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# The Sound of the Suburbs: A Case Study of Three Garage Bands in San Jose, California during the 1960s

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# **The Sound of the Suburbs: A Case Study of Three Garage Bands in San Jose, California During the 1960s**

**by Paul Kauppila**

## **INTRODUCTION/THE BEATLES**

The recent spate of articles, television specials, radio shows, and other observations of the fortieth anniversary of the Beatles' appearance on the Ed Sullivan show attest to that moment's lasting significance in the history of popular music and popular culture. In an increasingly fragmented era of media consumption through multiple technological avenues, most prominently cable and pay television and the Internet, it is sometimes difficult to imagine the profound effect that a single television program could have in the year 1964.

The tremendous popularity of the Beatles, coupled with an expanding and increasingly affluent middle class, led to an explosion of bands playing music in a style that eventually came to be known as "garage rock", although that term did not come into common usage until several years later. Garage rock could be defined as a musically simple, blues-based form of popular music influenced most heavily by the British Invasion bands of the mid-1960s, particularly the Beatles and Rolling Stones, but also encompassing the Animals, the Kinks, the Yardbirds, Them, and the Who. Since the sound of those bands was based partially on the sound of American rhythm & blues of the 1950s and 60s, one can see the relationship between the British Invasion bands and the American garage bands as an example of a continuing process of cultural transfer. The Fabulous Wailers, a band from Tacoma, Washington circa 1959, are often considered the first true "garage" band. They were one of the first white rock groups to play and record Richard Berry's "Louie Louie", which became a garage rock standard. The Wailers' version served as the blueprint for the Kingsmen's hit version a few years later.

Musician Larry Diehl of the band Lil' Boys Blue remembers the impact of the Beatles: "When the Beatles hit and later the British Invasion, life as we knew it changed completely and forever...If the Beatles wore a particular jacket, hat, pants, or even belt buckle, so too did we. If the Beatles began to play certain acoustic and electric guitars, so too did we. We would, in fact, sell our current equipment and go into hock for the balance just to buy the same guitars. I even knew guys who would fake an English accent to impress girls, or to give them a leg-up in joining a band. I simply can't imagine how music would have evolved without the Beatles" (Dugo, interview with Larry Diehl). As Philip Ennis observes: "They (The Beatles) formalized in 1964 the live performance rock band led by writer/performer" (332).

## **SAN JOSE/SOUTH BAY SCENE**

The San Jose, California area served as spawning ground for an active garage band scene during the years 1964-68. Sometimes referred to today as Silicon Valley, the South Bay, as it was known at the time, comprises San Jose, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale, Campbell,

Cupertino, Saratoga, Los Gatos, Los Altos, Mountain View, and Palo Alto. Meanwhile San Francisco, an hour to the north, was famous as the capital of the hippies. Some of the most prominent "hippie" bands of the time were the Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Big Brother and the Holding Company, featuring Janis Joplin on vocals.

Although San Francisco and South Bay bands shared gigs and sometimes members, the differences between the musical styles emanating from the two locales was striking. As the Beatles' influence took hold, rock moved in a more progressive direction, with songs featuring long solos that seemed to be made for listening rather than dancing. The San Francisco scene reflected this, most notably in the music of the Airplane and the Dead.

By contrast, the music of most of the South Bay bands, while often showing psychedelic influences, nevertheless remained more song-oriented. This stylistic difference was also reflected in the types of venues the bands played: while the South Bay bands frequently played at teen dances held in converted roller rinks or teen centers, the San Francisco bands more often played auditoriums in the city, usually for audiences of hippies who tended to be a few years older than the teen dance crowd. The mood of the crowd could be quite different, too, as hippie audiences were frequently under the influence of LSD or other psychedelic drugs, especially during the later 60s. Jud Cost refers to "the increasing polarization of the Bay Area into a 'teen rock' scene - founded by the Beau Brummels - and an 'adult rock' scene - traced back to the Charlatans" (*William Penn* 49).

### **THE CHOCOLATE WATCHBAND**

The three highest-profile bands from the San Jose area circa 1965-68 were the Chocolate Watchband, the Count Five, and the Syndicate of Sound. The Chocolate Watchband grew out of a number of earlier South Bay bands including the Chapparals, the Topsiders, the Shandels, and the English. The first version of the band featured lead singer Danny Phay but did not record. After a confusing switch of band members between the Topsiders (who became the Otherside after the musician swap) and the early Watchband, lead singer Dave Aguilar joined the group. This lineup, generally considered the "classic" version of the band, recorded two early singles and then an LP, *No Way Out*.

