LIKE THE LAST 30 YEARS NEVER HAPPENED:
UNDERSTANDING DETROIT ROCK MUSIC THROUGH ORAL HISTORY

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It’s a Detroit thing, everybody
It’s a Detroit thing, tell your body
It’s a Detroit thing, gonna show you right
It’s a Detroit thing, yeah, yeah

I’m bout to say the law, cause I’m the k-i-d
I’ll be whippin’ and flippin’ rhymes from the fuckin’ D
And for the peoples, and for the peoples
Ain’t nobody in the D be equal
To us, so I bust, cause it’s a must that I go for my
With another funky Detroit rhyme, yeah Aint talkin ‘bout Philly, no
Aint talkin ‘bout DC, no
Aint talkin ‘bout New Orleans, where they say the funk got started
I’m talkin ‘bout the D, I’m talkin ‘bout the D y’all
I'm talkin ‘bout the D
It's a Detroit thing

-Kid Rock, Early Mornin’ Stoned Pimp (1996)
ABSTRACT

James Foust, Advisor

This study was conducted to better understand Detroit’s unusual amount of rock music success. From the 1960s on, Detroit has continuously produced some of the nation’s most successful and influential rock and roll musicians. Through oral history research, this study looked specifically at the musical industry (record labels and radio stations), musical artists (recording artists and recording studios), and musical outlets (music venues and music retailers) with the intention to better uncover the aspects that allow the Detroit community to maintain an ongoing rock music success streak.

Through conducted interviews with many influential Detroit orientated musical leaders as well as referencing scarce existing literature, this study finds four distinct avenues that lead to Detroit’s longitudinal success. The study references the aspect of defiance as one of the key traits that allows Detroit to evade musical homogenization. This study also finds that Detroit’s unique publicity outlets (radio stations, music publications, counterculture promotions, and venues) offer a stronger voice and a larger audience for local musicians that translates into a larger musical fan base for Detroit musicians. This study documents how the unique suburban layout around the Detroit community provides segmented pockets of unique creativity. Finally, this study acknowledges that Detroit has maintained the direction and overall ideals of the early rock music pioneers of 1960s without letting evolving cultural trends dilute the regional music climate.
Jim Foust I cannot thank you enough for your unwavering dedication to this project.

Without Kristen Schmitt, my wife, editor, and moral supporter, I would have never been able to complete this process.

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I’ve read so many acknowledgment pages. I never know one person who is being acknowledged or understand the need to express thanks to every person who you may have known since second grade in this section. It to me does no good. I flip the page.

I acknowledge that unlike many academics, I am not a big reader. I acknowledge that that this trait does not have to be a negative. I also acknowledge that I am not sure if that last sentence is grammatically correct. I can’t talk Foucault or understand Critical Theory from the Frankfurt School and I acknowledge that. I’ve tried. But I can’t swim that deep. Don’t feel sorry for my academic shortcomings. I am a dabbler—and I am quite happy with my traits. I guess in a way I am true to my Detroit genetics. I am good with my hands—and a hard worker in many aspects. I can plaster walls better than you. I change my own oil and love manual labor.

I am also a people person. I truly love interacting with society. I love hearing stories. Maybe I like personal narrative so much because it paints more vivid pictures in my mind than written words. Conversation gets me excited. It is these traits which I think have allowed me to conduct a study like the following. I think it is also these traits which have allowed me to have “access” to people and testimony most researchers can’t find.

We make the full ecosystem. Me and some researcher at Stanford who wants to know how specific regions have so much success at certain tasks. She understands the theory more in-depth than I. I understand how to network, talk, and get through to interviewees whose statements are powerful and telling.

I hope my document allows further ammunition for all individuals who are intrigued by the concept that Detroit isn’t successful on most scales, yet can produce many of the most talented and influential musicians, throughout the years, regardless of these shortcomings.

Understanding Detroit as a culture is quite opposite from academic pursuits. Again, this is something that my mindset and persona seems equipped for. The Detroit mindset seems to embrace the idea of never using extra syllables, extra makeup, or extra fluff. The Detroit culture is built on the pollution-soaked banks of the Rouge River, and more importantly, with the mind frame of people accustomed to the assembly line labor. Nearly my whole family is in some way or another tied to working with Ford Motor Company. Nearly everyone in my grade school class had parents who worked for Ford or Fords as we call it.

This polarization of academic and Detroit mindsets puts this research in an interesting position: a position with a duty to both deliver the information in a manner that is both fitting to those who created the unique culture as well as appropriate for those reading the conducted research. I hope the following represents the passion, intrigue, and ideals associated with music from the Motor City and begins to provide documentation and understanding on how Detroit continually Kicks Out The Jams.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Detroit is a tough town. Every interview conducted for this study and nearly every mention of the city uses words like “gritty,” “strong” and “rough” to describe the city. Perhaps the common descriptors go hand-in-hand with written accounts of Detroit that focus on the high crime rate and high unemployment in the city. But the characteristics that make Detroit a tough city, also, in turn, represent the region as real and relatable. So, using that logic, it is possible to say Detroit is one of the toughest regions in the U.S. and, therefore, one of the most relatable and real. The realness of Detroit, which most likely stems from the hard-working local work force, has become one of the region’s key traits.

Diane Sawyer, in a 1990 Prime Time Live documentary entitled, “Detroit’s Agony,” perhaps describes a different, but equally important view of Detroit from a national media perspective. Sawyer relates Detroit to a sort of crystal ball of other cities in the U.S. that have specific industries that may eventually become diminished in economic strength. Sawyer, discussing Detroit in her documentary, says: “Our first story is not a story about a city. It is a story about some Americans who may be sending a kind of warning to the rest of us. Detroit, once a symbol for U.S. competitive vitality, and some say still a symbol: a symbol of the future, the first urban domino to fall.”

Detroit is just that: a symbol to many of the switching of the guard and the globalized economy. However, Detroit as a community seems to have an engrained ability to make due;
whether that be overcoming economic and racial problems or getting by regarding budget crises and safety concerns that have been long rooted in the region.

Detroit’s turbulence, disparity, and strife are not new. Julius P. Bolivar wrote a summary of Detroit’s rough early trends that was published as the forward to the City Directory of Detroit in 1837:

No place in the United States presents such a series of events, interesting in themselves, and permanently affecting, as they occurred, its progress and prosperity. Five times its flag has changed, three different sovereigns have claimed its allegiance, and since it has been held by the United States, its government has been thrice transferred; twice it has been besieged by Indians, once captured in war, and once burned to the ground.2

Detroit’s conflicting opinions and rough demeanor has been displayed many times since the 1837 City Directory of Detroit’s publication. One such occurrence took place on May 26, 1947, at Ford Motor Company’s Rouge Plant on Miller road in Dearborn during an altercation between Ford Motor Company and several United Auto Workers members who were distributing unionization pamphlets. The fight, unfortunately for Ford Motor Company, was captured by local media photographers and depicted bloodied union representatives. This fight became known as “The Battle of the Overpass” to the national media.3 This public coverage identified the industrialization and automobile production of Detroit as not exclusively related to success and prosperity.

The turmoil of Detroit again erupted publicly with the racial riots on June 23, 1967. The riots, which required the deployment of the National Guard, lasted more than a week and ended with over 1600 fires in the city and an overall cost to Detroit of $50 million. Over the course of the week of rioting and looting, 7,331 arrests were made in the city.4 Coverage of the riot was broadcast by the national media and allowed the rest of the country to view the racial uneasiness
in the region. More recently, the downsizing that has occurred by automotive giants Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors has been well-covered by the national media and shows Detroit as being one of the regions most affected by recession. The national media has also documented Detroit’s diminishing residential base, which at its peak consisted of two million residents. Today, the city has fewer than nine hundred thousand residents. Corresponding with the decline in residents, Detroit housing markets have become oversaturated with foreclosures and delinquent tax payments.

This dissertation will examine a path that for many readers may seem leaps and bounds away from the nuts and bolts of an automobile engine or the coverage of Detroit’s numerous shortcomings. However, the topic is every bit as prominent to the region. One of Detroit’s most unique commodities has been, and continues to be, rock music. Regardless of the strife, downsizing, racial uprisings and automotive downsizing, Detroit has continually been cited as a headquarters for rock music. Detroit might not have safety, or economic good fortune, but it does have, in the opinion of many, some of the best rock music on the planet. Newsweek magazine in 1969 described United States rock music as having “a real Detroit sound, pulsating with the belch of its smokestacks and the beat of its machinery.”

This dissertation will focus on the rock music of Detroit that, similar to Motown, has had significant success. Although Motown’s prominence in the 1950s and 1960s has been well documented, little research has focused on the catalysts of Detroit’s rock music success. Although some academic research has dealt with regional characteristics of music, a thorough examination of the Detroit rock music scene has never taken place. Detroit’s rock music grounding begins with Mitch Ryder, who revolutionized the rock music genre by blending African-American inspired styles and theatrics into a product that appealed greatly to listening
audiences. From Mitch Ryder’s lead, groups such as the MC5, Grand Funk Railroad, Bob Seger, Ted Nugent, Alice Cooper and Iggy Pop took control of the music scene in Detroit, set the direction for Detroit rock music, and, in a larger view, dominated the direction of rock music throughout the country and the world.

One of the unique occurrences of the Detroit rock music scene was that successful artists continued to emerge from the region after its initial success. The Verve Pipe, Sponge, Taproot, Insane Clown Posse, Kid Rock, Eminem, The Muggs, The Detroit Cobras, The Von Bondies, and The White Stripes, as well as hundreds of other popular bands emerged and continue to emerge from the region. All the bands from Detroit, whether from the 1960s or 1990s, share a similar grounding, similar toughness, and a similar world view. The traits that made the Detroit artists successful from its early years in the 1960s seem to have maintained importance over the decades, and are still embodied by the newer Detroit rock musicians. In fact, every Detroit artist mentioned expresses defiance toward common national musical views and decries the homogenized national musical products at every turn. In addition, every one of the previous bands mentioned have had musical success, in a large part due to the specific Detroit attributes that were formed in the 1960s, which have become ingrained with their cumulative Detroit-based musical messages.

Detroit’s musical success is not confined to a short period of time or even a specific decade like some other music locales, such as Seattle’s rather brief grunge rock movement. Instead, Detroit has had the ability to continually supply the world with successful rock artists. It is this dissertation’s goal to better understand why Detroit, as a community, has had the enduring ability to continually manufacture artists that are extremely popular with national and international audiences. It is also a goal of this research to better document the traits that seem to
be represented throughout the decades of Detroit artists and better understand why Detroit rock music success never stagnated like other regional centers.

This dissertation will collect and directly document oral history data from primary sources to more thoroughly understand how Detroit's rock success developed, and how the region has maintained a similar rock music direction throughout the decades. The data received from this research will help illuminate Detroit’s unique longitudinal musical traits that have been neglected in existing literature.

Prior to graduate school I was employed in several positions at Atlantic Records and the Warner/Elektra/Atlantic music group owned by Time Warner/America Online. I also owned my own recording studio called Sad Song Recording and played on numerous compilations for other artists. Throughout my employment, I met many individuals who were directly involved in the creation, maintenance and sustaining qualities of Detroit rock music. My contacts within the region’s industry have allowed the diverse stories and views of Detroit rock, which for many are inaccessible, to become identified and documented.

As noted, one of the only areas in Detroit’s musical heritage that is well documented is the Motown phenomenon. Berry Gordy, Jr., founded Motown Records in the early 1960s and created one of the most successful independent music labels in history. Through the 1950s and 1960s, Motown Records built one of the most impressive rosters of artists in the history of pop music, and became the largest and most successful independent record company in the United States by 1964. It was Motown’s grounding in the region which presented the Detroit rock music scene with the ability to understand how to realize musical success. The Motown vision of success has stuck with Detroit’s rock music scene as successful artists, records, and tours have maintained a dominant role since the 1960s.
To better understand the factors which play into Detroit’s rock music success, this dissertation will identify and document Detroit rock music as it relates to three main areas:

(1) Detroit’s music industry, which consists of the record labels that attempt to direct the course of musical trends, and also Detroit radio stations, that serve to diffuse new music to the local communities. Overall, the music labels and radio stations are a powerful tool for understanding Detroit’s musical culture from an industry standpoint. This study, by providing oral history accounts directed at the influence and importance of Detroit’s music industry, as well as providing secondary accounts of their power from existing texts, will provide a more complete coverage to their overall importance to the Detroit rock music scene.

(2) Detroit’s rock artists and the Detroit recording studios will be studied to gain firsthand opinions as to the unique attributes of the Detroit music scene. This section will provide oral history accounts of musicians’ views toward the Detroit rock music scene. Also this section will more clearly document the historical background which has paved a path for continued artist success. In addition, this section will provide a view into the Detroit recording studio climate, and how the studio environment has played a role in maintaining a Detroit rock music style and sound.

(3) Detroit’s musical outlets, which consist of music retailers who sell music and musical venues that sell live performances. Both musical venues and musical retailers will be assessed in a historical and contemporary view. This section will address music venues from a lens of large and small venues and the unique cultivation which takes place at each type of outlet. In addition, this section will address the music retailers, their strategies for cultivating local success for musicians, and a current view into music retailing’s business shift and future business plans.
The focus toward the music industry, music artists and musical outlets was initially utilized by Robert Burnett in his text, *The Global Jukebox: The International Music Industry*, which allowed a way for the author to diagnose the often symbiotic relationship that these areas of the music business engage in. Burnett also allowed his focus on these three separate areas to highlight the overall macro understanding of the newly formed digital music revolution. For this dissertation, my investigation of the industry, artists, and outlets will allow the identification of the unique attributes at play within the Detroit culture, and allow the investigation to link the areas to find more macro identified regional characteristics.

ASSERTIONS OF THE STUDY

This dissertation will argue that the infrastructure that was important in the early generation of Detroit rock music has been a vital ingredient to Detroit rock music’s continuing success. This infrastructure includes Detroit-focused radio programming, which evaded national dictates; successful Detroit artists helping new artists succeed; competitiveness among local musicians, helping to increase overall musicianship within the region; and an admiration of African-American musical attributes, which has been maintained throughout the decades in the region’s culture.

This dissertation will also focus on Detroit’s defiance: the musicians defying labels’ homogenizing strategies, the radio stations defying common national radio playlist choices, the venues defying national strategies to reduce concert tours to only the most successful artists, and others will be represented and displayed. The results of the defiance find Detroit as one of the most unique radio market in the country, the venues having the most national tours of any region in the country, and the musical products of Detroit artists unique and innovative regardless of
national music trends. The interesting factor with the defiance in Detroit is it represents a mentality that is not changing or evolving, but rather maintaining a course that began in the 1960s. By Detroit not evolving to adapt to new musical directions, the region has remained an ongoing source of music talent.

This dissertation will also argue that one of the ingredients in the Detroit musical equation has no direct relation to musical creativity; instead, it has to do with the spread of the Detroit population into vast outlying suburban communities. The city of Detroit encompasses 139 square miles, which is a relatively small city space compared to many of the Sunbelt cities. Houston, for example, used annexation powers to grow to more than 500 square miles. This resulted in Detroit’s inability to capture the suburban growth and prosperity of the post-1960s boom years since all of its lands were already developed.

The heavily reliant suburban culture of Detroit, accompanied by an intricate highway system, allowed the downtown Detroit workforce to leave the city after the workday was completed. The underlying result of this suburbanization is greatly segregated communities which produce their own style, values and behavioral codes while having little interaction with neighboring communities. Dan Carlisle, a former Detroit radio DJ, says, “I could clearly tell the difference in dress and behavior from bands in the downriver area like Lincoln Park, as opposed to the north area of Birmingham and Troy.”

This dissertation’s interest in the suburban phenomenon of Detroit does not focus on the ethnic, socio-economic, or religious reasons for suburban uprising in the region. Professor Samuel R. Staley covers this focus in his report for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy entitled, *Urban Sprawl and the Michigan Landscape: A Market-Orientated Approach*. Instead,
the focus on suburban sprawl will help to reveal the reason for such a multitude of unique stylistic expressions in the region.

This dissertation will also help to identify how Detroit musicians have more accessible ways to receive local and national promotion. From radio stations and music venues that often defy the common assumptions about which artists to promote, the local media in Detroit seems responsive to promoting Detroit musicians. The local musicians, in turn, have more opportunity to receive regional and national promotion and, correspondingly, the ability to gain a larger musical fan base than musicians in other regions.

The culmination of this dissertation will fill a gap regarding Detroit’s music in the existing scholarship. Due to the limited amount of academic research on my subject, I reference other regional music investigations, incorporate the scarce literature on the Detroit music community, and, ultimately, provide a context for documenting, as well as dissecting, personal narratives about Detroit rock music. This dissertation will represent an important building block for understanding Detroit’s unique attributes. In addition, identifying the processes working within the Detroit music scene will represent a strong grounding for other scholars with interests in regional music, regional culture, and identity creation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considering the importance of Detroit, little has been written about how and why it produces such a plentiful resource of creative and successful rock musicians. Histories of rock music tend to focus on rock acts and not community origins, which allows regions like Detroit little coverage. Recently, there have been a number of dissertations written on regions that at one time or another were “hotbeds” for music. For example, successful jazz community
Memphis was assessed in Ray Briggs’ 2003 dissertation. The dissertation, which examines the Memphis jazz community from 1910 through the 1990s, identifies the political and economic forces that were at play within the local African-American community and how those forces took shape in the local Memphis jazz music community.15

The Colorado Rocky Mountains region was addressed in Robert O. Gardner’s 2004 dissertation about how the region cultivates bluegrass music and how the local Appalachians specifically performed a sense of place, community, and identity through several bluegrass music festivals. The author ultimately looks at successful, authentic bluegrass music, and why music fans label it as authentic for representing their cumulative world view.16

Steven Graves’ 1993 work, The Historical Geography of the Music Industry, provides a good overview as to the relationship between a region and its musical success. Focusing on the 1980 to 1990 Champaign-Urbana and the Seattle scene, Graves draws parallels between the two musical regions and how artists’ successes are realized. Although his study is a solid investigation into musical innovation and regional traits, it may be found that not focusing on a longer time frame of reference ultimately limits the understanding of the region’s overall influence. In addition, his study also fails to include first-person interview data with individuals who were important in the creation of the region’s music.17

Tony Louis Kirschner’s 2002 work, Producing Class: Indie Rock and Cultural Studies, is focused on providing an account of the formation of the genre of music rather than a regional focus. Indie Rock is a genre focused toward artists keeping complete control of their music and career. Indie Rock is known for releasing albums on independent record labels, sometimes by individual bands, and relying on touring, word-of-mouth, and airplay on independent or college radio stations for promotion. Kirschner’s research on Indie Rock includes interviews with Indie
Rock participants and fans with the underlying focus of trying to pinpoint the subtleties that composes this over-arching musical genre.\textsuperscript{18}

Barbara Lebrun’s dissertation, \textit{The Constitution of an ‘Alternative’ Music Culture in French Rock Music 1981-2001}, provides useful insights into the intrinsic relationship between social struggles and French rock music. This dissertation provides longitudinal coverage and focuses on segments of the French population and their relation with Rock Metisse (modern retro rock) and the development toward rock alternative (a more modern rock style). Lebrun helps identify factors influencing the evolution of the French rock music scene. Unfortunately, however, Lebrun’s coverage is limited in its applicability to United States regional music pursuits.\textsuperscript{19}

The sole dissertation focusing on Detroit music is Michael Cary’s \textit{The Rise and Fall of the MC5: Rock Music and Counter Culture Politics in the Sixties}. Cary bases his dissertation on understanding the catalysts for the counterculture movement spurred in Detroit in the 1960s. Cary’s research, while not examining Detroit, but rather the counterculture movement specifically, is informative for understanding the effectiveness and ultimate usefulness of the counterculture protests in Detroit. Cary’s work shows a clear relationship between the White Panther Party, the hippie culture and the counterculture movement, all of which were greatly influenced by the success of The MC5 and their manager, John Sinclair, the revolutionary leader of the counterculture political movement. Cary’s work further shows the rise -- and later -- the fall of the protest movement of the 1960s, which he explains in terms of hegemony and the mobilization of bias which is diagnosed using the generation gap theory. Overall, Cary’s dissertation is theoretically rigorous yet reliant nearly exclusively on written accounts and
reflections that unfortunately do not add additional information on the Detroit music scene that produced the MC5 and led the other counterculture bands throughout the world in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{20}

David A. Carson has written the only book on Detroit rock, 2005’s \textit{Grit, Noise and Revolution: The Birth of Detroit Rock ‘N’ Roll}. This non-academic examination was extremely diligent within the scope of connecting artists of the 1960s and 1970s, their careers, and venues into a timeline. This book is solidly supported by interviews regarding artists and their careers; however, Carson does not address why Detroit possesses the talent and how the continuing supply of artists is produced by the region.\textsuperscript{21} Carson also wrote another book in 2000, \textit{Rockin’ Down the Dial}, which is an examination into Detroit radio personalities, stations and the climate of the 1950s and 1960s music business.\textsuperscript{22}

Of all the accounts written about Detroit, some of the best information about the city and music culture has come from documentaries. Two documentaries have been produced within the last two years, both of which have received publicity and praise. The first, \textit{MC5: A True Testimonial}, was produced by Jim Roehm in 2005. This documentary presents a very complete picture of the MC5 and the counterculture movement of the late 1960s. With emphasis on Sinclair, the history of the MC5, and the politics of Detroit’s rock music scene, this documentary is a strong resource for telling a history of Detroit that is not available in any other medium.

The second major documentary focused on Detroit was produced by James Petix in 2007: \textit{It Came From Detroit}. This documentary was focused on interviewing the bands and fans involved in Garage Rock subculture, but unfortunately this examination does not necessarily transcend to a broader understanding of Detroit Rock culture. This documentary also does not have a reason to produce any longitudinal understanding of the Detroit music culture that produced the Garage Rock genre.
One of the only areas of academic study that seems inclined to address regional attributes in music, aside from a handful of sporadic dissertations in Communication Studies, History, and American Culture Studies, is the field of geography. Music geography is specifically geared toward portraying spatial descriptions of communities and their associative music trends.

Relating the field of musical geography to rock music specifically, Larry Ford, in 1971, outlined the history and geography of rock from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. According to Ford, rock n’ roll emerged from combining black rhythm and blues and white country and western into a type of music that was acceptable to the adherents of both styles. Ford ultimately suggested that regional identities permitting a cultural hybridization were being overrun by a creeping cultural homogeneity.23

Another geographer, R.W. Butler, carried forth Ford’s work, discussing the factors that were involved in musical innovations established in Detroit, Liverpool, and southern California during the 1960s. In a philosophy similar to Ford’s, Butler argues that the likelihood of the continued emergence of prominent, regionally-based centers of innovation had been greatly diminished by industry restructuring beginning in 1970. Butler finds that improvements in technology, increased availability of facilities, and the dispersal of artists destroyed the unique advantages that locations such as Memphis or Los Angeles previously had.24 Ultimately, the current study will challenge the assumptions made by Butler of diminished regional uniqueness and show that Detroit does in fact defy the homogenizational trends that Butler asserts uproot regional uniqueness.

George Carney focused his geographically orientated study primarily on bluegrass and rock music. Carney generally questioned why geographic location plays such a major factor in the style of music. He found that the birthplace of an artist is considered more important than
any location to which they may have moved after achieving success or where the artist’s records were produced. Carney illustrates this idea with the Beatles. Although they recorded many of their records in London, the Beatles will clearly be forever identified with Liverpool. Carney’s work transcends well onto the Detroit culture. Like Liverpool, artists from Detroit seem forever tied to Detroit and the Detroit mentality for their full careers.

STUDY OVERVIEW

This dissertation will use oral history to better understand Detroit’s rock and roll inner workings. Rock and roll, which became later referred to as “rock” music, can be defined as hybrid music, or a mix of various musical styles and genres. From the 1960s to the present, Detroit has been a significant breeding ground for successful rock musicians.

Detroit more than adequately fits the bill to be highlighted next to communities such as Seattle as a music city worthy of further academic research. Not only does Detroit meet the definition of a “hotbed” for rock music, its success has not been confined to a particular time period. Regardless of the decade in question, Detroit has always produced important new rock music acts.

Recently Detroit’s musicians’ skills, hardworking nature, and antics are finding more of an audience interested in the region’s long-term success. “Detroit’s real attitude in our music as well as our lifestyle interests a wide range of people,” says James Petix, producer of a Detroit music documentary entitled, It Came From Detroit. In addition to Petix’s documentary, Detroit has had other recent opportunities to showcase its musical abilities including the 2005 Motor City Music Conference. The conference brought together more than 450 artists in more than 50 venues around the city. The conference provided publicity for independent artists, a
tradeshow atmosphere for Detroit musicians seeking industry information, and an opportunity to have musical critiques from record artist and repertoire (A&R) scouts who are employed by large music labels to find and sign new talent. More importantly, the creation of a music conference in the Detroit community attracting artists from throughout the nation shows the widespread audience that finds Detroit’s musical landscape worthy of a large scale convention.

In addition to respect for music, the Detroit region is also respected for its industrial and automotive dominance. Historical writings focusing on the Detroit region usually mention relevance of the assembly line process and the Henry Ford ideals of hard work for fair pay. The positive light unfortunately does not sustain and, in current inspection, the tenor of the conversation is quickly dimmed to a current view of economic downturn, vacant warehouses, and visible despair.

Detroit’s isolation is not just geographical, noted Laura Pike writing for *LA Weekly* in 2002. “There’s a psychological aspect to it that’s self imposed,” she said. “Not only do the rock bands not care about what the outside world thinks of them, they don’t for the most part, give a hoot about commercial radio.” 30 Matt Smith, of the Detroit band Ko and the Knockouts, discussed this isolation with Pike:

People here play as if the last 30 years of American culture never happened. You’ll try out a guitar player and it’s like he’s never heard anything since 1972. Because it’s an isolated place, it’s got a lot of social outcasts going through their lives uninterested in mainstream culture. Most [Detroiter]s don’t listen to any music that’s produced today aside from bands that they know in Detroit.31

**IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

This dissertation has four distinct reasons for its importance. First, there is a void in academic regional music research pursuits -- the scholarship has not been concerned with the
continual cultivation of regional talent or, in other words, how a region obtains its continual uniqueness. Justifiably, other academic works positioned in regional attributes of music have, for the most part, had no reason to be concerned about the continual cultivation of talent due to it being relatively nonexistent on a longitudinal timeline. In response to this, the scholarly arena tends to focus on the “talent of the time” with emphasis on a specific musical act, or limited time frame of musical creativity within the culture. This dissertation, by focusing on the Detroit rock music scene from 1965 to 2005, will help identify broader trends to the regional music landscape and the cultivation of the music culture.

Second, there has been no academic research conducted to understand regional music and culture from first-hand, personal testimony. Academic investigations focused toward music and regional data utilize secondary sources nearly exclusively, with limited interviews added to the research. This study finds pertinence in addressing testimony from the original sources primarily and incorporating scarce existing literature secondarily, a trait that historian Barbara Tuchman suggests for reducing the reliance on personal biases and the small frame of reference that the handful of published accounts of the culture possess. In addition, the completion of this oral history process has justifiable positive attributes for overall research generalizability due to the study being conducted from a knowledgeable research position that produces strong reflexivity, a trait that David Fischer finds useful by the historical researcher tackling a subject from which the researcher possesses a prior knowledge base.

The third reason for this dissertation focus is to better understand why Detroit seems to refute the often-argued paradigm that once an idea is disseminated into culture at large, the idea eventually becomes passé and “not cool.” Futurists, trendsetters, and the newly coined term “cool hunters,” collectively agree that the act of discovering what is cool is precisely what causes
cool to move on. Documenting Detroit’s unusual longitudinal success may aid in better understanding trends and cultural dissemination and how Detroit cultivation seems to evade these prescripts for “outdatedness,” which are applied to cultural items.

Finally, Detroit has never had a collective academic focus provided for one of its most famous assets: rock music. The lack of academic scrutiny on Detroit rock music is a great oversight due to the fact that the city has been so important to the international development of rock music. Overall, this dissertation, through the capturing of first-hand testimony, will allow the personal accounts and word-of-mouth knowledge that has been undocumented for decades to find historical relevance.

METHOD OF THE STUDY

This investigation into the Detroit rock scene has been conducted largely through oral history. Oral history is invaluable to any effort to add human emotions, feelings, and thoughts to the historical record. The majority of oral history studies have concentrated upon the ordinary person, particularly the working classes and the underprivileged.

The goal of oral history is ultimately to place the interviewee’s experiences within the total understanding, both politically and socially, of the period or research in question. Lummis, a notable scholar in oral history, suggests a definition of oral evidence as “an account of first-hand experience recalled retrospectively, communicated to an interviewer for historical purposes and preserved on a system of reproducible sound.”

In Barbara Allen’s book, From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research, she notes that the researcher should define a community’s geographical and cultural boundaries in accordance with the concepts held by the people who lived there during
the period under scrutiny. She further explains that people’s statements may differ sharply from those of outsiders. Taking cues from her suggestions, I will obtain data from individuals exclusively tied to the Detroit musical community. The principal oral interviews for this dissertation have been collected in person, or by recorded telephone exclusively by myself. In these interview tapings, the interviewees were asked to share their knowledge regarding the Detroit rock music scene in accordance with the Human Subjects Review Board (“HSRB”) approved questions.

