

Went to the Senate and I Lost My Band

By Constance Bandacoot

*Not many people are aware that while attending St. Paul's prep school in New Hampshire in the early Sixties, **John Kerry** was the bass player in a rock band called the **Electras**. In 1961, the **Electras** privately cut their only recording.*

*We decided to find out more, so we located **Toffy Billingsley**, road tech for the **Electras**.*

“Road tech? We never actually went anywhere,” said Toffy. “Good thing too. My god man, if the family had ever found out that I was even thinking of doing common laborer work such as lifting one of those amplifier thingies, they would have cut-off my trust funds. I got my father’s gardener up from Boston in the late fall of 1961 to move a few things for the band, but he stayed all year. When the other lads found out that he really was a gardener, they found other activities to keep him busy.

“I did condescend to tune the string instruments because I was promised ‘intro-seductions’ to the young women who came around all flushed after the band had performed what I can only broadly define as music that appealed to the lower extremities. I was not a man of the world at that point in my life, but even so, the gyrations of these young women was not totally unattractive.”

“If you really want to find out more you should talk to Bertie Havesham. They kicked him out of the band.”

*We tracked down **Bertie Havesham**, the so-called Seventh Electra, a exotic grape skin importer living in Kingston-on-Topping, New York.*

*We interviewed Bertie by telephone, as he was peeling *Vitis labrusca* grapes for his fourth wife **Exclusiva**. We discussed his time with the band, and his new book: “*The Bertie Havesham Story: The Seventh, maybe Eighth, Member of the Electras.*”*

“That is correct,” said Bertie. “For several years afterwards, I thought I got the boot because I was the only one who was well rounded musically. I played the pipe organ, guitar and bass. But no, it was something more fundamental. There were too many guys and too few women, particularly ‘sporting women,’ coming around after the mixers. I won’t mention names here, but some people don’t like to share. I do mention the names in the book. Autographed copies will soon be available on eBay.”

”Toffy couldn’t play but he had a good ear for tuning, and we liked his gardener. So they kept them both around - the gardener to move the equipment because most of them had blisters almost full-time from trying to learn how to play their instruments. More importantly, the gardener knew how to grow special plants - if you know what I mean.”

We asked Bertie about his relationship with John Kerry.

“Let me put it this way,” he said. “A three-note chord like a C Major has a root C, an E, and a G. John’s emphasis was always on the root - *dum, dum, dum, dum*. I told him there are other notes there, and he could play double-stops, eighth notes, kind of mix it up, but no ... *(long pause on the line)* ... I often got a headache.”

Bertie permitted us to print a section from his book dealing specifically with the arrangements of the songs by the band.

KERRY: Root notes equal root values. That’s what America is all about. That’s why I became the bass player so I could concentrate on accentuating the root values.

BERTIE: Yes, we understand that John, but do we agree that these are the chords, with their root notes, that go into “*Guitar Boogie Shuffle?*”

KERRY: I support the root notes. Root notes equal...

BERTIE: Yes, you said that. But do you support the arrangements containing these particular root notes?

KERRY: Now that is a serious issue. We shouldn’t blindly commit to a course of action without building a consensus for the arrangement. Make no mistake, I support the root notes in the arrangement, but we have to be sensitive to the situation. The folks that attend the mixers are our allies. We just can’t unilaterally play notes that are discordant to them. When girls are bused into St Paul’s from St. Joan of the Apocalypse, some of them may become overly excited as certain root notes reverberate through their ripe vibrant bodies. Others...

BERTIE: Isn’t that the whole point of playing - to get at those ripe vibrant bodies?

KERRY: ...Others may view as divisive our unilateral decision to select certain notes.

BERTIE: So what are you saying, you support the root notes and the even the arrangements, but we shouldn’t play the same notes all the time?

KERRY: I’m suggesting that, except for the root notes, the other players may have to leave some notes out, or even slow them down in an effort...

BERTIE: You want the girls to vote on the notes?

KERRY: If it comes to that. But more fundamentally, I suggest we demonstrate where we’re going with the arrangement.

BERTIE: D__n it man, the girls know where we’re going with the song. They can hear the original on the radio. That’s why we’re playing it, because that’s what they want to hear. They don’t want to hear Elvis with some notes left out.

KERRY: No, I think that sends the wrong signal. Who's to say the original had the right consensus building notes. Some people don't like "You Can't Sit Down," others don't like the arrangement. We just can't shove the notes down their throats.

Toffy has suggested, actually his gardener did, that we could set up a projection screen to display the arrangement with one of those white bouncing balls, so people can clearly see the notes that are coming up. We play a little bit, and then we ask them what they think so far.

BERTIE: And when do we take decisive action and play the whole song straight through without doing "play four bars, vote, play four bars, vote?"

KERRY: When we've heard from a representative sample of people at the mixer.

BERTIE: Good gravy, have you forgotten where you are? You're at St. Paul's – well-off white boys at a school where well-off white girls are bused in for mixers. The whole point of being here is to be around the well-off. If, on occasion, and it should only be occasionally, we feel the need to converse with the common man, we can do so when we conduct our transactions with Toffy's gardener for some consensus building plant matter.

I mean, c'mon. A mixer is only supposed to last 3 hours. If we follow your suggestion, it will take 3 days.

KERRY: Consensus building, and considering various view points, takes time and patience.

BERTIE: I'm a kid. Kids don't have patience. We just want to lump lips and wig out.

After the interview, we contacted the Senator Kerry's office to get the Senator's reaction to Bertie's allegation that, as a member of the Electras, Kerry "flip-flopped" on the notes the band would play.

The Senator's office released this statement:

"John Kerry is proud of the time he spent with The Electras. In every band there are occasional disagreements. Bertie's insistence on playing St. Paul's enormous chapel organ in some of the faster arrangements, like "Summertime Blues," would have required stringing 500 yards of electric line across campus, and that presented a safety hazard with no guaranty that Bertie would be electrocuted. Nevertheless, John Kerry is thankful for his association with Bertie, who taught him important lessons about non-root values."

Later we received a telephone call from the Senator's office, at which time Senator Kerry read a statement:

"Je suis fier d'avoir été membre de The Electras. Et je (staffer's voice in the background: "Speak English to them Senator")... And I am proud to this day of the recording we made. I'll compare that recording with the recordings by Senator Mitch McConnell - oh, that's right, he doesn't have any recordings. OK, then I'll compare my record in Vietnam with the record of Senator McConnell in Vietnam - oh, I forgot again, he doesn't have any record in Vietnam - he was reservist who spent all his time at Fort Knox. Alright, I'll compare the sales of the Electras' recording with the number of jobs created during President Obama's first term. Let's see, we cut 500 copies altogether, I still have ten, and then I gave a couple to Toffy's gardener to pay for... Well, never mind that. The point is if anyone wants to compare records of public service, then I'll repeat the immortal words of T. Rex: 'Bang a gong. Get it on!' ... Well, banging a gavel at the end of my confirmation hearing would be an acceptable substitute."