

# woman

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## Tin Roof Rusted Gal Still Shines

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Cindy Wilson of The B-52's



# Here's to the Party

By Mary Welch

She knows they're staring at her in the car pool lane. She hears the whispers and sees the discrete finger pointing. Yes, Cindy Wilson is used to being the talked-about-mom in the car pool lane. She even knows what they're saying. "I know they're sort of looking and going, 'That's the girl in the B-52's. Isn't it?'" But, if they looked a little closer at the B-52 in the car pool lane, they "just might see me with my hair in curlers, no make-up and my clothes thrown on," she says with a laugh. "I mean, I'm doing my best just getting the kids to school on time. Let's be real."

Photography by Jay Thomas, on location at Cindy Wilson's home.







**K**eeping it real – and fun – is something Cindy Wilson has been doing all her life. Today, Wilson is still the bongo-playing singer of the B-52's, and although the trademark beehive hairdo is retired, her voice, attitude and dedication to her image and profession are as strong as ever. However, when the stage lights go out, she switches to the other Cindy Wilson, the one in the car pool lane who is a mother of two, and, as she laughingly admits, “a Dunwoody housewife who’s still crazy about my husband.”

“Cindy, at heart, is a Southern gal, sweet, unpretentious,” says her friend Elizabeth Cogswell Baskin, CEO of Tribe, an Atlanta boutique ad agency. “After I had my baby, she came over with a big basket of food -- fried chicken, potato salad, desserts. She made them all herself. I mean that’s amazing that anyone would do it, but you sure don’t think an international pop star would. And, then she bragged about the secret of her potato salad, which is cutting the onions up into teeny, tiny pieces.”

Wilson also has the recipe for why the B-52's remain as popular as ever and the secret for keeping it real. “It’s all about having fun,” she says. “What we do makes us happy, and hopefully, our audience as well. It’s not an act because then it’s forced. We sing songs and dress in ways that make us happy. It’s whatever makes us laugh.”

And 29 years later the group is still having fun and cutting a new record. Eight songs have been recorded with three more to go. Every Monday the group has a conference call to discuss business and the music. It’s a little more challenging now because they don’t have an album label or a producer. Still, she is hopeful.

“I think the songs are really good; a couple could be singles,” she says. Band member Keith Strickland comes up with the melody and brings it to Georgia where the other members – Kate Pierson and Fred Schneider – meet to practice and write songs. “It’s nice because I’m the only one with kids so they come here. We’ve been recording and we’re coming up with about a song every four days. They’re party songs, fun songs. We were aiming for a fall release in time for Christmas but it’s looking like a spring 2007 date. The band’s in a really good place now.”

Very involved in the business aspect, Cindy doesn’t know how the band will market the album. “I think the songs are so strong that we probably could get a record deal,” she muses. “But, if we market the album ourselves, we keep more of the money. We’re not sure what we’re going to do.”

Although the band hasn’t released an album in over a decade, they tour each summer and do a number of highly lucrative corporate shows a year. “With all the downloading and stuff you

don’t make money off records any more,” she says. “You make money being a great live touring act.” In fact, they will perform on any day except Christmas, and since Wilson became a mother, Halloween, so she can go ‘trick ‘n’ treatin’ with her kids.

The B-52's arguably did their biggest private show of their careers last month when they were the opening act for the Rolling Stones at a private fundraiser in Radio City Music Hall.

“It was so amazing,” she says. “It was the best show we’ve ever done. We just went all out. We even got a standing ovation, which as the opening act is really hard to get. We were so psyched, and I’ve got to tell you Mick Jagger is so sexy!”

Cindy Wilson has been a B-52 more than half her life.

Born in Athens, she, her brother Ricky, Kate, Keith and Fred started hanging out and making music. “Athens was great because there were so many influences because of the college that you didn’t get in most Southern towns. It was a great place to grow up and become creative. We had to make our own fun.”

