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## Reflections of Poe

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The collective of Tom Varano, Augie Christiano, Rick Richards and Lou Cossa went by several different names in their days as one of the dominant forces on the Northeastern Pennsylvania music scene.

They started off as the El Caminos, who eventually begat the Glass Prism, who eventually begat Shenandoah.

More than 30 years since last sharing a stage together, they're reuniting, thanks to the middle of the three bands.

On Oct. 27, the Glass Prism will play a benefit concert for Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site at the German Society in Philadelphia. There, the progressive rock band will perform an hour-long set that will include songs from its 1969 RCA Records concept album, "Poe Through the Glass Prism," including "Eldorado," "Conqueror Worm" and its biggest hit, "The Raven," which is essentially Poe's famous poem of the same name set to music.



The popular 1960s band the Glass Prism will play a benefit show for the Edgar Allan Poe Historic Site in Philadelphia on Oct. 27. From left, bassist Augie Christiano, drummer Rick Richards (Chojnowski), keyboardist Lou Cossa and guitarist Tom Varano.

Other musicians, such as Lou Reed, have put their spin on Poe's works, but the Glass Prism is the only one to adhere so faithfully to source material, said Helen McKenna-Uff, a park ranger at the site, a house that Poe once lived in.

"What's really great about these guys is that they're taking Poe's words as he wrote it and setting them to music," she said.

The reunion came about after Mr. Varano learned that a CD copy of "Poe Through the Glass Prism" was being played daily at the site. The CD had come from a guy who had converted it from its original vinyl. Turns out, the man's first introduction to Poe's work came courtesy of the Glass Prism.

### Quite popular

There were plenty more fans besides him. The Web site, Frank's Vinyl Museum ([www.franklarosa.com](http://www.franklarosa.com)), which is devoted to offbeat albums of yesteryear, features a message board filled with hundreds of people singing the praises of "Poe Through the Glass Prism." And the band members have heard from numerous teachers who incorporate the album into their lesson plans on Poe.

"We're all over the world," said Mr. Christiano, who now calls Mays Landing, N.J., home.

While Mr. Varano (lead guitar), Mr. Richards (drums) and Mr. Christiano (bass) all jumped at the chance to reunite, fellow original keyboardist Carl Siracuse decided to sit it out. In his place came Mr. Cossa, owner of Scranton's Cossa Music and Sound, who replaced Mr. Christiano on bass for Shenandoah, the power trio that followed the Glass Prism.

The band members have spent the past eight Friday evenings rehearsing for their comeback. Admittedly, there was a lot of rust to scrape off, given the last Shenandoah show was in 1976. And, aside from Mr. Cossa, 56, who was also a member of the popular local band Dakota (which reunited two years ago), none of them had even picked up their instruments in recent years. Mr. Varano, 60, now works in entertainment promotions in Binghamton, N.Y. Mr. Christiano, 63, drives a bus. And Mr. Richards (real last name: Chojnowski), 64, of Dickson City, is an electrical contractor.

At last Friday's practice, the band seemed to be gelling nicely. Mr. Christiano's voice was strong, Mr. Varano was pulling out

complicated riffs on his '69 Les Paul Gibson, Mr. Richards pounded the skins with precision and Mr. Cossa produced plenty of haunting organ effects on his keyboard. In addition to originals, they played some of their better-known covers, including Cream's "White Room" and Procol Harum's "Hamburg."

"It's starting to sound good," Mr. Christiano said.

"We'll see," Mr. Varano said.

"Sometimes you go to grab 'em (the notes), and they're not there," Mr. Richards joked.

The roots of The Glass Prism go back to 1960, when Mr. Varano formed the El Caminos with George Fox, Steve Bond and Jim Schrader. The other three eventually left (Mr. Bond died in a car accident on the way to a show) and by 1966 Mr. Siracuse, Mr. Richards and Mr. Christiano were all part of the band's lineup. The band changed its name — Mr. Siracuse's sister came up with Glass Prism — after landing a record deal with RCA, thanks to the work of local talent manager Gene Weiss.

"We just thought it was another day at the office," Mr. Varano said of the record deal. "We just thought it was supposed to happen."

### **In the studio**

The album was recorded over three days at the New Jersey studio of electric guitar inventor Les Paul, who served as the record's engineer. The band slept at Mr. Paul's house next door. Mr. Paul woke Mr. Christiano before dawn one morning, passed him a cup of coffee, then sent him to the studio to record the vocals for "The Raven."

As unorthodox a tactic as it was, it worked.

"I knocked it out. I was relaxed," said Mr. Christiano, a big Poe fan who came up with the idea to put a rock 'n' roll spin on the poem.

After cutting "Poe Through the Glass Prism," The Glass Prism opened for bands like Three Dog Night, the Guess Who and Vanilla Fudge. However, RCA never really got behind the album, and as a result it never made much headway on the charts. Still, "The Raven" was a huge hit locally.

As part of its record deal, the band was obligated to record one more album for RCA. That album, 1970s's "Of Joy and Sorrow," was recorded over a whirlwind 11 days, with the band forced to pen some of the songs right there in the studio. That album received almost no publicity.

From there, Mr. Christiano and Mr. Siracuse departed, and Mr. Cossa joined Mr. Varano and Mr. Richards in forming Shenandoah. Where the Glass Prism had an arty, progressive sound, Shenandoah was blues-based hard rock in the tradition of Cream and Led Zeppelin. Five years into that band's existence, the guys went their separate ways, after Mr. Richards decided he'd had enough of the road.

"The drummer screwed the band up," Mr. Richards said with a chuckle. "My kids were growing up. I couldn't handle it any longer."

Now they're ready to give it another go, and, assuming things go well in Philly, some future dates could be in store for the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre area.

"It would be nice if it goes well down there. It's nice to find a place to do a reunion," Mr. Richards said. "I want to hear people have a good time."

If you go Who: Glass Prism WhEN: Oct. 27, 8 p.m. WhERE: German Society, 611 Spring Garden, Philadelphia DETAILS: The popular local band, known best for its song "The Raven," is performing a benefit for Philadelphia's Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site. Tickets are \$20 and can be purchased by calling 800-836-1691 or 215-861-4971. For more information on the band, visit [www.glassprismband.com](http://www.glassprismband.com). or the band's page at [myspace.com](http://myspace.com).

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