The Watchband had a sound heavily influenced by the Rolling Stones, particularly in Aguilar's snarling lead vocals. The band also experimented with psychedelic elements, although their sound remained much more direct and R&B influenced (by way of the British Invasion) than San Francisco "jam" bands like the Grateful Dead or Jefferson Airplane. These comments by lead singer Dave Aguilar help explain the Watchband's sound: "I had a friend over in England, who sent me some stuff by the Stones. I enjoyed black R&B, and that's what they were playing. I got interested in them that way. I never cared for the Beatles. The Stones appealed to me solely because they were playing the same music that I'd been listening to all along, (people like) Muddy Waters" (*Palao, Watchband* 45).

The Chocolate Watchband then signed a contract with Green Grass Productions, home of garage impresario Ed Cobb, who also managed Los Angeles' Standells, another legendary 60s garage band, as well as the E-Types, a Salinas band very popular in the San Jose area.

Cobb was a member of the Four Preps and wrote songs as well, including the Watchband's first vocal hit, "Sweet Young Thing". The contract also landed them a small role in the 60s teen-exploitation film, "Riot on Sunset Strip".

However, the band was stunned when their first LP was released. While they had been touring, their record company, unbeknownst to them, had erased some of Aguilar's vocals and replaced them with vocals by session musician Don Bennett. In addition, they even recorded several instrumental numbers for the LP with session musicians. The result was the only four tracks out of ten actually featured the full band, while two did not feature any members of the Watchband at all! The participation of Bennett had its value, however - while the Watchband may have been furious at the way his vocals were dubbed-in over Aguilar's, the fact remains that Bennett wrote what has become close to a "signature song" for the band "Are You Gonna Be There (At the Love-In)".

Contracts such as the one signed by the band may have been exploitative and unfair, but unfortunately, they were all too common at the time. The rise of the Beatles ushered in a new era where bands frequently wrote their own material and had more control over their image and message, but the contract signed by the Watchband evoked an earlier era when working-class black and white performers signed exploitative contracts with fast-talking businessmen, who then exerted creative control over the music regardless of the opinions of the artist or performer. As Aguilar has said, "Signing that contract was probably the worst thing we ever did." To make matters worse, San Francisco's legendary promoter Bill Graham expressed interest in managing the Watchband immediately after they had signed a contract with a rival South Bay promoter. The band was left to wonder what might have been had they taken Graham's offer instead.

Although, unlike the Count Five and the Syndicate of Sound, the Watchband did not have any substantial national hits, they remain the group that has the highest current profile among the three. There are a number of reasons for this - they made three LPs instead of just one each, as did the Count Five and Syndicate of Sound, their sound had more psychedelic elements than either of the other two bands, and perhaps most importantly, the underground network of 60s garage music fans and writers that sprang up in later years helped to raise their visibility as an important "cult" band. One could also argue that Aguilar was a more compelling frontman than most. Reports from the era when the band was active indicate that they were one of the most popular and successful of the San Jose scene. People who saw them play in the 60s also comment that the band represented on the records had almost nothing to do with the band they saw live!

### **THE COUNT FIVE**

The Count Five scored the biggest hit of these three bands, with "Psychotic Reaction" reaching number 5 on the Billboard singles chart in the fall of 1966. The band evolved from a South Bay surf/rock & roll band called the Squires. The California boys who made up most of the Count Five then added a vitally important new member, Irish immigrant John "Sean" Byrne, who provided both the lyrics and the lead vocals for "Psychotic Reaction". As the story was told by Count Five guitarist John "Mouse" Michalski, "We found John, because he lived across the street from Kenn who said

there's this guy from Ireland, he knows all the Beatles songs, he looks like a Beatle plus he writes originals. I went over there, heard him and said good choice, you're in the band. Right now! Let's go!" (Palao, *Psychotic* 6) Dublin native Byrne had had his own group in Ireland called the Scorpions.

The Count Five had record company troubles too, signing with Double Shot, a label best known for the R&B recordings of Brenton Wood. Although the label did well with "Psychotic Reaction", in the view of the band members, Double Shot "lost interest" in their later singles and failed to promote them adequately in spite of some excellent reviews. However, the relationship between these bands and their record companies, while often problematic, was not just a one-sided exploitation of a young band by a Svengali-like manager. "Psychotic Reaction", for example, may not have been a hit with its original ending, which included an anticlimactic ending with a key change. But producer Hal Winn cut a section from the middle of the tune and pasted in to the end of the song, after the second verse, as a fade-out.

