



"KICK OUT THE JAMS!" Detroit Rock & Roll

by Ben Edmonds

For our purposes, the story of Detroit rock & roll begins on September 3, 1948, when a little-known local performer named John Lee Hooker entered United Sound Studios for his first recording session. Rock & roll was still an obscure rhythm & blues catchphrase, certainly not yet a musical genre, and Hooker's career trajectory had been that of the standard-issue bluesman. A native of the Mississippi Delta, he had drifted north for the same reason that eastern Europeans and Kentucky hillbillies, Greeks and Poles and Arabs and Asians and Mexicans had all been migrating toward Michigan in waves for the first half of the 20th Century.

"The Motor City it was then, with the factories and everything, and the money was flowing," Hooker told biographer Charles Shaar Murray. "All the cars were being built there. Detroit was *the* city then. Work, work, work, work. Plenty work, good wages, good money at that time." He worked many of those factories, Ford and General Motors among them, and at night he plied the craft of the bluesman in bars, social clubs and at house parties.

But John Lee Hooker was no ordinary bluesman, and the song he cut at the tail of his first session, "Boogie Chillen," was no ordinary blues. Accompanied only by the stomp of his right foot, his acoustic guitar hammered an insistent pattern, partially based on boogie-woogie piano, that Hooker said he learned from his stepfather back in Mississippi as "country boogie." Informed by the urgency and relentless drive of his Detroit assembly line experiences, John Lee's urban guitar boogie would become a signature color on the rock & roll palette, as readily identifiable as Bo Diddley's beat or Chuck Berry's ringing chords. John Lee had another, more symbolic, influence on the rock & roll that followed, and more specifically the music of his adopted hometown. Then as now, the capital of the blues universe was Chicago. But John Lee's Detroit blues concedes nothing to the slaughterhouse brute 300 miles to the west. It trusts only the creative instinct of its creator, and the immediate experiences that shaped it. It needs nothing from the outside.

When John Lee Hooker commanded the chillen of the Motor City to boogie, they knew exactly what to do.

Not long thereafter, Detroit's assembly line culture would provide Berry Gordy Jr. with a blueprint for building his own dream machines as Motown Records. Not long after that it would provide the emerging rock & roll scene with musical inspiration. But the stage was set, literally and figuratively, decades before. The parallel rise of Detroit as a work magnet and as an entertainment center is not coincidental. This city of hard work not only supported a plentitude of diversions for the off-hours, it demanded that its nighttime entertainers put out as much as the day laborers did.

"There's an interesting bit in [humorist] Fred Allen's book *Treadmill To Oblivion* offers broadcaster Dave Dixon, who helped bring underground radio to Detroit in the late 60s over the airwaves of WABX-FM. "Allen's roots were in vaudeville. He says that throughout the vaudeville circuit in the early part of this century, Detroit was considered the toughest audience. If you made it in front of a Detroit crowd then you were safe on any stage in America.

"These people will sit on their hands. I was at a concert recently where an artist--who will remain nameless--wanted to know why the room had failed to heat up for him. I had to explain that Detroit is a demanding audience. These people work hard for their money. When they pay \$10 to see a show, they don't get excited until they've had ten dollars' worth. After they've gotten that, if you give them another dollar's worth they'll go nuts. And if you give them twelve dollars' worth they'll stand on their seats for the last half hour of the show.

"But don't give them a \$9.50 show and expect them to be impressed. This is Detroit. They know the difference."

As vaudeville gave way to jazz and the big band era, Detroit developed a circuit of ballrooms to rival any metropolis in the land. These gilded palaces hosted furious battles of the bands, with competing jazz orchestras hurling sonic thunderbolts from opposite ends of the ballrooms. When jazz eventually shrank to the size of small bebop groups and



retreated to the clubs, the ballrooms fell into disuse and disrepair, but this would be to the benefit of a future musical generation.

Even before the advent of rock & roll, the Motor City audience was making its presence felt. Just as outsiders were drawn by factory work, so musicians from elsewhere began relocating to avail themselves of the plentiful musical possibilities. A young white pop singer from Oregon named Johnnie Ray became a major example of what *Creem* magazine publisher Barry Kramer would later term "the imported native": artists from elsewhere who found a spiritual home here and were pushed to become a better version of themselves by the welcoming but highly demanding Detroit audiences. The imported native would play an important part in the Motor City rock & roll revolution, attracting characters including Alice Cooper, Lester Bangs, George Clinton, and the author of this chapter.

Johnnie Ray took up temporary Detroit residence in 1951 and honed his craft during an extended engagement at the Flame Show Bar, the city's premier rhythm & blues club. Performing in front of discerning black and tan crowds, he developed the aggressive, hyper-emotive vocal and performing style that would later lead him to be dubbed "The Prince of Wails." As Ray recalled, "When I started at the Flame, they told me, 'the louder you sing, boy, the better!'"³ When this wailing style was showcased in over-the-top ballads like "Cry" and "The Little White Cloud That Cried" it created a small sensation with the youngsters of the early 50s. It wasn't quite rock & roll--biographer Jonny Whiteside's description of Ray as "the missing link between Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley"⁴ is only slightly exaggerated--but Detroit was the perfect Petri dish in which to experiment with the combination of elements that would produce this pre-rock teen hysteria.

His example points up the influence of rhythm & blues in the musical mash-up that became early rock & roll. Ray's first recordings for the Columbia Records blues subsidiary Okeh featured Maurice King & the Wolverines, the Flame Show Bar house orchestra. King and Wolverine Thomas "Beans" Bowles would later be recruited by Berry Gordy to help shape the musical bedrock of what we know as "the Motown Sound." Ray credits King and fellow Flame regular Little Miss Sharecropper (whom rock audiences would come to know and love as LaVern Baker, singer of "Tweedlee Dee" and "Jim Dandy") as his principal mentors in this melding of idioms. His debut single "Whiskey & Gin" was later described by Columbia A&R chief Mitch Miller as "the very first rock & roll record,"⁵ though notorious rock-hater Miller hardly qualifies as an expert in this area. The record was basically big band blues, but as a white singer working in an African-American idiom Johnnie Ray was clearly a pivotal figure.

Nowhere was rock's R&B connection more pronounced than in Detroit. Racism has always been an unavoidable fact of American life, but other factors were working to bridge the great divide. The Motor City was a true melting pot, where people of all colors and creeds worked shoulder-to-shoulder on the assembly lines. Their children were therefore a bit less inclined to blindly accept the received racism that had been their legacy. The cracks in the facade may have been slight, but they were real. Especially when it came to music. Detroit was an R&B town, home to immortal singers like Jackie Wilson and Little Willie John. While most of the scenes remained segregated throughout the 50s--when Johnnie Ray performed at the Flame Show Bar he was the only white singer there--some bleedthrough was inevitable, and a shot of R&B attitude found its way into *all* the local musics. Detroit boasted a thriving polka scene centered in the Polish enclave called Hamtramck, and I'm sure that if you asked visiting bands, they'd tell you that those Motor City accordionists worked their squeezeboxes with an aggressive edge that struck fear in the hearts of out-of-towners.

If what you feared in early rock & roll was what some saw as the blurring of racial barriers and the loosening of sexual mores, then this new music probably was as dangerous as they said. Nothing embodied this threat more provocatively than the records of Detroit R&B giant (and yet another refugee from the automotive plants) Hank Ballard. The vestments of church music had already been appropriated by Ray Charles to proclaim the pleasures of the flesh, but masked in metaphor just enough to slip past the sentries guarding the pop mainstream. Hank Ballard & the Midnighters made the carnal connection explicit in R&B hits like "Get It," "Sexy Ways," "Work With Me Annie" and, this being the 1950s, the inevitable denouement "Annie Had A Baby." These records had no hope of ever crossing over. Ballard would be responsible for the biggest dance fad of the early 60s with his song "The Twist," but it's easy to see why it took Chubby Checker's comparatively milquetoast reading to ignite the mania. As essayed by the Midnighters, there's no way the Twist would have been suitable for children. Hank Ballard was definitely *not* thinking about hula hoops.

Detroit may not have produced any major performers in the initial wave of rock & roll, but the advisory role played by disc jockey Robin Seymour in Johnnie Ray's Detroit breakout demonstrates another crucial element the city contributed to



the music's development. Detroit's first rock & roll stars were its deejays. They were the messengers of the music and were not averse to letting the occasional bit of unadulterated R&B sully the city's pop radio airwaves. "Ed McKenzie, known as 'Jack the Bellboy' on WXYZ, didn't play much of what you'd consider rock & roll," explains Dave Dixon. "He was more of a Four Lads, Johnny Mathis, Ray Anthony kind of guy. So when I heard him play 'Gee' by the Crows in late '53, that's when I knew something was up. He would've played the Ink Spots and the Mills Brothers. Harmless. But 'Gee' by the Crows was clearly not harmless."

In those days before corporate consultants and nationally dictated playlists, rock & roll radio was a seat-of-the-pants enterprise. Tom Shannon arrived at powerhouse CKLW just in time to witness the tail end of this freewheeling pioneer era. "They essentially gave you a block of time, a bunch of records, and turned you loose to do your show," he says. "They left you alone. As long as the FCC didn't object, you were on your own. You didn't have the bean counters, the accountants, running the building. It was a very creative time. You could do almost anything. There was no net. Your only mandate was to create a life on the air."

Few created a larger life, on or off the air, than Mickey Shorr. The 6'4" Shorr started out purchasing airtime by the hour to advertise the family seatcover business, but his flamboyant personal style and the wildly eclectic array of records he played showed that he was moved by the spirit in a manner closer to his audience than the older radio pros he competed against. R&B, doo wop, rockabilly, blues -- nothing was out of bounds. His obsessional spinning of "Mystery Train" is said to have given Elvis Presley his first significant foothold outside the south. Clad in gold lame, Shorr promoted Alan Freed-style "Rock 'n' Rollorama" revue shows at the Fox Theater, and hosted "Mickey's Record Room" on TV.

Across town at the Riviera Theater you'd find "Robin Seymour's Original Rock 'n' Roll Revue," and the deejay had his own TV show "Teen Town." (Seymour's 60s show "Swingin' Time" would become the city's most influential TV outlet in that decade.) In music-mad Detroit of the late 50s, it appeared that every radio shift came with a television show attached. Some TV stations even had multiple teen shows, all jostling to provide a local alternative to Dick Clark's national "American Bandstand." Following Bud Davies' trailblazing "Top Ten Dance Party," there was "Ed McKenzie's Saturday Party"; "Club 1270" with Lee Alan, Dave Prince and Brother Joel Sebastian; and not surprisingly Dale Young's "Detroit Bandstand." There was even a dance party show for the squeezebox crowd called "Club Polka."

