

CAPITOL ROCK: REVISED AND REMASTERED EDITION is a comprehensive cultural history of Washington, D.C. area rock and roll that focuses on the early era of rock music in the nation's capital (1951-1976).

CAPITOL ROCK: REVISED AND REMASTERED EDITION

By Mark Opsasnick

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CAPITOL ROCK

REVISED AND REMASTERED EDITION

Mark Opsasnick

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1998

MISCELLANEOUS AND UNKNOWN

2000

THE CULTURAL BADLANDS TOUR

2001

THE MARYLAND BIGFOOT DIGEST

2004

THE LIZARD KING WAS HERE

2006

THE REAL STORY BEHIND THE EXORCIST

2007

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CHAPTER 1: THE 1950s: ROCK AND ROLL EMERGES IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

The popularity of live musical entertainment in the Washington, D.C. area increased after Prohibition (1920-1933), a nationwide constitutional ban on the production, importation, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages, came to an end when the Twenty-first Amendment to the Constitution of the United States repealed the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States on Tuesday, December 5, 1933. In the wake of this development, dozens of bars, night clubs, and taverns opened throughout the region, with many of these establishments offering live musical entertainment.

In the block of years that followed Prohibition and preceded rock and roll there were many different establishments in Washington, D.C. that offered live music: Downtown establishments like the Blue Mirror Club, the Casino Royal Theatre Restaurant, and the Lotus Restaurant booked quality pop music entertainment; bars throughout the city from Northwest to Southeast such as the Covered Wagon Restaurant near Logan Circle, the Kit Mar Restaurant in Uptown, the Shamrock Restaurant in Georgetown, and the Stage Coach Tavern in Anacostia specialized in country music (later commonly referred to as country and western or C&W); and the You Street area – U Street NW and its arteries, from 7th to 14th Streets NW – offered race music (later commonly referred to as rhythm and blues or R&B) in a number of night clubs including the Casbah Restaurant, Club Bali, Club Bengasi, and Club Caverns Restaurant (later renamed Bohemian Caverns).

During this post-Prohibition period the night clubs of Prince George's County, Maryland, many of which offered live country music, were mainly situated along five separate commercial

arteries that led out from Washington, D.C. into the open eastern suburbs. These main avenues were: Rhode Island Avenue (Mt. Rainier to Brentwood to College Park), which hosted Bass' Restaurant & Bar, Waldrop's Restaurant, and the 4400 Club; Bladensburg Road (Colmar Manor and Cottage City), which hosted the Romano Inn, the Wheel Bar, the Chesapeake Café (later renamed the Dixie Pig), Tony Bresnahan's Tavern (later renamed the Surf Club), the Rustic Cabin Restaurant, and, on Baltimore Avenue near the Peace Cross, the Cross Roads (Bladensburg Road was known at the time as "The Strip" and was written up in detail in the 1951 book "Washington Confidential" by Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer); Central Avenue (Capitol Heights to Seat Pleasant), which hosted the Wagon Wheel, the State Restaurant, the M&S Bar, Rose's Tavern, Lockett's Bar, and the Stumble Inn – further out on the avenue in Seat Pleasant were Club Hillbilly, Chubby's Restaurant & Bar, and the Tea Topper Tavern; Marlboro Pike (Coral Hills to Hillside to District Heights), which was home to the Campus Club, the Hilltop Restaurant, Mike Young's Café, the Senate Inn, Detta's Musical Bar, and the Homestretch Tavern; and Branch Avenue (Silver Hill), which was originally called Southern Maryland Pike and hosted the Quonset Inn (later renamed the Quonset Supper Club), Yesterday's Inn, and Strick's Restaurant.

In the early 1950s many of the night clubs of the Washington, D.C. area adopted the new style of rock and roll, which came into existence when a 29-year-old disc jockey named Alan Freed coined the term in 1951 to describe a new classification of music. Freed began hosting a classical music program on radio station WJW in Cleveland, Ohio entitled "Allan Freed" (sic) on the night of Wednesday, July 4, 1951 (the segment initially aired at either 11:15pm or 11:30pm for either 60 or 90 minutes). The show had its name changed to "The Moon Dog House" on Wednesday, November 14, 1951, and, reportedly, it was at that time that Freed began calling the R&B tunes he played over the air "rock and roll."

The only reference for Freed's action is in the back cover notes of the record album "Alan Freed's Top 15" (Alan Freed; End Records, 1962), where he wrote: "It is impossible for me to present this album without thinking back to 1951 in Cleveland, where I named our music 'rock n roll.'" However, it should be noted that there are no audio tapes of Freed's on-air broadcasts that verify he used that term on his radio show that year.

Alan Freed's assertions sparked a great debate that continues to the present day: Should the birth of "rock and roll" be credited to the various musicians of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s who had performed songs whose musical content was strikingly similar to what we now accept as rock and roll music, or should its invention solely be attributed to Freed himself, who apparently was responsible for using the term as a noun to label a new category of music in the early 1950s? Regardless of one's opinion on this matter, the term "rock and roll" began showing up in various newspaper, trade publication, and record company promotional articles throughout the United States in late 1951.

