

Sin Sisters make history in 'CT Rock 'N' Roll'

By Lisa Reisman

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BRANFORD — On Friday night, Kathy Kessler, a vocalist for the Sin Sisters Band, will take her place behind a microphone at the Owenego Inn and deploy every last bit of her powerful soprano to induce a mass of costumed humans to shimmy, bop and rock 'n' roll.

It's the fourth annual Halloween Bash & Coat Drive to benefit Trinity's Closet for the Shoreline band, but that's not the story here. Nor is the group's sheer longevity: Kessler, as well as Janice Ingarra and recent Nashville, Tenn., émigré Patti Rahl, have been singing honey-sweet harmonies since the late 1980s.

Nor, for that matter, is the fact that they've performed everywhere from the deck on the Liberty Belle to B.O.M.B Fest to celebrated rock clubs like Toad's Place and Cafe Nine, as well as shared the stage with legendary acts like NRBQ, John Cafferty and Lou Christie.

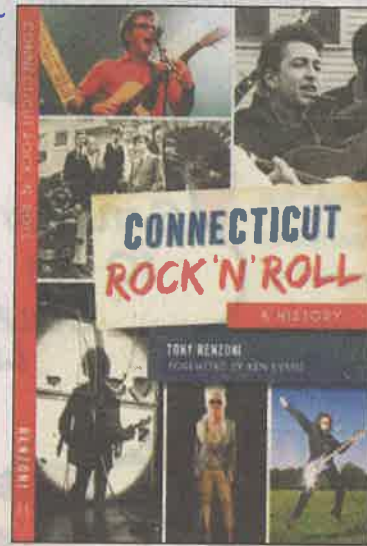
It's where they've been doing it all these years that's the story and explains their inclusion in Tony Renzoni's encyclopedic "Connecticut Rock 'n' Roll: A History," ("CT Rock 'N' Roll") released in August.

The book's mission, according to Renzoni, is to pay tribute to all the musicians who can lay claim as contributors to the Nutmeg State's influence on rock 'n' roll. And not just the ones that reached the heights of fame.

"I wanted to recognize the groups that were popular on a local and regional basis," the Branford resident said.

Among the rare gems yielded from his years of research, he said, were the unexpected connections among Connecticut musicians, even those whose talents took them across the globe.

That's true of Karen Carpenter,



Tony Renzoni / Contributed photo

a New Haven native, and Al Anderson, of Windsor, who went on to become the lead singer for NRBQ, as well as a sought-after songwriter in Nashville.

"Al Anderson had written and recorded the song, 'And When She Smiles,' and Karen Carpenter loved to perform it as 'And When He Smiles' in concert," he said. "Al was also a huge fan of Karen's, but it wasn't until recently that he became aware she'd been singing his song. He was really honored."

Alan Freed, the Hall of Fame disc jockey who coined the term "rock and roll," sums up this phenomenon in the introduction of "CT Rock 'N' Roll."

"Rock 'n' roll is a river of music that has absorbed many streams," he said. "All have contributed to the big beat."

The Sin Sisters are part of that river. There's their longtime association with Beehive Queen and Cheshire-reared Christine Ohlman, who's featured prominently in Renzoni's book.

"She heard about three girl singers from a friend, and the next thing we knew we were her backup singers," Kessler said.



Edmund R. Rogers III / Contributed photo

The Sin Sisters Band consists of Kathy Kessler, Janice Ingarra and Patti Rahl.

From there, they've joined "the mind-bogglingly talented and generous" Ohlman, as Kessler put it, at The Kate and The Mystic Blues Festival, among other venues, and lent their voices to her "Strip" and "Re-Hive" albums.

As part of "that river of music that flows through time and space," as Renzoni put it, there's also the site of the Halloween Bash & Coat Drive at the Owenego Friday night. Not far down the road, a then-unknown Bob Dylan appeared at the Indian Neck Folk Festival in 1961.

And just eight miles and 61 years away, the Five Satins were recording "In the Still of the Night," among the best-known doo-wop songs in history, in the basement of St. Bernadette's

Church in New Haven.

If, unlike the Carpenters and Al Anderson and New Haven native Michael Bolton, the Sin Sisters rarely ventured beyond the Nutmeg State's borders, Kessler, for one, has no regrets.

"We were three 9 to 5 working moms with voices that happened to fit together," she said. "Sure, we worked hard for our sound, but we also always just had fun with each other. Had fun and made sure our audience did too."

Leave it to Kessler to sum up what unifies each of the rock 'n' rollers included in Renzoni's book.

"It doesn't really matter where you do it," she said. "You do it for the love of music. Because that's what it really comes down to: the

love of music."

"Connecticut Rock 'N' Roll: A History" is available at Branford Book & Card and on amazon.com.

The Sin Sisters Halloween Bash will take place from 7:30 p.m. to midnight on Friday at the Owenego Inn and Beach Club, 40 Linden Ave., Branford. Tickets are \$20, which includes a full buffet, Halloween treats and non-stop entertainment, available at halloweensinsisters.brownpapertickets.com or 800-838-3006 or at the door (cash only). A donation of new or gently used coats would be welcome.

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