

HOW TO BE THE WORST LINE DANCE BAND EVER TO APPEAR AT WITTINGDON CHURCH HALL

Loosely based on a true story

All the names have been changed to protect the innocent!

by Vivienne Scott

“I won’t be long John, just popping down to the shop to get some milk”, I called out. “Not that he can hear me”, I mumbled to myself. In fact, I could hardly hear myself!! “Good job our neighbours are in on this too”.

I smiled as I pictured Ralph and Bob lugging their electric guitars into our garage thirty minutes before. This all started a few months ago when we invited our neighbours over for a barbecue. The men started reminiscing about the fact that they had all dreamt of being rock stars when they were young and not the 50 years olds they currently were! Bob had actually had some experience playing guitar in a high school band and his brother Nigel, the accountant, had gone so far as to play drums for a big band when he was in college. John, my husband, had always fancied himself as a keyboard player but although he had a good ear for a tune he had never played the piano. Paul, the local electrician, who had dropped by to fix our kitchen light socket, enthusiastically joined in the discussion informing everyone that he used to play the drums and he was great at karaoke as well. Before any of the wives had a chance to raise objections, a band was borne and John had invited them all to practice in our garage. To our surprise their enthusiasm was still going strong and they were now practicing twice a week. Not that the practicing seemed to help ... there were some pretty strange sounds that emanated from the garage! I told them that they should start a competition ‘Name this Song’. People would pay to play hoping to win a large cash prize ... no one would ever win and the band would end up making a fortune!!! They looked rather hurt when I made this suggestion so feeling sorry for them I took out a tray full of cold beers.

The band at this point had a name – there had been intense debate about this important decision and much disagreement but finally accord was reached on ‘Solid Gold’. Nigel painted a gold rim around the edge of his drums, the guitarists purchased gold guitar straps and John reckoned he looked very cool wearing gold braces holding up his blue jeans. I came home from work one day to discover a pair of his shoes sitting in the laundry tub which was filled with gold dye. Certainly they reckoned they looked the bees’ knees although their wives weren’t quite as confident. That said, as long as the whole project kept the men occupied and cheerful we weren’t complaining. Trudy was a bit concerned that Ralph wasn’t doing a good job of mowing the lawn in his eagerness to get over to our garage and Susan was rather anxious about whether husband Bob being part of a rock band quite fit the image of the local Bank Manager. But ultimately it was a pleasure to see their enthusiasm besides which it allowed us more freedom to pursue our passion of line dancing.

With that in mind I headed off to the local supermarket to pick up milk and a few bits and bobs for the evening meal. Grumbling under my breath at the incompetent shoppers pushing their trolleys, I reckoned there should be driving tests before anyone was allowed to push them around. In fact, I brightened up, I would write out a proposal to the local supermarket to offer training sessions for a small fee; the idea opened up all sorts of possibilities. Unfortunately, while I pondered this potentially profitable notion the next thing I knew I had bashed my trolley straight into the ankles of the large man who had stopped in front of me to check out the baked beans.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” he yelled, “people like you shouldn’t be allowed to push shopping trolleys. Oh it’s you, Pattie, good job you don’t dance the way you push your trolley”, Frank roared with laughter at his own witicism. “I don’t know what I’m laughing about though”, he added, ‘I’m just so upset”.

“What’s the matter Frank?” I asked, “We’re really looking forward to the dance tomorrow night”. “That’s the problem”, he responded, “The Midnight Liners have been delayed in Ireland and won’t be able to make it. They called this afternoon to tell me that their equipment has been stolen and they are trying to track it down. But, I heard from one of the dancers over there that the lead singer got involved in a high stakes Texas Hold ’Em poker game and gambled all the equipment away right down to the drummer’s stool. I reckon he must have been playing poker with the ‘Irish Jiggers’, I heard that band has been on a lucky streak. But that doesn’t help me, I’ve called all the bands I could think of and none of them can make it. The dancers are going to lynch me; the tickets are completely sold out.” I knew he was right; we had been looking forward to this event for months. “I’ve got one more group to contact tonight but if they can’t make it I’m going to have to cancel”, Frank went on. On that note I remembered my family waiting for their dinner and with a hurried “goodbye” and “don’t worry about it” to Frank I paid for my shopping and headed home.