Thompson has identified three ways in which oral history can be compiled after the interview data is obtained. The first method is a single life story narrative. This procedure presents just one individual biography; however in outstanding cases it can be used to convey the history of a whole class or community. Second is a collection of stories. Since none of these needs to be separately as rich or complete as a single narrative, Thompson finds this is a better way of presenting typical life history material. The third method is cross analysis. This direction is focused on when oral evidence is treated as a query from which to construct an argument.

This dissertation will take the latter query path and use individual testimony, aided with existing literature to verify, confirm and expand on interviewee testimony, to deliver a clear understanding of the history of Detroit rock music and why this innovative nature continually evolves. This study will represent a needed bridge for academic literature to diagnose and identify the Detroit rock culture system and the production of group values.

To complete the oral history, I interviewed the following individuals who are organized in the following list in an order that I feel represents the amount of dialogue utilized in this study. The subjects were chosen due to their importance in the Detroit music community and their
knowledge of specific areas of focus. In addition, I selected these interviewees due to personal
rapport and intersecting contacts.

Russ Gibb, owner of Grande Ballroom, media mogul
Ted Nugent, rock musician, played with Amboy Dukes
Slash, rock musician, played with Guns ‘n’ Roses and Velvet Revolver
Kid Rock, rock musician
Wayne Kramer, rock musician, guitarist for MC5
Mitch Ryder, rock musician, played with Detroit Wheels
John Sinclair, Detroit culture revolutionary, manager of MC5
Jim Diamond, producer of three White Stripes albums and many influential recordings
James Petix, producer of documentary *It Came From Detroit*
Gary Grimshaw, poster artist for Jimi Hendrix, Cream, The Doors
Tom Wright, manager of The Who, manager of Grande Ballroom, rock photographer
Tom Wilson, President of Palace Entertainment
Jim Townsend, President of Detroit Tourism and Economic Council
Michael Stevens, Senior Promotions Manager-Atlantic Records
Dan Carlisle, Detroit DJ
Mike Staff, radio DJ with WRIF 101.1
Tony D’Anunnizo, video/media expert creating documentary on the Grande Ballroom
Anthony Allegrina, college radio station DJ, local music fan
John Gallagher, *Detroit Free Press* columnist
Culley Summers, local musician, parents were founders of *CREEM* magazine
Alfred Taubman, local philanthropist
Christophe Delcourt, Detroit music fan, Paris recording engineer
Kevin Watts, guitarist for Detroit band The Senate
Bill Martindale, Detroit music fan
Leo Early, Detroit music fan, archivist for www.grandeballroom.com
Harry Phillips, keyboard player for Bob Seger, Rolling Stones

The interviews lasted between 15 minutes to one hour in length and were recorded
either by a handheld audio recorder or by a phone recording device. After recording the
testimony, the recording was transferred to digital backup.

After digital transfer the relevant information was transcribed for easier accessibility for
my research. In addition to this dissertation, which captures many of the important statements
made in the interviews, the full recordings will be archived in the Bowling Green State
University Popular Culture Library for future research purposes.
ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study begins with an overall focus of the early history of Detroit to better ground the reader in the unique undercurrents that influence the regional culture. The study then focuses on the music industry (chapter 3), musical artists (chapter 4), and musical outlets (chapter 5). While addressing the main emphasis of the chapters, this study also attempts to simultaneously find dominant themes for Detroit’s musical uniqueness that are common among all the chapter topics.

Although it is the author’s intention that this study be a readable “story,” the research question of uncovering the catalysts of Detroit’s rock music uniqueness will be addressed throughout the document as an integral part of the narrative. The overall findings of the research question will be acknowledged and more thoroughly addressed in the final chapter of this dissertation. To better understand the roadmap of this study, the following breaks down the main areas each chapter will investigate.

Chapter 2 will provide a sense of grounding for the reader. This chapter will identify the predominant Detroit rock history with a focus on each decade from the 1960s through the 1990s. I will briefly cover the longitudinal history of the Detroit rock music scene, which will allow for a general understanding of Detroit’s changing musical trends.

The third chapter will identify the specific mindset of the Detroit music industry. This section will be useful in dissecting the evolution of industry influence (both radio and labels) and the changing procedures of rock bands to find commercial acceptance.

The fourth chapter will identify the creative side of the Detroit musical equation. Focusing on Detroit artists and recording studios, this chapter will highlight the artistic mentality and address how the act of musical creation has adapted from the 1960s through the present.
Chapter 5 will focus on the marketing and sales of music to the public with equal emphasis on record stores (which sell audio) and venues (which sell live performances). This chapter is meant to identify the path that the Detroit music community has taken to bring its music to the Detroit consumers as well as the criteria used to evaluate successful artists.

Chapter 6 brings the diverse musical testimony into a strategic path of analysis. This chapter is used to diagnose the trends brought about through the research by summarizing the testimony and identifying the attributes which directly affect Detroit’s uniqueness as a rock music producer.

Before it is possible to understand how each unique segment of investigation plays upon Detroit’s longstanding musical success, it is important to understand a more comprehensive history of the region. The following chapter will serve as a bridge to bring the reader to a more complete understanding of some of the unique and influential happenings that affect the dominant Detroit views.
NOTES


12. Alfred Taubman, keynote speaker for Cityscape Detroit given at Center for Creative Studies, December 2006.


31. *Ibid*


CHAPTER II

DETROIT HISTORY OVERVIEW

“Detroit is the most representative city in America.”

--Jerry Herron, author of AfterCulture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History

To better understand the unique influences which act to shape and structure the Detroit culture, it is important to obtain a grounding of Detroit’s history and historical attributes. It is this chapter’s goal to better orient the reader about the climate of Detroit as well as offer a pre-history to the study conducted. This chapter ultimately gets the reader ready to relate to the following chapters’ subject matter by focusing on the makeup of the region, by providing an early history of Detroit and by providing a longitudinal overview highlighting Detroit’s early workings and unique cultural traits.

This chapter provides specific acknowledgment of Motown Records’ success, which in turn defined Detroit music to the nation and the world. This chapter will also provide an overview of the main “phases” of Detroit rock music history. In addition to early regional history and musical phases, this chapter also offers coverage on other avenues of importance such as the unique racial climate that distinguishes Detroit. It is the historical events, artists, turmoil, and people which have played, and continue to play, a significant role in Detroit’s musical output. The following helps to set the stage to better relate and fully understand the complete document.
DETROIT: THE GROUNDING

The first documented European voyage to Detroit dates to the summer of 1669 when the French explorer Adrien Joliet was guided down the St. Clair-Detroit waterway by an Iriquois Indian.\(^1\) A decade later, the famous Great Lakes explorer, Robert Cavalier de la Salle, came in the Griffin, which was noted as the first sailing vessel on the Detroit waters.\(^2\) It was de la Salle's party which named Lake Ste. Claire, now known as Lake St. Clair.

Detroit’s most notable and widely told history starts with Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac. Cadillac arrived at the future location of Detroit in July 1701. The site of Cadillac’s camp was strategically chosen for protecting French interests in the Great Lakes, which supported a thriving fur market. The main river near this new location was called d’Étroit, a French word meaning strait. The new village under construction was named by Cadillac as ville d’étroit, which translated to “city of the strait.”\(^3\)

Detroit was incorporated as a town in 1802. In 1805, Detroit was selected as the capital of the newly created Michigan territory. Detroit’s growing success was not long lived. On June 11, 1805, a fire totally destroyed the developing town. Although the fire was a setback for Detroit as it burned down every building, it offered an opportunity to redesign the layout and structure of Detroit from a clean slate, and gear the area for its future uses and rising population. Detroit became a city in 1815. To create a street design for the quickly developing city, the judge Augustus B. Woodward selected Pierre Charles L’Enfant’s plans for Washington, D.C., as a base layout. Utilizing a hexagon street, with a park in the middle and wide streets radiating outward in a hub-and-spoke pattern, the city was designed. As Detroit grew, Woodward thought additional hexagons could be added parallel to the original one. This idea, however, was eventually abandoned and a grid street pattern was superimposed over the hexagonal design.\(^4\)
this day, has a makeup of hexagonal streets in the center of the city called Campus Martias, while the rest of the city has standard grid-based street systems from the hexagon center.

Detroit, as the capital of the state, was pivotal in Michigan eventually gaining statehood in 1837; ten years later, fearing Detroit’s vulnerability to foreign invasion due to its close proximity to Canada and waterways that could be easily navigated by foreign armies, the Michigan legislature moved the state’s capital from Detroit to the middle of the state in Lansing.

Since its inception, Detroit has always been a city of firsts. In 1879, Detroit telephone customers were the first in the nation to be assigned phone numbers to facilitate handling calls. In 1909, the first mile of paved concrete road was built on Woodward Avenue between McNichols and Seven Mile Road. In 1915, the country’s first traffic light was installed in downtown Detroit. The nation’s first regularly scheduled air passenger service began operation between Grand Rapids and Detroit in 1926. In 1930, the first automobile traffic tunnel built between two nations opened -- the mile-long Detroit-Windsor tunnel under the Detroit River, and in 1942, the nation’s first urban freeway, the Davison, was finished.  

In the twentieth century, many of Detroit’s firsts evolved around the automobile industry. Although the first automobile produced in Detroit was constructed by The Olds Motor Vehicle Works established by Ransom E. Olds and Frank Clark, one of the most important events in the history of Detroit was the development of the first assembly line by Henry Ford. Introduced in 1913, the assembly line revolutionized the automobile industry in Detroit and, in turn, revolutionized corporations and industrialization around the world. Ford sought to “democratize the car, so that everyone could afford one.”

It was Ford’s intention to build an automobile more powerful than the Oldsmobile and also light enough to travel muddy roads without getting stuck, large enough to hold an entire
family, easy to operate, simple to repair, and, perhaps most importantly, inexpensive. Henry Ford, his team of Michigan engineers and the Ford Motor company work force did just that—they made the automobile accessible and common place.\(^7\)

Perhaps more important than the success and versatility of the new Ford car was the fact that Ford paid his assembly line workers five dollars a day. This wage made thousands of employees potential customers to purchase a car for their own use. It was this cyclical system of higher wages for more Detroiter who could then afford cars themselves that set the landmark success of Ford Motor Company.

The news of Ford Motor Company’s generous wages traveled the country and, in turn, more and more workers headed to Detroit with hopes of working in the automotive industry. Detroit developed as the center of the automobile industry because of its abundance of available capital to invest in new enterprises, its leadership in the manufacturing business, and the extraordinary number of skilled craftsmen and inventors who resided in the state. Not only did the automobile alter the economic growth of Michigan and the nation, but it also revolutionized American society toward industrialization.\(^8\)

Rubenstein and Ziewacz, in their book *Michigan: A History of the Great Lakes State*, find that no other invention affected every aspect of American life to the extent of Detroit’s creation of the automobile. They find that the influence of Detroit engineers on the automobile exceeded any other invention and altered nearly every avenue of the American life:

The coming of the car marked the beginning of widespread decline in respect for law and order, as speed limits were exceeded, illegal turns made, and parking rules flaunted. Smoking habits changed as men began to utilize cigarettes and cigars more than a pipe because the latter was difficult to relight while driving. Morals were dramatically affected as young lovers left the front porch and mother’s watchful eye to whisper sweet nothings to each other in the back seats of cars. Houses became smaller, with fewer bedrooms, because guests no longer had
to remain overnight. Women’s skirts rose so they would not become embellished with the accelerator, brake, and clutch pedals.  

Rubenstein and Ziewacz also find that the automobile and the alteration of American culture posed many new businesses opportunities and gave rise to a new age of tourism around the country by saying,

Tourism thrived and in 1915 automobile dealers promoted the initial “See America First” campaign. In 1920 over 10 million people were housed at auto courts, and five years later, the first motor hotel, or motel was built. As mobility increased and people visited new areas of the country, job transfers became common. Family ties were weakened as cars made it easier for young adults to leave home. Michigan put the nation on wheels and it was never the same again.  

Due to the incredible success of the automotive industry Detroit quickly became one of the most influential cities in America. In fact, on June 19, 1920, *The New York Times* declared Detroit as the fourth largest city in the United States as it displaced St. Louis. Between 1900 and 1930, the city's population soared from 265,000 to over 1.5 million. The landscape of the city also changed dramatically due to the influx of new residents. Detroit became known as the Paris of the Midwest for its tree-shaded avenues; the city took on a more blue-collar appearance as its riverfront became lined with factories and grain silos. At the same time, as industrialization soared, Detroit’s downtown flourished architecturally, largely under the leadership of architects Albert Kahn and Robert O. Derrick, who both worked directly with Henry Ford and other automotive pioneers. Kahn and Derrick were responsible for many of Detroit’s notable architectural skyscrapers, factories, museums and mansions. Both architects are ranked as some of the most influential in the United States according the American Institute of Architects.  

During World War II, the automobile industry played a crucial role in the manufacture of weapons and vehicles, earning the city another nickname by Theodore Roosevelt as “The
Arsenal of Democracy.” It was also during war time at Ford’s Willow Run B-24 Bomber plant that the nickname for women who worked in the war, Rosie the Riveter, originated.\textsuperscript{14} 

By the 1920s, Detroit’s status as the automotive capital of the country was paying great dividends. Its population boomed and the city began to spread out, annexing surrounding areas rapidly between 1900 and 1925.\textsuperscript{15} Great chunks of the city’s current makeup were added in the 1920s as the city grew. Detroit adapted a “mile road” system to keep better track of the grid road system, where the main roads were labeled according to the number of miles away from Detroit’s downtown Campus Martius district. The mile road grid system begins at 1 mile road, which is known as Warren Road, and continues to 37 mile road which is 37 miles away from downtown Detroit.

Detroit as a city added great chunks of land to its boarders until it reached 8 Mile Road. There it stopped. Today, 8 Mile Road represents an unbridgeable legal and social barrier to further Detroit expansion. One of the reasons for the halt of subsequent expansion was that 8 Mile Road represented the change of counties from Wayne County (which houses Detroit) to Oakland County (which is exclusively suburbs).

The inability to annex property beyond 8 Mile Road was not immediately problematic as the population of Detroit was large enough to fill all building projects in and outside of the city.\textsuperscript{16} However, as the years went by, Detroit’s lack of new property for building and development became a tragedy for the city. Detroit remains a city of 139 square miles, compared to Sunbelt cities like Houston, Texas that used annexation powers to grow to more than 500 square miles.\textsuperscript{17} The result is that Detroit was never able to capture the suburban growth and prosperity of later years. This would condemn the city from the 1950s on to watch, hopelessly, as the middle class fled the city limits for the suburbs. Alfred Taubman, land developer and Detroit retail mall
mogul, attributes this great suburban expansion in Michigan to one easy denominator: the sale of water. Detroit, as a city, was willing to sell its drinking water to suburban communities. Taubman contends that if the city was not so eager to sell its water for a profit to suburban communities past 8 Mile Road, the lack of “city” water would have greatly slowed the development of new suburban communities.18

Population continuously decreased after the 1950s as Detroit’s population of nearly two million residents began to dwindle to its current low of 899,387 residents. Although the city’s population decreased significantly, a large majority of the six million residents in the Detroit suburban area continued to use downtown Detroit. From this suburban use, significant development continued in the city. In 1960, Detroit’s main convention center, Cobo Hall, was completed and now occupies more than 700,000 square feet of exhibition space.

The Renaissance Center, designed to bring people and growth back to the center of the city, was one of the largest privately-financed projects in the world. The Renaissance Center concept, spurred by Henry Ford II, was planned in 1970 after the 1967 riots left Detroit’s reputation blemished.19 Its goal was to boost the Detroit economy, with 26 business, economic and civic leaders pledging to making the revitalization in Detroit happen. The Renaissance Center was completed in 1977.

The prosperity and hope to spur the economy unfortunately did not last as the population continued to decrease. The Renaissance Center, which was built for more than $500 million was in default of its mortgage by 1982. In May 1996, General Motors purchased the Renaissance Center for $73 million to use as its headquarters and pledged to invest $500 million restoring the facility.20
Threaded throughout Detroit’s history is a strong multicultural presence. Detroit, originally home to the Pottawatomie Indians, became known as a melting pot blend of national ethnicities including Irish, German, and Jewish which all settled in the community for work in the industrial factories. In the 1950s Dearborn, a suburb 10 minutes to the West of Detroit, began to have a large influx of Arab-American residents, and this community currently has the largest concentration of Arab-Americans in the country. Of all the diverse ethnicities, Detroit’s African-American presence holds the most lasting influence over the Detroit culture. Beginning in the 1950s, racial unrest in Detroit between African-Americans and white residents was spurred as automobile manufacturers such as Ford, Chrysler and GM began to automate their assembly lines and outsource production to subcontractors located in other regions as well as in foreign countries.\textsuperscript{21}

AFRICAN-AMERICAN TURMOIL IN DETROIT

As Detroit corporations were cutting back on labor and wages, it was the African-American workers, who as a whole had less seniority and lower job grades overall than white workers, that had the most significant wage cuts. According to historian Thomas Sugrue, young workers, especially those who had no post-secondary education, found that entry-level operative jobs that had been open in Detroit to their fathers or older siblings in the 1940s and early 1950s were now gone.\textsuperscript{22}

The anger and despair that prevailed among black Detroiters would eventually explode in the summer of 1967. The Detroit Riot of 1967 began when police officers conducted a surprise raid on an after hours bar in a predominantly black neighborhood located at Twelfth Street and Clairmount Avenue. The police officers were expecting to round up a few patrons, but
instead found 82 people inside holding a party for two returning Vietnam veterans. Regardless of the large crowd, the officers attempted to arrest everyone who was on the scene. While the police awaited a bus to transport the bar patrons, a crowd gathered around the establishment in protest. After the last police car left, a small group of men lifted up the bars of an adjacent clothing store and broke the windows. From this point of origin, further reports of vandalism spread. Looting and fires moved through the Northwest side of Detroit, then crossed over to the East Side.

Within 48 hours, the National Guard was mobilized in Detroit, to be followed by the 82nd Airborne Division on the riot’s fourth day. As police and military troops sought to regain control of the city, violence escalated. Many of the suburbs’ borders were secured with fully automatic machine guns and tanks. After five days of massive rioting, 43 Detroiter were dead, 1,189 injured and over 7,000 people had been arrested. 23

From the 1967 riots to the present, Detroit is still strongly divided racially. *Detroit News* columnist Ron French finds these divisions are often dismissed by politicians and widely accepted by the residents of Detroit and the surrounding suburbs. French finds the new segregation enacted in Detroit is enforced by choice rather than law. The prevalence of this segregation has frustrated longtime civil rights leaders and raised new questions about the necessity, and meaning, of integration within the Detroit culture, which is often defined as the most segregated neighborhoods in the nation. 24

The segregation in the Detroit area in a current inspection is represented between the city and the suburbs. The city of Detroit is made up of a majority of African-Americans and the suburb structure made up of a majority of the white residents. This racial division does not take into account that a large percentage of the suburban residents come into the city for business and pleasure—but leave at the end of the day.
Mary Winston, a lifelong Detroit resident says, “I was born and raised here (and) we’re still dealing with the same things, I’m afraid I’ll have to live to 100 to see things better.”

Martin Luther King III, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, is frustrated by the lack of progress in Detroit. King says that the current fight is for the right to live where one chooses, yet that often comes with strong self-segregation in the Detroit area.

Regardless of the strong racial divide and turmoil in Detroit, the African-American community is the main ingredient to Detroit’s musical success. America’s Musical Life: A History by Richard Crawford, written in 2001, makes a strong case regarding the influence of Detroit-born African-Americans in popular music. Although the success of the African-American community has been widely acknowledged, little research has been done aside from Motown to directly highlight the reasons for its success. With the exception of research compiled on jazz in the last 20 years in Detroit (undertaken by the scholar Lars Bjorn of the University of Michigan-Dearborn), the extent of African-American influence on musical directions as a whole have remained, and continue to remain, for the most part hidden.

Mary Packet-Abt, an invited scholar and research fellow at Wayne State University, in her colloquium entitled, “City Life and Music Performance in Detroit 1800-1920,” states, “Detroit’s rich early African-American past is documented in both the Detroit Public Library’s Burton Collection and also its E. Azalia Hackley collection. From minstrels, to early jazz, to the opera performances by all African-American casts, the true basis of Detroit’s musical footing rests in this early work.” It is these early African-American performances that in many ways provide the grounding for this study to take place.
DETROIT’S MUSIC TO THE MASSES: MOTOWN

Without a doubt, Motown Records formed the cornerstone of Detroit Music. In 1966, three out of every four Motown releases made the charts and this high hit ratio helped to produce $100 million in annual sales for many years. Motown paved the way for subsequent musical success to continue in the Detroit community. The study of Motown records has a main ingredient: the story of Berry Gordy, Jr., who was born in Detroit on November 28, 1929. Gordy was brought up in a tight-knit family. He dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade to become a professional boxer until 1950 when he was drafted by the United States Army for the Korean War.

After the war, Gordy eventually formed Motown Records, a label that was revolutionary in promoting African-American artists to the American society at large. During the 1960s, Motown became one of the largest successes in American music, competing with the draw and magnitude of The Beatles. To gain this musical success, Gordy assembled local Detroit artists at a house which was converted to a recording studio on the main floor and offices on the second floor where bedrooms would have been located. Gordy’s converted house at 2648 West Grand Boulevard was called “Hitsville USA,” and eventually became one of the most famous addresses in Detroit. Gordy, talking of Motown’s overall success, says, “I earned $367 million in 16 years. I must be doing something right.” Gordy sculpted and perfected his Motown musicians’ abilities, style, and songs to become both catchy music to hum along to as well as fashionable musicians to watch on television.

The artists who occupied Motown's studio included The Supremes, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, The Temptations, Martha and The Vandellas, The Four Tops, The Contours, The
Marvelettes, Mary Wells, Junior Walker and The All-Stars, Gladys Knight and The Pips, The Isley Brothers and The Miracles.

The most successful Motown act was The Supremes, an all girl group that had number one hits on the *Billboard* Music Charts with “Where Did Our Love Go,” “Baby Love,” “Come See About Me,” “Stop! In the Name of Love,” “Back in My Arms Again,” “I Hear a Symphony,” and “You Can’t Hurry Love.” The Supremes have continually held the title of the most successful female singing group of all time. The group’s lead singer, Diana Ross, eventually continued with a solo singing career as well as becoming an actress.

Motown’s success was not just contained to just its musical artists, but also its behind-the-scene songwriters and producers. Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland, who wrote as well as produced the majority of The Supremes’ hits, became nearly household names in the 1960s. Motown’s house band, The Funk Brothers, also gained fame as they were utilized on a majority of the records produced at the Motown Studio.

The Funk Brothers were comprised of some of the best musicians in Detroit, including Earl Van Dyke on keyboards, Benny Benjamin on drums, and James Jamerson on bass. These individuals were not only important for the albums they played on, but also their crucial role in the development of the Motown sound.

Motown Records’ sound, which is often referred to as the Motown sound, was known for bringing together rhythm-and-blues, gospel, and pop influences, which blended the genre distinctions of its music that in turn allowed the music to reach a larger audience of listeners, including the white middle class youth. Motown records were engineered with the teenage audience in mind as they were specifically mixed to sound good on car radios and nearly always had a prevalent backbeat that made dancing to the songs easy. Gordy had a goal for Motown
which he defined as “The Sound of Young America,” and he understood that young people had a much greater listening and purchasing ability than any one specific niche group or cultural group. Gordy was continually cognizant of this which made Motown Records songs dominate the charts for a wide range of audiences.  

The ultimate success and profitable nature of Motown Records was due to the efficiency and quality control the organization adopted. Gordy prided himself on having learned about producing a quality product from his early career on the assembly line at a Ford Motor Company automobile plant. As the President of Motown, Gordy had rigorous quality control meetings, and only records that could pass the harsh criticism of his talent scouts and staff were released to consumers. As a result, Motown, in the mid- to-late 1960s, enjoyed the highest hit ratio for its released singles of any record company in music history.

Along with running efficiently and producing quality songs, artist development was a critical component to the label’s success. The Motown artists often found that a finishing school atmosphere was provided by Motown Records. The Supremes, and many others, were schooled in social graces and manners prior to touring. As the tour began, chaperones were mandatory to accompany the artists, and the artist was to act in accordance to the Motown practices at all times. Commenting on the grooming of Motown, Martha Reeves, who was a Motown recording artist, says, “Berry knew how to build an artist. Once he got to a point, it was up to you to take the lesson and go on and do your job and keep yourself on your own feet, or you’d fall by the wayside. But they gave us everything we needed.”

It was perhaps due to Berry Gordy and Motown that the Detroit rock scene came to have success. The region was already primed for producing some of the best, chart topping songs. The Detroiter associated with Motown helped to define the region as being synonymous with
great musicians. It is an easy assertion to make that Motown helped catapult Detroit rock music into a successful musical form.

To understand Detroit rock music, especially from a longitudinal framework, it is important to emphasize each era that represented unique shifts in Detroit rock music. The following will identify the main occurrences within rock music through each rock music era in Detroit.

ROCK MUSIC AND THE RISE OF THE 1960s: BRANCHING FROM MOTOWN

As Detroit rock music moved beyond Motown and took shape in the 1960s a large portion of its direction resulted from its location of creation. The first rock music location in Detroit was a rented Veterans of Foreign War (VFW) hall in Harper Woods, which was a suburb on the east side of Detroit. The VFW hall would allow a sign hung on the outside of the building saying “The Hideout.” This location offered many of Detroit’s rock musicians a first venue for their musical performances and a location for the audiences of Detroit to be subjects to some of the first rock and roll music. The Hideout specifically offered Mitch Ryder, Bob Seger, Ted Nugent, The MC5, and many other musicians a venue to gain more exposure on their musical paths.

The success and widespread appeal of many of the prior Detroit musicians who started in the 1960s at The Hideout is massive. Mitch Ryder, the identified starting point of Detroit rock musicians, is known as the first artist to guide Detroit into rock music. Ryder’s inspiration from the earlier black soul and rhythm and blues allowed a large group of Detroiter in the 1960s the ability to hear and appreciate the black musical attributes, which were embodied in his enthusiastic delivery. Ryder’s stage shows were found to be theatrical in nature and, again, drew
parallels from earlier African-American artists such as Little Richard. Ryder’s overall appeal was evident in his song “Jenny Take a Ride,” which was an instant success, hitting number ten on the *Billboard* charts in January 1966. Ryder’s biggest hit, however, was a remake of an obscure Motown record by Shorty Long, “Devil With a Blue Dress On,” combined with another Little Richard song, “Good Golly Miss Molly.” Ryder’s combination of these songs reached number four on the *Billboard* charts in October 1966 and became an all-time favorite of the Baby Boomer generation. “Good Golly Miss Molly/Devil With a Blue Dress On” was listed as one of the 100 best singles of the 1963-1988 era by *Rolling Stone* magazine.

Bob Seger also became a successful musician in the 1960s. Seger had a hit single with “East Side Story” and was eventually signed to Capitol Records. By 1969, with his band the Bob Seger System, Seger had a top 20 hit with “Ramblin’ Gamblin’ Man.” Seger’s hard-working, heavily touring nature made him a Midwestern rock music role model throughout much of the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Ted Nugent’s early success in the 1960s is linked to his band The Amboy Dukes. It was in the 1960s at The Hideout that Nugent began playing a Gibson Byrdland, a hollow-body electric guitar known for producing heavy, but easy to attain feedback. Although Nugent continuously was a proponent of a drug-free lifestyle, his other band members were not so “clean” as proven by The Amboy Dukes’ psychedelic hit “Journey to the Center of the Mind.” Although The Amboy Dukes’ success was, in fact, confined to the 1960s, Nugent’s solo career saw great success through the 1980s and 1990s and he has sold over 20 million albums.

The Motor City 5, better known as The MC5 was perhaps the main pillar in Detroit’s rock music scene in the 1960s. The MC5, through their loud, intense, and political nature brought an edge to Detroit’s 1960s musical climate. The MC5 celebrated sex, drugs, and rock
and roll through their music and stage antics, and, perhaps accordingly, corporate censorship limited the band’s hopes of mainstream success. Regardless of The MC5’s marketability, their cumulative sound and musical style became one of the most influential on rock artists throughout the country.

