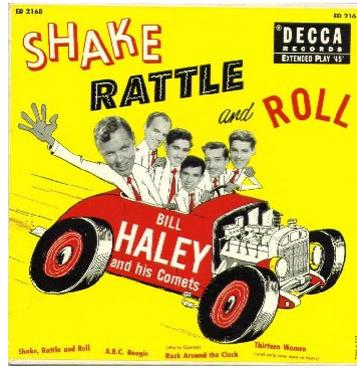


The Rock and Roll Hall of Shame

Jerry Woodfill



“One, two, three, o’clock four o’clock rock...”

The cadence was hypnotic for a Lincoln School upperclassman, i.e., eighth grader. This was what one author deemed, “The Plains of Passage,” an unescorted South Shore rail trip from Hammond’s Indianapolis Blvd. station into the metropolis, Chicago. And not a routine trip, at that, one of momentous historic significance, a landmark moment in time. It was the opening of that 1955 cinematic classic *Black Board Jungle* starring Glen Ford as “Daddy-o”, along with its blockbuster theme song “Rock Around The Clock.”

Yet, there was much-much more about the event jacking its notoriety near the top of great moments in the annals of musical entertainment history. Bill Halley and his Comets were appearing live onstage. During intermission, they would perform the hit of the year, no, the hit of the decade; for all I knew the greatest rock and roll hit of the millennium.

While there had been modest peril taking the South Shore through the south Chicago war zone (Only one beer bottle came RPG fashion through the window of the car I rode.), seeing the Comets in person outweighed any threats. For, we, the Brantwoodian Rock ‘n Roll devotees of the fifties, this would be a seminal experience much rehearsed in coming years. I was not alone. Rickie and Eddie made it a trio. Perhaps, we were the only residents of Northwest Indiana to have witnessed the event. After all, it was a full 40 miles from Wicker Park. For us, a sheltered lot, only a later journey to the Indy 500 would equal this daring adventure.

But it was not the city which left a lasting impression, it was the antics of the rock and roll crowd at intermission. There were girls and women of extreme diversity: teens and moms, young and old, fat and thin, ugly and pretty charging forth beneath the stage, some screaming, others crying, tearing at one-another to be closest to their idols.

The objects of adoration were a group of middle aged men, none exceptionally handsome to behold. These were not the Rock Hudson, Cary Grant or even Frank Sinatra “pretty boys.” Yet, the adulation rolled out around them like a tidal wave of irrational feminine lust. There were professional women of material substance jostling baser types for access to these non-descript white guys.

Manifestations included superhuman feats, catapulting themselves on stage, tearing at the performers clothes, fainting amidst the cheering, whooping, screaming sounds of these deranged fans.

To a man, not one male was among the flurry of demented female devotees. I say demented in

this sense, “They had forgotten who they were.” This became the birthplace of my rock and roll addiction. I returned to Lincoln School changed. No longer did Snooky Lanson’s and Gisele MacKenzie’s Lucky Strike *Hit Parade* ballads move me. Bill Haley, Elvis, Ricky, Roy, and Paul (Anka not McCartney) had replaced them.

A strange confluence, a synergy of interests, deepened my addiction. Audio Electronics as a hobby tracked the advent of Rock and Roll. It was something called High Fidelity audio, HiFi for short, that became the catalyst for my continued addiction.

Brantwoodians, as a whole, caught the HiFi bug while I dealt with my case of Rock and Roll-itis. No longer was the latest Detroit automobile that which impressed. The size of the V-8 engine was supplanted by the frequency range of the HiFi system as the specification which impressed friends and neighbors.

Book shelves no longer held books. Instead all manner of tweeters, woofers, and mid-range speakers stood where the printed text once was. In fact, the challenge of the art was to manufacture a speaker with the specs of a low-throated ultra-base vibrato in a cabinet the size of a set of World Book encyclopedias. Fireplaces no longer burned wood in those cold Indiana winters. Rather the sounds of Percy Faith’s Orchestra warmed the heart and soul of listeners.

Though our fire place stayed speaker-free, the wood-bin beside the hearth no longer held wood. Its content became our woofer’s place in the living room. Likewise, Mom’s antique, wash basin stand, a cherished heirloom from the family

home place, was savagely modified for the HiFi preamp, FM tuner, and horror of horrors the 20 watt Williamson amplifier. Where antique Oak leaf China once resided, the heat of electronics aged those ancient timbers.

