

Michael Bunge:

A Timeline History

Michael Kuelker

NOTE: This is a “working draft” of material that will be refined over the next few months as I conduct more interviews and verify details. The finished draft will be abundantly illustrated. Please contact me at omdonrecord@gmail.com to communicate your feedback about this timeline history.

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Michael Casey Bunge was born on Feb. 10, 1947. His parents, Martha Gertrude Casey & Walter Edward Bunge, were married on March 22, 1940, and resided in Union, Missouri, before moving to Springfield in 1947. They were married for 60 years and had one other son, Walter Edward ‘Eddy’ Bunge, Jr. (b. Dec. 2, 1942).

EDDY BUNGE: My mom was a graduate of the Conservatory of Music in Kansas City. She was an accomplished pianist with 120 hours just in piano. So she was incredible on classical, she could play jazz, she arranged, do all of it. We grew up with this beautiful music background. There was always music in the house. Dad and Mom had all the 78s — Count Basie, Glen Miller, Fats Waller, all of the great jazz bands out of the forties.

That evolved up into the fifties and of course, the big age of rock and roll popped in about 1955, '56. Mike had a lot of background listening to jazz and real good music. In high school, he went to jazz camps, played clarinet, played saxophone, I think he played alto; of course, B-flat tenor is what he ended up with in Granny's.

Mike was just a natural. He took into it better than I did. He was the better musician of the two of us.

When Mike was young, I would say probably 13, 12 years old, we were going to church. Mom had us in choir, had us in Sunday school, whatever, all of our beginning lives. Bless her heart, she was trying to keep us from going the devil's ways. Anyway, Michael and I would sit there and

they'd be singing a hymn. And it'd be of course a simple, boring Baptist hymn. Well, Michael would motion up, he would point to the note and he'd have me put a 7th in and he would put a 9th... And Mom would look over, and under her breath I know she was grinnin', but she would reach over and kinda tap him on the shoulder. This was Mike. He heard these beautiful big round sounds, these chords.

Well, we'd come home, and Mom would say, 'Come here a minute, I want to talk to you.' So I thought, oh crap. And we'd go into the music room and Mom'd sit down at the piano and say, 'Here's what you were doing... now this sounds good too.' Mike said, 'yeah, that's it, Mom, that's what I was wanting to do... What are you doing there?' So she worked with him and she worked with me and we both had this beautiful background from Mom.

Mom and Dad were both teachers in the beginning. Dad was a coach. Mom was an English and music teacher. They settled in Springfield. Dad later got into the insurance business. Mom was a housewife; she taught private piano lessons for years. Michael had that library right there built into the house.

He'd come in with an arrangement that Granny's was doing. 'Mom, help me with this line here,' whatever, this chord, 'what I'm wanting to do.' She would work and say, you could do this or that, whatever sounds good to you, but here's things you can do. It was a beautiful family thing. That's why his loss was such a big thing not only to us but to the musical community in Springfield.

Eddy Bunge is a drummer who performed in Benny Mahan & the Ravens and other groups and who for 26 years owned and operated Eddy Bunge's Percussion Shop in Springfield.

1950s

Michael attends McDaniel School. His earliest public performances are piano recitals.

Early to Mid-1960s

As a student at the Bettye Vogel Dance Studio (2640 South Glenstone), Michael performs in public for special demonstrations. He is a member of the Missouri Iota chapter of Phi Lambda Epsilon fraternity and a graduate of Glendale High School class of 1965. He enrolls in the 1965-66 academic year at SMS, majoring in music, but with his music career in bloom, he does not finish the degree.

1962-63 – Michael performs with Benny Mahan & the Ravens. The group, established in 1959, is on the vanguard of live rock and roll in the region along with Dave Smith & the Blue Notes (Springfield, MO) and Mike McAlister & the Hi Fi's (Harrison, AR).

BILL JONES: I was 14 the first time I got in at Half-a-Hill [off of old Hwy 65] to hear my first live rock band, Benny Mahan & the Ravens – with Benny, later a member of Granny's; 15-year-old Mike Bunge, who played either alto sax or guitar (I remember he didn't own a guitar but would hunt around town for a guitar to borrow before gigs); Mike's older brother Eddy on drums, who's still thriving in Springfield; Charlie McCord, who went on to become an NBC radio commentator in New York and Don Imus' long-time sidekick; and Johnny Frishkorn on bass. Granny's, as well as Lewie and the 7 Days, went on to play at Half-a-Hill many, many times.

Bill Jones performed widely with Lewie & the 7 Days and Granny's Bathwater, and he has been a member of the Ozark Mountain Daredevils in two periods, 1974-77 and 2010 to present.

1963 – Michael performs with Artie Nanney Band w/ David Kershenbaum.

Sept 4, 1964 – Bunge performs with The Lansirs, led by David Kershenbaum, at the debut of Kids, Inc., a Springfield teen club. The Playboys and The Esquires are also on the bill.

early to mid-1960s – Bunge records demos of songs penned by Wayne Carson and provides musical accompaniment on out of town dates. At different times, drummers Eddy Bunge, Larry Lee, and Bobby Lloyd Hicks perform in Carson's combo.

LARRY LEE: Wayne's brother [Gary Head] was kind of a booking guy. He'd book shows at really off the wall little places, like little towns in Kansas; he would do some deal with the chamber of commerce and put on concerts. And so Wayne started going out playing those shows. I went out with him and Mike Bunge and Hughie Walpole. I was 15.

