

RENT'S DUE HISTORY: BY CHARLIE YOUNG



Gerry Mulé,
Steve Wolf,
Bill & Scott Taylor
(in front of
Ernie's Place,
1974).

with dozens of stars including **Joan Amatrading, Jeff Beck**, members of **The Band, Kenny Rankin**, and the late **Steve Goodman**, as well as blues and jazz greats such as **John Lee Hooker** and **Woody Shaw**.

Before his music career, Holland worked primarily as a writer, and he returned to writing after the Rent's Due years as the Washington Bureau Chief of **Billboard**, covering the legislative beat. Even while earning a steady paycheck, though, he kept playing piano and writing songs.

By the middle of the '90s, Holland was back in area clubs, this time with a bluesy, jazz-oriented group. He also produced a collection of new songs, **Players, Fools & Thieves**. This fine CD featured vocals by Holland and such guest singers as Washington Area Music Award (WAMA) winner **Mary Ann Redmond**, as well as horn stars **Bruce Swaim** and **Ron Holloway** on the instrumentals. Area fans acknowledged Holland's return to the music scene by nominating him and the CD for five 1995 WAMA prizes, and awarding him the "Best Traditional Male Jazz Vocalist" WAMMIE.

The tracks on **Way Overdue** represent some of the best (and some of the rarest) recordings from the Rent's Due era. **"Anxiety"** is a dark but wonderfully free-floating, rhythm-driven track recorded in the late '70s, remixed by Holland and John Jennings in the mid-'80s, and finally released here for the first time. It was worth the wait. Holland's impeccable delivery of his tightly-rhymed lyrics is a perfect companion to the driving drums and bass, while the late Larry Strother's funky sax adds fun to a song full of fear and loathing.

"Do the Mambo" follows. A purely fun tune (Holland calls it a "Huey Smith-on-downers song"), it garnered airplay on many progressive stations across the country.

Pete Kennedy, Rick Anderson, Wade Matthews, Bill & Larry Strother (at Desperado's, 1977).



Call it the Bill Holland School of Music....

From 1974 to 1981, Bill Holland's Rent's Due Band was a popular and critically acclaimed fixture on the Washington D.C. music scene. Many graduates of his band went on to record with nationally-known artists as diverse as Frank Zappa, The Meters, The Pointer Sisters, Emmylou Harris, Tony Williams Lifetime, Nils Lofgren, Lyle Lovett and Mary Chapin Carpenter, to name a few.

Holland drew rave reviews throughout the Rent's Due days. In praising his "fine debut" LP, veteran critic Richard Harrington accurately noted that "the variety of his songs, the assortment of moods and arrangements, is one of the album's strong points...reflecting both a gutsiness and a gentility missing in too many of today's singer-songwriters." Critic Joe Sasfy called Holland "probably



**Carl Holzapfel, John Jennings,
Bill & Gary Starr (1976)**

Washington's finest singer-songwriter... (with) a scotch and soda weariness... that lets his music lull you from the bottom while the lyrics sink in from the top." And the **Village Voice's** Robert Christgau said it plainly enough: "If I were an A&R man, " he wrote, "I'd say sign him." (Several major labels came very close, but the big deal never materialized).

Rent's Due also became a favorite opening act in the Washington D.C. area, working

Gerry Mulé's guitar work here is reminiscent of Jerry Garcia's best playing, while Holland's vocal is a true treasure, especially the purposely tinny "hello operator" section, and the echoed "cellblock nine" bit. One of Holland's most literary lyrics, and best vocal efforts, "**Cogito Ergo Sum Ne,**" follows in the previously unreleased studio version.

Affectionately called "Mr. Descartes" by some fans, the track is an excellent showcase for Larry Strother on sax, and Pete Kennedy, a terrific guitarist who went on to critical accolades in various musical settings of his own and with others, including **Nancy Griffith.**

Kennedy also plays on "**Night of Wonder,**" a stunningly-produced piece of romantic jazz. Holland's words and understated electric piano build an atmosphere of autumnal elegance, while Strother's sax solo grabs the listener's ear for a breezy journey before dropping back to the quiet flow of the tune.

"**Blue Fire**" is the first track here featuring **John Jennings,** the versatile and talented guitarist and producer best known as **Mary Chapin Carpenter's** right-hand man. Another previously unreleased song, this is a mysterious and beautiful ballad about lovers "as different as the snow and rain." On "**Talk That Talk**" Jennings provides two crisp solos, one acoustic, the other electric, and the rest of the band plays

with impressive tightness.

Holland describes "**Honey I Need Your Lovin**" as "soul-oriented...with a more compressed studio sound" than most of his songs of the period. Today he cites the beauty of Jennings' "miniature" guitar break on the track.

"**Hamburger Heaven**" is another clever lyric with sardonically delivered vocals by Holland, who says the song wasn't simply a prophetic indictment of the fast food satura-



tion of America, but a commentary on the commercial currents of the music industry as well. **"Feel That Fire,"** from the final Rent's Due studio sessions for *It's About Time*, is marked by great horns and one of Holland's strongest vocal performances.