Actually, the guttural, earthy groans, throaty appellations, and falsetto harmony of groups like Buddy Holly's Crickets and The Platters along with solo performers Chuck Berry, Sam Cooke, and, of course, Elvis were little challenge to the wide range of our Sherwood Ravina speakers. Our ten year old Philco radio would have served equally well. Bill Haley's vocal range was at best little more than an octave. But somehow the combination of snare drums, guitars, and that locomotive beat served up a mixture of broken harmony, raucous nasal lead singing, and repetitious lyrics that stirred a visceral something in the deepest depths of all who heard it.

Neighborhood amateurs attempted to clone their idols. Many an irate Brantwood homeowner complained to authorities about the din of discordant sounds heard from a garage combo butchering "Great Balls of Fire", "Whole Lot a Shakin' Goin' On," or Little Richard's classic screamer "Tutti Frutti, All Rutti." Somehow these groups had an unsavory reputation such that soon none existed amongst the Brantwoodians. These types were of more earthy upbringings across the tracks.

Though I agreed with the assessment, I could not forget that Chicago theater scene, the groveling, grabbing, grasping, growling, gang of girls, gasping with each gyration of Bill Haley's Comets. This led to that unfortunate thought, "Perhaps, I, too, can be a rock and roll idol."

The era of the Elvis impersonator was decades away. Besides, Elvis, did live so why impersonate him? There was no easy access to Rock and Roll, off the shelf, paraphernalia. The regalia was devoid of today's readily available greasy looking Elvis-like wigs. There were no sequined body shirts and tight fitting pants, no back-up accompaniment tapes, no inexpensive Fender guitars. There was absolutely nothing for an aspiring rock and roll artist to accelerate entry into the genre.

I played first trumpet in the band. A lousy trumpet was not the instrument of feminine devotion. Though I wore a flat-top haircut, a nasty colic refused to respond to combing. This made an Elvis hair-do out of the question. Worst of all, I didn't own a guitar though Dad had a ukulele bought as a gag. He played it at a Brantwood Hawaiian party.

Again, imagine Elvis singing *Hound Dog* accompanied by a four string uke. No respected rock idol would have one.

"At least having a guitar would be a start," I sighed. Only through Mom's intercessions did Dad agree to trade in his silver trumpet along with his bass and tenor saxophones on a steel string acoustic guitar. I had the guitar but not the ability to play this instrument of feminine attraction. Of course, a Mel Bay How To book was purchased. But that was the extent of the process. Rather than the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, I was destined for its Hall of Shame.

But I found something as useful for the kind of respect I sought from women. I made the discovery by accident. Women swooned over this

thing as much as they did Bill Haley's performances. The revelation came at our school gym the same year as the trip to Chicago.

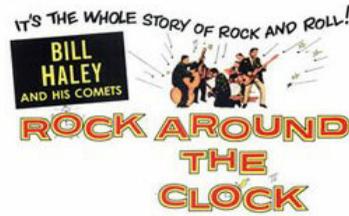
I'd played an exceptional game that evening, the high scorer, against a respected grade school team. Leaving the gym, I noticed a special friendliness from our cheerleaders, not experienced previously:

"It's got to be something about how I played tonight." I guessed. I was right. To preserve that friendliness, I had better become the Bill Haley of the hardwood. From that moment, my rock and roll performances were rocking opponents into submission and rolling up points for Lincoln School.

This required no long greasy hair. The flat-top was fine. No guitar required either...just make baskets. A sequined body shirt and pants? Gym shorts got better response from the girls as long as the guy wearing them was the star. Henceforth, I would be that star. And...ah, yes. Having an attractive girl friend was never a problem again, though I wore glasses and looked uglier than Buddy Holly and more homely than Bill Haley.



Rock 'n Roll Hall of Shame Comprehension Questions



Bill Haley and Comets : Vintage 1955 Chicago, Illinois

(Enter answers on the line to left of each question.)

