

# **CANNED HEAT**

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Canned Heat rose to fame because their knowledge and love of blues music was both wide and deep. Emerging in 1966, Canned Heat was founded by blues historians and record collectors Alan “Blind Owl” Wilson and Bob “The Bear” Hite. Drawing on an encyclopedic knowledge of all phases of the genre, the group specialized in updating obscure old blues recordings. Applying this bold approach, the band attained two worldwide hits, “On The Road Again” in 1968 and “Going Up The Country” in 1969. These were inspired interpretations of the late 1920s blues recordings by Floyd Jones and Henry Thomas.

Canned Heat gained international attention and secured their niche in the pages of rock ‘n roll history with their performances at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival (along with Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and The Who) and the headlining slot at the original Woodstock Festival in 1969. Alan Wilson was already renowned for his distinctive harmonica work when he accompanied veteran bluesman, Son House, on his rediscovery album, “Father of the Delta Blues.” Hite took the name Canned Heat from a 1928 recording by Tommy Johnson. They were joined by Henry “The Sunflower” Vestine, another ardent record collector and former member of Frank Zappa’s Mothers of Invention, capable of fretboard fireworks at a moment’s notice. Rounding out the band in 1967 were Larry “The Mole” Taylor on bass, an experienced session musician who had played with Jerry Lee Lewis and The Monkees and Adolfo “Fito” de la Parra on drums who had played in two of the biggest Latin American bands, Los Sinners and Los Hooligans and then with The Platters, The Shirelles, T-Bone Walker and Etta James.

Canned Heat’s unique blend of modern electric blues, rock and boogie has earned them a loyal following and influenced many aspiring guitarists and bands during the past four decades. Their Top-40 country-blues-rock songs, “On The Road Again,” “Let’s Work Together,” and “Going Up The Country,” became rock anthems throughout the world with the latter being adopted as the unofficial theme song for the film Woodstock. Their cover version of Wilbert Harrison’s “Let’s Work Together” was actually their biggest hit as it rose to #1 in 31 different countries around the world.

Much of Canned Heat’s legacy stems from these three, classic, early recordings, which featured two unique talents, both of whom died young: Alan Wilson (b. July 4, 1943, Boston, Massachusetts; d. September 3, 1970, Topanga, California), a gifted slide guitarist, harmonica player, songwriter and vocalist with a high tenor reminiscent of blues great Skip James; and Bob Hite (b. February 26, 1945, Torrance, California; d. April 6, 1981, Venice, California), a blues shouter whose massive physique earned him the nickname “The Bear.” His size was matched only by his equally massive knowledge of blues music.

Bob Hite was born into a musical family in Torrance, California. His mother was a singer and his father had played in a dance band in Pennsylvania. Hite remembered hearing his first blues record, “Cruel Hearted Woman” by Thunder Smith, when he was only eight. As a young man, he became obsessed with records and he purchased old jukebox records for nine cents each, regardless of who the artist was. By the time he reached the fifth grade, he had amassed more records than the rest of his classmates put together. He soon expanded

his collection to include 78 r.p.m. blues records, which later influenced his vocal technique of “shouting the blues.” Spending his teenage years hanging around record stores, Hite would later manage a store that specialized in old records, making many useful contacts with fellow collectors and musicians as part of his job.

Alan Wilson grew up in Boston, Massachusetts, where he became a music major at Boston University and a frequent player at the Cambridge coffeehouse folk-blues circuit. He also found time to write two lengthy, analytical articles on bluesmen Robert Pete Williams and Son House for “Broadside Of Boston”, a Massachusetts music paper, which *Downbeat Magazine* described as “among the most significant contributions to modern blues scholarship, representing the first important musicological analysis of blues style.” In fact, when Son House was “rediscovered” in 1964 by Phil Spiro, Dick Waterman and Nick Perls, Wilson ended up spending hours with the elderly bluesman helping him recall how to play his own songs again, as House had not owned a guitar for several years and was suffering from what was later diagnosed as both Alzheimers and Parkinsons. Waterman managed House and got him a recording contract with Columbia Records and Wilson assisted House in recording his 1965 album, *Father of the Delta Blues*, and provided harmonica and second guitar on three songs (two of which, “Empire State Express” and “Levee Camp Moan”) were included on the album.

