

ROCHESTER

Democrat and Chronicle

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2006

DemocratandChronicle.com

50 CENTS NEWSSTAND

Invictas as good 'Today' as yesteryear

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(September 1, 2006) — The band's 1984 black Cadillac hearse was parked out back, behind the Constellation Brands-Marvin Sands Performing Arts Center. Ultra-genial NBC correspondent Bob Dotson was parked in the shadows of the side of the stage, among the roadies and family members, a smile — amused? bemused? — on his face.

And here came Herb Gross, 62-year-old lead singer of the Invictas, charging down a center aisle of the venue with his cordless microphone, running up onto the stage and pacing pack and forth, barking out the words to "Mony Mony." He was like Mick Jagger. Or maybe not. In that black suit and white hair, maybe more like an evangelical preacher.

This is what Dotson and the Today show came for: Old guys rocking out. This week, "American Story With Bob Dotson," a regular feature of the Today show, is scheduled to air four minutes or so of the more than four hours of tape that it shot during a couple of weeks in early August of the Rochester band: Gross, drummer Dave Hickey, guitarist Bruce Hickey, bassist Jim Kohler, guitarist Dave Profeta, who joined on for the 1980 reunion, and a recent addition, keyboardist Sam Gruttadauria. The distilled moments include a concert at the Pelican's Nest in Charlotte, a band rehearsal, a stop at Dave Hickey's house to interview him with his 18-year-old son, Colin, and the Aug. 20 Beach Boys show at C-MAC, climaxed by the Invictas' set-closing version of the band's infamous "The Hump."

"The Hump," which pales to anything you'll see on MTV today, is a song and matching dance that involves placing your hands behind your head and shaking your pelvis in a pseudo-suggestive manner. But in 1965, the Invictas became a regional phenomena — western New York's version of Beatlemania — thanks to the song, which was banned in Boston.

For his show, Dotson wasn't quite satisfied with old rockers. (Actually, all of the Invictas are younger than the Rolling Stones.) After watching some of the initial tape assembled by a film crew, he decided to focus on Dave and Colin Hickey, creating a cross-generational storyline. "For some reason, his interview came off the best of the bunch," said Dave. Colin has nothing to do with the Invictas, although he did agreeably haul some of the band's equipment on and offstage at C-MAC.

Four minutes seems a short time to tell the story, but on network TV it's nearly epic; Dotson called it "Gone With the Wind territory." And the four-week gestation period for the story isn't unusual, either. "I jumped off into wars, hurricanes," the graying correspondent says. "At my age, I want some time."

Thankfully for Dotson's story, the Invictas didn't play their age. Fueled by the adrenaline rush of appearing on a huge stage for 4,500 people, rather than backed into the corner of a bar by a hundred or so, the band sounded surprisingly spry. Its hour-long set included a handful of bar-band rock classics: the Stones' "Brown Sugar" and "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," Wilson Pickett's "Mustang Sally," Ray Charles' "What'd I Say" and a new Invictas song, "Skip 'N Go Naked." Gross tossed strings of plastic beads to audience members and had the folks seated in the pavilion standing for the predictable encore: "The Hump," with eight women — and after a few moments, two guys — doing the pelvic thing.

"They had 'em on their feet," an approving Dotson said afterward.

Like they had been there before, of course. Backstage, before the show, the Invictas seemed at ease with their incoming four minutes of fame. "You guys want to do a shot of Jack Daniel's?" Bruce Hickey had asked Dotson. "We usually do a couple of those before the show." But if rock and roll wasn't such a volatile profession, the times were. A couple of the Invictas had been recalling the Vietnam-era military service that in part broke up the band. Dave Hickey did a tour of 'Nam. Bruce Hickey seemed to have forgotten that Kohler had also done some service. "They must have been a little lax," he joked, "in the drug-testing those days."



JAMIE GERMANO Staff Photographer
Herb Gross draws a few of the band's adoring fans onto the stage to join him in a patented Invictas move.