



Musician Tony Goddess of Bang-a-Song Studios in his studio in Gloucester.

THE MUSIC MAN

Tony Goddess Brings The World of Music To Gloucester

There's a non-descript building on busy Rogers Street. It has no signs, no numbers. There's a tiny parking lot out front. The windows are scratched. But up on the second floor, after you've gone through a dull metal doorway and past a room filled with chairs and tables, you enter two rooms.

In one room, the floor is covered with large Persian-style rugs. A drum kit sits in the corner. Behind the drums is a large wooden cut-out of the word "rock." An organ is pushed against the wall. Guitars of every conceivable shape and make are lined up against the edges of the room. There's a piano.

In the room right next door, there's an elaborate console covered with buttons, levers, knobs, computer monitors — an amalgamation of technology that makes the place something other than a play room. This is Bang-A-Song Studios, and at the console sits Tony Goddess.

Goddess — that's his real name; it comes from Russian — is the owner and the engineer. After almost 20 years on the road,

making music with his own bands and playing in others, Goddess has settled in Gloucester to help other musicians realize the dream of getting their music recorded.

Today, musicians playing everything from punk to theatrical-style show tunes walk into Bang-A-Song and lay down tracks. Goddess, who recorded three albums with his band Papas Fritas, and who has played on countless others, knows how important it is for a musician to have some kind of permanent record of the music they write, and have it recorded in a way that sounds like the original they had in their imaginations.

This is a natural extension of the love for music that Goddess felt growing up.

"I grew up in a house with a piano, where you heard Dylan and the Stones, which I rejected for heavy metal: Rush, Led Zeppelin," Goddess said about his early life in Wilmington, Del. But he also remembered that bands did not visit Wilmington — "they didn't come to Delaware" — and so, when the time came, he decided to go where the music was. And

in the early 1990s, the scene was in Boston. Goddess landed at Tufts University.

"When you're young, music is used to define yourself as exclusive," Goddess said. "It's not an inclusive thing." But as he matured in college, "I became a complete omnivore." Goddess said that there may have been "more record stores in Boston in the 1990s than anywhere. I lived in the dollar stores." He discovered such life-changing music as a bootleg version of the Beach Boys' mythical "Smile" record, and powerful indie influences such as Jonathan Richman and The Modern Lovers.

Goddess had been in a high school band, but while at Tufts — where he majored in music and English — he helped form Papas Fritas ("French fries" in Spanish) and the group put out some records, vinyl 45s, and suddenly they were booked on tours through New Orleans and Chicago. The group included Goddess on guitars, Shivika Asthana on drums and Keith Gendel on bass. All members sang, which was in keeping with their musically

By LARS TRODSO • Photo by ALLEGRA BOVERMAN

inclusive philosophy.

"A radio station in Chicago played us and we were heard by a small record company, just two guys – it's still run by the same two guys – called Minty Fresh Records," Goddess said. Minty Fresh is home to such artists as Veruca Salt and The Cardigans. Minty Fresh released the first Papas Fritas record, self-titled, in 1995.

Papas Fritas, Goddess said, went for a sound that was completely opposite of what was the prevailing sound of the mid-1990s – which was "low fidelity, distortion and we were going for high-fidelity, sparkly, Fleetwood Mac-inspired. Steely Dan as opposed to Nirvana and the Stone Temple Pilots."

The name of the band, he said, was indicative of their philosophy. "We were making pop music, we were mixing it up. We were inclusive. We had all these theories about it (the name). Someone said they thought they heard "pop has freed us."

Suddenly, Goddess was living the rock 'n' roll life. Traveling, sleeping in buses, playing gigs all over the world – "Spain was one of our best countries," he said of the fan base – which lasted about a decade. The band actually recorded its second and third albums in a house in West Gloucester, which is how Goddess was introduced to the area.

"That band had a great run. I felt like it was a great way to spend my 20s. We went anywhere and everywhere. Now I look back and realize how lucky we were. When the band ended, I was about to turn 30, and I realize it was hard, but we were lucky," Goddess said.

After having spent a decade playing in one band, Goddess spent almost 10 years playing in other bands, until opening Bang-A-Song Studios. He played with Sunburned Hand of the Man, Bebe Buell (who is the mother of actress Liv Tyler), and he co-wrote one of Guster's biggest hits, "Amsterdam," which was the first song released off the band's "Keep It Together" album from 2003 (in which the lyrics reference the great underground New Hampshire band, The Shaggs). Guster was also formed at Tufts.

He's still in a band – he plays guitar in Jenny Dee and the Deelinquents; his wife, Samantha, is one of group's three vocalists.

Goddess quips that his studio is "state-of-the-art for 1973. ... I'm using tape, I have German microphones from the 1950s," Goddess said. With everything



Photo courtesy of Tony Goddess

Jenny Dee and the Deelinquents at Fenway Park in Boston on Aug. 14, 2010, with the J. Geils Band and Aerosmith. Tony Goddess is at far left.

today recorded digitally, sometimes on small computers, Goddess said he is interested in capturing a fuller, warmer sound. "This is a less disposable product," he says of the music that comes out

of Bang-A-Song. "I can't relate to corporate music."

Papas Fritas, in the meantime, has enjoyed a bit of a revival. The reformed band played to huge crowds in Barcelona. One song was picked up for a national ad campaign and another for the Nickelodeon children's TV series "Yo Gabba Gabba!" Then, in 2010, Jenny Dee and the Deelinquents became the first local band to play Fenway Park, opening for hometown band J. Geils.

Goddess sits in his studio today, holding a guitar, thinking about what he has accomplished in the past 20 years. He thinks of the variety of music that's played in the Bang-A-Song Studios.

"I had a 70-year-old guy who has been working on theatrical music his whole life," said Goddess. "I had a teenager who was writing songs for a contest. I've had punk bands, reggae bands, legendary punk rockers" – this would be Gloucester resident Willie "Loco" Alexander. "People are putting out their own music," Goddess said. "It's a satisfying experience."

Twenty years after he started making music, Tony Goddess is still adhering to the idea of music being an all-inclusive thing. **CA**

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