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TORA TORA

It's been quite a progression for Tora Tora: from jamming in one of the member's living rooms, to performing for local kids in an old warehouse, to gigging on the stages of hard rock clubs across America – and all in the space of about two years.

But the Tora Tora story is really just beginning. Now, with the release of *Surprise Attack*, their first album for A&M, folks everywhere will know what this young, hard-rock quartet is all about.

The band hails from Memphis, a city that has spawned far more than its share of immortal musicians and sounds: Elvis Presley, B.B. King, Jerry Lee Lewis, Otis Redding, the Sun and Stax labels. But while the members of Tora Tora certainly knew about the city's incredibly rich legacy, they were cutting their own teeth on the likes of Kiss, Van Halen, Aerosmith, and Led Zeppelin.

The band came together for the first time in the living room of guitarist Keith Douglas. As Keith recalls it, he collared singer Anthony Corder in a local mall one day, "and I said, 'Look, I hear you can sing. Why don't you come over to my house – I've got a p.a. set up, a big stack of amps and guitars, and we can jam out, or whatever...'"

And so it went. Joined by bassist Patrick Francis and drummer John Patterson (Douglas, Francis and Patterson had already played in bands together), the foursome practiced together that weekend, learned three songs – and performed for their friends the very first day they ever got together, playing those same three songs over and over. "I'm not sayin' it was good," laughs Francis. "but our friends loved it!"

The band went on to practice whenever they could in a glue factory owned by Douglas' father. "It was a big room, with 55 gallon drums of glue stacked everywhere, leaving a small open space in the middle for us to play," Keith recalls. "We had to load and unload equipment for every practice, which was a hassle, but I'll tell you it sounded great in there."

A more permanent rehearsal space was soon found, this time in another warehouse, and the band soon made their own stage by stacking plywood over a pile of old barrels and cover the walls with black plastic. They'd been warned by Douglas' dad to keep to themselves – "No parties or you're outta here!" – but boys will be boys, and before long, Tora Tora had themselves a scene going, attracting up to 500 kids a night to a place that was supposed to be a secret.

"When my dad found out what we were doin', he was ready to kick us out," says Douglas. "But we'd been charging admission, and when we pulled out this stack of money, he said, 'Hey, you guys are doin' pretty good!' In fact, he went out and got us a sound system for the place."

It was in that warehouse that Tora Tora (the name was taken from a cut on a Van Halen album) first performed for their A&R man-to-be, A&M's Bryan Huttenhower. Others took an interest in the burgeoning career as well, including local disc jockey Malcolm Ryker. Along the way, Tora Tora



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began developing their own material and moving away from the cover tunes they'd performed for their first several months together.

It also helped that they won a Memphis music festival, beating out 60 other bands to secure \$1000 and a day's recording time at Ardent Studios. They used the time to record "Phantom Rider," an Anthony Corder tune; it came out so well that they spent their prize money to record another two or three tunes. The result was a locally-released EP, called *To Rock, To Roll*.

Ardent engineer Paul Ebersold, who played piano on those first sessions, liked what he heard so much that he helped Tora Tora sho their material for a label deal. The rest, as they say, is history: Ebersold and fellow Ardent engineer Joe Hardy went on to produce *Surprise Attack*, the band's first full album; they also had a track featured on A&M's soundtrack album for the film "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure."

Now that their album's completed, Tora Tora has one primary goal, says Anthony Corder. "Get confident. In Memphis we deliberately spaced out the gigs, so people would be hungry to hear us. Now that we've been playing around more, we're starting to get real comfortable...It's easier now, looser, more natural. We just go out there and do it."