As I cleared the table and John filled the dish washer I relayed my encounter with Frank. John knew how fond we all were of Frank. He was one of those fierce looking individuals who have a heart of gold. That said, word was that he had been a member of the Hell’s Angels in his younger days and had only changed his ways when he met Lily, our line dance instructor. Anyone more prim and proper than Lily you couldn’t hope to meet, but every now and again her rather wicked sense of humour came to the fore and you could see how she must have tamed the leather clad Frank. I chattered on until it occurred to me that John was rather quiet and looking very thoughtful. Next thing I knew, he interrupted “Excuse me Pattie” and walked out of the kitchen.

Rather taken aback, I nevertheless finished cleaning up the kitchen and headed down to the basement to practice the steps to my current favourite dance ‘Don’t feel like Prancin’. I had been line dancing for nearly four years at this point and my enthusiasm was growing more than diminishing. The more I danced, the more I loved it. Just putting the music on and letting my feet lead the way took my mind off all my worries. But that was not to happen tonight, the basement door blew open and John raced down the steps two at a time, his face alight!

“Pattie, I have the answer to your friend Frank’s problem”, he told me, “What about ‘Solid Gold’?” Rather bemused I responded, “I don’t know that he needs gold bars John”. “No, no”, he replied, “The band, you know, our band. I’ve spoken to the guys and we’ll play at your dance tomorrow night. You’re always telling me that line dancers can dance to anything. I’ll call Frank now”. John bounded back up the stairs and to my horror the next thing I knew he was speaking to Frank. “We’re a new band but we’ve had experience My wife’s a line dancer so of course I know what kind of songs you need played. You don’t have to pay us, only a few beers, we just want to help out”. Well the last few words were obviously the magic potion because the next thing I heard he was talking to Bob “Tell the band we’re in. We should meet around 4:30 at the Bull and Bear to decide what songs we’re going to play and then we have to be at Wittingdon Church Hall at 6:30 to set up and the dance starts at 8.”

I went through the rest of the evening and the next day in a daze. I considered throwing myself down the stairs and breaking my leg so I absolutely couldn’t go to the dance but at the same time there was the vague notion in my mind that if I was there I might be able to prevent disaster. The other wives were equally as panic stricken. Trudy had succumbed to a terrible migraine brought upon by the notion of public disclosure of her husband the bank manager as a member of a rock band while Susan gallantly decided she would attend the event but wear a wig and remain anonymous.

The men assured us that our help was not needed and we should just head out to the dance at our normal time. We kept out of the way as with much huffing, puffing and a few oaths they loaded their equipment into Bob’s camper van; held our tongues when they had to return to pick up the drum sticks, extension chords and guitar picks and again when they returned the second time to pick up their microphones and gold shoes.

By the time 7:30 came around an air of gloom had settled over our little group. Whereas normally we were eagerly practicing some of our dance steps ready for the evening dance, that night it was the last thing on our

minds. To make matters worse, what the men didn't know was that Frank had his own unique twist to a dance event; he had the band play for 1/2 hour as dancers lined up to come in. It stemmed from his experiences as a student when he had paid good money to go to a concert and then hated the band. This way, he reckoned, if people didn't like the band they didn't have to pay to come in. Some of the bands weren't too keen on the idea but the others used the time to warm up and tune their instruments. We were simply afraid that 'Solid Gold' wouldn't have enough songs to last the 30 minutes. However, we couldn't delay any longer; silently we picked up our shoe bags in one hand, water bottles in the other and made our way to the car. Trudy was driving and needed to be reminded to turn left into the parking lot of the church hall when she drove past, "Quite accidentally" she assured us.

There were already quite a few people in line outside the hall and we could hear music in the background. "Weird group" commented Connie, as we came up. "They'll just be tuning up", responded Peggy, "Guitars take quite a bit of sorting out to get them ready for a show. I heard the Spoon Brothers discussing this on the radio the other day." Thank goodness for Peggy, I thought, nodding my head vigorously in support of her comment. As others gathered the discussion gained momentum but thankfully Frank decided to let us in early as it was getting chilly. On the other hand I did think that maybe he was afraid that the dancers might decide that going home to watch 'Idle of the Week' could be a better choice for the evening.

By the time we got in the band had left the stage and a local DJ was starting the evening off for 1/2 hour of dance music. "At least we've got a reprieve for a little while" whispered Susan, "let's make the most of it". And soon we were on the floor with some of our favourite dances 'Bosher Never', 'North to South' and 'A Jig Low'. However, all too soon Frank took to the stage to announce the world famous band, first time appearing at Wittington Town Hall "Here they are ... Solid Gold". To a smatter of applause the curtains opened and there were our husbands.

