

## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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# Last train to Popsville

## Kevin Baldwin revives the music of Boyce & Hart

By Brian Goslow

It's just after 1 p.m. on Saturday, and director Kevin Baldwin is calling out the names of children who are performing in Hot Rod Hot Dogs, K & K Productions' upcoming theatrical presentation. He gives each a copy of a CD bearing the number they'll be performing on the St. Matthew's Parish stage this weekend while wife Karen (the other K in K & K) measures them for their stage costumes. The rehearsal begins to the sound of "Journey of Love" by Bobby Hart — as in Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart, the songwriting duo that gave us many of The Monkees' greatest hits, including "Theme from the Monkees," "Steppin' Stone," and "Last Train to Clarksville." They also penned "Alice Long" and "I Wonder What She's Doing Tonight?" (Top 40 hits under their own names) as well as the theme music to "Days of Our Lives," which has resulted in 40 years of royalty checks.

It takes an obsessively devoted fan to create a theatrical production based on his favorite musical heroes and that's exactly what Baldwin is doing. Hot Rod Hot Dogs is the first step of a larger project — Sunshine Pop: The Story of Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart.

"I've been a Monkees fan and a Boyce & Hart fan going back to high school," Baldwin explains. "I approached Caroline Boyce [Tommy Boyce's widow — he committed suicide in 1994] in April about what it would take to acquire music to their songs which hadn't been hits. She said she had been approached by a number of people about using the hits but they wanted to focus on his suicide. I told her my interest was in the music and telling the story of how they got together, before they got together, and after they were together. I told her I didn't want to touch areas that have nothing to do with the music they produced."



### DETAILS

**What:** K & K Productions presents Kevin Baldwin's Hot Rod Hot Dogs

**When:** Friday and Saturday, Nov. 7 and 8, at 7 p.m.

**Where:** St. Matthew's Parish, 695 Southbridge St.

**Cost:** Adults \$7, children and seniors \$4

**Call:** 508-791-9544

She agreed with the proposal and arranged a conference call between Baldwin and Tommy Hart. "He loved the idea," Baldwin says, "and we worked on the script over the summer and have been hammering and tweaking it ever since."

Hart, speaking from his California office, says he had to give Baldwin a course in '60s lingo. "He's from a different generation so I had some reservations about the dialogue. It was just about the way we spoke back then."

As part of his research, Baldwin has talked with Keith Allison, a Boyce & Hart cohort best known for his role with Paul Revere and the Raiders. "He said Tommy was pure pop with a surf side while Bobby was into R & B and the blues."

In the midst of his research, Baldwin received a Boyce & Hart Holy Grail — a CD compilation of their pre-Monkees-period solo records that had been compiled by a Japanese collector. The songs on the disc are the soundtrack to Hot Rod Hot Dogs, a 1950s-based story of a racetrack/dragstrip diner that an evil major wants to pull down and turn into a golf course. "The kids are trying to save the restaurant," says Baldwin, whose five-year-old daughter Amanda has a role in the 15-song show, which features bobby soxers, cheerleaders, hot rods, jukeboxes and poodle skirts. The music will be arranged by Jim Perry of the local rock band Hothouse.

"It's kind of amazing that someone would be that interested in the music 40 years later," says Hart of Baldwin's devotion to the project. "He's immersed himself in our careers."

Baldwin hopes the kids have a good enough time with Hot Rod Hot Dogs that they'll bring their enthusiasm to the production of Sunshine Pop.

"The hope is to reignite interest in Boyce & Hart," Baldwin says. "Why they aren't in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Songwriters Hall of Fame is beyond me — that's the premise of Sunshine Pop — a reporter interviews them with the intention of beginning the process to get them inducted." If things go as planned, Sunshine Pop will have its world premiere in Worcester in the fall of 2004. "I'd sure love to be there," Hart says.

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