

THE LYRES

Title: She Pays The Rent Live

Label: Impossible Records

Release Date: 1988

Medium: Album

Availability: Poor

Venue: Madrid, Spain

Recording Date: 1987 and 1988

Lineup: Jeff Conolly - Vocals, organ, percussion
Jack Hickey - Guitar, vocals
Judd Williams - Drums (6 tracks)

Matt Miklos - Bass
John Bernardo - Drums (8 tracks)

Set List: I Can't Stop The Want
Jezebel
Touch
Today I'm Gay
Here's A Heart
Soapy
She Pays The Rent

How Do You Know
You'll Never Do That
Not Looking Back
She's Got Eyes That Tell Lies
Signed D.C.
Help You Ann
Cinderella

Initially formed in 1979 in Boston, Massachusetts, the Lyres were New England's most significant garage rock revival band. Their founder, main songwriter, frontman, and organist, Jeff Conolly, who has been the one constant in the group since their beginning. Just like the Chesterfield Kings, the Fuzztones, and the Fleshtones, the Lyres have a dedicated cult following that has sustained them for decades. While they never broke through commercially, they did release five studio albums, four live albums, eighteen singles, and three EPs and have toured internationally.

The Lyres are legendary for their explosive high energy stage shows, which were centered around the often outrageous antics of Conolly. He has been the glue behind the band right from the start. While the band has had many different lineups, his musical vision remained the same. They were going to play his blend of sixties garage and psychedelic rock n matter what and if no one bought their records then so be it. Their high energy live shows and their first two studio albums did more than enough to establish them as one of the most important garage rock revival bands of their time.

The Lyres came out of Boston's late seventies rock scene, but their sound was rooted in the mid-sixties, when nascent garage rock bands like The Remains, The Barbarians, and The Lost dominated the local music scene. These bands provided the foundation for a psychedelic rock scene which emerged in 1967 under the auspices of record producer Alan Lorber. Now known as the Bosstown Sound, Lorber signed several bands to MGM Records and promoted them as the East Coast equivalent of the San Francisco music scene.

Lorber had some success with Ultimate Spinach, Orpheus, and The Beacon Street Union, which helped put Boston on the national music map. New venues like The Boston Tea Party, the Psychedelic Supermarket, and Club 47 opened to support these up and coming bands, which also included Eden's Children, Ill Wind, and Earth Opera. The most famous of these clubs was The Boston Tea Party, which became internationally known. A who's who of rock legends like Zed Zeppelin, The Who, Cream, Janis

Joplin, the Grateful Dead, and Velvet Underground all played there. At the same time, Club 47 became a mecca for folk artists, hosting Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Tom Rush among many others.

As the seventies started, Boston developed a potent rock scene. Hard rock bands like Aerosmith and Boston competed with new wave inspired groups like The Modern Lovers and The Cars. While all of this was going on, the J. Geils Band broke out nationally with their brand of high energy blues rock. And, James Taylor became one of folk music's superstars and surprisingly, Kenmore Square in the city became the center of a punk rock movement which included the Nervous Eaters and band known as DMZ.

Jeff Conolly (born in Albany, NY) had moved around with this family several times before they finally settled in Darien, Connecticut. Not much is known about his early musical training, but he did learn to play the piano and had an extensive knowledge of sixties garage rock and r&b music. He loved bands like The Sonics, Chocolate Watchband, the Seeds, ? and the Mysterians, and the 13th Floor Elevators. He also was a fan of The Pretty Things and the Kinks. He was so into this style of music that he would later be nicknamed "Monoman" because of his obsessive love for monophonic recordings from the sixties.

Still a teen, Conolly became obsessed with the New York Dolls and The Stooges in the early seventies. The DIY attitude of both bands and their proto-punk sound were huge influences and Conolly decided to follow their path and form his first band to compete in a high school talent show. Fittingly, his band played a cover of Frank Zappa's "Peaches En Regalia" and Otis Reddings' "Can't Turn You Loose", an early indication that there were no limits on what he wanted to play.

In 1975, he enrolled at Boston University and became part of the developing punk music scene in Kenmore Square. While attending a practice session of a new punk band named DMZ in early 1976, he challenged their lead singer to a musical duel and essentially stole his spot. Since Conolly also knew how to play keyboards and had his own electric piano, he was a potent package and when the other band members discovered that he had already written some songs, he was in. Almost immediately, he assumed control of DMZ, which also included guitarists J.J. Rassler and Peter Greenberg, bassist Rick Coraccio and drummer Paul Murphy.