With fierce competition among radio stations WXYZ, WJBK, WKMH (later WKNR) and 50,000 watt Canadian powerhouse CKLW across the river in Windsor, Ontario, the Detroit rock & roll radio market may have been the most dynamic in the country. It was known in the industry as a breakout market, a city where exiting new records and artists would be welcomed and could be proven worthy of a national push (or not) on the local radio programs of such future national stars as Casey Kasem, Gary Stevens and Tom Clay.

One who didn't make the cut was Milton "Soupy" Supman, a comic and radio personality who arrived in 1953 from Cleveland via Cincinnati, where he had hosted "Soupy's Soda Shop" in 1950, making it possibly the first televised teen dance show. Soupy Sales (as he billed himself) didn't get the WXYZ radio airshift he auditioned for, but a programmer at WXYZ-TV liked what he heard and the comic wound up with two daily television shows: "Lunch with Soupy Sales," for kids home from school at the noontime hour, and "Soupy's On," a late-night comedy and talk show. The latter also showcased some of the most adventurous jazz of the time from the likes of Charlie Parker, Thelonius Monk, Billie Holiday, Miles Davis and others, and featured a house band that included several future Motown session stalwarts.

The more adventurous teenagers discovered another world entirely on the other side of the radio tracks, as R&B stations WJLB and WCHB dueled for the affection of the city's African-American population with unforgettable personalities like Senator Bristol Bryant, Larry Dixon, Joltin' Joe Howard, Martha Jean The Queen and (take a deep breath) Long Tall Lean Leaping Larry Dean. The most influential was Frantic Ernie Durham, with his dizzying non-stop stream of jive, much of it in a language of his own invention, sometimes delivered over the records he was employed to play, and all of it imparted in rhyme: "This is your ace from outer space, with the swinging'-est show on the ra-dee-o!" Sixty miles north in Flint, one particular white kid fell under the spell of Durham, and began calling himself Frantic John when he spun records at his high school dances. This is not the last time "Frantic John" Sinclair will pop up on our radar.

To cite another dramatic example of this forbidden cultural crossover we'll jump ahead slightly to the downriver Detroit suburb of Lincoln Park, where high school buddies Gary Grimshaw and Bob Derminer are hanging out on a late autumn Saturday afternoon in 1961. These artsy teens were too late to be beatniks and too early to be hippies, so they contented themselves with Kerouac novels and science fiction, *Mad* magazine, and--this being the Motor City--drawing endless



variations on the hot rods of the future. They'd already made the musical leap to blues and R&B, but on this afternoon their consciousness was about to be expanded again.

"We were walking around Lincoln Park listening to my transistor radio," Grimshaw recalled. "We were big fans of Larry Dixon, who called himself The Ugly Duckling, on WCHB. The station went off the air at sunset and, though it was an R&B show, in the last hour he'd play different stuff, really wild jazz. It started to rain, and we ducked into the doorway of a Hudson's department store as The Ugly Duckling announced 'My Favorite Things' by John Coltrane. We'd never heard it, and I held the radio up so we could both get an ear right into the little speaker. It was, like, twelve minutes long" [13:41 to be precise] "and we were so transfixed by this music that we didn't move a muscle. We didn't say a word through the whole thing, and when it was over there was nothing we *could* say. We just walked around in the rain getting wet. We didn't care. We were brand new people."

Indeed they were. When we meet Gary Grimshaw again, he'll have become the primary poster designer for the Grande Ballroom and one of the preeminent artists of the psychedelic movement. And Bob Derminer, who'd been as moved by McCoy Tyner's fluid piano as by Coltrane's soaring alto saxophone, will have reinvented himself as Rob Tyner, lead singer of the MC5, whose brand of what they called "Avant-Rock" would have as galvanizing an effect on the Detroit rock scene as John Coltrane's quartet had had upon him.

Meanwhile, back in the 50s Detroit was a hotbed of teen activity. Kids obviously couldn't avail themselves of the city's bountiful adult nightlife, but there were almost as many options for the underage set. There were regular revue-style theater shows, both national and local, and weekly dances and record hops at schools, churches and community centers. Then there were the teen clubs, where kids could buy soda pop and potato chips, listen to records and dance. So many of these places sprouted in the Detroit area that it eventually necessitated a Federation of Teen Clubs to keep it all straight, and spawned *Teen Life*, which, according to staffer Marilyn Bond was "the first newspaper in the country written for teens by teens." As a rock & roll scene Detroit had pretty much everything going for it. Everything, that is, except for much good homegrown rock & roll.

Detroit artists like the Gaylords and the Larados and Bunny Paul were local stars who would occasionally make a run at the national charts in the early part of the decade, but theirs was a primarily vocal music that favored the pop side of things. The Motor City's first significant rock & roll star of the 50s didn't arrive until 1957 with the rockabilly rave-up "Baby She's Gone." Like a lot of early rockers, Jack Scott wasn't thinking in terms of rock & roll. He thought he was a country singer.

"I never heard the term 'rockabilly,'" Scott stated. "I was doing nothing but country songs until I heard Presley's first records. I had a little show at a dance hall [the Dance Ranch in suburban Troy] and I'd do a song like 'Walkin' The Floor Over You' and then do an Elvis song like 'Money Honey.' Today it seems you either play rock or country, but back then we were doing 'Rock Around The Clock,' 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' and so on at square dances. It all blended. The audiences loved one as much as the other."⁶

It wasn't simply that Jack Scott was Detroit's first bona fide rock & roll star. He was also one of the largest talents of rock's early era. Elvis was obviously the yardstick by which all rockabilly cats were then measured, and Scott--with his dark, burly look and fondness for motorcycles--certainly fit that bill. Mitch Ryder remembers hearing about a Jack Scott appearance at a local A&W Root Beer drive-in restaurant. He arrived expecting a concert, only to discover that Scott was actually there to fight someone in the parking lot!

Jack Scott was actually closer to Buddy Holly, in that he not only sang and played his songs, he wrote them as well. And like Holly, or maybe a country Jackie Wilson, Scott was equally at home with energetic uptempo songs and pop ballads. He'd have his biggest national hits with the weepy, sentimental numbers "My True Love" and "What In The World's Come Over You," but it was his tough, swaggering rock--"Leroy" (originally written and recorded as "Greaseball"), "Geraldine" and most of all "The Way I Walk"--that left a lasting impression. "The Way I Walk" (1959), known to later generations through a Cramps cover and a version by Robert Gordon for the film *Natural Born Killers*, became a defiant Detroit assertion of style: "The way I walk is just the way I walk."



"The Way I Walk" was a classic of rockabilly swagger and rock & roll attitude, but it rose no higher than #35 on the *Billboard* Hot 100. Unfortunately, by the time it arrived in 1959 Elvis was in the Army, Little Richard was in the seminary, and the cynicism of the Philadelphia "teen idol" promoters had rendered (as perhaps was intended) the untamed passions of the rock pioneers passe. Jack Scott's records were classics, but in a dead language. A language dead almost everywhere but Detroit, that is.

The spread of culture was a vastly different and *much* slower process in the ancient times under discussion. Instantaneous communication and exchange of information as practiced today was unknown, except in speculative science fiction. Culture followed essentially the same trade routes that had been in place for centuries. New trends entered through the coastal port centers, then moved slowly inward. A trend developing in Paris or New York or Los Angeles would be barely a rumor in Detroit. This resulted in a cultural hiccup, a space between when something happened in the outside world and when its style or significance would filter inward until it finally reached the backwaters of the midwest.

So while the sneer and swagger of rock & roll bands had been replaced by the cheesy spit-polish of Philadelphia pretty-boy idolatry, in Detroit rock combos still ruled. Part of this was that hiccup; the news that they were dinosaurs simply hadn't reached them yet. Then factor in the blue collar orientation of the town. You didn't find pretty-boys grinding out five sets a night in the clubs. For that you needed a band, and a tough one. Jack Scott was the only major rock figure Detroit produced in the late 50s, but the city's thriving rock combo scene occasionally broke through with instrumental hits by the Royaltones ("Poor Boy"), the Thunder Rocks ("Rampage"), Danny Zella & His Zell Rocks ("Wicked Ruby") and Johnny & the Hurricanes ("Crossfire" and "Red River Rock"). They carried echoes of the old energy, but these records were novelties in the larger picture. Still, Detroit's relative isolation, an impediment to the city becoming a hub of 50s rock, would make the region uniquely situated and suited to respond to the rock revolution that was on the way. Michigan's next major rock & roll figure was also an unlikely conduit to that revolution.

Charlie Westover of Grand Rapids was nothing special to look at, a major disadvantage in the record business of the late 50s. Like Jack Scott he thought of himself as a country singer, which in the Michigan boondocks amounted to strike two in terms of career prospects. But like Scott he was also blessed with an active creative imagination which he channeled into songwriting. (Later in the 60s, when his own hits had stopped coming with regularity, he took the Buddy Holly/Sam Cooke step and became a producer of hits for others.) Unlike Scott, however, Charlie possessed a secret musical weapon that would lift him out of the countrybilly rut and into rock & roll history.

Westover hired Max Crook in 1959 to play keyboards in his group Charlie Johnson & the Big Little Show Band, but he got much more. Crook was something of a sonic mad scientist, and earlier that year he had created a proto-synthesizer he called a Musitron. It was a version of the French electronic instrument the clavioline--known to pop audiences through the otherworldly 1962 instrumental hit "Telstar" by the Tornados and later in the Beatles' "Baby You're A Rich Man"--but modified with spare parts scavenged from other instruments, old televisions and even household appliances. In January 1961 Westover and Crook took a riff they'd been messing around with at soundchecks and developed it into a song that featured a cascading, stinging Musitron solo. Within weeks the recording of "Runaway" (as they called the song) by Del Shannon (as Westover was now calling himself) was the #1 record in America, and shortly thereafter the world.

"Runaway" set Del Shannon on a course that led to several more hits ("Hats Off To Larry," "Keep Searchin'") and eventually the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. It became one of the most covered hits of the era, a chart contender for artists as disparate as Bonnie Raitt and cornball bandleader Lawrence Welk, not to mention multiple updates by Shannon himself. None came close to the original. At a time of manufactured pretty-boy romance, "Runaway" and most of Del's other hits were dark, brooding, emotionally intense. And in the Michigan tradition, they rocked.

Del Shannon's aforementioned ties to the coming revolution called the English Invasion were real and lasting. His records were even bigger hits in the UK than at home, with "Little Town Flirt" (1962) being regarded as one of the templates for the emerging British guitar band scene spearheaded by the Beatles. He returned the favor by recording "From Me To You" in early 1963, his version becoming the first John Lennon/Paul McCartney song to make the American charts. He wrote "I Go To Pieces" for Peter & Gordon, and his "Cry Myself To Sleep" was an obvious inspiration for Elton John's "Crocodile Rock." Shannon later travelled to London to record an album of orchestrated psychedelia with Rolling Stones manager/producer Andrew Loog Oldham, and many of the recordings he made in the last decade of his life were produced by ELO's Jeff Lynne.



