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Anthony Westbury: A man for all 'Seasons'



Anthony Westbury
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Sometimes, it seems, life can be like an arc. For singer/songwriter Don Ciccone of Port St. Lucie, his musical career has come almost full circle.

Ciccone, 60, spent a decade as a vocalist, writer and guitarist with the classic rock group Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, but it's the tendrils of a much earlier band back home in New Jersey that have wound their way south.

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The time was the mid-1960s and the British Invasion of Beatles and Animals was in full swing.

Four high school buddies from Westfield, N.J. formed a group called the Critters. Why not? Everyone else seemed to have insect or animal names at the time, Ciccone says.

The Critters spent time in a New York studio, working on three singles and one album for what was to become Karma Sutra Records. Other artists on the label at the time included John Sebastian of Lovin' Spoonful and singer Melanie.

Ciccone sang lead vocals on their version of Sebastian's "Younger Girl" and on a song he wrote, "Mr. Dieingly Sad."

Then Ciccone was drafted to go to Vietnam.

He remembers hearing the songs on the radio, but missed out on any of the acclaim. "Mr. Dieingly Sad," ("Yes, I know it was spelled wrong," Ciccone says now, "but I wasn't there to give it my OK,") reached number 17 on the charts.

Ciccone got out of the service in 1970 and did music manuscript work for a number of New York record companies. Out of the blue in 1972 came a phone call from Frankie Valli.

"He said he'd been a Critters fan and was I interested in joining the Four Seasons?" Ciccone recalls.

By then, Valli and his group, known internationally for hits such as "Sherry," "Big Girls Don't Cry" and "Can't take My Eyes Off You," hadn't had a hit for six years. Ciccone spent the next decade singing, recording and touring the world with the Four Seasons and was featured on a subsequent hit, "(December 1963) Oh What a Night."

Eventually, those old, familiar "creative differences" surfaced between him

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and Valli, Ciccone said. He went on to pursue other music publishing, producing and performing opportunities, including a four-year stint with Tommy James (of The Shondells fame).

A bout with cancer in 1999 forced Ciccone to re-examine his priorities, and he moved to Port St. Lucie to "make the most beautiful music I could do."

Last year another phone call out of the blue stirred him up all over again.

"Milt Kostner of (Treasure Coast band) Skeeze asked if I'd be interested in joining them. ... Turns out the keyboard player did have a Critters connection. When the band was splitting up in the '70s, several offshoots took on the name and Albert Miller was in one of them."

Ciccone sat in on guitar five or six times and "things always worked well musically." He joined recently as a full-time member. Skeeze will play Saturday afternoon as part of the St. Patrick's Day celebrations in downtown Fort Pierce.

Life can indeed come full circle and, as Ciccone says with a big smile, "it ain't over until they close the lid."

Associate Editor Anthony Westbury may be reached at (772) 409-1320 or at anthony.westbury@scripps.com. Catch his take on local news Mondays at 9 a.m. on WIRA 1400 AM.

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