Musically, the Count Five were influenced by the same British Invasion bands as their San Jose compatriots in the Chocolate Watchband and the Syndicate of Sound. The sound of "Psychotic Reaction" in particular was influenced by the Yardbirds, with some critics going so far as to call the song a "rip-off" of their sound. The so-called "rave-up" section in the middle of the song was an important element in several Yardbirds songs.

Although the Count Five toured with many national performers, they generally only did so on the weekends, as several band members were still in school. The band became famous for turning down what was reputed to be a million dollars' worth of bookings in order to continue their education, although with the draft and the Vietnam War looming, it is debatable whether this decision was based on a love of learning or simply an entirely sensible attempt to avoid being drafted!

Besides "Psychotic Reaction", the Count Five's other main claim to fame was something the band had nothing to do with. Legendary rock critic Lester Bangs wrote an article in 1971 called "Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung", usually considered one of the all-time high points of rock & roll journalism. In the first half of the article, Bangs writes evocatively about the power of garage bands and simple, crude rock & roll, using the Count Five and "Psychotic Reaction" as examples. Not content to stop there, he then proceeded to create an entirely fictional five-album career for the band, culminating in the band's magnum opus, the 27-minute long LP title track, entitled *Snowflakes Falling on the International Dateline*. So detailed and convincing was his half-true/half-fiction essay on the band that, more than thirty years later, easily-fooled garage rock collectors are still looking for *Carburetor Dung* and the other four albums that sprang entirely from Bangs' imagination!

Comment [cs1]: agination.

### **THE SYNDICATE OF SOUND**

The Syndicate of Sound had been on the San Jose scene before the Watchband and the Count Five, and by most accounts, were much admired by other area bands for their professionalism, musicianship, and stage show. Their sound was more Beatle-oriented

than the Stones-influenced raunch of the Watchband or the Yardbirds-influenced Count Five, although they started as an R&B band. But after the Beatles became popular in the U.S., the band changed their style. Band member Don Baskin: "The British Invasion was a real eye-opener. 'Bob and I said, Screw the R&B. We really like *this* stuff', recalls Baskin" (Cost, *Syndicate* 35). Nevertheless, their R&B experience was valuable: "'All we had to do was learn the originals on the new Beatles and Rolling Stones album because we already knew the R&B covers that everybody else had to study', says Gonzalez" (Cost, *Syndicate* 35).

They cut their teeth playing in a common ritual of 60s garage groups, the "Battle of the Bands". As many as 20 or 30 different groups would play at these events, with audience response determining which band won. Frequently, the prize was a recording contract. The Syndicate perfected their stage show and repertoire at these events. As band member Don Baskin remembers, "Those battles were dogfights. When you won a trophy, it was a *big deal*", Baskin recalls. 'It was great training for us as sixteen year old kids to be up against seasoned music veterans of twenty-five or thirty'"(Cost, *Syndicate* 35). The Syndicate's big hit song, which, like "Psychotic Reaction", can still be heard today on 60s oldies radio stations, was "Little Girl", a sneering putdown of an unfaithful girlfriend. It reached number 8 in the summer of 1966.

Like the Chocolate Watchband, the members of Syndicate of Sound had missed opportunities as well - their manager Chick Patti, in a move that still mystifies band members to this day, turned down an offer to open for the Beatles on their last-ever tour in summer 1966. Baskin claims to still have the letter as proof. Later, the Syndicate was offered a spot at the Monterey Pop Festival but turned it down because the promoter, John Phillips of the Mamas & the Papas, wanted them to play for free. Had they realized what a seminal countercultural event it would turn out to be, they may well have reconsidered their decision.