The first major popular music act advertised as a "rock and roll" band in the United States was Bill Haley and the Saddlemen, who had formed in the late 1940s as a country music group based in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. In April 1952, this band recorded and issued the 45rpm single record "Rock the Joint" backed with "Icy Heart" (Bill Haley with the Saddlemen; Essex Records, 1952), which reportedly sold over 75,000 copies nationwide and is considered by many music historians to be the first rock and roll song ever recorded and promoted as such. Haley changed the name of his group to "Bill Haley and His Comets" in November 1952 and the band became one of the premier rock and roll acts in America.

In the spring of 1953 Bill Haley and His Comets rocked the world with the release of the single "Crazy Man, Crazy" backed with "Whatcha Gonna Do" (Bill Haley with Haley's Comets; Essex Records, 1953). The song debuted (and peaked) on

Saturday, May 23, 1953 at number 15 on Billboard's "Best Selling Singles" chart, which was listed under the general heading of "Top Popular Records." It was publicized in newspapers and other print publications around the United States as a hit song in the new "rock and roll" style and remained on the chart for six weeks.

The release of "Crazy Man, Crazy" was a musical milestone, as it marked the first time in history that a song being promoted as "rock and roll" ever appeared on a Billboard popular music chart. While touring in support of this rock and roll single, Bill Haley and His Comets visited Washington, D.C., where they performed before capacity crowds at the Blue Mirror Club from Monday, June 29 to Saturday, July 4, 1953.

Bill Haley and His Comets were popular in the nation's capital and influenced innumerable local bands to adopt rock and roll as their musical style. Haley and his band returned to the Washington, D.C. area several times throughout the decade, making stops at such venues as the Casino Royal Theatre Restaurant (week-long engagements in January and April 1955), the Spanish Ballroom at Glen Echo Park (Monday, September 5, 1955), Uline Arena (Friday, November 11, 1955), the District of Columbia National Guard Armory (Sunday, February 5, 1956), and Ritchie Coliseum (University of Maryland, College Park campus; Saturday, December 27, 1958).

Ultimately, Bill Haley and His Comets had single releases that reached various Billboard charts on 14 different occasions between 1953 and 1958 including the smash hit "(We're Gonna) Rock Around the Clock," which reached number one on the "Best Sellers in Stores" popular records chart on Saturday, July 9, 1955. Reportedly, this single eventually sold more than 30 million copies worldwide.

In the 1950s rock and roll music grew in popularity with both teenagers and adults. In the Washington, D.C. area its youthful following was sizeable and fueled a subculture characterized by teenage musical groups, teen clubs, dances, and record

hops. The dances and record hops were held in local church halls, community centers, firehouses, and schools. They became popular events, drew large audiences, and created a spawning ground for future Washington, D.C. area rock and roll musicians.

Teen clubs were originally formed in Prince George's County, Maryland to serve as recreational outlets to keep kids off the streets. The first published reference for a local teen club gathering was an article that appeared in the Wednesday, December 15, 1937 edition of the Greenbelt Cooperator newspaper. The short piece discussed activities that took place at a "Young People's Meeting" that first gathered on Friday, December 10 in a private home at 1-G Gardenway in the city of Greenbelt. The pages of that same newspaper offered periodic updates on this group, culminating in the formation of "The Greenbelt Junior Citizen's Association" on Tuesday, June 21, 1938.

While little was written about this group's activities over the next few years, the Greenbelt Recreation Department eventually assumed control of the supervision of youth activities and developed its own teen club system, staging a total of nine "Young People's Dances" between May 1943 and April 1944 in the auditorium of Center School, an elementary school then located at 15 Crescent Road in Greenbelt. Dance music for these events was provided by a pop group from Greenbelt called the Serenaders, whose lineup consisted of pianist Jack Huntington, clarinetist-saxophonist Mahlon Eshbaugh, saxophonists Jimmy Griggs and Sam Downs, trumpeters Dick Palmer and Harry Benefiel, trombonist Jimmy McCarl, and drummer Dick Coulter.

On Saturday, December 23, 1944 the city of Greenbelt established the Drop Inn, a unique teen center that secured quarters in the basement of the building marked 151 Centerway that housed the Greenbelt Police Department and the Greenbelt Fire Department (today this basement space has a separate address of 155 Centerway). The Drop Inn's earliest

dances utilized a jukebox, with teen bands being hired as entertainment in the early 1950s. (In May 1947 the Drop Inn relocated to a transplanted army surplus building at 9 Parkway Road in Greenbelt and remained in operation at that facility until May 1954.)

Elsewhere, the Prince George's Post of Thursday, November 30, 1939 included an article on an "Entertainment and Dance" sponsored by the Young People's Fellowship of Pinkney Memorial Church, then located at 5201 42nd Avenue in Hyattsville, Maryland, to take place in their church hall on Friday, December 8. The article mentioned that "The theme for the entertainment will be that of a series of popular and well-known radio programs. There will be dancing all evening in between these various presentations." In 1940, Pinkney Memorial Church labeled these gatherings "Young People's Night Clubs" and continued the monthly gatherings with radio entertainment throughout the early 1940s.

As the county's population increased, local communities used the Greenbelt Recreation Department and Pinkney Memorial Church as models and established teen club organizations of their own. In the summer of 1943 Mrs. William Parvin Starr of Riverdale, Maryland served as supervisor of "The Riverdale Recreation Center for the Teenagers." This group held teen dances on Saturday nights in the Riverdale Town Hall, then located on the second floor of the Riverdale Volunteer Fire Department building at 4714 Queensbury Road. The first dance for this outfit was held on August 7, 1943 with a phonograph as the musical source.

