

The Story of The Adelphys

THE ADELPHYS (AKA *THE ADELPHIS*) may be best remembered for a gig they never played: they were the band booked to play a dance at the Scarsdale Teen Center — cancelled, as was everything else — on what turned out to be the tragic weekend of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. In 1963, they were one of the area's best and most popular local bands. And so a bit more of their story than that deserves to be told.



[*The Scarsdale Inquirer*](#), Nov. 21, 1963

BEGINNINGS

THE BAND STARTED OUT with a different, much catchier name: *The New York Times*. Perhaps (or perhaps not) surprisingly, that brought a cease-and-desist order from the newspaper of the same name.

They practiced almost every day after school at the Scarsdale home of organist Jim Brownold and soon settled on a new moniker — although apparently not before they had posed for the publicity photo below (note the lack of band name on the head of Jerry Cohen's bass drum).



The AdelpHys (1963, l to r): Jerry Birnbach (guitar), Carl Wilkenfeld (guitar), Jerry Cohen (drums), Jeffrey Troodler (bass), Jim Brownold (organ). Credit: [scarsdalerock](https://www.scarsdalerock.com/)

SURF-ROCK

THE ADELPHYS PLAYED a style of music known as “surf-rock.” It was the last teenage music craze to sweep America before the arrival of the Beatles. While the Beach Boys had by 1960 wedded tight, Four Freshman-style vocal arrangements to the instrumental surf-rock music style introduced by Dick Dale creating “vocal surf-rock,” the AdelpHys played the original, purely instrumental style of Dick Dale and The Del-Tones (“Let’s Go Trippin,” September 1961 and “Miserlou,” April 1962); The Chantays (“Pipeline,” May 1963); and The Surfaris (“Wipeout,” August 1963).

The AdelpHys’ instruments were very “surf-rock.” For rock n’ rollers, the guitars of choice had been (and continued to be) the Fender Telecaster (*Tele*, 1950) and Fender Stratocaster (*Strat*, 1954). But Jerry Birnbach and Carl Wilkenfeld played matching wider-bodied sunburst Fender Jazzmasters (1958) made popular by surf-rock bands such as The Surfaris and other instrumental rock bands of the era, such as The Ventures.



Don Wilson (left) and Bob Bogle (2nd from left) of The Ventures

Credit: [images.genius](https://images.genius.com)

Jerry Cohen is seen in the Adelphys' publicity photo sitting behind a set of Slingerland drums. Slingerland was not favored by rock n' roll drummers. Jerry Allison of The Crickets preferred Ludwig (and later played Premier); D. J. Fontana of Elvis Presley's band The Blue Moon Boys played Gretsch. Slingerland was rather associated with jazz drummers like Gene Krupa. Jerry Cohen was at the time a big Gene Krupa fan.



Slingerland ad. Credit: [Squarespace](https://www.squarespace.com)

It was only a few months after the Adelphys' publicity photo was taken that The Beatles first appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show* (February 9, 1964). Overnight, every teenage rock n' roll drummer in the country wanted what Ringo had been seen sitting behind: Oyster-Pearl-Black-finished Ludwig drums.

Organist Jim Brownold played a Thomas "two-manual." (Jim's left foot never touched the bass pedals; the band's bassist Jeffrey Troodler held down that part.)



Jim Brownold with The Adelphys
Credit: [scarsdalerock](http://scarsdalerock.com)

It was so heavy it took two or three band members to lift it into Jim's father's station wagon for transport (which is why the band practiced at Jim's house). Jim's father had laid out the money to buy the organ and Jim paid him back on installments after each gig. It created a lot of heat. A series of vents cut into the back wall were there to let the hot air out. The vents can be seen in a detail from a photograph of Jim playing with his other band of the time, The NepTunes.



Jim Brownold with The NepTunes
Credit: [scarsdalerock](http://scarsdalerock.com)

Wildly popular through the early 1960's no keyboard would in a few months be less cool than the Thomas Organ, associated as it was with the "cocktail music" of Lawrence Welk.



Thomas Organ ad. Credit: [picclicking](#)

A few years later, the Thomas Organ Company's pitchman was [Liberace](#).

