

# Sun-Times

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## Rock 'n' roll love story brought together Phil 'n' the Blanks

44 **weekender**

### How about rock 'n' roll love story?

What could be more appropriate as we head into a St. Valentine's Day weekend than a rock 'n' roll love story?

Ours begins a little more than a year ago, at a North Side watering hole—the kind of setting where modern romance so often blossoms, if only for a night. A would-be songwriter named Phil Bimstein had just finished checking out a new local band, hoping to interest it in his tunes. Before heading home, he decided to have a nightcap at a nearby club. He bought himself a drink and sat down to watch the blues group that was playing.

"There was this blond girl sitting in front of me," remembers Bimstein. "She was wearing this backless dress and looked real interesting, real vibrant. I was a little drunk. She was sitting there with four guys, but I guess they all went to the bathroom at the same time. So, I asked her to dance."

They danced. As they did, Bimstein learned that his enchantress' she used to be in a new wave band.

"That's funny," Bimstein recalls telling her, "I'm a new wave songwriter. Maybe I could write some songs for you."

**NOT BAD**, as far as lines go, although Bimstein swears that his intentions—as always—were honorable. In any case, Bimstein and Holmberg started seeing each other and working on songs together.

Around the same time, Bimstein decided that he'd be better off forming his own band than trying to peddle his material. Through a series of ads, he recruited guitarist



Phil 'n' the Blanks will celebrate its first anniversary at Gaspars on Saturday.

### After hours

Don McLeese

Eric Kister, bassist Bill Hyland and drummer Roman Zabicki.

On Valentine's Day of last year, Phil 'n' the Blanks made their performing debut.

While love affairs may come and go, a good rock 'n' roll pairing is a match made in heaven. In the year since, Phil 'n' the Blanks has established itself as one of the freshest-sounding bands in Chicago. The group's material combines a literate, lyrical sensibility with an instrumental edge that is hard-rocking yet consistently melodic. At the heart of the band's appeal is a certain sparkle in the interplay between Bimstein and Holmberg, both as singers and performers.

Though the band is only a year old, there's a maturity in its music that reflects Bimstein's years of experience. As a Chicago high schooler in the mid-'60s, he fronted a Rolling Stones type band called the Dharma Bums that attracted a major-label recording contract and released a single for Parrot Records.

After a few years on the fringes of the San Francisco scene, he returned to Chicago to study classical composition and piano at the Chicago Conservatory.

**HE BECAME** interested in rock again with the emergence of the more inventive new wave bands. "I was never really a punker," says Bimstein, "but when it started getting a little more sophisticated—the Talking Heads, for instance—I started really listening. I've always been writing songs."

Music aside, one thing that sets Phil 'n' the Blanks apart from so many other local bands is Bimstein's promotional flair. Within the past year, he has established himself as the most inspired and most incessant self-promoter on the local rock scene. Before the band had played its first date, the Blanks already boasted a full line of Phil 'n' the Blanks buttons, yo-yos, T-shirts, posters—anything to keep its name in front of the public.

Saturday Phil 'n' the Blanks will be celebrating its first anniversary at Gaspars, 3159 N. Southport (871-6680), one of our favorite spots for taking old valentines or meeting new ones. In addition to being an anniversary party and a Valentine's Day party, the festivities also will mark the release of the band's second single: "I Want Some More," the flipside of which is "I'm Losing Interest."