When he first asked me to do that, of course, I was itching to go and do anything like that. I told Wayne, I said, 'Look, when you come by to pick me up, just make sure you're not drinking beer or anything like this 'cause my mom's going to be real skeptical of this anyway.' He said, 'Aw, no problem.' [laughs] The morning of the first time we went out, he came out rolling in my driveway and I came out with some of my drums to put in the trunk, and my mom came out to meet him and sure enough, six-pack sittin' right next to him. And she brought me in and she said, 'Now, you make sure he's not doing that when you're driving and I don't want you drinking any of that.' And I said, 'I'll be fine, Mom, don't worry about me; I'll be good.' Michael Bunge, who was my best friend, was playing with him, and she really trusted Mike and that's how I got to go out.

We would drive all the way up to Wisconsin and play some stupid gig and drive all the way back home again. We did a lot of concerts out in Kansas and Oklahoma. So I did that and then I started doing the 7 Days thing in college.

Larry Lee played in Lewie & the 7 Days, served four years in the U.S. Navy, and was a member of Granny's Bathwater in 1970-71. He then became a founding member of the Ozark Mountain Daredevils. Since the early 1980s, Lee has been a music producer, solo artist, and member of The Vinyl Kings, Beyond Reach, Chowning Wilson & Lee, and The HigLeeWils.

BOBBY LLOYD HICKS: Wayne Carson's brother Gary had this thing where he would, well he would contact like a fire department in some little town and say he was going to do a fundraiser, you know, make some money, buy some equipment or something, and we're gonna put on a show. And then he had this bank of phone callers back here in Springfield who would call all the businesses in whatever town it was just to sell little ads for a program that he would put together and give away at the door. So it'd be one page of a bio on Wayne and then 40 pages of \$2 car washes and stuff like that. He just had this whole – I wouldn't call it stealing – he did it for years. He'd book Wayne on these shows, and we'd go around and sometimes it would be a benefit for a nunnery or a school or the police department. And those were fun shows because Wayne was funny and talented, and Mike was great; I loved Mike Bunge. He was my best friend when I got down here. Just a soulful, charismatic, funny guy.

Drummer Bobby Lloyd Hicks (1947-2017) played in myriad Springfield-based bands including Lewie & the 7 Days, Granny's Bathwater, and The Skeletons. The many artists he performed with include The Ozark Mountain Daredevils, Jonathan Richman, NRBQ, and Dave Alvin.

1965

Lewie & the 7 Days form during Michael Bunge's freshman year (1965-66) at Southwest Missouri State College (SMS), today Missouri State University. The band is Bunge (horns), Lew Taylor (lead vocals, keyboards), Larry Lee (drums), Bill Jones (sax), Romeo Bonifacio (guitar), and Hugh Walpole (bass). Bunge also enlists in the U.S. National Guard.

LEW TAYLOR on the influence of black music: Eddy [Bunge] turned us onto a lot of this. I'll never forget when Eddy played for Mike and I Ray Charles' *In Person* live. He played this album for us, and the first time we heard 'What I'd Say,' we were hooked.

We didn't even think about [race]. We were friends with everybody, didn't matter what the color of your skin was. People loved our music. We were already pretty accomplished musicians for our age because of our family. The Bunge family has been known in Springfield for decades as the first family of music. Most of 'em are gone now, but we had just hung around good musicians so long, we were pretty accomplished musicians for our age.

After The 7 Days, Dr. Lew Taylor, a cousin of the Bunges, went into the military, serving as a fighter pilot in the US Marine Corps and the US Air National Guard. He retired from the military and embarked upon a long career in academia before retiring in 2019 from the Department of Management of the University of North Texas. He has long been associated with the Wounded Warrior Project, a nonprofit that serves veterans, and with Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities.

1966

Lewie & the 7 Days record two singles for the Skipper label: “You’ve Been Cheatin’ on Me” b/w “You’re the Reason” (composed by Lew Taylor and Hugh Walpole respectively) and “What You Never Had” b/w “Night Train” (composed by Wayne Thompson and Forrest / Simpkins / Washington respectively). Skipper is owned by Springfield music impresario Si Siman, the driving force behind *Ozark Jubilee*. “Skipper” is the nickname of Ralph Foster, Siman’s business partner and the founder of the influential radio station KWTO in Springfield. The 7 Days perform on bills with The Gentrys, The Happenings, The Kingsmen, and others.

Jan 22 – Lewie & the 7 Days play Katz Discount City (1735 S. Glenstone).

April 22 – Bunge takes part in a student recital in the Recital Hall at SMS. An article in the campus publication *Student Standard* describes him as a saxophone student of Elton Burgstahler.

July 7 – Lewie & the 7 Days depart for a tour of Vietnam to perform for American soldiers on a trip conducted under the auspices of the U.S. State Department. The band’s appearances include Saigon, Da Nang, Ah Khee, La Trang, and the Mekong Delta.

July 24 – Lewie & the 7 Days return to Springfield.

LEW TAYLOR: The war was going on, and we wanted to go over and entertain the troops. Si was able to get us an arrangement with the State Department to do that for a month, so we went all over South Vietnam that month, 40-some-odd different places. Including going on the USS Intrepid, landing on that carrier, and they unloaded all of our gear and we were there for a couple of days on the carrier. We rode a seat on a rope over to a destroyer and played for them. [chuckles] It was quite a tour.

When we went to Vietnam in the summer of ’66, that was a State Department tour because had it been a USO tour, there were some locations where we went and played that we wouldn’t have been able to; it was too dangerous. So it was a State Department tour including we played sometimes out in the jungle for a platoon of Marines with a gas generator giving us some power. They’d fly us in on Hueys and we’d play for ‘em, and then they’d pick us up and take us out.

LARRY LEE: We were flown around in C-130’s and helicopters to the un-godliest hellholes I’d ever seen, where we’d set up our gear and play songs like the Impressions’ ‘Woman’s Got Soul’ and James Brown’s ‘Papa’s Got A Brand New Bag.’ We played to all these guys who were mostly around my age and who constantly told me all they wanted to do was just to make it back home. The last place they took us was to perform at a field hospital. It was horrible. I saw guys my age with no arms, no legs, heads wrapped up in bandages to the point you couldn’t even see their eyes. Almost every one of them said, ‘Man, do whatever you have to do not come back here.’