Even before the Adelphys had gotten started, a much hipper organ sound — the Hammond — had made the leap from [northern Black gospel churches](#) into the pop world, where it would soon reign supreme. Booker T. Jones played a Model M on Booker T. and The M. G.'s hit [Green Onions](#), which by the fall of 1962 was number 3 on the Top 100 and number 1 on the R&B charts.

The Model M was soon overtaken in popularity by the B-3, played through a Leslie Tone cabinet. Billy Preston — who'd played one on tour with Little Richard in Europe 1962 — can be heard playing a B-3 on Sam Cooke's [Little Red Rooster](#) (1963; covered by The Rolling Stones in 1964); Al Kooper played one on Bob Dylan's [Like a Rolling Stone](#) (1965); Felix Cavaliere played a B-3 on all of the Young Rascals (and Rascals) records including [Good Lovin'](#) (number 1, April 30, 1966); Lenny Maitlin played one on Donovan's [Season of the Witch](#) (August, 1966); Steve Winwood played one on Spencer Davis Group's [Gimme Some Lovin](#) (October 1966); Matthew Fisher played one on Procol Harum's [A White Shade of Pale](#) (1967); Brian Auger played one on Brian Auger and The Trinity Featuring Julie Driscoll's version of [Season of the Witch](#) (1967; here, live in 1968); Neil Young played one on [Sea of Madness](#) (Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, recorded live at the Fillmore East, 1969; released on the album *Woodstock*, 1970); Stephen Stills played one on [Carry On](#) (Crosby, Stills, and Nash, recorded November 1969; released September 1970); and Gregg Allman played one on the Allman Brothers Band's [Whipping Post](#) (1969, here live in 1970). By the close of the 1960's The Band's [Garth Hudson](#) was one of the few [non-electric](#) organ players *not* playing a Hammond. All of this is to say that the Adelphys' sound was decidedly shaped in the pre-Beatles era — although the band's performance life straddled what constituted in America the pre-Beatles and early-Beatles eras.

THE FIRST YEAR (1963-1964)

JIM BROWNOLD WAS THE ONLY MEMBER of the band from Scarsdale (the others were from New Rochelle). Based on the band's publicity photograph, Jim was probably the last one recruited: his pants are a lighter color than the others', suggesting that he had missed the band's uniform shopping trip (a ritual for bands of the time). That shopping trip was likely to Jac-Ron on New Rochelle's North Avenue next door to Carl Wilkenfeld's father's Wykagyl Delicatessen (it appears in the photograph below as it looked in 1977, under new ownership as Lipson's Kosher Delicatessen & Caterers).



Credit: [Westchester County Historical Society](#)



Credit: [Huguenot Herald](#)

The band's name appears in print first as *The Adelphis* (in the *Scarsdale Inquirer* blurb promoting their October 12, 1963 dance). The spelling was a source of confusion and it changed a number of times. The band was initially *Adelphi* (anglicized Greek plural for *brothers*) but was referred to by non-Greek speaking fans with a superfluous plural *s*. The band settled on *The Adelphis* — which from time to time appeared in print erroneously as *The Adelphies*. On the eve of their recording session their manager, unbeknownst to them, changed it — ala *The Byrds*, *The Tymes*, and *The Cyrkle* — to *The Adelphys*.

There were only so many places to play when *The Adelphis* kicked off the Scarsdale Teen Center's 1963-1964 season. Scarsdale's American Legion Teen-Canteen was still a few weeks away from opening. The first of Westchester's many teen coffee houses (or, teen night clubs) — New Rochelle's *The Apogee* — would not open until December.

After the November 23 dance was cancelled, the band played *The Apogee* (only the second band to play there); Beth El of New Rochelle; New Rochelle's Albert Leonard Junior High School; Columbia University; New Rochelle High School; and of course umpteen sweet-sixteen parties. On March 7, 1964, they were back in Scarsdale for "Nite Club Nite" (elsewhere, *Night Club Night*) held in the high school gymnasiums A and B. Amongst the other musicians and singers on the bill that night was Nancy Obin — seen here seated in front of Jerry Cohen's partially obscured bass drum.



Credit: [The Scarsdale Inquirer](#)

The next month, in anticipation of the April 22, 1964 opening of the World's Fair, the band played Scarsdale Teen Center's "World's Fair Night" (Saturday, April 4, 1964).



