

Local Contributors to the History of Rock & Roll

Music has always been a significant part of history, including local history. Recent media coverage of the 50th Anniversary of Buddy Holly's untimely death in an airplane crash in 1959 has certainly brought back vivid memories of that era for many of us. The various musical groups, the individual performers, the songs all tend to stir up thoughts and recollections of the past. The memories music might invoke could include friends from the past, our family and childhood, clothing styles, major events, and more of what took place at that time in history, including in our personal lives.

Poodle skirts, pony tails, slicked back hair, and black leather jackets were all part of the fun spirit of the fifties music of Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley. By the late 1950's Rock & Roll began to fizzle out in America. This was due primarily to a congressional committee review of the payola scandal that swept the nation at that time. But in spite of its many detractors here in the United States, Rock & Roll began to thrive in Great Britain. Born from the ashes of this early form of American Rock & Roll of the 1950's came a new music, a music that soon became known as the "British Invasion."

Dozens of British music groups exploded on the American musical landscape. Paul McCartney, one of the Beatles, was the driving force behind this resurgence. The Beatles appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show in February of 1964 changed the American youth culture forever.

This musical shockwave was felt in Fairmont as well. New bands formed, disbanded, and merged, as the Rock & Roll movement grew stronger with each passing year. By the end of 1964, Fairmont had produced many Beatle's style Rock & Roll bands, such as, the *Radiants*, *Nocturnes*, *Delrays*, *Heartbeats*, *Twilighters*, *Pacers*, *Corvairs*, *Brotherhood*, *Colors*, and *Epicureans*. All of these bands were regularly heard playing at the local Fairmont Youth Center, the Armory, the high school, or church auditorium dances. By 1966, two Fairmont bands had emerged and became widely recognized well beyond the local area. They were the *Colors*, who had recorded in Chicago at Columbia Records, and the *Epicureans*, who had already produced their first vinyl 45 record.

The merger of these two bands was inevitable, primarily as a result of the Vietnam War. The draft board had riddled holes into Fairmont's Rock & Roll music scene and consequently shot down the musical aspirations of many of the young local musicians. However, as the years passed, the eventual induction of the *Epicureans* into the *Minnesota Rock & Country Hall of Fame* in 2005 proved to be not only a genuine tribute to them, but also to the legacy of the many other local musical groups of that era included in Fairmont's already rich Rock & Roll history.

Then in 1994, the appearance in Fairmont of pop-music's largest icon, the former Beatle, Sir Paul McCartney, and his late wife, Linda, caused a great deal of

excitement, even though he wasn't in Fairmont to perform. The former Beatle arrived in Fairmont with his late wife, Linda, to launch her new business venture, producing frozen vegetarian entrées at Fairmont Foods of Minnesota which is located in Fairmont.

Over the years, numerous individual musicians and musical groups have contributed significantly to the local history of Fairmont and Martin County. Their accomplishments have been recognized, remembered, and recorded as evidenced by the *Minnesota Rock & Country Hall of Fame* as well as locally by the *Rock & Roll Preservation Society* and its historic music display, *The Great Sounds of Interlaken*, which includes photos, musical instruments, and other memorabilia from the past in the Pioneer Museum.

Not to be overlooked or forgotten are some of predecessors to the Rock & Roll era that were also significant and have contributed to local history. Included in this category would be the likes of Lynn Kerns and The Rhythm Club Orchestra, the Al Menke Orchestra, and Millie & The Saddle Pals. They were also a vital part of the local music scene which many may fondly remember.

I would like to acknowledge the *Rock & Roll Preservation Society* as the primary resource for the content of this article. For more information on this topic, or to view the *Great Sounds of Interlaken* exhibit, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.