Tom & the Tornadoes were typical of the thriving band scene in the early 60s. Based in the small town of Niles in southwest Michigan near the Indiana border, leader Tommy Jackson went to junior high and worked in the town's one record store after school, where he hustled jobs for his band at dances, churches, and VFW and American Legion halls. Considering the times, there was a surprising level of competition. And in the days before the Beatles made songwriting a prerequisite for any serious band, the competition was to *find* the right song.

"Our territory was southern Michigan and northern Indiana, and that area definitely had a sound," says Tommy Jackson, known to us today as Tommy James. "We called it party rock, and there were all these groups everywhere. There were three or four other groups in Niles, and every town seemed to be like that. Our major competition on the circuit was a group called the Playboys from Laporte, Indiana. One day their manager came into the record store with a new 45. They'd changed their name to the Rivas and recorded 'California Sun,' an R&B song by Joe Jones that we all knew because another local group called the Princeton Five featured it in their repertoire. All of a sudden the Rivas' version is all over the radio and on its way to becoming a *big* national hit. I was so jealous I couldn't stand myself, and promised that I wouldn't let another great party rock song get away.

"Not long after I was at Shuler's Nightclub, a place where I could sneak in and drink beer at 15. A local band called the Spinners--no relation to the R&B group--played this song 'Hanky Panky.' The kids went *nuts*, absolutely berserk. The band must've played it four times, and every time they'd play it the reaction was bigger and wilder than the time before. I said, 'That's our song!' We went to radio station WNIL to record it, or what I could remember of it. All I knew for sure was a bit of melody and the words 'My baby does the hanky panky,' so we made up the rest. We recorded it quickly, with everybody playing and singing at the same time. It was basically live and in glorious mono."

Indeed, that one signature line is just about all their version shared with the original by the Raindrops. But the parts Tommy James made up made all the difference, turning a New York girl group song written by Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich into a classic of electric guitar strut. Released on the tiny Snap label in early 1964, "Hanky Panky" by the rechristened Shondells ("I made it up in study hall; in those days anything ending in 'dells' was cool") made some local noise before petering out, as so many regional records did. But a year later one copy somehow found its way to Pittsburgh, where it created a sensation when played at record hops and then on the radio. An enterprising distributor rushed out pirated copies on the Red Fox label, slightly speeding up the 45 to give it extra pep. By the time they tracked down Tommy James in Niles, Michigan, he was astonished to discover that he had the #1 record in Pittsburgh, which had sold some 80,000 bootlegged copies. Eventually the record was picked up by Roulette Records in New York. In the summer of 1966, more than two years after it was recorded, "Hanky Panky" was the #1 record in America.

This is one of the great stories in rock history, but "Hanky Panky" is an important record in our story. It's the only record Tommy James & the Shondells made as a Michigan band--James' subsequent move to the east coast was permanent--and by the time it reached the national consciousness the English Invasion had arrived and conquered. But what "Hanky Panky" shows us is that what was so electrifying about the English bands to the rest of America was simply business as usual in Michigan, and had been for years.

England and rock & roll being two concepts one would never have thought to combine in the same sentence, the very notion of an English rock & roll invasion was unthinkable until the moment it happened. When it did, one would have thought Detroit, where bands had never gone out of style, would have greeted the British invaders as liberators, or at the very least vindicators. Not quite. In Detroit's eyes another guitar band had already beaten the limeys to the punch. The Beach Boys were as big in Michigan as they were in California, and it wasn't for their songs about surfing and beach bunnies. In a culture where cruising main thoroughfare Woodward Avenue in your customized wheels has become a tradition handed down through the generations to this day, the Dick Dale-meets-Chuck Berry guitars driving Beach Boy hits like "I Get Around" were the perfect Motor City soundtrack.

As far as vindication, Detroit didn't need it. With the city's typical hubris, it initially viewed the English as interlopers, latecomers to a party that, in Detroit anyway, had never stopped. At first even the all-conquering Beatles were resisted. "I remember the night Lee Alan did a 'Make It or Break It' with 'Love Me Do' by the Beatles," says Dan Carlisle, who later joined Dave Dixon on the airstaff of WABX-FM. "I was driving down Woodward with my friends, and Lee said, 'here's a group from England.' No one liked it. It was resoundingly stomped on 'Make It or Break It' that night. To me it sounded like they were trying to sing like hillbillies. We thought it was funny. Our bands were tougher, and we had singers like Smokey



Robinson and Marvin Gaye on every streetcorner, so what did we need with these Beatles? We surrendered five minutes later, of course, but the English groups that took off here first were the funkier, blues-oriented ones like the Animals and Them, and especially the Kinks and the Rolling Stones. Those were the bands our bands covered."

The Stones actually preceded the Beatles into town, headlining Olympia Stadium on June 14, 1964. It was a ludicrous booking for a foreign group that had yet to score its first American hit, and the show only attracted a few hundred to a venue that held close to 15,000. Yet this date must be declared a holiday on the Detroit rock & roll calendar. Because, to twist an old cliché first applied to describe the influence of the Velvet Underground, there may not have been many in the audience that night, but soon thereafter almost all of them would be in bands of their own.

The very same night the Rolling Stones closed the deal for the English Invasion at Olympia, Detroit's answer was already hard at work thirty miles to the northwest in suburban Novi. There, in a former big band ballroom called the Walled Lake Casino, local group Billy Lee & the Rivas were driving thousands of teens into a frenzy by injecting rock & roll testosterone into an already revved-up Detroit R&B showband model. So great was their popularity that established acts like Smokey Robinson & the Miracles would be miffed to discover themselves equally billed with an unsigned band that only had one failed single on its resume.

If the party rock of Tommy James & the Shondells was representative of what was happening out in the Michigan boonies, then Billy Lee & the Rivas--no relation to the aforementioned Rivas of Indiana, who were no relation to the R&B group of the same name--illustrated what could happen when these driven young rock & roll bands experienced directly, interacting with and learning from, the sources of their musical inspiration.

Billy Lee, known to his classmates at suburban Warren High School as William Levis, was one of those adventurous kids who'd followed Little Richard's frantic siren song "Tutti Frutti" to the excitement on the R&B side of the radio dial. This put him well outside the high school mainstream, but he found his true calling at the Village, a small, slightly run-down theater on Woodward Avenue downtown. Not in the same league as the Flame Show Bar or the Twenty Grand, the Village catered to young talent looking for a place to break in, and second-tier local singers looking to move up in the city's competitive R&B pecking order. Soon Billy Lee was singing with a black group called the Peps. The house band was a trio of similarly besotted kids from the city's white east side called the Rivas. These kids--guitarist Jim McCarty, bassist Earl Elliot and drummer Johnny "Bee" Badanjek--might've thought they'd gotten a break. What they were getting was an education.

Johnny Bee: "We were little kids; I was only twelve or thirteen. But the older guys saw that we were serious, and that we could really play, so they took us under their wing. We became the house band, and we'd go rehearse with whoever the singers were each week. Leroy Belcher, Lee Rogers, the Pips, Teddy Martinez; these guys never got beyond local hits, but we learned so much because of their generosity. I remember Nathaniel Mayer laughing and telling me 'Hit the drums white boy. They not gonna hit you back. Hit 'em and hit 'em *hard!*' It was a great experience. Later, when we moved to New York and became the Detroit Wheels, we ended up on package shows where we'd be backing ten acts and have to learn all their stuff in an afternoon. Because of what those guys at the Village taught us, it was a snap."

From the moment Berry Gordy's Motown Records took off in the early 60s, not only did it dominate the airwaves black *and* white, it added several staples to rock band repertoires. Every band was expected to know Barrett Strong's "Money," Smokey Robinson's "You Really Got a Hold on Me" and the Contours' "Do You Love Me," while Eddie Holland's semi-hit "Leaving Here" may have been more popular among rock bands than with the record-buying public. Detroit was suddenly the epicenter of the R&B universe, a place where not only was there a singing group on every corner, but also a small label willing to record them. After a while you didn't even have to venture to the black stations; the local scene produced a steady stream of tough, guitar-driven R&B that crossed over to local Top 40 success. Nathaniel Mayer's "Village of Love," Andre Williams' "Bacon Fat," Nolan Strong's "Mind Over Matter," Gino Washington's "Gino Is a Coward" and Edwin Starr's "Agent Double-O-Soul" were rock & roll records that happened to feature black singers, and were received as such by the Motor City rock mainstream.

Bands that played the white bar circuit--Jamie Coe & the Gigolos, Sunny & the Sunliners, Rusty Day & the Midnighters, Doug Brown & the Omens--worked from a base of blues and R&B perennials like "Shake A Tail Feather," "In The Midnight Hour" and "Turn On Your Lovelight." Being slightly younger, Billy Lee & the Rivas and the bands that followed built on the same base but were fully in thrall to the raging hormones that ruled their audience because they *were* their audience. Billy Lee and the boys took what they learned downtown at the Village and brought it back home to the suburbs, where



they delivered the word to thousands of their peers every weekend at a packed Walled Lake Casino, from which WXYZ deejay Lee Alan would broadcast his show live. It was not unlike what the Beatles and other English invaders were doing with American roots musics, except in this case the music traveled a much shorter distance.

"My band opened one of those Walled Lake Casino shows," says Ted Nugent, whose group the Lourds followed the Rivas into a Village residency. "It was Billy Lee & the Rivas, Martha & the Vandellas, Gene Pitney and us. Billy Lee hadn't changed his name to Mitch Ryder yet but the energy of that band was already what they'd be known for as the Detroit Wheels. Their take-no-prisoners attack was everything I aspired to as a performer, and it's still the benchmark I measure everything by. It has kept my spirit fully erect to this day."

Billy Lee & the Rivas ruled this roost throughout 1964. Bob Crewe, writer/producer of many Four Seasons hits, witnessed a show where the Rivas completely upstaged the Dave Clark Five and immediately whisked the group off to New York. They reappeared at the end of 1965 rechristened Mitch Ryder & the Detroit Wheels, but even after a year of "grooming" the virtues of their records were those of a Billy Lee show at the Walled Lake Casino -- energy, passion and drive. Their first two hits even used their live device of running songs together to keep the energy up and the crowd moving. "Jenny Take A Ride!" married Little Richard's "Jenny Jenny" and Chuck Willis' "C.C. Rider" and earned its exclamation point. "Devil With A Blue Dress On & Good Golly Miss Molly" (a medley of Shorty Long and Little Richard respectively) was even more propulsive, as sweaty a shakedown as has ever been committed to wax. The Young Rascals released their first record the same month as "Jenny," and both bands would feature prominently in any discussion of the new category "blue-eyed soul." But the records of Mitch Ryder & the Detroit Wheels also represented the apogee of the Michigan party rock tradition at a time when the music was about to evolve again.