Conolly pushed DMZ into their own niche, which included elements of garage rock and psychedelia played at an intense level. He sang with fury and developed an often outrageous vocal style and explosive stagecraft. With his organ a prominent part of their sound, no other band in the city sounded anything like them and they became very popular in local clubs like the Rathskeller, which was the premier punk club in the city. They even traveled to downtown NYC, where they played punk clubs like CBGBs and Max's Kansas City.

Had things worked out differently, I would also be writing about DMZ on this website. Their blend of proto-punk and garage rock was captured on a 1977 EP which was released on Bomp! Records. It did well enough that they were signed by the legendary British new wave/punk label, Sire Records. They released a self-named full length studio album in 1978 that was produced by Flo & Eddie, former members of the Turtles who were adopted by one of Conolly's heroes, Frank Zappa.

The album was far ahead of its time and still is regarded as a cult classic to this day, but it was criticized at the time because it was clean and polished. It did sound anything like their famous live shows and Sire had no idea how to market it. They targeted the punk community, but *DMZ* (1978) was prototypical garage rock revival music, which had not yet been defined as a separate musical movement. Despite the backing of Sire, the album went nowhere.

Shortly after the release of the album, a disappointed Greenburg left and replaced by Preston Ward. This created a clear division within the band between Conolly, Caraccio, Murphy, who were dedicated to their garage rock sound, and Rassler and Ward, who wanted to move in another direction. Things came to a head and a physical confrontation took place during a rehearsal in late 1978. Conolly wound up tumbling down two flights of stairs and DMZ broke up on the spot. Ward and Rassler immediately formed the Odds, while Conolly, Caraccio, and Murphy recruited guitarist Rick Carmel and formed the Lyres.

One of the first things the Lyres did was record their debut single, “How Do You Know”, which was released on their own independent label, Sounds Interesting Studio, in early 1988. The B side was “Don’t Give Up Now”. The single sold well regionally and was a positive first step for the new band. They played their first live show on January 17, 1979 at the Rathskeller Club and were on their way. They followed that up with a series of shows at the Rat, Paradise, The Space, The Channel, and Cantones later that same month, establishing themselves as Boston’s hot new band.

During the month of March, they played another sixteen live shows and began to play shows throughout New England. They continued to do this throughout the remainder of 1979 and were featured on a WBCN radio concert later that year. The band continued to build their fan base during the first half of 1980, when three tracks from show held in Portland, Maine on May 23 and 24 were recorded and showed up on a future compilation of some of their early shows called *The Early Years – 1979 To 1983 (Live At Cantones And WERS-FM)*. It was released on Crypt Records in 1994 and also included three tracks from their second show and one from the 1979 WBCN radio show.

The band completely fell apart during the summer of 1980, with Carmel leaving in July and Caraccio and Murphy following in August. The mass departure was due to Conolly’s obsessive need to control every aspect of the band. The three departing members felt that he had no respect for their ideas and contributions and could no longer work with him. This would become a recurring theme during the Lyres history.

They were replaced by guitarist Peter Greenberg, who had played with Conolly in DMZ, and bassist Mike Lewis and drummer Howie Ferguson. They were in place by the time the band recorded a September 3, 1980 show at the Rathskeller, which was much later released as a legacy live album called *Live At The Rat* (2019).

Around this same time, the Lyres signed a record deal with Ace Of Hearts Records, which was Boston’s leading independent punk based label. The label was formed in 1979 by Rick Harte, who seemed to be one of the few people in the music business that Conolly could get along with..

The new lineup’s first recording for Ace Of Hearts was a four song EP called *AHS 105* (1981), which was the label’s catalog number. Fans now refer to the album as *Buried Alive*, which was the first song on the recording. All four songs were written by Conolly and produced by Harte. They firmly established that the Lyres were the number one garage rock band in Boston and local reviews were strong.

The album was heavily influenced by the garage rock sixties bands that Conolly loved, with loud guitars, the ever present organ, a driving bottom end, and strong lead vocals. The EP received strong reviews in Boston as well as London, where the NME praised the band’s “infectious rhythms and their understanding of the dynamics of interplay between rhythm guitar and cheesy organ that borders on the remarkable”.

