

Schpaybo hangs in there and returns with 'Long Way Back'

JERRY KISHBAUGH – Off The Record

It's no secret that making it in the music business is a hard nut to crack. That's why I have to give the subject of this column a high grade for perseverance.

A few years ago, a musician who goes by the moniker of Schpaybo (in reality he is Steve Spirko) sent me his self-titled debut CD. Without belaboring a point, I chose not to write anything about the release. Why? Well, it was the Edwardsville musician's first stab at doing a record and, in all fairness, it wasn't all that good in my humble opinion. So, rather than dash an aspiring musician's hopes, I let it go at that.

In the meantime, Schpaybo never gave up and went about honing his musical and song-writing skills for the next three years or so. The end result is Schpaybo's second attempt at releasing a CD to dispel any notion he is one of a myriad of musicians who put out a CD just for the sake of putting out a CD.

Schpaybo's hard work and never-say-die attitude has paid off handsomely as *Long Way Back* is a juggernaut of power, rife with blistering guitars and driving rhythms. I'm not trying to stroke this guy, but Schpaybo indeed has traveled a long way back (even though he didn't go that far away).

On the seven-song compilation, Schpaybo is literally a one-man band as he wrote, arranged and produced the CD. And if that's not enough, he also did the bulk of the vocals, drumming, and guitar and bass duties. In certain instances, the multi-instrumentalist enlisted the services of guitarists Bob Bartoli and Chris London, vocalists Ian Ritter of Cider fame and Rob Nicoletti, bassists Len "E" and Rick Lesoine and drummer Neil Braunstein.

Making *Long Way Back* more palatable is the fact, that Tom Borthwick and Wiggy Wegleski of Sound Investments in Scranton recorded, mixed and mastered the hard-drivin' CD.

Long Way Back is out-and-out rock & roll, powered by thick, full-bodied instrumentation as evidenced on each and every tune. In addition to the title track, which can be likened to a heavier version of Alice Cooper, my particular favorite on the CD is the ballad, *Fall In Love Eyes*. The power ballad is as sweet; smooth and as thick as maple syrup and tosses in a tinge of country with the harmonies. Jokingly, Schpaybo said I probably liked this tune because he didn't sing the lead. Of course, I didn't know that when I listened to the CD, but credit has to be given to Ian Ritter of Cider for the lead vocals on this number.

The music on *Long Way Back* is hard & heavy and is meant to be played loud. Though Schpaybo has been missing in action for a while, he makes a statement on his sophomore effort by not conforming to the music of today. Basically, this musician is all rock & roll.

The CD shifts into hyper-drive on *Heartshock*, which features rapid-fire vocals, catapulted to a higher plane by slick instrumentation. Speaking of hyper, if you've had too much caffeine, don't listen to *Stress*. The music and vocals (in the vein of AC/DC) on this song convey a pulsating, stress fraught journey.

Out of Time has a Rolling Stones' feel to it, which is only fitting since, if I'm not mistaken, the Stones had a song or an album of the same name. Like the majority of the seven songs, *Won't You Be My Girl* is filled with exceptional guitar and edge-of-the-seat rhythms. *Long Way Back*

is rounded out by *For Barbara's Love* (and I thought her name was Peterlyn). Though the back sleeve of the CD only lists seven songs, there is an added bonus with a double-time reprise of *Long Way Back* on which Schpaybo really cuts loose on guitar. Not surprisingly, Schpaybo can't get a break when it comes to his music getting airplay on local stations. Still, he shouldn't feel bad because this has always been the cage. When it comes to local bands and musicians trying to get their original music played on the local airwaves, they might as well forget it. But, there is one exception since the Bear does let local talent strut its stuff on "Cellar Full of Noise." More local stations should follow suit. With Schpaybo's release of *Long Way Back*, one thing is certain - this guy won't call it quits until rock & roll ceases to exist. But, we all know that rock & roll will never die.