

The Reducers

Biography excerpted from The Reducers' website ([www.http://thereducers.com](http://thereducers.com))

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Bassist/Vocalist

(The Reducers) Biography



“I can’t think of anything better than spending 30 years doing something you love with three of your best friends,” Peter Detmold says of his time with The Reducers, the band he co-founded in 1978.

For more than three decades, The Reducers maintained their stature as regional rock ‘n’ roll legends and tenacious true believers. The quartet

remains a beloved institution in and around their hometown of New London, Connecticut, while maintaining a fiercely loyal fan base around the world.

The four longstanding compatriots forged an enduring friendship and a productive musical partnership rooted in their shared belief in the catchy, unpretentious, effortlessly uplifting rock ‘n’ roll that remained the band’s focus for its entire existence.

The Reducers remained a vital musical force until June 2012, when bassist Steve Kaika passed away after battling cancer. His bandmates chose not to continue without him, and instead set about putting the finishing touches upon their final studio sessions, which had been recorded prior to Steve’s illness. Those recordings now form the foundation of *Last Tracks & Lost Songs*, which combines those sessions with a scintillating selection of rare and unreleased Reducers tracks dating back to the 1980s.

The Reducers spent more than three decades resisting the fickle turns of popular taste, the transient whims of musical fashion, and the temptations of the music-industry buzz that briefly threatened to turn them into the Next Big Thing. Instead, the band spontaneously moved forward on its own uncompromising terms, continuing to make brilliant, personally charged rock ‘n’ roll, while remaining well below the radar of the mainstream music biz but prominent in the hearts of those who loved them.

The Reducers’ history is a powerful testament to rock ‘n’ roll’s power to transcend and inspire, for those who create it as well as for those who consume it. These four working-class underdogs—Detmold and fellow singer-guitarist-songwriter Hugh Birdsall, drummer Tom Trombley and bassist/vocalist Kaika—spent most of their adult lives building a potent body of recordings and a far-reaching reputation as a scrappy, riveting live act that affirmed rock ‘n’ roll’s vibrant promise on a regular basis.

“There’s a lot you can do with two guitars, bass and drums,” asserts Birdsall.

The nine albums that The Reducers released between 1978 and 2012 charted the band’s evolution from punk-inspired smartasses to thoughtful craftsmen, without sacrificing the musical and personal edge that originally established them as a special band. Those recordings showcase the foursome’s organic musical rapport and the ace songwriting of Birdsall and Detmold, whose unfailingly infectious tunes incorporate a witty, heartfelt lyrical sensibility that’s laced with barbed humor and humanistic insight.

Throughout their existence, The Reducers embodied the same fannish enthusiasm that first asserted itself in the late 1970s, when teenaged pals Birdsall and Detmold bonded over their mutual affinity for the punk and new wave sounds that were emerging at the time. They indulged their love for the new music with a ten-day visit to London during the musically volatile winter of 1977, during which the pair witnessed historic performances by the Sex Pistols, the Clash, the Jam, the Only Ones, the Motors, the Pirates, Chris Spedding, Eddie and the Hot Rods, the Kinks—and Bert Jansch.

The new music's raw energy and do-it-yourself spirit provided a focus for the duo's own budding musical energies, and their passion for the music was further fueled by their frequent treks into Manhattan to pick up the latest British import releases, and to check out the city's booming punk scene.

"Those experiences were huge for us," Birdsall notes. "They made us realize that we didn't have to be virtuoso musicians to play out in clubs. All of those early punk songs were easy to learn, so we could actually learn lots of complete songs. And we started to learn about arranging songs so that we could play them, without having to achieve note-for-note perfection. It also made us realize that we'd have to write our own songs if we wanted to be a real band."

"The biggest lesson that punk rock taught us was 'You can do it,'" Detmold adds. "I'd been going to see bands for years and years, but when I'd see the Who or Thin Lizzy or Queen or the Allman Brothers, it felt like there was no way that I could ever manage something like that. But then when I began seeing shows by the likes of the Ramones and the Clash and the Jam and the Sex Pistols, it felt like it was within my grasp, and that it was something that we could do."

Another touchstone for the soon-to-be-Reducers was the '70s school of earthy, rootsy British pub-rock bands, e.g. Ducks Deluxe, Rockpile and Dr. Feelgood.

As Detmold recalls, "I got into the whole pub-rock thing after I found the first Ducks Deluxe album in a cutout bin at my local record store. I bought it because I was intrigued by the cover photo; those four guys looked like a band, but nothing like the bands I was used to. The whole idea of bands that played in bars for a drinking crowd appealed to us, because it further stripped away the pretense that there was something unattainable about being in a rock 'n' roll band."

Inspired to get serious about launching their own band, Birdsall and Detmold soon roped in Kaika and Trombley to complete the lineup. At the time, the bassist and drummer were gainfully employed as the rhythm section of the popular local country-rock outfit the Bob Bridgeman Band, but were nonetheless persuaded to join forces with Hugh and Peter. Armed with a growing list of original compositions and an eclectic array of cover tunes, The Reducers began playing out in New London and various New England college towns, quickly developing an enthusiastic following.

