

rock 'n roll



Blast from the past: Popular '60s rock band continues to entertain

By Ernst Lamothe Jr.

This is a love story. But not the kind that Meg Ryan made her money doing before she left the industry.

It's a story of a band, The Invictas, who were jamming on stages two years before the world would know a London band called The Rolling Stones.

Herb Gross started the group in 1960 while attending the Rochester Institute of Technology as the lead guitarist and vocalist. He recruited his neighbors, Dave Hickey on the drums and his young brother, Bruce Hickey on the guitar. They were a plucky rock 'n' roll band that at that time called themselves The Furys.

After a year, he expanded the group to include Jim Kohler on bass, Mark Blumenfeld on lead guitar and re-branded themselves as The Invictas, inspired by both the Buick vehicle and the Latin word meaning invincible. They also had to change their names

after an attorney told them that The Furys' name was already taken by another band.

At that time, they were a bunch of college kids playing for the fun of the music, the women who would come to the shows and the exhilaration of being on stage.

They played at Tiny's Bengal Inn, which was at the end of St. Paul Street in Rochester.

The funny thing is that Bruce Hickey couldn't play with them because he was too young to get into the bar. But that little bar brought out inspiration for their No. 1 hit single. One day they were playing a gig in front of 400 people in a place that the fire marshal would have shut down because it only had a 150-person capacity.

Gross saw two teenagers dancing provocatively to their music.

"I leaned over to them and asked them what they were doing? The

guy said 'we are humping.' Then I went home and wrote a song called 'The Hump' and it exploded," added Gross.

That was because a Buffalo record executive saw the band perform and wanted to record the track. The guys then drove to Buffalo with 30 of their friends and cases filled with beer to create a rumpus atmosphere for the recording.

'The Hump Song'

On YouTube, people reminisce about how much they loved "The Hump Song" and how they used to see the band in Rochester and Canandaigua during the 1960s. They also recount how the song became a huge No. 1 hit in Buffalo, where they recorded the track along with making the nationwide charts.

With the song soaring in popularity, the group toured with The Beach Boys, The Shirelles, The Young Rascals and Otis Redding.

"Parents hated the song but the kids loved it of course," said Gross. "One day we were at a show in Newark, N.J. and we were about to perform the song but the police told us that they would shut down the concert if we played the song. The next thing you know, we tell the crowd this and they were ready to riot. The police didn't want thousands of kids going crazy, so they let us play the song."

Dave Hickey, one of the original members, was destined to find a kinship with music. His mother played 10 instruments, was an Eastman School of Music graduate and taught the subject at Irondequoit Central School District. When it came to deciding his instrument, it all had to do with talent.

"I realized pretty quickly that I didn't have the ear to play guitar," said Dave, 66, of Brighton. "But I was fine with that because playing the drums is electric, especially when you perform live."

In 2005, they opted to do another reunion with three of the original members: Dave Hickey, Jim Kohler and Herb Gross. Dave Profeta was added in 1980 and he remains the longest serving lead guitarist in the band. Gross was turning 60 years old at the time and he wanted to play with his boys once again.

Band resurrects

"I knew I wanted the band back together again, but I didn't know if the guys would be up for that," said Gross. "I called everyone and we started practicing to get the rust off. We brought in three guys who were regular musicians who had never stopped playing, unlike Dave and I. After the first few rehearsals the regular musicians gave us a look like 'this might not be a good idea.' But we hung in there and practiced some more and we were ready."

Dave Hickey said even more impressive than the fact the band found its musical groove and started performing is its members have remained close.

"It's pretty amazing that we have kept it going for so long, but even more amazing that we are still great friends," he said. "It's rare for bands to stick because of personalities and egos. Herb deserves a lot of credit for keeping us together and never giving up. He just loves to perform and we

Herb Gross started the group in 1960.



Spank, bass player of The Invictas.



Dave Hickey on the drums.





are great together.”

Jim Kohler, 70, is the jokester of the group. He often ribs other band members and excitedly says he woke up “on the right side of the grave this morning.”

He also says when asked about what the ‘60s were like, he said he remembers 1960 and 1969, but the rest of the decade is a little hazy.

“As you get older you have to do the things you want to do that bring excitement to your life. Age isn’t going to keep us from doing anything,” said Kohler, who attended East Rochester High School and now lives in Pennsylvania. “I have so many memories playing with these guys and they can’t take that away from me.”

Still, he wasn’t sure what to think when Gross called about getting the guys in one room again to play their music.

“I couldn’t believe he wanted to put the band back together again,” said Kohler. “We hadn’t played in one room in so long and I didn’t know how it would all turn out. I didn’t think it would happen, but I am so glad that it did.”

Since reuniting again in 2004, they have played for thousands at events, including this year at the George Eastman House, Corn Hill Festival and Wegman’s Concerts On The Shore. They also performed at the CMAC in Canandaigua with The Beach Boys as well as events at The Villages in Florida. They are known as one of the longest playing rock bands in America.

“We call our philosophy ‘Rock ‘til ya Drop,’” said Gross. “Every member is 60 or older, but we all still have the energy.”

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