Next, the Berwyn Youth Recreational Committee held its first "Recreational Night" on Monday, September 4, 1944 in the auditorium of Berwyn Elementary School, then located at 4810 Greenbelt Road in College Park, Maryland. The initial Recreational Night dance drew a crowd of 60 persons, with live music offered by "Mr. Blacksmith and Son George" of Washington, D.C.

In September 1947, the University Park Teen Club was established at University Park Elementary School at 4315 Underwood Street in Hyattsville, Maryland. On opening night, they featured a live instrumental pop music band called the Off Beats, thus becoming the first teen club to ever offer a musical group comprised of the club's members themselves.

The Off Beats consisted of students who were attending University Park Elementary School and Hyattsville Junior High School. The original lineup of the band consisted of clarinetist Harvey Beavers, pianist Bobby Charlton, trumpeter Dickie Burgess, saxophonist John MacBride, and drummer Tommy Donaldson. They played a mix of Dixieland jazz and pop songs and stayed together for several years into the early 1950s. During its existence, the band played at dances in Prince George's County, Maryland held by the Bladensburg Teen Club (Bladensburg Junior High School), the Drop Inn (Greenbelt), the Hyattsville Teen Club (Hyattsville Junior High School), the St. Ambrose Catholic Church Teen Club (Cheverly), and the St. Hugh's Catholic Church Teen Club (Greenbelt). (At this time, it should be noted that there was a different band on the local scene in the late 1950s also named the Off Beats that played rock and roll and featured guitarist Danny Gatton.)

Rock and roll music reportedly first appeared in the teen clubs of Prince George's County, Maryland during the 1953-54 school year. Many of the teen musicians from that era recall a pop music band called the Lewis Maddox Orchestra first experimenting with rock and roll songs during its local live performances, thus separating itself from most of the other bands and orchestras that were a part of the area's rapidly growing teen dance circuit.

Lewis Maddox grew up in Cheverly, Maryland and as a youth was inspired to take up the saxophone after attending vaudeville shows at the Capitol Theatre in Washington, D.C. He attended Bladensburg High School in Prince George's County where he was a member of the Class of 1956. During

his freshman year (the 1952-1953 school year) he put together the first version of the Lewis Maddox Orchestra with four Bladensburg High School classmates, all of whom played in the school band. The group's initial lineup consisted of Maddox and Charlie Kelley on saxophones, bassist-singer Jack Otley, trumpeter Kermit Frye, and drummer Stan Spiwak.

From 1952 to 1956 the Lewis Maddox Orchestra performed in Prince George's County, Maryland at teen dances conducted by the Bladensburg Teen Club (Bladensburg Junior High School), the Drop Inn (Greenbelt), the Landover Youth Services Teen Club (Landover Hills), St. Ambrose Catholic Church Teen Club (Cheverly), and the University Park Teen Club (University Park Elementary School in Hyattsville). Initially, this outfit specialized in pop songs and jazz material by the likes of Dizzy Gillespie and Benny Goodman.

In the summer of 1953 Maddox began listening to Bill Haley and His Comets, who had raced up the Billboard popular music charts with their hit "Crazy Man, Crazy." That fall he taught several of Haley's songs to the band. The Lewis Maddox Orchestra first started performing this material after Labor Day weekend at the St. Ambrose Catholic Church Teen Club, which, at the time, operated out of the gymnasium of St. Ambrose Catholic School at 6310 Jason Street in Cheverly, Maryland. These performances made his combo the first teen band to perform that musical style in a live setting. In time the music of several rock and rollers including Fats Domino and Jerry Lee Lewis was incorporated into the combo's set lists. Maddox's band played this new rock and roll style of music for the next three years.

The establishment of rock and roll as a new classification of popular music, combined with increased interest in the region's teen club situation, caused one of Washington, D.C.'s daily newspapers, the Evening Star, to begin publishing a special weekend section called "Teen" The first 12-page segment of "Teen" appeared in the Sunday Star edition on November 18, 1956. It was specifically aimed at area youths and offered

articles on local high school events, the area's teen music scene, and the top popular music entertainers in the country. This special section greatly enhanced rock and roll's status with area youths. The final installment of "Teen" appeared in the Washington Star-News (as the newspaper came to be called) of Saturday, May 11, 1974.

A feature of "Teen" in the late 1950s was "Teen-to-Teen," a classified marketplace page which had two separate categories marked "Miscellaneous" and "Notices." These categories included advertisements for the appearances of rock and roll bands at local teen dances and record hops. Among the area groups that advertised on the "Teen-to-Teen" page were the Bel Airs, the Belvederes, the Bobolinks, the Cadets, the Cavaliers, the Chain Gang, the Chessmen, the Chirps, the Continentals, the Corpse Combo, the Dukes, the Epics, the Fabulous Esquires, the Four Js, the Galaxies, the Javelins, Jerry Dallman and the Knightcaps, the Knights, the Lancers, the Moderns, the Nomads, the Off Keys, the Partymakers, the Rhythm Makers, the Royals, the Savoys, the Serenaders, the Silvers, the Sonotones, the Sportsmen, Terry and the Pirates, the Thunderbirds, the Tri-Tones, and the Zing Ding Daddies.