Wilson was an excellent harpist, slide guitarist and vocalist with a unique tenor style. His friend, Mike Bloomfield introduced him to Charlie Musselwhite as “the best goddamn harp player there is. He can do things that you’ve never heard before.” Wilson occasionally worked for his father’s construction firm laying bricks but, thankfully, he preferred laying down unforgettable riffs to hard physical labor. Wilson’s nickname, “Blind Owl,” was bestowed upon him by friend John Fahey during a road trip in 1965 from Boston to Los Angeles and was a reference to the extra-thick lenses Wilson wore to compensate for his poor vision. Later Fahey, while researching a book on bluesman Charlie Patton for his degree in Folklore at UCLA, invited Wilson out to California to help with the project. Wilson was a music major at Boston University, and Fahey needed someone who could transcribe, chart and notate Patton’s material correctly.

Through Fahey, Wilson (a blues scholar) met Hite (a record collector) which led to the collectors’ meeting at Hite’s house where Canned Heat originated in 1965. The group decided to take their name from “Canned Heat Blues,” an obscure 1928 track by bluesman Tommy Johnson that described the drug high achieved through drinking the household product Sterno.

Sterno is a cooking fuel that has been used since the turn of the century, and while it was intended to be used for keeping food warm, it was consumed by the early bluesman as a cheap way to get “high” during prohibition. Sterno was originally made from methyl alcohol which, if ingested, the user risked blindness or even death. The contents of the container was strained through slices of bread or a nylon sock to separate the alcohol from the paraffin, and mixed with seltzer or soft drinks. These were desperate times; a tin of Sterno was 7 cents as opposed to a quarter for an illegal bottle of wine. In Mississippi, it was subsequently nicknamed “Canned Heat”. Tommy Johnson died of severe alcohol poisoning directly related to his consumption of the product.

Collectors Hite, Mike Perlowin, John Fahey and Alan Wilson were present and by the meeting’s end, these blues devotees had decided to form their own jug band, with the first rehearsal soon to follow. The initial configuration was comprised of Perlowin on lead guitar,

Wilson on bottleneck guitar, Hite on vocals, Stu Brotman on bass and Keith Sawyer on drums. Perlowin and Sawyer dropped out within a few days of the rehearsal, so guitarist Kenny Edwards (a close friend of Alan Wilson) stepped in to replace Perlowin, and Ron Holmes agreed to sit in on drums until they could find a permanent drummer.

The new group quickly landed a gig at the Ash Grove on Melrose Avenue in Hollywood, and Hite invited his friend Henry Vestine to attend. Vestine liked what he heard and asked if he could join the band, so Vestine was added while keeping Edwards on temporarily.

They all soon realized that three guitars were overkill, so they let Edwards go. (He went on to form the Stone Poneys with Linda Ronstadt.) At around the same time, Frank Cook came in to replace Holmes as their permanent drummer.

In 1957, Henry Vestine (b. December 25, 1944, Tacoma Park, Maryland; d. October 21, 1997, Paris, France) moved with his family to Los Angeles where he spent his teenage years. Like Hite, he started collecting records and became interested in the blues. In June, 1964, Vestine, Fahey and Ed Denson tracked down the legendary and mystical blues singer Skip James. Locating the 62-year-old singer in a hospital in Tunica, Mississippi, the three blues researchers arranged for him to appear at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival. The following year, Vestine became a member of The Beans, a San Fernando Valley-based group. By 1965, he had joined the Mothers of Invention, where he stayed for only a few months before joining the Heat.

Frank Cook had a jazz background, having performed with such luminaries as bassist Charlie Haden, trumpeter Chet Baker and pianist Elmo Hope. He also collaborated with black soul/pop artists Shirley Ellis and Dobie Gray.

Johnny Otis produced the group's first full-length album in 1966. It featured Hite, Wilson, Cook, Vestine, and Brotman in his studio off of Vine Street in Los Angeles. The record was not actually released until 1970; and "Vintage Heat" as it was titled, has since become the most re-packaged and bootlegged record in Canned Heat's discography. Otis ran the board for two versions of "Rollin' And Tumblin'" (with & without harmonica), "Spoonful" by Willie Dixon, and "Louise" by John Lee Hooker.