I hadn’t yet enrolled in my sophomore year, and as soon as I got back from that tour, I had an induction notice to go get my physical. It was the time of the draft and after just getting back from Vietnam and talking to everybody over there, I told myself I wasn’t going to take a chance with what the draft and the Army might give me, and instead I would rather join some other

military service for four years and stay the hell away from there. So I ended up joining the Navy in the fall 1966 for a four-years stint away from my family, my girlfriend, and my band.

LEW TAYLOR: We would tour with Wayne Carson on occasion, sometimes as his backup band, sometimes one or two of us would go on the road with him. Mike and I played with him quite a bit. We were all in this crowd, you know, this group, and we connected through Si Siman, and we had a good time, made a lot of good music.

October – The 7 Days play the Glendale High School homecoming.

JIM KERSHAW on the homecoming at Glendale: Lewie & the 7 Days blew my mind. That experience, and that music played at that level, was unlike anything this high school kid had ever experienced. And it quite literally changed me from a British Invasion fan over to a soul music fan. It literally changed my musical path going forward for the rest of my life. Because I became enamored with horn bands, completely and totally enamored with horn bands, after hearing those guys. Very, very powerful impact.

Jim Kershaw has been involved in professional audio for many years. He executive produced the Granny's compilation *Dig It or Book!*

autumn '66 – The band adds trumpet player Rick Haymes.

RICK HAYMES: I was at school at what was then Southwest Missouri State College. Mike and Lloyd and Hugh were going to school at SMS, and they had gained some regional notoriety. I didn't really know them but knew of them because they were regional celebrities. One day, Mike and Lloyd met me in the hallway in the music department at SMS and said, 'We've been hearing you play trumpet, and we were wondering if you'd be interested in hearing more about our band and thinking about joining us.' I said, 'Absolutely!' We got together, had a couple of rehearsals. They had just come back from Vietnam at that point.

The band's manager was Si Siman, and every week he would know what the next top tunes were going to be on *Billboard*. When we had weekend gigs, we would practice on Wednesday-Thursday; we would get that information on Wednesday. And by Friday or Saturday night, we would be able to debut songs that people had only heard for two or three days on the radio. One of them I remember distinctly was 'Kind of a Drag' by The Buckingham.

After The 7 Days, Rick Haymes served in the U.S. Navy and then worked for many years as an executive with a major pharmaceutical company. Since the 2000s, he has been an actor with appearances in nine feature films and over three dozen short films. He returned to musical performance in 2019 in a duet called Frank and Maury.

Dec 3 – The 7 Days, with new drummer Lloyd Hicks, open for The Yardbirds @ SMS.

RICK HAYMES on opening for The Yardbirds: It was an amazing experience and of course was the biggest crowd I had ever played for. My debut was, we did Lou Rawls' 'Love is a Hurtin' Thing,' and in the chorus of it, there's a trumpet solo that goes way up to a high C and, I think,

maybe a D or an E. I was able to play that, and I just remember looking out over the crowd and thinking, 'Oh my god...!' In the world of trying to center yourself and stay in control, I use that moment as a touchpoint to bring myself back to some kind of calm when I find myself needing to get centered. Because it was a magical moment for me.

LEW TAYLOR on cutting demos with Ronnie Self, the talented, volatile rockabilly singer/songwriter: Ronnie Self was one of Si Siman's clients. He had signed with Si Siman, and when Ronnie Self had some new songs to do, I always got the nod. Wayne Carson or somebody would call me and say come over to the studio. Mike and I and a couple of other guys, whatever he needed, we would play his demos. He was great. Ronnie Self was an original. He didn't copy anybody. He didn't have to.

1967

early '67 – The 7 Days go to Memphis to record at Chips Moman's studio with plans to record Wayne Carson's 'The Letter,' which becomes one of the biggest hits of 1967 ... for The Box Tops featuring 16-year-old singer Alex Chilton.

BILL JONES: About that time, we used to do Wayne [Carson]'s demos. He wrote a song for the 7 Days called 'The Letter.' It was just a great song. Wayne took us to Memphis to a little studio that his friend had, Chips Moman and Tommy Cogbill, called American Sound Studio. We went down to record 'The Letter.' Chips says, 'Oh, I just did that song with a little local band here a couple weeks ago. We put strings on it, we got a jet plane on it.' We listened to it, and we decided we couldn't do any better than that, so we did something else. I have no idea what we did.

March 12 – An announcement runs in the *Springfield Leader & Press* regarding the engagement of Michael Bunge and [name redacted]. "Wedding plans are indefinite," says the piece. The marriage does not take place. The future Granny's Bathwater song "Silent Treatment" is thought to have been inspired by this relationship.

June/July – The 7 Days conduct a 28-day tour of the Caribbean with Wayne Carson and Della Rae performing for American troops. The Panama Canal Zone, Guantanamo Bay, Puerto Rico, and several islands are on the itinerary. The trip is again brokered by Si Siman.

BILL JONES: We started in the Canal Zone, and we were there for a week, played all over the Canal Zone, the Atlantic coast, the Pacific coast, and everywhere in between. It's a tiny country, kind of like the Vatican but bigger. We went to Antigua, spent two or three days there. We spent a week in Guantanamo. We had our own barracks; everybody was really nice.

undated 1967 – The 7 Days record two songs [in Oklahoma] before the band members disperse. Several members enlist in military service: Lew Taylor in the Marines and Rick Haymes and Romeo Bonifacio in the Navy.

LEW TAYLOR on the disbanding of The 7 Days: We didn't really have a fight and quit each other. We all just kind of went our separate ways. I had to find some work. I got married that summer and I needed to find some steady work. Mike had to leave to go on six months of active duty in the Army. It just kinda happened.