Credit: [disneygals](#)

RECORD DEAL

A SERIES OF CONTACTS (beginning with a lawyer-friend of bass-player Jeffrey Troodler's father) led the band to a recording contract with 20th Century Records. The label had been around for many years and would have major pop success in the 1970's with The DeFranco Family, Maureen McGovern, Barry White's Love Unlimited Orchestra, and The Alan Parsons Project.



Credit: [discogs](#)

For their project, the Adelphys chose two instrumentals written by Scarsdale High School garage band members: *Mau Mau* (penned by Peter Langsfelder of The Scarlads and later Garth Radio Session and The Blue Realm) backed with *Free Fall* (written by Richard Schweitzer of The Camelots/Spotlights and NepTunes, and later Judge & Jury). Both sides can be heard [here](#).

RE-FORMING THE BAND



Credit: [Irwin H. Zaetz](#)

CARL WILKENFELD HAD SPENT his summers at Camp Cayuga on Schroon Lake in upstate New York where, as a CIT in the summer of 1963, he'd formed a singing group — The Fabulous Nocturners — with a musical prodigy from Jackson Heights, Queens by the name of Bobby Wachtel. Some nights they'd go into town on the opposite side of the lake and sing for tips. They did very well.

After the Adelphys cut their single in 1964, Wilkenfeld invited Wachtel — with whom he'd been writing songs — to join the band. Almost immediately, Wachtel decided The Adelphys needed to re-form themselves more along the lines of The Beatles. Jim Brownold was out (the Beatles didn't have a keyboardist). Practices moved to Wilkenfeld's home on Old Orchard Road in New Rochelle. Then Wachtel replaced bassist Jeffrey Troodler (enormously talented, he didn't fit the image) bringing in Bob Munz, a friend of Wachtel's from Queens, to play bass. As each member of the new lineup had by coincidence lost a parent, a new name for the band presented itself: "The Orphans."

Television personality and comedian Soupy Sales was back in New York from Los Angeles and had begun presenting live music revues (a poster for one at the Paramount Theater is below).



Credit: [stumptownblogger](#)

The comedian Robert Klein was friendly with Jerry Birnbach's older brother Larry and through that connection The Orphans got themselves booked for a *very* big gig: a Soupy Sales revue. At The Manhattan Center (West 34th Street), The Orphans were on the same lineup as [The Tymes](#)

— one of the great vocal groups of the era, whose [*So In Love*](#) had gone to number one (August 3, 1963), a million-seller.



The Tymes. Credit: [Pinterest](#)

Also on the bill were The Del Satins. Arguably the top white doo-wop group in the country, they'd sung backup on Dion's hits like "Runaround Sue" and "The Wanderer," and later morphed into The Brooklyn Bridge ("Worst That Could Happen"). The Orphans — Carl Wilkenfeld, Jerry Birnbach, Jerry Cohen, and Waddy Wachtel — were in stellar company.



The Del Satins. Credit: [Discogs](#)

Tensions existed, though, between Wachtel and Birnbach. One day in a fit of pique, Birnbach quit — but not before he'd bestowed on Wachtel the name he'd be known by professionally for the rest of his career: "Waddy" (as in, "*What d'ya* want from me?!").

Jerry Cohen also left. Once again Wachtel re-formed the band. This time the lineup was Bob Munz (bass); Bob Meinzer (drums); Waddy Wachtel (guitar); and Carl Wilkenfeld (guitar).