Canned Heat's first year was marked by infrequent gigs and public indifference. Al Wilson later told *Melody Maker*, "The first year we were together, we worked for three weeks. We'd get a gig, play three days and get fired... because we refused to be a human jukebox." After a particularly disastrous engagement (surprisingly, this was at what became the hip Whiskey A Go Go) the group disbanded in August, 1966 for the next three months.

During this period, Alan Wilson, and Henry Vestine moved on to join the Electric Beavers, an ensemble featuring a full horn section which lasted for only a short time on a rehearsal basis only. Eventually, Canned Heat re-formed in November, 1966 for a one-off gig at a Mothers concert at UCLA. Two agents from the world renowned William Morris talent agency, were in the audience that night and, following their performance, offered to meet with the band the next day. Under the guidance of Skip Taylor and John Hartmann, the band's career was revitalized and when the two agents left William Morris to form their own personal management and concert production company, Canned Heat became their number one project. They played a number of times at the Ash Grove where they came to the attention of singer/songwriter Jackie DeShannon. She was married to the head of A&R at Liberty Records, Bud Dain, and soon that all important recording contract with a major

label became reality.

Even though prospects were now looking good, the previous unsteadiness of the group prompted Stuart Brotman to sign a union contract with an Armenian belly-dancing troupe in January, 1967 over the summer hiatus of '66, and he was obligated to keep his commitment. His developing interests in Arabic and various other types of ethnic music prompted him, a year later, to form the acclaimed world-music band Kaleidoscope with David Lindley and Chris Darrow. So Canned Heat replaced Brotman with bassist Mark Andes, who lasted only a couple of months because he preferred to play in a rock 'n' roll band. (Andes rejoined his former colleagues in the Red Roosters, who adopted a new name... Spirits Rebelious, later shortened to Spirit.)

Canned Heat finally found a permanent bassist in Samuel Larry Taylor, a.k.a. "The Mole," who joined in March, 1967. Taylor (b. June 26, 1942; Brooklyn, New York) was the brother of Ventures' drummer, Mel Taylor. He had previous experience backing Jerry Lee Lewis and Chuck Berry in concert. Taylor had also been a member of the Moondogs along with James Marcus Smith (who later found fame as P.J. Proby and is credited with nicknaming Bob Hite, "The Bear.") Taylor also participated in recording sessions for the first two albums by The Monkees.

With Taylor, the band started recording in April, 1967. Many of these early demos, including an early version of "On The Road Again," would surface years later on the 1994 EMI CD release, "*Uncanned!*"

Before their first album "Canned Heat", which Liberty released, the band appeared at the Monterey Pop Festival on June 17, 1967. *Downbeat Magazine* complimented their performance in an article appearing in the August 10<sup>th</sup> issue (which featured a picture of the band at Monterey on the magazine cover): "Technically, Vestine and Wilson are quite possibly the best two-guitar team in the world and Wilson has certainly become our finest white blues harmonica man. Together with powerhouse vocalist Bob Hite, they performed the country and Chicago blues idiom of the 1950s so skillfully and naturally that the question of which race the music belongs to becomes totally irrelevant."

Recordings of the festival resulted in their spirited rendition of "Rollin' and Tumblin'" being captured in a film of the event, and a 1992 boxed CD set, the *Monterey International Pop Festival*, included "Rollin' and Tumblin'" along with "Bullfrog Blues" and "Dust My Broom." "Rollin' and Tumblin'" backed with "Bullfrog Blues" became Canned Heat's first single, which Liberty released shortly after their Monterey appearance. It received a significant amount of West Coast airplay, but failed to break out nationally.

Canned Heat's self-titled debut was released in July, 1967. The straightforward traditional blues effort was highlighted by covers of blues standards, including Willie Dixon's "Evil Is Going On," Muddy Water's "Rollin' and Tumblin'" and a take of the Sonny Boy Williamson classic "Help Me," with vocals by Wilson. The *Los Angeles Free Press* reported, "This group has it! They should do very well, both live and with their recordings." *Canned Heat* fared reasonably well commercially, reaching #76 on the *Billboard* chart.