It was a simple idea. Dave Leone and Ed "Punch" Andrews were graduates of the college bacchanals known as fraternity parties--not coincidentally a gig staple of the party rock bands--and understood the need for teens to have a place of their own with minimal adult supervision. The Hideout club, which they opened in a rented suburban VFW hall on Friday nights in May 1964, was basically a frat party without the keg. It was an immediate sensation, due in no small part to a scatologically customized version of the then-current hit "Louie Louie" performed by the house band the Fugitives.

"Certain tunes were required no matter where you played on the circuit," explains Cub Koda of the Del-Tino's and later Brownsville Station. "You *had* to play 'What'd I Say'; you *had* to play 'Money'; you *had* to play 'Shake A Tail Feather'; and you *absolutely* had to play 'Louie Louie.' Every school had a different set of the quote-unquote dirty lyrics to 'Louie Louie.' Inevitably somebody would hand you a sheet of notebook paper with the Denby High or Clawson High version, and you'd sing that one. To sing any other version would be like singing another school's fight song. You'd get killed."

The Hideout became such a hip hangout that they began selling memberships in an attempt to contain the crowds, only to see 4,000 sold in the first month. Soon there were not only multiple Hideouts, but a sudden profusion of clubs that made the teen club explosion of the 50s look like the warm-up it was. Where the previous decade had been about teen culture coming into a sense of itself, this new circuit was created by the sudden profusion of rock & roll bands. This was the zeitgeist the Hideout had unknowingly stumbled into. The English Invasion gave the time-honored Michigan rock band format a new haircut, dressed it in mod fashion and sold it to the suburbs as the latest thing. The American suburbs were then home to the wealthiest middle class the world has ever seen. In Detroit the auto industry created its own super middle class, providing ready and willing funding for the guitars, drums and amplifiers needed to exercise this new passion, which quickly came to rival athletics in terms of teen status.

In Detroit, no matter how many church basements, Knights of Columbus halls and community centers turned themselves into weekend teen clubs, there were always full houses and too many groups clamoring to play. This simple arithmetic heightened what was already an ultra-competitive band scene. This led to a revival of the "Battle of the Bands" concept so popular in the Big Band era, but expanded to accommodate suburbs suddenly crawling with beat combos.

Ted Nugent: "In hindsight, what's the easiest way get a bunch of groups climbing over each other to play for nothing? Announce a battle of the bands! But we did learn something, and I wouldn't trade that knowledge for anything. These battles taught us that every show is the most important show of our lives. Every opportunity to take the stage was a crowbar-chewing, fire-breathing test of the energy and emotion and passion that must be delivered if you're to survive in the arena. It was a merciless and exhilarating proving ground."



But the culture wasn't just about teenage gladiators battling each other to the death. The more aware of these bands began to understand, if only instinctively, that what they were practicing was something profound, something more about connection than domination. Something almost spiritual.

"The first place the MC5 were accepted away from home was at this teen center in Flat Rock," said singer Rob Tyner. "It was six miles away, which to us at that time was like going on the road. To them, of course, we were guys from the big bad city of Lincoln Park. But they got to know us, and that's where we really started to click as a band. I'd look out and see the crowd all dancing, and you could just feel the connection. To connect with an audience forcefully enough that they lose themselves in your music--what a wild and insane thing. After one of those great Flat Rock sets, I came offstage all sweaty and puffed up and full of myself. I was jumping up and down and saying 'Did you see what we did out there? We killed those people. We *killed* 'em!' Fred Smith was all sweaty and excited too. He said 'Yeah, it's like giving to them.' *Giving to them*. I have never forgotten that. What a beautiful way of expressing what we try and do with our music."

The Motor City 5--singer Tyner and guitarists Wayne Kramer and Fred "Sonic" Smith, later joined by bassist Michael Davis and drummer Dennis Thompson--came from Lincoln Park in the blue-collar and lily-white "downriver" suburbs southwest of the city. "Downriver was an intense little scene," states Wayne Kramer, "and intensity became the MC5's trademark. We were hip to the manipulation of energy very early. You can't overstate the role of amplification in this. We conned a would-be manager into getting us a set of Vox Super Beatle amps, big-time stuff for a young band in those days. Just the sight of that line of Super Beatles across the stage gave a tremendous advantage to a group of adolescents already suffering a severe hormonal overload. We were learning the basics of performance. One *big* turning point was in 1965 when we went to the drive-in to see [concert movie] *The T.A.M.I. Show*. The closing section of James Brown followed by the Rolling Stones hit me like a thunderbolt; I went back night after night to see it. That set the bar for where we wanted our performance to be."

A new generation of Detroit bands was learning its lessons, but the scene was still isolated and fragmented. Downriver in Lincoln Park, for example, the MC5 would battle the Satellites from next-door Allen Park for supremacy, but neither band was known at all in the northern suburbs. Once again the guys over at the Hideout, Dave Leone and Punch Andrews, stepped in to fill the void. Their label Hideout Records was the first significant local label to emerge from the new music. They released a series of 45s by cherry-picking the bands who lined up to play their clubs. Other labels quickly followed suit, providing a developing scene with a much-needed sense of self-awareness. Among the Hideout bands were the Underdogs (who'd later cut the garage classic "Love's Gone Bad" as one of the few rock acts on Motown), the all-girl Pleasure Seekers (whose bassist Suzi Quatro would find 70s mega-success in England) and the Mushrooms (featuring future Eagle Glenn Frey). Hideout's lead artist, and its greatest gift to the future, started as a sideman in one of the label's other groups.

"We had signed Doug Brown & the Omens," Dave Leone recalled. "He came to me and said, 'I know you're trying to get a product flow going. My organ player is really talented. How about if we cut a record on him? We can use the Omens and just put it out under a different name.' So one afternoon he brought this guy around to our little storefront office on Mack Avenue. We went into the back, where there was nothing but a beat-up old couch and a metal folding chair. Doug and I sat on the couch while his organ player, this kid named Bob Seger, sat on the chair with an acoustic guitar and played us a song he'd just written called 'East Side Story.' I had never been in the presence of anybody who could pull a song that good out of nowhere. The chills started with the first line."

"Beneath the bare light bulb above
She gazed into the eyes of love..."
Bob Seger "East Side Story"

Ann Arbor-based Bob Seger had it all. A self-contained artist in the mold of Jack Scott and Del Shannon, singer/songwriter/guitarist Seger also possessed, like Mitch Ryder, a raspy, full-throated shout that pledged allegiance to Detroit's R&B tradition. It was his writing, something that had become de rigueur in the wake of the Beatles, which set Seger apart and assured him a career that would endure for decades to come.

It's easy to finger the sources of Bob Seger's first two local hits. "East Side Story" was based on a riff borrowed from Them, whose singer Van Morrison would become a lifelong Seger inspiration. "Persecution Smith" showed that Bob was under Dylan's spell just like everybody else. His third 45 was more than the charm. "Heavy Music" boasts another killer



opening line ("Don't ay ever listen to the radio/When the big bad beat comes on?") and its 2 minutes and 37 seconds are a non-stop celebration of rock's rhythmic bottom end. Its repeated boast of "going deeper" made some program directors wary, and the bankruptcy of the record's national distributor prevented it from becoming a hit everywhere, but in Detroit "Heavy Music" sold more than 60,000 copies and became a rock & soul anthem.

Michigan was the epicenter of "blue-eyed soul," and Seger's primary competition came from down the street in Ann Arbor, the college town thirty miles west of Detroit. The Rationals were produced by booking agent and manager Hugh "Jeep" Holland and released on his A-Square label. "The main reason we started making records is because they helped us get gigs," Holland said. "If you could send a picture and a bio and a record, you weren't just an average group. They'd often take you even if they didn't know who you were. We got a lot of jobs that way."

Thanks to the Rationals, Jeep Holland's A-Square Records became much more than that. Ann Arbor high school students Scott Morgan (vocals/guitar), Steve Correll (guitar/vocals), Terry Trabandt (bass/vocals) and Bill Figg (drums) were fairly typical imitation Merseybeat boppers until they discovered their true calling in Holland's massive collection of R&B 45s, with Morgan blossoming into one of the best white soul voices of the era. Their rocked-up arrangement of Otis Redding's "Respect" became a Top 5 hit in Detroit and pre-dated Aretha Franklin's version by more than six months. Their cover of Chuck Jackson's minor R&B chart item "I Need You" was a Morgan vocal tour-de-force and another big local hit. (The Rationals track "I Need You" that appears on Rhino's boxed set *Nuggets* is a different song, this one salvaged from a Kinks b-side.) Voted the most popular group in Detroit by the listeners of WKNR in 1966, the Rationals also led the scene in what we'd now call "networking." The obsessive Holland had shipped the band all over the state to play for deejays at record hops, forming radio relationships that eventually paid substantial dividends, and his personalized and interactive fan club was the largest and most sophisticated of any local band.

"Guys like Jamie Coe and Rusty Day could do the bar circuit and do very well," explains Scott Morgan. "But for the first few years of the Rationals we were too young to even get into the bars. The record hops had a more vital energy anyway. We drove long distances to play the hops, and we were lucky if they tossed us \$5 or \$10 gas money. But we were glad to do them, because if you had a little record out it was understood that the deejay would promote you to promote himself. Before we cracked the big radio stations in Detroit, we built a following through alliances with stations in Ann Arbor and Flint and Saginaw, and then with Robin Seymour's TV show. Jeep was obsessive about orchestrating those things, and demanded that we interact with the fans at shows and through the fan club. When he got the idea for the 'Think Rational' buttons the fan network spread them all over town. Soon every band had buttons. Later he spread himself too thin, but in the beginning when he was focused Jeep had great musical ideas and was a promotion dynamo."

Jeep Holland's day job as manager of the Ann Arbor branch of the Discount Records chain gave him access to English imports as well as R&B 45s. These too were used to A-Square's advantage. SRC, a band that evolved out of the Fugitives, were set to release their version of the Pretty Things' "Get the Picture" until Holland got an advance of Cream's debut album. SRC's rush-recorded cover of Cream's arrangement of the ancient Skip James blues "I'm So Glad" became a sizeable local hit. Holland's prescient cover of the Zombies' "Time of the Season" with his group the Thyme motivated Columbia Records to concentrate on the original, in the process snuffing A-Square's regional breakout.

Bob Seger and the Rationals had hit after hit in Detroit, but none broke through nationally. Apart from the artists' justifiably bruised egos, this failure to communicate with the outside world didn't create any feeling of provincial inferiority. Quite the opposite. The international phenomenon of Motown made Detroiters feel they were at the center of the musical universe, and a bit of that stardust rubbed off on all the many musics the city contained. The percolating rock band scene figured it was only a matter of time until it claimed the brass ring that Berry Gordy had brought so tantalizingly close. Until then, and in typical Detroit fashion, what they already had was enough.