That they did. In October 1976 the five met at HuNan, a restaurant near Athens. Instead of eating, they drank flaming volcanoes. “We were drinking those things and then we went and started jamming and playing music. It was the best time. That night we came up with a couple of songs,

Killer Bees, Planet Claire and part of Rock Lobster. Someone said we should start playing at parties and that’s how it started. It was very organic but again, all about having fun, partying and making music.”

The band’s first paying gig was at Julia’s in Athens on Valentine’s Day, 1977, and was a pivotal day in the life of Cindy Wilson. It was the first time the B-52's played in public and for money. And, it was the first time she met Keith Bennett, one of the partygoers and an art student. It was a cosmic thing.

“I believe the angels brought Keith Bennett to me,” she says. “I had it so bad when we met – you know the kind where you’re so much in love that it hurts. He was an artistic weirdo and I related to him right off. He completed me and it just felt right.”

So, as Wilson often says, in one night she got a career and the man of her dreams.

The show was a success. They played their six-song set twice and knew they had a formula that worked.

The band moved to New York and word-of-mouth made them a quick success. “It’s easy to get a big head and lose track of who you really are,” she says. “It’s dangerous. But I was lucky because we are a group. There’s no one star and we’re very democratic as far as how we approach things. Plus I had my brother and Keith.”

**“We have  
a very nontraditional  
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but we’re a very  
traditional family”**





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→  
NO EXCEPTIONS

B-52  
July 15

Photography by Jay Thomas, on location at Cindy Wilson's home.





Photography by Jay Thomas, on location at Cindy Wilson's home.

The band put out records, played clubs and toured relentlessly. In 1985, Wilson's brother, Ricky, died of AIDS and the band's future was in doubt. Ironically, after his death, the band came together and recorded their biggest hit, the multi-platinum album *Cosmic Thing*, which included Love Shack. But the death of her brother, coupled with the 18 months of touring following the album's success, took its toll. "It was the biggest thing that happened to us but with success comes other things. My life became lopsided and I was burned out."

She quit the band and moved to Atlanta with the hopes of starting a family with Keith, whom she married in 1985. "I knew the other band members would be OK. I just needed to come home, hang with my parents, our old friends and make new ones. I'm spiritual and I count my blessings. You can lose track of them so I make lists of my blessings. I had to figure out where I wanted to be and what I wanted. We wanted children so badly."

Her pregnancy with their daughter was so difficult that she was bedridden for months; her second pregnancy with their son was easier. "We have a very nontraditional approach to being a family and to life, but we're a very traditional family," she says. "When I re-joined the band and when I started my own band, The Cindy Wilson Band, the kids came along. It was easier when they were younger. Now they get pretty bored by it but we are all together. And Keith has had to sacrifice his career a bit. We just circle the wagons and stay together as a family."

Wilson is protective of her children's privacy and very involved

with their activities, including participating in a recent school parent-student talent show where, along with several children she performed the B-52's hit *Roam* on stage. Her calendar is full of PTA meetings, play dates as well as tour dates.

In fact, her philosophy as a parent is very similar to the message of the B-52's. Follow your own path and have fun doing it.

"I guess my kids get a kick out of my performing and if they want to do it that's fine," she says. "I just want them to know that what the B-52's did was to challenge and change the rules, and we had fun. It's fine to write your own rules. You don't have to follow the exact path as everyone else. It's OK to walk the road by yourself. Actually, sometimes you have to go alone in your own path; that's just how it is."

The message, Wilson says, has resonated with her fans as well as her kids. "I often have fans tell me how alienated they felt in school or how alone they were but listening to us and watching us onstage showed them that it was OK to be different. You can make your own fun."

It is the live shows that Wilson enjoys the most. "I love the creative process of making the music but I love performing. It's very healing for me, and an escape."

But isn't it hard getting up on stage in one's forties?

"Not at all," she laughs. "First of all, it's all about fun. And, remember, you should write your own rules. Who says a forty-something can't get up, get crazy and shake it up?" ♀