Following a one week gig at the Ash Grove from August 22-26, the band went on their first national tour. Disaster struck when the group was arrested in Denver for marijuana possession. Only Wilson, a pioneer eco-warrior who had been out collecting leaves at the time, escaped arrest. Upon returning to L.A., the group held a press conference to announce

that their bust had been orchestrated and that the Denver Police Department had planted evidence to use against them as part of an ongoing campaign of harassment waged against the owners and promoters of the Family Dog (a hippy ballroom) and its patrons.

Publicity aside, the members, with the exception of Wilson, ended up spending the weekend in jail before being released on bail. The arrest would have disastrous financial consequences for them in future years. Lacking the funds to mount an adequate legal defense, the band was forced to sell half of their publishing rights to Liberty Records for \$10,000 so that they could secure the services of a top Denver attorney. The trial ended up with the band members only receiving probation, but the loss of their publishing continues to cost them thousands and thousands of dollars every year.

After being released, their first gig was a shared bill with Bluesberry Jam at the Magic Mushroom in Los Angeles. Manager Skip Taylor had arranged for the two bands to play together so that the members of Canned Heat could watch drummer Adolfo “Fito” de la Parra. Following the gig, around 3 a.m., Taylor asked de la Parra if he would be interested in auditioning for the band, which was looking to replace Cook. De la Parra showed up for the audition clutching albums by Buddy Guy and Junior Wells, which, along with his playing skills, made an impression on Hite. When asked by Skip Taylor if he would like to join the band, de la Parra reportedly replied, “I was born to play with Canned Heat.” In a neat switch, Cook took de la Parra’s spot in Bluesberry Jam, which soon evolved into Pacific Gas & Electric. De la Parra played his first gig as an official member of Canned Heat on December 1, 1967.

De la Parra had played drums professionally since he was 16 years old. He was born in Mexico City on February 8, 1946, and as he grew older, had become a member of a series of Mexican rock bands... starting with Los Sparks in 1958 and including Los Juniors, Los Sinners, Los Hooligans and Javier Batiz / the “Godfather of Rhythm & Blues” in Mexico and Carlos Santana’s first guitar mentor... all of which mainly played covers of American hits. Los Sinners evolved into Los Tequilas and, after a number of gold records, entered the U.S. in 1965 to play in clubs in the Los Angeles area. After some success, de la Parra returned to Mexico where he married an American woman and soon returned to the U.S. again. This time, as the drummer for the house band at the Tom Cat Club in Torrance, California, he played behind some of the greatest R&B artists of the time, including the Coasters, T-Bone Walker, Ben E. King, Mary Wells, Etta James, and the Platters. After a short stint with the Sotweed Factor, they broke up and he joined Bluesberry Jam.

At the end of 1967, with the Canned Heat “classic lineup” now complete, the band began to raise their profile with mainstream media press coverage of their live shows. A December review in *Variety* (an entertainment trade publication) called the band “one of the most devastating, ear-shattering, psychedelic units ever to play this ‘now music,’” and described Hite as “one of the rare species floating around (and that he does) who shows promise of being singled out in this new crop of bands as a top performer.”

In the January issue of *The Beat*, a reviewer wrote, “The new drummer named Fito de la Parra is completely fantastic and the equal of any of the best jazz drummers around... This group is completely able to play the finest solos and yet are a totally integrated group which functions best as a unit.”

Right from the start, Canned Heat has been at the forefront of popularizing blues music. Their second album, “Boogie With Canned Heat,” included the worldwide hit “On The

Road Again,” the crown jewel of the set. It revealed Wilson in six different capacities, three tambour parts, harmonica, vocal and guitar, all recorded at different times. His unconventional falsetto and the song’s Eastern textures made the recording an instant classic. A twelve-minute version of “Fried Hockey Boogie,” (credited to Larry Taylor, but obviously derived from John Lee Hooker’s “Boogie Chillen” riff) allowed each member to stretch out on his instrument while establishing them with hippie ballroom audiences across America as the “kings of the boogie!” Hite’s “Amphetamine Annie” (a tune inspired by the drug abuse of an acquaintance), became one of their most enduring songs and the first “anti-drug” song of the decade. Another well-known track, “My Crime,” had lyrics inspired by the Denver drug bust.