All of these artists performed at The Hideout. The Hideout and its history is an important ingredient to the initial 1960s rock music mentality in Detroit. The Hideout was created by Dave Leone and Ed “Punch” Andrews. They signed The Fugitives as the first band to play at their venue. The Fugitives, with little commercial success, and small musical influence in comparison to Mitch Ryder, Bob Seger, Ted Nugent, and the MC5, were the real reason for the initial appeal of rock music at the location. Much of the early success of The Fugitives, the new form of rock music, and The Hideout seemed to be a rendition of “Louie Louie,” which was originally written by Richard Berry in 1955. Leone finds that it was definitely the bands, not the venue, which drew in the new rock music fans. Leone describes the situation which led to the success of 1960s Detroit rock music by saying,

It was $45 a night to lease the hall. We charged a dollar to get in and we’d pay the bands fifty bucks. We’d hang up the sign and later take it down. And that was the beginning of the Hideout. The place only held 550 capacity. The first night we had 87 people and about four or five fights. The second night we had 113 people and four or five fights. I got a couple strong guys for bouncers, hired the local cops so we wouldn’t have fights and the third night it jumped up to three hundred people. 39

Leone discusses his interpretations of the success of early rock music and the success of The Hideout, which he directly related to the new, provocative lyrics and unrestrained tone of the quickly evolving rock music:

There was one reason [for the success]. It was 1964. You never heard a four letter word on the radio, television, movies, nothing. The Fugitives did a version of “Louie Louie” and they said “fuck.” These 87 kids, their eyes just went “boing” and they told all their friends. The next week there’s 500 kids, a line out
the door. People started filing complaints to the city. It was really the beginning of a lotta things in rock n’ roll—live bands, PA systems were being put together.40

As the success of The Hideout and the early rock music grew, so did the local talent waiting on the sidelines to play the newly opening music clubs in Detroit. Around 1965, the demand for live music was heading toward an unprecedented level, and Detroit’s new musicians rose to the challenge to fill the available spots for performances.

Leone talks about the local nature of the rise of Detroit rock music in the 1960s by saying, “seeing Herman’s Hermits on was one thing but discovering that squirrelly guy with the shaggy hair from your study hall was on TV, wailin’ out a would-be hit record was quite another. Which, not unexpectedly, inspired even more kids to grab a guitar, a set of sticks or a microphone.”41

Approaching the late 1960s, the musical climate of Detroit was evolving again. This time the music scene was moving past the initial intrigue of the first rock music pioneers who were revolutionary merely for swearing in the lyrics. The new musical direction, perhaps directed by the clout and power of The Beatles, The Who and The Rolling Stones, as well as the rest of the British musical invasion, formed a new musical appreciation. The late 1960s found an audience more receptive to less polished music with more political or cultural meaning. By 1967, the early rock pioneers that brought fame to the initial idea of “rock,” such as Mitch Ryder and his band, were breaking up or evolving to new stylistic tendencies. It was in the late 1960s that The MC5, Iggy Pop and the Stooges, The Amboy Dukes and Bob Seger System began to gain a major audience. However, pressured by the realities of high school graduation, the draft toward the war in Vietnam and a maturing audience, the climate of the late 1960s music scene did not last long.
1970 AND THE END OF THE COUNTERCULTURE

Drugs and personality issues continued to taken their toll on a number of Detroit’s successful bands in the 1970s, most notably The MC5, The Stooges, Bob Seger System, and The Amboy Dukes. The overall climate of the 1970s in Detroit seemed to be that of regression. According to one famous Detroit quotation, “When the nation gets a cold, Detroit gets pneumonia.” This is the exact phenomenon that played heavily into the Detroit culture for this decade.

Although the 1970s economic slowdown in the Detroit manufacturing base hurt the local economy, the mass production mindset of automation and robotics was created to help trim losses from decreasing profits. This method of mass production, which produced more profits for Detroit’s automotive sector, was the same idea coming into fashion in the 1970s musical venues.

The opening of large arenas in the 1970s was paramount in changing the Detroit culture and mass producing the musical venue experience. Another worthy switch to the Detroit music culture was the lowering of the legal drinking age to 18 in the 1970s; the entertainment focus for a large segment of Detroit’s youth became bars rather than concert halls. The 1970s climate for Detroit musicians was not exclusively in regression. As many of the once-famous groups disbanded in the 1970s, the breakups subsequently launched several successful solo careers, such as Iggy Pop from his band Iggy Pop and the Stooges and Ted Nugent from his earlier band The Amboy Dukes.

It was in the 1970s that Bob Seger became a national widespread success. Beginning with 1976’s album “Night Moves,” the title track of which became a top 5 hit, Seger continued
a lengthy hit streak which included “Still The Same,” “Hollywood Nights,” “We've Got Tonight,” “Fire Lake,” and “Against The Wind.” Through his many chart topping songs, his albums and music career in the 1970s was a major success. The album “Live Bullet” went quadruple platinum, “Night Moves” and “Stranger In Town” both went quintuple platinum, and Seger had his first number one album, “Against The Wind,” which went quadruple platinum.43

1980: MUSIC REBELS AND A MELTING POT

The common view of rock music in the 1980s is often associated with heavily polished “hair” bands best known for their overuse of hairspray and spandex. Although this “polished” view represents some of the national acts that stopped in Detroit in the 1980s, as well as the direction some of the larger, already famous, rock bands moved, Detroit was heavily involved in the roots of the “Garage Rock” movement of the 1980s. This movement was embedded with the ideals of refuting the commercial culture, defying the mainstream music, and focused on “not selling out.”44

The Garage Rock Detroit underground musical scene drew a diverse group of musicians and fans. Garage Rock became one of the largest, fastest growing underground, and, eventually, mainstream scenes in Detroit.45

The Garage Rock ideal, especially as it relates to Detroit, became popular in the 1980s for bringing the “underground,” which was signified as raw, untamed, and unpolished, into the mainstream. The aspect of bands crossing over from the underground, non-publicized segment, into the mainstream of society has historically been detrimental to many underground movements. As bands move from the underground and are diffused in popular media, the term
“sellout” usually halts their subsequent career. Their original fans usually move on to find a less “mainstream” artist.

Malcolm Gladwell documents this phenomenon in the documentary “Merchants of Cool,” by identifying that when the new cool gadget, music, or idea is taken from the creators and diffused to the mass public, it kills the original “coolness” and makes the creators move on to find the next new idea. Although this cyclical pattern of “coolness” seems to apply to most popular culture items, contemporary Garage Rock of the 1980s seems to have avoided its effect.

The surprising issue within the 1980s Detroit garage scene is that the music is not specifically advocating any kind of rebellion like the earlier counterculture movements against war, elder generations, or the need for sexual freedoms. Almost every other style, as well as decade, of Detroit music has been an attempt to deliberately challenge a faction of society. In this case, the 1980s Garage Rock has often been viewed in a limited light, most likely because it becomes hard to position what the root cause of the movement stemmed from.

“What the Detroit Garage Rock scene did was more subversive because it is using the mainstream in a way that attempts to destroy it from the inside,” states Eric Abbey in his 2006 text *Garage Rock and its Roots: Musical Rebels and the Drive for Individuality*. By embracing the success of bands that maintain underground ideals, the Garage Rock scene states that these ideals are in some way something to strive to obtain.

The 1980s Garage Rock scene out of Detroit, and its view of defying mass marketed music and praising home grown, unique, noncommercial music even transcended national borders and eventually permeated the Australian culture where their Australian music scene developed a specific style of music, reminiscent of the music in Detroit at the time, and called the Australian music movement “Detroit Garage Rock.”
1990s AND BEYOND: DETROIT CONTINUES TO PERSEVERE

The 1990s brought a new shift to the Detroit music culture. Growing tired of the anti-establishment sentiments of the 1980s garage movement, Detroiter’s looked to switch the message for the next decade. In the 1990s, several areas of Detroit music skyrocketed to the top of national attention. With the success of bands such as Sponge, The Verve Pipe and Kid Rock presenting a more polished, classic rock music and bands such as The White Stripes, Von Bondies, Taproot, The Dirtboms, and Electric Six producing more raw rock sounds, Detroit had a varied musical intrigue. Other bands such as The Hard Lessons and The Muggs also revived and continued producing music which falls toward Detroit’s historical rock scene tones and sentiments, and again found a receptive national audience.

Assessing the 1990s, it is important to include the other genres of music that formed in this decade from the same Detroit musical heritage. The Detroit area became accepted as the birthplace of techno, which has grown since 1990 through local radio and clubs to dance venues worldwide. Seminal Detroit Techno artists include Juan Atkins, Derrick May, and Kevin Saunderson, all of whom went on to worldwide acclaim. Detroit techno music reached a worldwide audience and, in Europe, triggered a revolution in both youth culture and music industry.

In a similar vain, Detroit’s hip hop scene also rose to prominence in the 1990s with the emergence of nationally renowned acts, such as Eminem, Kid Rock, Insane Clown Posse, Slum Village, D12, J Dilla, Obie Trice, Twiztid, Blade Icewood, Big Herk, Tone Tone, and Esham.

Overall, the 1990s musicians presented an even greater diversification of the Detroit music scene. The incorporation of the influential rap and techno scenes into the already famous,
and continually producing, rock culture shows the diversity and strength of Detroit’s musical community. One of the first areas to investigate to better understand how the strength was created and is possessed by the Detroit music community is the distinct presence of the region’s music industry.
NOTES


8. Ibid.


10. Ibid.


16. Ibid.

18. Alfred Taubman, presentation in December 2006, for Cityscape Detroit at Center for Creative Studies.


34. Hitsville USA personal tour of the facility, Detroit, MI, August 23, 2007.

36. “Mitch Ryder Biography,” accessed April 12, 2008, 
http://www.musicianguide.com/biographies/1608002199/Mitch-Ryder.html

37. “Bob Seger Biography,” accessed April 5, 2008 from: 


40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Chris Handyside, “Laying Down Detroit Sounds,” Model D, April 4, 2006, 

43. “Bob Seger Biography,” accessed April 5, 2008 from: 


45. Ibid.


CHAPTER III
DETROIT MUSIC INDUSTRY

“If music was like the Olympics, [Detroit] would be like Russia.”

-- Dick Valentine of Electric Six.

The relation between Detroit artists and the Detroit music industry represents an important element to better understand the Detroit music community. From identifying the unique factors that led to Detroit’s music industry interactions, and how the music industry has benefited from the Detroit region’s culture, it is possible to more clearly understand how the region produces an unusual amount of artistic success. This chapter will provide coverage of the radio evolution in the Detroit marketplace, how Detroit’s counterculture movement produced a more clear direction and cumulative voice for the local music scene, and how Detroit music labels direct and shape the region’s musical products through their clout, artistic directions and sometimes bribery of radio stations. This chapter will ultimately show how little has changed in regard to success in the Detroit music industry from its early beginning in the 1960s to a more current inspection.

EARLY RADIO

Musicians from Detroit represent a strong and profitable product for the music industry. Motown represented one of Detroit’s earliest ingredients to the massive string of popular music associated with the region. Motown artists had 110 Top Ten hits from 1960 -1970. From
Motown’s successful radio domination, coupled with a thriving Detroit rock scene, Detroit songs, music, and ideals were aired all around the country in a steady stream.

Rock music in Detroit in the 1960s was a different commodity than the established Motown sound. Although both musical styles shared a relation with African-American inspired rhythms and a great association with the youth culture, Motown was polished and professional, and the new rock music was rough and raw. Detroit rock artists, although different from Motown, were still able to maintain the success streak to both the radio audiences and the music industry due to Motown’s success.

The years 1965 to 1972 represented the era when Detroit rock music became a widespread success. These years have also been called the “season of rebellion,” which refers to one of the most pivotal shifts of American consumer musical tastes. This shift of tastes, from Motown’s polished demeanor to the untamed cries of the young rock bands, directly influenced the music that was heard on radio and throughout the venues in Detroit. It was in this time period that the diversification toward rock and roll music occurred and, within Detroit, it was this time period that brought rock and roll, and its related political messages, into a national spotlight.

These years provided more than just the proliferation of a new style of music, rock and roll; these years were also the proving ground for the music industry to stay current and, ultimately, ahead of the quickly changing consumer music trends. These new rock musicians represented a new evolving form of music that the record labels had not dealt with in the past. Many of the Detroit rock bands did not have the social graces that were expected of the Motown acts. These new Detroit artists with long hair and rowdy behavior were not as easy to direct and influence. Rock music of the 1960s represented a product that the record labels were not versed in, but the success of these early rock artists proved a lucrative musical commodity.
To better understand how the late 1960s Detroit musical evolution toward rock and roll occurred and how the music industry helped to propel Detroit artists’ careers, it is necessary to look at the media that preceded this rise in Detroit rock music. One of the most important contributors to the history of rock music and the rise of the musical industries’ strength was the creation of television.

The introduction of television in the 1950s, followed by the syndication of dance party television shows such as “The Ed Sullivan Show” and “American Bandstand” to network television in 1957, increased consumer demand for popular music. Television and the newly developing music television format had an announcer briefly interviewing upcoming music stars, allowing the musicians to perform their hit songs, and play video footage of the teens dancing and enjoying the live performances of such musical acts as The Beatles, Bob Dylan, and The Who. This music television concept was intriguing and influential to a large segment of the American youth population and set the stage for the strong relationship between youth culture and musical acts.

Prior to TV’s rise, radio stations’ programming agendas maintained the exclusive ability to provide American society with popular nationally produced radio shows that included drama, comedy, live music, and several day time serials and news reports. Detroit’s early radio was unique from other national syndication due to a local radio segment also being included in its broadcast. The radio station CKLW produced and broadcast 142 radio sketches from 1945-1962 which focused exclusively on Detroit’s regional history and heritage. The sketches of early Detroit radio are archived in transcription in the Essex County Historical Association’s compilation entitled *Radio Sketches of Periods, Events, Personalities.*
During early radio’s dominance, changes in Americans’ musical preferences were slowly adopted and the changes in musical taste were easy for the music labels to adapt to accommodate due to the gradual change. After the wide dispersion of TV, and the incorporation of “American Bandstand” and “The Ed Sullivan Show” as well as several similar spin off shows including Detroit’s own “Swingin’ Time,” the promotion of new musical acts to the American society took place weekly. This change in musical consumption forced the music labels and radio stations to be ready, with tangible musical records to be in stores and at radio stations, should a change in America’s musical tastes occur.

In the 1960s, the popularity of television grew much more readily than the older, more commonly available programming of AM radio. No longer did families gather in living rooms to listen to the radio programs which aired every evening; now television was the focus of attention. Gradually, television nearly replaced the nationally syndicated radio programs, as radio had difficulty competing with the visual mass appeal of the television set.

As nationally syndicated radio became obsolete to the American family, newly evolving smaller radio shows served local communities and markets throughout the country. In turn, this regional radio allowed a more segmented market of listeners to develop. In the early 1960s, as parents turned on the television, teenagers tuned in the AM radio. Radio began filling spaces that it never before occupied: the bedroom, the workplace, and retail stores. These new locations for radio found receptive audiences all around society throughout the work day and all around the clock.

The quickly changing audience demographics and the changing role of radio around the country demanded that local radio stations become more flexible to meet the needs of their newly forming audiences. One of the unique factors that separated the “new” radio in Detroit
from the radio around the country was the presence, and the influential role of the disc jockey. Dan Carlyle, a disc jockey on WABX-Detroit says that the Detroit radio disc jockeys had more interaction with their listening audiences than anywhere around the country. This interaction and camaraderie between disc jockey and radio listener quickly gave way to a new phenomenon: disc jockeys as local heroes. The hero status that the disc jockeys received was more apparent in the Detroit radio market than anywhere else in the country.

David Carson, speaking about Detroit’s disc jockeys hero status in his book, *Rockin’ Down the Dial*, recounts a story from the early 1960s in which police were called to the scene of a disturbance in an usually calm, middle-class neighborhood in northwest Detroit. They arrived to find what looked like a potentially volatile situation as several thousand teenagers were beginning to overflow onto a small street. Cars were parked haphazardly and neighbors were cautiously observing the proceedings from the safety of their front porches, while lawns around them were turned into mush. Upon further investigation, it was found that the crowd had gathered by invitation of a local disc jockey, Mickey Shorr, who had recently moved into the neighborhood and announced his address on the air. “They’re all my good buddies and good gals” was only explanation Shorr had given for the impromptu party.

As radio continued to evolve in Detroit and the disc jockeys maintained their hero status, the audience wanted to spend time around their newly appointed idols and listen to their advice on the newest musical trends. One way the Detroit disc jockeys would interact face-to-face with many of their radio program listeners, or fans, was the evolving local record hops.

The record hop involved a local radio disc jockey going to a rented hall and playing new records to an eagerly awaiting group of listeners. The listeners would get to hear the very latest in musical offerings “hot off the presses,” would get to see their favorite disc jockeys face-to-
face, and, often, would get to dance to the new songs. The record hop provided disc jockeys the opportunity to become identifiable heroes to the listening audience as well as learn what songs and styles had a positive effect on the radio station’s audience. This new phenomenon of the record hop was the first time the radio audience was “captured” in a tangible setting. The record hop proved pivotal to the evolution of the Detroit music scene. It allowed a group of like-minded fans the chance to bond over similar musical tastes.

One of the most influential individuals within Detroit for bringing like minded youth together to relate to new music was Russ Gibb. Gibb seemed an unlikely Detroit musical icon. He was a grade school teacher by day. His musical ventures in Detroit eventually led to him to being a successful disc jockey in the evenings at WKNR-Detroit, eventually owing Detroit’s famous Grande Ballroom, as well as owning all southeast Michigan’s cable television licenses. Gibb reminisces on attending a record hop in Detroit for the first time:

I was like, man look at what is going on here, you could feel the energy and the possibilities. So I started doing them myself. I’d rent the hall for $50, pay a DJ $75 to come for a couple hours and play some rock and roll, and charge the kids $1 at the door. The first one I did I made $75. That was big money. I was making $50 a week teaching high school at the time.

The initial record hop mentality was beginning to take hold of Detroit and the concept led to a more united and cultivating musical culture in Detroit.

The equation was perfect in Detroit for a large, successful rock music scene. The radio stations had a large devoted youth fan base; the record hops, using radio disc jockeys to draw like minded fans together, were a massive success and the major labels were aware of Detroit’s longstanding success as a musical community. From these perfect ingredients for success, Detroit was primed for a powerful rock music scene. Like clockwork, new rock bands were formed. It did not take long for the popularity to spread.
RADIO, CULTURE, AND MUSIC EVOLUTION

The early rock music of Detroit began by coming through the early AM radios. Although the AM radio defined Detroit as a unique radio market due to the growth of record hops and a growingly receptive musical audience, it was the switch to FM radio in the late 1960s that allowed the radio to begin to dominate the region and further set Detroit radio programming apart from the rest of the country.20

FM radio quickly caught on to the Detroit culture and, specifically, the rock music culture. FM radio provided Detroiter with more consistent radio reception and allowed car radios to lock into the stations’ frequency without continuously fading in and out like AM radio. Most significantly, perhaps, FM also allowed a better signal to come through many of the brick and metal walls of the Detroit factories and was not as susceptible to equipment and machinery interferences in the delivery of the signal. The Detroit FM radio revolution of 1968 had stations such as WABX, WKNR-FM and WXYZ-FM featuring long sets of music and introducing many new Detroit artists who did not receive airtime on national top 40 radio.21 It was at this time that Detroit’s radio station guidelines regarding rock music became more diverse than other regions around the nation. Ted Nugent finds that Detroit in the 1960s began to define the local radio stations longstanding history of focusing primarily on Detroit audience preferences as opposed to those dictated by national audience trends.22

One of the factors that led to FM radio in Detroit having the ability to try more creative broadcasts, focus on Detroit music listeners preferences, and not follow national mandates was that the FM format was originally seen as just another radio format.23 Initially, FM radio did not represent a more useful broadcast than AM radio. Advertisers were spending on AM radio and
frequently on television, and could not figure any gain by adding FM radio to their advertising
directions and budgets.\textsuperscript{24} It was this advertising revenue scenario that placed less pressure on
Detroit FM stations to be a financial success. The FM stations were able to take risks and try to
cater specifically to their station’s listening audience.

“The main factor that made the Detroit FM radio dial unique,” states Steven Greer of
\textit{Rusted Chrome}, a website focused on Detroit rock music, “was one simple denominator: the
hosts of Detroit’s FM programs.”\textsuperscript{25} Greer is referring to Dave Dixon, Dan Carlysle, and Jerry
Lubin, and the other self-titled “Air Aces” from WABX, as well as Jerry Goodwin and Russ
Gibb on WKNR-FM.

Michael Cary, in his dissertation, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the MC5: Rock Music and
Counterculture Politics in the Sixties}, finds the FM radio format in Detroit to be more
sophisticated:

\begin{quote}
FM jocks played album cuts in addition to the standard 45 RPM singles. Many of
them featured ‘free-format’ shows which were creatively unpredictable. The
heart of the free-format shows was still rock music, but it was supplemented by
whatever seemed to fit, such as old jazz, blues pieces, snippets of movie dialog,
occasional big band numbers and the like.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

The local FM disc jockey pushed the radio envelope further than it had ever been pushed in
Detroit or anywhere in the nation. Dan Carlysle, a former WABX disc jockey, and the
announcer featured on Bob Segers’ \textit{Live Bullet} album, finds that throughout all of his years of
working in radio around the country, “WABX Detroit is the best radio station in the country.
The audience as well as the music industry all knew this.”\textsuperscript{27}

The disc jockeys of the late 1960s in Detroit were many of the best in the country, as on
air personalities, musical selection makers, and leaders of the Detroit musical community. One of
the reasons for the success was their willingness to take risks and listen to the Detroit audiences.
The ultimate influence that the Detroit radio station personalities maintained represented the ground work for the rising rock music culture and the receptive collective Detroit audience.

Although Detroit radio was directed by the local Detroit culture, the national focus of the time period played an important part on Detroit’s music. The national mindset included the draft for the Vietnam war and society keeping track of the Vietnam War combat deaths that eventually numbered 46,226 combat deaths and 10,326 non-combat deaths; the Watergate break-in and President Nixon becoming the first president to resign from office.28

Detroit was not only susceptible to hearing the latest news regarding the war and cultural unrest, but the Detroit region, due to its manufacturing roots, was a pivotal tool in producing the tools for the war effort. From Ford Motor Company’s incorporation of the Willow Run Airport to manufacture the Bomber aircrafts, refitting assembly lines to produce war vehicles, producing artillery, machine guns and a large portion of all the necessary components for the war effort, the Detroit region was extremely important in fueling the war cause. At the peak of production, Detroit’s Willow Run airport, a one mile long airplane assembly line, housed ninety two million pounds of airframes and was producing one B-24 bomber every sixty-three seconds.29 From Detroit’s production roots the region was fueled by both the national cultural unrest as well as the tangible awareness of the magnitude and severity of the war effort.

In retaliation of war efforts Allen Matusow, in his book The Unraveling of America, finds the newly formed Student Peace Union sparked demonstrations against many war causes such as the ROTC, nuclear testing, and the arms race at colleges such as Michigan, Chicago, Dartmouth and Oberlin.30 If anything united the protesters, it was their insistence on “speaking the truth to power,” on calling America to redeem her democratic values.31
The 1960s Detroit disc jockeys understood the revolutionary thunder in the Detroit air and that the Detroit musicians spoke to many of the issues that were culturally relevant at the time. It did not take long for Detroit music, specifically rock music, to pioneer the critique of the 1960s political climate and find a receptive audience at the national level.

THE HIPPIE MOVEMENT AND THE DETROIT PERSPECTIVE

The Hippie Movement came to national attention during the “summer of love” in 1967. That summer, the media focused on the newly forming cultural group who were proclaimed as hippies from areas such as San Francisco’s Haight-Asbury neighborhood and New York City’s East Village. The growing hippie movement spoke of peace, love and questioning society’s current political and social directions.

It is speculation that the use of the term “hippies” which was used by the mass media was significantly fostered by an article entitled, “The Social History of the Hippies” that appeared in Ramparts in March, 1967. Since the publication of the Ramparts article, the term hippie has been widely used by the media to identify the people of the new movement. Although many leaders in the movement rejected the term as it was placed on them through the media, Lewis Yablonsky, in his book, The Hippie Trip, finds the actual term hippie is thought to have risen from the 1930s and 1940s terms “hep” or “hep-cat”, which were used to describe people “in the know.” Yablonsky also shows the term hippie relating the climate of the 1950s, where if you said “hep” you were a square and if you said “hip” you were “down” (wise) and “in” (in the know).

This newly evolving hippie movement, created by the 1960s youth culture had a significantly different view of politics and Vietnam War policies than earlier generations.
Kenneth Keniston dissects the unique cultural occurrences of the 1960s era in his book, *The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in America Society*, in which he finds the hippie orientated youth’s failure of acculturation to the American way of life split the society between their parents’ generation and the hippies who longed for a more authentic, sincere world. The hippie movement and what it represented created a significant generation gap in the 1960s youth culture who rejected the beliefs of the older generations, and the older generations who considered the lifestyle of hippies unacceptable.

The hippies of Detroit were composed mostly of teenagers and young adults between the ages of 15 and 25 years old who inherited the common tradition of Bohemian values that is associated with the hippie movement in general. The Detroit hippie scenes headquarters was on Plum Street, in the Elton Park neighborhood, located between Michigan Avenue and the Lodge and Fisher Freeways. The Detroit media likened Plum Street to San Francisco’s Haigh-Ashbury district.

By the fall of 1967, Plum Street was home to forty businesses. It also began to house head shops, hippie clothing boutiques and the Hai-Ku and Red Roach coffee houses. The *Fifth Estate*, a radical Detroit newspaper, moved its offices there as well as opening its own bookstore, stocked with radical newspapers such as the *San Francisco Oracle*, the *Chicago Seed*, and the *East Village Other*, and books by authors such as William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac.

The Detroit hippies, while not unique on a national scale, represented a differing political direction in Detroit. Gibb says the Detroit hippies were more political and radical than any other hippie movement that was in progress in other regions of the country.

In Detroit, by December 1968, the hippie movement was in full effect, even though Detroit hippies represented a vastly different product than the common San Francisco hippie
model. John Sinclair, a graduate student at Wayne State University, the manager of The MC5, a major advocate for marijuana legalization, poet, writer, and a quickly growing leader of Detroit’s counterculture groups, discusses the differences between the hippie movements in Detroit and San Francisco in his co-authored text with Robert Levin titled *Music and Politics*. Sinclair says “San Francisco and Detroit are probably polar opposites in terms of the general social context of America today: San Francisco being the loosest, most open, freest metropolitan center in the country, and retaining the positive characteristics of the Western frontier; while Detroit, in the center of the country both physically and metaphorically, is one of the tightest, nastiest, dirtiest, most rigidly policed cities in Amerika.” Sinclair gives an example and says,

> When the first bi-ins emerged in all their glory in early 1967, San Francisco accepted them more or less warmly, since they were born out of the open social situation there and reflected that situation, albeit in its freakiest form; but when we organized a love-in in Detroit that same spring, in happy emulation of the San Francisco scene, the Detroit police rode down on the people there and ended up beating and clubbing hundreds of longhairs while chasing us out of the park we had begged from the city for the day.

Sinclair continues to assess San Francisco and Detroit’s differing characteristics:

> When the summer of love was flowering in San Francisco that year, ten thousand people were arrested in Detroit as the inhabitants of the black and poor-white colonies rose up to strike out at the police and industrial oppression they felt every day. While the Airplane [Jefferson Airplane] and the Dead [The Grateful Dead] were playing in the parks of San Francisco, the MC5 and the UP were barricading their doors against police attacks and bailing each other out of jail. So like I say, the music came to reflect that social situation.

Sinclair’s statements of the inherent differences of the two cultures are important when examining the specifics of the Detroit music scene in relation to the hippie movement.

> Perhaps due to the inherent fight of the hippies in Detroit with law enforcement, Sinclair declared from his leadership role, Detroit rock music “a weapon of cultural revolution.” Sinclair directed the local musical and artistic community with his visions of a collective culture,
and a uniform focus for assessing of the status quo. Sinclair writes in the *Fifth Estate*, “rock and roll not only is a weapon of cultural revolution, it is the model for the revolutionary future. At its best the music works to free people on all levels, and a rock and roll band is a working model of the post-revolutionary production unit.”

Sinclair’s writing identifies the Detroit focus which put the musical messages of local bands at the forefront for leading and directing the course of Detroit’s counterculture movement. Sinclair took the San Francisco hippie movement’s ideal of love for one another, and directly applied it to the Detroit music scene. Sinclair, the Detroit hippie community, and local musicians saw Detroit rock artists as a family, with a goal of the same end product, which was to revolutionize how society, specifically Detroit’s society, functioned. Ultimately, Sinclair was proposing that the Detroit music community function collectively and provide cumulative support for the purpose of doing good for the community and to the world.

The Detroit community caught onto the revolutionary culture portrayed by Sinclair and embodied by his work with The MC5 and many other bands that supported his overall direction. The MC5, through their powerful live music performances were continuing to convert more youth and musicians toward the overall collective culture. Norman Mailer describes the experience of a MC5 performance in an excerpt written for the magazine *Harpers* in 1968:

>A young white singer with a cherubic face, perhaps eighteen, maybe twenty-eight, his hair in one huge puff ball teased out to nine inches from his head, was taking off on an interplanetary, then galactic, flight of song, halfway between the space music of Sun Ra and ‘The Flight of the Bumblebee,’ the singer’s head shaking at the climb like the blur of a buzzing fly, his sound an electric caterwauling of power…and the singer not bending it, but whirling it, burning it, flashing it down some arc of consciousness, the sound screaming up to a climax of vibrations like one rocket blasting out of itself, the force of the noise a vertigo in the cauldrons of inner space -- it was the roar of the beast in all nihilism, electric bass and drum driving behind out of their own non-stop to the end of mind. And the reporter, caught in the din -- had the horns of the Huns ever had noise to compare? -- knew this was some variety of true song for the Hippies."
Through Mailer’s account, the spontaneity, original creativity and multidimensional traits of The MC5 and the performances they embodied are fully illustrated. Mailer also acknowledges the direct relation of this style of music and the counterculture direction of the hippie movement. The Detroit rock music movement, not unlike the key band The MC5, was also ingrained with politically orientated messages and artistic representations, based on a cumulative culture.