The most persistent petitioner at the door of national stardom was Terry Knight. The Flint native was a popular deejay on CKLW who promoted himself as the "Sixth Stone," owing to a friendship with Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones. When he quit radio to make his own grab for the brass ring, his act was a blatant knockoff of the Stones and whoever else he happened to be listening to. Knight was a much better hustler than singer, and his radio connections ensured that his records, released on the Flint label Lucky Eleven, got play in Detroit and throughout the midwest. He scored with a version of the Yardbirds' "Better Man Than I," and his vanilla cover of Ben E. King's "I (Who Have Nothing)" climbed to #46 on the *Billboard* Hot 100. Though Terry Knight & the Pack are no more than a derivative footnote, we haven't seen the last of them. Knight and a couple of his bandmembers will make a significant reappearance later in our story.



Oddly enough, the two authentic Michigan rock & roll records that reached the national consciousness in 1966 were not the product of the local band scene. They were, near as we can tell, not part of any scene known to man.

"Cool Jerk" by black vocal trio the Capitols was made to cash in on the Jerk dance craze. It was produced by Ann Arbor deejay Ollie McLaughlin, who'd cut national pop-R&B hits with Deon Jackson ("Love Makes the World Go 'Round") and Barbara Lewis ("Hello Stranger" and "Baby I'm Yours"), and the track featured illicitly moonlighting Motown musicians. Its lyrics boasting of dancefloor superiority place the song squarely in the long African-American tradition of bragging songs, yet "Cool Jerk" is another of those rock & roll records in R&B clothing. What identifies it as rock is the hyper, frantic energy that turned the serious cutting of a song they originally called "Pimp Jerk" into the cartoon braggadocio of "Cool Jerk." It is a supremely silly record, and silliness should not be underestimated as one of the essential seasonings in the rock & roll stew. The reader is advised to keep this in mind during later chapters, when comparisons to fine art and literature will begin to worm their way into the musical discussion.

This brings us to "96 Tears" by Question Mark & the Mysterians, a record that seemed to come out of nowhere in the summer of '66 and shot to #1 in the nation. It certainly *sounded* like it came from another dimension. At a time when guitars ruled, "96 Tears" was not simply fronted by an organ, it was among the cheesiest keyboards imaginable. Over an inanely incessant Farfisa organ riff, the singer whose legal name was Question Mark spit out his simplistic revenge fantasy: "You're gonna cry/Cry cry cry/96 Tears." Recorded just as Brian Wilson was readying the Beach Boys *Pet Sounds*, the album that represented rock's quantum leap in sophistication, "96 Tears" headed in the opposite direction. It might have represented cultural de-evolution, but it was primitive dynamite on the dancefloor, and a virtual primer in garage-rock fun. For better or worse, you couldn't get the damn thing out of your head, a form of mass hypnosis that caused nearly three million people to purchase the 45, which had initially been released on the tiny Flint label Pa-Go-Go Records.

Though Question Mark claims to be from Mars, the less celestial truth is that the former Rudy Martinez and his associates originally hailed from Texas. They were the children of Mexican-American farmworkers who followed the harvest to Michigan every year. Steadier employment in the auto industry eventually drew these families to the Saginaw Valley permanently. This helps explain the mutated Tex-Mex flavor that finds its way into their music, but also its rootlessness, the feeling that it comes out of nowhere. Though the Mysterians visited the charts twice more with "I Need Somebody" and "Can't Get Enough Of You Baby," their first hit was so unique that even its creators couldn't duplicate it. No matter; "96 Tears" exists beyond space and time, possessing a power that continues to carry the band.

("96 Tears" was picked up nationally by Cameo-Parkway, the Philadelphia company that also secured distribution on local hits by the Rationals, Bob Seger, and Terry Knight & the Pack. The man in Michigan's corner was the label's promotion wunderkind Neil Bogart, who'd later create Casablanca Records. Bogart's Michigan grounding was then put to good use when "Detroit Rock City" became one of the primary bases from which he launched the KISS phenomenon.)

By far the most momentous local rock & roll occasion of 1966 was witnessed by only a handful of people. On October 7 the Grande Ballroom opened as a new music venue with a concert by the "Avant-Rock" MC5. The Grande had been among the most prestigious of Detroit's many Big Band dance palaces of the 1920s and '30s, but its best days were long behind it. This proved fortuitous, placing its decaying opulence within the limited means of the emerging rock & roll underground. High school teacher and weekend deejay Russ Gibb had visited the similarly dilapidated Fillmore Auditorium during a San Francisco trip earlier in the year, and sensed that the rock scene back home was ready for its own version of the service Bill Graham was providing. Thus the Grande, then suffering the indignity of being used as a mattress warehouse, became the first hippie ballroom to open outside the Bay Area.

The rumbling of the underground signaled a shift from the 45 to the long-playing album, an evolution beyond the teen clubs and record hops. That's where the Grande Ballroom came in. "It was a very different situation," said Ron Asheton, the Stooges guitarist who, as the bassist of the Chosen Few, had played the first notes heard in the resurrected Grande on opening night. "At the dances for sure, and even in the teen clubs, it was like you were still in school. The Grande was the first time a lot of us felt there wasn't somebody looking over our shoulder. Completely unchaperoned at last! We were free to explore. That's what I super-loved about the place."



For the first year it was open, the Grande struggled to break even. It booked only local bands, for whom this was a period of gestation and growth. The pioneering countercultural warriors of Detroit heard about what other tribes were building in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and London, but the recorded evidence of what a scene sounded like inevitably lagged behind the hip grapevine and the burgeoning underground media. So Detroit built its psychedelic community largely on an *idea* of what was happening elsewhere. In this imagining, Detroit dreamed up an identity all its own.

This being the Motor City, there was still a competitive mentality at work, except that now it was to see who could be the wildest, the craziest, the farthest-out. The ballroom was a space that encouraged an intense self-investigation that made the bands stronger. And the audience, which grew by a few paying customers every weekend, forged bonds with its local heroes that were stronger and deeper than ever before. When Russ Gibb began bringing in national headliners in mid-'67--the first being Tim Buckley, the Grateful Dead, the Chambers Bros. and Cream--the Detroit bands were ready for them.

The MC5 were pissed.

In the year the Grande had been strictly a local venue, the Five had become synonymous with the ballroom and the underground culture it showcased. In this they had been aided by an alliance with beat poet, marijuana criminal, jazzbo and cultural gadfly John Sinclair and his Trans-Love Energies organization. The introduction of international artists meant that the MC5 had gone from headliners back to the "local opening act." This wasn't so bad when the big boys turned out to be the Who or the Jimi Hendrix Experience. But Detroit was also finding out that not all the great stuff they'd been hearing so much about on the underground grapevine was as advertised.

On the late afternoon of Feb 2, 1968, the MC5 arrived at the Grande to fulfill the customary opening act ritual of waiting around for the headliners to complete their soundcheck. This weekend it was one of the long-forgotten exponents of the "Bosstown Sound," MGM Records' clumsy and clueless corporate attempt to market a San Francisco-style scene using some of the worst bands in Boston. The timid, polite, low-energy music coming from the stage so appalled the MC5 that they began heckling the hapless headliners from Beantown.

"Kick out the jams! Kick out the jams, motherfucker!"

This phrase dated back to singer Rob Tyner's high school days, when he and his buddies would haunt the Sunday afternoon jam sessions at local jazz clubs. The phrase was reserved for jammers who were judged to be giving it less than their all. "Kick out the jams or get off the stand" was the full epithet, and the simplest translation would be "put out or go home." When the MC5 resurrected it to chide a limp, half-hearted group being promoted as the real deal, they added another layer by implication. If you won't kick out the jams, the MC5 were saying, *we will*. They meant it.

According to John Sinclair, "We set out to destroy every time. We started developing a vision of what it should be like when the MC5 appeared, which was total destruction. It wasn't like we were really out to destroy the headliners. We wanted to destroy the audience, to give them an experience they'd never had before in pop music. And if some other band was unfortunate enough to have to follow that, well..."

The MC5 would literally explode onto the stage, a whirlwind of thunderous sound and non-stop movement. They were like an R&B show band gone completely berserk, a total assault that often ended with the band demolishing its equipment along with the audience's minds. Kick out the jams, indeed. The Five upstaged Grande headliners with such deadly efficiency that national acts began stipulating that anybody *but* the MC5 open for them.

Sinclair and the group's brazen rabble-rousing and public flaunting of drug and obscenity proprieties also attracted the attention of local law enforcement. The staid midwest was proving to be particularly resistant to the encroachment of the counterculture. Detroit's attempt at a west coast-style Love-In on April 30, 1967 turned into a bloody rout at the hands of bikers and mounted police. Less than three months later the city itself was in flames, and it required the National Guard to put down the insurrection that was the black community's response to what Marvin Gaye called "heavy-handed policin'." By mid-'68 escalating police harassment at MC5 shows and the Trans-Love commune eventually drove the band out of



Detroit to the relatively calmer college town Ann Arbor. The more the authorities hassled them, however, the more fervently the MC5 were embraced by their audience.

The MC5 were the most notorious band in town, and the public face of an underground that was threatening to surface and lead the children of Michigan astray en masse. Their January '68 single "Looking At You" was a blitzkrieg exposition of "Avant-Rock" and possibly the noisiest three minutes ever committed to tape. But the Five were not the first to release a full album of this new music. That honor belonged to the Amboy Dukes.

The Amboy Dukes evolved out of the Lourds, the Redford High band led by guitarist Ted Nugent and singer John Drake. The Lourds had followed Billy Lee & the Rivas as the house band at the Village club, where they learned the same R&B lessons and used them to make their versions of Rolling Stones album tracks even more vivid. When Nugent's family relocated to Chicago, the guitarist formed the first edition of the Dukes there. "The Cellar [club] was where everyone played, and the Shadows of Knight were the big bad dudes of town," he explains. "The Chicago bands played well, but really white. It was too 'Ferry 'Cross The Mersey.' It lacked Detroit attack. Within weeks the Amboy Dukes owned that scene. We wiped the stage with the Shadows of Knight, because we played with the power drive so prevalent at the battles of the bands back in Michigan. That competitive spirit was in my blood."

Returning to Detroit, Nugent began exchanging Chicago members for Michigan musicians, eventually arriving at what is considered the "classic" Amboy Dukes lineup: John Drake (vocals), Ted Nugent (lead guitar), Steve Farmer (rhythm guitar), Andy Solomon (keyboards), Greg Arama (bass) and Dave Palmer (drums). It is no slight to the many superb Detroit groups to say that the Dukes were the most instrumentally accomplished band on the scene. The MC5 were ferocious performers, but the Amboy Dukes were equally ferocious as musicians. "I was turned on by these master musicians," Ted testifies. "I never wanted to be a rockstar; I wanted to play music. In this band I had virtuosos eight years ahead of their time and their age, *much* better musicians than I was. They're the ones who prodded me and goaded me and propelled me to catch up with their musicality. I was a showman and I could play some serious guitar licks, but I wasn't musical like they were. They taught me to be musical."