In the summer of 1980, The Reducers entered a small local studio to cut their first single, "Out of Step"/"No Ambition," which they released on their own homespun Rave On label. The landmark disc (original copies of which now fetch princely sums on eBay) was a perfect encapsulation of the band's hard-working underdog appeal. Despite a lack of promotional resources, the single gained numerous positive reviews and helped to spread The Reducers' reputation outside of their home region, even as their local popularity was helping to fuel a scene of new bands to coalesce around them at home.

The Reducers' public profile was raised further when the band's self-titled debut LP, recorded on the cheap and live in the studio, was released in 1984, with all four members sharing vocal duties and songwriting credits. Despite its lo-fi sonics, the album's urgent performances and winsome songcraft struck a chord with critics and college-radio DJs.

The Reducers' second long player Let's Go! was released in early 1985 and was even better received, breaking into the Top 10 on various alternative charts. Let's Go!'s anthemic title song broke out as a college-radio hit, ending up on Epic Records' compilation album Epic Presents the Unsigned. It was also named Single of the Year by the influential college radio trade publication CMJ, which also anointed The Reducers as 1985's Best Unsigned Band.

Those honors, combined with some grueling national touring and a widely-read rave by Robert Christgau in New York's Village Voice, helped to set off a national buzz that attracted the interest of several major labels.

At the time, The Reducers were in the vanguard of a historic wave of iconoclastic, independently minded young bands sprouting up across the United States.

"When we first started putting out albums in the early '80s, we'd find them in record store bins right in front of R.E.M. and the Replacements, and it was obvious that we were part of a movement away from the bloated arena-rock thing," explains Detmold. "I saw both of those bands, and lots of others, in small clubs in front of small crowds, and I realized that we were all working different variations of a similar idea."

"We felt like we were part of something," adds Birdsall. "But we also felt like we were on the periphery of it, on the outside looking in. To me, it's miraculous that we ever even got close to the music business. That was more the work of others, who heard something in us that they thought might be marketable, than it was any ambitions on our part."

But while many of their contemporaries went on to major-label deals and mainstream recognition, the big deal that many predicted for The Reducers failed to materialize. Rather than turn bitter, the band simply continued doing what they loved. A third album, 1985's *Cruise to Nowhere*, was quickly written and recorded amidst touring commitments.

But the strain of constant roadwork began to wear on the band, and they soon retreated from national touring. Instead, they continued gigging locally and writing vital new material, sustained by their hometown fans and by their abiding belief in the music.

The Reducers made their belated CD debut in 1991 with the 29-song retrospective *Redux*, which gathered most of the band's prior vinyl output into one handy package. In addition to belatedly dragging the band into the digital age, the collection launched a wave of renewed public and press interest. 1995's *Shinola*, the band's first album of new material in a decade, covered some impressive new creative ground, while maintaining the qualities that had originally endeared The Reducers to their admirers.

In 2000, the band responded to years of fan requests for a live album by assembling the rough-and-ready *Fistfight At Ocean Beach*. That disc was a limited-edition CD-R release available only as a premium for donations to WCNI, the non-profit local radio station where Birdsall and Detmold have served as DJs almost continuously since 1979, carefully avoiding self-promotion and sharing their favorite old and new rock 'n' roll tunes with their loyal listeners.

A more formal live CD, 2003's *Old Cons*, found The Reducers celebrating their 25th anniversary with a career-spanning onstage retrospective that documented the band's intensity and versatility—as well as their longstanding love for early rock 'n' roll, vintage soul, British Invasion pop and '70s punk and new wave.

The Reducers' 25th anniversary also coincided with the mayor of New London's official proclamation of August 23, 2003 as Reducers Day, and the premiere of the career-spanning documentary *The Reducers: America's Best Unsigned Band*, which won critical acclaim for its compelling retelling of the group's unlikely journey.

The following year, a request from a group of Japanese Reducers fans—who had already bought out the backlog of vinyl LP stock that had been gathering dust in Peter's basement—led to the band's first-ever overseas tour, a ten-day run of rapturously received shows in Japan.

Such acknowledgements demonstrated how these humble outsiders had ended up as unlikely rock 'n' roll heroes. The title and musical contents of their 2008 studio effort *Guitars, Bass and Drums* underlined how The Reducers' unpretentious musical agenda remained as compelling as ever.

"It was never about money or fame," states Birdsall. "It was always about the music, and the camaraderie, and getting people to dance. I've heard from people in Germany, France, Spain and Japan. We seem to be their favorite secret band, whose record they put on at parties and their friends go 'Hey, who's that?' I kind of like having that status. In a way, it's even better than being really popular."

"None of us ever had any delusions about getting rich off of this band," concludes Detmold, who continues to play new material alongside Birdsall and Trombley in the 3-Pack, having put the Reducers' repertoire on the shelf out of respect for the absent Steve Kaika.

"When we started, we were full of piss and vinegar and just wanted to show what we could do," Detmold remembers. "We were four friends with a common vision, and our goals were to play around our area, maybe play New York City and Boston and maybe make a few 45s, and make a name for ourselves. That turned into something much bigger, and we had more success than we could have ever imagined, and it continued for much longer than any of us would have guessed."