

THE HISTORY OF ROCK IN THE ROC

It's cold in the winter. It's muggy in the summer. But it's cool all the time. That's right, Jack: Rock 'n' roll is here in Rochester. Maybe you didn't know it, but it's always been here. From little dives in Charlotte to arenas around the United States, Rochester rock has been making a dent since the beginning. There are a couple times we forgot our cool and waxed a little square (Bowie and The Stones will never play here again), but for the most part rock 'n' roll is one of this town's strongest assets. Rochester musicians don't run grocery store chains, or giant factories, but they can — and will — steal your girlfriends. Here's a brief, totally selective history of rock in Rochester. To add your own rock 'n' roll memories go to rochestercitynewspaper.com.

1950's



Irondequoit native Jerry Engler put out the single "Sputnik," which charted and got Engler on stage with icons like Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, and the Everly Brothers. After playing a show with Buddy Holly at the Rochester War Memorial, Engler traveled to Clovis, New Mexico, in 1958 and recorded at Bob Keen's studio, where Holly had recorded many of his hits. Holly played on tracks "What A You Gonna Do?" and "I Sent You Roses" five months before his death.

1960's



The Tempests' "Rockin' Rochester U.S.A."/"Lemon Lime" single is primo raw garage rock and extremely collectible. Formed at Irondequoit High School in 1960, this band played shows at venues like the Grange Hall, now the House Of Guitars.



Quintessential garage rock band The Invictas form. The band traveled to gigs in a Cadillac hearse emblazoned with its logo, and frequently played Tiny's Bengal Inn in Charlotte. In 1965 the band released "The Hump," which became a huge hit nationally, but many radio stations banned it due to its suggestive lyrics.



The Rolling Stones' only appearance in Rochester ends abruptly when 3000 rabid fans storm the stage after just seven minutes. Three attempts were made to resume the show, but ultimately fans got no satisfaction.



Guitarist Gene Cornish joins The Young Rascals, later shortened to The Rascals. Cornish attended Ben Franklin High School while fronting several area garage acts like The Unbeatables. The Rascals had a pile of hits, including "Good Lovin'," "Groovin'," "How Can I Be Sure," "A Beautiful Morning," and "People Got To Be Free."

1960's cont.



The Soul Brothers Six, led by John Ellison, got its start playing clubs on Rochester's northeast side. The band recorded its first 45 for the Fine label, 1965's "Move Girl," and in 1966 did "Don't Neglect Your Baby" for Lyndell Records. The band eventually relocated to Philadelphia, where it signed with Atlantic and recorded what would be its only hit, 1967's "Some Kind Of Wonderful."



Local R&B sensations The Rustix form, the first white act ever signed to Motown Records through its subsidiary, Rare Earth Records. The label released "Bedlam" in 1969. Jimi Hendrix's first appearance in Rochester in 1968 featured The Rustix on the bill, along with Soft Machine

1970's



Short-lived blues-based rock band Rain released its album "Live Christmas Night" on the Whazoo! Label, featuring artwork by Richard Storms. The live recording featured knock-out rockers like "Billy Goat" and Chuck Berry's "Tulane." The band toured regionally, and opened for bigger acts at the time like Nazareth and The Amboy Dukes.



During his Thin White Duke period, David Bowie spent a few hours in the Rochester clink the morning of March 21, 1976, after being arrested along with Iggy Pop and two others at the Americana Rochester Hotel. Vice squad detectives confiscated half a pound of pot (a felony with a potential 15-year prison sentence). Bowie, then 29, was freed after posting \$2000 bail. He hasn't been back since.



Lou Gramm joins Foreigner. Gramm (short for Grammatico), a graduate of Gates-Chili High School, started out as a drummer before switching to vocals in Black Sheep. Black Sheep toured the country with KISS and Ted Nugent before Gramm got the call from Mick Jones to join Foreigner. During Gramm's tenure the band amassed 20 Top 40 singles. Foreigner's "Rev On the Red Line" is about drag racing on Lake Avenue.

1980's



Punk legends The Cramps play their Rochester debut at Scorgie's, where singer Lux Interior pulls down the ceiling, and owner Don Scorgie in turns destroys the band's drum set. The Andrews Street club brought now-legendary bands like X, The Ramones, Lords Of The New Church, Johnny Thunders and others to town before closing in the early 90's.



Initially an R&B instrumental act, Duke Jupiter grew into what is now called classic rock. The locally based band toured nationally, and at the height of its popularity in June 1982 effectively put an end to rock concerts at Ontario Beach Park after 25,000 fans showed up for a free concert that officials figured would draw about 5000.

1980's cont.



Metallica records its incredible "Kill 'Em All" at Music America Studios on East Avenue. The album was engineered by the late Gary Zeffing (keyboard salesman at The Music Lover's Shoppe) and the cover was shot by Gary Heard in his studio in Village Gate Square. According to the folks at The House Of Guitars, the band spent hours there drooling over guitars they couldn't yet afford.



Eddie "Son" House dies. House lived in Rochester's Corn Hill Neighborhood from 1943 to 1974. House's recordings in the 1930's and 40's solidified his place as a Delta blues innovator and master. When he was rediscovered here in 1964, House reportedly hadn't touched a guitar in years. During one of his local sessions House recorded the tune "Rochester Blues."

1990's



One of the few local artists who put punk and its ancestors in perspective was Luke Warm (Andrew L. Ogrodowski). Warm was a glam disciple, a punk prophet, an instigator, and chiefly a rocker. His stage persona was his persona. He lived rock 'n' roll, and tragically died rock 'n' roll on March 17, 1995. In 2008 his last band, SLT, released the band's only album, "Dirty Sleep."



Local alternative band Nod released the album "I'm Around." Nod's music is filled with raw, ragged emotion that either thinly veils — or completely buries — the tune. It's an acquired taste with fans around the world, including alternative rock giant Sonic Youth, which has covered Nod songs. Nod continues to play and record, and released its sixth album in 2008.



Wendy O. Williams commits suicide. Born in Rochester in 1949, Williams was the vocalist, saxophonist, chainsaw operator, and sledgehammer wielder in 80's punk band The Plasmatics, known for its ultra-violent stage act, which included demolishing cars, or driving them through walls of TV sets.

2000's



The Worm Quartet — a local one-man band led by a man simply known as Shoebox — scored the No. 1 Most Requested Song of the Year on the national "Dr. Demento Show" for his "Great Idea for a Song." (He repeated the honor in 2005 with "Inner Voice.") Shoebox is 300 pounds, proudly sports a mullet, and plays odd synthesizer-driven madness. He tours the states in a Chevy Cavalier.



Gym Class Heroes win Best New Artist at the 2007 MTV Music Awards. Formed in nearby Geneva in 1997, the band has exploded with its blend of clever hip-hop with live rock instrumentation.