

Top 40 tribute band based in Tustin reunites for Concerts in the Park series

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The Moods practice for their Concert in the Park appearance.

They are Tom Richardson, left, Ron Herrick, Ron Blatt and Paul Dustin.

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By SUSAN CHRISTIAN GOULDING / STAFF WRITER

It was a game-changing decade for popular music.

Liverpool gave birth to the Beatles. Hawthorne hatched the Beach Boys. Detroit spawned the Temptations. Hollywood crafted the Monkees.

And Tustin sired The Moods.

Fifty years ago, The Moods – comprised of local teens – took first place in the Tustin Tiller Days Battle of the Bands at Larwin Square – launching them to unexpected heights.

The talented sextet would go on to make good money at Disneyland and even open for upstarts like Neil Diamond and Glen Campbell at a popular Long Beach club.

Now the aging rock stars – in “real life” airline pilots, doctors and a real estate broker – will return to their roots, taking center stage Wednesday night at the Tustin Concerts in the Park.

And, no, they are not a Moody Blues tribute band.

“We came first,” drummer Tom Richardson claimed. “We’re a *Top 40* tribute band. We liked the name because it captures our range, from Motown to the Rolling Stones.”

The band was a conglomeration of Foothill, El Modena, Villa Park and Santa Ana high school students who managed to find each other well before social media made matchmaking less serendipitous.

“I got my drums for Christmas in ’64 when I was a freshman,” recalled Richardson, a dentist in Virginia. “A month later, I was practicing in my bedroom and some guys walking by heard me and knocked on my door.”

He simultaneously played trombone in his high school band. Once The Moods started picking up nighttime gigs, Richardson would quickly change from his “totally clunky” band uniform into a blazer and tie – the sweetly innocent rocker garb of the day.

“I went from dorky to acceptable,” Richardson said with a chuckle.

Santa Ana High student Ron Herrick, now a property manager in Newport Beach, signed on with the Moods as lead guitarist.

“We have literally been lifelong friends,” Herrick said. “It’s always great to meet up with them again.”

Just for fun, The Moods periodically reunite for paying events like high school reunions. The band’s number has dwindled to four, after two of the original members lost interest.

But The Moods have never again come close to the \$1,200 per week per musician earned performing in Tomorrowland for three summers.

“We were all able to buy ourselves cars,” Herrick said.

Those cars came in handy when the Moods were hired as the house band at the Cinnamon Cinder in Long Beach.

“We look back and laugh,” Herrick said. “Our parents let us get home at 1:30 in the morning on school nights. We’re not sure we’d let our own kids do the same.”

At the Cinnamon Cinder and other venues, the group opened for a host of budding stars – including Sonny and Cher, Ike and Tina Turner, Jefferson Airplane, the Doors, the 5th Dimension and Wilson Pickett.

“We had never heard of Neil Diamond,” Richardson remembered. “We were like, ‘Wow, he’s pretty good.’”

He credits winning the Tustin Tiller Days Battle of the Bands in 1966 with putting The Moods on the map. Thanks to that victory, the boys got to perform at the Hollywood Palladium.

Their prize included a contract with Capitol Records to record one song – an opportunity never pursued.

“By that time, I was just thinking about college,” said retired American Airlines pilot Paul Dustin, who juggled his roles as bass guitarist and captain of the El Modena football team. “I wish we had sat down and tried to write some original music, so we at least could have been a one-hit wonder.”

All of the band members made college and careers primary goals.

“We looked at each other and realized, ‘We’re cute, but we’re not that cute,’” Herrick said, half-jokingly. “We’re not Paul McCartney.”

Richardson landed on the idea of celebrating their Battle of the Bands 50th anniversary back in the contest’s host city. Wednesday will mark their debut in the Concert in the Park series.

Looking back, Richardson sized up The Moods:

“For not being very successful, we sure were successful.”

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