In the spring of 1968, Al Wilson, Bob Hite, and Fito de la Parra took a cab in Chicago to a blues performance after one of their gigs. The cab driver was none other than Albert Luandrew, whom the musicologists recognized by his a.k.a. Sunnyland Slim; Muddy Waters piano player during the Chess Records days in the late 40’s and early ‘50s. Slim had taken a six-year break from recording to pay the bills driving a taxi, and was convinced by the aspiring trio to go back into the studio. After a session in June with Shakey Horton, Johnny Shines, and Willie Dixon on Blue Horizon Records, Slim was convinced by Bob and Alan to cut an album for the “Bluesmakers” series on World Pacific Records (a subdivision of Liberty). The album, “Slim’s Got His Thing Goin’ On”, featured the tracks “Going Back To Memphis”, “Unlucky One”, and “Dust My Broom” with Slim fronting Canned Heat and Hite acting as co-producer. Slim also did them the honor of playing the piano on “Turpentine Moan” for the album “Boogie With Canned Heat”

The press began, universally, acclaiming Canned Heat as blues innovators. The influential jazz magazine, *Downbeat*, ran a glowing article about the group in their June 13, 1968 issue, calling them “probably the best band of its type in the world today, playing with a power and conviction, and generating an excitement which has been matched by only the finest of the Negro bands in this idiom, early postwar blues music. One would, in fact, have to go back to the great innovators of the genre... Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, John Lee Hooker, Elmore James, Little Walter, and the like... to find groups comparable to Canned Heat in mastery, ease and inventiveness.”

In September, 1968, Canned Heat left for their first European tour, a month of concert performances and media engagements that included TV appearances on the British show *Top of the Pops* and the German program *Beat Club*, where they capably lip-synched “On The Road Again” as it rose to #1 in both countries and practically all of Europe.

Their third album, “*Living The Blues*,” included a 19-minute tour de force, “Parthenogenesis” which displayed the quintet at their most experimental. This song, was a nine-part sound collage and fusion of blues, raga, sitar music, honky-tonk, guitar distortion and other electronic effects, all pulled together under the experimental direction of manager/producer, Skip Taylor. This album included their incarnation of Henry Thomas’ “Bulldozer Blues” where singer, Wilson, retained the tune of the original song, rewrote the lyric and came up with “Goin’ Up The Country,” whose simple message caught the “back-to-nature” attitude of the late ‘60s, providing Canned Heat with another smash single on both sides of the Atlantic. It reached only #11 on the U.S national chart because it took months to spread across the country (going to #1 in almost every city) but went to #1 in 25 countries around the world.

In early 1969, Canned Heat’s tour took them to Houston where a record collector friend of

Bob's casually mentioned that guitar legend Albert Collins ("The Master of the Telecaster") was playing a little joint called the Ponderosa Club in the city's Black neighborhood. After sitting down for ribs and admiring his odd D-minor tunings and unorthodox style, the band introduced themselves after the gig and found that Albert had too heard of them, commenting "Damn... You guys cook!" After advising him to move to LA to boost his career, the Heat got him an agent and introduced him to the executives for United Artists. To show his appreciation, Collins' first record title for UA, "Love Can Be Found Anywhere" was taken from Bob Hite's lyric in the "Fried Hockey Boogie". Collins developed an amazing career after that, and became well known in blues circles around the world until his death in 1994.

At about the same time in 1969 that the band recorded *Living The Blues*, they were also taping a live album deceptively titled *Live at the Topanga Corral*. It was actually recorded at the Kaleidoscope nightclub in Hollywood, owned by band managers Skip Taylor and John Hartmann. Liberty Records didn't want a live recording, so the record was originally issued on the small Wand label in the early 1970's with the venue purposely incorrectly identified in order to conceal that the recording was actually made while the band was still under contract with Liberty.

In an incongruous move, the band next released a Christmas single. The "A" side, "The Chipmunk Song," paired Canned Heat with their Liberty label mates, the Chipmunks. The "Chipmunk Song" wasn't actually the same song as the Chipmunks' similarly titled 1958 chart-topper, but it was a good-natured boogie containing humorous dialogue between Bob Hite and the Chipmunks (Simon, Theodore and Alvin... named after executives at Liberty). The "B" side entitled "Christmas Blues" was a slow, blues melody with de la Parra on piano and a lyric written by Skip Taylor in less than five minutes. The song was re-recorded by Eric Clapton and John Popper of Blues Traveler for a Christmas charity CD in 2000.

