

sights

PERCEIVE MOST OF WHAT FOLLOWS IS TRUE

The Sights play
Manhattan-based Piano's
April 30 and Brooklyn's
Bruar Falls, May 1.
myspace.com/thesights.

by John Fortunato

Put off by industry politics and temporarily quitting the music biz after busting his butt for nearly a decade, Sights brainchild Eddie Baranek stepped back while weighing future options. Momentarily losing interest in rock and roll, he toiled in country and western, joined regional bluegrass outfit, Shotgun Wedding, and took a backup role drumming for an unheralded local Detroit band before deciding to re-form the Sights. During the interim, Baranek also taught at School Of Rock and became a peer mentor for Wayne State students seeking musical development.

Happily, this Motor City maven found his way back to garage rock nirvana, becoming reinvigorated by a few respected instrumentalists that'd form the core of his newest same-named rock-rooted unit. Heading back to the studio with Jim Diamond (who'd produced the Sights previous three albums), Baranek came up with his finest batch of songs yet for triumphant 2010 revival, *Most Of What Follows Is True*. Incorporating his fresh country leanings into a well-rounded pop sensibility, Baranek once again threw down some gratifying tracks then headed out on the road to share a few new numbers with old and new fans alike.

Acquiring co-guitarist Gordon Smith, composing bassist Dave Lawson, and drummer Skip Denomme, plus rippin' steel guitarist (and landlord) Pete Ballard, the diminutive blonde-haired front man has definitely proved to be clued into rock and roll's hastening lifestyle once again.

"Getting Gordon Smith to join is a great example of how fucking lucky this little guy

gets," a grateful Baranek claims. "Every time someone decides to get out of here, another fine player ends up in my life."

A Wayne State graduate with technical expertise and an advanced jazz background, Smith's clean six-string textures perfectly counter Baranek's wankering blues motifs. His lone compositional contribution, "Take & Take," recalls vintage '60s garage gurus, 13th Floor Elevators. On top of that, Smith adds cello and keys to a few choice cuts. Meanwhile, Lawson wrote both the Gram Parsons-fashioned Country-rock vignette, "I Left My Muse," and catchy psychedelictinged zinger, "Tick Talk Lies."

Keeping his proverbial "Nose To The Grindstone," Baranek's latest hard-driving originals include blazing chanted rampage, "How Do You Sleep," unapologetic upbeat merriment, "Hello To Everybody," peppy Who-derived ass-shaker, "Happy," charged-up horn-rimmed blues-rocker, "Guilty," and obliging Strokes-meet-Beatles ululation, "3 Cheers." Dusky piano-based bedroom lament, "Honey," packs deeper emotionalism into a sensitive rant. And reserved Western-styled retreat, "Back To You," provides anodyne relief to the heavier stuff.

Yet the best way to discover the Sights is when they play live. Used to making a few jaunts per year to Manhattan, Baranek's latest crew hits the Big Apple April 30 for a show at Ludlow Street's notable club, Pianos, as well as a May 1 date at Brooklyn's recently renovated Bruar Falls.

I spoke to my old friend, Baranek, over the phone in March.

The Sights not only rock out on *Most Of What Follows Is True*, but also engage

in neo-traditional Country. How'd that come about?

That country element has always been in me. In 2000, at age 19, I was getting into the Flying Burrito Brothers hardcore. That influence was always bubbling under, but I wanted it to rise up organically. I didn't want to force it. We did the Rolling Stones' "Waiting On A Friend" live with a country vibe. I thought it fit in line with the band's character and personality. We branched out.

On the other end, 'How Do You Sleep' is a loud harmony-based guitar rampage. Were you afraid you'd disenfranchise longtime fans by being so stylistically diversified?

(laughter) What are you a freaking record label? I make these Sights records selfishly. They're what I wanna listen to. That said, I rarely go home and listen to my own records. We mirror what we enjoy listening to.

Are you mimicking John Lennon's post-Beatles Paul McCartney snub with the title of 'How Do You Sleep'? Or are you degrading a bitchy girl?

I understand the Lennon thing, but no... I wish it was about someone.

The Sights utilize horns for 'Guilty'; a first for the band.

That's Gordon Smith on trumpet. And Brad Stern on sax—fucker nailed it in 40 minutes. 'Guilty' formed while cutting lawns with my dad. It swirled around my brain. I was ripping off the Stones' 'Heartbreaker' and the Temptations' 'I'm Losing You.' Those melodies crept up while lawnmowing. I left the melody on a voice mail to work with later.

'Maria' is a neat diversion. The banjo and

ukulele have a skiffle influence while the fiddle adapts Appalachian folk in a Ragtime setting.

That's about my girlfriend. It's a true story. I took her on a date to Roma Café, the oldest Italian restaurant in Detroit, on her birthday. This 65-year-old waiter, Harry, will sing to you if asked. It's a love song heavily influenced by Ronnie Lane solo albums I discovered last summer. I draw upon British Music Hall tradition and spit out Tin Pan Alley Ragtime piano. Lawson added the banjo to the overall pop feel.

What's the post-White Stripes Detroit scene like now?

It's a funny thing. Five years ago, all this new wave keyboard shit came out. Everyone started wearing ironic headbands and growing moustaches. But guitar rock in this town will never go away. You can't put that guitar away. The Detroit Cobras, Hentchmen, Dirtbombs, and us are still going. There's new bands like The Crooks and The Displays—who I reference in 'Maria' next to 'Russian ballet.' I'd never want a different crowd than what we've got here. It's a tough-ass crowd. I've watched popular bands come to town and the audience gave them a great big 'fuck you!' Then, the Detroit band comes on and fans head towards the stage.

What's with the title, *Most Of What Follows Is True*?

When John Lennon wanted to name 'Yer Blues,' he said, 'I got fucking really self-conscious about shit.' So he couldn't name it 'My Blues' because it ain't his. You don't know if the songs are all or partially true. I'm basically protecting myself lyrically. But honestly, I picked it out of the intro

to *Butch Cassidy & The Sundance Kid*. I was wrapping up the album and that title was staring me in the face.

Veteran producer Jim Diamond has produced all four Sights albums. How has he molded your eclectic array of tunes?

He understands us and helps us get there. He's not afraid to tell us we're fucking idiots sometimes. There's such love between us and I respect him. The new guys are in tune with him. It's home, man.

Did you have a large collection of tunes to choose from?

Yeah. There was a shitload to cull from. But sometimes I'm glad only me and my cat hear some songs.

Do you agree artists have to tour for prominent exposure instead of relying on dwindling CD sales in the Internet age?

That's how we did it anyway. You have to get your face out there or it don't mean shit. Some 12-year-old whacking off eating Cheetos looking at a computer screen doesn't make money. You got to get out and bring it to the people. We borrow, hustle, and haggle just to get a van to come to your town. Being label-less is great. We have more power and control. We get local rags to write us up. That's what we did to start out and continue to do. I'm trying to get west of the Mississippi again soon. My sister in Oakland, California, I'd seen her a lot for a year-and-a-half. In California during 2002 and '03, we toured with the Datsuns, then the Dirtbombs, Kills, Donnas, and Robert Plant. It was a nice ride playing great theatre venues.