The Amboy Dukes signed with the small jazz label Mainstream and released their eponymous debut album in December 1967. Their souped-up cover of Big Joe Williams' "Baby Please Don't Go," adapted from the arrangement by Van Morrison's group Them, was another monster hit in Detroit that never cracked the national consciousness. ("Baby Please Don't Go" would get its due in the following decade when Lenny Kaye included it in his seminal garage-psych compilation *Nuggets*. And as long as we're being parenthetical, this is a good place to point out the tremendous influence of Them on Detroit rock & roll. Van Morrison's original band provided Bob Seger with a riff for "East Side Story" and nearly every band had their own extended, usually libidinous version of "Gloria." When the Shadows of Knight beat everybody to the punch with a hit cover of "Gloria," the Amboy Dukes and MC5 both returned to the Them catalog for their debut singles; the Dukes with "Baby Please..." and the Five with "I Can Only Give You Everything.")

The Dukes had a second album on the street less than six months later, and this time its calling-card hit traveled well beyond the city limits. "Journey To The Center Of The Mind" was a six-string romp, a racetrack rhythm guitar giving way to searing leads, and a fuzzed-out bridge that still inspires air guitarists. The problem was that the song's blatant chemical cheerleading—which lifelong teetotaler Nugent has always claimed he never recognized—was closer to psychedelic bubblegum. On movie terms, the band thought of themselves as serious filmmakers, yet they became known for their Roger Corman moment. Yes, it gave them a national hit and a garage-psych classic, but it also typecast them in a way that would not prove entirely beneficial to their longterm career prospects.

Next out of the album box was SRC, the band Jeep Holland had midwived by putting Chosen Few singer Scott Richardson with the last incarnation of the Fugitives, the original Hideout house band. Richardson, Gary Quackenbush (lead guitar), Glenn Quackenbush (organ), Steve Lyman (rhythm guitar), Robin Dale (bass) and E.G. Clawson (drums) quickly became one of the leading live bands on the circuit. Following their local hit cover of "I'm So Glad" on A-Square, they split with Holland and were signed by Capitol Records. The mid-'68 album SRC and its single "Black Sheep" did predictably big business in Michigan and little elsewhere, at least in the states. SRC's dual guitar and keyboard attack aligned it with the proto-'prog' wing of the British underground and bands like Procol Harum. The album became a staple of John Peel's influential "Perfumed Garden" program on BBC Radio in London, making SRC the first of the new Detroit bands to have an impact in England.



Capitol also snapped up Bob Seger. His first record for the label was the anti-Vietnam War anthem "2+2=?" and another Detroit smash. His next, released in the autumn of '68 finally cracked the *Billboard* Hot 100 and kept going until it reached the national Top 20. "Ramblin' Gamblin' Man" is an organ-driven shakedown that not only played into Seger's soulful blue-eyed wheelhouse, it was a natural successor to "Heavy Music." Capitol rushed out an album named for the hit, but the breakthrough proved to be a mirage. Or maybe a premonition; it would be another six-plus years before Bob Seger truly broke through. In the meantime, Bob had arrived at an understanding with Michigan: he'd keep the local hits coming and Detroit would keep supporting them. The arrangement worked out nicely.

On purely economic terms, the shift from 45s to albums also meant a move away from the elaborate network of local labels and toward the big-ticket muscle of the majors. The major label mindset would hold sway for the next decade until punk resurrected the indie 45, but in the 1967-68 period of transition the Michigan economy pumped out local vinyl like the Big Three pumped out cars. A few groups made major connections: The Underdogs graduated from Hideout to Motown, where a cover of "Love's Gone Bad" (with their garage-level chops supplemented by various Funk Brothers) became a regional favorite. The Woolies from East Lansing, who were Chuck Berry's favored midwestern backing band, scraped the bottom of the national charts with their version of Bo Diddley's "Who Do You Love" on ABC-Dunhill. Mostly, though, the labels were local, small and often here-today-gone-tomorrow. None of this stopped the Top 40 stations in town from playing these upstart 45s. So curios like the Southbound Freeway's folk-rock novelty "Psychedelic Used Car Lot Blues" were welcomed onto the AM airwaves. Even versions the hoariest bar standards like "Farmer John" (by the Tidal Waves) and "In The Midnight Hour" (by the Wanted) became huge local hits.

It was a scene overflowing with heroes you've never head of. The Unrelated Segments emerged from the same downriver suburbs that had produced the MC5, and their suburban mutation was almost as unique. Singer Ron Stults had an unforgettable style somewhere between punk snarl and Brit erudition, and the songs he wrote with lead guitarist Rory Mack were catchy and substantial. (The group also included rhythm guitarist John Torok, bassist Barry Van Engelen and drummer Andy Angellotti.) Their entire output consisted of three 1967-68 singles on the SVR label--"Story Of My Life," "Where You Gonna Go" and "Cry Cry Cry"--but all three were Michigan hits. They use all the same fuzzbox tools of the time everybody employed, but these three small gems and still sound like nobody else. The group fell into the crack between the teen club scene and psychedelia, and it is one of this chapter's major injustices that the singularly talented Unrelated Segments never got the chance to join the album revolution.

The change caught some off-guard. In early '67 Mitch Ryder had been sweet-talked by his producer/manager into jettisoning the Detroit Wheels in favor of a big, glitzy show band better suited to Las Vegas than the Grande Ballroom. Shortly thereafter he headlined a New York theater extravaganza promoted by deejay Murray the K that also featured the American debut of Cream. "I was there with my big band," Ryder recalled, "but when I met Eric Clapton all he wanted to know was where [Wheels guitarist] Jim McCarty was. My heart sank. I knew right then I'd made a *big* mistake." It took Mitch Ryder a couple of years to begin to right his musical ship. When he returned in 1970, it was as the frontman of a band simply called Detroit that featured a young guitar hero named Steve Hunter and a kickass rhythm section anchored by Wheels drummer Johnny Bee. Their high energy arrangement of the Velvet Underground's "Rock & Roll" became another hometown hit that could have been bigger, had it not the misfortune of being on Paramount Records, among the most minor of the major labels.

Perhaps appropriately, the local long-playing revolution reached its zenith with the MC5. The group had cemented its radical credentials by being the only band willing to brave rioting Chicago police to play for protesters massed outside the Democratic National Convention in August '68. A month later Elektra Records rep (and future Ramones manager) Danny Fields saw them perform on a Friday, and by Monday the MC5 and their "baby brother" band the Psychedelic Stooges were Elektra artists. In another appropriately revolutionary move, the decision was made to record the band's all-important debut album live at the Grande Ballroom.

MC5 members contend that *Kick Out The Jams*, recorded October 30-31 and released the following February, did not capture them on a particularly inspired evening. Perhaps, but the album still establishes benchmarks for a live recording in terms of passion, sweat and (to borrow a phrase from their baby brother band) raw power. Their monstrous sound, always on the brink of being overwhelmed by feedback or dissolving into pure noise, was sculpted into fierce originals like the title track, which turned their catchphrase into a rock & roll battle cry and a sure-shot single. The originals were interspersed with their versions of tunes by R&B screamer Ted Taylor, avant-garde jazz master Sun Ra and the garage-punk Troggs, plus a brutal rendition of "Motor City's Burning," John Lee Hooker's song about the 1967 race riots that consumed Detroit while other places were enjoying a media-ballyhoo'd "Summer of Love."



The most remarkable thing about *Kick Out The Jams* was its documentation of the intense bond between the MC5 and their audience. This was emblematic of the relationship between Michigan music and its following, and *Kick Out The Jams* immediately became a totem album. It quickly sold 20,000 copies in Detroit, numbers usually reserved for the Beatles and Rolling Stones. The sales began to spread as the "Kick Out the Jams" single, having topped the Detroit charts, caught fire in Cleveland, New York and other markets.

The MC5 eruption seemed to give locals an expanded sense of their power, and kicked an already-thriving scene up an incendiary notch. It signaled that Detroit rock might be about to stake a worldwide claim alongside Motown and the city's other R&B purveyors. This beacon attracted representatives from all the major labels, checkbooks in hand.

Warner Bros. signed Savage Grace, a group that fused classical chops with hard rock. Vanguard snapped up the Frost, led by guitarist Dick Wagner, which had evolved out of the popular Flint band the Bossmen. Vanguard also signed a Cream-style power trio called the Third Power, whose guitarist Drew Abbott would become better known in the '70s as a member of Bob Seger's Silver Bullet Band. Cub Koda's band Brownsville Station had the honor of having the last local hit on Hideout Records, "Rock & Roll Holiday," before quickly moving on to Polydor and then Atlantic Records, where they unleashed the immortal "Smokin' In The Boy's Room." CBS subsidiary Epic signed blues-rockers Catfish. Frijid Pink went with Parrot, the label that was the US home of the Zombies and the beloved Them, and their bombastic version of "House of the Rising Sun" sold a million copies in America and was an even bigger hit in Europe. The James Gang, who recorded for ABC-BluesWay, were technically from Ohio, but the trio led by guitarist (and another future Eagle) Joe Walsh spent so much time in Michigan that they were thought of as locals.

Popcorn Blizzard featured a rotund singer from Texas who called himself Meat Loaf. That band failed to land a deal, but Motown's "hip" label Rare Earth paired him with Sean "Stoney" Murphy, lead singer of another local band, Wilson Mower Pursuit, and as Stoney & Meat Loaf they enjoyed regional action with "What You See Is What You Get." Rare Earth (the band) evolved out of club perennials Sunny & the Sunliners, and although only tangentially related to the underground, they did become Motown Records' only successful rock band. University of Michigan art student George Frayne joined forces with the remnants of a psychedelic rockabilly band called Billy C & the Sunshine to form Commander Cody & His Lost Planet Airmen, who eventually signed with Paramount Records and relocated to California. They'd become known for their reworking of Tex Ritter's "Hot Rod Lincoln," but "Seeds and Stems" from their debut album *Lost In The Ozone* is now recognized as among the first C&W stoner anthems. When the plans of Vanilla Fudge rhythm section Tim Bogert and Carmine Appice to form a supergroup with Jeff Beck and Rod Stewart were derailed, they found Michigan replacements to complete the band called Cactus: Detroit Wheels guitarist Jim McCarty and second-generation Amboy Dukes singer Rusty Day.

This was a rich and varied scene, but nowhere, not in any scene anywhere, was there a group like the Psychedelic Stooges. The band was the brainchild of Jim Osterberg, who attended a tony Ann Arbor high school but actually resided in a trailer park in the less desirable neighboring town Ypsilanti. He played drums for the Iguanas (hence his nickname "Iggy") and then the Prime Movers, the area's finest white blues band. A Chicago pilgrimage to sit at the feet of the blues masters convinced Osterberg that he needed to go home and create his own kind of blues. This he did, recruiting high school pals Ron Asheton on guitar, brother Scott Asheton on drums, and Dave Alexander on bass. They possessed almost no musical experience, but that was precisely the point. To create a new music, the drummer who reinvented himself as singer Iggy Pop would start from scratch.