1968 – 69

Michael Bunge returns from active duty and forms Granny's Bathwater with David Pease (bass), and Bobby Lloyd Hicks (drums). John Dillon (guitar) joins soon after. The band performs at Ananda Leather Co. (South Jefferson) in what is informally known as the Sun Festival and later at the Warehouse (address), BeBops, and a variety of venues. Granny's performs blues-rock in a jam band format that departs from the R&B-driven sound of Lewie & the 7 Days. The world of popular music had been infused with blues in the 1960s and electrified in stimulating ways, so it was natural for Bunge and his compatriots to embrace this musical direction. A big, horn-based fusion band was likely never far from his mind.

JOHN DILLON: Michael Bunge was a big influence on my musical life. He was an amazing player, real unusual personality. Huge personality, intimidating personality it was so large. He was an incredible player. He could play everything. Piano, horns, drums, guitar, anything, he could play it all. When they started, I was living in a smokehouse behind Lloyd's house and basically by osmosis became part of the original group. They needed a singer and at that time I was doing electric blues.

I can't remember how long I was with them. It wasn't terribly long. We had a few gigs. Basically, we were a jam band. I don't know if we even had a setlist. I'm not sure how many songs we even knew. We would get together and start playing a riff or a line, and everybody would just fall in. Sometimes these things would go on for 20, 30 minutes.

John Dillon is a founding member of the Ozark Mountain Daredevils with whom he records and performs to this day.

DONNIE THOMPSON: I guess I saw them in late 69 or early 1970. In fact, I remember going with Randy [Chowning]. Randy called me and says, 'Hey, there is this thing going on. These guys are playing. We should go check it out.' The Ananda Leather Factory was downtown in this kind of warehouse room. These were kinda older guys and it was an older crowd. Randy and I were just these teenage guys. You could just walk in. It wasn't a bar; we just walked and saw these guys jamming and it was heavy and you smelled heavy pot smoke in the air. I guess I'd never smelled that in my life. Anyway, Randy & I saw Granny's Bathwater the first time. They would just jam. People were just milling around. Couple guys would get up and start up a riff and the drummer would fall in and the bass player and that's what they did all night.

Guitarist Donnie Thompson has recorded and performed with The Symptoms, The Moreells, The Skeletons, and The Ozark Mountain Daredevils. The Skeletons recorded and performed with Dave Alvin, Boxcar Willie, Jonathan Richman, and many other artists.

JOHN DILLON: I remember once we played a high school prom. They wanted a slow song, so we did a slow blues called 'Sweet Root Man' by Memphis Slim. 'I'm your sweet root man / please take hold of my big yellow yam.' And it was the king and queen dance; it was hilarious.

1970

In early to mid-1970, Granny's records "Milk Cow Blues" at Top Talent studio, and the song gets airplay on KWTO on Les Sweckard's evening rock program "Campus '71." On "Milk Cow Blues" are Michael Bunge (guitar), John Dillon (vocals, guitar), Don Shipps (bass), and Lloyd Hicks (drums). Later in the year, band membership shifts to Bunge, Shipps, Larry Lee (drums), Jon Goin (guitar), and Bill Jones (keyboards and sax).

JOHN DILLON: 'Milk Cow Blues' is a song that I learned from Mississippi Fred McDowell. The arrangement is much different than what he did of course, and the lick itself came out of the blue. I just started doing the lick and everybody else fell in and I put what I could remember of 'Milk Cow Blues' lyrics in the song. I think I also made up a verse. That same lick is the basis for a new song on our new CD called 'Nosferatu.' I've never forgotten the lick and always wanted to use it in some other way.

That night 'Milk Cow' was recorded was a very special night for all of us, and maybe the first time I ever understood the power of music to serve as a medium for communication. I mean, real telepathy took place! There was no rehearsal; we did not lay it down; we just basically found our spaces in the studio. Mike played his guitar from the board itself once he hit the record button to start, and it was one take with no overdubs. We came back in the control room, just freaked out, and then Mike played the second lead with himself which blew everybody away. And we walked out with a reel to reel.

I had a friend down the street at KWTO. They had an FM sister station, and a guy named Les Garland started the FM side of that station. They allowed him to rock and roll between 9 and midnight. He basically brought rock and roll to FM radio in Springfield. They only gave him three hours a night, 9 to midnight, because it was a big country station, huge wattage station on FM. I'd go up there in the night and he'd come down and lock the door behind me, I would sit at the board with him. He'd put on 'In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida' [Iron Butterfly] and because it is 18 minutes long, we would go out back and smoke a joint.

It was a huge deal because all of a sudden, we had FM radio rock and roll. And so I took the tape down to him. 'Hey man, would you play this on the air?' It was a reel to reel. He said, "Sure, I'll play it tomorrow night' and so-and-so a time. So I call up everybody ... and for the first time heard my voice on the radio.

LES SWECKARD (GARLAND): Through my association at KWTO [I met] the famous Ralph Foster; his partner was Si Siman. Amazing people. These guys did the *Ozark Jubilee* in the 50s – the #1 TV show in America comin' from Springfield, okay, pretty crazy. These were legendary guys and the next thing you know, I'm hanging out with these guys. I've got this rock and roll thing going at night and we were doing great in the ratings. Things couldn't have been better.

Hanging out with the music scene, my god, I remember ... First guy that ever put a joint in front of me was Mike Bunge. *God bless him and rest his soul.* I think about him often. Mike Bunge was an amazingly talented musician who could play literally anything. I remember the night Bunge offered me a joint, I almost had a heart attack. I'm like, you gotta be kidding me, where would you get something like that? And it was a *scene*, this music thing, and it was the sixties and it was a lot of *fun*.

