

Spirit

Spirit was an American rock band founded in 1967 and based in Los Angeles, California. Their most commercially successful single in the United States was "I Got a Line on You", but they were also known for their albums including their self-titled debut album, *The Family That Plays Together*, *Clear*, and *Twelve Dreams of Dr. Sardonicus*.

Original lineup:

The original lineup of the group evolved from an earlier Los Angeles band the Red Roosters, which included Randy California (guitars, vocals), Mark Andes (bass), and Jay Ferguson (vocals, percussion). With the addition of California's stepfather Ed Cassidy (drums) and keyboard player John Locke, the new band was originally named the *Spirits Rebellious* (after a book by Kahlil Gibran) but was soon shortened simply to Spirit. In 1966 California had also played with Jimi Hendrix (then known as Jimmy James) in his band, Jimmy James and the Blue Flames.

Cassidy was recognizable by his shaven head (hence his nickname "Mr. Skin", later the name of a Spirit song) and his fondness for wearing black. He was about twenty years older than the rest of the group (born in 1923). His earlier career was primarily in jazz and included stints with Cannonball Adderley, Gerry Mulligan, Roland Kirk, Thelonious Monk, and Lee Konitz. He was a founding member of Rising Sons with Taj Mahal and Ry Cooder.

1960s:

Early demo recordings by the band were produced by their Topanga Canyon roommate Barry Hansen, later known as radio host Dr. Demento. In August 1967, record producer Lou Adler signed the band to his label Ode Records. The group's first album, *Spirit*, was released in 1968. "Mechanical World" was released as a single (it lists the playing time merely as "very long"). The album was a hit, reaching No. 31 on the Billboard 200 and staying on the chart for seven months. The album displayed jazz influences, as well as using elaborate string arrangements (not found on their subsequent recordings) and is the most overtly psychedelic of their albums.

The band capitalized on the success of their first album with another single, "I Got a Line on You". Released in November 1968, a month before their second album, *The Family That Plays Together*, it became their biggest hit single, reaching No. 25 on the charts (#28 in Canada). The album matched its success, reaching No. 22. In December, they appeared at the Denver Auditorium with support band Led Zeppelin, who soon after incorporated parts of Spirit's song "Fresh Garbage" in an extended medley during their early 1969 concerts. Spirit also appeared with Led Zeppelin at two outdoor music festivals in July 1969. Jimmy Page's use of a theremin has been attributed to his seeing Randy California use one that he had mounted to his amplifier;^[3] and *Guitar World* magazine stated "California's most enduring legacy may well be the fingerpicked acoustic theme of the song 'Taurus', which Jimmy Page lifted virtually note for note for the introduction to 'Stairway to Heaven'."^[4] Page may have reworked a riff from "Taurus" while composing "Stairway to Heaven"; *The Independent* remarked upon the similarity in 1997. In 2014, Mark Andes, and a trust acting on behalf of Randy California, filed a copyright infringement suit against Led Zeppelin in an attempt to obtain a writing credit for "Stairway to Heaven". Page denies copying "Taurus".

After the success of their early records, the group was asked by French film director Jacques Demy to record the soundtrack to his film *Model Shop*, and they also made a brief appearance in the film. Their third album, *Clear*, released in 1969, reached No. 55 on the charts.

"1984" and the Sardonicus era:

After the release of *Clear*, the group recorded the song "1984", written by California and produced by the group on their own. After being released in February 1970, it placed at No. 69 on the Billboard charts. The song would finally see general release on *The Best of Spirit* in 1973.

In 1970, Spirit started working on their LP *Twelve Dreams of Dr. Sardonicus*. On the recommendation of Neil Young, the band chose David Briggs as the producer. It was a prolific time for the group's writers, and the album was released in late 1970. The album included Randy California's "Nature's Way", which was written in an afternoon when the group was playing at the Fillmore West in San Francisco.

Epic released an early mix of "Animal Zoo" as a single, but this only made it to No. 97 on the charts. Like the Who's *Tommy* and Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*, *Twelve Dreams of Dr. Sardonicus* is critically regarded as a landmark of art rock, with a tapestry of literary themes about the fragility of life and the complexity of the human experience, illustrated by recurring lyric "life has just begun", and continued the group's pioneering exploration of environmental issues in their lyrics (cf. "Fresh Garbage"). The album is also notable for its inventive production and the use of a modular Moog synthesizer.

