

Long John Baldry

John William "Long John" Baldry (12 January 1941 – 21 July 2005) was an English musician and actor. In the 1960s, he was one of the first British vocalists to sing the blues in clubs and shared the stage with many British musicians including the Rolling Stones and the Beatles. Before achieving stardom, Rod Stewart and Elton John were members of bands led by Baldry. He enjoyed pop success in 1967 when "Let the Heartaches Begin" reached No. 1 in the UK, and in Australia where his duet with Kathi McDonald "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" reached No. 2 in 1980.

Baldry lived in Canada from the late 1970s until his death. He continued to make records there, and do voiceover work. Two of his best-known voice roles were as Dr. Ivo Robotnik in *Adventures of Sonic the Hedgehog*, and as KOMPLEX in *Bucky O'Hare and the Toad Wars*.

Early life

John William Baldry was born at East Haddon Hall, East Haddon, Northamptonshire, which was serving as a makeshift wartime maternity ward, on 12 January 1941, the son of William James Baldry (1915–1990), a Metropolitan Police constable and his wife, Margaret Louisa (née; 1915–1989); their usual address was recorded as 18 Frinton Road, East Ham. His early life was spent in Edgware, Middlesex where he attended Camrose Primary School until the age of 11, after which he attended Downer Grammar School (now Canons High School).

Baldry grew to 6 ft 7 in (2.01 m), resulting in the nickname "Long John". Baldry appeared quite regularly in the early 1960s in the Gyre & Gimble coffee lounge, around the corner from Charing Cross railway station, and at the Bluesville R. & B. Club, Manor House, London, also Klooks Kleek (Railway Hotel, West Hampstead). He appeared weekly for some years at Eel Pie Island on the Thames at Twickenham and also appeared at the Station Hotel in Richmond, one of the Rolling Stones' earliest venues.

In the early 1960s, he sang with Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated, with whom he recorded the first British blues album in 1962 *R&B from the Marquee*. At stages, Mick Jagger, Jack Bruce and Charlie Watts were members of this band while Keith Richards and Brian Jones played on stage, although none played on the *R&B at the Marquee* album. When The Rolling Stones made their debut at the Marquee Club in July 1962, Baldry put together a group to support them. Later, Baldry was the announcer introducing the Stones on their U.S.-only live album *Got Live If You Want It!*, in 1966.

Baldry became friendly with Paul McCartney after a show at the Cavern Club in Liverpool in the early 1960s, leading to an invitation to sing on one of the Beatles 1964 TV specials *Around The Beatles*. In the special, Baldry performs "Got My Mojo Workin'" and a medley of songs with members of the Vernons Girls trio; in the latter, the Beatles are shown singing along in the audience.

In 1963, Baldry joined the Cyril Davies R&B All Stars with Nicky Hopkins playing piano. He took over in 1964 after the death of Cyril Davies, and the group became Long John Baldry and his Hoochie Coochie Men featuring Rod Stewart on vocals

and Geoff Bradford on guitar. Stewart was recruited when Baldry heard him busking a Muddy Waters song at Twickenham Station after Stewart had been to a Baldry gig at Eel Pie Island. Long John Baldry became a regular fixture on Sunday nights at Eel Pie Island from then onwards, fronting a series of bands.

In 1965, the Hoochie Coochie Men became Steampacket with Baldry and Stewart as male vocalists, Julie Driscoll as the female vocalist and Brian Auger on Hammond organ. After Steampacket broke up in 1966, Baldry formed Bluesology featuring Reg Dwight on keyboards and Elton Dean, later of Soft Machine, as well as Caleb Quaye on guitar. Dwight, when he began to record as a solo artist, adopted the name Elton John, his first name from Elton Dean and his surname from John Baldry.

Following the departure of Elton John and Bluesology, Baldry was left without a backup band. Attending a show in the Mecca at Shaftesbury Avenue, he saw a five-piece harmony group called *Chimera* from Plymouth, who had recently turned professional. He approached them after their set to tell them how impressed he was by their vocal harmonies and that they would be ideal to back him on the cabaret circuit he was currently embarked on, which they did.

Solo artist

In 1967, he recorded a pop song "Let the Heartaches Begin" that went to number one in Britain, followed by a 1968 top 20 hit titled "Mexico", which was the theme of the UK Olympic team that year. "Let the Heartaches Begin" made the lower reaches of the *Billboard* Hot 100 in the US. Baldry was still touring, doing gigs with Bluesology, but the band refused to back his rendition of "Let the Heartaches Begin", and left the stage while he performed to a backing-tape played on a large Revox tape-recorder.

