

The kid that stays blazed: part 1

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The Brooklynite was no longer a silhouette, a figure that faded into the curtains and backdrops of music venue stages. The shadow that usually steered clear of the spotlight and blended into the menagerie of horn and string instruments was to be revealed. Brian Bonz, a native of the ensemble of backup bands, was to meet me in the flesh to discuss the formation of his very own band, the release of their debut record, and his sort of self-imposed promotion to leader and frontman.

I had previously met him at past shows, but he was always under the guise of "that guy in the Goddamn Band, as in Kevin Devine...and the Goddamn Band." Talented and versatile on stage, he never alluded to any kind of star quality. Far from it.

He was thankful and naturally spoke fondly of the rest of the band as though he was a publicist for it, more than an integral part of it. I wondered as I awaited his arrival at Park Slope's Bar 4, Would the transition to main mic prove to be a grand unmasking of the real Brian Bonz?

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Alone at the bar, halfway through a bottle of Woodchuck Cider, I glanced at a clock hanging over the entrance. I made out the numbers of the aging antique piece.

6:45 p.m. He was fifteen minutes late.

Suddenly the door swung in as Bonz tumbled forward at an awkward angle, as though he overestimated how heavy the door actually was and pushed way too hard. His dark jewfro curls swayed to and fro as he gained his balance and made his way towards me. At about 5'8", his big-boned body was outfitted like a typical Brooklyn singer-songwriter: an incorrectly buttoned flannel shirt, American Apparel grey hoodie, and a shabby corduroy blazer.

He flashed a hazy half-smile my way and motioned to the bartender, Pete, that he'd like a pint of Blue Point Ale. Originally starting out as a regular customer at Bar 4, Bonz eventually was hired as a part-time bartender and sound guy by Pete, who not only co-owns the place, but also happens to be one of Bonz's longtime friends.

"When I heard you'd get to work two oww-ahhz [hours] early, I needed to see it to believe it!" said Pete, smacking the palm of his hand on the bar.

A Brooklyn accent continued when Bonz quickly shot back with a laugh, "Well, I'm fawkin' [fuckin] here, ya see?" Lively, humorous, and expletive-filled banter like this between him and Pete seeped in and out of my conversation with him that night.

Bonz was a spacey, chameleon-like character, switching on and off from different topics — overdone paninis, the demise of the Staten Island punk rock scene, the rising prices of pot, etc. — and frequently staring into oblivion for a couple of seconds before I got his attention again. Although I could have attributed his somewhat cloudy mindset to his "smoking," his laid-back, go-where-the-wind-takes-me vibe seemed to be a part of his personality more than I thought.

Before forming Brian Bonz and the Dot Hongs, a mellow indie-folk band comprised of everything from harmonicas and trombones to keyboards and the occasional triangle, he had played in other Brooklyn indie bands ("Brooklyn has always been in my bones") like Pablo, where he drummed, and Kevin Devine and the Goddamn Band, where he did a little bit of each backup instrument. Every musical project he was involved in also happened to be with friends. "Ever since I was a kid, I'd just sort of float around from one band of friends to another," he recalled. "Sometimes we'd jam, sometimes we'd record...at the end of the day, it was just us doing what we loved."

The sparks of creativity and inspiration were not just in himself alone, but a result of the artistic collaborations of those colleagues who felt more like family than just neighborhood rat-packs. When Pablo and Kevin Devine began to draw larger crowds and sell out shows, Bonz naturally went along for the ride, touring nationally, seeing faces and places he thought he'd never get the chance to see in his wildest Brooklyn dreams.

"I'd be playing and contributing in everyone's set on stage, kind of cross-pollinating my way to new bands and branching out to new fans," Bonz said as he lapped the last drop of his beer, before hailing for another. An old Smashing Pumpkins

tune oozed out of the speakers above us. I, too, was on my second drink. A couple more people had shuffled into the bar by now. "But I knew I wanted to take a step back from being a frontman, I wanted to stay in the backseat for a while longer."

Stay tuned for parts 2 and 3 later this month...