The band continued to perform live into 1982 but underwent another significant lineup shakeup. By the time they recorded material on March 26, 1982 that was later released as a live set called *Live At Cantones*,

Boston 1982 (2011), Coraccio and Murphy had returned and replaced Lewis and Ferguson. It appears that the last time the Conolly, Greenberg, Lewis, Ferguson lineup played together was at the recording session for what would become their 1983 single, "I Want To Help You Ann" backed by "I Really Want You Right Now", which must have taken place in early 1982 but not released for over a year later.

The revolving door regarding the lead guitar spot took another turn in 1983 when Greenberg left and was replaced by Danny McCormack. He played on a March 20, 1983 radio session for WERS-FM which was also captured on *The Early Years – 1979 To 1983 (Live At Cantones And WERS-FM)*.

He was also featured on their debut studio album, *On Fyre* (1984), which was released by Ace Of Hearts in the summer of 1984. The album is now considered to be one of the cornerstones of the garage rock revival movement. It was raw and full of energy, evoking the mid-sixties sounds of the Sonics, the Seeds, ? and the Mysterians, as well as British bands like Pretty Things and The Troggs. Conolly's organ work stood out in the mix and was a great offset to McCormick's aggressive guitar work.

Despite the intensity of the tracks, Conolly had a knack for writing catchy melodies with strong choruses, both of which were featured on this album. He also incorporated r&b elements into his songs, which made them even more appealing. Four of the album's songs ("Help You Ann", "I Want To Help You Ann", "She Pays The Rent", and "I'm Telling You Lately") have stood the test of time and the album is even more highly regarded today than it was when it was released.

With Ace Of Heart's limited distribution network and their inability to finance a national tour, there was little chance that the album would break through on the American pop albums chart. And, it did not. However, the band played plenty of regional shows in support and the album sold well locally. The band did play shows at Irving Plaza in NYC and traveled to the west coast for shows at the I-Beam in San Francisco. They also traveled to the Netherlands, Sweden, London, and France in the last three months of 1984.

The group's second studio album, *Lyres Lyres* (1986), was released on Ace Of Hearts in 1986. It featured new drummer John Bernardo (aka John Smith), who had replaced Murphy sometime before the album was recorded. He had been a member of the Columbus, Ohio garage rock band, Boys From Nowhere.

The new album featured slower r&b/soul based songs but also retained their signature garage rock sound via Conolly's Vox or Farfisa organ work. The album included a slower version of "She Pays The Rent". After the release of the album, Pryct Records released a legacy live set called *Recorded Live At Cantones* (1987), which was taken from a series of live recordings made over the previous five years.

The band also launched the most extensive tour in their history. They started with a show at the Ritz in NYC in January, then played the Metro in Chicago, the Blind Pig in Ann Arbor, the Music Machine in LA, The I-Beam in San Francisco, and Les Fofunes Electriques in Montreal, before heading to Europe for shows in early May. They came back to the States for some shows in the summer before traveling back to Europe in late October for shows in the Netherland, Spain, Sweden, Belgium, and Germany.

They then released their last studio album for Ace Of Hearts in 1988. *A Promise Is A Promise* (1988) did not include McCormick or Coraccio, who had been replaced by Jack Hickey and Matt Miklos respectively. The album featured a combination of studio and live recordings. Siv Bators (The Dead Boys and The Lords of the New Church) and Wally Tax (The Outsiders) were featured guests.

The support tour included more shows in the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, and Italy, as well as shows throughout the U.S. and Canada. Sometime during 1988, Bernardo left and was replaced by Judd Williams. The new lineup ended the year with shows in Boston before Conolly took a one plus year break and moved to California.

Meanwhile, two more legacy live sets were released in 1988 and 1989. The first was *She Pays The Rent Live*, which was recorded in Spain in November 1987 and June 1988 and released by Impossible Records. It is the only Lyres recording to feature Williams, who plays drum on the 1988 tracks. Then Pryct released *Live 1983 Let's Have A Party* (1989), which features the Conolly, McCormick, Coraccio, and Murphy lineup.

In 1990, Conolly resurrected the band and recorded a new single called "We Sell Soul" which appeared on a compilation of the same name that was released on Impossible Records in 1991. It was also released as a single by their new label, Taang! Records. The Boston based label was founded by Curtis Casella in 1983. The Lyres released an EP called *Nobody But Lyres* (1992), one studio album named *Happy Now* (1993), and a compilation called *Some Lyres* (1994) while on the label.