Les Sweckard moved on from Springfield radio and soon became known as Les Garland and simply as Garland, and he became an executive or co-founder of MTV, VH1, AfterPlay Entertainment, and other ventures.

LLOYD HICKS: There just were so many bars [in Springfield at the time] and the thing was, you did a residency at one place and just played there six nights a week. Some bands played in the same bar for 15 years, some 20 years. But now everybody's doing one-nighters; there's no such thing as a house gig anymore around here. But yeah, very vibrant, a lotta bands, a lotta music. I was really happy that I ended up down here.

BILL JONES: I went to Detroit and came back totally changed, was skin and bones and had an edge which I never had before, living in Detroit. That's when I started with Granny's. Mike and I did two-horn things. I was always really good at anticipating what he was going to play and following. He would play something, and I would immediately catch on to what he was doing and play harmony with him or unison, whatever was appropriate.

Don [Shipps] lived in the Drury neighborhood. He was like this 15-year-old kid that used to hang around the band building and brought his bass in one day and started jamming with us, and he was just phenomenal. I got Don to join, and he would have been 16 or 17 at that time when he joined Granny's.

Mike had come up with all kinds of great original songs. We did two or three of Larry's, but they were not in the style. Larry had a very unique and original style, and no one could really be adjusted to them.

LARRY LEE: The first song I recorded after coming home [June 1970] after my four years in the Navy was titled 'Burlington's Castle.' Mike Bunge had keys to Si Siman's studio, and we went in there late one night to make a two-man demo. Mike played it to Si, and he said he'd publish it and gave Mike and I permission to record more of my songs. Mike and I continued doing demos of new songs I had written, and we were using a girl to sing the songs. Her name was Teresa Van Fleet, and she was far and away a much better singer than I was.

My first gig with Granny's was at the Finley River Memorial Festival in early September of 1970. I played with Granny's until the summer of 1971 when I left to help build the New Bijou Theatre.

CURT HARGIS: We all lived at a place we called the Ranch [Plainview Road west of Campbell Street]. There were 30 acres there and three houses, kind of a circle drive that went up around each one of them. My wife Johnelle & I lived in the farthest one to the east, and the furthest one to the west, which was the main house, is where Mike Bunge lived. They played there and practiced there and wrote there. He introduced me to Steve Canaday, my partner [at soon-to-be-opened New Bijou Theatre].

I worked at a leather shop downtown in Springfield, Ananda Leather Co., and there was quite a little warehouse place, I think a soft water company had been in there. We were privy to that space, and we started out having gigs in the back. It ended up being couple hundred people there at the high point. We called it the Sun Festival and it kinda caught on and we did it throughout one summer.

That business closed and I leased a place north of Springfield a few miles called BeBop Brown's. BeBop Brown was a pretty famous black jazz kind of a guy back in the day, and he had this really cool club out on the highway kinda off by itself. It was a nice little club. It was a great deal. We had a band friend of mine named Dean Billingsley. He'd been out east and came back to Springfield with all of his mates. They were our house band. Granny's Bathwater played there quite a bit.

Curt Hargis co-owned several venues in these years where Granny's Bathwater performed including BeBops and the New Bijou Theatre. Hargis is president of the Ozark Mountain Cutting Horse Association.

Sept 12-13 – Finley River Music Festival featuring the James Gang, Pacific Gas & Electric, Ides of March, Sugarloaf, and Crow, all of whom are nationally touring groups with hit songs in 1970. The festival has local bands, too, including Granny's Bathwater and Grate Sloth.

1971

Bunge does audio engineering work at Top Talent, and he produces two singles for the band Lead Hill on the Mid-American Artists, Inc. label with Si Siman publishing (Rose Bridge Music and Earl Barton Music). Mid-America Artists, Inc. is run by Bob Phillibert of the Lavender Hill Mob, a popular Springfield band.

For Sho-Boat, a label out of Hot Springs, AR, Bunge produces "No Place to Go" by Mainstream; the song is composed by John Barnes. Sho-Boat has a small body of work, some of whose publishing is handled by Si Siman's companies.

autumn and winter '71 – Granny's Bathwater performs regularly at the New Bijou Theatre (1749 East Trafficway), a club operated by Curt Hargis and Steve Canaday. The venue features national acts such as blues rockers Canned Heat, singer-songwriter Dan Hicks & His Hot Licks, War, and blues artists Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee and Blues Project. Local talent is on display, too, including Shorty Dunn, Zachary Beau, and John Dillon & Friends. The latter morph into Family Tree, who become the Ozark Mountain Daredevils and sign to A&M Records in 1973. The New Bijou's seven-month existence ends with a totalizing fire in March 1972.

1972

A history-making year for Granny's Bathwater with new members and new opportunities.

April/May – Rick Weaver, Larry Getz, and Benny Mahan join Granny's. The new configuration of the band performs at the Alibi Club (S. Glenstone), the Executive Lounge (Glenstone & Elm), and other venues in the run-up to a residency in Panama City, Florida in June. The band picks up keyboardists Tom Becker and Frank Westbrook as well as drummer Melvin Robinson along the way.

RICK WEAVER: Granny's was coming from a five-piece band that did mostly original stuff, blues-oriented stuff, playing around Springfield. And then when I joined and Larry [Getz] joined, we added two more horns, giving us a four-horn section. Larry and I came more from the jazz world, and so Michael wanted to add that into this soup of music that we were all interested in. So the band was changing complexions. The music was evolving into something more jazz fusion-oriented; consequently, we were all interested in adding players who would enhance that.

Rick Weaver studied instrumental music/trombone from the age of 9 under the tutelage of Jerry Hoover in 1962. From 1968-1971, he studied each summer with the Stan Kenton Orchestra jazz clinics in Redlands, California; his mentor was Dick Shearer lead trombonist. In June 1971, Weaver was awarded "outstanding soloist" in HS competition at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Montreux, Switzerland.