In the spring of 1956, a new television show directed at teenagers entitled "Record Hop" began broadcasting in the Washington, D.C. area. This program brought pop and rock music into the homes of thousands and showcased both musicians of national prominence and local bands on the rise. Hosted by Milt Grant, a veteran of the local radio airwaves who had successfully made the transition to television programming, "Record Hop" inspired area teen musicians to hone their musical skills, broaden their horizons as performing artists, and develop an appreciation for the talents of other local bands and musicians.

"Record Hop" debuted for WTTG-TV Channel 5 from the ballroom of the Raleigh Hotel (401 12th Street NW, Washington, D.C.), on Saturday, July 21, 1956. Its first episode featured performances by rock and roll singer Gene Vincent

and pop singer Teddi King. The show was a hit from the start and initially aired on Saturdays from 4:00pm to 5:00pm. On Monday, August 19, 1957, the program switched its title to "The Milt Grant Show" and began airing on a Monday-to-Friday schedule from 5:00pm to 6:00pm, all the while maintaining its regular Saturday time slot as well. The show remained on the air for more than four years.

Among the local acts to appear on "Record Hop" and "The Milt Grant Show" were Jerry Dallman and the Knightcaps, the Naturals, the Off Keys, Ray Vernon, Terry and the Pirates, the Triumphs (featuring future Jefferson Airplane and Hot Tuna members Jack Casady and Jorma Kaukonen), Vernon Taylor, and others. Rock and roll guitarist Link Wray earned a spot as a house band musician and would reportedly dash off into the local night club scene the moment the cameras stopped rolling.

Big-name stars Milt Grant featured on this television program included the Ames Brothers, the Andrews Sisters, Andy Williams, Anita Bryant, Billy Grammer, Bo Diddley, Bobby Darin, Bobby Rydell, Brenda Lee, Brook Benton, Charlton Heston, Chubby Checker, Chuck Berry, Clyde McPhatter, the Coasters, Connie Francis, Conway Twitty, Crash Craddock, Danny and the Juniors, the Del Vikings, Della Reese, Dion and the Belmonts, the Drifters, Duane Eddy, Ella Fitzgerald, the Everly Brothers, Fabian, Fats Domino, the Four Aces, Frankie Avalon, Freddy Cannon, Gary U.S. Bonds, Gogi Grant, Ike & Tina Turner, Jackie Wilson, Jimmy Clanton, Johnny Horton, Johnny Mathis, the Laurie Sisters, LaVern Baker, Les Paul & Mary Ford, Little Richard, Lloyd Price, Mickey & Sylvia, Mitch Miller, Neil Sedaka, Paul Anka, the Platters, Ray Peterson, Roger Miller, Roy Hamilton, Sal Mineo, Sam Cooke, Sarah Vaughan, Tab Hunter, and Teddy Randazzo.

Milt Grant also held many record hops and live concert shows in the area at different high school gymnasiums and larger venues such as the Bladensburg Volunteer Fire Department, the Maryland Army National Guard Greenbelt Armory, the Maryland Army National Guard Hyattsville Armory,

and the Maryland Army National Guard Silver Spring Armory. These events, which were heavily promoted on his television show, usually featured a headlining national act with several local teen bands rounding out the bill. It was a lucrative practice that was emulated by numerous area disc jockeys and music promoters in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s.

“The Milt Grant Show” was advertised as a show for teenagers, about teenagers, and starring teenagers, and predated the inaugural broadcast of “American Bandstand” featuring host Dick Clark by 13 months. The program went to number one in the Washington, D.C. area’s television ratings and reportedly reached an estimated audience of more than 250,000 teenagers. When WTTG-TV Channel 5 unceremoniously aired the final episode of “The Milt Grant Show” on Saturday, April 15, 1961, an important chapter in Washington, D.C. area rock and roll history ended. To this day the reason for the show’s cancellation remains a mystery.

During the late 1950s as “The Milt Grant Show” enjoyed tremendous popularity in the Washington, D.C. area, a 250-watt radio station in Wheaton, Maryland called WDON was broadcasting an exciting rock and roll program called “The Record Club.” Hosted by disc jockey Don Dillard, this production directed rock and roll music toward local teens and built an enthusiastic listening audience.

Don Dillard, along with Milt Grant, was one of the first local promoters to bring in national popular music acts, support them with top teen bands from the region, and present them in live concerts at area armories and halls. He initially called his live music events “Record Hops” and throughout the late 1950s utilized the local rock and roll group Terry and the Pirates as his primary teen dance house band. His first show was held in early 1957 in Rosensteel Hall at the Knights of Columbus Father Rosensteel Council 2169 in Silver Spring, Maryland. Reportedly, several hundred teens showed up at that event to see the Starlighters (featuring singer Van McCoy) and Terry and the Pirates.

Dillard's live music shows in the late 1950s and early 1960s were held at several area locations including the Bladensburg Volunteer Fire Department, the Maryland Army National Guard Hyattsville Armory, the Maryland Army National Guard Silver Spring Armory, and the Spanish Ballroom at Glen Echo Park. Many of his events featured such local favorites as singer Ray Vernon and Terry and the Pirates, with a variety of acts rounding out the bills. Dillard's Bladensburg Volunteer Fire Department shows in the early 1960s were headlined by such acts as Barry Darvell and the Blazers, Bo Diddley, Chubby Checker, Danny and the Juniors, the Hot Tamales, Joey Dee and the Starlighters, Link Wray and His Ray Men, the Miracles, the Shangri-Las, the Shirelles, the Supremes, and Tab Hunter. In 1966 WDON switched to a C&W music format and Dillard left the radio station and the local music scene behind.