### **COVER BANDS**

One similarity between all three of these bands is that they were all, predominantly, what was known as "cover bands" - that is, most of their repertoire consisted of songs originally by other groups. At the time, there was no dishonor in this arrangement, since most bands were cover bands. The Beatles were helping to change this as they did write their own songs, however, it is worthwhile to remember that at these early stages, both the Beatles and the Rolling Stones incorporated many non-original songs into their live sets and LPs. This can be contrasted with the usual pop music dichotomy found today, where there are two types of bands - those who write and perform original material, sometimes for no profits and small audiences, and those who are strictly "cover bands" and play mostly weddings, private parties, high school dances, and the like. Although original bands may not make money, there is a certain artistic respect afforded bands that write their own material. Conversely, cover bands, while they may be quite profitable, are usually not as well respected creatively. This paradigm did not exist to this extent during the garage band explosion, where it was considered standard practice for bands to know and play the hits of the day. Part of the reason for this may be attributable to the relative infancy of the mobile DJ industry, the absence of music videos, and the relative

lack of a national rock infrastructure. That is to say, for many listeners, the only way to hear hit songs of the day - other than on the radio - was to go see your local garage band play. The process was quite competitive as well - the Syndicate of Sound prided themselves on acquiring the latest releases by British bands immediately, learning the songs quickly, and playing them - sometimes all in the same day. The Syndicate of Sound, the Count Five, and the Chocolate Watchband all went out of their way to learn not the hits from these records, but rather the more obscure B-sides (the flip side of a 45rpm single) and album tracks.

### **AUDIENCES**

When comparing the San Jose and San Francisco scenes of this period, it is useful to consider the difference in the makeup of the audiences. South Bay bands played more frequently at teen dances, community centers, and the like, while SF bands more often played clubs and auditoriums. In addition, while marijuana and LSD existed in the South Bay as well as San Francisco, they were far more prevalent in the SF hippie scene, leading to an audience more likely to be listening closely than dancing or trying to pick up members of the opposite sex. The behavior of the crowd, then, has an effect on the style of the music being played, with long free-form solos more suited to a stoned, tripping, hippie audience and short, catchy pop songs more appropriate for a teen dance crowd under the influence of alcohol, if anything.

### **THE BEATLES/STONES DICHOTOMY**

Although both these groups influenced virtually all garage bands, there was a yin and yang to their images that still exists in rock today. To put it simply, the Beatles were the good boys that you would be proud to bring home to your parents, while the Stones were dirty, unkempt street hooligans that you wouldn't tell your parents about at all. While these are gross oversimplifications, especially considering the personalities of the various band members, the image resonated nevertheless. A good parallel would be 50s rockers Elvis - the good boy who loves his mama - versus Jerry Lee Lewis - the bad boy who married his cousin. Seen through this prism, the Chocolate Watchband were definitely Stones sympathizers/imitators, while the Syndicate of Sound, because of their pop leanings, would be Beatles devotees.

### **COMPETITIVENESS**

In the mid-60s, rock & roll was an almost entirely male-dominated mode of cultural expression. One indicator of this was the competition between the various bands. Dave Aguilar of the Chocolate Watchband says, referring to their label's habit of using studio musicians and overdubbing band tracks with additional instruments, says "It angered us, because I don't think there was any group we couldn't blow off the stage" (Sullivan, *Watchband*). The Count Five's Kenn Ellner: "The truth of the matter is, we were actually a real good band" (Sullivan, *Psychotic*). The Count Five's John Byrne remembers: "We competed with the Syndicate of Sound and we actually beat Stevie Nicks in a Battle of the Bands. I'll never forget Stevie Nicks coming up to me after we beat her and saying, 'You're good, but you're not as good as me'" (Dugo, interview with John Byrne). Larry Diehl of Lil' Boys Blue: "If memory serves, I believe we won most of the competitions we entered" (Dugo, interview with Larry Diehl). Mike Shapiro of

William Penn and his Pals: "We were actually in a Battle of the Bands with the Grateful Dead. They won and I could never really figure that out because they were really bad back then" (Dugo, interview with Mike Shapiro). Shapiro again: "It always blew my mind that the Count Five got a hit record, because they were like the lousiest group - bottom of the bill". Shapiro, interviewed in 1991, shows how the competitive streak dies hard, even after 25 years: "I'm a computer programmer now, and someone at my office was the drummer for Peter Wheat and the Breadmen. And there's still this rivalry between us. We thought they stunk" (Cost, *William Penn* 49). And finally, Aguilar again, commenting on the night they opened for the Seeds from Los Angeles, and infuriated their lead singer Sky Saxon, by performing an entire set of Seeds material as a prank: "Granted, it was a pretty crappy thing to do. We thought it was a lark! Dogs peed on your tree to let you know you were trespassing. The Watchband played your music and stole your women. In retrospect, what we were really saying was that we were better than they were. We could out play them even using their own music" (Aguilar pt. 10, 4).