April 20 – Granny's Bathwater & Family Tree @ the Landers Theatre (311 E. Walnut)

May 4 – Granny's opens for War @ McDonald Arena, part of SMS' third annual Soul Week.

May 7 – Granny's takes part in a voter registration-related concert @ McDonald Arena with Family Tree, Lavender Hill Mob, Benny Mahan, Spillwater Junction, and others.

June 1 – Granny's goes to Panama City for a residency at Al & Glenn's Restaurant and Lounge on the beach.

RICK WEAVER: The back window was all glass. From the bandstand, we're looking at a panoramic view of Panama City beach – white sand, blue water, gorgeous. Of course, all these

people are eating lobster. It's a really nice seafood restaurant. Benny gets up and goes, 'all right, we're gonna do 'Joe Tex,' which is this tune we had worked up which was balls to the wall. A freakin' *wall* of sound. Benny sheepishly grins. And here's all these people, going, 'Hi, honey, you look nice tonight' and chinking their drinks, and we kicked that tune off, I was looking and I saw the windows move. Everybody in the place dropped their fork. Glenn comes running out, jumping over the bar, going ... [telling the band in profane terms to shut it down]. You can't shut it down. We finished it. It ends as abruptly as it starts. Boom, done. This wall of sound and these people are *holy shit*; they're used to a little trio with a piano player.

June – The group resides at a house in Phillips Inlet. On June 19, Hurricane Agnes hits Florida. "We evacuated to Dothan, Alabama," recalls Bill Jones. "I remember standing on the patio/storm wall of the club before all got in our cars a half hour before it hit. It didn't do all that much damage in P.C., and we played again the next night, but the storm totally 'dumped' on Pennsylvania, causing the most damage of a hurricane, up to that time."

During their six-week engagement, the band meets John Cook, owner of the Ivanhoe Club (601 Bourbon Street) in the French Quarter of New Orleans. He offers Granny's a residency during which time the band adds keyboardist Tom Becker and conga player Sababa Bahutu aka Chaino (born Leon Johnson).

After respiting a couple of weeks in Springfield, Granny's performs in New Orleans for much of the summer. There, they meet Ron Strasner, manager of Martha Reeves, who likes what he hears and hires the band to tour with the Motown legend, who is gearing up for a solo career.

TOM BECKER: The Ivanhoe is where I met 'em. I had just gotten back from Thule, Greenland. I had a tour up there playing NCO clubs with a B3 trio and a singer. I went down to Fat City to join another group, and they went over to Bourbon and Toulouse. I sat in with Granny's Bathwater, and Don Shipps said, 'Hey, you wanna join us? We're gonna make \$700 a week all expenses paid backing Martha Reeves.' I said, 'Sure!'

Ten of us at the Ivanhoe, I think we were making, I don't know, \$2200. The bar tab was \$2600 one week and two of us didn't even drink. Little things like that kept me from getting my \$700/all-expenses-paid a week.

Keyboardist Tom Becker started his professional career in music in 1963. From 1965-67, he was with Wayne Cochran & the CC Riders. After his stints in Granny's Bathwater, among his many projects and recordings, Becker collaborated in the jazz group Entropy with Granny's alumni Don Shipps, Larry Getz, and Sababa Bahutu, releasing one album, *Grazin'*, in 1982.

July 1 – Granny's participates in Rock Jam for Charity at the Ranch House Inn to benefit youth in the Bay County, Florida, area. Larry Getz is one of the promoters.

July 25 – Martha Reeves backed by Granny's perform at Madison Square Garden.

Aug 12 – One of several Lake Springfield concerts organized by Chris Albert. The events

featured Granny's, Family Tree, Chameleon, Shorty Dunn, The Rockets, and others.

Oct 6-7 – Granny's Bathwater @ the Landers Theatre w/ Family Tree, Zachary Beau, The Rockets, and Daybreak

Dec 15 – Martha Reeves backed by Granny's perform at Madison Square Garden.

BILL JONES: It was a very fun gig, but under horrific conditions, including doing two sold-out shows at the Madison Square Garden in a Golden Oldies show with The Four Seasons, Jay and the Americans, Martha, and maybe one more act. The last show was filmed and broadcast on ABC for about a year. Granny's never got paid for either MSG show or the television show. In between we played at a place called the Blue Baby Lounge in Bedford Stuyvesant, back when it was the most dangerous neighborhood in the US. We never got paid for that gig either, except in nightly dinners of turkey, mashed potatoes, and peas. We stayed at a motel called the Golden Gate Inn out on the Belt Parkway in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, ten people, two rooms, ten days.

We then went to Toronto to play at the wonderful Colonial Tavern for a week. We stayed at the Waldorf Astoria, ten people, one room. Benny [Mahan] bought a big sack of beans, and we lived on that all week. We then returned to NYC for the follow-up MSG gig.

TOM BECKER: We had to panhandle to get to Toronto, Canada. We had to go through a terrible snowstorm, and we stopped and panhandled at shopping centers to get to Toronto. Then we got there, and we ended up, all of us, in one motel room. It was a huge room, but still. All of us in one room. It was a maze of one-nighters. I think we had maybe a week or so in Toronto, maybe a week in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and everything else was one-nighters. Travel and play, travel and play, travel and play.

BILL JONES: We drove to Toronto after the second show. The highways were slick. I recall driving behind Tom Becker's van pulling a trailer, the trailer frighteningly and incessantly jackknifing through the Adirondack Mountains.

FRANK WESTBROOK: I showed up at AD Studios in Memphis because Granny's had been down there doing some demos. One thing led to another of doing some demos [with the hand], and then Bunge asked me, could I come to the airport lounge, which is the gig that they were playing. *Okay.* I show up over to the airport lounge. This is probably the first time I'd seen everybody in the whole band. That gig started on Tuesday and went to Saturday. I did that week and then Bunge asked me if I could go to New Orleans because that was going to be the next gig. And so, you know, on with the show.