His sonic inspiration was pure Detroit. "When I got to be about nine years old," he explained, "I found myself fascinated by the industrial hum that was always around me. Everything from my father's electric shaver--which was *bzzzz* all the time--to the electric space heater in our metal trailer. I was taken on a [school trip to] tour the Ford Motor Company main assembly plant at River Rouge, and there I saw my first machine press. A machine press is a metal foundation and a giant piece of very heavy metal cut in a form. You put what's about to become a fender in the middle, and it [explosion noise] crashes down, and you pull out the formed metal and put another piece in. I *loved* that sound."⁷

The sound his Stooges made was like that at first, a freeform industrial drone in front of which Iggy could sing, dance, or fling himself into the crowd in acts of increasingly confrontational theater. "People assume Elektra signed the Stooges because of Iggy as a performer," says "discoverer" Danny Fields, "but it was the sound of the music. I had always worshipped the Velvet Underground as the height of modernity, but this seemed like the next step. It was the music I'd been waiting all my life to hear."



This qualifies Fields as a visionary, because few on the Michigan scene heard any future in the Psychedelic Stooges' uneducated clatter. But when the album simply titled *The Stooges* (the Psychedelic prefix having been dropped) arrived without fanfare in August 1969, even the most ardent fans of Iggy's performance art were stunned. Produced by John Cale of the Velvet Underground, the record showed an instrumental trio whose skills were still rudimentary at best, and laughable by the elevated standard rock was now aspiring to. Yet it didn't matter. Against all probability the Stooges--whose entire set once consisted of "Asthma Attack" and "Goodbye Bozos," two pieces of virtually indistinguishable noise--had somehow learned to sculpt their chaos into actual songs. Primitive they might have been, but "I Wanna Be Your Dog," "1969" and "No Fun" boasted Ron Asheton guitar grooves so elementally irresistible that kids in basements and garages have been banging them out ever since. Killer, as they'd say in the parlance of the day.

And rather than the cosmic claptrap so many of the more fashionable outfits were peddling, Iggy Pop's lyrics predicted the boredom and frustration that waited on the other side of the fraying hippie dream. The Stooges debut was released the week of Woodstock, and despite the outpouring of tie-dyed nostalgia surrounding the festival's every anniversary, there's little doubt which event was more significant. Danny Fields was right. This was the sound of the future.

The Motor City scene was now firing on all cylinders. All the major label activity was just the tip of an iceberg-size community of bands. There remained a network of local labels releasing a steady stream of 45s, and radio actively embraced the gush of homegrown product. In addition to the Top 40 perennials on the AM dial, underground rock found a home at WABX-FM, which was quickly joined by WKNR-FM and WXYZ-FM. Down in the basement of the Mixed Media headshop, Barry Kramer and Brit expatriate Tony Reay were at work on a rock & roll newspaper called *Creem*, whose staff would grow to include Dave Marsh, Lester Bangs, Jaan Uhelszki, and the author of this chapter.

As happened in previous eras, this self-contained midwestern bubble of rock & roll nirvana attracted artists from outside the region. David Teegarden and Skip Knappe were Oklahoma musicians who drifted into town and stayed. As the drum/organ duo Teegarden & Van Winkle these mad Okies released "God, Love and Rock & Roll" on their own Plumm label before it was picked up by distributor Armen Boladian's new Westbound Records and made the Top 30 nationally.

The most dramatic example of the "imported native" concept was the five-man band called Alice Cooper. Minister's son Vince Furnier, who took the band's name as his own, was born in Detroit but raised in Phoenix, where he and school friends Michael Bruce and Glenn Buxton (guitars), Dennis Dunaway (bass) and Neal Smith (drums) formed their group. Moving to Los Angeles, their consciously confused sexuality and twisted take on psychedelia cleared rooms all over town. This negative capability attracted Frank Zappa, who sponsored two album of largely unlistenable art-rock. Alice Cooper were regarded as little more than an LA art joke, but something strange happened when they came through Detroit.

"The crowds were crazy, which after laid-back LA was strange in itself," recalls frontman Alice. "But they actually seemed to *like* us, something we'd never experienced. We couldn't believe it at first. The crazier we got, the more they liked it. We played all the big places--the Grande Ballroom, the Eastown Theater and the festivals--but there was also a rock club on every block. We'd never worked so much in our lives, and we loved every minute of it. We thought we'd stumbled into rock & roll heaven."

The group relocated to a farm outside Pontiac and immersed themselves in the local culture. The enthusiastic audience appreciation sharpened the theater that in many respects had been more interesting than their music. But exposure to the high energy ethos of the Michigan bands also sharpened them musically. It was a very different Alice Cooper that next entered the recording studio in 1970, a lean, focused Detroit-style rock & roll band that the folks back in LA wouldn't recognize. Their transformation on the album *Love It To Death* was every bit as startling as the Stooges' had been, and the tale of teen frustration that was the subject of its first single could have come straight from the Stooge playbook. "I'm 18" was an unexpected hit that in time would come to be seen as a post-hippie anthem. When John Lydon, not yet Johnny Rotten, auditioned for the band that became the Sex Pistols, "I'm 18" was the record he sang along to.

Alice Cooper only recorded two albums while in Michigan residence, *Love It To Death* (1971) and *Killer* (1972), before moving further east to New York, but these albums turned the onetime art joke into a hard rock sensation and one of the biggest concert draws in the world. Alice Cooper became the ultimate example of the transformative power of the Detroit



rock & roll community and audience. Unfortunately the Cooper quintet also became much more successful than any of the Michigan bands that inspired this transformation.

The outside world had not developed much affection for the high energy Michigan sound or its ambassadors. The MC5 had generated a mountain of pre-release press, much of it centered on their commune's formation of a self-defense arm, the White Panther Party, in response to the unrelenting police harassment. The American public at large, however, found the band's mega-decibel assault and the increasingly strident White Panther politics oppressive rather than liberating. The band had removed the "motherfucker" from their rapidly rising single, softening the intro to "kick out the jams, brothers and sisters", but influential radio programmer Bill Drake warned that playing the clean 45 was still promoting an obscene album, a flimsy pretext that nonetheless stopped the single cold. The bad-boy behavior that made them outlaw heroes in Detroit eventually caused Elektra to conclude that the band was more trouble than it was worth, and the label took the unprecedented step of terminating the MC5's contract even as *Kick Out The Jams* was bulleted inside the national Top 30. Atlantic Records quickly stepped in with a handsome new contract, but this would prove to be more than a speed-bump.

The Stooges, too, despite national pockets of cult-level appreciation, found the going similarly rough outside Michigan. Detroiters might have marveled at how mind-blowingly the Stooges had risen to their recording occasion, but the rest of Woodstock Nation recoiled from the primitive throb of future classics "No Fun" and "I Wanna Be Your Dog." The prevailing wisdom was that rock had become an elevated artform, and rude noises of the sort made by the MC5 and the Stooges represented the primeval muck that the music had managed to pull itself out of. In the royal family of late-'60s rock & roll, the MC5 were regarded as the overbearing uncle whose earsplitting rants were an embarrassment, and the Stooges were treated like the idiot progeny who needed to be locked away in the attic.

For a time, Detroit's self-sufficiency shielded it from the slings and arrows of uncomprehending outsiders. And what a vibrant, joyful, celebratory self-sufficiency it was. On April 7, 1969, 16,000 kids packed Olympia Stadium, home of the beloved Red Wings hockey team, for the Detroit Pop Festival, an all-day (and night) affair that featured more than twenty of the city's best bands battling it out non-stop from stages at both ends of the stadium. The following day the same bill--headed by the MC5, Amboy Dukes, Bob Seger System, SRC, Rationals and Frost--moved north to become the Grand Rapids Pop Festival. The day after that it became the Saginaw Pop Festival, doing "boffo box office" (as *Billboard* magazine often termed it) at each stop. "We were crazy, but the audiences were way crazier than we were," marveled Brownsville Station's Cub Koda 25 years after the fact. "They couldn't get enough."

The saturation of rock & roll culture even bled back into the Detroit R&B consciousness that had nurtured it. Over at Motown, Norman Whitfield was producing a kind of faux-psychedelia with the Temptations, but outsider George Clinton got it for real. The former barber from Plainfield, New Jersey, had moved his doo-wop group the Parliaments to Detroit seeking some Hitsville magic, but never quite fit the Motown system. Clinton had his own way of seeing things, and he saw much more after some associates of Timothy Leary introduced him to LSD-25. What he envisioned, after sharing stages with the Five, Dukes, Stooges and Alice Cooper, was a lysergic co-mingling of the city's musical energies. This involved moving the Parliaments' backing band to the fore. Christened Funkadelic and led by the monster guitar of Eddie Hazel, the group marshaled the extreme energy of Detroit rock and created a radical funk that, in early works like "Free Your Mind...And Your Ass Will Follow" and "Maggot Brain," became the next evolution in rock & soul beyond Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone.

The area was so dense with musical activity that it existed in layers, sub-scenes isolated by age or genre or neighborhood. While George Clinton actively sought out alliances with the Detroit rock community, there were other pockets of black psychedelia that never made any of Clinton's connections. Black Merda got as far as recording two largely unheard albums for Chess Records, but the subterranean scenes that produced black rock bands like Flying Wedge and Death will provide fertile ground for future pop archaeology. A folksinger and activist named Rodriguez, despite having no connection to *any* of the city's scenes, attracted the attention of Sussex Records in Los Angeles. On *Cold Fact* (1970) his song stories of inner city street life were co-produced by Dennis Coffey--the guitarist whose wah-wah had psychedelized the Temptations and who'd shortly have his own instrumental hit "Scorpio"--and featured a stellar cast of Motown-associated musicians. *Cold Fact* introduced Rodriguez as an original voice, but it and its follow-up *Where I'm Coming From* (1971) passed unnoticed.

Even as all this activity was reaching fever pitch, cracks began to show in the foundation. Part of it was the inevitable distancing that accompanies success. Just as it had grown out of the teen clubs, the scene had now outgrown the ballrooms--the level at which the intense bond between musician and audience had been forged--and into the theaters,



which would in turn give way to arenas and then stadiums. Each level, though increasingly more profitable to the business interests, took the music a little further from the original source of its inspiration. The center, as philosophers and poets delight in telling us, never holds.

No band illustrated this better than the MC5. Shortly after being bounced by Elektra and signing with Atlantic, the Five split with John Sinclair and the White Panther Party. This divided their audience, a fracture reinforced by their sophomore release *Back In The USA* (1970), an album as obsessively tight and controlled as *Kick Out The Jams* had been loose and feedback-ridden. This radical alteration of sound was a resounding commercial failure, despite first-rate material like "The American Ruse," "Shakin' Street" and a revamped "Looking At You." The album sold only a fraction of its predecessor in Michigan while failing to attract the post-hippie national audience the MC5 had aimed it at.