"Happy Now" was recorded in the summer of 1991 and on various tours. It featured the original lineup of Coraccio, Murphy, Carmel, and Conolly. Covers included songs originally recorded by Tthemm, The Scavengers, Dale & The Devonaires, The Road Runners, Phil & the Frantics, The Rolling Stones, The Isley Brothers, Mr. Lucky & The Gamblers, Bo Diddley, and Elvis Presley.

During these years, the Lyres played some live shows in the U.S. and overseas, but not to the extent of the eighties. In November 1993, they recorded a live show in Oslo, Norway that was released as the live portion of the Norton's 1995 compilation, *Those Lyres*. The band's lineup at that point included Conolly, Coraccio, Hickey, and drummer Jim Janota.

By the second half of the nineties, they were mostly a festival and packaged tour band, appearing at *Cavestomp! 1997* and the *Underground Garage Festival* on Randalls Island in NY in 2004. They made a second appearance at the 2007 version of *Cavestomp!*. For the most part, they played miscellaneous shows in the U.S. and primarily Europe, which continued up to onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. During all these years, their lineup continued to shift based on who was available although he did seem to stabilize it with guitarist Steve Aquino and bassist Dave Szczepaniak in the late 2010s.

After the pandemic, Conolly played at least one show in Cambridge, MA in October 2021. He also played at least two live shows in Spain on March 9 and 10, 2023, billed as LYRES Jeff Connolly & LOS ARRRRGHS. These are his last documented live shows.

The Lyres are featured on several multi-artist compilations but only have released three individual sets. Impossible Records 1991 set, *We Sell Soul*, includes 10 tracks. Impossible's 1995 release, *Shitkickers*, contains 10 covers recorded during the eighties. Finally, Norton's 1995 set, *Those Lyres*, includes 26 tracks, with 15 taken from a live show in Oslo, Norway on September 24, 1993 and the other 11 new versions of older material recorded around the same time.

The band has also released a series of live recordings. Pryct's 1987 set, *Live At Cantones*, includes 14 tracks recorded at various points in the early eighties. Impossible's 1988 release, *She Pays The Rent Live*, contains 14 tracks recorded in 1987 and 1988 in Spain. Pryct's 1989 set, *Live 1983, Let's Have A Party!!*, includes 13 tracks recorded in March 1983. Munster's 2011 release, *Live At Cantones, Boston 1982*,

contains 13 tracks recorded on March 26, 1982. Finally, Crypt's 2019 set, *Live At The Rat (September 3 1980)*, includes 11 tracks recorded in 1980.

My only live recording of the Lyres is Impossible's 1988 release, *She Pays The Rent Live*, which was recorded in Madrid, Spain in November 1987 and June 1988. Between the late eighties and the early 2000s, Impossible Records carved out a niche selling garage rock, power-pop, and punk rock recordings.. They would either license American studio recordings and sell them throughout Spain or put together live albums of those same band as they toured Spain and visited Madrid. As such, they released rare live recordings of bands like the Cynics, The Fleshtones, The Devil Dogs, Burn, The Barracudas, Young Fresh Fellows, The Pleasure Fuckers, Elliott Murphy, and the Lyres.

Unlike many other independent European labels, the folks at Impossible put together great album packages. This one has a fold out sleeve, several high quality band photos, and nicely printed album notes. I could not believe the quality put into the jacket and I had every reason to believe that I found a gem. Then, the music started.

The album was recorded at two different shows in November 1987 and June 1988. By this point, the Lyres opportunity to break through commercially had passed. Their debut album, *On Fyre* (1984) and its follow-up, *Lyres Lyres* (1986), had both been released and while they generated good reviews, they did nothing on the charts. The tour for the later stretched into the later part of 1987 when eight of these tracks were recorded. By this point, the lineup featured Conolly, Hickey, Miklos, and Bernardo.

The Lyres' 1988 album, *A Promise Is A Promise*, was recorded by this same lineup but by the time the June 1988 live material was recorded, Bernardo had been replaced by Judd Williams. After this tour was completed, Conolly was so depressed about the prospects for the band that he took an extended hiatus and moved to Los Angeles.

The eight tracks recorded with Bernardo in 1987 come from *On Fyre* ("Soapy", "Help You Ann"), *Lyres Lyres* ("She Pays The Rent", "Not Looking Back"), and *A Promise Is A Promise* ("Touch", "She's Got Eyes That Tell Lies). They also cover the Sonics classic, "Cinderella", and an obscure Cobs 'N Robbers song called "You'll Never Do It Baby", which is mistakenly called "You'll Never Do That" on the liner notes.