1971–73:

After the group undertook a promotional tour to support the album *Twelve Dreams of Dr. Sardonicus*, Ferguson and Andes left the group, forming Jo Jo Gunne. California had accused them of plotting to take over the group. Their final gig with Spirit occurred on January 30, 1970, which almost ended with a fist-fight.

Bass player John Arliss initially took Andes' place. California was still in the line-up, but he had suffered a head injury from a horse riding accident and was unable to tour. Bass player Al Staehely was recruited by Locke and Cassidy, and they toured briefly before deciding that they had to add a guitar player to do the music justice. Al's brother, John Christian (Chris) Staehely, auditioned for the band and was quickly brought on board, departing the Texas rock group "Krackerjack". Brothers John and Al, along with Cassidy and Locke, recorded the 1972 album *Feedback* in Columbia/Epic's Hollywood studios. It was a different turn for the group, showing more of a country rock influence pervading their jazzier tendencies, but it also met with a mild commercial response, reaching No. 63 in the charts (the same position that *Sardonicus* reached). The tour for *Feedback* proceeded very well for much of that year, but with musical roots that went different directions, eventually both Cassidy and Locke left the lineup. The Staehely brothers recruited Stu Perry to play drums. While the tour was well received critically, Spirit disbanded in mid-1973. The brothers would release their own album, *Sta-Hay-Lee*, in 1973.

California, meanwhile, had recorded and issued his first solo album, *Kapt. Kopter and the (Fabulous) Twirly Birds*, also on Epic Records in late 1972. The album had a hard-rock sound. It featured appearances by Noel Redding (as "Clit McTorius"), Leslie Sampson (the

drummer from Noel's band *Road*, as "Henry Manchovitz"), and Cassidy. After launching a brief tour to support the album, a follow-up album was recorded with Cassidy, entitled *The Adventures Of Kaptain Kopter And Commander Cassidy In Potato Land*. Although Locke made a guest appearance, it was not intended as a Spirit album at the time. However, Epic rejected the completed album. California moved to Molokai, Hawaii.

In 1973, Epic Records decided to re-issue the group's first and third albums as a two-fer entitled *Spirit*, in response to *Sardonicus* continuing to sell well despite being off the charts. That same year, Epic also issued a compilation album *The Best of Spirit*, as well as releasing the *Sardonicus* track "Mr. Skin" as a single. "Mr. Skin" became a minor hit, and the two-fer hit the charts (along with *The Best Of Spirit*). There was new demand for the group; Cassidy decided to capitalize on this and put together an entirely new group for touring purposes, which lasted throughout the year.

The Mercury years (1974–79):

In 1974 Cassidy made it a point to find and re-establish contact with Randy California. He eventually persuaded California to return to the mainland and give the band another shot. Andes worked with the duo for a while, but never intended to stay, as he was in the process of working with the group Firefall at the same time. Sound engineer/bassist Barry Keene, who had been a personal sound engineer for Frank Zappa, joined the band as its bass player.

In early 1975, the group was supposed to be the opening act for Ten Years After at a show in Florida, but when Ten Years After backed out at the last minute, Spirit was granted permission to take over the theatre for the evening. After going around to local radio stations to promote the show and setting a low (\$3) ticket price, Spirit managed to sell out the 3,000 seat theatre. Using the profits from the show, they booked out as much time as they could at Studio 70 in Tampa, Florida.

After recording a large amount of material at the studio, their manager at the time, Marshall Berle (the nephew of Milton Berle), offered the material to Mercury Records. On the basis of the material, the group was offered a contract, and a double-album entitled *Spirit of '76* was culled from the material and released in May 1975. The album garnered a bit of FM airplay, so they quickly followed it up with *Son of Spirit*, released early the next year and featuring many songs taken from the same sessions.

For the tour in support of *Son of Spirit*, Locke re-joined the group. Eventually, Andes returned to the line-up as well, and though Ferguson declined to participate in the group reunion at first, the band (with the addition of Mark's brother Matt Andes as a second guitarist) recorded an album entitled *Farther Along*.