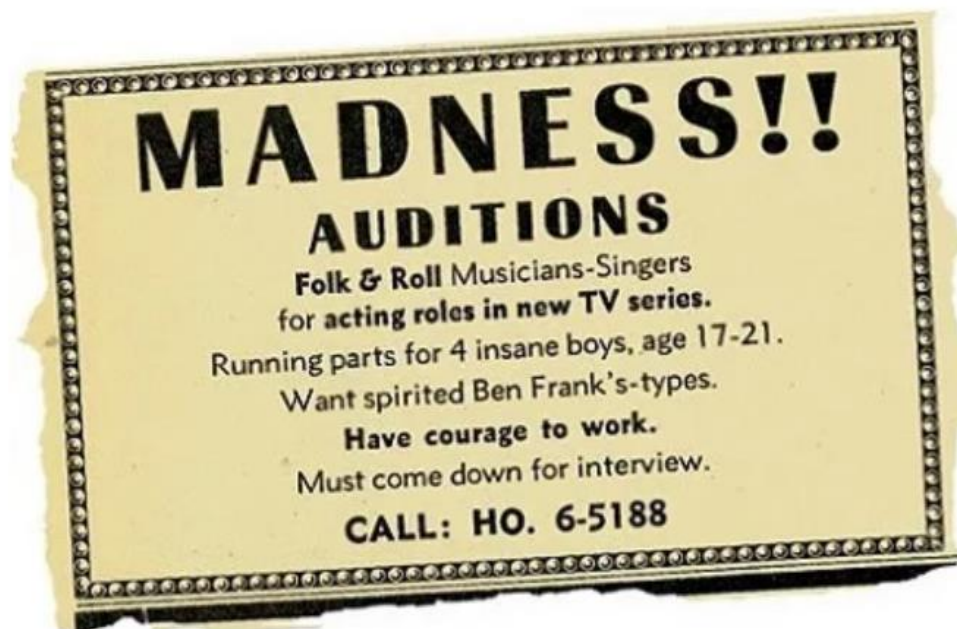


The Orphans, l to r: Bob Munz, Bob Meinzer,
Waddy Wachtel, Carl Wilkenfeld
Credit: [waddywachtel](#)

HEY, HEY WE'RE THE ... MONKEES? (1965)

BY JULY 1965, the English-born actor and singer Davy Jones had been cast to play a rock n' roll musician in an upcoming American TV series. The producers were looking for three more players to fill out the band, to be known as [The Monkees](#).

Following the Beatles' musical comedy movies [A Hard Day's Night](#) (1964) and [Help](#) (1965), the producers were casting about for "insane boys" who not only could sing, play, and act, but could present the same sort of madcap image the Beatles presented on screen. That September an ad ran in *The Hollywood Reporter*:



Monkees auditions ad. Credit: [Medium](#)

A small ad appeared as well in [Daily Variety](#) which came to Wachtel's attention. The New York auditions were held at a club on Bleecker Street. The line stretched down the street. 437 musicians vied for the roles.

The Orphans auditioned as a group. Carl was in his second year at Temple University and he made a special trip up from Philly for the “cattle call.” Onstage, the Orphans ripped into “[Mona \(I Need You Baby\)](#)” — a Bo Diddley number that had appeared on the Rolling Stones' 1964 debut album — with Carl singing lead and playing maracas ala Mick Jagger. The producers were impressed. They had passed on [Stephen Stills](#) but Carl was asked back for a second audition. “What about the other guys?” Carl asked. If it wasn't the whole band, he told them, he wasn't interested. And that was that. The open roles went to Michael Nesmith, Peter Tork, and Micky Dolenz.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN (1966)

ACCORDING TO WACHTEL, it was because Wilkenfeld was attending college while Waddy “wanted players who could devote all their time to the band” that he decided to [part ways](#) with Carl. By early 1966, Carl Wilkenfeld — the last of the Adelphys, the one who'd brought [Waddy Wachtel](#) into the band — was out.

Carl continued to travel between Philly and New York on weekends, this time to play in a new band with his former Adelphys bandmate, organist Jim Brownold; Peter Langsfelder, who'd written The Adelphys' song *Mau*; and three other players including Ellis Disick and Dave Murdoch, former members of The Esquires with [Billy \(Schwartz\) Cross](#). Playing on Ellis Disick's name they called themselves “Ellis D. and The Sugar Cubes” — a not-too-subtle nod to the psychedelic drug LSD.



Ellis D. and The Sugar Cubes ~1966. Carl Wilkenfeld is at center;
Jim Brownold is behind Carl's right shoulder; [Ellis Disick](#) (Ellis D.) is to Carl's
immediate right. Peter Langsfelder (writer of The Adelphys' song *Mau Mau*) is in front.

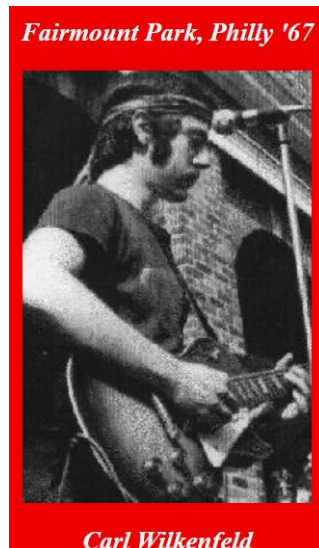
The band also performed as “The Blue Realm.” Two of their proto-punk songs — *Proud* and *Crosstown Bus* — and their “trippy” Tim Buckely-esque ballad, *AM in the City*, can be heard on the Scarsdale Rock website.