The Detroit collective music scene, which began as relating to the hippie movement, eventually evolved into distinct group mentalities within Detroit. These mentalities became directly associated with the Detroit rock music scene and their ultimate critique on society. The Hippies, Translove Energies, and the White Panthers represented distinct counterculture groups, all with ties toward the music community and with the focus of changing the predominant culture in Detroit as well as the nation. It is important to understand the distinctions these groups maintained, while simultaneously understanding that they cumulatively had a vital role in allowing Detroit audiences to come together and unite over political directions and music messages.

Detroit’s Translove Energies movement, which was exclusive to Detroit, was directionally different than the Hippie movement, yet still embodied in the rock music culture. Translove Energies was formed by John Sinclair, Gary Grimshaw, Emil Bacilla, Rob Tyner of the MC5, Allen Van Newkirk of Guerilla newspaper, and Jim Semark. Translove Energies began as an umbrella coalition of all the active elements in the hippie community including the poster artists, musicians, poets, filmmakers, photographers, printers, craftspeople, the Plum Street stores, the Magic Veil Light Show, and the Fifth Estate radical newspaper. The leader and creators of the group saw the burgeoning potential for rock music as a vehicle for radical
change and left-wing political action in Detroit. Translove Energies used their organization and focus to awaken American youth from both a political and musical standpoint. Translove Energies engaged in many acts with a community focus.

Translove Energies created a cooperative booking agency for the bands, had a messaging service that related what was happening in the organization the bands, started a phone message center, put out a daily mimeographed news bulletin, created a 24-hour-a-day community center, started a free store, tried to organize a free ride service for people who had to get around town, provided rehearsal space for bands who didn’t have a place to practice, sponsored benefits to raise money for the Bail Fund, directed people in trouble with the law to attorneys and bail bonds agencies and sometimes posted bond for them, started the Psychedelic Rangers as a “peace force” for free outdoor gatherings like the Belle Isle Love-In of April 30, 1967. The Translove Energies also distributed free food and clothes to poor.

It was specifically the idea of “taking action” that truly separated the Translove Energies’ mentalities from those of the overarching hippie scene. Keeping with the aggressive protests and the concept of taking action, John Sinclair, along with his wife Leni Sinclair and Lawrence Plamondon also created the White Panther Party in Detroit in 1968. The White Panther Party was built in response to an interview in which Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party, was asked what white people could do to support the Black Panthers. Newton replied that they could form a White Panther Party and retaliate against the system that oppresses people of all races. The group dedicated its energies to “cultural revolution” within Detroit and its message was engrained in Detroit rock music, with The MC5 being the main band to promote its ideals and directions. Sinclair discusses the political context for the White Panthers in Detroit:

We have developed organic high-energy guerrilla rock and roll bands who are infiltrating the popular culture. With our music and our economic genius we
plunder the unsuspecting straight world for money and the means to carry out our program, and revolutionize its children at the same time. And with our entrance into the straight media we have demonstrated to the honkies that anything they do to hassle us will be exposed to their children.\textsuperscript{50}

Sinclair also states how the revolution is embodied, “Detroit’s MC5 began talking about ‘revolution’ before every show in an attempt to put the music and the ‘cultural revolution’ into an explicitly political context and sum up our experience and make some sense out of it so the kids who followed the band could see that they were part of a revolutionary movement and not just rock and roll fans.”\textsuperscript{51} Sinclair, who took the title of White Panther Minister of Information, said during the first formal meeting held on December 5, 1968, “We have shown no mercy and we will grant none until all harassment of all citizens is stopped and the brontosaurus capitalist economy smashed to smithereens. We mean it. We are tired of this shit from the honkies and so are millions of young brothers and sisters all over the planet. We will not rest until it is stopped.”\textsuperscript{52} Sinclair continues his speech and again relates the political force of the movement to Detroit’s MC5 and says, “get down, brothers and sisters, it’s time to testify, and what you have here in your hands is a living testimonial to the absolute power and strength of this music. Go wild! The world is yours! Take it now, and be one with it! Kick out the jams, motherfucker! And stay alive, with The MC5!”\textsuperscript{53}

The White Panthers, Hippies, and Translove Energies were cumulatively pivotal in uniting a large segment of Detroit citizens within the Detroit community. Their overall mission is summed up in Sinclair’s 1971 writing in the book \textit{Music and Politics}, “All power to the people! We are not free until the people are free! Live the people revolutionary culture!”\textsuperscript{54} These groups, and the voices they collectively brought to a public arena, allowed the youth, musicians, and politically active an outlet to confront and address the war and the problems in Detroit.
These groups served as the beginning of Detroit’s supportive music culture where artists could come together and attain public exposure. These parties’ voices, which were often disseminated in the underground, counterculture papers such as *The Fifth Estate*, were paramount in assessing the outcomes of society and also for gaining unity. In addition to the underground counterculture papers, Detroit was the hub of the creation of one of the most famous popular music magazines: *CREEM*.

**DETROIT’S MUSIC MAGAZINE -- *CREEM***

*CREEM*’s initial tagline was “America’s Only Rock ‘N’ Roll Magazine.” *CREEM*, although not modest, did in fact understand the pulse associated with its creation and its self-proclaimed “legendary,” status. From *CREEM*’s inception to a current view, the magazine has been pivotal in relating to national rock music in general, and Detroit rock music in particular.

*CREEM* was founded in the winter of 1969 by Barry Kramer, a Wayne State University student and entrepreneur who ran a hip Detroit record store called Full Circle. Kramer, who briefly hosted a WABX radio show, was also trying his hand at concert promotion and later managed Mitch Ryder’s post-Detroit Wheels band, Detroit, among several other groups. Legend has it that when a local radical newspaper rejected a review Kramer had written, he decided to start his own publication. Bill Holdship, uncovering the start of the distribution of *CREEM* found that “Kramer soon made a deal with a New York-based distributor, which sent the magazine direct to retailers. The retailers turned out to mostly be porn shops, which picked up the magazine due to its strange name; it frequently sat beside Al Goldstein’s *Screw* on many newsstands.”⁵⁵ The magazine, after finding a more appropriate distribution channel, exploded on the national music scene.
CREEM magazine was both a magazine that assessed rock music as well as a vehicle to help understand the evolution of the musical form. CREEM music critics were often the first to blaze a musical trail. CREEM writer Mike Saunders was the first person to use the term “heavy metal” which was used to associate and describe a certain genre of rock music that was associated with extreme guitar distortion and screaming lyrical tones. This “heavy metal” descriptor became a worldwide phrase continuously used in assessing heavy rock music. Additionally, co-founding editor Dave Marsh coined the term “punk rock” in CREEM’S pages, which again shows how the magazine was pivotal in the creation and understanding of diverse rock musical genres and influential in how the music will continuously be defined on a global scale. Kurt Cobain, the legendary guitarist/vocalist of the 1990s band Nirvana tells an interviewer at the height of Nirvana’s fame that he’d learned everything he knew about punk rock from reading CREEM magazine as a kid.56

Michael Kramer documents the overall importance of CREEM magazine in association with a Detroit rock music identity. Kramer’s examination titled “Can’t Forget the Motor City: CREEM Magazine, Rock Music, Detroit Identity, Mass Consumerism, and the Counterculture,” was published in Michigan Historical Review, and finds CREEM’s direction and perspective, a Detroit perspective, to be representative of the full United States. It seems that Kramer is proposing that from a Detroit view, everyone can relate to the ideas and views, because everyone understands what is going on in Detroit politically, socially, and due to CREEM, musically.

Kramer talks about CREEM’s history and states, “Based literally and figuratively in Detroit, CREEM sought to confront what it felt was an increasingly desperate, but also exciting time.” Kramer finds that CREEM progressed from a local Detroit paper in 1969 to a national rock magazine in the 1970s with the magazine reaching a circulation of more than 100,000
copies monthly. The approach to the aesthetics of the magazine was revolutionary, engrained with humor and satire, and took shape in everything from the publication’s cover art to its most famous critics, Dave Marsh and Lester Bangs, to its letters section, which ultimately became a vibrant “public sphere” for debate by CREEM’s readers.

It is said that of the many musical critics and writers who went from CREEM’s pages to greater fame, none is more renowned than Lester Bangs. Bangs, although originally from San Diego, believed that the Detroit rock music scene was the most real music scene in the nation. Bangs, as well as the CREEM editor Dave Marsh, believed that Detroit was truly the “last frontier of America.” Bangs states, “the only real hope is Detroit, because the city takes the intolerableness of Detroit life and channels it into a form of strength and survival with humor and much energy claimed.”

Bangs, as a writer for CREEM, became one of the main sources of information for music fans around the country in the 1960s and 1970s. It was through Bangs’s writing that music fans were made aware of what their favorite artists were doing. Bill Holdship, writing in Metro Times says:

The only way a fan could know what, say David Bowie or Lou Reed were doing at any particular time in those days was by buying the records, going to the concerts, or reading CREEM. In fact, the magazine became so pertinent to some of those artists’ career that when I saw Reed at Detroit’s Masonic Auditorium on his peroxided-hair, painted-black-fingernails Sally Can’t Dance tour in 1975, I recall him saying only two things from the stage the entire night: “Shut the Fuck up and let me dance!” and “Take a walk on the wild side, Lester Bangs!” Without Bangs, Reed (and many other artists) would have never had a career, or, at least, certainly not the same career.

Bangs’s style of writing for CREEM has often been compared to Beat writers and described as gonzo journalism. Writer Andrew Leonard from Salon.com talks about Bangs’s work and says,
To pull a sentence or a phrase here and there, is to do an injustice to the whole. [Bangs] sentences pile on top of each other, the attention wanders frenetically. To read his essays is to lose your breath; it’s like hanging on for dear life as the toboggan hurtles downhill – you don’t really know where it’s headed and you’ve lost all ability to steer, but the adrenaline rush from the experience is enough, the racing heart is its own reward.”62

Regardless what attributes were the main draw to the Detroit based magazine, it can be clearly understood that the magazine, as well as its most famous writer Bangs were essential to Detroit’s music industry.

The appeal of CREEM continues today as the magazine is still in production. In fact, a reissue of many articles from the magazine made their way to a 2007 released book titled CREEM: America’s Only Rock and Roll Magazine. CREEM magazine has also gained recent notoriety from being a large portion of the 2001 Dreamworks film, Almost Famous which portrays CREEM’s most famous writer Lester Bangs as a primary character in the movie.

The legendary status of CREEM is associated with its famous branding cartoon created by the underground cartoonist R. Crumb. Crumb created the following cartoon picture titled “Boy Howdy!” which has become synonymous with CREEM magazine.
All of Detroit artists’ experiences with CREEM magazine and Lester Bangs writing have not been positive. Ted Nugent, often known for his admonishment of the hippie lifestyle and drug-related beliefs provided to this study his personal letter written to Robert Matheau, cofounder of CREEM magazine, in response to being asked to write a review for the October 23, 2007, book entitled, CREEM: America’s Only Rock and Roll Magazine. Nugent’s letter to Matheau helps to display his sentiments and his personal relations to CREEM by stating:

CREEM magazine and most of its so called writers provided me with constant fortification to my concrete understanding of how pathetic, transparent, criminal and chimplike the hippie lifestyle truly is. My “interviews” with Lester Bangs can only be described as hysterical attempts on his part to form cognitive questions that could possibly lead to any meaningful thought process or dialog. His brilliant grasp of real rock-n-roll can be best identified by his mumbling in CREEM about how my TED NUGENT debut solo LP would be “...the final nail in the coffin of my career.” Dope addicts are so funny. Fuck CREEM magazine and all the stinky, filthy, irresponsible pukes who ran it. Drive safely. Fuck you, Uncle Ted.63

Although CREEM may have polarized musicians and music fans, its satirical stance provided a unique medium for understanding rock music generally and Detroit rock in particular. “[CREEM] fostered a spirited dialogue with anyone who shared its enthusiasms, and for all its snotty attitude, it never talked down to anyone” says rock critic Jim DeRogatis. “It could be stupid, but it was always smart, and just because an article was a gas to read didn’t mean that it lacked ideas.”64

The appeal of CREEM as relatable, smart in a more subversive way, and truly unique, also work as descriptors of Detroit’s legendary rock music station.

DETROIT’S RADIO ICON IS BORN: WRIF

As Detroit’s political culture proved itself as a unique occurrence on a national scale, and Detroit’s music magazines, such as CREEM, became national successes, Detroit’s rock radio
also grew to possess an original and creative environment. Detroit’s unique radio climate grew from the region’s affection toward rock and roll music, and Detroit’s culture held the right formula to allow a unique rock radio station to take form. On February 14, 1971, WRIF began broadcasting. Since then, it has come to symbolize Detroit Rock and to represent the mainstay of Detroit rock culture.65

The call letters for WRIF were originally intended for a Chicago station and the letters for the Detroit station were supposed to be WAIN, or Auto Industry National. A mix up in the government issued identification sent WRIF to Detroit instead. WRIF was a pioneer in the album-oriented rock format and has been a steady force in the Detroit rock community for over 37 years. WRIF, or “riff,” which is a term associated with electric guitar playing, is one of the longest running rock orientated radio stations in the country.66

WRIF gained its original grounding and passionate following through the decades for several unique reasons. First, it is owned and operated by a family owned company, Greater Media Detroit. The ownership of WRIF has allowed it to continue to pioneer unique formatting choices for the Detroit region that are not necessarily mandated by larger national trends. WRIF also followed a long tradition that projected Detroit radio as a larger, more celebrity focused medium, which gave more clout to the local radio station. Also, Detroit’s pride in WRIF may be due to the station embodying the same admiration for originality and unique musical performances preferable to Detroit audiences.

Although there are many possibilities for WRIF’s longstanding success, one important reason rests on WRIF not following national trends regarding the current “hot” songs that were playing on the rock radio stations throughout the country. WRIF represented a unique opportunity for Detroit radio listeners to hear many songs that were not necessarily the most
current or most popular. WRIF’s originality, which was similar to the early Detroit 1960s rock radio stations, was geared toward not following national dictates. This freeness and creativity directly related to the vast amount of Detroit rock artists’ music that has been aired on the station in its nearly 40 years of operation. Nearly everyone in the Detroit rock community commends and supports WRIF for its continued originality and dedication to Detroit rock music.

“Here it is in 2007, and the whole country is controlled by a couple [of] people about what can be played on the radio, except W-R-I- fucking F,” says Ted Nugent “Detroit wouldn’t allow control [like that] by an outside influence.”

The sentiment that WRIF is one of a kind runs deep, says Michael Stevens, a former Senior Promotion Manager at Atlantic Records and former local disc jockey for WKNR. Stevens finds, “after traveling the country listening to the radio, when I come back to Detroit there is nothing like it left. Listening to WRIF, and Arthur P [famous DJ], it is the best radio in the country.”

Mike Staff, a disc jockey at WRIF from 1992-2006, finds that the direction of WRIF is the result of Detroit culture, the program direction of the station, and the Detroit audience’s receptiveness to the unique play list:

The longevity and success falls directly to the program directors, and Doug Podell [famous local radio personality] has been a remarkable force. Podell is a true fan at heart. He is one of the first guys going up to the bands, getting autographs, telling them he loves their music and being a true fan. There is no faking it. He takes the same philosophy with running the station. Nowhere else in the country will radio stations play “pre-Pump” records of Aerosmith, or “Black Dog” by Led Zeppelin. The stuff that we throw in the mix on the station is unheard of. Detroit is, I don’t want to say in a vacuum, but not relevant to Billboard Charts.

Staff’s statements of Detroit’s radio culture evading national trends are both important to the radio listening fans as well as the WRIF staff and disc jockeys.
The rare occurrence of Detroit radio, and WRIF in particular, may be more clearly highlighted, for example, if another regional music center is addressed for its radio station directions. In Atlanta, the entertainment community utilizes a website titled “Access Atlanta,” which addresses all the aspects of culture in the region. One area that is available for users is *RadioTalk*, which focuses on musical fans discussing the Atlanta radio community in a running blog format. This blog space helps to define the Atlanta region’s views of their musical radio community.

One Atlanta *Radio Talk* user posts on May 17, 2006:

I am totally fed up with Atlanta radio. Apparently Elton John is in control. I refuse to pay for satellite radio, so I purchased a CD burner, and make my own music. It’s such a shame, with all the music out there, that we have to constantly listen to the same ten songs over and over and over and over. I also noticed, most the songs listed here are hip-hop. What a shame. Music died in the 90s.

Following this user’s sentiments, another entry writes on May 17, 2006: “Great, even more evidence that program directors have no taste and take the Atlanta listening audience for fools!”

The disenfranchisement of the Atlanta listening audience helps to further identify the local admiration of WRIF as a unique occurrence. Mike Staff suggests that at WRIF they do not have radio listeners, but instead have fans of the station and of the music:

We always said we were right in between the artists and the people. In other parts of the country rock stations are just a frequency playing music. Station managers usually use the term, if you can’t say it in 30 seconds, it is not worth saying it to the audience. At WRIF, Podell [the program director] would tell us, keep it to the point on air, but he was never sitting around with a stop watch timing our every move. If we had something to say, he would tell us to say it. I think the audience respects that.

The direction that Staff highlights brings several factors into the Detroit radio equation. Detroit radio station listeners are more supportive of their rock station WRIF, and the listening audience
seems to have more invested into the act of listening, and they appreciate the station catering specifically to the unique musical choices of the Detroit area. From WRIF catering to their listening audience, the station in turn possesses stronger credibility from the listening audience. Although WRIF has been the most pivotal station for rock music in Detroit there are other stations which also provide exposure and an outlet to Detroit rock bands.

The support from radio stations such as WDVD 96.3 FM, CIMX 89X FM, WCBN 88.3, and WDET 101.9, all of which according to Lise Harwin, in *The Michigan Daily*, says helps turn local bands into nationwide sensations and makes albums into chart-toppers.73

The most influential part of a band’s movement from the local scene to the mainstream can be attributed to radio airplay. Harwin continues by stating that once a band has a “hit single,” a song that makes it into heavy rotation on the air, the band’s future is clear. Thousands of people at a time will hear the song, hundreds of them will like it, and those who do will ask to hear it again.74 This phenomenon makes Detroit radio stations an integral part of the local music scene and also part of the Detroit community. It is the pursuit of being featured on Detroit radio that had Dennis White, the lead singer of the Detroit rock band Charm Farm agree that Detroit radio had a significant impact on the popularity of his band. “Radio airplay was singularly responsible for all the band’s success,” White says. White continues and talks about the importance of making it with Detroit radio in *The Michigan Daily*,

Don’t spend too much time always playing gigs, as it’s more important to have two or three really good songs and record them. Then, take them to a radio station and find out who the program director is. Just be a pain in the ass until they give you a shot. Call everyone you know and have them listen while the song is on the air. Then have everyone call and request it all the time. Consequently, the radio station will notice and put in on their most requested list. If you’re on three or more of these lists, the record companies will notice. All this can be done without gigs.75
Overall, Harwin finds that both CIMX and WDVD play local music on a regular basis, and each have helped to make names for bands in the past. WDVD broadcasts a special local feature each Monday through Friday at 9:00 p.m. called “Local Nine Six Three. CIMX has a similar show called “The Homeboy Show which broadcast on Sunday nights at 10:00 p.m.

Although WRIF as well as CIMX and WDVD selects songs that the station feels bests suits the needs and musical tastes of its listening audiences, from Bob Seger, Ted Nugent, and Aerosmith to Ozzy Ozborne, Metallica, and Kid Rock, the aspect of having songs played on Detroit radio has not always been so honestly directed.

DETROIT RADIO AND THE POLITICS OF A SONG

In the early years of Detroit rock radio, station managers relied upon the Detroit disc jockeys to make decisions about what was going to be played on a given day. Disc jockeys were primarily responsible for a station’s success or failure, and also served as the contact between the radio station and the local music culture. One of the main roles of the early disc jockey was to help find new acts. In most instances, a disc jockeys could rely on compensation for their duties and extra hours of work as scouts for upcoming talent. Usually these compensation payments took the form of “payola,” a form of bribery.

Of the various roles taken by Detroit disc jockeys, the most important role was marketing new records. Record companies around Detroit, as well as the nation, were quick to realize the consequences of having influential disc jockeys as friends. The chance for any song to become a hit was directly influenced by the amount of air-time the song received on the radio. To make this process of exposure more easily available, the record companies turned to bribery in order
to ensure adequate “air-time” of their newest products. Despite its apparent acceptance as a matter of course among labels, payola is illegal under federal law.76

During the 1960s and the birth of rock and roll, the illegal nature of this practice became public knowledge in Detroit. Still the legality of the practice remained unchallenged until the major music labels realized their inability to effectively compete with smaller, independent labels.77 Because the major labels were having serious trouble finding suitable talent to counter the independent labels’ artists, they sought to change the means by which the smaller labels got their music on the air.78

By bringing the payola issue to the attention of the federal authorities, the major labels were, in effect, admitting their A&R [artist and repertoire] scouts could not compete with the smaller independent labels. Colin Escott and Martin Haskin find in their book, Good Rockin’ Tonight: Sun Records and the Birth of Rock N’ Roll, that payola affected all large radio markets in the US, but the adoption of payola did not necessarily alter the musical artists’ success. The talented artists were signed to a good record label, either major or independent, and the label then used its leverage to get the artist on the radio. Although the process of payola did alter the music industry and the process of attaining radio exposure, the main ingredient was still the talent and musical abilities of the artist and the audience’s approval.

TABULATING SUCCESS: THE HOMOGENIZING OF RADIO

Although payola was a powerful force, in recent years, there is a more legitimately accepted authority to decide what songs should play on current radio across the country: Billboard. Each week, Billboard, a company that compiles statistics on songs, radio play, and album sales, publishes a weekly magazine for the record industry that compiles charts to identify
the top performing songs organized by musical genres and radio broadcast formats (based on a national sample of Top 40 radio airplay, Top 40 radio play lists, and music sales).

The Billboard corporation identifies what is actually being played on the radio and on music video channels on TV. By focusing on what is currently playing on stations across the nation, program directors and disc jockeys can access all of the radio stations’ top songlists through Broadcast Data Systems (BDS), which is run by Nielsen. BDS uses digital pattern-recognition technology to identify songs that are played on radio stations and music video TV channels across the United States and Canada. This is done 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and captures over 100 million songs annually. These data are used not only by Billboard in compiling the weekly charts, but also by record company executives, radio stations, publishing firms, performance rights organizations, music retailers, independent promoters, film and TV producers, and artist managers.

Billboard utilizes another measure to tabulate popularity through identification of music consumer sales. David Gollob, in his research paper entitled, *The Making of a Commercial Music Radio Playlist: A Primer*, identifies the process of understanding what music is selling in record stores by utilizing SoundScan created by Nielsen. SoundScan is an information system technology that tracks the sale of music and music videos in stores and retailers throughout the United States and Canada. By scanning the bar codes, they can collect sales information from cash registers each week from over 14,000 retail, mass merchant, and non-traditional sources such as online stores and concert sales. The data are compiled and available every Wednesday for subscribers who pay a significant price for this current information. Like BDS data, the data from SoundScan are also very valuable for record companies, artists, concert promoters, and retailers, and directly impacts the song selections played on radio across the country.
From the adoption of BDS and SoundScan, the justification for radio stations to play specific songs becomes more concrete. The quantifiable statistics of what songs are played on what stations at what time of the day has led to a new radio culture to develop nationally. The new radio culture is based exclusively on statistics and charts, rather than the earlier methods of disc jockeys and regional audience preferences. The end product is represented by a very similar musical playlist on nearly all radio stations throughout the country.

The idea of monitoring consumption patterns as well as radio playlists from across the nation dilutes the popular music business to a strictly political game. Radio stations often only play the songs that are playing elsewhere in the country on similar radio stations, or only play the top selling albums of the week from SoundScan charts. Due to the heavy reliance on BDS and SoundScan, the directions and methods for breaking into the industry and gaining exposure are more limited. No longer can a disc jockey help a local band by playing the song on the local radio station.

The adoption of BDS and SoundScan represent one more homogenization roadblock that the Detroit rock music community, due to the WRIF leadership, has overcome. WRIF, due to its family business ownership, has maintained a focus which is specifically geared toward regional music preferences. Through not focusing exclusively on technological tabulations of what to play, there is an opportunity for musical artists to receive airtime on Detroit radio more readily than other radio stations throughout the country. Due to this, Detroit is one of the only rock radio markets that provides an opening for new musicians. The musicians receive airtime on Detroit rock radio, have the support of the Detroit culture and, eventually, can use the fact that they receive airplay in Detroit to break through the other national radio stations that refuse to take risks on new talent.
Kid Rock, speaking about the issues associated with national rock radio and the impact of the new radio formats on his career as well as on other new Detroit artists:

Radio stations and award shows are [about] who can suck the best dick. That’s all they are. Period. The music is what suffers. The people who win the awards are not making the best music. The people who get played on the radio are not making the best music.  

Kid Rock continues to identify his personal struggles trying to get on radio as well as what he now understands about radio from his success:

Back in the day radio wouldn’t touch me you know. Then I got successful and you can’t turn it on without hearing me. So that is just ignorance [the reason he was not initially played on radio]. Ignorance is what you can’t be mad about. Because somebody got educated, and they learned. Which is cool. That is life. No big deal.

Kid Rock identifies the problem that before an artist gains a large following it is nearly impossible to attain radio play, most likely due to the lack of BDS data showing a proven radio success record. This lack of data is a negative for musicians regardless if the musical product is excellent or mediocre. Ultimately, the lack of data limits nearly all stations around the country that would play an artists’ song without the data stating its success.

When Kid Rock was starting his major label career with Atlantic Records in 1999 with his album Devil Without A Cause, he was continuously seeking heavy rotation radio airplay. His first significant Detroit airplay resulted from a deal that was struck between WRIF and the Atlantic Record management. In 1999 his song “Bahwitdaba” seemed a successful song for Detroit rock radio, and Atlantic was promoting it heavily to rock radio. The national stations who were contacted with the promotion were reluctant to play the track even though Kid Rock maintained a significant audience in the Detroit
area. In early 2000, WRIF agreed to play the song in rotation (multiple time per day) if Kid Rock would attend a Saint Patrick’s Day party sponsored by WRIF at 6:00 a.m. The day before the scheduled St. Patrick’s Day party, Kid Rock was playing a venue across the country. The label, management and the Atlantic Promotions department made sure he would be in town and at the venue at the required time. Because of Kid Rock’s willingness to help WRIF, and the use of his presence to promote WRIF’s St. Patrick’s Day party, his song was subsequently put in heavy rotation on Detroit radio, the first radio market in the U.S. to do so.

Within two months of the St. Patrick’s Day party, his success in the Detroit radio market had spread across the country. National rock radio stations, looking at the BDS and SoundScan data could now air the song with data showing its proven success. Within two months from WRIF’s rotation of “Bawitdaba,” Kid Rock was booked to play the Woodstock music festival and his career has been continuously gaining popularity.84

The prior St. Patrick’s Day party helps to identify the earlier notion portrayed by Kid Rock’s quote relating to radio and the prominence of the best songs not necessarily being played on air due to the political nature of the music industry. The picture painted of Kid Rock’s rise to fame identifies the roadblocks and process for his musical success. After the initial success of his song, and strong BDS and SoundScan data, his subsequent songs were received without effort due to data showing fan base support and strong radio history. It is important to note that WRIF, and the Detroit musical community, was willing to take a gamble and promote Kid Rock, and this willingness ultimately allowed the national acceptance of his art to take place.
THE RADIO SHOW: THE NEW PAYOLA

Detroit music industry has maintained the ideals of radio focused on the local Detroiters’ preferences from the 1960s to a current inspection. Paralleling this sustaining quality of Detroit radio, a form of radio payola does still exist. Getting on the radio is still political, and the aspects of payola are illegal, however a new form of compensation has been developed for radio stations. The new generation of radio politics as it affects rock musicians is geared toward the phenomenon of the radio show. The radio show concept brings several popular touring artists to one venue for an evening supporting the radio station and playing to thousands of radio station’s fans. In Detroit, WRIF, CIMX, WDRQ and other stations host radio shows at least once a year. The politics of the radio show come in play as the station pays the artists the fees associated with the performance. Kid Rock recently addressed his dilemma with the modern radio show format and identified the lucrative nature associated with the performances:

It’s the politics across the board that all the stations play that everyone plays. You know, [radio stations] want me to come and play their radio show. You know I could go into a market and make $250,000 playing. They want me to come in and pay me $100,000 so they can make $150,000 and play my songs. Well, if they play my songs, it’s cool, I get hits, but the record company makes all the money [on the sale of records]. So it’s kind an evil axis of turns and you play as much of the game as you can, and you still try to, you know, be yourself and not sell your soul.85

Kid Rock, as well as the other Detroit rock artists’ dilemmas are a direct result of the major record labels having the majority stake in the profit from the sale of albums, due to less album sales from digital piracy. The modern artist is aware that his music label would like the artist to play the radio show, which in turn gets more songs on the radio and, ultimately, sells more albums for the record label due to the increase of radio hits. However when the artist accepts this scenario, they accept less payment for their live show, and as Kid Rock identified, the
discrepancy between full payment and a reduced rate is often a large amount of money for every show scheduled. Kid Rock also notes that the small profit he makes on the sale of the albums is not justified by the reduced rate of his performance for the radio show.86

The current radio show represents the modern day form of payola. Ultimately, this view represents a current view of the political nature associated with rock music. In addition the awareness of the radio show payola format illustrates the similarity between the 1960s and 2000s regarding radio broadcasting techniques and media bribery.