### **R&B/BRITISH INVASION**

Many 60s garage bands started as surf or R&B bands, two prominent styles popular in the years just before Beatlemania. After the popularity of the Beatles, many bands changed their sound and look drastically - sometimes dropping horn sections, changing names in order to sound more "British", adopting new modes of dress, etc. Yet the basis of their sound in many cases was still American R&B - except this time, it was filtered through the sound of the British bands, who tended to speed up the songs, play them louder, and add guitar distortion and feedback. Feedback and distortion were an important element of the garage band sound. Switching from the American R&B sound to the British one was not difficult for most of the bands. As Mike Shapiro remembers: "You had to know your Freddy King and James Brown in Palo Alto. It was easy to move to the English rhythm and blues sound" (Dugo, interview with Mike Shapiro).

### **TECHNOLOGY**

The emerging youth culture in the United States took advantage of several technological innovations as well to create their new musical culture. The advent of inexpensive home stereos and polystyrene 45rpm singles brought the music of the British bands to a mass U.S. audience. Television was reaching new levels of saturation as well - it is worth considering that the single most important event to the creation of U.S. garage band culture was not a record or a concert but an appearance on a TV show.

The other major technological innovation that gave rise to the garage band explosion was the availability of inexpensive, solid-body electric guitars, usually mass-produced in the U.S. or Japan. The "solid-body" distinction is crucial, as the traditional hollow-body guitar would emit uncontrollable amounts of feedback when turned up to a high volume. Solid-body guitars were combined with new sonic modification devices such as distortion boxes and wah-wah pedals. These enabled small 4 or 5 piece rock & roll groups to produce a sound just as loud and powerful as a 10-piece R&B band with horns.

The availability of cheap electric guitars caused a sea change in the way music making was viewed by the working class and middle class. As Andy Bennett writes, "Before the



arrival of rock n' roll, music-making was something which required a large element of self-discipline and money. Mastering a musical instrument meant long hours of practice and a commitment to studying music theory, often under the experienced eye of a qualified music teacher. Rock n' roll functioned to demystify the music-making process...removing the need for formal music tuition" (138).

### **FOLK VS. POP/ART VS. COMMERCE**

The question of "authenticity" vs. commerciality is a recurring one in popular music studies. I argue that rather than a distinct choice between one extreme and the other, what actually happens in popular music is a continuum of tendencies - that is, music, and the conditions under which it is made, exists on a scale with commerciality at one end and "pure" folk music (not made for profit or mass distribution) at the other. Where a particular band or style lies on the continuum determines its level of commerciality or authenticity. As Simon Frith writes, "And it was the scholars who first made a sharp distinction between 'folk' and 'pop' songs; the distinction was not always apparent to the people themselves (in the 1930s, for example, song collectors in the U.S. rural South quite often recorded 'authentic' versions of songs learned from the radio a few weeks before) (*Magic* 160).

Forty years later, this small window of about four years (1965-68) retains its fascination for many listeners. A substantial percentage of garage rock fans are considerably younger than the music they enjoy, so nostalgia is obviously not a factor. Why, then the appeal of this particular period with rock & roll fans and collectors? I know of no comparable listeners who are devoted to, say, the period from 1969-72, or 1975-78. Why is this?

I speculate that it is because of the continuum between authenticity and commerciality. The 60s garage rock scene was obviously a product of a mass-market, consumer society. Frith again: "If 'folk' describes pre-capitalist modes of music production, rock is, without a doubt, a mass-produced, mass-consumed, commodity" (*Magic* 159). Granted. However, some would argue that the earliest stages of any commercial, popular art form are the most interesting, because no reliable formulas exist yet for what will become popular. Therefore, corporations cannot follow reliable formulas to create a hit, as they may be able to do once an art form becomes more formalized (as rock did in the late 60s and 70s). The earliest stages of any new mode of cultural or artistic expression will tend to be located closer to the authenticity, or "folk" end of the continuum than later stages. The form of expression will tend to be less formalized, more individual, and more local. One example of this is the importance of independent labels. Large corporations tend to be conservative by nature and this was especially true in the 1960s pop music world. It was up to the smaller independent labels to record and market these new sounds. Only later, when they saw the potential profits involved, did the major labels begin to take an interest in crude and primitive garage rock. As Frith observes while discussing rock & roll audiences of the 1950s and 60s: "The industry had to *learn* about these audiences and their demands, and the musical results followed rather than led youthful tastes and choices" (*Sound* 62). In his critique of the overly simplistic "art vs. commerce" paradigm, Frith writes: "To reduce pop history to the struggles of musician heroes and

corporate clowns is to ignore the critical issue: the music industry's strategies of market control have been developed precisely because the market is one they can't control" (*Sound 91*). Or in the more colorful words of 'Melodylaughter' on their website devoted to the Chocolate Watchband: "I have also read that someone once tried to feed very early Rolling Stones into a computer to analyze it and figure out precisely what's so magical about it all. Yes indeed, this has been standard practice with "pop" hits, done to determine if a melody is "hooky" enough for major record company investment capital to be put behind it. There's a certain feeling of reassurance involved in hearing that *this method will not work* for punk and metal and garage and grunge and hardcore...the reason being that there ARE no melodies! Hahahahaha. I shit you not".