In July, 1969, *Hallelujah*, their fourth album was released. *Melody Maker*, an English newspaper, had this to say: "While less ambitious than some of their work, this is nonetheless an excellent blues-based album and they remain the most convincing of the white electric blues groups." The album contained many strong tracks, most notably the original "Same All Over," with lyrics by Skip Taylor describing the travel and events of the past year on the road. The tension-filled "Get Off My Back," which featured some fine psychedelic-tinged guitar work by Henry Vestine, was similarly strong, as was "Big Fat," a reading of Fats Domino's 1950 R&B hit, "The Fat Man," which was nicely empowered by Hite's explosive harmonica playing and singing.

Canned Heat's appearance at the Fillmore West in San Francisco in late July, 1969 was hampered by severe tension between Larry Taylor and Henry Vestine. Taylor finally refused to perform on the same stage as Vestine, and soon after this quarrel, Henry quit to form a band of his own, the short-lived Sun. In the first set of the Fillmore gig, Mike Bloomfield filled in for Vestine and was asked to join the band but declined due to his dislike of touring. Harvey Mandel sat in during the next set, played well and readily accepted the offer to become a member of Canned Heat. Mandel was a veteran Chicago musician, having played with both Barry Goldberg and Charlie Musselwhite and the South Side Sound System. His own first album, *Christo Redentor*, was released earlier in the year.

With Mandel as guitarist, the group played two days at the Fillmore East in New York before appearing at the legendary Woodstock Music Festival in mid-August. "Going Up

The Country,” which became the festival anthem, was included on the *Woodstock* triple album and “Woodstock Boogie” was part of *Woodstock II*, while *Woodstock: The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Collection* added “Leaving This Town” to the band’s previously released Woodstock performances. Unfortunately, the day before the release of the Woodstock movie, Warner Brothers shortened the film by twelve minutes, eliminating performances by Canned Heat and Jefferson Airplane, both non-Warners’ acts. Certainly, Canned Heat would have risen to much greater stardom if their dynamic performance had remained in the original film. It can, however, be seen in *Woodstock, The Directors Cut*, which was issued a few years later.

In October, 1969, Liberty released a compilation album, *Canned Heat Cookbook*, which found its way into the Top 100 in the U.S. and all the way to #8 in the U.K.

In January, 1970, the band embarked on another European tour that provided the tracks for *Canned Heat ’70 Concert*, later retitled, *Live In Europe*. This was the first live album by a band that combined tracks from different shows throughout the tour, all put together to make-up one continuous concert for the listener. While the album garnered much critical acclaim, it had limited commercial success in the U.S., but did well in the U.K., peaking at #15.

Prior to their departure for Europe, the group turned out a storming version of Wilbert Harrison’s “Let’s Work Together.” Liberty wanted to release the single in the U.S. immediately, but Bob Hite wanted to give Harrison a chance at some long awaited success, having not seen the charts since his 1957 hit, “Kansas City.” Liberty agreed to hold the release in the U.S., but immediately released the single in the U.K. and Europe to coincide with the band’s tour. Unexpectedly, it became their biggest British chart hit and a #1 single in practically every country in Europe along with Australia and New Zealand. The record was later released in the U.S. where it went to #11 on the national Cashbox chart.

In May, 1970, both Harvey Mandel and Larry Taylor defected from Canned Heat to join John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers. With Taylor gone, Henry Vestine returned on guitar, accompanied by bassist Antonio de la Barreda. De la Barreda had played with Fito de la Parra for five years in Mexico City and was previously a member of the group Jerome. The new lineup immediately went into the studio to record with John Lee Hooker on sessions that would yield the double album *Hooker ‘N Heat*. The format for the sessions called for Hooker to perform a few songs by himself, followed by some duets with Alan Wilson playing piano or guitar and finally, Hooker with some sympathetic backing by the group sans Bob Hite, who co-produced the album along with Skip Taylor. It turned out to be a major landmark in Hooker’s recording career: an artistic and commercial triumph of resounding proportions which recaptured and re-created the authentic early Hooker sound of the Bernie Besman era and managed to shine on the pop album charts.