THE LABELS: DETROIT PLAYING THE POLITICS OF A SONG

As previously described, the record labels take a large portion of album royalties; however, the concept and employment of the record label seems to still be a necessary tool for most Detroit bands’ success. The record label has always been looked upon with both positive and negative qualities for the musician. John Sinclair finds that although the record labels were important to Detroit music, their presence was not always a positive addition to the Detroit musical culture. “Their business is to extract a sound from a region and homogenize the product, and it always has been this way.”87

Today in Detroit, the major record label presence is exclusively under the control of corporate umbrella organizations, which are referred to as music groups. Music groups are typically owned by massive international companies that (due to their enormous sizes) often have many non-music divisions such as Warner Music partnering with American Online as well as many other successful corporations.

All music groups have a similar musical business model. All consist of music publishing companies; record manufacturers who construct the albums, artwork and videos; record
distributors who are essential to delivering and stocking the product on retailer shelves; and record labels who manage the artists, the businesses and discover new talent.

As of 2007, four major music groups dominated the music market. EMI, Sony BMG, Universal Music Group, and Warner Music Group controlled about 80 percent of the United States’ musical products. All have significant ties to the Detroit region. Across America, the remaining 20 percent of music was controlled by independent labels that are also referred to as Indie labels.

Indie labels often perform the same tasks as large music groups without the enormous scale and structure. Indie labels also allow more flexibility for artists and provide a more creative environment for artistic directions. Indie labels are significant in providing cultivation for artists that are starting their career and have not received large scale contracts, or prefer less label influence on their artistic and creative paths.

There are many independent labels: folk singer Ani DiFranco's Righteous Babe Records is an ideal example. DiFranco turned down many major label recording contracts from several top music groups in order to establish her own New York-based record company. DiFranco’s nearly constant touring schedule resulted in noteworthy success for an act without significant record label backing. DiFranco and others have spoken on several occasions about their independent labels and their superior business model in hopes of encouraging others.

Many of Detroit’s most unique and upcoming bands are signed to Indie labels, which often provide opportunities for the musicians to maintain creative control of their music product. Indie labels have offered many Detroit bands the ability to achieve national recognition. Bloodshot Records (based in Chicago) has signed Detroit’s Gore Gore Girls, Deadstring Brothers, and The Detroit Cobras. Norton Records (based in New York) is responsible for
Detroit-based The Hentchmen, the Dirtbombs and Question Mark & the Mysterians. Alive-Total Energy (based in Los Angeles) added local bands Soledad Brothers, SSM, the Lovemasters, and Howling Diablos on their lineup. Ubiquity Records (based in Costa Mesa, California) have recently signed Detroit’s Platinum Pied Pipers, Jeremy Ellis, John Arnold and John Beltran. Rainbow Quartz (based in Chicago) signed The Waxwings, The Singles, and Outrageous Cherry. Finally, Get Hip Recordings (based in Pittsburgh) added The Paybacks, Fortune & Maltese, and Rocket 455.

Detroit musicians currently have more options for worldwide exposure than ever before due to the Internet becoming a viable source for music fans to obtain music. Of all the Internet revolutions toward music, Napster.com represented the pinnacle change in digital music transferring. In 1999, a college student named Shawn Fanning altered the complete business model of the music industry with his file-sharing program called Napster. His idea was to utilize a program that allowed computer users to share music files through a centralized computer server. Fanning created Napster after his friends complained about the difficulty they had in finding and downloading music over the Internet. To alleviate the problem he invented a program that combined a music-search function with a file-sharing system and the ability to instant message.

Napster and other file sharing programs have become the largest competitors to the record labels. With the introduction of the mp3 and its popularization in the late 1990s, there have been several significant restructuring operations within the music industry both nationally and in Detroit. Prior to 2000, Detroit had regional branch offices for all of the main record labels: Sony, Universal, EMI, and Warner Music Group. These offices were constructed for the
purpose of promoting label talent to the region, providing a central location for employees, and serving as a monitoring point of upcoming regional artists.

After 2000, the music business -- across the board -- restructured its business models and regional branch offices. 90 percent of the employees in many of the regional offices around the country were let go between 2000-2002. The remaining employees were shifted to regional offices servicing larger segments of the country.

The disbanding of the standard music business format post 2000 left a segmented view of technological constraints on Detroit musicians. Some musicians understood the breakup of the music industry as an opportunity to level the playing field, or better disseminate their music, while others took the new technological direction as a negative for the music industry.

Ted Nugent, commenting on the recent changes in the music industry states, “Technology has fucked the music thing. People think they can get bread for free because they have a direct pipeline to the bakery.” Nugent’s sentiments are similar to many musicians’ views of the significant shift of musical album purchasing. Prior to the switch to digital files, every change that occurred: from vinyl records to eight tracks, from eight tracks to analog tapes, from analog tapes to minidisk, from minidisk to CD, represented a significant sale and profit for the music labels and musical artists, due to music fans repurchasing their entire collection of favorite songs. In a current view, the opportunity for that income stream has become obsolete.

Although the revenue stream from album sales has diminished, not all artists look to this evolution as a negative direction. Kid Rock, in a more technologically friendly view, discusses the current record labels and the technological shifts:

[The record labels are] such a fucking cut throat business, it’s the most horrendous business. It is worse that Hollywood. They are finally getting their dues. It’s like when they came out with these free downloads and shit and the
record companies are telling me you need to speak up on this shit and stand out for it. I was like, wait a second you motherfuckers have been ripping off artists for years, now that someone found a way to rip you off you want me to stand up for you. I was like fuck all you motherfuckers. I could care less. I want to go play live, make my money there. I’d give my records away for free if I could.92

Although technology has placed the artist and the music label as somewhat adversaries, the relationship between the artist and the record label has always been ingrained with turmoil. In 1971, John Lennon of The Beatles commented on record labels and identified his sentiments toward their end goals:

All that [record label] business was awful, it was fuckin’ humiliation. One has to completely humiliate oneself to be what the Beatles were, and that’s what I resent. I didn’t know, I didn’t foresee. It happened bit by bit, gradually, until this complete craziness is surrounding you, and you’re doing exactly what you don’t want to do with people you can’t stand—the people you hated when you were ten.93

The confrontation between artist and label is usually hinged on the musical direction and musical message. As Detroit’s music culture is more unique and less homogenized than the national music climate, the Detroit musicians, in turn, have found more pressure from music labels to conform to national trends. Nugent, speaking about his artistic relationship with Atlantic Records, states, “It is a constant battle, constantly fighting for your ideas, fighting for your songs. Turning down stupid photographs. Turning down stupid marketing ideas that they think are the current trend or the current cute thing. Realizing that cute would kill me.”94

Nugent also says the underlying business model of record labels tries to influence the artist and specific songs into directions the label feels are appropriate, while not necessarily caring about the artist’s creativity:

[Record labels] didn’t like jams. They wanted hit records. If there was some formula they believed in that was more likely to sell a lot of records and make a profit. I didn’t even think about selling records, I just thought of making music. I
knew I was just this huge success on the road without a hit record. It was because of the music. People came to hear this fucking guitar, this feedback, this energy, the screams, the sexy, intense, defiant music. Since we all know that is why I am in the studio in the first place, how could you tell me not to do it, you dumb fuck.

The direction that labels take their artists, whether it is Ted Nugent, Kid Rock, John Lennon or any other artist, seems to be similar to any company’s model for success—make the product that will sell the best. The strategies for labels wanting to alter the sound, style, or musical product has been maintained throughout the timeline of 1960s Detroit rock music through present day. The friction this research identifies often comes after the artist is signed and legally affiliated with the label and the musical product is not in the direction the label has decided to travel. Better understanding of the Detroit artist will help to more thoroughly highlight a complete view.
NOTES


19. Ibid.


24. Ibid.


36. Ibid.


43. Ibid., 23.


48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.


53. Ibid, 95.


56. Ibid.

57. As with many counter culture publications, CREEM’s precise circulation figures are not available: this estimate comes from Chester Flippo, Rock Journalism and Rolling Stone (Master’s Thesis, University of Texas-Austin, 1974).


59. Ibid.


63. Ted Nugent, Letter to Robert Matheau (Co-Founder of CREEM magazine), provided for inclusion to this study, August, 2007.


66. Ibid.


71. Ibid.


73. Ibid.


75. Ibid.


83. Ibid.
84. The following was personal observations resulting from my employment at Atlantic Records from 1998-2001 and represents my exclusive views and opinions and in no way reflects any other individuals or companies consent.


86. Ibid.


95. Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

MUSICAL ARTISTS

“All Detroit artists can be defined by one word and that is defiance.”

-- Ted Nugent

This chapter will document some of the reasons that explain Detroit rock artist’s musical success. From oral interviews and secondary sources, this chapter will uncover how the environment in Detroit helps cultivate such highly acclaimed artists. Looking at both the artists and their ideas of successful musicianship and the recording studio process that makes successful songs, this chapter will help to provide a more complete picture regarding successful musicianship in Detroit.

Talking about Detroit musicianship, Mick Collins, the leader of the Detroit band The Dirtbombs says, “Detroit artists have pretty much done everything by their own rules.”\(^1\) Collins goes on to say that the auto plants and factory assembly lines helped make the city an incredible incubator for the arts. Culley Summers, the son of the founder of CREEM magazine, agrees with Collins’ sentiments that Detroit is a perfect incubator for unique musicians, but also says that Mick Collins himself is the perfect example of what Detroit rock musicians embody. Collins, according to Summers, plays with many successful local Detroit musicians, provides great energy and musical showmanship, and plays uniquely created music that doesn’t follow trends.\(^2\)

Rock musicians, like Mick Collins, are representative of the eclectic tastes that are expected of a Detroit musician, says Summers.\(^3\). He also says that Detroit musicians, in addition
to being unique individuals are also into a lot of different things, and that they are stripped down in a lot of ways, and not overly fancy.⁴

Eddie Harsch, the former keyboard player for the Black Crowes and the current bass player for the Cobras says that Detroit is more than eclectic musicians. People in Detroit know their records and the musical history of the region. Harsch, discussing his Detroit band the Cobras, helps to show the amount of research and respect Detroit musicians pay to the earlier Detroit musical grounding by saying, “We’ll all sit around and listen to an old Supremes record or a Martha Reeves and the Vandellas record and marvel at the production level, especially considering how cheaply it was done.”⁵

Chuck Klosterman, in his book, IV: A Decade of Curious People and Dangerous Ideas, talks about the Detroit knowledge of more obscure songs and relates it to the White Stripes. Klosterman says that the White Stripes renditions of Dolly Parton’s “Jolene,” Loretta Lynn’s “Rated X,” and Link Wray’s “Jack the Ripper,” all help to show Detroit musicians’ varied and eclectic listening habits. Jack White of the White Stripes says that it is not his intention to cover songs just to be unique and, ultimately, if that is your reasoning of covering songs it is wrong reason:

We’ve never covered a song simply because it would be cool or because we’d seem really obscure for doing so. Certain circles of musicians will all get involved with the same record at the same time, and suddenly it will be cool to like the Kinks’ Village Green Preservation Society for a month. But why didn’t people feel that way three years ago? I’ve always hated the whole idea of record collectors who are obsessed with how obscure something is. Usually when somebody brings up something obscure, I assume it’s not very good, because—if it was—I would have heard it already. Record collectors are collecting. They’re not really listening to music. ⁶
Mick Collins discusses the diverse listening abilities that White references. He says that the diverse, extra-curricular music listening of Detroit musicians and music fans stems from the Detroit region and its relation to industrialization:

> When Detroit was a car town, it was like, ‘As long as you stamp that fender out for eight hours, whatever you do on your own time is yours.’ Back in the ‘60s, that meant music. So everybody was cutting records. Now everybody’s an artist but it’s the same thing, really. There’s so much going on artwise here, and a lot of it has to do with the fact that there’s nothing else to do here. You just get bored and start throwing paint on walls. And we’ve got a lot of walls to throw paint on in Detroit!7

Detroit’s abundance of talented, knowledgeable musicians and passionate music fans stemmed from the sheer number of factory employees that Collins references and the relatively high pay associated with the Detroit factory system. It was the draw of Detroit’s factories that allowed the diverse and prosperous music scene to cultivate in the area. The music climate of Detroit, aided by the diverse residents from unique and varied cultural backgrounds, was perfect for regional music cultivation to thrive.

Otis Williams from the Motown band The Temptations speaks in a similar vein as Collins about the attributes in the early Detroit musical environment and says, “Detroit is a real music town. You heard it everywhere from radios and record players, outside the doors of the clubs, from guys and girls standing out on the street singing. It sounds like a scene out of a musical, but that’s truly how it was.”8 The musicians and musical makeup of Detroit that Williams describes led to the abundance of successful Motown recording artists and, eventually, came to fuel the rock music from the Detroit region.

To start to understand the abundance of musicians and the unique musicianship of the region, it is important to understand one of the most important factors that led to Detroit’s powerful cultivation and vibrant music culture: the melding of many distinct regional influenced
individuals in one location. Marilyn Bond and S.R. Boland in their book, *The Birth of Detroit Sound*, say, “it was the diversity in Detroit that directly contributed to its growing role as a hub of the music industry.”

Detroit’s regionally influenced individuals came to the region for hopes of higher pay in the manufacturing sector. For a long period of time Detroit workers were some of the most highly paid and well taken care of work force in the country. Jobs in the auto industry brought many African-Americans into the middle class. Blind Arthur Blake, an influential southern blues guitarist and singer, explains his necessity to move to Detroit and make a good, livable wage. Blake’s reasoning and desires to move to Detroit were similar to many others’ reasoning to relocate to the Detroit region. Blake allows the lyrics of his song, *Detroit Bound Blues*, to capture the draw and intrigue with the Detroit region:

I'm goin’ to Detroit, get myself a good job
I'm goin’ to Detroit, get myself a good job
Tried to stay around here with the starvation mob

I'm goin’ to get a job, up there in Mr. Ford’s place
I'm goin’ to get a job, up there in Mr. Ford’s place
Stop these eatless days from starin’ me in the face

When I start to makin’ money, she don’t need to come around
When I start to makin’ money, she don’t need to come around
’Cause I don't want her now, Lord. I’m Detroit bound

Detroit workers, as Blake details in his song, came to the region for one reason: high paying factory jobs. The only requirement for those available jobs was a strong work ethic.

Detroit residents secured thousands upon thousands of high paying jobs. Through unionization, most notably the United Auto Workers, the Detroit population was protected and looked after to make sure the residents received adequate compensation. The strong prominence of the UAW helped to provide the hard working factory workers pay raises, compensate
employees for cost of living adjustments, and made sure health care was offered for the workers.\textsuperscript{13}

The well-paid labor force of the region can be looked at as an early catalyst which allowed the Detroit community the time, ability, and funding to take part in the eclectic musical cultivation of the region. The money and free time to pursue music, coupled with the blending of regional heritages allowed a musical climate unlike any other to exist. During the mid twentieth century Detroit attracted African-American residents from Louisiana who had been raised in a jazz tradition in the same community as African-American blues players from Georgia, who blended with African-American southern influenced soul musicians with gospel influences, and who crossed paths with white musicians from a blue grass-guitar playing tradition.\textsuperscript{14}

Music geographer Larry Ford helps to identify the spatial dynamics of the United States music scenes and the separate musical genres which cumulatively aided Detroit through use of the following map that appeared in his 1971 article, \textit{Geographic Factors in the Origin, Evolution and Diffusion of Rock and Roll Music}.\textsuperscript{15}
As Larry Ford’s map shows, Detroit was being influenced by many separate genres of music that eventually culminated in Detroit’s rock music. Ford identifies the trend that although the Southern states seem to represent the initial ingredients for rock music, several centers emerge as being the most important for the development of rock music. Ford finds that Detroit represents 20 percent of the successful performers in the country for rock music between 1960 and 1970.
From Ford’s research identified by the map labeled *Origins of rock and roll acts (U.S.* recording from 1960 to 1970 it becomes apparent the Detroit region, represented for creating as Ford states as 20 percent of the national rock musicians, is significant. Ford’s illustration, which uses dots to represent the number of regional rock and roll acts, becomes more powerful when addressing both New York and California as regions that are not regionally specific and do not qualify for direct comparison due to their national focus and lack of a definable regional culture. Ultimately, Ford’s examination of the origins of rock music helps to concretely identify Detroit’s uniqueness regarding the sheer number of rock music artists.

One of the specific traits which seems to relate to the abundance of musical success is the engrained work ethic. The work ethic, whether it be geared toward factory work or musical compositions, seems to be an important factor and the overall ideology of the Detroit region. The work ethic of Detroit is not only a local descriptor that relates to the population, but also
represents how diverse populations across the country and world seem to relate to the mindset of Detroit. Christophe Delcourt, a music producer based in Paris, talks of Detroit music and says, “Detroiters are so real and true. In Paris all we do is copy musically from Detroit. Regardless of if I hear Obie Trice [Detroit rapper] or The White Stripes you know they are talking about their real experiences.” Delcourt continues by saying, “The musicians in Detroit produce so much great music, I don’t know of any other area that has as many great records.”

Detroit record producer Jim Diamond, who has produced many successful Detroit artists, finds the success Detroit musicians obtained directly attributed to their work ethic, which came from their Detroit heritage and not moving to the region to become rock stars. Diamond states, “Detroit musicians had to overcome not being in a prime location for musical success, as New York or LA would provide, and they overcame this deficit by being the best quality musicians who played the best quality music.” Perhaps the reason for the large quantity of talented musicians in the region, from the 1960s to today, can further be attributed to the region’s need to “give it your all,” which proves the need to be respected by other local artists. Gary Grimshaw, one of the most famous music poster artists in the country and a well-known Detroit artist says, “You have to give everything you got to being a musician in Detroit, or else you won’t get the respect of the other artists who are giving it their all.” One of the ways Detroit’s rock musician’s effort was judged was the artists’ ability to maintain the African-American ideals that successful artists displayed generations before.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDEALS IN DETROIT ROCK MUSIC

Detroit rock musicians were heavily inspired and judged upon the prevalence of black rhythm and soul influences within their musical repertoire. The newly forming rock bands in the
The starting point to Detroit rock musicians’ relation to African-American ideals was with Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels. Mitch Ryder was known for his gruff singing voice, that seems directly influenced by Little Richard and also by his dynamic stage performances, which are in the same direction of James Brown. Mitch Ryder had several large hit records in the 1960s and is probably one of the most influential Detroit rock musicians.

“Mitch Ryder influenced The MC5 before they were The MC5, he touched Bob Seger when he was still with the Omens,” Ted Nugent says. Mitch Ryder deserves all the credit.”

Nugent goes on to say, “every musician, whether directly or indirectly, sensed the competition for authentic black soul music that Mitch Ryder established at the club level. The audience saw you couldn’t just play ‘Johnny B Good’ like a white guy; Mitch Ryder already established the barometer that you better play it this good pal, or you can go get a real job.”

The barometer Nugent references was influenced by the community becoming aware of the full-scale musical ability of the varied regional musicians due to the competition taking place in Detroit called the Battle of the Bands. The barometer was also influenced by the dominance and need of African-American ideals possessed by all of Detroit’s early rock successes.

“We loved black music that’s all we loved. It was more visceral, it had more energy, and it spoke to us. That is why we loved it,” says Bob Seger, who became one of the most popular
rock musicians in the country by the 1970s. Both Seger and Nugent relate their personal success, as well as the success of the cumulative Detroit artists, toward the ability to play African-American inspired music. Nugent also believes that the full infrastructure of Detroit is based on the African-American heritage, and says:

> Detroit’s successful artists wouldn’t have existed if it was not specifically for artists like Wilson Pickett, Sam and Dave, James Brown, Otis Redding, Marvin Gaye, The Funk Brothers, Motown, Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, Howling Wolf, Muddy Waters, Lights and Hopkins, and Mose Allison.

A big part of Mitch Ryder’s interest in early African-American music revolved around theatrics such as running around the stage, wearing exciting costumes, using costume changes, and making a spectacle in addition to playing good music. Ryder says he was exposed to black culture at an early age. He had friends, girlfriends, and musical influences that were all black. The thing he found attractive about African-American music and culture was the complete, unabandoned restraint on emotion. The performers that he idolized seemed not to care about control. “There was something rebellious in their voices, in the way they sang,” says Ryder. Ryder goes on to say, “there was a freedom to innovate in African-American music that didn’t exist in white boy Detroit.”

With his tight pants, shimmering shoes, eye makeup and outrageous hair, James Brown set the stage for younger Detroit musicians like Mitch Ryder. Jay Ross, Brown’s lawyer for 15 years says “James Brown earned the nickname the hardest working man in show business, and often tried to prove it to his fans.” Brown’s energy made him move, dance, and gyrate all over the stage in an energetic manner. Marc Eliot in his book, James Brown: I Feel Good, says the difference between Brown and other performers of the time period was that most performers worked for commercial acceptance. Eliot says that Brown wanted an emotional connection. “The scream, the moan, the moves—he put them all out there and that was the message even if it
made some in the audience uncomfortable with it and him.”

A good portion of the energy and excitement of Brown as a role model can be understood by looking at his lyrical selection: “Give it up or turn it a loose;” “Gimme some air!;” “Take it to the bridge!;” “Mama, come here quick/ Bring me that lickin' stick;” “Hit me!;” “Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud;” “Sometimes I feel so nice/ Good Lord!/ I jump back, I wanna kiss myself” -- these lyrics were often shouted in bursts rather than sung in a melody.

Due to the strong African-American musical abilities in the Detroit music scene in the early 1960s, the region was dominated by Motown. “There didn’t seem to be any outlet for a young, white, Detroit rock and roll group,” says Mitch Ryder. For this reason, Ryder constructed a show that was more than just standing there, playing the music. He says that he threw in the theatrics and the entertainment to his music like his African-American idols, who were having such musical success. Ryder found what he was doing was unusual and no other bands were doing the same thing. Ultimately, Ryder brought to the table something new, which he defined as a melding of two cultures.

Ryder says that he was vocally influenced by Little Richard and James Brown and that they brought the full package which included the choreography, the tempo, the lights, and a sense of theatre. Ryder focused on these attributes in his own musical performances which represented a different direction and musical product than his other 1960 Detroit rock counterparts.

Ted Nugent recalls Mitch Ryder’s importance for the blending of African-American showmanship and stylistic tendencies and says:

The reason that the MC5 and Bob Seger were so inspired by black musicianship, and that the Amboy Dukes, we were so inspired by the black rhythm sections was Mitch Ryder. The reason that The MC5’s entire show was based on a James Brown presentation was Mitch Ryder. The MC5’s biggest songs, their
showmanship, it was all James Brown orientated. Nobody will tell that because I don’t think they were cognizant of their surroundings. I hope that someday, it will be conveyed that Billy Lee and the Riverias, who became Mitch Ryder and the Detroit wheels, that they gave direction to the entire music scene in Detroit. And we all owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.  

Tracing the passing of musical directions from James Brown to Mitch Ryder, and then having Mitch Ryder disseminate the African-American ideals to the Detroit rock music community is an important finding. To better understanding how these African-American ideals were transferred and judged in the Detroit community amongst musicians it is important to know how Detroit artists were cultivated.

BATTLE OF THE BANDS: LOCAL COMPETITION

Slash, lead guitarist for Los Angeles-based bands Velvet Revolver and formerly of Guns N Roses, continually lauds the Detroit environment as a prime example of what produces good rock music, which is a competitive environment that allows musicians to compete for overall acceptance. Slash discusses these ideals relating to Detroit and says:

It seems very apparent to me that in Detroit everyone is trying to make a statement. It is a very competitive kind of town. Whoever is making a statement; they want to be the best at it. And Detroit’s stages provide a forum for people to go show who is better. It’s like the colosseum in Rome.  

One area that helped Detroit to be a competitive musical region, make the best quality music, and hone the African-American traits into rock music was the community involvement in the Battle of the Bands contest.

The Battle of the Bands was a local contest known for musicians and bands from Detroit, and its surrounding suburbs, competing head-to-head with other musicians from Detroit in front of live audiences. The Battle of the Bands competitions of the 1960s most notably took place in
Detroit at the State Fair Grounds located on Woodward and 8 Mile Road. On Saturdays, groups of music fans would come to the State Fair Grounds and witness many of Detroit’s most well-respected bands competing directly against one another. Each band would take the stage, play several songs, and, after playing, listen to the competition play their songs. The winner of the battle would be selected by a group of judges based on overall musicianship, showmanship, and crowd response. The winner would then compete with other winners in a tournament draw format until there was one overall winner for that Battle of the Bands competition. The musical acts competed in the Battle of the Bands as a way to gain fans and win prizes. The competitive nature made the Detroit bands physically view the “competition” and practice musicianship which would hopefully beat the competition in the next contest.

Although the Battle of the Bands in the 1960s was known for portraying the new rock music from Detroit, the Battle of the Bands idea is thought to originate in the 1930s and 1940s from jazz players who would perform after hours in clubs and lofts with trumpeters, drummers and varied musicians taking turns going on a stage trying to outperform each other, and being judged by an audience of musicians and hardcore jazz fans.33

Other cities also had the Battle of the Bands, but in most places they were not as strong as they were in Detroit. In fact, Ted Nugent says that the Battle of the Bands contest was stronger in Detroit than anywhere else in the country.34 The Battle of the Bands became famous and noteworthy in the Detroit region as many of the Detroit winners of the battle went on to become successful national and international artists. Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, Bob Seger and members of his Silver Bullet Band, Iggy Pop and members of his band the Stooges, and Wayne Kramer and his band The MC5 were all contestants and winners of the Detroit Battle of the Bands. Ted Nugent won a Battle of the Bands contest in the early 1960s at the age of 14, and the
prize of winning was an opportunity to open a show for the Supremes and the Beau Brummels. Nugent reflects and says “I didn’t even dream in the dimensions of opening for the Supremes,” but he received the opportunity from the local contest.

According to Ryder, local musicians used the Battle of the Bands as a place to start measuring themselves and their performances. A musician could dream about his songs going to New York or LA, but before he did that, he had to conquer Detroit. The Battle of the Bands allowed the artists to know when they were truly good enough for their audiences. Ryder and Nugent both agree that in order to do well in the Detroit Battle of the Bands competition a band had to demonstrate the African-American influences in its musical performance, musical style, and ultimate showmanship.

Although the intrigue of the 1960s Battle of the Bands will be forever linked the success of the contest, the format has been a mainstay in the Detroit culture through the decades. In fact, the Detroit band The Displays whose lineup includes all middle school students, won a Battle of the Bands competition in 2007, as a crowd of 700 looked on. The band, from their victory, received the opportunity to record a professional music video through the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus, receive a limo ride to dinner at Detroit’s Hard Rock Café and play multiple venues around the city. Tim Ehlers, the father of a competing musician sums up the continued intrigue with the Detroit Battle of the Bands by saying, “There is no better way to spend a Saturday. It is great to come down and support Detroit artists.”

The Battle of the Bands has served to maintain Detroit’s musical competitiveness throughout the musical decades. Detroit’s continued admiration of his musical messages and style of performance continue to show the ingrained importance of Detroit’s early rock music pioneers.
Mitch Ryder, born William Levise Jr., was originally from Hamtramck, Michigan, a suburb located on the edge of Detroit. Ryder initially sang with a local black quartet dubbed the Peps, but eventually went on to form a group with his school friends called Billy Lee and the Rivieras in 1964.  

Mitch Ryder, reflecting back to his early years in Detroit rock and roll, found his success came from the Battle of the Bands:  

We would get into these Battle of the Bands on a regular basis, and on a regular basis just kick everyone’s asses. We had that different thing going. We weren’t just standing there playing, and this was during the beginning of the British Invasion. A lot of the groups thought that it was enough to stand there and cover the tunes and sound somewhat reasonably like their heroes. We thought it had to be something a little more than that. Let’s throw in the showmanship, let’s do the best singing, playing and let’s do a show, and it proved to be a formula that worked on a national scale.  

Once Ryder began to achieve success nationally, his stardom highlighted a path for other aspiring Detroit rock musicians to gain fame and audiences. Ryder’s personal fame came in 1967 with “Devil with a Blue Dress On/Good Golly Miss Molly” and “Sock it to Me Baby,” and, from Ryder’s success, other bands began to realize that it was possible to come from Detroit and become national stars. Michael Stevens, a DJ for WKNR says, “When you listen to Mitch Ryder, you can hear the reason that all the people at Ford or Chrysler would get out of work, off the line, grab a beer, and listen to ‘Devil with a Blue Dress On’.”  