Frank Westbrook was a member of Rare Earth, playing on *Midnight Lady* (Motown 1976), and he is on *Black Stallion Featuring Benny Mahan* (Black Stallion 1983). Westbrook has performed with Jackie Wilson, The Tiptones, Joe Simon, and many others.

1973

undated – “Michael My Friend,” composed and sung by Lew Taylor, is recorded at Dungeon Studio in Springfield. On backing vocals are Larry Lee and Michael Bunge.

DAVID WILSON: I remember being a senior in high school and playing in the jazz band in school, and my high school music teacher saying anybody who wants to earn extra credit go to Doling Park this Saturday and listen to Granny’s play. ‘If you go and you actually listen, I’ll give you extra credit.’ High school jazz banders’ perspective on what jazz is and how to play and emote those melodies and those chord progressions is rather limited compared with someone who is a veteran funk and jazz and rock musician like the folks in Granny’s. So I went and watched ‘em play, and they were just stunning. That was in ’73.

I approached Mike after their set was over to tell him why I was there and that I was so inspired by their music. He commented that you really just need three notes to write a memorable riff or melody. Then he gave me some notes, a specific group of intervals. He said, ‘You can have those three notes ... so go and write something.’ When he ‘gave’ me those three notes, he fingered them like he was playing the sax, you know, in the air. I still have those notes, the interval of those exact notes. I have a piece based on them. Always dug when our band opened for Granny’s. He was a generous, sweet, brilliant musician.

David Wilson is a multi-instrumentalist who has contributed to hundreds of recordings. He was a member of The Undergrass Boys and Radio Flyer, and in recent years, he has performed with Beyond Reach, Chowning Wilson & Lee, and The HigLeeWils.

ED BUNGE: One of the funny things I remember: My wife Suzy, who I miss every day, talked to Michael and he said, ‘Well, we’re having trouble getting money out of these clubs here, so that makes it a little hard to eat.’ Suzy was an executive secretary to the two owners of McDonalds restaurants in Springfield. They had four or five stores. She boxed up \$500 of McDonalds coupons and sent it to ‘em so those guys could eat. [laughs] That was 1973, I guess, ’73 or ’74. She said, ‘They’re not gonna be hungry. I’m not gonna have that.’ Those McDonalds stores were busy with Granny’s Bathwater.

Oct 5-6 – Granny’s Bathwater @ the Landers Theatre w/ the Ozark Mountain Daredevils, Hang Dog, and Con-Funk-Shun. The show is dubbed “Homegrown Reunion.”

1974

June – Granny’s Bathwater @ Rockaway Beach

JIM KERSHAW on the Rockaway Beach gig: The cut that's on the record [*Dig It or Book!*] from that particular session is the Billy Cobham instrumental, I think we called it 'Storm.' The tape that was done was recorded by myself and Larry Lee. There were about 20 of us in Springfield that came down. Branson was not Branson; it was literally a one stoplight town. Reed Spring and Rockaway Beach, all of that was still more of a fishing village than a tourist trap. So we had these 20 longhairs from Springfield down there and then a whole bunch of people in fishing hats with plastic mesh on 'em and that kind of a thing, trying to figure out who these ten guys on stage were and what the *hell* they were playing. [laughs] I guarantee you they had never heard anything like it. That was an absolute magical evening. That's when I first started getting involved in sound work as well as recording almost every gig they played.

July 6 – Granny's Bathwater performs at Ozark Empire Fairgrounds Speedway on a bill with the Edgar Winter Group, Rick Derringer, and Poco.

undated July – Martha Reeves & Granny's @ The Troubadour in Los Angeles, celebrating Reeves' birthday. Stevie Wonder sits in.

Sept – Martha Reeves & Granny's play a three-night stand at NYC's Bottom Line. *New York Times*: "Her band, Granny's Bathwater, from Memphis, is tight in a Tower of Powerish sort of way. Above all, she projects a warm blend of sexuality and shyness that her audience on Friday found impossible to resist."

Aug/Sept 1974 – Memphis drummer Ralph Toles joins the band.

FRANK WESTBROOK: Ralph [Toles] was a good friend of mine. Whenever Granny's was playing in Memphis, Ralph would always come out to the gig, and he asked me if they ever get an opening to let him know. There was an opening. He came up. I had to go talk to his mother about leaving Memphis and going up to Springfield [Aug or Sept 1974]. Just a creative, lovable soul.

TOM BECKER: Ralph and I were friends. We spent a Christmas together, because neither of us could make it to our hometowns. He was young, ambitious, and could have been one of the very best in the business.

1975

The band goes to New Orleans for another residency, and late in the year, or in early 1976, they go to Memphis to record at Ardent Studios. Six songs from Ardent can be heard on *Dig It or Book!*.

March – A six-month residency begins at Steve's Sweetwater Inn [3138 E Sunshine]. The venue

was established in 1973 by restaurateur Steve Branstetter, who sold it in 1979 whereupon the business became WF Cody's.

JIM KERSHAW: They were at residence at Steve's Sweetwater Inn for probably six months, from March till September or thereabouts in the summer of '75. If I could turn the clock back to any one point in my life, it would be that six months. I never had more fun in my life.

After we got through playing, there's a law that everybody but the workers had to be out of the bars by 1:30. So we'd usually leave the bar 1:30 or 2 o'clock, and once or twice a month, they'd come over to my house after one of the gigs, usually Saturday night. I had an extensive audio system because that was my profession at the time, along with both a reel to reel and a cassette recorder, and a bunch of albums. We'd sit there and listen to music till dawn. We'd be recording a cassette for Michael for songs that they wanted to cover. And then two weeks later when I'd mix the band, I'd hear them.