Local music personalities and promoters aside, it was a Philadelphia-based jazz-R&B band called Murray Schaff and His Aristocrats that initially introduced live rock and roll music to the Washington, D.C. area night club scene. The group's powerful music mixed traditional jazz and R&B covers with raucous originals and the dynamic stage show they presented literally had audiences rocking and rolling in the seats. The act's initial lineup consisted of singer-saxophonist Murray Schaff, electric guitarist Al Carmen (later replaced by Don Farrell), electric bassist Frankie Mayo, pianist Bobby Boyd, and drummer Dave Black.

Murray Schaff and His Aristocrats (occasionally billed as "Murray Schaff's Aristocrats") debuted in Washington, D.C. at the Blue Mirror Club where they were second billed to the Billy Williams Quartet in an engagement that ran from Monday, November 19 through Sunday, November 25, 1951. Initially billed as a jazz act, Schaff's band played rousing music with a prominent back beat which local music fans immediately embraced. The group was called back for an extended four-week stay at the Blue Mirror Club that began on Monday, December 24, 1951 and lasted through Sunday, January 20,

1952. This engagement included a week where they were second billed to jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald from Monday, January 14 to Saturday, January 19, 1952.

When the Blue Mirror Club bookings concluded, Murray Schaff and His Aristocrats were booked into the Hilltop Restaurant which was located at 5211 Marlboro Pike in Coral Hills, Maryland, very close to the Washington, D.C. line. (In 1961 this building – then occupied by the Las Vegas Club – burned to the ground. A new building was constructed on its site in 1966 and a McDonald's Restaurant opened on the premises in 1967. At that time, this building's street address was changed to 4857 Marlboro Pike, Capitol Heights.) The Hilltop Restaurant had changed hands in early 1952 and was under the new ownership of Lucy M. Gentile and Bayless Smith, who were looking for new ensembles that could offer their patrons many different styles of high-energy music.

The opening night of Murray Schaff and His Aristocrats at the Hilltop Restaurant took place on Tuesday, March 25, 1952. On that evening they headlined a bill that included the duo of Kast & Abernathy (Frank "Sonny" Kast and Bill Abernathy – "Washington's Favorite Jivesters") and trapeze artist Alma Bray. An advertisement in the Washington Daily News on the combo's opening day announced: "HERE THEY COME. 1952's Skyrocketing Quintet. Rock and Roll to Their Exciting Jazz." It was the first time the full term "rock and roll" was used to advertise the appearance of a live band in Prince George's County, Maryland.

Several days later, Hal Rosen, in his "Tips on Tables" column in the Saturday, March 29, 1952 edition of the Washington Daily News, wrote: "Here's a group who wants to make you rock and roll in your seats. It's Murray Schaff and his Aristocrats, currently featured at the Hilltop...the music these boys provide is more than slightly frantic."

Murray Schaff and His Aristocrats performed a variety of tunes at the Hilltop Restaurant including jazz and pop classics, covers of songs by the Treniers, the Dominoes, and Bill Haley

and His Comets, and their own originals such as “Believe Me” and “I Am Waiting for Ships That Never Come.” The band worked this night club through September 1953, during which time ads for the group in the night club section of the Washington Daily News screamed out “Go! Go! Go!” and “Still Rocking the Town.”

Murray Schaff and His Aristocrats, the region’s original rock and roll invaders, remained in the nation’s capital throughout the 1950s. During that time, the band performed in such Washington, D.C. night clubs as the Blue Mirror Club, the Casino Royal Theatre Restaurant, and the Showcase. They also worked in Prince George’s County, Maryland at the 4400 Club, the Rustic Cabin Restaurant, and the Senate Inn. During these years, the band recorded several singles for such regional labels as Essex, Josie, Jubilee, and Sound. Despite its local and regional success, the group disbanded in 1960.

With Murray Schaff and His Aristocrats having shaken up the live music scene at the Hilltop Restaurant in March 1952, several night clubs in Washington, D.C. followed suit and brought in local and national rock and roll acts throughout the 1950s. These establishments included: the Blue Mirror Club (823 14th Street NW), which primarily booked jazz but offered such rock and roll headliners as Bobby Boyd and His Jazz Bombers, the Treniers, and the Van Perry Quartet; Bob White’s Hideaway (319 Pennsylvania Avenue SE), which, in its basement space, offered the Chet Ivey Combo, George Eades, and Lucky Wray and His Rock and Roll Trio; the Casino Royal Theatre Restaurant (802 14th Street NW), which boasted a number of visiting national artists including Bill Haley and His Comets, Danny and the Juniors, Fats Domino, Gene Vincent, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Lillian (“The Queen of Rock and Roll”) Briggs; the Charles Café (3201 14th Street NW), which booked Lucky Wray and His Rock and Roll Band and Tommy Woods and His Rhythm Rockers; Club Kavakos (727 H Street NE), which, though primarily a pop and jazz venue, featured such locals as Joe Lagana and TNT Tribble and His Band; Club