One of the Detroit bands directly inspired by Mitch Ryder was The MC5. Wayne Kramer, guitarist for The MC5 said The MC5 straddled the two worlds of the old Detroit bands: those who did choreography and wore matching suits, and those who grew their hair long.
Showing a similar interest in theatrical presentation, The MC5’s style directly followed in Mitch Ryder’s path, mirroring the African-American showmanship --most notably James Brown. Slash discusses his views of The MC5 and says,

The MC5 was the heaviest rock and roll band I had heard, ever, when I was a kid. That was the first real heavy, punk, heavy metal attitude I was exposed to. It was no holds barred. Really big sound -- thick guitars. It was just, black or white—it was right there, and I really dug that. It stuck with me because I wasn’t playing guitar, or thinking of playing guitar at that point. But it definitely stuck with me.44

Watching The MC5 perform was a definite high energy, interpretive art event. Rob Tyner, The MC5’s lead singer, with his hair teased into a large afro reaching a foot from his head, would jump, spin, and dive on stage with just as much energy as James Brown did years before. Guitarists Wayne Kramer and Fred Smith, using their guitars as props would also move on stage, sometimes portraying sexual innuendos, and always evoking a strong energy. The members of The MC5 pervaded an energy, and creative style that went on to influence hosts of rock bands throughout the decades, including Nirvana, Kiss, Aerosmith, Meat Puppets, Mud Honey, Rollins Band, the Cult, Rage Against the Machine, Monster Magnet and many others. This breadth of The MC5’s influence helps to dissect the massive influence and direction that Mitch Ryder passed down to subsequent rock inspired bands.

Slash says it was the vibe of early Detroit music in general that influenced his guitar playing, and that his musical direction was always parallel with Detroit’s musicians.45 Slash says that he has continuously been a large fan of the full Detroit music spectrum including: The MC5, Seger, Nugent, Iggy Pop, and Alice Cooper. Slash relates Cooper to Detroit musicians in general and says,

Alice Cooper is very true to life. You can always go along with the story of whatever he’s saying. He’s got that Detroit, gritty, edgy, rock and roll voice
which again seems to basically seems to come out of Detroit when you talk about American rock and roll bands. Maybe it has something to do with the cars.46

THE UNDERTONE OF DETROIT MUSICIANS: DEFIANCE

Along with African-American musical styles becoming a binding agent for Detroit-influenced rock music, another common thread that continues to define Detroit musicians is defiance. From Mitch Ryder’s era through to the present, Detroit rock artists have shared this similarity of going against the predominant trends in the music industry. Nugent elaborates on this aspect:

Don’t underestimate the most important word of all to describe Detroit music. And it is one fucking word and it is called defiance. We defied fashion, we defied trends, we went for the jugular constantly. And to this day if you listen to The White Stripes, or Eminem, or Kid Rock you still hear that volatile energy and that is what makes us so wonderful.47

It may be this common defiance that gives a sense of heritage and respect for other local Detroit musicians as well as an appreciation of the overall Detroit musical climate. Due to Detroit defying most national trends, it may be easier for Detroit musicians to see and relate to their collective Detroit mindset by embracing common cultural values. Kid Rock says, “Michigan, Detroit is as strong, if not stronger than a Texas, than a New York, than a Boston or Chicago where people are extremely proud to be from here. Detroit supports everything that goes on, from the cars, to the sport teams to the musicians.”48 Slash also finds Detroit’s mindset geared toward a defiance or an in-your-face edginess:

If you think about all the different metropolises in the US, and all the bands that have come out, I don’t think there has been one area that has been more responsible than Detroit for serving up really in your face hard rock bands. When I say hard rock band, I don’t mean the prototypical hard rock where everything has to be super distorted and super screaming. I am just talking about rock with balls. Where it has an edge to it and it is a really sincere kind of thing. That is the way I see Detroit, the bands that are coming out of Detroit, or anybody coming
out of Detroit is going to have that edge. Eminem is not necessarily hard rock, but he definitely has an edge.⁴⁹

Nearly all artists interviewed identified Detroit as one of the most energetic and musically supporting regions. Nugent talks about the energy of Detroit by saying, “When I traveled the country, no other city could compare to the volatility in Detroit and it is because of the genuine emotion and support of the music as conveyed by white artists who understood the soul of music not the fashion.”⁵₀

Slash continues Nugent’s sentiments for the region defying trends and focusing on truly unique musical products:

Maybe Detroit’s working class mentality has given Detroit musicians a hardcore point of view and no bullshit kind of attitude. It has really got a certain kind of brash thing to it. Iggy Pop was unparalleled when it came to that. Alice Cooper—obviously. When you think of Ted Nugent, you think of the Amboy Dukes and then Ted Nugent on his own. That was somebody who was screaming for attention. I went to a few Ted Nugent concerts back in the day that were just the loudest rock concerts I ever went to. And even Bob Seger. Back in the mid seventies there was singer songwriter rock guys coming out: Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen, and there was Bob Seger. And the only one I really liked was Bob Seger because he again had that gruff, down to earth, in your face kind of mentality even though it was a very singer songwriter kind of thing. He still had good rock guitar and a certain kind of roughness around the edges of his voice.”⁵₁

This understanding of the true “soul” of the music from Detroiter, has led to many individuals saying Detroit produces some of the best musicians. In fact, Kid Rock says the Detroit musicians are “the best in the world.” One of the main reasons Rock feels for Detroit’s musical superiority is that the Detroit community has the ability to truly relate to the working class population:

I think we relate to more of middle America than anyone else, especially people who come out of New York, LA and those type of towns. The people who speak with the working class people of America are working class people themselves, who are from those environments and who stay rooted in those environments.⁵²
Ultimately, it seems that the Detroit musical audience relates to middle class America due to the ingrained defiance. The defiance of Detroit often takes the shape of the sound of the rock music of the region. The interesting aspect uncovered is the defiance, and the “in your face attitude,” and “brashness” of the region is not relatable to a specific time period. Instead, Detroit has continually embodied the defiance from the 1960s at its creation throughout the timeline of Detroit rock music. From the defiant traits as well as the world understanding the local hardships that the Detroit community endures, Detroit rock music seems to become relatable and truthful to Detroit and all music audiences worldwide.

THE SOUND OF DETROIT

There are many factors and variables that go into producing the sounds associated with Detroit rock music. Often upon initial reaction listeners find the common Detroit rock music distorted, unrestrained, raw and unpolished—similar characteristics that help to emphasize Detroit’s rough, hard edged, defiant nature. The raw unpolished tones do not translate into a lack of concern toward the quality of music. In fact, in many regards the aspects to create the distorted tones and nearly uncontrollable feedback of guitars is often more complex than capturing the most clear or processed sounds of the modern music world. Nugent discusses Detroit’s musicianship and the relation to the tones of the instruments and says,

Remember, we were musicians. Yeah there was some guys who were into fashion, probably some guys who just wanted to meet girls. All the transparent bullshit reasons to play music. But the vast majority of musicians in Detroit were hardcore heart and soul musicians. Music is about audio. Music is about sound. Nothing is more important than guitar tone.
The importance of the sound of the guitar continued throughout the Detroit musical community and musicians again went on to try to recreate and utilize the earlier African-American tones and styles which were so prominent in the region. Above all, the musicians in Detroit were extremely aware of the importance of the musical tones, and understood the relation from the sound characteristics of music and the amount of success that could be expected. Nugent comments on the process of understanding the origins of his musical sound and the ultimate influence his musical tones have had on his success,

When we started playing we had to get that Chuck Berry, Bo Diddly guitar sound. When we played the James Brown songs, we had to get that incredible crisp Stratocaster and Les Paul sound. That once again was a competition in how the music was conveyed. The bass had to be big, and fat, and round, and deep. The drums had to sound like gunfire. The guitar had to be really volatile, energized, and dynamic-- it had to be crisp and bright but raw and angry. So we were all sound conscious. Because that is the vehicle by which your musical statement is going to be either embraced or avoided. The better the sound the more the people like it.54

Although Nugent has a definite view on the make up of good Detroit rock music, and illustrates his direct influence from earlier Detroit musicians, the newer generations of Detroit musicians have often developed their musical direction in the digital age. Kid Rock talks about the current view of the Detroit sound,

Sounds are now across the board. You can walk into a Guitar Center and you can get any fucking sound you want. You know, back in the day it was something to obtain an 808 [one of the first programmable drum machines] it was something to obtain a 59 Marshall that had been hot rodded [an amplifier sought for its unique distortion qualities]. But now there’s digital plug-ins. The playing field has been leveled.55

Although Kid Rock finds that the creative act of making a musical statement
through the sounds of the instrument has been diminished, he also says that the ability to
attain the nearly limitless digital sound possibilities has provided musicians the ability to
focus more on other areas of their craft. Rock says,

“So give everybody all the equipment they want. Give them the best studios in the world,
then it comes back down to songs, and song writing which has been very absent from a
lot of popular music I think in the last ten years.”

Ted Nugent identifies the obstacles between the song and the end product. He highlights
that although the Detroit musicians often have a clear idea of the sounds and direction of their
song, there is often a necessary fight or “defiance,” needed to create the product that they
imagined.

Nugent discusses his song, “Stranglehold” and his need for defiance against his music
label. When Nugent’s “Stranglehold” begins there is a single guitar which plays for eight long
bars before the full band assists with bass guitar and drums. The guitar, bass and drums, all play
at specific “down beat” intervals to give a massive, thick, and heavy sonic quality to specific
sections of the song’s melody. The song is full of energy, heavy rhythm and extremely intricate
guitar melodies for all of its 8 minutes and 22 seconds. The length of the song alone does not
conform to the standard three or four minute common rock song.

“Stranglehold,” which has become known as one of the best guitar riffs of all time, serves
as Nugent’s personal reminder to defy other opinions, especially music labels, and to focus on
his feeling and musical aspiration. Nugent discusses the struggle with the recording of
“Stranglehold:”

You listen to “Stranglehold” come on the radio; listen to that motherfucker come acros.
There just isn’t any better guitar in the world. When I went into the
studio and members of the band and members of the production team didn’t want
to record that song. They didn’t think it went into the mix. I had to fight—that is
where that Detroit fuck you defiance came up. I went that’s really a shame you don’t want to record it. Now shut the fuck up and get in the studio cause we are recording this motherfucker.\textsuperscript{57}

A large percentage of the barriers imposed on the Detroit rock musicians in the recording studios come in the form of music labels trying to formulate songs into products they believe have higher odds of success. It seems appropriate that due to Detroit’s long history of not following national trends, that the musicians in the Detroit region would have a hard time conveying their ideas and aspirations initially to music labels who are geared toward following the very trends Detroit, as a whole, tries to evade.

The specific area in which these confrontations usually occur is in the recording studio. It is in the studio where the music labels, who are hoping for hit songs and high record sales want to often exert influence over the song selections and song content. It is also in the studio that the musician makes, or jeopardizes the chance at a long musical career. Ultimately the recording studio is a tool used to capture and reproduce the unique sound of Detroit rock music.

STUDIO CULTURE IN DETROIT

The recording studio is often understood to be one of the most important areas in a musician’s career. It is the recording, created in the recording studio, which is played by music fans again and again and represents the true voice of the artist. Similar to all other aspects that this dissertation has documented, the Detroit recording studios often are not associated with following national trends and, like Detroiters in general, seem more focused on recording the song rather than tweaking the sounds to ultimate perfection.

Jim Diamond, founder of the Detroit recording studio Ghetto Recorders, has had a steady streak of successful recording projects. Motorcityrocks.com, a website geared specifically for
Detroit musicians provides information about the Detroit rock music community, and posts, “More than anyone else, Diamond is behind the signature Detroit sound. As the owner of Detroit's world famous Ghetto Recorders, Jim brought new life to the recording process by reverting to the old.”

Diamond has produced and recorded several Grammy Award winning albums by The White Stripes as well as hosts of other successful albums. Diamond finds that the style of recording musicians in Detroit has evolved throughout the decades. He says that from Motown being very polished but very rhythmic, to The MC5 and The Stooges being consistently unpolished and gritty, Detroit has covered the full spectrum of musical messages. Diamond does acknowledge that after the MC5’s generation of rock musicians focused on unpolished rock music, the region, more or less, has maintained that course throughout the decades. Diamond also finds Detroit’s rock movement has always been specifically focused on a real representation of the band, without the added polish that other studios and musicians put on their music:

Musicians in Detroit look at the studio as representing their live sound but a little better. Not so much of the, ‘oh we are going in the studio so now we can add all the horns and string sections and tympanis we ever dreamed of.’ People want to make good rock and roll records, and I think I capture a good representation of what the band is live you know, without the mistakes, or at least most of them.

Diamond also finds the musical equipment associated with most Detroit musicians is pretty standard. The musicians he deals with will have a Fender or Marshall amp, a Gibson or Fender guitar with little other equipment or technology. This equipment is the common choice for musicians worldwide.

The Fender guitar, often a Stratocaster or Telecaster model, has a bright, tinny sound that transfers greatly into a distorted amplifier to provide penetrating sounds which rise above the cumulative band to provide clarity to the guitar tone. The other popular guitar choice is the
Gibson Les Paul. The Les Paul is a much heavier, solid guitar, which produces a more deep, full, and low sound. The depth of sound and the heavy body of the guitar often allow the notes played on the electric guitar to ring or sound longer than other guitars. The Fender amplifier, similar to the Fender guitars is known for providing a lighter, tinnier tone. The Fender amplifier is often used in conjunction with the amplifier’s reverb which creates an echo that seems to round out the sound. The Marshall amplifiers have a much more edgy and aggressive sound. The Marshall amplifiers are known for their strong distortion which often creates a high frequency feedback when the noise of the amplifier vibrates the guitar strings. Feedback is an often used tool in rock music and again produces an edgy, almost uncontrollable tone of the music.

Although Diamond acknowledges that nearly all Detroit rock musicians use the standard instruments, he believes that his studio does provide a significant influence over the musicians and their ultimate recordings:

I think a studio influences musicians quite a bit. My studio is pretty raw. It is like a big concrete rehearsal room with a control room. It used to actually be a chicken processing factory in the 30s, and the control room used to be the freezer. I talk to a lot of other musicians and they talk of other studios and how uncomfortable they are. It is like going to the dentist. You know everything has wood, and carpeting, and track lighting. I mean my place isn’t like feral dogs live here but it doesn’t make you feel like a doctor’s office.

Diamond believes that his focus on embracing the “real” performance aspect of the bands has been a key to his success. Diamond says, “My place is set up like a rehearsal space, where everyone can jam, and it just happens to have a tape machine.”

From Diamond’s input, as well as his string of success, he makes the point that Detroit musicians relate best with minimal technology. Detroiters are better with just plugging in their guitar to an amplifier and playing—rather than fussing with a diverse array of digital
technologies. Speaking specifically on digital technology, Diamond addresses the computer revolution changing many recording studios:

I think the digital studio evolution has made things more generic. People in the digital format all use the same sound effects that they have in the computer. And that is why I don’t have that. I like every recording session to be a little different.\(^{62}\)

The fact that Diamond avoids utilizing digital, computer-based recording represents a unique defying phenomenon. Currently nearly every large studio that services successful artists and often works for music labels utilizes digital technology. Diamond distinguishes himself by his choice of continuing with an older method of recording. Diamond still employs a two-inch analog tape recording machine. The two-inch tape machine, which has been used in recording studios since the 1970s, allows 24 distinct recorded tracks of analog for recording individual instruments or vocals. The tape machine Diamond employs gives the overall recording a smoother, round sonic quality although represents limitations by not allowing the recording studio to digitally alter the music for perfection. It is because of these limitations of analog tape recording that most studios have gravitated toward digital recording exclusively. Diamond, however, illustrates through his not accepting the common philosophy on digital recording, that Detroit, as a community, is defiant across the full spectrum of musical traits.

ARTISTS AND THE SUBURBAN SOUND: REGIONS INSIDE A REGION

The Detroit community is widely dispersed among the city of Detroit and its multitude of far-reaching suburbs. The vastness of the region, and the lack of mass transit creates a segmented, individualized region with unique pockets of culture. The lack of mass transit is unusual in a city the size of Detroit and emphasizes the isolation of the suburbs.
Perhaps because of the isolation among the Detroit suburbs, Dan Carlylsle says he feels there were different dress codes and behavioral codes from musical bands that directly related to where in the Detroit area the bands were based. Carlylsle identifies the differing traits of the suburbs of Detroit:

I always thought one of the things I loved about The MC5 [from the Detroit suburb of Lincoln Park], and I am from the North area, The MC5 weren’t a hippie band. They were a show band. And if you stole their equipment they would beat your ass for sure. And if you pushed them a little far you would probably get a fist fight if you wanted one. The MC5 were coming from a more rock-a-billy tradition, where a lot of the bands in the north area were coming from a British tradition.63

Focusing on this idea that one could distinguish a band’s identity based on its suburban location, others interviewed for this dissertation also found this regional distinction by the suburbs a factor in influencing the musical outcome. Detroiters have downriver suburbs such as Lincoln Park (hometown to The MC5) that identify with southern or rock-a-billy characteristics. Northern suburbs such as West Bloomfield, Birmingham, Royal Oak, and Rochester Hills embrace an international ideology with often more metropolitan flair and European and British tendencies. The eastern suburbs of Grosse Pointe and St. Clair Shores are oriented more toward nautical inspiration and conservative East Coast music preferences. The suburb of Ann Arbor represents a California-Berkley cultural experience.

Nugent agrees with Carlyle’s idea that each suburb around Detroit is distinct and could be placed in different regional areas of the nation at large. Nugent says that he was also aware of the different sounds and stylistic traits from bands from each of the suburban regions. He relates this idea to what he refers to as “the spokes of the wheel” phenomenon. Detroit, as Nugent describes, is the center and the vast suburbs spring out from the center like the spokes of the wheel. This philosophy also allows for a more segmented Detroit to develop due to many
individuals not wanting to drive or pass through Detroit in the evening for concerns of their safety. In turn, alienated and far reaching suburbs are left on their own. As the separated from the regional culture, the musicians are left to the resources in their specific neighborhoods. The separate, niche suburban sounds eventually are diffused as the musicians come to play at the popular venues and outlets within Detroit. This suburban phenomenon illustrates the diversity within Detroit and its ability to maintain separate, unique communities, with the underlying common theme of defying national trends throughout the region.64

DETROIT ARTISTS: SUPPORT FROM THE INSIDE

A large percentage of Detroit’s artistic success in the musical industry rests on the ability for the region to cultivate an atmosphere that nurtures upcoming talent. Earlier in this chapter, it was identified that common beliefs in defying current trends helped to form Detroit musician cohesion. From this cohesion, where established musicians tend to help new musicians gain popularity and hone talent, there is an engrained cultivation of creative energy.

Wayne Kramer, with his band The MC5, was a strong factor in continuing Detroit’s rock music strength. Kramer discusses The MC5’s relation to subsequent Detroit artists:

We were on the cutting edge. We were at the point of the spear. We initially were about busting the idea that nothing cool could happen here because it is Detroit. We said we have some good ideas, and we think these ideas are as good as anything else on the world stage, and we are not ashamed from being from Detroit. We brought a degree of self efficacy to the other musicians. To keep us from copying people from London or Liverpool, New York, or the West Coast. We said we don’t need to copy anybody; we have plenty going on right here. 65

Kramer’s focus on Detroit music and the need to nurture its local art continues to this day within the Detroit community. There are several distinct ways in which the Detroit music community
prepares and promotes upcoming musicians for musical success. These methods have been utilized by the rock music scene since the 1960s and continue to be strong components in the local success ratio.

**Compilation Albums**

One of the ways that this nurturing has been achieved is through recording studios releasing compilation CDs that feature several local artists on one CD. The studio usually charges a band a small fee to record the song for the compilation CD and, in turn, the band is given several hundred copies of the compilation CD to distribute. The bands sell the compilation CD at shows to recoup the investment for recording the CD. The sale of the CD to music fans allows the fans in the community to become familiar with many regional bands. This also allows the recording studios the opportunity to market their services to many musicians as the musicians and fans become aware of the studio’s recording ability.

Several of the recording studio compilations from Detroit have become extremely sought after for music collectors—especially if one or more of the artists achieved musical success and the compilation represented one of the first public song recordings. This phenomenon happened to Jim Diamond and his studio, Ghetto Recorder, with an early compilation CD featuring songs by The White Stripes prior to their widespread fame.

**Venue Cross Marketing**

Another technique utilized by the Detroit music community to gain support is through cross marketing of Detroit rock bands on show posters. On average, each musical performance has a minimum of three Detroit bands that play in an evening lineup. Creatively designed
posters are routinely constructed and hung throughout the city and suburbs announcing the shows. This display allows developing Detroit bands to begin to gain name recognition within the community and benefit from sharing a stage with more well known artists.

The concert poster artwork in Detroit began in the 1960s with Gary Grimshaw, who became the premier artist in charge of making unique, colorful posters for upcoming shows for artists such as The MC5, Jimi Hendrix, The Doors, The Who and thousands of other bands. Grimshaw says he had to lure the Detroit audiences into the Detroit clubs because “Detroit didn’t have rich kids waiting to spend money on drinks.” Grimshaw’s art posters were a tactic to lure in large audiences. In comparison, Grimshaw says that “in the bay area around San Francisco the clubs where filled with rich kids who would come in even if the bands stunk.”

Local Promotion

Detroit has maintained a large infrastructure devoted to assessing and promoting musical acts and musical performances. With musically-geared weekly newspapers, including *Metro Times* and *Real Detroit Weekly* there is a continuous flow of new articles and concert promotions available to all Detroit residents for free. Also, the main Detroit newspapers, *The Detroit Free Press* and *The Detroit News*, offer local columns featuring local musicians and their schedules in the paper nearly daily. The large scale, Detroit-based music magazine, *CREEM* magazine, which specialized in providing humorous accounts of Detroit musical acts, helped provide large following to the Detroit music community. Local radio stations provide exposure through full radio programs devoted to playing exclusively new upcoming Detroit artists, both in a historical context with WABX and WKNR in the 1960s to “The Homeboy Show,” which is on CIMX 89.9FM today.
Helping Other Artists Receive Major Label Contracts

A current trend in recent Detroit music has been successful artists helping other Detroit artists receive lucrative major label contracts. After Kid Rock achieved national success in 1999 on Atlantic Records with his album “Devil Without a Cause,” he helped his longtime best friend and DJ, Uncle Kracker, obtain his own contract with Atlantic Records. Uncle Kracker’s first album, “Double Wide,” sold over two million copies and he continues to maintain a successful career as a touring solo artist.68

In 2006, Kid Rock, while at a Detroit Pistons basketball game, was handed a demo recording by a Detroit artist named Ty Stone. Kid Rock invited Stone to join his personal label, Top Dog Records, and helped Stone secure a spot on Atlantic Records. Stone’s first record will be nationally released in 2008.

Detroit artist Eminem secured his Detroit friends a spot with their cumulative group D12, on his label, Shady Records. D12 released their 2001 debut CD, “Devils Night” which went multi-platinum and started the continued success of the group both as recording artists and touring artists.

INTERNET REVOLUTION: A NEW BATTLE FOR DETROIT MUSICIANS

As with all aspects of life, the digital revolution has greatly changed the process and methods in which Detroit artist’s careers are directed and how their music is received. The Internet and its pivotal role in the current music climate presents one of the only areas of this investigation not to display an extreme parallel between the 1960s musical climate and the successive generations. The Internet revolution is acting on the new Detroit musicians in unique
and important ways. One example of the Internet becoming imbedded in musical messages took place at a White Stripes show in London in 2006 where all 10,000 attendees were presented a blank CD enclosed in a sleeve that labeled it a live recording of an unreleased single played at the concert that night. All the concert attendees needed to do was log on and download the song onto the disc the following morning.69

Detroit artists, as a whole, may defy the notions of trends and new technology when it comes to musical equipment; however, nearly all Detroit artists have become adept with the use of the Internet for their career advancement. Nearly all Detroit musicians now utilize the networking website myspace.com as an agent to inform and gain a larger fan base. Through MySpace, many of the earlier cultivation tools, such as local promotion and cross marketing bands are conducted simultaneously on the Internet. MySpace has allowed beginning artists an opportunity to capture a fan base and name recognition that was not possible in earlier decades.

The lack of payment to the artists from illegal Internet downloading has greatly influenced the shape and structure of Detroit music culture. Again, this does allow a different view between the early and current Detroit rock musician. The current artist’s structure is highly reliant on tour revenue to offset the lack of funds from album sales. Due to the increasing importance of touring, more artists are actively touring for longer periods of time. The increase in artist touring has given the venues and clubs of Detroit even more regional influence. To completely understand the Detroit rock music picture it is essential to assess and understand the Detroit venues and musical retailers.


35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.


41. Ibid.


44. Slash, personal interview with author, September 17, 2007.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.


54. Ibid.

56. Ibid.


59. Ibid.


61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.


CHAPTER V

DETOUR MUSICAL OUTLETS

“Sports and music -- that is all we have. Detroit isn’t a city that worships a broad range of culture. We don’t care about the opera, or have a lot of interest in the theatre, chamber music or symphony. Detroit loves rock and roll and sports.”

-- Tom Wilson, President of Palace Sports and Entertainment

The musical venues and music retailers in Detroit have been vital components to the region’s musical success. After the music listener becomes aware of the Detroit artist, the next step is to purchase the artist’s product. It is the point of purchase, whether a consumer is buying an album at a music retailer, or buying a ticket to a performance at a music venue, that displays the appreciation and support for the artist’s craft. It is also through the act of “supporting” an artist, where the musician begins to understand the musical traits that relate to their listening audience by the “support” they receive. The music venues and music retailers, in turn, are essential for the creation and continued evolution of successful Detroit music.

The support that accompanies Detroit’s music venues seems to be continually lauded as unparalleled to a national scale. From the 1960s to today, this chapter will document that Detroit has had an unusual amount of live music success. Slash, guitarist for the legendary band Guns ‘N’ Roses and currently a member of the band Velvet Revolver, is intrinsically aware of how important the venue and the Detroit audience is to his performance:

The whole thing about touring, about being in a rock band and touring, especially being in a band like ours [Velvet Revolver], which is very susceptible to who we are playing to. Our energy is our own, but how it really gets turned on, the way it gets magnified is by the energy we get in the give and take with an audience. Most rock bands, at least true ones, are like that. And we know which towns are most receptive, and this [Detroit] is one of them. You get excited when you get here because you know you are not going to have to work as hard to get the emotional content through and to have a really good time performing your thing
This chapter will document and capture a clearer picture as to why Detroit is “explosive” regarding unique trends found in the Detroit music venues and music retailers. Addressing musical outlets in a current context, as well as providing historical roots, this chapter will help to illuminate how the music scene defies current industry homogenization and brings an extremely large quantity of rock music to the city’s music fans.

LARGE MUSIC VENUES IN DETROIT

Detroit’s musical tastes and longstanding musical heritage relates to the unusual number of live musical performances which take place in the Detroit region. Detroit as a community possesses several large-capacity music venues, such as DTE Energy Music Theater, The Fox Theatre, The Palace of Auburn Hills, Comerica Park, Ford Field, the Phoenix Plaza Amphitheater, Freedom Hill Amphitheater, Cobo Arena, and Joe Louis Arena. Historically, Detroit’s venues, such as Olympia Stadium, Eastown Theater, and the Pontiac Silverdome, have also been crucial in providing large crowds the physical location to listen and experience the rock music of Detroit.

Although it is well known that the Detroit region has a large live music scene, it is often not acknowledged that DTE Energy Music Theatre, one of Detroit’s premier venues, has been the most attended amphitheater in the world for 17 consecutive years. The success of Detroit music venues is not a recent phenomenon. Alice Cooper, who grew up in Detroit, remembers the vibe and success of The Eastown Theater, which was a 1,500-person venue located in Detroit in the 1960s and 1970s. Cooper links the success of The Eastown Theater and, in turn, the
success of Detroit music venues to the great musical audiences in the region by saying, “[Detroit] was the best audience in the world. Any other city, people went home from work to put on their Levis and black leather jackets for a concert. In Detroit they came from work like that.”

Perhaps it is because of the energy associated with the Detroit audiences that so many famous “live” concerts have been recorded. Cobo Arena, a venue located a quarter of a mile from the Renaissance Center, served as the location for the KISS “Alive!” Album, Bob Seger’s “Live Bullet” album, Kid Rock’s “Live Trucker” album, The Canadian band, Tragically Hip’s “Live Between Us” album, Yes’s “Yesshows” album, J. Geils Band, “Live: Blow Your Face Out,” and The Doors album, “Live in Detroit.”

The Detroit audiences that come to see artists at venues seem to leave a lasting effect on the touring musicians and, in turn, seem to be the deciding force behind recording live albums in the Detroit area. Slash speaks in a similar vein about Detroit venue audiences and their lasting memories in his career:

> It has been my experience since I started playing guitar, first coming through Detroit in the early touring days of Guns ‘N Roses, it was a great gig. It was killer. From that point on for me it just became a known fact that every time you came through Detroit it was going to kick ass. And it has always had the history in my book as being one of the best rock and roll towns in the nation.

Slash goes on to acknowledge that it is the unique audiences that create the experience of playing in Detroit so great. Slash says, “Detroit is one of the most energized audiences in the world and that translates to us not having to worry about getting the audience into our show. We know that we will always have a great show in Detroit.” Kid Rock follows the same sentiments as Slash and says, “Detroit audiences are the best in the world.”

