

The Night The Rascals Blew the Roof Off in Buffalo

By: Paul Chimera

As far as I'm concerned, the "Fab-Four" from the '60s were The Young Rascals, not that other foursome with the shaggy haircuts and British accents.

In 1966, my buddy Mike and I had front row seats for The Young Rascals when they performed in Clark Gymnasium on the campus of the University of Buffalo in Buffalo, New York, my hometown. They blew the roof off the place that night!

I'd been enthralled by The Rascals' pulsating rhythms for a long time. Despite my reverence for The Beatles, the Byrds and other groups of that era, The Rascals held sway over me in ways the others couldn't. There was something about their relentless energy, their excellent harmonies, their unabashed excitement. From Eddie's whistles that added accents to their riveting organ leads, to Felix's smokey, soulful vocals harmonized with Eddie's more dulcet tones -- all melded with the energetic guitar work of Gene and inimitable drumming artistry of Dino -- The Rascals always managed to retain their designation as my favorite band of the 1960s and '70s.

For a long time, my admiration of The Young Rascals was based strictly on their recordings. *Good Lovin'* continues to sound fresh and dynamic in 1997 -- truly a timeless rock classic. *Lonely Too Long* defines the Rascals' sound as well as any single hit they had. But my opinion of this talented quartet was to change on that concert night in 1966, on the U.B. campus.

The show opened with a fine performance by a folk group of some note during the time -- the Pozo Seco Singers. Don Williams, their lead singer and songwriter, went on to a successful career as a country performer through the 1980s, though his star seems to have faded in the 90s.

Then, after intermission, The Young Rascals burst onto the stage. For the next hour or so, the non-stop electricity of this band peeled the paint off the walls, rattled the folding wooden chairs on the gymnasium floor like huts in a hurricane -- and damn near blew the roof off the place!

But it was not just their volume that made the crowd stand up and take notice. Their musicianship was as finely honed as a Stratovarius. Eddie and Felix took command of the vocals and sounded as close to their studio recordings as you could expect from a live performance. Gene, long regarded as a splendid guitarist -- clutching that wide-bodied Guild guitar as he dodged and weaved across the stage -- also provided third-part harmonies that added depth and texture to the group's great vocal range.

That big, bad B3 organ which Felix attacked like a madman -- pointing up and out toward the crowd as if leading a charge -- reverberated throughout Clark Gymnasium, accompanied by a strong bottom courtesy of Felix on foot pedals.

And Dino Danelli. Wow! This chap was perhaps the show-stealer that night. The drums were his prey, and his predatory percussionist style added fantastic showmanship to his undeniable genius on the instrument. He twirled his drum sticks so rapidly, I wondered if he somehow had some kind of

motorized apparatus hooked up to his hands!

The Young Rascals belted out hit after hit: *Lonely Too Long*, *You Better Run*, *Good Lovin'*-- and *Groovin'*, which they performed for the first time ever that evening. Gene revealed yet another side of his musical talent, playing a melodic harmonica that helped make *Groovin'* go on to become one of their greatest recordings.

What stands out above it all -- beyond the great singing, the superb instrumental work -- was their energy. They worked *so* hard that evening, putting on an unforgettable show. As a member of the audience, I felt almost drained myself, just watching them! Their momentum, their drive -- it was infectious. They left the crowd breathless.

It's hard to believe that I was just 16 when I saw The Young Rascals perform in concert. The only time I saw all four originals, and only the four of them, perform together. Yet today, at 48, I can say without the slightest hesitation, that their concert in Buffalo in 1966 was the single greatest concert I've ever attended. And trust me, I've seen numerous concerts -- from The Rolling Stones to Simon & Garfunkle, The Who to The Fifth Dimension, Reba MacEntire to James Brown.

And, yes, even John Lennon of The Beatles, performing with The Plastic Ono Band, and Eric Clapton, together in concert in Toronto, in 1969.

The Young Rascals were the best. Plain and simple. Paul Chimera