The Five weren't alone. The Stooges drove off a cliff in the opposite direction. After their reasonably restrained, surprisingly song-oriented debut, *Fun House* (1970) was an intense, frenzied howl informed by an elemental funk and, with the addition of saxophonist Steve MacKay, avant-garde jazz. "Loose" and "T.V. Eye" captured all the dangerous energy Iggy and the boys generated live, but *Fun House* failed to match the modest-but-promising sales of *The Stooges*. The Amboy Dukes had ditched lightweight Mainstream Records for international heavyweight Polydor, but couldn't escape the public perception (outside Michigan) that they were one-shot psychedelic wonders. Bob Seger had finally enjoyed a coast-to-coast hit with "Ramblin' Gamblin' Man" but had been unable to follow it. "Lookin' Back" and "Lucifer" continued the string of exemplary Detroit hits that caused *Creem's* Dave Marsh to liken Seger to a midwestern John Fogerty, but for the moment the genie had somehow been put back in the local bottle. And by the time Rationals finally got to record an album in 1971, their moment had passed.

The lack of national appreciation would have eventually constricted even the hardest local base, but there was another, more insidious force at work. Soft drugs like marijuana were giving way to the harder, heavier substances cocaine and heroin. The national narcotic epidemic that claimed iconic figures Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin hit Michigan especially hard. It would eventually kill members of the Stooges, Amboy Dukes and Detroit Wheels, and send multiple members of the MC5 to prison. In the larger picture there could be no greater threat to a scene based on energy, discipline and drive than the spirit-draining embrace of heroin addiction.

It took outside eyes to register the full horror of the situation. The Flamin' Groovies were from San Francisco, but their spunky, bare-bones approach made them pariahs in the hipper-than-thou Bay Area music community. Like so many before them, however, the Groovies found Detroit's arms opened wide. Appearing at the Grande Ballroom with the MC5, their rootsy rock--at this time enlivened by bits of political theater that featured roadies dressed as cops and Ku Klux Klansmen--was rapturously received. Like Alice Cooper, the Flamin' Groovies thought they'd stumbled into rock & roll heaven. Yet when they returned to the Motor City only a matter of months later, they found a landscape so ravaged by the heroin plague as to be almost unrecognizable. Sitting in a fleabag motel on the east side of Detroit, the sound of sirens and the occasional gunshot punctuating the night, guitarist Cyril Jordan and singer Roy Loney wrote a song that captured the devastation surrounding them. "Slow Death," released on an English 45 in 1972, immediately claimed a place among the most persuasive of all anti-drug rock songs. On the soundtrack of this chapter, it serves as an elegy for the Detroit scene that inspired it.

Terry Knight knew all this. He was a smart guy, smart enough to know that his shelf life as a singer had passed its expiration date. He appreciated the strength of the scene that had made his semi-career possible, but he also understood why so much popular Michigan music wasn't translating elsewhere. When two former members of his Pack, guitarist Mark Farner and drummer Don Brewer, came to him with the heavy trio they'd formed with latter-day Mysterians bassist Mel Schacter, Terry Knight knew what to do. Christening the trio Grand Funk Railroad and signing on as their manager/producer, he had Jeep Holland book the unknown group as an opening act, frequently unpaid, on the national festival circuit. Grand Funk delivered the high energy do-anything-to-please Motor City rama-lama, but without any of the attendant Detroit baggage. As far as the festival masses knew, the band could have come from anywhere, maybe even their own home town. This was just as Terry Knight wanted it.

When Grand Funk Railroad's albums for Capitol consequently sold by the truckload, people back in Michigan grumbled that the band hadn't paid its dues (as if backing Terry Knight's vocalizing wasn't dues enough for a lifetime). Knight's game plan made such muttering irrelevant. Grand Funk's best record--made, ironically, immediately after their acrimonious split



from svengali Knight--was "We're An American Band," but it could just as easily have been "We're A Detroit Band," so perfectly did the group calibrate the everyman ethos of Motor City rock & roll, sans the bullshit.

With American interest exhausted, both the MC5 and the Stooges attempted to revive their fortunes in Europe. The third MC5 album *High Time*, begun in London and completed back in Detroit, marked the creative flowering of Fred "Sonic" Smith. On his songs "Sister Ann," "Baby Won't Ya" and "Over & Over" the band began to achieve a balance between the power of their first album and the precision of their second. Too late, alas. Even with a London residence and the guidance of Ronan O'Rahilly--the man behind Radio Caroline, the pirate radio station broadcasting off the English coast in international waters--for the MC5 the brass ring was receding and their chemical demons were gaining ground.

The Stooges had thrown in the towel when Elektra declined to record a third album. But they had an English fan in David Bowie, whose character Ziggy Stardust was partially based on Iggy Pop, as was his hit single "The Jean Genie." With Bowie's patronage and a new Columbia Records contract, Iggy & the Stooges (as they would now be billed) reconvened in London, with Ron Asheton moving to bass and former Chosen Few guitarist James Williamson taking over as Iggy's prime foil and writing partner.

This lineup was musically more accomplished, especially when they later added Bob Sheff and then Scott Thurston on piano, but their album *Raw Power* was an even more crazed kamikaze assault than the first two. "Search & Destroy," "Your Pretty Face Is Going To Hell" and the title track all boasted savage riff propulsion, while "Gimme Danger" and "I Need Somebody" showed a surprising aptitude for conjuring dark, acoustic-based atmospheres. The bratty self-producing band, however, had laid on so many screaming overdubs that mixer David Bowie couldn't begin to sort out the chaos. Lou Reed and Mott The Hoople had scored unexpected hits under Bowie's direction, but this was not to be for the ill-starred and dope-sick Stooges. The troublemaking band was given the boot by Bowie's MainMan management organization before *Raw Power* even reached the streets. "I am the world's forgotten boy," Iggy sang on "Search & Destroy." It was a statement he appeared to be working overtime to turn into permanent prophesy.

As these bands and others stumbled toward an apparently ignominious end, it was no coincidence that the Detroit rockers who not only survived and even flourished in the 70s and beyond, Bob Seger and Ted Nugent, were the ones who'd steered clear of the drug trap. (George Clinton was the exception to this and many, many other rules.) Nugent has always claimed that he had no idea his co-writer of "Journey To The Center Of The Mind" was engaging in psychedelic proselytizing, and no-one who knows Terrible Ted is inclined to disbelieve him. He became a 70s platinum solo beast by creating an outsized persona as the "Motor City Madman," yet he assiduously avoided the narcotic madness that afflicted so many of his compatriots and, truth be told, an alarming percentage of his own paying customers. Bob Seger had never fully embraced the counterculture; he was the only major Michigan act who never played the Grande Ballroom. When Seger and his Silver Bullet Band made a second big breakthrough with the *Live Bullet* album in 1976, he stood at a similar blue-collar remove from both the fashionable singer/songwriter crowd and the arena rock masses. Bob Seger always lived just outside the system, content to occupy his own territory until the rest of the world finally came around.

Most of the albums by the Detroit groups were out-of-print before the bands themselves succumbed. The industry still regarded Detroit as a breakout market, but its once-mighty local scene was like some lost Aztec civilization swallowed by the ever-expanding pop jungle. As you've no doubt already observed, however, history does not run in anything resembling a straight line, and death proved to be only the beginning for the Michigan bands.

Leading the exodus from the grave were the most reviled among them, the MC5 and the Stooges. Both bands reaped posthumous dividends from the time they'd spent in the UK. The sonic distillation of their *Back In The USA* album, and the greasy R&B the Five reverted to in their final days, were an inspiration to the English back-to-basics movement called pub-rock, while the Stooges' fearlessness presaged and then goaded the somewhat dubious development known as glitter or glam rock. These styles were the breeding ground for punk rock, which looked to Detroit as its spiritual home. The Sex Pistols covered the Stooges' "No Fun" and the Clash emulated the MC5's total assault and strident politics. But there is virtually no subsequent hard rock development--from speed metal to thrash to grunge--that doesn't owe a debt to the loud, proud and passionately uncompromising sound and the take-no-prisoners performances of the Motor City bands. The garage rock resurgence of the 1990s is only the most recent and obvious example. Detroit being one of the centers of modern garage, its young musicians made use of many of the structures left behind by earlier scenes, just as those older musicians had appropriated the abandoned venues of an even earlier era.



The most inspirational example of Detroit's delayed-impact music, however, belongs to the folksinger Rodriguez, whose two albums made no waves whatsoever upon release, even in his hometown. The singer subsequently left the music business to get an education, raise a family and express himself through community activism. Yet his music *had* been heard, and in some far-flung places. He didn't know it, but his albums had quietly acquired a substantial following in Australia. When word finally trickled back to Detroit, Rodriguez came out of retirement to tour the continent Down Under, sometimes accompanied by a young activist group called Midnight Oil.

More remarkably still, his *Cold Fact* album had found its way to South Africa, where home-taped copies were passed hand-to-hand around the political and countercultural underground. In the sexual frankness of "I Wonder," the multi-layered corruption catalog of "This Is Not A Song It's An Outburst" and the longing for psychedelic escape of "Sugar Man," the forces working against the state-sponsored system of racism called apartheid found powerful expressions of the freedom they were fighting for. In a place where even the Beatles had been banned, the music of Rodriguez found its most appreciative audience. Because of his self-imposed obscurity, a rumor took root that the mysterious singer was dead. A fan's intrepid sleuthing eventually established the living truth, and in 1998, following the fall of apartheid, Rodriguez played to packed arenas across a free South Africa.

Bob Dylan didn't know it when he sang "the loser now will be later to win" (in "The Times They Are A-Changin'"), but he was describing the fate of Detroit rock & roll. The times have indeed a-changed, countless times in the long road of American popular music this book traces and travels. It is a highway that boasts many fascinating sidestreets, back alleys and secondary roads. But when we're talking about rock & roll and its ability to connect with an audience at the deepest level, all roads now run through the music of the Motor City.

--Ben Edmonds

Notes: All quotes come from interviews conducted by the author, with the following exceptions. 1 *Boogie Man* by Charles Shaar Murray, St. Martin's Press 2000; 2 *Treadmill To Oblivion* by Fred Allen, Atlantic Monthly Press 1954; 3 "Negroes Taught Me To Sing: Famous Cry Crooner Tells What Blues Taught Him" by Johnnie Ray, *Ebony* March 1953; 4 *Cry: The Johnny Ray Story* by Jonny Whiteside, Barricade Books 1994; 5 *ibid*; 6 *Classic Scott* boxed set liner notes by Colin Escott, interview by Dave Booth, Bear Family Records 1992; 7 "Lust For Life" German TV documentary 1986.