1976

Feb 1 – Granny's Bathwater participates in a concert at McDonald Arena aimed for students at the cost of \$1. Dean Billingsley & the Bicentennial Blues Band, Tim Burrows & Friends, and portions of U.F.O. Church were also on the bill. The concert was organized by SMS student Burrows along with Billingsley and Dan Faggard.

Feb 7 – Granny's performs at Dollars for Dystrophy at Weiser Gymnasium at Drury College. Proceeds benefitted the Muscular Dystrophy Association of Springfield.

March/April – Jon R Goin departs the band and is replaced by Jason Lemaster

May 8 – Granny's backs up violinist Papa John Creach (Jefferson Starship, Hot Tuna) at Dattola's Farm (25 miles west of Springfield).

June 15 – Michael Bunge, 29, and Granny's drummer Ralph Toles, 22, are killed in a motor vehicle crash at National and Grand in Springfield.

After

Granny's Bathwater carried on for a couple of years, but it was unsustainable without the originating energy and vision of Michael Bunge, and the members dispersed. Reunion performances have taken place intermittently from the 1980s to present, most recently at The Riff in Springfield on Oct. 18, 2019.

In 2002, Chris Albert, Eddy Bunge, Jim Kershaw, and Mike Odell produced a set of Granny's Bathwater recordings titled *Dig It or Book!* on Hideaway Records, the lone official release of music featuring Michael Bunge. Long out of print on CD, *Dig It or Book!* is widely available on digital platforms.

Members of Granny's and many other musical luminaries of the Ozarks have participated in the long-running oral history project Music Monday of the Ozarks, a nonprofit organization devoted to preserving and promoting the musical heritage of the region and to educating the public. The sessions can be seen at Music Monday of the Ozarks' YouTube page.



LARRY GETZ: It was the most fun I've ever had. We had an inspirational band that sometimes would swing so hard it would make cold chills go all over your body, and it happened to the crowd at the same time. (*News-Leader* 6-29-2017)

ED BUNGE: To be able to hold that band together for those years, that is tough. When you try to work around bookings, and you don't work for two weeks, people are wanting money. They gotta eat, and so they start finding other gigs, and you've got to try to hold it all together, and he did it. He did it. I always admired that in him. He was a magnet that they wanted to stay with. 'We'll do this. We'll tough it out.'

CURT HARGIS ('Bugs'): Michael was not a mean guy, but he was a guy that was driven and knew what music was. He was pretty unforgiving actually. I played harmonica and still do a little bit, but I know when given the chance to play with the band, unsure of myself and nervous with stage fright and all those things, he said, 'Bugs, man. We want you to play with us, but we can't wait on you. You get up here and you play.' I was trying to find the note or where I was going to fit into these songs and being respectful of my space and be a harp player. He said, 'Man, we're not gonna wait on you. We want you up here. *Play* that sumbitch.' It was one of those deals where you get pushed in the creek and you either learn how to swim ... or good luck.

TOM BECKER: It was an experience I will cherish, and I have cherished, my whole life. That song 'We Gotta Live Together' [recorded live at The Ivanhoe in 1972], that's the most meaningful song that I ever played. I keep playing it over and over. The group, it just meant so much. I loved every one of them. Michael was one of the most soulful people I ever met. What he said, he meant, and he knew how to put it into music. The one thing I will always have is the love for every musician in Granny's Bathwater, love for their musicianship and as human beings. We gotta live together – and that's exactly what we did – making fun music and unreal stories that will never be forgotten.

JIM KERSHAW: I'll never-ever forget that phone call I got the morning of June 16th after that

accident. I've got goosebumps head to toe right now. It was part of that that drove me to spend a fair amount of to do this disc [*Dig It or Book!*] and bring these people back as close as I could do it because those were magic times, and that was a magic band. Live, they were absolutely incredible. They were a big, big part of my life. They were a big part of my friendships at the time, certainly a driving force musically in my life. Hell, I still got a house full of horn bands as a result of the influences I got from them going all the way back to that high school dance in 1967.

RICK WEAVER: Michael quintessentially was the force of Granny's in that Michael's love of rhythm & blues, blues in particular, jazz, that kind of at that time unheard of chordal changes and that style of music, that's what he wanted, and we all happened to want the same thing. When we came together, it was kind of a magical thing. To me at least, when we played happenstance at the same time and the same place and then went on the road, it was as if we had all been in another life and planned on meeting up and doing this and here we were. We all had a sense of each other. It was an immediate attraction. We couldn't get enough of what we were doing. It was a very special.

Sources

The interviews for this timeline history were conducted by Michael Kuelker between 2015 and 2023. The Larry Getz quotation ("most fun I've ever had") comes from the *Springfield News-Leader's* article "Ozark Traditions: Niches for Jazz, Bathwater for R&B" by Ed Peaco on June 29, 2017. The *New York Times* review quote from 1974 is derived from "New Image Shown By Martha Reeves At the Bottom Line" Sept. 15, 1974 (p. 56).

GRANNY'S BATHWATER: THE ROSTER OF MUSICIANS

(Roughly Chronological Order)

Michael Bunge (1947-1976)

David Pease (1942-2017)

Lloyd Hicks (1947-2017)

John Dillon

Larry Lee

Don Shipps (1952-2004)

Jon R Goin

Bill Jones

Larry Getz (1941- 2022)

Rick Weaver

Benny Mahan (1944-2009)

“Chaino” Sababa Bahutu (1927-1999)

Tom Becker

Greg Solomon

Frank Westbrook

Melvin Robinson

Lew Taylor

Ronnie Williams

Buddy Causey

Jimmy Prima (d. 2018)

Jason LeMasters

Ralph Toles (d. 1976)

Ike Stubblefield (1952-2021)

Carmine Delligatti

Charlie McCall (1950-2002)