### **RADIO**

Radio stations had not yet adopted the tight playlists that became common in the 1970s, so DJs were often free to choose at least some of the material they played. The importance of the local garage rock scene and the flourishing of the small independent labels meant that in any given city, one could hear songs that were only being played locally. If the song was a big enough hit, it might be then picked up and reissued on a larger label that could do more to promote the record. In this way, commercial rock & roll radio stations had much more unique and locally oriented sounds than they do today, where major-market stations are virtually indistinguishable from one another. Ironically, the only really local aspects remaining in commercial rock radio today are...the commercials.

### **ROCK BUSINESS AND CULTURE**

Grossberg makes an important distinction between what he calls the "two meanings" of rock and roll as a commodity - the music itself, as played live, and the records. As he says, "The musical product must be reproduced as an object (e.g., a record) precisely if it is to be available to those whom it addresses, to those existing within its boundaries. The music must voluntarily enter into various systems of economic practices, and hence accept its existence as apparently mass art" (253).

Some claim that once a new style or art form attracts the attention of mass-market media like television news and major newsmagazines, that form is creatively dead. This is not a new phenomenon - for example, the San Francisco "Death of the Hippie" ritual from October 1967 was a direct response to what the hippies saw as increasing commercialization of their "scene". Another example of this is the infamous Columbia ad slogan of the late 60s, "The Man Can't Bust Our Music". By 1968 the "rock culture", spearheaded by Rolling Stone magazine, had taken hold and rock & roll was now treated as an art form. Not coincidentally, that year also corresponds to the disappearance of the garage-rock sound in favor of psychedelia. Another harbinger of the end of the garage rock movement was the fact that all three of the San Jose bands previously discussed broke up in 1968 or shortly thereafter.

The problem is that the earliest stages of a new form of art or culture also tend to be less well documented. One must remember that at the time, there was no "rock culture" comparable to today's. Rock criticism had not reached the level of respectability that it

did just a few years later with the advent of *Rolling Stone* and other counterculture/music magazines. Larry Diehl observes, "Before the Beatles, playing in a 'rock' band was something of a rarity...There simply was no network of music or musicians available to us" (Dugo, interview with Larry Diehl).

### **SUBURBIA/LEISURE/ALIENATION**

The suburban United States of the mid-60s was generally a place of affluence and optimism. Unlike today, most young people believed that they would one day be better off materially than their parents. But other social realities mitigated against this positive feeling; for example, the Cold War and its threat of nuclear annihilation, the Kennedy assassination, the impending Vietnam War, the cookie-cutter nature of the developing suburbs, etc. Ergo, there was a feeling of rootlessness and alienation and young people were looking for cultural experiences that reflected this. As Frith writes, "The paradox of rock & roll leisure, the effect of its success in intensifying feeling, was that it offered a sense of freedom that was, simultaneously, a sense of rootlessness and estrangement...This paradox - leisure as an experience of freedom so intense that it becomes, simultaneously, an experience of loneliness - is rooted in working-class experience of work - in alienation" (*Magic* 165). Or, as Lawrence Grossberg writes, "In more traditional terms, rock and roll inscribes the particular mark of post-war alienation upon the surface of other social structures of difference" (227). Grossberg also observes that the relentless and constant nature of change "(cannot) provide meaning or depth and a sense of inheritance" (229). In explaining the appeal of the "anti-hero", Grossberg writes, "The significance of Holden Caulfield, James Dean, Marlon Brando, and the Beats as cultural heroes lies in their struggle to achieve some identity consistent with this new set of experiences, and the Beats' turn to the model of the black hipster pointed the way for the rock and roll/youth culture" (230). Grossberg again: "Rock and roll practice is a form of resistance for generations with no faith in revolution" (232). Or in the less academic words of Dave Aguilar, "All across the nation, polite clean-cut teenagers were becoming unkempt, drug-induced, free-love, peacenik hippies that wanted to destroy the God fearing military-industrial complex that had been so good to them" (Aguilar pt. 3, 2).

