band. I could do an album because my material was going to be totally different from the Alice Cooper material. *Rock and Roll Radio*, which is our single off the new album, is an outgrowth of Neal's solo project. At the time, Alice just said that he was going to lay out; that he was tired.

D.D.: Unfortunately some unknown thing changed the course of that.

M.B.: Well for business reasons the record company didn't feel that the

(Continued on page 92)



B.R.: How do you feel about it now? You're really in the position of starting your whole career over again.

N.S.: I would say that we are, but we've got a lot of friends out there. The people are waiting for it, and we've been working a long time for it, and we know it's good.

M.B.: They call a lot of people overnight sensations, like Frampton. Which isn't true. This is probably going to be more of a real overnight sensation than it was with the early

Cooper group. Because there we ledge.

M.B.: Even though we've changed somewhat, we're still in a straight line with what we were originally doing, which was one of the reasons we split with Alice. At the time everybody was experimenting with different directions and Alice wanted to experiment with Hollywood. The Billion Dollar Babies tour (*their last appearances together in 1974*) was kind of a topper for that and from



worked for years and nobody noticed us until we hit, and they assume that that happened overnight. With this band we've got so much legend already built in that I think it's going to happen a lot sooner than it did the first time.

D.D.: We have two new influences in our music now also. They're both good in different ways. One is harder rock, tighter guitar parts and the other is technical classical know-

there he went to golf and country clubs and then to mint juleps by the pool. That kind of went against us as the musical part of the group.

D.D.: It was like a public retirement.

N.S.: We were very happy in the success that we found ourselves in and we wanted to maintain the energy. Alice. . . well, when you cut the umbilical cord to what you really are you cut yourself short.

D.D.: Alice getting all of the credit

for things that we did is kind of like Secretariat winning the triple crown and then putting the flowers on the jockey's neck.

B.R.: That's something I don't think many people realize. The extent to which you were the Alice Cooper sound.

M.B.: I think that's part of why Billion Dollar Babies is going to be so interesting to people. Alice has been around, he's done three albums

forth. I'd be betraying confidences if I told you all of what I know. One relatively well-known musician quit fooling around with the occult after a member of his family was murdered, and the police tried to tie in her death with his membership in a particular cult." Beckley is currently finishing his latest book, **Psychic Celebrities**, in which he goes into what he knows in further detail.

One person who knows all about Jimmy Page's occult involvement is Joe Massot, who produced **The Song Remains the Same**, the Zeppelin film. "Jimmy has moments of being enigmatic," Massot told Ritchie Yorke, author of **The Led Zeppelin Biography** (two continents/Methuen). When asked the person in all of history he would have liked to

meet, Page replied by naming Machiavelli, the 15th century writer and statesman. Says Page about this infamous figure of history, "He was a master of evil—but you can't ignore evil if you study the supernatural as I do," thus adding proof that Page is engrossed in the bizarre.

From what is known about this character, Page is always looking over his shoulder. At one time he was convinced someone was out to murder him. According to a statement in Yorke's book, attributed to Page: "Actually, it was a lot more serious than I originally thought. The guy was a real crazy and had all these photographs on the wall with circles around them. It was a real Manson sort of situation and he was sending out waves of this absurd paranoia

which a friend of mine got mixed up with. I got to hear of it through this friend and we hired a special security guard for the American tour. It was actually a lot worse than we all at first believed. Eventually the guy was tracked down and got carted away to a hospital. I think he would have definitely had a try."

As Zeppelin travels in the United States, **ROCK's** readers can only hope nothing will prevent them from having a successful tour. The idea of a curse hanging over their head may be so much superstitious nonsense, but for their own good it might just pay to be extra cautious. After all, even Jimmy Page would agree that we don't know what lies out in the great void, beyond our normal earthly existence and beyond our five senses. •

BILLION DOLLAR

(Continued from page 32)

image could take a vacation, so I think management forced Alice right out of the agreement and on to the road.

B.R.: So there never was a conscious decision to break up the band?

M.B.: No. We just didn't have a lead singer anymore. He had another group, and another image as well. After we stopped working we began enjoying ourselves. Neal and Dennis and I bought houses and we all just cruised for a while. The timing for this group now was perfect because it wasn't pushed to start working again, it just happened.

B.R.: The three of you were in the original group together. How did you come across Bob and Mike?

D.D.: Well Bob (Dolin) had worked with us on the Billion Dollar Babies tour and on the **Muscle of Love** album. So he was really a part of it, too.

B.R.: So Mike (Marconi), you're the only real new member of the group. How does it feel to be the "new kid on the block?"

M.M.: Fantastic. I came out of a club band situation, playing bars and such for five or six years, so I'm on cloud nine.

M.B.: By the way, he used to date Linda Eastman before Paul.

B.R.: And you're from Rochester. Was that your Kodak connection?

M.B.: We told Paul we wouldn't say anything about it.

B.R.: Okay. I won't print a word.

B.R.: The music on the new album is really strong rock and roll. There seems to be a trend back towards that sort of stuff this year, with the

"punk" bands and all. It's interesting that you're coming back into the scene now and the same time that these new bands that were influenced by the Cooper group and Iggy Pop are just breaking.

N.S.: Yeah. I just found out about this whole thing with the Ramones and all. As far as I'm concerned "punk" started a long time ago when Townshend was smashing his guitar and the early Stones. If people are talking "punk" they'd better play real damn good, cause there's a little more to it than just a word and an image.

M.B.: All those things are there all the time and people just keep rediscovering them.

N.S.: This is the first time in my life that I can't wait to do a live recording.

B.R.: Why wasn't one ever done with Alice?

D.D.: Traditionally record companies saved a live album till after a group broke up. We kind of caught them off guard and just stopped.

B.R.: Will you be doing any of the old material in your new stage show?

N.S.: Yeah. I'm 18 and four or five others.

B.R.: So you're not trying to play down the past at all?

M.B.: Why should we? We were a big part of the past and with a name like Billion Dollar Babies (*the name of one of Alice Cooper's most successful albums*)...

B.R.: What about the stage show? Will it be as theatrical as the old tours?

N.S.: To an extent. The first half will be strictly music, because that's the most important thing. The second half is very theatrical. We'll have a gladiatorial battle between Mike and

Mike, they use guitars as axes. It takes place in a boxing ring that rises out from the stage on a hydraulic lift. But we don't want to give the whole thing away.

M.B.: We could have put together a show with no theatrics but that wouldn't have been much fun. Part of the fun, for us, is playing on stage, not instruments, just playing, having a good time and doing a show that's very different.

N.S.: The whole concept of the thing is ballsy. That this group is coming back strong, and playing rock and roll. We're using our guitars as weapons.

B.R.: How do you (*M. Marconi*) feel about being the loser in this battle of guitars?

M.M.: I get a lot of sympathy.

D.D.: He also gets the girls. They take him home and patch him up.

M.M.: What Mike doesn't know is that I've been in training.

B.R.: So you may not lose.

D.D.: Yeah, he walks through the Bowery with his hands tied behind his back, naked, with a hundred dollar bill in his mouth. Great training.

End Tape

Dennis Dunaway: (*post interview*) Alice was an established legend, now it's our turn.*

***B.R.:** You'd better believe it. •

Cicely Tyson says:
"The spotlight's
on birth defects
...it's time for
you to act!"

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