In July, 1970, the band cut a superb Alan Wilson boogie, “Human Condition,” which unfortunately remained unissued in its original form until it showed up on the 1994 compilation *Uncanned!* “Human Condition” featured some especially good guitar work by Vestine and was Wilson’s last work in the studio.

The sweep of releases in 1970 continued with *Future Blues* in August. Lyrically, the band had moved away from traditional blues topics in favor of current issues, such as the earth’s fragile ecology. Controversially, the album cover depicted five astronauts on the moon, in the famous Iwo Jima pose, planting an upside-down American flag to signal distress as the



earth was plainly immersed in pollution in the background. Some segments of the public viewed the upside-down flag as a serious affront, causing major retailers K-Mart, Sears and Woolworth's to refuse to stock the album. The row over the cover art (ironically, not the cover's socio-ecological message) threatened to overshadow the music, which was hailed by the *New York Times* as being "as magnificent a blues-rock album as has ever been made!"

Canned Heat was touring Europe in the summer of 1970, and June 30<sup>th</sup> was an off night for them in Britain. Alan Wilson went to go see his old friend Son House, who was performing at London's nearby 100 Club. The evening was being recorded, and Alan sat in for "Between Midnight And Day" and "I Want To Go Home On The Morning Train". Originally released as the Liberty LP "John The Revelator" in 1970, The session was a concept album with House narrating through his last European performance in a biblical format. It was re-issued in 1995 with extensive liner notes by David Evans as "Delta Blues And Spirituals" on Capitol Records. The album was posthumously dedicated to Wilson, who would be gone in just two months time.

On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1970, the band was shattered when they learned of the suicide of Alan Wilson on a hillside behind Bob Hite's Topanga Canyon home. His band mates knew Wilson as a sensitive, devoted environmentalist and ecologist who, with Skip Taylor, established the Music Mountain Foundation, an organization formed with the goal of preserving redwood trees in an area called Skunk Cabbage Creek in northern California. In this context, they understood how his being distraught over L.A. smog and the destruction, not only of redwood forests, but the environment in general, coupled with strife in his own personal relationships, had pushed him to attempt suicide on several previous occasions. He had recently undergone psychiatric care in a hospital and, upon his release, had been placed under Hite's care.

Alan Wilson's premature death at age 27, just like Hendrix, Joplin and Morrison who all died at 27, robbed music of one of its unsung geniuses. Though praised by John Lee Hooker as "the greatest harmonica player ever," multitalented Wilson never received the recognition on the world stage that he so assuredly deserved. In February, 1971, the album recorded with Hooker entitled *Hooker 'n Heat* was finally released. The collaborative effort was widely praised throughout the world and became Hooker's biggest charting album at the time and is credited with revitalizing Hooker's career and, to the end of his great life, it remained his personal favorite of all of his recordings.

And then came "Memphis Heat". Just a few days after the loss of their spiritual and musical leader, Joel Scott Hill had stepped into the gigantic task of fulfilling The Blind Owl's duties. They completed half of their tour, and on September 18, 1970 they went into the studio at the request of French music producer Phillippe Rault to record with blues legend Memphis Slim, the expatriate barrelhouse piano player. "Boogie Duo" features de la Parra in prime form, and "Mother Earth" is wonderfully reworked as the crème of the project. Three years later and after an overdubbing session with the Memphis Horns of Stax Records fame, "Memphis Heat" was finally released on the French record label, Barclay, and was re-released in 2006 on Sunnyside Recordings.

Wilson's passing sparked constant reconstruction within the group. In December, 1971, the band brought out *Historical Figures and Ancient Heads*. The album received very positive reviews and contained some special moments including Bob Hite's vocal duel with legendary rocker Little Richard on the Skip Taylor written track, "Rockin' With The King" and some sizzling guitar work by both Henry Vestine and Joel Scott Hill. Member

changes continued throughout the next two decades while they toured Europe, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and the United States.

