

Manticore Members' Bios

Rob Shepard - Keys

Born a poor sharecropper's son in the wilds of deepest, darkest Brooklyn, Rob currently resides in lovely, lyrical, Lynbrook, Long Island. A piano student from age 4, Rob has played in many bands (and types of bands) in his 58 odd years. He's played in innumerable cover bands doing classic rock, funk, R&B & blues. His avocations, however, have always been toward prog & fusion. In recent years, he's formed several groups, most notably, Morse Code & AfterLife. Morse Code played small venues doing the best of the Dixie Dregs & Steve Morse, King Crimson, Return to Forever, Flash and post-PG Genesis. AfterLife focused on ELP, Yes, Genesis, Rush, Kansas, Saga & UK and was playing small theaters before disbanding in 2008. It was in AfterLife, however, that Rob met drummer extraordinaire, Glenn Dove. Rob joined & played with Rael - the Music of Genesis in 2014 recreating the keyboard artistry of Tony Banks. He was with Rael for 3 1/2 years, helping to establish the core and initial direction of the band but after the tragic passing of Keith Emerson & Greg Lake in 2016, Rob felt the need to pay homage to the brilliant legacy of the musical phenomenon, Emerson, Lake & Palmer. Rob uses a Hammond SK-2, Yamaha Motif EM8, Yamaha S-30, Alesis Micron and Behringer DeepMind 6.

John Cristando - Percussion

John Cristando, a mystery man from birth, suddenly appeared behind a drum kit at the horrible age of 17. As a troubled teen, now with weapons in his hands, he was hitting things with sticks every chance he got. Fortunately for Long Island, though, he never came out from behind that drum kit. When some wandering minstrels found him in Valley Stream, NY, (fortunately for them) Little John was preoccupied repairing his broken drum heads, so they seized the moment and quickly recruited him to drum for a soon-to-be locally famous copy band, Spartacus. Spartacus, a band among the elite Long Island rock bands of the '70s, distinguished themselves by playing more unique & challenging material than their brethren. Music by such artists as ELP, The Tubes, Todd Rundgren's Utopia, Flash... Spartacus carved a niche for themselves, until the untimely death of their lead singer/bassist on the way home from a show (no joke - sorry, this is the serious part). Spartacus broke up shortly after that. Not long after, though, John was recruited once again. This time, to tour South America with the '80s band, Video. From there, Little John's life became a blur - he still talks of flashback moments of clarity, doing TV & stage shows, studio work, hanging with Frankie Avalon & various cartels..... But suddenly, in the late '80s, he emerged from the fog to find that he had a family, a wife and kids, a home in Syosset, a cabinet-making business designing kitchens & living spaces, a collection of sports cars....and no recollection of being a drummer! John went for close to 30 years without picking up a stick! Until, one day, the music fairy came banging on his door....not with a vengeance, as you'd expect, but timidly - offering up little lounge quartets, fill-in spots with friends, occasional jams..... as John's chops came back, he found himself playing more & more. The Blue Jays, doing lounge-type stuff, UnderCover, doing more cover-rock in bars & restaurants. Then, out of the blue, John gets a call from his old friend, Rob Shepard, to come & play the music of his

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childhood idols, Keith Emerson Greg Lake & Carl Palmer, in the close-to-world-famous project Manticore-the tribute to ELP, and John's resounding response was....

“,,,ummmmm, let me get back to you....uh, yeah, no thanks.” Well, that was his initial response - until Rob whacked Little John with a Vic Firth American Classic wood tip 5A drum stick and said “Wrong answer, John!” and the rest is history - or history yet-to-be-made, as John is now the Carl Palmer surrogate in Manticore-the tribute to ELP. And life goes on!

BTW, for anyone curious about John's gear, he builds his own drums! How cool is that?

Ron Ponella - Vocals, Bass & Guitar

Ron Ponella was born in Brooklyn, and grew up in Ozone Park Queens. He started playing bass at the age of eight years old when he removed the E & B strings from his acoustic guitar to create a makeshift bass. His early musical influences were Paul McCartney and Jack Bruce. With the advent of Progressive Rock Music, he fell in love with such bands as King Crimson, ELP, Yes, Genesis, and Pink Floyd, adding a totally new dimension to his playing. With similar vocal range, depth and tonality, Ron always tried to model his vocal styling after the great Greg Lake. Being such a big ELP fan, Ron even named one of his earlier bands Karnival (an homage to Karn Evil 9) which had him playing original music extensively in the NYC music scene, including regular appearances at the legendary Max's Kansas City in Manhattan and several TV performances on the Uncle Floyd Show.

Ron has also been a successful writer, producer, vocal artist and performer for Television Commercials, children's projects (for Sony Wonder) and the band The NY Pedestrians. Ron worked closely with the international recording artist Lyn Liechty, producing, writing, and recording bass and backup vocals for several of her albums and music videos such as “CaveMan!” which has received over 1.6 million views. Ron is very honored and excited to be part of Manticore, working with two great musicians; Rob Shepard and John Cristando. Ron uses Fender, Gibson & Rickenbacker Basses & Guitars, Mesa Power House Bass Cabs and Amplification and Moog Taurus Bass Pedals