Players (486 K Street NW), which hosted Bobby Wilkes and His Band, Don Covay, George Eades, and the Kalin Twins; Guy's Place (529 8th Street SE), which offered Bobby Stephenson and His Rock and Roll Boys, the Cyclones, the Fabulous Dynatones, Georgie Ross and the Red Tops, the Jimmy Kent Quartet, Joe Bruce and His Steppers, Joe Pasko and His Rockin' Maniacs, the Rockin' Horses, and the Saxtons; Jack Rowe's Restaurant (911-913 11th Street SE), which featured Charlie Parrish and His Combo, Don Covay, George Eades, Joe Lagana, Ray Marshall and the Ko-Ko Nuts, and Spud Spuduto and the Carousers; the Lotus Restaurant (727 14th Street NW), which booked such national acts as Bobby Darin, the Diamonds, and Jo Ann Campbell; Maynard's Restaurant (1508 14th Street NW), which hosted Fats Pinere, George Eades, the Three Jacks, and the Van Perry Quartet; the Moulin Rouge (407 11th Street NW), which boasted the Jones Brothers and Their House Rockers, Sterling Singleton and His Band, and the Three of Us Trio; the Ozarks Restaurant (931 10th Street NW), whose regulars included Link Wray and His Ray Men, Lucky Wray and His Ozarks Four, and Tommy Riddle's Versatones; and the Rendezvous (409 10th Street NW), whose headliners included Link Wray and His Ray Men, Roy Clark and the Power Pacs, the Three of Us Trio, and the Triumphs.

One interesting rock and roll footnote of the 1950s is the appearance of Elvis Presley and His Blue Moon Boys on a "Moonlight Cruise" on the S.S. Mount Vernon on the night of Friday, March 23, 1956. (This cruise ship was docked at Pier 4 on the Potomac River in Southwest Washington, D.C. and was frequently used for live music events.) The show was booked by country music entrepreneur Connie B. Gay and included Melvin Price and the Santa Fe Rangers, a C&W band from Easton, Maryland, as the opening act.

Gay had shelled out \$4,500 to charter the ship for the evening and priced tickets at a paltry \$2, feeling certain that the 2,452-person capacity would be met. Elvis Presley, who was

21 years old at the time of his Washington, D.C. visit, had just hit the big time with his first chart-topping hit, "I Forgot to Remember to Forget," which was released on the RCA Victor record label in December 1955 and had reached number one on Billboard's "Best Sellers in Stores" country & western records chart on Saturday, February 25, 1956. The song remained on this chart for a total of 40 weeks.

The entertainment on the S.S. Mount Vernon that evening began shortly after 8:00pm and featured two 80-minute sets separated by a 20-minute intermission. Each set consisted of an abbreviated opening performance by Melvin Price and the Santa Fe Rangers, followed by a one-hour presentation by Elvis Presley and His Blue Moon Boys. The concert took place in the glass-enclosed ballroom of the ship's main deck, directly below the top-level observation deck. It drew a near-capacity crowd which remained in place even after being informed the ship would remain docked due to a malfunctioning boiler room pressure valve.

Many who had attended the event recalled that shortly after the show as the crowd filed out, the soon-to-be King of Rock and Roll casually stood on the dance floor close to the stage and quietly chatted away with any fans who happened by. The evening is detailed in an article entitled "Elvis on the Potomac" by Peter Golkin in the Friday, February 16, 2007 edition of the Washington City Paper.

As rock and roll impacted the music scene of Washington, D.C., its popularity also accelerated in the night spots of Prince George's County, Maryland. During the summer of 1953 Chubby's Restaurant & Bar (originally marked 7101 Central Avenue, Seat Pleasant, MD; changed to 6715 Central Avenue in 1967) began booking a local rock and roll act called the Frank Shegogue Combo. Other establishments that brought in rock and roll in the middle 1950s included: the Club LaConga (9412 Baltimore Avenue, College Park, MD), which featured the Frank Moore Four; the Wheel Bar (3817 Bladensburg Road, Colmar Manor, MD), which featured the Marshall

Brothers; and the Quonset Supper Club (3225 Naylor Road, Silver Hill, MD), which featured the Three Jacks.

During the summer of 1954, the area's rock and roll atmosphere intensified when the Three Jacks left the Quonset Supper Club and took a job at the Romano Inn (3705 Bladensburg Road, Colmar Manor, MD). In March 1955, the band moved next door to the Wheel Bar and replaced the Marshall Brothers. While rolling at the Wheel, the Three Jacks were responsible for kicking off the legendary Sunday rock and roll jam sessions that later became a staple in many Prince George's County night clubs.

One of the most popular establishments in Prince George's County, Maryland to offer rock and roll music during this time was the Dixie Pig on Bladensburg Road in Cottage City. The original Dixie Pig Restaurant & Barbecue had opened in 1927 as a roadhouse saloon at 4500 Annapolis Road in Bladensburg, replacing Coldenstroth's Saloon, which had dated back to the middle 1800s. Benjamin Minovitz and William Rubin purchased the Dixie Pig Restaurant & Barbecue in 1948, only to have it burn to the ground on Saturday, November 22, 1952. It was never rebuilt at the Annapolis Road site.