In 1971, John and Stewart each produced one side of *It Ain't Easy* which became Baldry's most popular album and made the top 100 of the US album chart. The album featured "Don't Try to Lay No Boogie Woogie on the King of Rock and Roll" which became his most successful song in the US. Baldry's first tour of the US was at this time. The band included Micky Waller, Ian Armitt, Pete Sears, and Sammy Mitchell. Stewart and John would again co-produce his 1972 album *Everything Stops For Tea* which also made the lower reaches of the US album charts. The same year, Baldry worked with ex-Procol Harum guitarist Dave Ball. The 1979 album *Baldry's Out* was recorded in Canada, which he released at Zolly's Forum; a nightclub in Oshawa, underneath the Oshawa Shopping Centre.

In a 1997 interview with a German television programme Baldry claimed to be the last person to see singer Marc Bolan before Bolan's death on 16 September 1977, having conducted an interview with the fellow singer for an American production company, he says, just before Bolan was killed in a car accident.

Move to Canada, later career

After time in New York City and Los Angeles in 1978, Baldry lived in Dundas, Ontario from 1980 to 1984 before settling in Vancouver, British Columbia, where he became a Canadian citizen. He toured the west coast, as well as the US Northwest. Baldry also toured the Canadian east.

In 1976, he teamed with Seattle singer Kathi McDonald who became part of the Long John Baldry Band, touring Canada and the US. In 1979 the pair recorded a version of The Righteous Brothers' "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'", following which

McDonald became part of his touring group for two decades. The song entered the US Billboard charts and was a No. 2 hit in Australia in 1980. He last recorded with the Stony Plain label. His 1997 album *Right To Sing The Blues* won a Juno Award in the Blues Album of the Year category in the Juno Awards of 1997.

In 2003 Baldry headlined the British Legends of Rhythm and Blues UK tour, alongside Zoot Money, Ray Dorset and Paul Williams. Baldry's final United States performance was held at Barristers Hall in Columbus, Ohio, on 19 July 2004. Baldry's final UK Tour as 'The Long John Baldry Trio' concluded with a performance on Saturday 13 November 2004 at The King's Lynn Arts Centre, King's Lynn, Norfolk, England. The trio consisted of LJB, Butch Coulter on harmonica and Dave Kelly on slide guitar.

Personal life

Baldry was openly gay during the early 1960s, at least amongst his friends and industry peers. However, he did not make a formal public acknowledgement of this until the 1970s. This was possibly because until 1967 in Britain, male homosexual conduct was still a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment.

In 1968, Elton John tried to commit suicide after relationship problems with a woman, Linda Woodrow. His lyricist Bernie Taupin and Baldry found him, and Baldry talked him out of marrying her. The song "Someone Saved My Life Tonight" from *Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy* was about the experience. The name "Sugar Bear" in the song is a reference to Baldry. Baldry had a brief relationship with lead guitarist of the Kinks, Dave Davies.

In 1978, his then-upcoming album *Baldry's Out* announced his formal coming out, and he addressed sexuality problems with a cover of Canadian songwriter Barbra Amesbury's "A Thrill's a Thrill".

Health and death

During the mid-1970s, Baldry suffered from depression exacerbated by his collapsing career (particularly the failure of his 1973 album *Good to Be Alive*) and separation from an Austrian boyfriend who was required to leave the United Kingdom when his visitor visa expired. As a result, he developed an addiction to alcohol and painkillers.

Following an incident in which he was allegedly mugged in Amsterdam, Baldry was found barely conscious by his sister, Margaret, in their Muswell Hill home, having overdosed on Valium and alcohol in an apparent suicide attempt. Baldry was institutionalized for less than a week, reportedly stopping his dependencies cold turkey.

By the release of his 1986 album *Silent Treatment*, Baldry suffered from crippling gout – which required several pairs of special shoes – as well as bronchial and sinus issues. Shortly after moving into a condominium on Vancouver's 4th Avenue in 1995, Baldry was hospitalized and underwent surgery for a bleeding stomach ulcer. He quit smoking afterwards and ceased performing in clubs that allowed smoking. During a performance in Banbury promoting his 1999 live album *Live, Long John Baldry Trio*, Baldry was hospitalized for another bleeding ulcer caused and obscured by his arthritis medication indometacin. A few days after being discharged from Horton General Hospital, he developed agonizing gout across his body, prompting Rod Stewart to admit him to the London Clinic, where he stayed for three weeks.

In 2002, Baldry remarked that he had developed spinal osteoporosis and dorsocervical lipodystrophy. He underwent hip replacement surgery to treat his osteoporosis, after which Tom Lavin of the Powder Blues Band noted that he appeared healthier.

Baldry died on 21 July 2005 at Vancouver General Hospital after a four-month battle with a chest infection. He was 64 years old. He was survived by his partner, Felix "Oz" Rexach, his brother, Roger, and his sister, Margaret. According to Rexach, Baldry fell ill with pneumonia after returning from a European tour earlier that year, and his infection developed antibiotic resistance.