The Blue Realm. Credit: Scarsdale Rock

SUMMER OF LOVE: VALENTINE (1967)

BY 1967, THE YEAR OF *The Summer of Love*, Carl decided he had to focus more on his studies. He gave up The Blue Realm for a more geographically-desirable Philly-band: “Valentine” featuring [Frank Stallone](#) (brother of Sylvester). Carl would later be succeeded in that band by John Oates, who would in turn leave to form Hall and Oates.



Carl Wilkenfeld, Valentine. Credit: [geocities](#)

While remaining friends with his former bandmates, Carl and they now went their separate professional ways. Of the original Adelphys, Jerry Birnbach became an architect; Jerry Cohen became a cardiologist; Jeffrey Troodler became an Orthodox rabbi and moyel (performing some

15,000 circumcisions over his career), also inheriting and running his father's plumbing business before passing away in 2019; Jim Brownold continued to perform and record, was hired by NYC's FM powerhouse WPLJ where he wrote, produced and voiced comedy bits, promos and numerous award-winning commercials, and later worked as a voice actor, dabbled in stand-up, and taught improv. Of the five original Adelphys it was Carl Wilkenfeld (before he turned to representing [Pro Audio](#) and [Peavy](#) gear) who had the relatively-speaking longest musical career.

NEBRASKA BAY

BY 1970, after more than one brush (and near-brush) with fame, Carl was back in the Hudson Valley with a new band, "Nebraska Bay." Carl's journey from The Adelphys to Nebraska Bay was a memesis of the journey of his generation: the démodé instruments, sartorial uniformity, and literal *voicelessness* of instrumental surf-rock (which had nothing to say about anything) were gone. In their stead, an über-eclectic amalgam of individuals who at their best were able to create something at once personally expressive and stunningly whole. Carl was gifted with an impressive vocal range. His Nebraska Bay bandmate Scott Duncan's vocal range was off the charts. Together, their intricate, serpentine harmonies (ala [David Crosby and Graham Nash](#)) anchored the band; an ethereal sound.

The Nebraska Bay bandmates were living hippie-style on the grounds of an old, Jewish motel in Spring Valley (with permission; their manager's family owned the dilapidated property). That's where Wayne Merdinger, ten years Carl's junior at 14 years old, came across them. Merdinger recalls:

"While skipping school and taking a shortcut through the woods one day, my friends and I came upon this long-haired band chilling out on an old motel property that we had thought was abandoned. It was not. The band, called Nebraska Bay, was living in the staff quarters behind the burned-out motel. I soon befriended their leader, Carl Wilkenfeld, and his bandmates, Scott, Ritchie and Jack, and thus began a year-long adventure, where I would get to sit in and listen to them rehearsing the amazing classic rock music they were producing in the basement. At the time, they were frequently going to auditions with major record labels [after they opened for Arrowsmith at Max's Kansas City, Atlantic Records brought them into the studio to record an audition tape], but to no avail. Carl gave me a few guitar lessons in return for me mowing the grass on the property. I eventually lost contact with them and, though, in my opinion, they seemed to have been on a track to stardom, they were never to be discovered." — [Wayne Merdinger.com](#)

Wayne never forgot them, however. Even after fifty years he remembered some of their music. In 2022 he recorded what he could recall of Carl's *The Train Song (I Saw You)* — writing new sections for those that escaped him. The song appears on Wayne's EP *Troubadour*, along with a tribute song written to the band, *Nebraska Bay*. In 2023 Wayne recorded Carl's *All My Life* — written by Carl during her lifetime for his late wife Yvonne — at Abby Road Studios.



[All My Life](#): Official Music Video (YouTube)

All My Life didn't garner the attention of the 2023 releases by the Beatles and the Stones. But like the Beatles and the Stones — so many years down the line — it's incredibly nice to hear.



Jerry Birnbach
Credit: [experts.com](#)



Jeffrey Troodler
Credit: [ahavatyisrael](#)



Jim Brownold
Credit: [englishvoiceover](#)

—Mark Sameth
November, 2023