Harry Isikoff and Reuben Bonnett (business partners of Minovitz and Rubin) found a new location for what they called "The Dixie Pig" (legally dropping "Restaurant & Barbecue" from its trading name) on "The Strip" at 3804 Bladensburg Road in Cottage City, Maryland. At the time this building housed a night club called the Oriental House and had previously been the site of the Chesapeake Café. The Oriental House featured floorshows with groups like the Jerry Rodis Orchestra, guest pop singers, and exotic dancers. The Dixie Pig replaced the Oriental House in February 1953. Benjamin Minovitz and William Rubin ultimately regained ownership of the Dixie Pig in October 1954.

The Dixie Pig quickly became one of the area's most popular C&W night clubs and featured local guitarist Chick Hall ("Chick Hall and His Band") throughout most of 1953 and 1954.

Dub Howington and the Tennessee Haymakers handled the house entertainment chores throughout all of 1955. Other acts that headlined the night club during this time were Jimmy Dean and the Texas Wildcats and guitarist-singer Roy Clark.

The Dixie Pig needed to compete with the Wheel Bar across the street, which was still booking the Three Jacks. On Friday, February 24, 1956 this night club offered a rock and roll show featuring the music of the Five Rockets and Lou Rossi's Trio. The Dixie Pig continued to offer that style and throughout the year presented such out-of-town acts as Al Rappa and His New Riffs, Bobby Boyd and His Jazz Bombers, the Day Brothers, the Fabulous Dynatones, the Five Sins, singer-trumpeter Frankie Avalon, Jack Murdock and His Five Stems, Joey Nave and the Points, Joey Preston and His Five Rockets, Johnny Belmont and His Band, Red Prysock and His Orchestra, the Rockin' Horses, and the Royal Crowns, among others.

From January to April 1957 the Dixie Pig offered such headliners as Doc Stark and His Nite Riders, the Dynatones, Mike Sarge and the Sergeants, Pat the Cat, Red Prysock and His Orchestra, and the Rockin' Horses. In May of that year they abruptly switched back to C&W with Dub Howington and the Tennessee Haymakers returning to house band duty. Other performers at the Dixie Pig during the year included the Bluegrass Champs, Dale Turner, Mac Wiseman, Patsy Cline, and Smokey Mac and His Twilighters. The Dixie Pig returned to rock and roll in April 1959 and during the spring and summer months of that year booked such acts as Al Pometto and the Jazz Bombers, Charlie Daniels and the Rockets (later renamed Charlie Daniels and the Jaguars), the Off Keys, and the Savoys.

Not far from the Dixie Pig was the 4400 Club, which was located at 4400 Rhode Island Avenue in Brentwood, Maryland. This night club was built in 1945 and was later purchased in January 1951 by a former Cross Roads bartender named James J. "Jimmy" Comber. The new owner hailed from

Philadelphia and brought in different pop and jazz groups from his native city as entertainment. When Jimmy Comber sold the 4400 Club to Washington, D.C. native Herbert Hertz in April 1956, rock and roll music became the feature, spurring on a friendly competition with the Dixie Pig that lasted for years.

The first group to play the 4400 Club under Hertz's ownership was Murray Schaff and His Aristocrats. Other groups that played there during the summer of 1956 included Benny Ventura and His Band, the Block Busters (featuring Al Pometto), Don Haven and the Hi Fis, Herbie Fields and His Orchestra, the Jimmy Cavallo Quintet, the Jodimars, the Johnny Hamlin Quintet, and the Leonard Sues Quintet.

The 4400 Club kept its rock and roll schedule alive throughout the late 1950s by mixing local combos like Joe Renaldi's Sextet and the Saxtons with out-of-town bands like Bobby Sherwood and His Orchestra, Dave Appell and the Applejacks, the Four Tunes, the Frank Moore Four, Frankie Mayo and the New Yorkers, Georgie Young and the Rockin' Bocs, the High Hopes, Jimmy Cavallo and His House Rockers, the Nitecaps, the Nu-Tornados, Red Prysock and His Orchestra, the Treniers, the Twin Tunes, and the Tyrones. Thrown in for good measure were occasional special attractions, like one 1958 appearance by singer Conway Twitty.

One of the most interesting of all the night clubs of Prince George's County was Strick's Restaurant, which was located at 3211 Branch Avenue in Silver Hill, Maryland. This establishment was built in 1934 and initially offered live jazz music as entertainment. Original owner Julius Strickland sold the business to Giles Fletcher Sr. in January 1954 and the new owner began booking C&W bands and musicians every night of the week. Headliners at the night spot from this point forward included Andy Gardner, the Cactus Matt Trio (accordionist-singer Stoney Rigsby, guitarist Jimmy Grove, and steel guitarist Dickie Thompson), Dub Howington and the Tennessee Haymakers, Frankie Robinson, Jimmy Dean and the Texas Wildcats (featuring guitarist Roy Clark), the Pirateers, Reds