"They don't look too bad" whispered Susan. "Just wait 'til they start playing" lamented Trudy. We didn't have long to wait; Nigel clicked his drum sticks a few times until the rest of the group realized this was a ploy to get them started and then, with Paul leading the charge with his vocals, they launched into a most unusual rendition of 'Coffee With Milk & Sugar', one of the classics of our line dance scene. "At least we recognize what it's meant to be." Susan remarked optimistically "So let's get dancing". Looking rather confused but willing to give it a try the other dancers followed our lead. Nearly an hour later most of the dancers had given up as we danced 'Coffee with Milk & Sugar' for the tenth time. We were afraid to go to the toilets as the discussions we encountered there were becoming increasingly heated and seemed to focus on the fact that the beat changed so frequently within each single song that no one was sure whether they were doing a cha, a tango or a waltz or anything else come to that. Let alone the fact that there was complete lack of recognition as to what songs the band was actually playing. To our relief, at this point Frank announced a break and the DJ again took over the controls. A few dancers went up on the stage and we overheard them inform their friends that the keyboard player had the musical notes written on the keys "which explains a lot". We quickly moved away.

Back came 'Solid Gold' with the band members looking rather apprehensive. Within seconds Bob's guitar string had snapped. A few minutes break while it was sort-of fixed by Bob who had obviously forgotten to bring his glasses. The band was off again but at this point smoke began to billow out of one of the amps and the hall's smoke detectors began to shriek. A sense of panic seemed to permeate the stage as Nigel attempted to rectify the situation by flailing his arms around to clear the air. After some coughing and spluttering they started again but this time we realized they were all playing distinctly different tunes (we later found out that without that amp they literally couldn't hear each other). "They're going to be lynched" cried Trudy "What shall we do? You've got to rescue them Pattie". I'm known for being inventive and fairly quick thinking but at this point my brain was completely numb and all I could do was look longingly towards the exit doors where suddenly there was a commotion. To my absolute astonishment in came lead singer, Donny Marshall, of 'The Midnight Liners' followed by the other band members. With a wide beam Frank raced onto the stage holding up his hand to stop 'Solid Gold' with Donny now by his side. "Hi ya'all", called out Donny "Although we still

don't have our equipment, we felt so guilty about not playing that we reckoned we would at least put in an appearance. We want to thank 'Solid Gold' for keeping this event alive and for letting us use their equipment. Let's dance". By that point his fellow band members had sorted out the equipment and our husbands with relief written all over their faces had exited stage left.

Suffice to say that the atmosphere in the hall turned on a dime and soon the floor was packed with happy smiling dancers which included us. Midnight came too soon and the crowd roared its approval of The Midnight Liners' performance. We had been given strict instructions not to go back stage so we headed home leaving 'Solid Gold' to pack itself up. I was still awake however when John came home. "You all worked really hard tonight" I commented diplomatically. "Well, maybe that's not the best type of event for us" he responded. "Bob said that one of his cousins needs a band for a big 'sit-down' wedding so perhaps we should try for that". Let me just say that cooler heads prevailed when the band next met. The majority decided that, although no doubt it would be easy for them to get gigs, modest men that they were, fame and fortune was not what they were after. So if you're wondering they still practice in our garage and over beers reminisce about their one and only gig playing for the line dance crowd at Wittingdon Town Hall.

NOTE: *Many years ago my husband, Michael, was drawn into a band rather like this one with no musical background and he played the keyboard with the notes written on the keys. After a few short weeks of practice the band played a dance gig in a large hall and had played their full repertoire in the 30 minutes before the dancers came in. The amp blew up and the guitars strings broke just as in the story and I was afraid to go into the women's washrooms because of the discussions going on there. It was a complete unmitigated disaster and they were lucky to escape unscathed! It was also true that they subsequently considered playing for a big Greek sit-down wedding but decided against it when their wives threatened them with corporal punishment if they did!!*

With regard to 'Solid Gold' dying their clothes, when I first met Michael in London, England, my flatmates and I were having a 'purple' party and Michael and his friends dyed all their clothes (shoes as well) purple in their bathtub. My husband still plays for fun with some friends and there are photos on my website showing them kindly wearing gold T-Shirts!

www.stayinline.ca
linedanceviv@hotmail.com