The 1988 tracks include "How Do You Know", which was the A side of the Lyres debut 1979 single, and a track from *A Promise Is A Promise* called "Here's A Heart". The other four tracks are covers. "I Can't Stop The Want" was originally recorded by Go Go dancer turned one time singer Sandy Sarjeant, who was famous in the mid-sixties for dancing on *Ready Steady Go* and *The Beat Club*. "Today I'm Gay" comes from a Jay-Jays 1966 album. "Signed D.C." is one of the more popular Love songs and "Jezebel" is a well-known Frankie Lane song that was covered by many artists.

One of the biggest problems with this album is the recording level of the 1987 and 1988 tracks. The 1987 tracks are barely audible without dramatically increasing the volume while the 1988 tracks are way louder. Since all these songs are mixed together, it is impossible to listen to the album without the volume control for your stereo in your hands. Why Impossible's engineer did not correct this before transferring the tapes to vinyl is beyond comprehension.

There are also some mixing problems regarding Conolly's organ. At times it is undermixed, which is problematic when it is used for solos. However, at other times, it is fine, especially on songs like on "Soapy", "She Pays The Rent", "You'll Never Do It Baby", "Not Looking Back", and "Help You Ann".

The last recording problem takes place on the obscure cover, “I Can’t Stop The Want”, which features Conolly’s smooth vocals and nice guitar work from Hickey. However, a second vocalist is screaming in the background throughout the entire song. I assume it is Hickey but no one else other than Conolly is credited on vocals so who knows. Fortunately, he is undermixed, so it is more annoying than anything else.

Given all this, there are some redeeming qualities. Hickey, Miklos, and the two drummers sound great and give a good performance. Hickey’s rhythm and lead guitar work is strong throughout. Some of his solos, especially on songs like “Signed D.C.” are very strong. He even uses some nice guitar atmospherics during “Here’s A Heart”, which also features Miklos and Williams. Speaking of them, the bottom end is strong throughout with no noticeable difference between the two drummers. In total, the backing band is tight pretty much nail all the songs.

Of course, the focal point is Conolly, who has the perfect voice for mid-sixties garage rock. He can scream with the best of them but also sing conventionally, as he shows on “Jezebel” and “Here’s A Heart”, with a nice lower and upper register. While his pitch is sometimes off, as shown on “Jezebel” and “Today I’m Gay”, which were both recorded in 1988, his performance on the other 1988 tracks is much stronger, especially during a performance of their debut single, “How Do You Know”. He also captures the menace inherent in Arthur Lee’s Love classic, “Signed D.C.”. With some searing guitar work by Hickey, the song is one of the best on the album.

Aside from the recording level problems, the 1987 tracks are the meat of this recording. Six of the eight tracks appeared on a Lyres studio album and some are outstanding. “Help You Ann” is a terrific ensemble recording with Bernardo on fire throughout. There is a perfect mix of Conolly’s organ and Hickey’s guitar. While “Touch” has some dicey moments, Conolly is clearly giving it his all. His vocals go off key at times but the emotion is there.

“Soapy” and “She Pays The Rent” sound great. The first evokes the mid-sixties garage rock scene with its organ, driving beat, and nice guitar solo. The second is a slow burn, starting with a slow blues vibe before ending with a bang. It may be Conolly’s best vocal on the entire album and his organ work is very good. The three songs on the second side of the album also capture the band at their best. “You’ll Never Do It Baby” has another passionate vocal performance from Conolly and the mix of organ and guitar is perfect.

“Not Looking Back” is very similar and “She’s Got Eyes That Tell Lies” veers more to the psychedelic side, with a Blue Cheer like feel, especially in terms of Conolly’s screaming vocals and Hickey’s guitar solo. The final 1987 track is a searing cover of the Sonics’ “Cinderella”. It takes some grit to cover any of the Sonics songs and Conolly and this track, which features a Gary Roslie like lead vocal, is proof that the Lyres had the goods to deliver.

While the recording quality issues on this album are impossible to ignore, the overall performance level and choice of songs makes it a better bet than the other live sets that were recorded much earlier. The only other recording that may be comparable is Pryct’s 1987 set, *Live At Cantones*, which was recorded over a number of years and has a similar set list. Either way, consider one of the sets for your live collection.