- _____ 1. Jerry's tone compares Bill Haley's stage show to:
- a ballet performance
 - a Cub Scout Pack meeting
 - the Indy 500
 - fan behavior at a wrestling match
- _____ 2. Jerry's inference about women's behavior at the performance is?
- politely subdued and appreciative
 - like a scene in movie *Little Women*
 - a lady wrestlers' training class
- _____ 3. The women were impressed by?:
- the handsome Comets
 - the range of Bill Haley's voice
 - the soft melodic musical selections
 - the Comets gyrations along with the drum beat, and repetitious raucous lyrics of the music
- _____ 4. Jerry was the only male to jump on stage.
(T)rue or (F)alse.
- _____ 5. The train trip to Chicago:

- was uneventful
- had a beer bottle break a window
- was fraught with vagrants
- ended in hitch-hiking

- _____ 6. Why did Jerry want to hear Bill Haley and the Comets?
- he liked astronomy
 - he wanted to see "Haley's Comet"
 - he was running away hoping to be a rock star
 - Rock Around the Clock* was a hit
- _____ 7. What was the name of the movie featuring the Comets' song?
- "Rock of Ages"
 - "Rocket to the Moon"
 - "Jingle Bell Rock"
 - "Blackboard Jungle"
- _____ 8. What was the year of Jerry's trip?
- when Jerry was in eighth grade
 - when Jerry was in first grade
 - Jerry's senior year in high school
 - not mentioned in the story
- _____ 9. What instrument did Jerry play?
- the harmonica
 - Hawaiian guitar
 - Ukulele
 - trumpet
- _____ 10. Why did Jerry not like that instrument?
- it was difficult to master
 - his neighbor played it better
 - it did not impress girls much
 - he didn't like his music teacher
- _____ 11. Where were the firecrackers from?

- Egypt
- China
- Indiana
- Brantwood

- _____ 12. Jerry learned the guitar from _____?
- corresponding with Bill Haley
 - his neighbor, a guitar virtuoso
 - a comic-book guitar course
 - a Mel Bay book
- _____ 13. Why couldn't Jerry copy Elvis?
- he couldn't memorize lyrics
 - he couldn't move like Elvis.
 - he had a nasty hair colic
 - he had no acoustic guitar
- _____ 14. What was the "HiFi" Bug??
- an incurable disease of the 50s
 - an insect common to Brantwood
 - pursuit of the best audio system
 - fan of Rock 'n Roll music
- _____ 15. What made Jerry popular?
- he looked like Buddy Holly
 - his basketball skill
 - his Elvis-like hair
 - he sounded like Bill Haley
- _____ 16. What did Jerry compare the trip to Chicago to?
- a journey to the Moon
 - the movie *Blackboard Jungle*
 - a family vacation
 - the Indy 500
- _____ 17. The women at the show did not ____?
- scream
 - get excited
 - sit demurely in their seats
 - rush the stage

- _____ 18. Which of the performers was not a Rock 'n Roll star?
- Elvis
 - Roy Orbison
 - Buddy Holly
 - Snooky Lanson
- _____ 19. The Comets were _____?
- a rhythm and blues group
 - a stringed quartet
 - folk singers
 - pioneer rock 'n rollers
- _____ 20. Why was the movie named Blackboard Jungle?
- it was a film about a jungle
 - it was about rebellious students
 - it was about a pirate in Africa
 - it was about global warming

- genre
 - raucous
 - visceral
 - clone
 - paraphernalia
 - seminal
 - guttural
 - en masse
 - colic
- style, type, class
hoarse, harsh
deep seated, emotional
copy, duplicate
belongings, apparatus
formative, pioneering
husty, deep, low
bodily
hair twist

Rock 'n Roll Hall of Shame Vocabulary List

<u>Word</u>	<u>Synonym</u>
1. cadence	rhythm, tempo
2. adulation	worship, adoration
3. deranged	crazed, irrational
4. confluence	meeting, junction
5. synergy	cooperation
6. vibrato	variation in pitch
7. catalyst	impetus, stimulation
8. heirloom	inherited keepsake
9. tweeter	high frequency speaker
10. woofer	low frequency speaker
11. octave	music range of eight notes
12. discordant	off-key, tuneless



The March 20, 1955 Movie Posters Jerry must have seen in the lobby of the Chicago Theater featuring the movie along with Bill Haley and the Comets