### **MATTERS OF TASTE**

Yet the preference for a certain style of music is not simply a matter of age or class. Many factors determine what sort of popular music styles listeners prefer. George H. Lewis provides us with a useful framework for what he refers to as "taste culture". He sees three main elements that determine musical taste: demographics, aesthetics, and politics (144). The youth culture of the mid-1960s was demographically homogenous, and the popularity of early rock & roll such as Elvis and later, the Beatles, widely disseminated through mass media, encouraged a certain level of aesthetic homogeneity as well. The level of homogeneity of the third factor, is more debatable, however, rock & roll musicians at the time were generally assumed to be more liberal/progressive than conservative. Garage band rock & roll in general, however, usually has little or no political content - that came later with the hippie bands. Differing political preferences made for some strange bedfellows, as when the San Jose band Orphan Egg played at the opening of the Santa Clara County Nixon for President headquarters in 1968. And the San Jose band the Otherside played a rally for Nelson Rockefeller from the back of a

flatbed truck. As writer Jud Cost observes in his interview with the band, "Wow, not too astute a move politically. Any luck trying to get gigs in San Francisco after that?" (Cost, *Otherside* 84).

### **SEXUAL REVOLUTION**

Virtually all garage band musicians were young men, and the hysterical reaction of young women to the music of the Beatles did not escape their notice. The widespread availability of the Pill also contributed to the sexually charged atmosphere of the garage rock scene. As Dave Aguilar of the Watchband says, "I'm convinced that just before practice sessions, 60s rock bands secreted pheromones detectable from outer space by the underage female species of Homo Erectus" (Aguilar pt. 1, 2). When socializing with San Francisco bands, the hedonism of their scene sometimes made the South Bay musicians feel like wide-eyed suburbanites. Consider this comment from Mike Shapiro of William Penn and his Pals: "I remember playing Petaluma, and the Dead were playing at another place in town. I knew Garcia pretty well then so we went over to say 'hi'. And the difference between their dressing room and ours was incredible. They had women with beads and jugs of wine, smoking pot - people walking around without their clothes on" (Cost, *William Penn* 49).

### **SAN JOSE GETS NO RESPECT**

When Count Five member Kenn Ellner visited the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland a few years back, he sat down to watch a short film about San Francisco's Summer of Love in 1967. During the introduction, a very familiar-sounding song began to play - it was "Psychotic Reaction", the Count Five's big hit. The only problem was that the Count Five were from San Jose, not San Francisco. None of the band members ever lived in San Francisco. As the Count Five's bassist, Roy Chaney, said, "They would say we were from San Francisco because they didn't know where San Jose was". Even the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane had several members with South Bay roots. Members of Creedence Clearwater Revival attended San Jose State. Bob Dylan played San Jose before he ever played San Francisco (Purdy). Jud Cost describes the challenge of trying to get San Francisco radio stations to add the Syndicate of Sound's "Little Girl" to their playlists: "San Jose began to clamor for the disc almost immediately, but, true to form, San Francisco, with its nose pointed due north, didn't want to hear about anything from the South Bay" (Cost, *Syndicate* 37).

The degree of rivalry between the two cities is debatable, however, there is no doubt that many South Bay musicians felt slighted by the national attention paid to the San Francisco scene, in their view, not always deservedly. For example, John Byrne of the Count Five says, "We paid attention to the San Francisco scene, but I was never influenced by any of that music. I was especially not impressed by the Grateful Dead, though I liked Moby Grape. Those groups from the city always looked down at the South Bay, and treated us with disdain" (Palao, *Psychotic* 21-22). Jud Cost writes of the Syndicate of Sound's reciprocal disdain for the San Francisco scene: "In fact, the Syndicate had very little to do with the San Francisco hippie scene. 'We thought things were happening down here and not up there', Baskin states, 'and coming from our background of real R&B, when we saw some of those bands doing lousy blues, we didn't

want to be associated with it" (Cost, *Syndicate* 38). The Chocolate Watchband's Dave Aguilar comments on the Dead: "My main problem with the Dead was that I was never stoned enough to ever uncover or appreciate any of their hidden genius. I always thought of them as a really bad country and western band that had accidentally taken too much acid. I was just too impatient to hang around twenty or thirty minutes to find out how a song ended" (Aguilar pt. 4, 1).