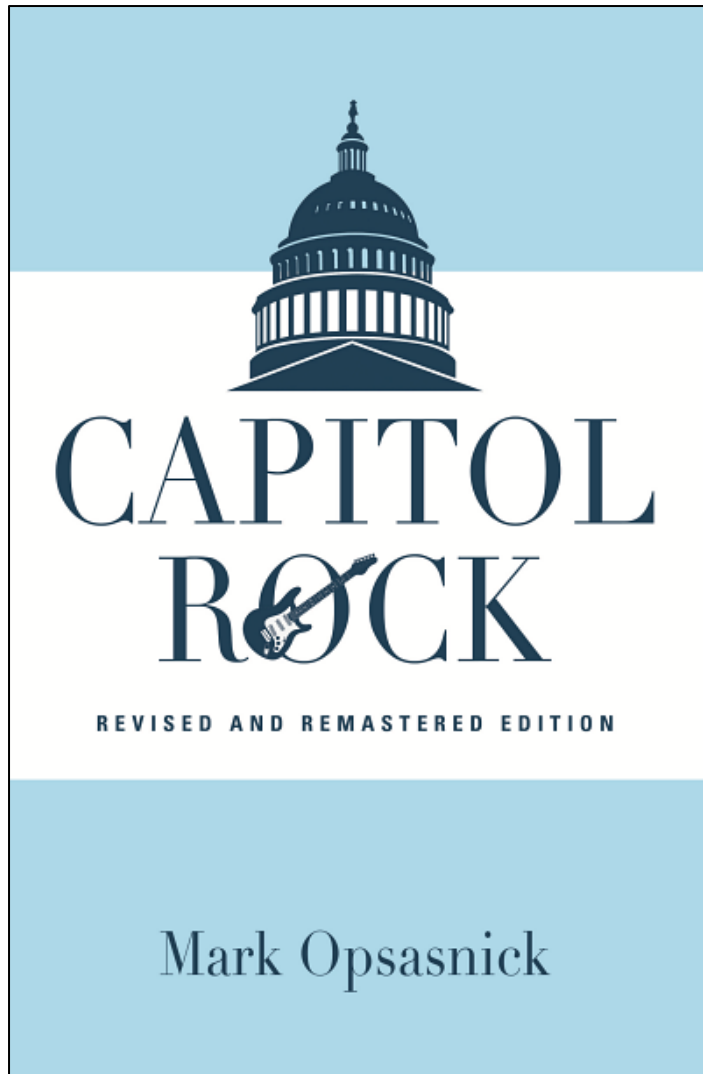
Goatee, the Sunset Ramblers, and Tiny Jenkins. Of special note is that on every Sunday from March 1955 through September 1955, Strick's Restaurant offered all-day music sessions headlined by Bill Peer and His Melody Boys (featuring singer Patsy Cline).

On Sunday, February 19, 1956 Strick's Restaurant first advertised rock and roll music with an afternoon session featuring "Rock N' Roll Charlie" (saxophonist Charlie Burgee). Throughout the remainder of the 1950s Strick's Restaurant mixed both C&W and rock and roll, with its main headliners being Charlie Daniels and the Jaguars, the Naturals, Roy Clark and the Stardusters, Smokey Mac and His Yellowstone Valley Boys, and the Three of Us Trio.

Other Prince George's County night clubs that booked live rock and roll music in the 1950s included: Billy's Tavern (originally marked 6254 Marlboro Pike, Capitol Heights, MD; changed to 5256 Marlboro Pike in 1967), which featured Charlie Burgee and His Sophisticators, the Louis Ray Trio, and Pete Potter and His Rock and Roll Band; Chubby's Restaurant & Bar (originally marked 7101 Central Avenue, Seat Pleasant, MD; changed to 6715 Central Avenue in 1967), which, late in the decade, was advertised in local newspapers as "The Hottest Rock n' Roll Club in America" and featured Frankie Mayo and the New Yorkers, Joe Stanley and His Building Rockers, Mark Ruslander (today known as Mark Russell), and the Pete Rubino Quintet; Jimmy Comber's Supper Club (4318 Rhode Island Avenue, Brentwood, MD; formerly Waldrop's Restaurant), which featured such groups as Bobby Boyd and the Jazz Bombers, Dave Appell and the Applejacks, the Jodimars, and such special attractions as Woody Herman and His Orchestra; the Las Vegas Club (5211 Marlboro Pike, Coral Hills, MD; formerly the Hilltop Restaurant), which featured Al Dunn and His Band, the Crawford Brothers, Mark Ruslander, and, late in the decade, such C&W acts as Dub Howington and the Tennessee Haymakers, Roy Clark and the Stardusters, and Smokey Mac and His Rhythm Rockers; the Rustic Cabin

Capitol Rock

Restaurant (4321 Bladensburg Road, Colmar Manor, MD), which featured Billy Stewart, Frankie Mayo and the New Yorkers, the House Rockers, Jimmy Dean and the Texas Wildcats, Jo Ann Campbell, the Jodimars, Lloyd Price, Murray Schaff and His Aristocrats, Ray Charles, and the Tyrones; the Senate Inn (originally marked 5704 Marlboro Pike, Hillside, MD; changed to 5000 Marlboro Pike in 1967), which featured Murray Schaff and His Aristocrats and the Super Jets; the Surf Club (4201 Bladensburg Road, Colmar Manor, MD), which was primarily a C&W night club but also featured bands that could play rock and roll like the Chick Hall Trio and the Three of Us Trio; and the Wheel Bar (3817 Bladensburg Road, Colmar Manor, MD), which featured the Three Jacks.



CAPITOL ROCK: REVISED AND REMASTERED EDITION is a comprehensive cultural history of Washington, D.C. area rock and roll that focuses on the early era of rock music in the nation's capital (1951-1976).

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By Mark Opsasnick

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