The great audience support and artist interaction may, in fact come from Detroit possessing a more vibrant, appreciative rock music crowd; however, the massive, continuous,
selection of live performances nearly every night of the week in Detroit definitely keeps the intrigue and appreciation of music at a high level.

“It seems like a day doesn’t go by that I don’t hear or see an ad for an upcoming show in Detroit,” says Kevin Watts, a local resident and musician. The community excitement for live music ultimately leads to a larger audience attending the music venues.

From this high level of rock music appreciation, fans are willing to support and attend concerts on a continual basis. It is this wide scale support that Alice Cooper, Kid Rock, Ted Nugent and Slash all reference as a great trait of Detroit. It is also this wide scale support that is linked to the engrained energy of the region.

It is the energy of the live music performance and the involvement of the band, audience, and venue, which makes the live performance a unique product. Tony Conway, a leading music booking agent, discusses the unique nature of live music and says, “You can’t download live, the magic and energy that comes from a live show – you can’t experience that anywhere else. You can’t experience it with an MP3, or a high-definition television, or a surround-sound system. There’s an emotional level you only get from a concert.”

The prominence of live music, and the fact as Conway points out of not getting the same experience via media, has helped Detroit build its reputation as a major music city. The act of “not being able to experience it any other way,” allows Detroiter’s to experience music in a way in which other communities may not have access. Many musicians from around the country have stated their admiration for the Detroit music community through songs such as, “Detroit Rock City” by the rock band KISS, “Detroit Medley” by Bruce Springsteen, and “Motor City,” by Neil Young.
Adam Graham, a *Detroit Free Press* columnist, finds that even with the concert industry in a transitional period and the Metro Detroit economy in a state of flux the venues in Detroit continue to have success. The reasoning for Detroit’s large crowd turn out is similar to the uniqueness and originality of Detroit radio: (a) Detroit venues are nearly all small, family run businesses, (b) Detroit venue owners are willing to take chances on lesser known tours and musical acts, and (c) Detroit venues look for other revenue streams to finance lesser known musical acts to allow the shows to be provided to the local audiences.

Tom Wilson, president of Palace Sports and Entertainment, which is an independently owned company that controls DTE Energy Music Theater, the Palace of Auburn Hills, and the Meadowbrook Music Festival, outlines his management plan regarding a recent concert with Eddie Money. Money, a moderately popular performer, was performing at the DTE Energy Music Theater and the tickets to his show were not selling well. Palace Sports and Entertainment, at Wilson’s suggestion, discounted many tickets for the performance to $2.00. Wilson illustrates the logic of this plan: “We have to ask, are we better off with an empty seat for Eddie, or do we count on that person to pay for parking and maybe a pop or two?” In the end, Wilson displayed a unique management strategy that is geared toward looking for ways to fund less popular acts.

Edsel Ford II, the great grandson of Henry Ford, gave a speech that seemed to identify the unique management directions that Tom Wilson exhibits. Ford, addressing the Detroit Regional Chamber’s annual conference said that the Michigan economy is about Regionalism, that “the competition that really matters isn’t Detroit versus Pontiac or Dearborn or Ann Arbor, it’s Detroit versus Atlanta, Stuttgart or Tokyo.” Ford makes reference to the fact that the
Michigan economic ideology has been focused on ways to “beat” these other regions, but take care of the varied cities and businesses in Michigan. ¹⁰

It is Wilson’s ideals along with the ideology of the other managers and executives in the Michigan region, that add to the continuation of Detroit’s longstanding community view which, in Ford’s words, seems to “beat” the other regional music scenes. The music prosperity, due to unconventional management strategies, continues to bring a disproportional number of unique artists and tours to the region.

Most music regions have limited control of their local music venues due to Live Nation or Clear Channel ownership. Live Nation and Clear Channel have policies which will not allow for specific venues to change ticket sale prices. This rigidness is in part due to Live Nation and Clear Channel being public companies which are constrained by investors, board members, and stock exchange rules. As a result, all regional music centers, which were controlled by these entities were scaling back and only booking top-end, extremely popular concerts in 2007. This method of scaling back was part of a nationwide strategy by Live Nation and Clear Channel to try to increase profit margins. ¹¹ The method of limiting the number of musical tours to solely large successful acts does not provide the diversity that caters to many unique music listeners. As a result, “most amphitheaters were lucky to break 30 shows,” said Gary Bongiovanni, editor of the concert industry trade publication Pollstar. ¹² The difference between 30 large music shows and Detroit’s 61 large music shows at DTE Energy Theater in 2007 seems significant in defining Detroit’s ability to cultivate more defined musical tastes. ¹³ Coupled with that, looking at the live performance as an event which can not be duplicated by recorded media, the Detroit region’s recipe for music success seems more pronounced.
The musical tastes of the Detroit audience lead to DTE Energy Music Theater averaging more than 10,000 fans per concert and hosting 15 sellout shows in 2007. DTE Energy Music Theater had nearly 597,000 music fans attend a musical performance at its venue. This is significantly more than the number two national amphitheatre, Colorado’s Red Rocks, which had 404,000 fans in 2007.\textsuperscript{14}

In addition to DTE Energy Music Theater’s domination, the Meadowbrook Music Festival hosted 37 shows with more than 150,000 fans; and the Palace of Auburn Hills hosted 200,000 music fans in 2007. The total of the three music operations, led by Wilson and owned by the family-run Palace Sports and Entertainment Group, catered to nearly one million music fans in Detroit in 2007.\textsuperscript{15}

Kevin Cassidy, who runs Detroit’s Freedom Hill Amphitheater, states in a 2007 Detroit \textit{Free Press} interview that he agrees there is an unprecedented support of live music in the Detroit community. “[The people who ultimately make out best are the fans],” Cassidy says. “[They’re getting more shows now and they’ve got the opportunity to sample more programming].” Although Cassidy views the fans as benefiting from Detroit’s varied musical market, the venue employees and independent owners also have the opportunity to thrive. It is apparent that the full music community in Detroit realizes the unique and successful live music situation. Cassidy sums up the engrained appreciation for Detroit’s music scene from the multiple large music venues standpoint: “We’re just happy to be part of the strongest touring market in the country.”\textsuperscript{16}

SMALL MUSIC VENUES IN DETROIT

Detroit’s musical success is not exclusively linked to the large crowds and famous artists associated with large capacity arenas and amphitheaters. In fact, the smaller venues, which hold
between 50 and 1,200 music fans, were the exclusive outlets for rock music in Detroit’s formative years. It is Detroit’s small clubs that are often filled with lesser known, more creative acts. Detroit small venues, although associated with smaller, or less popular acts, have a strong history in creating successful and noteworthy musicians and music. The small venue and its support from the complete Detroit music community is not a new phenomenon. It was the small clubs and theaters in Detroit that first showcased many of the large and successful regional and national artists throughout the decades.

A large portion of the successful rock music from Detroit in the 1960s and early 1970s was first performed and discovered at the most famous small venue for rock music in Detroit: The Grande Ballroom. The Grande Ballroom, as discussed earlier, was established in 1966 by Russ Gibb, an 8th grade Social Studies teacher, disc jockey on WKNR, and musical entrepreneur. Gibb leased a building that was a dance hall in the 1920s and a roller skate rink in the 1950s. Gibb’s building, which became known as The Grande Ballroom was located at 8952 Grand River Avenue, was a massive success. The venue eventually housed performances by The MC5, Iggy Pop and the Stooges, The Amboy Dukes with Ted Nugent, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, The Doors, Jefferson Airplane, Jeff Beck, Steve Miller Band, B.B. King, The Grateful Dead, Buddy Guy, Fleetwood Mac, Jimi Hendrix, Cream, The Who, Janis Joplin, Jethro Tull, and many other local and national artists. The Grande Ballroom was the first venue in Detroit -- and among the first in the country -- to devote itself exclusively to rock music performances. Gibb said his idea for The Grande Ballroom in 1966 came after traveling to San Francisco in 1965 and seeing The Fillmore created by Bill Graham, a legendary west coast concert promoter. Gibb met with Graham and, because Gibb was from Detroit and Graham didn’t view Gibb as someone who would compete with his business in San Francisco, Graham
provided information on the structure and business model of The Fillmore and its relation to the hippie movement in San Francisco.

From what Gibb witnessed in San Francisco, he knew the concept would be a massive success in Detroit. Gibb also understood that the location of the venue, close to one of Detroit’s major highways, I-94, which connects the East Coast with Chicago, would allow touring artists the ability to play the venue as they made their way between the East and West coasts of the United States.

The Grande Ballroom was every bit of the success that Gibb imagined, although it represented a different venue and atmosphere than The Fillmore in San Francisco. *Detroit Free Press* columnist Brian McCollum acknowledges the difference of the The Grande Ballroom by saying “The Grande was flower power with Detroit muscle.”

Iggy Pop, in a 1997 *Detroit Free Press* interview, summed up the unique crowd at The Grande Ballroom by saying, “Detroit wasn’t San Francisco, so you had these heavy-lidded peace-and-love people on the edge of violence.”

Although The Grande Ballroom’s crowd was more rough and “edgy” than those found in San Francisco, they still responded to the unique facets of the general hippie movement. To relate to the forming hippie movement, Gibb purchased the first strobe light in the state of Michigan, which was made by a Stanford college student and shipped to Detroit. Gibb also utilized overhead projectors displaying shapes and colors on the walls -- all with the end result of creating a psychedelic vibe that was original and unique to the Detroit music scene. Gibb also says he put an emphasis on maintaining an overall safe environment for the young hippies, by employing security personnel both inside and outside the venue so that music fans would not be afraid to be repeat customers to the venue.
The appeal of the Grande Ballroom is best understood by the music fans who frequented the venue. Susan Whitall, a former Grande Ballroom customer states in the *Detroit News*, “It was at The Grande that great numbers of long-haired, rock and roll loving kids gathered in large numbers, making it the apex of all things counterculture in Detroit.” Michele Lundgren, a former patron of The Grande, says, “It gave a lot of kids from the suburbs a place to truly escape and feel like they fit in. It was a very free spirited time, and we were all a bunch of young artists, poets, and musicians who came together to express ourselves and listen to some fantastic tunes.”

Al Jacquez, who played at the Grande Ballroom with his band Savage Grace, reflects on the venue by saying:

The Grande Ballroom was an incredible place to play. The crowds were huge—really responsive. There’d be a sea of faces, all different ages, different looks. Guys, girls, long hair, short hair, people dressed to the nines in hippie regalia, others just dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. I remember a lot of people smiling. The smells of patchouli oil and pot. It was just so alive.

Although the cosmetic directions and the crowd’s behavior in the venue were important in the overall draw of the club, it was the acoustics which impressed the touring artists that played the club. Tom Wright, manager of The Grande Ballroom, relates the acoustics and the tangible structure as the key ingredient of the massive success:

Inside The Grande was like walking inside a Gibson Guitar—perfect acoustics which had a massive effect on the musicians who played there and brought incredible performances out of them and presented it to a packed house of people. Those people went out and told their experience to a zillion people. Consequently, The Cream sold a lot of records in Detroit and so did The Who.

Wright also attributes the longstanding success of The Grande Ballroom to the fact that the artist’s popularity increased after playing in the venue. Wright says,
“They say, ‘oh Russ [the owner] you brought all these great bands to The Grande well he did, but once those great bands came to The Grande, they became even greater. This was the case with Cream, Led Zeppelin, and with The Who. The Grande Ballroom was a transforming experience.’” 27

Wright’s experience with The Grande Ballroom also helps to identify the uniqueness of small clubs in Detroit. Before becoming the manager of The Grande Ballroom, Wright was the manager for The Who. He traveled on tour around North America with The Who and said that he was in nearly every music club on the continent. Of all the clubs he had visited with The Who, he felt the energy and vibe in The Grande Ballroom in Detroit was the strongest. When the tour ended, Wright wanted to be a part of the great energy of the Detroit music scene. He contacted The Grande Ballroom’s owner, Gibb, and told him that he wanted to run The Grande Ballroom.28

Wright also acknowledged that the success of The Grande Ballroom was in part due to the location. Wright says, “if The Grande had been in Grosse Pointe or Birmingham [more affluent cities] it would have never got off the ground.”29 He said the main reason for The Grande Ballroom’s success in Detroit was that the city was more tolerant to 500 long haired people coming and going to and from the shows.

Dave Miller, the emcee of The Grande Ballroom, says it’s easy to look back on The Grande Ballroom as historic, because everyone at the The Grande Ballroom knew that history was being made. Miller says, “I think we all sensed that at the time. That is how strong the energy was there. Detroit was blessed to have one of the epicenters of that culture in the form of the Grande. The ambience of the place was very special. And it’s still got an importance and relevance today.”30
Although the Grande Ballroom was pivotal for creating an early dominance of small venues in Detroit, the subsequent club proliferation in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s have also become legendary. On Wednesday, May 2, 2007, the successful Emmy Award winning, Golden Globe nominated television show, “Gilmore Girls” helped to reiterate the national appeal of Detroit’s small venues, specifically The Magic Stick. The TV drama showed an aspiring guitarist Zach, played by actor Todd Lowe, speaking about his band’s ability to play larger, more prestigious music venues by saying, “We’re not just playing anywhere, we’re playing the Magic Stick. Everybody has played the Magic Stick.”

The small venues in Detroit and their contribution and influence in the creation of rock music provides an outlet for musicians to cultivate their craft and hone their musicianship at legendary clubs. Venues such as The Magic Stick/Majestic Theatre, The Magic Bag, Saint Andrew’s Hall, The Shelter, Lager House, Small’s, Alvin's, Clutch Cargo’s, Paycheck’s, Belmont, Elbow Room, Emerald Theater, Berkley Front, Cadieux Cafe, Pharaoh’s Golden Cup, The Mosquito Club, Buddha Bar, and Jacoby’s all have paved the way for generations of musicians after The Grande Ballrooms early dominance. It is these clubs that provide a continual supply of music throughout the Detroit region and have been pivotal in producing many of Detroit’s recent music successes.

In 2007, James Petix completed a documentary entitled, It Came From Detroit, which focused on Detroit’s strong music scene in the 1980s and 1990s. Petix’s documentary provides coverage on the small clubs within Detroit and, ultimately, examines the local music scene and its successes such as The White Stripes, The Muggs, The Detroit Cobras and other nationally acclaimed Detroit artists. In the documentary, Petix shows the common “family” atmosphere
where nearly all small Detroit bands know each other, know the club employees and owners, 
attend other band shows, and, ultimately, support the full music scene.

Petix’s documentary also uncovers the fact that many musicians can live in Detroit, due 
to the low cost of living, often exclusive on the money they make from playing live shows. Petix 
says,

You can take the money that you made on tour and you can live off it for six 
months. Or a lot of musicians have really cool part time jobs to supplement it. A 
lot of musicians work at the DIA [Detroit Institute for Arts], and there is a whole 
bunch of people who work at Somerset Mall at Neiman Marcus’ display 
department because one of the girls is a manager there, and they need part time 
help and the musicians are perfect for that, they are home for six weeks after a 
tour and they need a job and some extra cash.32

In fact, Detroit’s cost of living is lower than any other music region in the United States, 
according to the “Cost of Living Index” compiled in 2007 by the Council for Community and 
Economic Research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost of Living for major cities in the USA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metro Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit, MI</td>
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<tr>
<td>(average U.S. city)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
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<td>New York, NY (Manhattan)</td>
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Fig. 3. Cost of Living Index.
In addition to Detroit having the lowest cost of living compared to other music regions, Detroit also has the most affordable housing in the country, according to a 2006 report by the National Association of Home Builders.

### Most Affordable Housing - Top 20 Metropolitan Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metro Area</th>
<th>Share of Homes Affordable for Median Income</th>
<th>Median Income (In Thousands)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detroit, MI</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis, MO-IL</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis, MN-WI</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>78.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas, TX</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>69.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>77.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix, AZ</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside, CA</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>57.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The low cost of living in Detroit coupled with the relatively inexpensive housing market has allowed local musicians more creative musical time due to fewer financial constraints. Grimshaw discusses his experiences of living in Detroit, moving to San Francisco, and eventually relocating back to Detroit. Grimshaw says, “The cost of living is so much higher in San Francisco. I wasn’t used to that. When I was living in an apartment in San Francisco I kept thinking to myself, boy I could buy something really nice in Detroit for what I am paying in rent.” Grimshaw says it took him seven months to find his dream house in Detroit and in nine months he was back in the community. Overall, the affordability of living in Detroit drew Grimshaw back to Detroit. It is the same affordability which allows the local musicians more free time to focus on creating music and staying active in the music community which directly relates to the nearly never ending supply of great Detroit music.

Looking at Detroit’s music and culture, parallels can be drawn from The Grande Ballroom’s dominance in the 1960s and 1970s to the more modern small venues that continue to support revolutionary music. Nearly all of the successful small venues for rock music reside within the city boundaries of Detroit. By locating the venues in the city of Detroit, and not the suburbs, the owners operate their business on less expensive real estate property. In addition the musical support and appreciation from the music fans of Detroit has maintained itself from the early 1960s through the following decades. The reason The Who selected The Grande Ballroom
as their favorite stop on a national tour of America was the Detroit music crowds in the 1960s. Likewise, the reason that Slash selects Detroit as his favorite stop on tour in the 2000s is, again, the audience. Overall, little has evolved regarding Detroit’s musical venues and the region’s music fans. The lack of change has become a strong positive attribute of Detroit’s live music scene.

MUSIC RETAILERS

Historically, since the 1960s, Detroit music stores have played a vital role in the regional supply of music to listening audiences. Detroit music retailers are known for their ability to cultivate new Detroit musicians by allowing new music groups to sell their local albums to local fans and attract audiences to their craft all within the confines of the local music stores.

To help local aspiring music groups within Detroit, independent music retailers promoted new, local albums at the music stores. The local artists, who receive shelf space for their albums, have their musical product sold on consignment. Consignment sales usually have the music store keeping 50 percent of the albums profit, and giving 50 percent of the sale price back to the musician. Through these Detroit music store consignment techniques, a large percentage of local musical acts cultivate an audience and following for their music. The consignment process is not exclusive to Detroit and has worked at independent music stores throughout the country.

The process of consignment does not exclusively benefit the artists as many music retailers have made a significant income through selling local artists. John Kunz, owner of Waterloo Records & Video, an independent music retailer in Texas discusses his music store’s success as it relates to local consignment CDs and says, “We do a couple hundred thousand dollars worth of consignment each year.” Kunz says that one of his store’s biggest all-time
sellers is Bob Schneider’s “Lone Lyland,” which sold 20,000 copies, the first 10,000 of which were sold on consignment in his store. Schneider got signed to Universal Records based on the success of his consigned record.  

From Kunz’s observations, the consignment process seems to work well for the artist who sell albums, the record store who makes a large commission, and the music label who understands that the artist who sold 10,000 consignment CDs has a successful music future.  

Although the consignment process helps all artists, Detroiter and non-Detroiter alike, there seems to be energy and an eclectic nature in the Detroit music retailers which also inspires local music audiences. Nugent, speaking about the excitement of Detroit music retailers, finds that the overall success of Detroit music retailers is that the consumers meet and learn from extremely knowledgeable staff about local and national music. Nugent discusses the unique factors he remembers of Detroit’s record stores:  

If you examine the look and feel of record stores in the 60s, 70s and 80s, the people who owned them were insane rock and roll fans. So their window displays, creativity, and once again, defiance was there. Detroit created the entire guidance of national retail about putting the artists in the window, saturating the windows with the artists who are in The Grande Ballroom this weekend. The signing party, autograph parties, meet the artist parties it just erupted. Detroit’s record store parties were the most energized and involved. Unfortunately today it is not the case, you couldn’t find a human being working at a record store who didn’t live the music. They worked there because they loved the music. Nowadays you have people working at record stores because they just want a job, they don’t care what type of job it is.  

The discrepancy that Nugent references between the “old” record stores and the “new” record stores is undoubtedly hinged on the model of independently owned small music retailers versus larger corporate owned companies who often hire employees rather than music lovers.  

Since 2003, between 1,200 and 1,300 independent record stores nationally have closed.  

By 2005, the share of the market captured by independent record retailers fell to just eight
percent. In Detroit, music stores and music chains such as the Michigan-based Harmony House, as well as Sam Goody, Blockbuster Music, and Tower Records have become extinct. Harmony House, one of the most well-known music retailers, operated 38 music stores exclusively in Michigan and has closed every store within the last five years.

Mike Himes, the owner of the two music stores called Record Time, says in a *Detroit Free Press* interview, that his sales are down 10 to 30 percent most weeks for his record stores in Roseville and Ferndale, which has led him to currently begin to close his store in Ferndale. As the flood of bankrupt music stores brings an end to the mass sale of independent music, online merchants such as Amazon.com and iTunes have picked up some of the market.

Chris Anderson, in his book entitled, *The Long Tail*, finds that tangible stores, such as Detroit music retailers cannot compete with the online model. Independent music stores have an average capacity of 35,000 titles, and to maintain a profitable business plan each album has to sell often to pay for the costs associated with the tangible business (utilities, rent, payroll, etc.). In comparison, according to Anderson, online retailers have no limitation on the number of music titles it carries, due to no tangible overhead with maintaining a storefront. In turn, online retailers are content to have a CD sell one copy per year—and that sale transcends into profit. To carry the obscure, one-CD-sold-a-year copy, the online retailers stock hundreds of thousands of CD titles—more than any tangible music retailer in history. In contrast, the tangible brick and mortar Detroit retailer can’t afford to stock rare CDs that sell one copy per year.

This equation has led to online retailers providing an unparalleled coverage of rare music albums, with a large selection of sales coming from small, specialized album sales. Compounding the problem for independent, tangible music retailers is the big box retailer section that consists of Wal-Mart, Best Buy, Target and Circuit City. These stores cumulatively climbed
from less than 14 percent of album sales in 1995 to more than 50 percent ten years later. Wal-
Mart is now the largest seller of CDs on the planet. These big-box retailers only maintain an
inventory of roughly 5,000 albums – however each album is a high selling, popular hit. Stacey
Mitchell talks about the big box strategies in music retailing in her book, *The Big-Box Swindle:
The True Cost of Mega-Retailers*, and finds that large retailers not only reduce music to a
commodity no different from toothpaste, but that they also sell the albums at a loss (cheaper than
they buy them for), hoping that someone who comes in for the latest Keith Urban CD will also
buy a DVD player or a refrigerator.

Kunz, speaking on the pricing discrepancies between big box retailers and his
independent music store, says that it is frustrating for him to see something that he has to pay
$11.50 or $12.00 for advertised below ten dollars at a big box retailer. While the mass
merchandisers can make up the losses in other departments, stores like Kunz’s are nearly
exclusively dedicated to selling music. It is unfortunate that the independent record stores
around the country, specifically within Detroit, cannot compete with the pricing imposed by the
big box retailers as well as the selection the online retailers carry. As the only choice for
competing with the new music retailer models of online and big box, independent music retailers
push customer service and the overall experience of going to the store.

One of Detroit’s premier local music stores in 2008 is Street Corner Music. Street Corner
Music is trying to specifically relate to the individual customer through unparalleled customer
service. The store identifies its current 2008 business plan toward customer service on its
website, which is geared toward helping customers find the most appropriate music for their
specific tastes. The Street Corner Music business plan states:

> Everyone at Street Corner Music works here because they love music. That’s not
to say that everyone here loves ALL types of music. That’s why we have different
people who are into different things, who specialize. WHAT WE ALL DO ENJOY is listening to music and finding music for people... hooking people up (the hook up). The hook up is the fun part of working at a record store. Watching someone flip over something they’ve been looking for is a supreme kick for us.  

The customer service and knowledge displayed by the Street Corner Music staff is becoming increasingly rare. To understand the effects of the massive music retailer closures and shifts in strategy, it is important to understand the complete big box retailers’ strategies that have made them the largest music retailers.

BIG BOX IN DETROIT

Perhaps the most disturbing factor of the big box retailers and their relation to the Detroit music scene is that they are fighting for the same regional territory. The strongest area for independent music retailers has always been in urban centers such as Detroit. These urban centers are exactly the same regions that the big box retailers have been targeting for new customers over the last decade. Wal-Mart and its 3,792 United States stores are directly saturating the main cultural areas of the United States. Figure 5, taken from Wal-Mart World: The World’s Biggest Corporation in the Global Economy shows the spreading of the Wal-Mart culture in the United States.
The above illustration displays the obvious conclusion that Wal-Mart locations have heavily consolidated in the Midwest and Eastern areas in the country. Figure 6 helps to provide clarity to the spreading of Wal-Mart in the Midwest and allows a clearer view of the strategy of saturating urban centers, such as Detroit, Chicago, Madison, and Cleveland while maintaining an even distribution in the rural areas.45
The complete saturation of Wal-Mart can best be viewed by Figure 6 which factors in the distance most individual shoppers are willing to drive to their nearest Wal-Mart location—a distance of 20 miles. The 20 mile ratio is shown on the following Figure 7 and represents the actual diffusion of the Wal-Mart locations. Again, for the purposes of this study, it is imperative to realize the near complete coverage in the Midwest region, generally, and the Detroit region, specifically.
Although Wal-Mart has been in the Detroit area since 1992, the focus of the company has been on other segments of the country for most of this time period. Brent Snavely, a writer for *Crain’s Detroit Business*, says, “as of 2002 Wal-Mart began to focus efforts to better serve the Detroit region.” It should also be noted that it was in late 2002 that all Harmony House music retailers in Michigan went out of business.

Wal-Mart’s presence and sales have been continually increasing in the Detroit area. Figure 8 helps identify the trend which continues to promote the big box retailers and, simultaneously, places more burden on the independent music retailer.
“Ultimately, the scenario for big box retailer domination is very shortsighted on the part of manufacturers,” says Ed Christman, senior editor covering retail for *Billboard*. The record labels are harming the very retail segment that they rely on to help them develop new talent and the next generation of mega hits. The mass merchandisers cannot fill this role. Christman goes on to say,

The impulse purchases of consumers who go to an independent [record] store for a new album are likely to be other CDs; at Target, those impulse buys might be drinking glasses or throw rugs. Some executives see the pitfalls of steering consumers to the mass retailers, but they cannot help themselves when offered the chance to harness the advertising and merchandising muscle of the chains to pump up sales of a particular album. 

Independent music retailers have tried to fight back by temporarily pulling albums by the artist or the label from their racks. “We managed to raise our voices against it and stick our finger in that hole in the dike and hold it back for a while, but it’s increasing,” said Kunz.
MUSIC STORES MAKE A MOVE TO COMPETE

Although the changes these obstacles have brought to the music store are numerous, a portion of Detroit music retailers have survived and continue to thrive during industry hardships. Bill O’Keefe, owner of Rock-A-Billy’s records in Utica, has found that to survive in the music business he has had to alter his tactics. O’Keefe says that he began working on getting people into the store. To do this he has scheduled performances by local musicians, magicians, and even midget wrestling. According to O’Keefe, at the 2005 Motor City Music Conference, the tactics worked as his business has not suffered a large loss of CD sales over the last several years.54

One way the remaining music retailers are finding strength in the marketplace that is increasingly dominated by big-box retailers is through the form of retail collectives. On the national level, most independent stores have become part of the National Association of Recording Merchandisers (NARM) which, since its establishment in 1958, has been a not-for-profit trade association that serves the music retailing community in the areas of networking, advocacy, information, education, and promotion. The NARM membership operates over 7,000 retail music storefronts throughout the country, and provides direction and ideas for competing in the modern music business. NARM provides strategies and directives that seem to work for higher independent music store profits. NARM provides concise strategies and music climate reports. NARM issued a report in April, 2004 for its members that highlighted the direction that the overall music climate is heading. Included in the report were key ideals, such as significant growth for online retailers, the diminishment of music piracy issues, and the increase in legal digital music downloading.55
Although NARM represents a national voice for music retailers and, through reports like the prior NARM serves to keep all music retailers informed about issues affecting the music industry, several communities have taken it upon themselves to form additional regional music coalitions that are focused on specific segments of the country. Within the Detroit region, a coalition called Detroit Music Retail Collective (DMRC) was formed as a way for local retailers to share ideas and advertise as a group of stores for the benefits of less cost per store and more clout. The DMRC has enrolled stores to the collective documented on the website of Detroit artist Stewart Francke. The DMRC includes the following stores throughout Michigan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Store Name</th>
<th>City</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flipside Records</td>
<td>Clawson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Street Corner Music</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record Time Inc.</td>
<td>Roseville</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hot Hits</td>
<td>Roseville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disarm, LLC</td>
<td>Ann Arbor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disc &amp; Tapes Unlimited</td>
<td>Brighton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dearborn Music</td>
<td>Dearborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Of Ages Inc.</td>
<td>Garden City</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slick Disc</td>
<td>Trenton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White's Music Plus</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ace's Jams</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record Time Ferndale</td>
<td>Ferndale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telluride</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damon's Record Center</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Alley Records Inc.</td>
<td>Rochester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock - A - Billy's</td>
<td>Utica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Insight</td>
<td>Keego Harbor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switched On Cd's</td>
<td>Novi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearinghouse Music</td>
<td>Burton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt Earp Records</td>
<td>Flint</td>
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<tr>
<td>Store Name</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neptune Records</td>
<td>Royal Oak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cd'S &amp; More'S</td>
<td>Saginaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discs &amp; Tapes Unlimited</td>
<td>Howell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Moon Records</td>
<td>Mt. Pleasant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Round Midnight</td>
<td>Owosso</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elderly Instruments</td>
<td>Lansing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marshall Music</td>
<td>Lansing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jam Enterprises</td>
<td>Lansing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bop Stop 1st Class</td>
<td>Portage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Express</td>
<td>Kalamazoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jam Records</td>
<td>Portage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disco Mania</td>
<td>Dowagiac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Nugent Adventure Outdoors</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corner Record Shop</td>
<td>Grandville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Circle</td>
<td>Holland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodd'S Record Shop</td>
<td>Grand Rapids</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vertigo Music</td>
<td>Grand Rapids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disc Location</td>
<td>Grand Rapids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverberation Music</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aris Disc Shop</td>
<td>Grand Rapids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Moon Records</td>
<td>Sault Ste. Marie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill's Compact Disc</td>
<td>Iron Mountain</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 9. Detroit Music Retail Collective member stores.