Finally, this story from Ned Torney of the Watchband and Otherside sums up the situation: "We went to audition for Bill Graham to try and get into the Fillmore. And we could hear him while we were standing outside his office door, talking to his secretary. Soon as he found out we were from San Jose, he tells her, 'Tell them I've gone to Los Angeles.' So we went over to see Chet Helms. He listened to us, and we played the Avalon that weekend with Bo Diddley and Quicksilver, who also liked us a lot. And the moral of that, I guess, just bears out Ned's Golden Rule: '*Never* tell anyone you're from San Jose'" (Cost, *Otherside* 84).

#### **QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

In the light of demographic changes in the makeup of popular music audiences, the long-held assumption that modern popular music is predominantly the province of the young must be re-examined. What is the special relationship between youth culture and popular music? More importantly, is there actually a special relationship, or was the 50s and 60s youth culture experience simply a product of its time? Is the traditional association between music and the young a thing of the past? In an age where it is more common to see buttons and bumper stickers stating "Don't trust anyone under 30" than the reverse, it's a question that bears looking into.

The other question that needs to be asked in the 21st century is whether rock & roll is really mass culture anymore, and if so, what kind. Popular music styles like rock and country seem to be divided into two strains - the truly "popular" - that is, what gets played on the radio and fills large concert halls - and the "underground" strain - music that gets played only on college or noncommercial radio and is heard live in small clubs. Ironically, in some genres such as rock & roll and country, the underground groups look to the earlier forms of the music for inspiration and eschew more modern techniques. This creates an interesting paradox wherein the mass-marketed form can be seen as the more progressive form (since it is more likely to alter the music's traditional elements), in contrast to the conservatism of the underground scene. In this sense, underground rock & roll that harkens back to the sounds of the past functions very much like a frozen-in-time form of folk music, like polka or New Orleans jazz. Fanzine writer Jeff Helwig alludes to this "retro" fixation in his review of the Chocolate Watchband reunion gig in San Diego in 1999: "Interestingly, it was the younger members of the crowd who dressed in all manner of sixties clothes and hair. No doubt we forty-somethings in attendance would have looked totally ridiculous in such mod gear. Even so, I never knew that Austin Powers had so many brothers" (45).

## DISCOGRAPHIES

### *Chocolate Watchband*

<u>Singles:</u>	<u>Label/number</u>	<u>Date</u>
Sweet Young Thing/Baby Blue	Uptown 740	December 1966
Blues Theme/Loose Lip Sync Ship	HBR 511	December 1966
Misty Lane/She Weaves A Tender Trap	Uptown 749	February 1967
Are You Gonna Be There (At The Love-In)/ No Way Out	Tower 373	1967

### LPs:

No Way Out	Tower 5096	September 1967
The Inner Mystique	Tower 5106	February 1968
One Step Beyond	Tower 5153	1969

### *Count Five*

<u>Singles:</u>	<u>Label/number</u>	<u>Date</u>
Psychotic Reaction/They're Gonna Get You	Double Shot 104	1966
Peace Of Mind/The Morning After	Double Shot 106	1966
You Must Believe Me/ Teeny Bopper Teeny Bopper	Double Shot 110	1967
Merry-Go-Round/Contrast	Double Shot 115	1967
Declaration Of Independence/ Revelation In Slow Motion	Double Shot 125	1968
Mailman/Pretty Big Mouth	Double Shot 141	1969

### LPs:

Psychotic Reaction	Double Shot DSM 1001	1967
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### *Syndicate Of Sound*

<u>Singles:</u>	<u>Label/number</u>	<u>Date</u>
Prepare For Love/Tell The World	Scarlet 503	1965
Prepare For Love/Tell The World	Del-Fi 4304	1965
Little Girl/You	Hush 228	1966
Little Girl/You	Bell 640	1966
Rumors/The Upper Hand	Bell 646	1966
Good Time Music/Keep It Up	Bell 655	1966
That Kind Of Mari/Mary	Bell 666	1967
Brown Paper Bag/Reverb Beat	Buddah 156	1967
Mexico/First To Love You	Buddah 183	1967
Little Girl/Rumors	Hip Pocket HP-29	1967

You're Looking Fine/Change The World      Capitol 2426      1968

**LPs:**

Little Girl      Bell 6001      1966

Note: This discography only lists original singles and LPs released while the bands were still active. All three bands' music is also available on assorted LP and CD reissues.

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