

Grapevine

One man's Litter is another's treasure — Minneapolis '60s garage psych band auctions don't go to waste

Thirty-nine-year-old Nicholas Smith was barely 2 in 1966, but the New York record collector has an affinity for music of the era, particularly for psychedelic garage bands. "I generally collect what I deem to be good garage and psych records, but I try not to go off the deep end by buying every single garage record," Smith said. So when he saw an eBay listing for the Minnesota band The Litter's original first album, *Distortions* (Warick WM-671-A, mono, 1966), he watched the auction like a hawk ready to swoop down on its prey.

Meanwhile, thousands of miles away, George Douvartzidis was tracking the same album from his home in South Australia. "I bought a reissue of *Distortions* years ago and liked it so much I started to chase down details of the band," Douvartzidis said. Unfortunately,



The Victors, pooled their collective band members together. Contrary to the obvious assumption that the band was named after garbage, the moniker was actually derived

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with several time zones to contend with, Douvartzidis lost track of the closing time and lost out on the disc, which eventually sold to Smith for \$921.67. "I guess the price was a little high, but I would have gone a couple of hundred dollars higher if need be," Smith said.

For Douvartzidis the loss was hard to take, but he quickly turned his attention to the band's second release, *\$100 Fine* (Hexagon 681A[S] 1968), which was listed on eBay shortly after the finale of the debut offering. His persistence paid off as he outbid his rivals and added the album to his collection for \$632.99. "These quality condition albums are not common, so when they come up, you become very focused," he admitted.

Tom "Zip" Caplan was the lead guitarist for The Litter from 1967-68 and the seller of both albums. He says the attention (and amounts) paid for these auctions is an affirmation that there is still an interest in the garage-band genre. "Most of all I think it's the simplicity of the sound and style — garage rock bands are playing pretty basic stuff — not overly produced or too complicated in the arrangements, just plain and simple hard-driving rock 'n' roll," said Caplan.

The Litter were created in 1966 when two popular Minneapolis bands, The Tabs and

from a litter of puppies.

"I think the group's sound originally was just British pop-mod and evolved into the psychedelic thing over the years — probably our biggest influence was The Yardbirds, The Who, and later Cream as evidenced by the style of songs on *\$100 Fine*. Most people refer to *Distortions* as garage rock and the forerunner to the punk sound, but *\$100 Fine* definitely went in a different direction — more out there, less mainstream and similar to the stuff Quicksilver Messenger Service was doing," Caplan said.

The group's first album, *Distortions*, was recorded in 1966 and 1967 at Dove recording studios in Minneapolis. The album title came about when producer Warren Kendrick noticed that almost all of the songs on the disc used fuzz tone guitars. While the album is heavy on covers, the original "Action Woman," proved to be a regional radio favorite worthy of being released as a stand-alone single. (Scotty 803G-6710). A second single, "Somebody Help Me/I'm A Man" (Warick 9445-6711) quickly followed. The extremely limited number of albums printed makes the recording a prized find. "Warren only had about 1,000 printed up," Caplan said.

(Litter from page 10)

The band's second offering, *\$100 Fine*, was recorded in 1968 in Amarillo, Texas, at Ray Ruff's (of Ray Ruff And The Checkmates) studio and finalized back in Minneapolis at the famed Kay Bank studios, where Dave Dudley's "Six Days On The Road" and The Trashmen's "Surfin' Bird" were cut. While the band was receiving rave reviews and selling out concerts,

only 2,000 copies of the *\$100 Fine* were released, making the recording also rare.

The following year, Caplan left the band to form White Lightning. ABC Probe Records signed The Litter to a recording contract, and, they enjoyed their first major-label release, *Emerge* (ABC Probe 4504S). Even though the album was charting in *Billboard* and they were opening for bands such as The Who, album distribution problems over-

whelmed the group, and they disbanded.

Fans of The Litter unable to shell out the final auction prices for the original vinyl releases are not denied access to the group's discography. The band are forever immortalized on compilations such as the famed *Pebbles* and *Nuggets* box sets. In 1990, K-tel records produced 500 copies of *Distortions* in a limited-edition vinyl release and provided fans with long-awaited compact disc versions of the first

two albums. In 1999 Sundazed remastered both discs on the Arf Arf label, which also include recording outtakes and live tracks. Still, the lure of the originals keeps collectors such as Douvartzidis hot on the trail.

"One thing is for sure — when these are listed on eBay, future *Distortion* and *Emerge* owner hopefuls will be looking over their shoulders," he said.

— Lisa Wheeler