Final reunion

The album returned the group to the US charts one last time, peaking at No. 179. For a few shows at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, Ferguson re-joined the group. Disaster struck, however, when an inebriated Neil Young walked onto stage to join the band during the final show's encore of "Like a Rolling Stone". California would later claim that he didn't recognize Young, but at the time was angry with Young for upstaging what he saw as his own comeback. California moved over in front of Neil and began pushing him backwards, away from the microphone, back past the drumkit and offstage. Young, along with a host of Hollywood music and film personas, including Hal Ashby, had been hanging out with the

band backstage before they went on, and Locke had invited Young to join them in their encore. When Locke saw California pushing Young offstage, he got up from his piano and said that he had had enough and didn't ever want to play with California again, walking off stage. Locke was a personal friend of Young. Cassidy initially quelled the situation by leaving his kit and physically pulling both California and Young back onstage to the microphone to close out the song, asking the audience to sing along with them. The audience stood, stunned at the scene that was playing out before them. There was no encore with band members arguing backstage over what had unfolded. The damage had been done, and the reunion ended that night.

Undaunted, California assembled what was basically a solo album as a Spirit album under the name *Future Games: A Magical Kahauna Dream*. Mercury released it in early 1977, but it received no promotion, and it ended what little bit of commercial momentum the group might have regained. It also (initially) ended their contract with Mercury. At the same time, former bandmate Jay Ferguson was having success in his solo career in late 1970s with the hits "Thunder Island" and "Shakedown Cruise".

The group, now down to a trio with new bassist Larry "Fuzzy" Knight, toured extensively throughout 1978, and recorded a live album (1978) that was released (in slightly different configurations) in several countries by different independent labels. It was not a commercial success, and after the tour's end in 1979, California left the group again.

The 1980s and beyond:

After Spirit's demise, California put together another group with the intent of restarting his solo career. This was short-lived, but while in England, a fan presented him with a petition of 5,000 signatures, requesting the release of the *Potato Land* album from 1973. In 1981, California put out a half-hearted version of the album, featuring only part of the original album (and what was there featured overdubbing done after the fact) with the addition of a few unrelated songs that were recorded in the late 1970s. It was released in the U.S. by Rhino Records (being one of the first albums that they released) and in the UK by Beggars Banquet Records, where it actually reached No. 40 in the UK Albums Chart (the only time they would chart in the UK), possibly due to the album being played by BBC Radio 1.

California's second solo album, *Euro-American*, was released in 1982 by Beggar's Banquet featuring a line up including British Drummer Preston Heyman and he headed the bill with Heyman at 1982 Glastonbury Festival much of the footage from which can be found on YouTube including a performance of the Bob Dylan classic song Like A Rolling Stone. At this concert the power generator failed, it was said because the operator had fallen asleep stoned and neglected to refill the fuel - forcing Drummer Preston Heyman to perform a 20 minute solo while the situation was rectified.

He would release two more solo albums during the decade.

In December 1982, the original Spirit line-up re-formed and recorded several songs from their first four albums (as well as a few new tracks) live on a soundstage. Though the album *Spirit of '84* was initially recorded for an audiophile label, Mercury Records re-signed the band (and gave California a solo deal) and released the album in 1984. The album was only a moderate success. Some of the original members went to do other projects, but California and Cassidy continued touring with new members Scott Monahan on keyboards and Dave Waterbury on bass.

California headed to England and recorded his third solo album, the contemporary hard rock *Restless* for which his friend British Drummer Preston Heyman (who played on the track "Jack Rabbit") secured a deal with Phonogram for in late 1985. Following a few live dates in England, California returned to the United States and resumed touring extensively with Cassidy, Monahan, and Waterbury. There was one more solo album from California: a collection of material entitled *Shattered Dreams* that was released in 1986.

In 1988 California secured a deal for Spirit with I.R.S. Records, and Locke rejoined the band. They recorded an album entitled *Rapture in the Chambers* at the Malibu recording studio Nileland, where studio owner/engineer, bass player, and vocalist Mike Nile was asked to join the band. The group toured extensively with California, Cassidy, and Nile, being joined by Locke, Monahan, and George Valuck on keyboards, but the album failed to return them to the charts.

California, Cassidy, and Nile continued to tour as a power trio, and self-released *Tent of Miracles* in 1990. Nile contributed heavily to the album writing songs and sharing lead vocals. Spirit continued working almost continually for the next six years. Though they would release very few albums of new material during the decade, the group was always either recording or touring. California had his own home recording studio since the early 1980s, though he had been making home recordings for years prior to that. This came to an end on January 2, 1997, when California drowned off the coast of Hawaii. He had been surfing with his son, who got caught in a riptide. He managed to push his son to safety but ended up losing his own life.

Though Cassidy played a few dates with some former Spirit alumni under the name "Spirit Revisited" in 1998, California's death was effectively the end of the group. Locke died of complications resulting from lymphoma in August 2006. Cassidy died on 6 December 2012 in San Jose, California, at age 89.