1973 saw a reformation of the group including Bob, Fito, Henry, James Shane on rhythm guitar and vocals, Ed Beyer on keyboards, and Bob's brother Richard Hite on bass. They went back to France to record with Rault again, this time for "Gate's On The Heat" working with the legendary Peacock recording artist and southern musician Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown. Already in his late 40's, "Gatemouth" was a pipe-smoking Texas Sherriff, a powerful vocalist and multi-instrumentalist, and equally adept at playing guitar, harmonica, and fiddle. After recording two songs; "Gate's On The Heat" with the London Symphony Orchestra, and "Dollar's Got The Blues" with the Memphis Horns, Henry and James adjusted the tuning on Gate's guitar while he was in the men's room. This triggered a shouting match between Henry and "Gatemouth" who were effectively southern polar opposites. It ended in a handshake, and they later reunited as friends for a magical set at the 1973 Montreux Jazz Festival, including "Please Mr. Nixon" and "Harmonica Boogie". Later that evening, they recorded "Cassiolet" for Gate's record "Down South In The Bayou Country", which was released on Barclay in 1973 and Sunnyside Recordings in 2006.

On April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1981, at the Palomino in Los Angeles, gargantuan vocalist, Bob Hite, collapsed and died of a heart attack and on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Henry Vestine died in Paris, France following the final gig of a European tour.

Despite these untimely deaths and assorted musical trends, Canned Heat has survived under the leadership of Fito de la Parra since the late 70's. Since 1967, the band has toured extensively all over the world, performing at numerous festivals including Monterey Pop, Newport Pop, the Sturgis Motorcycle Run U.S.A., and the original Woodstock. They have performed at world-renowned venues such as Paris' Olympia, both Fillmore Auditoriums, The Kaleidoscope, Carnegie Hall (with John Lee Hooker), Madison Square Garden and even Royal Albert Hall and have played more biker festivals and charity events than any other band in the world.

The band can boast of collaborations with John Mayall, Little Richard and blues icon, John Lee Hooker. This union first produced the spirited and revered album, "Hooker 'n Heat" and then Hooker's 1990 Grammy Award-winning classic, "The Healer." The band is also credited with bringing a number of other forgotten bluesmen to the forefront of modern music including Skip James, Johnny Shines, Robert Johnson, and Robert Pete Williams.

In 2003, Canned Heat released a new studio album, *Friends In The Can*, 2003 featuring new and unreleased recordings with various guests including John Lee Hooker, Taj Mahal, Walter Trout, Robert Lucas, Corey Stevens, Roy Rogers, Harvey Mandel, Larry Taylor and Henry Vestine. In 2008, they recorded an entire album of Christmas songs which is picking up new listeners each year.

They and/or their music have been featured on television (In Concert, David Frost, Merv Griffin, Midnight Special, Playboy After Dark, etc.), and in films ("Woodstock," "Big Fish," and "Forrest Gump," "Boomer\$," "The Bucket List," "Meet The Frockers," and "The Blind Side."). Their legend has recently been heard and felt in various television commercials ("On The Road Again" for Miller Beer, "Goin' Up The Country" for Pepsi, Chevrolet and McDonalds, "Let's Work Together" for Lloyd's Bank, England's Electric Company and for Target Stores along with other songs for 7-Up, Levi's and Heineken

Beer).

Now, having celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with their *WORLD BOOGIE TOUR*, Canned Heat is still going strong. Anchored throughout by the steady hand of drummer/band leader Adolfo “Fito” de la Parra (a member since 1967) and reunited with longtime manager/producer, Skip Taylor, Canned Heat is well on track to carry the boogie-blues it made famous, well into the 21st century with reunion concerts throughout the world again featuring original Woodstock era members Larry Taylor and Harvey Mandel.

Fito’s book, now in its third edition, “LIVING THE BLUES” is available through the band’s website at [www.cannedheatmusic.com](http://www.cannedheatmusic.com) and at most popular book outlets. It is the complete and outrageous Canned Heat story of “Music, Drugs, Death, Sex and Survival” along with over 100 captivating pictures from their past. A screenplay, that somewhat mirrors the book, is currently being written and efforts are underway to develop this into a feature length movie. Among the Heat’s latest projects are a CD series entitled “The Boogie House Tapes,” Volumes I, II and III put together by Fito and Dr. Boogie, aka Walter de Paduwa, Canned Heat’s biggest fan and historian. Also, they have just released a CD of legendary Canned Heat Instrumentals. Recently released are two DVDs, “Boogie With Canned Heat,” a 2½ hour history of the band & a mostly musical, German-made DVD, “On The Road Again.”

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