



Richard Boccelli (aka) Dick Richards was born in Upper Darby, PA on Feb. 12, 1924. He started in the music business in the 1940's as a driver and road manager for his father, Luigi Boccelli, a blind opera singer whom people referred to as the "blind Caruso". His father helped to organize blind musicians up and down the Jersey shore. Dick had no plans of becoming a drummer or musician. He attended college to become a teacher. After his older brother entered the Army, he learned to play the drums at his father's request. He never dreamed it would have the impact on his future that it has had. He toured with his father and his orchestra and

gained valuable experience both on the drums and in front of the microphone with his rich baritone voice.

In 1953 Bill Haley asked him to join his group as one of the Comets and Dick turned him down. A few months later Haley asked again and this time Dick accepted.

On April 12, 1954, the group recorded a record for promoter Milt Gabler, at the Pythian Temple in New York City, called "13 Women, and Only One Man in Town," a song about the "H' bomb, of all things. To fill side "B" Gabler said why don't you play that rock & roll thing. They had practiced the night before in Bill Haley's basement, a new song that would soon make history and change the culture, virtually overnight, of not only music and dance but attitudes in general in both in the US and in Europe. The song was "Rock Around The Clock" and although it wasn't a hit until a year later in 1955, after it was used as the soundtrack for the teenage rebellion movie, "Blackboard Jungle" it skyrocketed to the top of the charts for 8 weeks and the world would never be the same.

He played with Bill Haley until 1957, and after being refused a \$50 a week raise, Dick, Marshall Lytle (bass player) and Joey D'Ambrosio (aka Joey Ambrose – sax man), quit Haley's band and started their own band, using part of each of their own names, Joey, Dick & Marshall, called the JoDiMars. The Jodimars had great success mostly on the west coast and recorded several hits such as "Well Now Dig This" and "Dancin' the Bop", on which you can hear Dick's rich baritone vocals. After a few years, the Jodimars broke up in 1959 and went their separate ways. Marshall went into real estate, Joey worked at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas where he was living, and Dick went into the nightclub business with his brother for about 15 years until he tired of the business and decided to pursue acting. He went to the Hedgerow Theater in Media and began to learn acting.

He became an accomplished actor and landed his first stage role in 1974 in a play titled "The Ritz" with Rita Moreno, Jack Weston and Jerry Stiller. He also appeared locally on stage at the Electric & Light Theater in Philadelphia and in feature films, such as, "So Fine" with Ryan O'Neal & Jack Warden and "My Blue Heaven" with Steve Martin. Also on network TV, appearing on the hit TV series, "Kojak" with Telly Savalas and later (on the HBO series "Oz").

In 1987 a Philadelphia producer putting together a show to honor Dick Clark asked the original Comets to reunite to perform at the event. They agreed. After all, it was Dick Clark who called "Rock Around the Clock" the International Anthem of Rock & Roll. After such a rousing welcome they soon re-formed the band and started touring all over the US and Europe again and continue to this day adding oldies cruises and Branson, MO theaters to their tour dates. A few years back when he was much younger (at 82) they did a European tour of 22 cities in 25 days. Most younger groups today can't keep a rigorous pace like that.

Among some of his honors are gold records, an induction into the Hollywood Rock Walk of Fame along with the other Comets. The first inductees into the Wildwood, NJ, Walk of Fame and a Historical Marker placement at the old Hofbrau Hotel in Wildwood where they first performed "Rock Around The Clock" live in public. Another historical marker placement at Jack's Twin Bar in Gloucester City, NJ, was added to the list of honors and he was also inducted into the Rockabilly Hall of Fame and just recently they were all inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, OH.



Putting their hand imprints in cement for the Hollywood Rock Walk of Fame.

Dick also had quite an athletic college career

While Dick attended West Chester Teachers College (as it was known from 1927 to 1983) and studied to become a teacher, he played varsity baseball and football for the West Chester Rams and like everything else he did in life, he excelled. He played defense and offense for the “purple & gold” in 1946, 1947 and 1948. During the 1947 season he recovered a fumble on the 27 yard line in a win over the Drexel Dragons and after two early scoring runs were nullified by penalties the West Chester Rams cashed in after he blocked a punt on the 20 yard line in a win over Rider University. During the 3 years he played, the team won 26 games and lost only 3 and were the Burley Bowl Champions in 1947 and 1948, a traditional Thanksgiving Day bowl game played in Johnson City, TN. The college didn’t keep many defensive statistics in those days like they do today but he was a force on the field. So much so, that he was inducted into the West Chester University Sports Hall of Fame. He is also in the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame, and on the Upper Darby High School Wall of Fame.

He taught civics & general science and coached football and baseball at Springfield High School. And in 2001 he was inducted into the West Chester University’s Sturzebecker Health & Sciences Hall of Fame, named after the universities’ Health & Sciences director, Dr. Sturzebecker. Some of the criteria for induction into this hall of fame are that a nominee “has to have rendered service to a particular segment of society and that the nominee has influenced large numbers of persons throughout.” He has certainly met those requirements.

And today at 89 years young, when most folks are long since retired or looking to retire, Dick with his lifelong friend Joey D’Ambrosio, two of the original Comets, are still looking for work. They continue to perform year round across the United States, in Europe and on oldies cruises. And in his words, “I plan to rock til I drop!!”



Dick with West Chester Sports HOF Trophy



The Comets in 1954 & in 2004



Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction – April 14, 2012