"Spring Song (Song for Marianne)" is a simple, jazz-tinged love ballad inspired by Holland's wife, dating back to his first album twenty years ago. As the lyrics say, this is "a song that everyone should hear." **"Dr. Naked Goes to Washington,"** the funky, tight instrumental Holland co-wrote with guitarist Keith Grimes and tenor man Strother, makes its first appearance here. ("Dr. Naked" was Strother's stage name, a reference to the wilder side of "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington.")

"Old Leroy" was a musical word of caution to Holland's friend Roy Buchanan, the now-deceased guitar great who was, at the time, drinking heavily, using drugs, and living with a "graveyard outlook." The progressive chordal structure of "Old Leroy" owes more to hard bop than to the blues of Roy Buchanan, especially with the horn arrangement by Kurt McGettrick. The song stands as one of Holland's most heartfelt compositions.

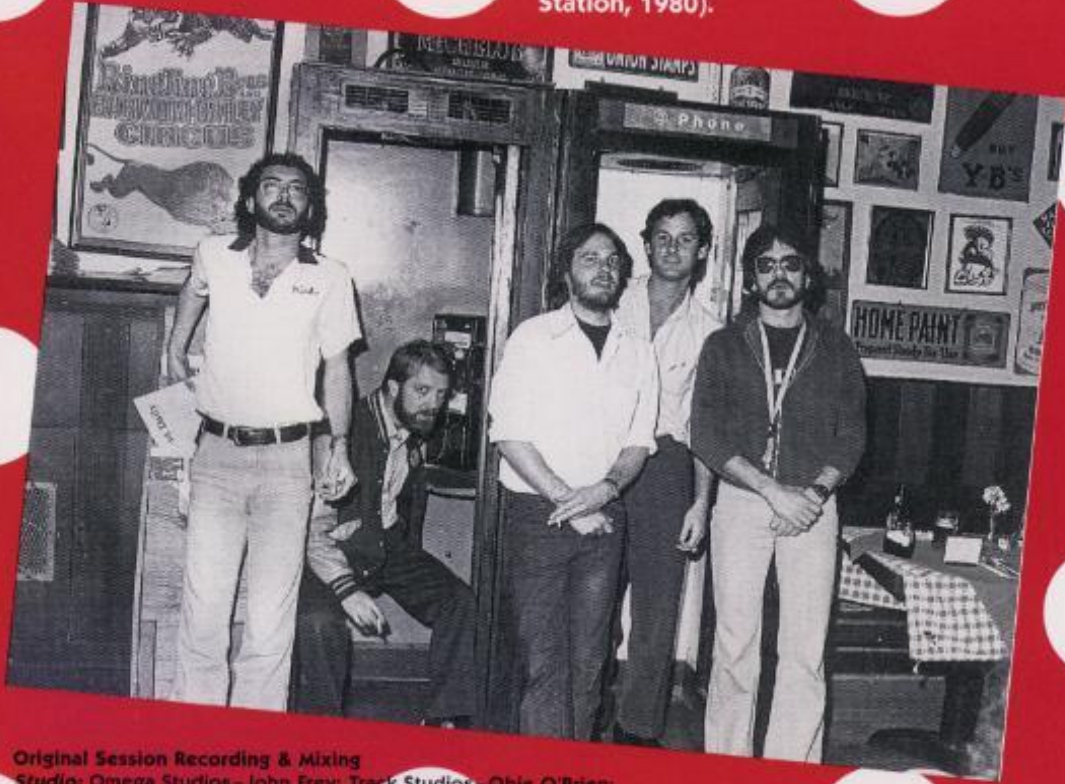
"Nothing But A Gas" also makes its debut appearance on this CD. Holland admits now that rather than having to choose between Tommy Hannum's beautiful pedal steel overdubs, he submitted to the "more is more" school of production by using both. One of The Rent's Due Band's most haunting recordings, and a truly flawless production, **"Oh Sweet September"** features a beautiful but spare piano performance.

The last two tracks on *Way Overdue* are live recordings from the famous Washington D.C. showcase club, the Cellar Door. **"Oh Child"** and **"Run or Fight"** are great examples of the punch and urgency of The Rent's Due Band. The spirit of these two songs demonstrates why **Bonnie Raitt** sent a bunch of her fans (from a late '70s concert in Harrisonburg, Virginia) off to see Holland and his ensemble at a local club, where Raitt wound up joining the group onstage.

With this CD it is finally possible to bring Bill Holland and The Rent's Due Band back for a well-deserved encore — **an overdue one, indeed!**

— **Charles D. Young**

Paul Bell, Bill, Chuck
Sullivan, Ron Newmyer
& Larry Strother
(at Columbia
Station, 1980).



Original Session Recording & Mixing

Studio: Omega Studios—John Frey; Track Studios—Obie O'Brien;

Sounds Reasonable Studios—Joe Bergman, Jim Harmon. Bias Studios—John Jennings.

Live: Sounds Reasonable Studios (for WGTB-FM "Take One" broadcast)—Terry Knight; Cellar Door (sound-board mix for WAVA-FM broadcast)—Gary Jackson. **Digital Transfers:** Gantt Kushner, Gizmo Recording;

Tom Lepson, on "Oh, Child" and "Run or Fight." **Album Re-Mastering:** David Glasser at Airshow, Springfield, Va.

Album Design: Wickham & Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C.