The DMRC allows all member stores to purchase music collectively to receive price breaks on the quantity ordered. Like any organization, continually seeks out more stores to aid in the group power, and it advertises for other local alliances within the region on the NARM
website, and promotes itself and the importance of regional music stores to the Detroit music climate by stating:

Being centered in one of the most fertile areas for new music in the nation means that the DMRC are “tastemakers” for the broader market. Artists who start in Detroit are often superstars in a few short years...KID ROCK, WHITE STRIPES, EMINEM, etc. We are the stores who sell the cool stuff first! We offer a variety of marketing programs that are very affordable.\footnote{57}

One recent advancement that the DMRC has incorporated into their affiliate stores to offer more interest to their customers, is the Music Monitor Network. The Music Monitor Network, as Ed Christman identifies in *Billboard*, is a kiosk with touch screen monitors. According to Christman, the kiosk will be in all Detroit DMRC stores. The kiosk monitors will feature information on the 20 featured artists that the network promotes every two months. Customers will be able to listen to all tracks on all albums and view electronic press kits and videos. In addition, the monitors will air trailers of new movies and videogames. They will also be used to run contests, which will allow the stores to build up a database of active buyers so that they can send e-cards to them.\footnote{58}

Although the music retailer landscape has greatly changed in the last decade, it seems that the Detroit retailers who have persevered in the region are the niche, creative and unique musical retailers. From the 1960s to the present day, it has been the same independent, creative, music retailer traits that have been vital for the cultivation of Detroit’s culture. Although limited testimony exists, it may be found that the “music-chain retailer” was not the venue that was essential in promoting and cultivating the new, rising music in Detroit. Instead, it was the independent music retailer. Although a large percentage of music stores have closed, the surviving independent music stores such as Street Corner Music, Rock-A-Billy’s, and Music Box, may be able to carry on the local musical cultivation without interruption.
Chris Weilminister, senior vice president of leasing with Federal Leasing, addresses the issues of music retailers in current malls in the Midwest and the overall credibility of national music retailers versus independent music retailers. Weilminister says, “Cannibalization is what’s happening in the music industry and we’re really looking at alternative uses for music space in malls.” Weilminister goes on to say that the only successful music operation he would consider leasing mall space to is, “a niche operator, a mom and pop store that sells vinyl.”

Overall, in Detroit, music retailers started as small independent stores in the 1960s. Through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s the independent retailers had to endure competition throughout the Detroit community from music chain retailers. However, in a more recent view, Detroit music retailers are again the only music retailer option, as the music chains have become an outdated model of music sales. In its own unique way, even the state of music retailers in Detroit has more or less gravitated to following the initial 1960s direction that was laid out for Detroit music.

From this chapter, as well as the earlier chapters, it is important to note that Detroit as a community hasn’t greatly changed how the music segments operate. There has been slight evolution to keep with a current culture—but there seems to be an underlying passion to maintain the current, already tried and true path of musical success.

Detroit has nearly completely maintained the same 1960s rock music direction, kept an appreciation for cultivating new local talent, and maintained the ability to defy national trends that did not fit into the regional mindset. Throughout all segments of this investigation, regardless of the decade examined, Detroit’s failure to follow has translated into success in nearly all musical avenues. Moreover, the earlier views and beliefs that were adopted in the 1960s rock era are the very ideas, beliefs, and views that are still lauded as the regional mindset.
The continued success mirroring the early 1960s rock is highlighted in radio stations. As this document illustrated that regardless if a radio station is pioneering a style of programming in the 1960s focused on playing albums and songs that were rare like WABX, or a radio station maintains the ability to not follow national dictates, and still focus on rare album orientated rock music such as the more modern WRIF, the community appreciates and supports the effort.

This focus of maintaining the 1960s ideals again surfaced with musical venues, who in the 1960s were some of the most revolutionary venues in the country due to having such a large selection of local and touring artists playing the venue and a great ambiance and crowd. In a modern view, Detroit still has an undying respect for the venues, large and small, which bring more tours to Detroit than any other region in the country.

The artists in the 1960s focused on being true to their view, not selling out, and helping fellow Detroiter through the musical messages. This artistic focus helped The MC5 gain success in the 1960s and possess a strong political and social critique. We can see the very same traits manifest in modern Detroit artists such as Kid Rock who speaks on war efforts and supports Detroit revitalization, and Eminem who critiques national society and the predominant media through his ingeniously crafted lyrics.

Overall, the defiance that Detroit embodies is across the board, and has always been across the board. Detroit seems to appeal to the confrontation and friction which has surfaced through the years. The region seems to thrive on the juxtaposition. Chapter 6 will further document the common directions and overall findings from this research to better understand and document Detroit’s unique music industry, artists and musical outlets.
NOTES


5. *Ibid*.


20. *Ibid*.


22. *Ibid*.


27. *Ibid*.


29. *Ibid*.


CHAPTER VI
EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

“Music and Musicians are important insofar as they reflect and shape the consciousness of the people out of which they emerge.”
-- John Sinclair

The following chapter will serve to direct the unique occurrences that surfaced during all facets of this research process including oral history interviews, referenced academic texts, trade journals, music consumer books, newspaper archives, and Internet resources. The findings from this research conclude why this project was conducted and completed: to better understand Detroit’s unique ability to continually produce successful rock musicians from the 1960s through the subsequent musical eras.

This project found four distinct avenues as strong factors for the continued local musical creativity within Detroit. This chapter will provide a concise understanding of the general themes which surfaced during the research. The data uncovered the recurrent theme of defiance that was represented in all aspects of the Detroit music scene. The defiance was often geared toward national trends and, in turn, illustrates the dominant confrontation in nearly all aspects of the region against large, national, homogenizing forces. This study also found Detroit’s unique publicity outlets (radio stations, music publications, counterculture promotions, and venues) offered a stronger voice and a larger audience for local musicians to reach that often translated into a larger musical fan base for Detroit musicians. This study also documented the unique suburban layout around the Detroit community provides segmented pockets of unique creativity. Detroit suburbs seem to act independently from other local suburbs and function to allow distinct
sounds to develop without succumbing to one regional musical direction. Finally this study acknowledges that Detroit has maintained the direction and overall ideals of the early rock music pioneers of 1960s, without letting evolving homogenization and cultural trends dilute the regional music climate.

DETROIT’S DEFIANCE

The most heavily addressed finding across the Detroit musical industry, musical artists and musical outlets was the recurrent theme of defiance. This aspect of defying common assumptions and national paths manifested in nearly every aspect of the study. Defiance as a regional trait has served as an activity to bring the Detroit community closer together in an effort to cumulatively refute the larger national systems.

It is unclear when to start identifying the defiance of the region. For the sake of this study, the defiant undertones surfaced exactly where this study began: in the 1960s rock music. It was documented in Chapter 3 through the testimony of several early Detroit disc jockeys, such as Dan Carlisle and Russ Gibb, that 1960s Detroit rock orientated radio from its inception defied the dominant radio programming taking place around the rest of the country. Gibb and Carlisle found that Detroit radio pioneered the disc jockey run radio shows. Testimony also found that Detroit radio station WABX pushed the envelope as to what Detroit rock oriented radio played and how Detroit radio programming often had to defy industry trends. Detroit radio’s defiance served to bring about regionally unique radio traits which separated Detroit radio from the dominant national radio programming.
This study finds through the interview testimony that the Detroit radio market still possesses a unique radio format, which defies national programming directives. As a result, this common theme of defiance transcends throughout the rock radio eras of this investigation.

Nearly all of the interviews involving Detroit radio found it to be innovative, unique, and among the best radio station markets in the country. In nearly every conducted interview the reason for the “uniqueness” was the region’s willingness to stand up against mainstream national radio programming.

The defiance that occurred during the early years studied in this project was not exclusively linked to the dominant radio mentality. Instead, the defiance was represented as a mindset that was disseminated to the local residents. Detroit’s counterculture and hippie movements, led by John Sinclair in the 1960s, depicted the region’s ability to abstain from the easy, compliant view and, instead, stand up for the Detroit-oriented beliefs.

These political and social movements in Detroit upheld a strong, defiant theme against common national and older generational views. This study documented the Detroit youth clash against the predominant cultural and governmental systems. In turn, it was the confrontation and conflicted interests that ultimately produced the many creative outlets, such as rock bands, social organizations and influential venues, which were erected to aid the counterculture cause in Detroit.

One of the products of the defiance of the Detroit youth was the creation and success of the pivotal counterculture/hippie culture musical venue: The Grande Ballroom. The Grande Ballroom became one of the first venues in the country to exclusively focus on rock music and, in doing so, also focused nearly exclusively on defiant music. The Grande Ballroom and the
other documented early venues in Chapter 3 gave a voice, purpose, and camaraderie to Detroit youth who defied the common assumptions of 1960s society.

Chapter 4 identified the common defiant traits held by Detroit artists. This chapter documented the conflicted interests between large, touring artists from Detroit, and their interrelated struggles for defying music labels’ paths toward national trends and homogenization. The Detroit artist testimony seems to fight against the common acts of record labels homogenizing their talent, musical sounds, and promotional materials into national standards.

It was identified through first-hand, personal interviews how smaller, lesser known Detroit artists were cultivated and raised on music that evaded mainstream music ideas. The upcoming Detroit musicians listened to and interacted with other local musicians who maintained similar, regional music interests while neglecting career direction based on national trends. Overall, local defiance allowed the Detroit musicians to create and interact nearly exclusively with regionally produced musical products, and in turn, produce music that has a message which is often in contrast with national music messages.

Chapter 5 identified the local music venues and their defiance of national trends. The defiance occurred in the venue mentality by overcoming the forces of Live Nation/Clear Channel’s method to limit the amount of national music tours for the sake of increasing profit margins. The defiant themes for Detroit music venues were, perhaps, illuminated most strongly in the sheer amount of live musical performances in the region as well as the unique overall view of profit streams such as parking, food and beverage purchases to supplement and, in many ways, justify the musical events. Detroit was documented as maintaining the largest musical touring region in the country due to defying common national music venue assumptions.
Overall, this research demonstrates that local conditions in Detroit seem to be ingrained with defiant undertones. These findings have implications for varied academic pursuits. This research will continue to assist in better understanding cultural production and, perhaps, more importantly, cultural refutation of homogenizational trends. Regional characteristics, often studied by cultural geographers, may also find the dominant themes of the documented defiant testimony informative for further research pursuits.

DETROIT’S UNIQUE PROMOTIONAL INDUSTRIES

A key issue uncovered by this research investigation was the relative ease at which Detroit rock artists could be played on Detroit radio, play a performance in a successful musical venue, or be featured in many of the Detroit music oriented, independently-owned publications (often which have a national readership/following). In addition, Detroit musicians were able to have their music for sale at local music retailers, receive career suggestions from successful local musicians, and have the ability to open shows for larger Detroit area musicians, which served to quickly draw a following for the new bands. All of the prior suggests that a portion of Detroit’s success as a strong music region is a result of the promotional tools available in the music community.

The testimony and available research compiled in this study directly relate the local promotional outlets as a unique tool for the cultivation of the region’s rock music. This study found the unique promotional system at work within Detroit directly influences the publicity and exposure of local rock musicians to larger audiences. This research documented that Detroit maintained an accessible promotional presence, which was a factor in the unusual amount of musical success within the Detroit region.
The available promotional magazines, including *CREEM* magazine, the politically oriented *The Fifth Estate*, and the more recent *Metro Times* and *Real Detroit Weekly*, all seem to find a devoted readership and fan base for emerging Detroit musicians. This investigation found that many Detroit music magazines maintained independent ownership that again translated into more freedom to publicize the local musicians without the constraints of a nationally dictated focus. The available promotion, combined with the long string of musical success from the region was represented as a necessary ingredient that led toward an apparent gateway into musical exposure.

Another strong ingredient in Detroit’s musical exposure was the city’s radio stations, which were represented as more receptive to providing exposure to local musicians. In Chapter 3, it was found that the most influential aspect of allowing local musicians to move to the popular and successful mainstream market was attributed to radio airplay.\(^1\) Based on interview responses Detroit’s rock radio’s willingness to play local music was acknowledged as a significant asset to the musical community.

This exposure in Detroit radio as well as other promotional materials seems to be regarded as a “loophole” into national exposure. The paths that Detroit musicians have available to publicize their art do not seem to be as widely available and apparent in other regional music centers. The prior translates into this idea: the odds in the Detroit region for a Detroit artists musical success seem higher than musicians from other regional music centers that do not have the system of exposure already established.
DETROIT’S SUBURBAN EFFECT

The shape of the Detroit region and the ultimate location of the Detroit suburbs were found as catalysts for the unique and varied musical products created in the Detroit area. Long time WABX disc jockey Dan Carlisle and musician Ted Nugent both agreed that they were directly aware of the distinct sound that each suburb within the Detroit area produced. Carlisle went so far as stating he could hear the difference between northern suburb bands, southern suburb bands and the other suburbs exclusively by the musical sound and performances.

This idea of the physical locations of the suburbs altering the local musical products becomes more plausible when factoring in the lack of local mass transit, and the fact that most suburbs represent what Nugent referred to as “the spokes of the wheel phenomenon.” In Nugent’s wheel metaphor, the center was Detroit and the spokes that branched out from the center were the other suburbs. This “wheel phenomenon” provides additional validity due to a large portion of Detroit’s suburban residents not wanting to travel through the actual city in the evening hours for safety concerns. If this idea is put into action, it is quite possible that Detroit’s location amongst the suburbs limits the local influences and keeps each suburban community “pocketed” away from an exchange in ideas.

The results from these pockets can easily lead to distinct musical styles forming in each suburb. After the styles are independently cultivated, the finished product is often displayed for other suburban residents at Detroit music venues, which show the developing styles, sounds, and directions of the local musicians. Slash states, “Venues are like the colosseum in Rome where people would come from miles around to show their shit.” It is this act of sharing unique music
on a common stage which continues to influence and motivate other local musicians to, as
Nugent says, “play faster, better, and more exciting music.”

One of the reasons for Detroit’s competitiveness to, as Nugent says, “play faster, better,
and more exciting music,” was the Battle of the Bands. The testimony focusing on local artists
found an inherent competitiveness within the region’s rock bands. Both Nugent and Mitch
Ryder referenced the extreme competitiveness in Detroit and the fact that it was the act of
competition which made Detroit’s rock music a more professional product than attempts by other
regions at rock music. This competitiveness was further addressed by Slash as one of his main
descriptors of Detroit musicians. It was found that through a large scale musical support of the
Battle of the Bands, from the 1960s through the subsequent musical eras, Detroit musicians were
more aware of the necessity for strong musicianship and musical fundamentals. The result of
this awareness was found by many to be one of the catalysts for Detroit musicians’ exceptional
musicianship.

DETROIT: MAINTAINING THE COURSE

When I began this project I envisioned focusing on each decade of musical evolution,
covering the highlights of the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s, to show the progression. As I became more
saturated in Detroit testimony it became evident that Detroit rock music is not, and has never
been about, evolving. Rather, the undercurrent of this complete research, which was exposed
through the varied testimony, highlights that the very aspects that made the Detroit community
initially recognized for great rock music permeated all of the music decades. In other words,
Detroit rock music stands out by not changing. By maintaining the course and ideals, Detroit
continually appears unique in comparison with the current musical trends due to its desire not to follow those very trends.

The showmanship, musicianship, and personal ideals of Ryder greatly influenced Nugent, Seger, Cooper and those same factors continue to influence successive generations of musicians, including Kid Rock, The White Stripes and The Von Bondies.

Rock historian and critic Larry Grossberg discusses the modern music cyclical style and adds pertinence to the unique findings by stating, “Each time rock and roll finds a new energy and what starts off as a local movement soon comes to reinvigorate rock, until it gets commercialized and boring.” Echoing the same sentiments of Grossberg, Malcolm Gladwell, in the cultural documentary “ Merchants of Cool” as well as his book The Tipping Point, explains that once a commodity becomes “cool,” or mainstream, the act of it being popular kills the “coolness” that was attached to the original idea. Gladwell identifies this process happening consistently in fashion, music, and the technology sectors.

Continuing on the ultimate outdatedness of new cultural items, Steven Graves, in his research on Seattle and Champaign-Urbana from his dissertation, A Historical Geography of the Music Industry, identifies, similarly to Grossberg and Gladwell, that roughly every ten years a new musical location rises as a site for popular music creation, and this change of location for musical hot beds is due to “cool music” becoming popular and mainstream, disseminated. However, over time, the music eventually becomes not relevant to the listening audiences. The audiences then seek out the next form of relevant music for their tastes.

In contrast to the above view of musical stagnation, Detroit rock music, represented on a longitudinal timeline, does not allow the “stagnation” of the “cool” to eventually reduce the overall effect of the regional music. Detroit has maintained successful, “cool,” music which has
been continually well received for over 50 years. Surely, other culturally connected cities, such as San Francisco or Seattle, could have maintained the successful track record of the Detroit region from the 1960s to a modern scope. However, as this dissertation has shown, Detroit’s continual success is regionally unique whereas locations such as Seattle and San Francisco fall into the previously mentioned Grossberg, Gladwell, and Graves notions of music scene outdatedness.

This dissertation illustrates that Detroit is not affected by the same cultural production system and constraints at play throughout the rest of the music regions. Detroit circumvents the outdated nature of regional music by maintaining the same, tried and true delivery of rock music. In turn, the community and the local musicians have been able to maintain stature and relevance within the rock music community for nearly fifty years.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FINDINGS

Scholars have continually asked, “Why have so many American musical innovations been dependent upon the specific place of origin?”8 The overall intrigue with place of origin relating to new music can be elaborated by Kenneth Binda in his edited text, *America’s Musical Pulse: Popular Music in Twentieth-Century Society*, which finds, like many other scholars, popular music dominating all aspects of modern media, such as television, radio, movies, CD players, home entertainment centers, videos, elevators, public space, and private businesses. The popular music that is dominating the mass culture today, according to Binda, becomes more intriguing to his research when he hears the statement, “Today’s music is yesterday’s local music.”9
John Orman, author of *The Impact of Popular Music in Society*, perhaps increases the reasoning and relevance for academic studies such as this, by saying that from the ages of six to eighteen there is more exposure to entertaining pop culture than actual formal schooling time. Orman goes on to say, “popular music provides the glue that holds American popular culture together.”\(^{10}\)

While Orman’s writing shows the ultimate diffusion of regional music into popular culture views and beliefs, some scholars have went so far as to link the collapse of Eastern European countries, as well as the Soviet political system itself not to the failure of Marxist systems, but rather the inability of these systems to deliver rock music to the society. Orman says, “Karl Marx in his political theory never anticipated the problem that ‘I WANT MY MTV’ could create for decision makers in socialist countries.”\(^{11}\)

Although the data uncovered from this project is powerful in and of itself, the generalizability of the recovered data will provide a broader academic outreach to answer many scholars’ questions of why local music is such a powerful commodity. In addition, the formant and approach of this study may be useful for other regional innovation studies.

I find the data presented in this project directly applicable to better understanding regionalism and the local cultivation for the full range of cultural artifacts (painting, dance, and symphonies) as well as regional traits (education, manufacturing, and health care). In a broader view, innovative industries, such as engineering and design, can also benefit from a more detailed understanding of cultural factors for new localized product creation and manufacturing innovation. It is the wide reach of regional cultivation, with emphasis on evading homogenization pitfalls that will continue to make this research relevant for years to come.
STUDY LIMITATIONS

Concluding the presented research, one of the deficiencies that surfaced was minimal supplementary research in several relating areas to my research questions. As mentioned throughout each chapter’s investigation, the lack of attention, both scholarly and by the music industry, on local music retailers, 1980s radio programming, and recording studio culture ultimately leaves holes into understanding the full picture of musical cultivation with supplementary text. However, I feel that the conducted oral history greatly aided the deficiency by identifying some of these oversights and offering some of the first documented testimony to many areas of Detroit musical cultivation in specific and music cultivation processes in general.

This dissertation also represented the act of defiance in a positive light, which allowed the region to defy homogenization and dilute the effects of mass culture. In another view, the local defiance of the region could also be linked to the imbedded racial unrest and segregation in the region. It was not this study’s goal to uncover other sides to the defiance trait, but the aspect of better understanding the process and its multifaceted nature could be valuable to future researchers.

It should also be noted that this study was nearly exclusively focused on interviewing subjects from Detroit. The focus on the regional voices allows the findings to only have direct applicability to the Detroit region. The dominant Detroit voice also may overly portray the Detroit region as “better than other regions” more readily than an investigation using a large sample of interviewees from two or more distinct regional music scenes. This study, of course, cannot assert that Detroit is an any way “better than” any other city of region at producing rock musicians. However, it has, I believe, presented a compelling case for the things Detroit does
have that aid in its ability to continually produce successful musicians. Other cities or regions may have one or more of these same traits.

DETROIT’S ROCK MUSIC FUTURE

Steven Graves concludes his 1999 dissertation’s examination of regional music by stating, “With the world as your audience, there is definite potential for an unprecedented homogenization of all forms of popular culture.” Completed in 1999, it seems appropriate for Graves to make such claims as this time period represented the cusp of computer dominance and a global influence. However, in the Detroit community, the expected homogenization post–1999 has not readily occurred as predicted. Instead, the Detroit bands of the region seem to still be situated in a unique fashion, direction, and worldly view that evades homogenization, yet still brings unprecedented success to the community.

Recently, the Detroit band, The Muggs, a long-time underground band regularly playing at the Detroit club Cadieux Café, appeared on Fox’s “The Next Great American Band.” The show has bands from around the country playing in front of an audience and judges, and eventually a band is eliminated each episode. The Muggs climbed from the thousands of bands which applied to the show, to being in the select, top 12 remaining bands. Oscar Dahl, a senior writer for Buddy TV, a service which provides updates for TV shows and TV news writes selects The Muggs as his number four pick to win the show:

These guys might be my favorite band in the competition. However, I can’t place them higher because of their low commercial potential. They are, after all, the self-proclaimed “world's ugliest band.” Then again, they play kick ass blues-y rock and I have a feeling they’ll be the best at going from genre to genre. In the end, though, I don’t see commercial success in their future and feel like the votes just won’t be there from America.
It should be noted that Dahl, when assessing The Muggs and their attributes for The Next Great American Band, highlighted the very ideals this document has championed: not conforming to national marketing, being truthful, and, overall, possessing excellent musician abilities.

Bill Holdship, in a May 7, 2008 Metro Times article, interviewed The Muggs about their overall experience on “The Next Great American Band” and uncovered more confrontation between The Muggs’ Detroit inspired musicianship and the direction that the producers intended for the nationally broadcast show. Holdship, interviewing the band, finds they feel that the show in fact became “The Next Great American Wedding Band.” Holdship states, “The Muggs were not thrilled when they discovered they would be covering Elton John and Billy Joel tunes instead of their own material; it didn't help when the family-oriented show had them cover Elton John’s song “I Guess That's Why They Call It The Blues” instead of their first choice, Elton's highly objectionable “The Bitch is Back.”

The Muggs bassist Tony DeNardo discusses the national television experience and the friction from their musical upbringing:

We didn't cooperate the way they would have liked. They interviewed us the day before our final show for green room footage to broadcast and they kinda thought we were little brats. They’d be like, ‘What do you think of Billy Joel?’ And I'd answer: ‘Terrible. We’re really not looking forward to that at all!’ And we’d even get in little digs like ‘What's next? Air Supply?’ Other bands were like ‘Oh, we love Billy Joel!’ Now, look, we respect all those people as artists. But The Muggs had no business doing Billy Joel songs on national TV!

Although The Muggs did not win “The Next Great American Band,” their success and admiration is one small example of the continued success of the region.
Nugent sums up the local admiration toward the next generation of Detroit musicians by saying, “Detroit continues to produce the hottest, baddest motherfuckers in music—no other regions can even compare.” The Detroit region seems to embody Nugent’s charged words, sentiments and the corresponding strength, confidence and defiance. It became more apparent, personally, through conducting this study and living the research that, in fact, the world-wide stage appreciates Detroit’s “tell it like it is” often expletive defined nature.

Recently, I went on a trip to Paris with my wife, Kristen. On the Northwest plane I looked at the NWA World Traveler magazine in my seat pocket. The cover article was titled “Detroit Rock City: Motown Records may have left Detroit Years ago, but the city remains a hotbed of American Popular Music.” It was here, on this international flight, where I began to get the feeling of how the Detroit culture truly cultivates a worldwide interest.

In Paris we met up with my childhood friend who took us to a club on the exclusive Parisian street, Champs Elysee. It wasn’t the sort of location I would find myself frequenting. The bar lit up in changing neon colors, small groupings of leather couches were around the perimeter of the room, the stairway was made out of clear plastic which also changed color, the floor was made of glass block that also had altering hues of color splash across it, and electronic music filled the venue. As the night progressed there was only one song played in the club that had lyrics. The song, by the Netherlands recording artist Feddie Le Grande was titled “Put your hands up for Detroit.” I had never heard of the song nor was aware of the artist prior to this encounter. As the songs said “put your hands up for Detroit, I love this city” the Parisian audience exploded in applause. After the song faded, the remaining songs for the evening had no lyrical content and little crowd reaction. It was in that instant that I began to realize that the global community was more interested in Detroit than Detroit was interested in the global
community. The Parisian audience, Netherlands’s recording artists, and international flight magazines were inspired by the Detroit ideals -- ideals which push off trends and homogenization -- ideals which are a dying breed throughout most of the world.

Cultural theorist Jerry Herron begins his book, *AfterCulture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History*, by noting that “Detroit is the most representative city in America: where Detroit once stood for success, it now stands for failure.” Herron continues and states, “This is the place where bad times get sent to make them belong to somebody else.”¹⁷ In refutation to Herron’s sentiments, it is my hope that this dissertation served as a rebuttal of the arguments that solely focus on the negatives regarding the receding industrialization and the corresponding economic downturn of the region. I hope this document instead showed the true human spirit which is possessed by each Detroit resident, often in the shape of musical admiration, that rises above the hum drum. This spirit clearly identifies that one of the hardest, roughest and darkest cities in the United States is home to some of the most creative, bright, and imaginative residents. It is for these attributes that the world will keep a hopeful eye and ear on the Detroit community for decades to come.
NOTES


REFERENCES

BOOKS:


ARTICLES:


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INTERVIEWS


Staff, Mike. Interview by author. Tape recording. Detroit, MI, 10 May 2007.


Watts, Kevin. Interview by author. Tape recording. Detroit, MI, 4 August 2007.


UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL


“About Street Corner Music,”

“Affiliates of the National Association for Retail Music NARM,”

“American Bandstand,”


“Media Content Contemporaneous with Broadcast,”


“Napster Then and Now,”


“Radio Deals Designed to Curb Payola,”


LECTURES


Taubman, Alfred. Keynote address, quarterly meeting of Cityscape Detroit, Detroit, MI, December 1, 2006.

BROADCAST INTERVIEWS


DISCOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

November 6, 2007

TO: Jason Schmitt  
COMS

FROM: Richard Rowlands  
HSRB Administrator

RE: Continuing HSRB Review for Project H06D112GE7

TITLE: Understanding Detroit Rock Music 1965-2005 through Oral History

This is to inform you that your research study indicated above has received continuing Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) review and approval. This approval is effective November 16, 2007 for a period of 12 months and will expire on November 15, 2008. You may continue with the project.

Please communicate any proposed changes in your project procedures or activities involving human subjects, including consent form changes or increases in the number of participants, to the HSRB via this office. Please notify me, at 372-7716, upon completion of your project.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments:

C: Dr. James Foust
Informed Consent

Study Title: Understanding Detroit Rock Music 1965-2005 through Oral History
Primary Investigator: Jason Schmitt

Dear prospective study participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study which is focused toward better understanding the uniqueness of the Detroit music scene.

I am conducting this study to understand your personal experiences and the relation to the Detroit music culture. Your participation will consist of taking part in an interview to reveal your knowledge of the Detroit music culture. I expect the interview to last between 20-25 minutes dependent upon your answers. Your responses will be Tape Recorded which will allow your testimony to be quoted and better understood at a later time. Your name will be identified as a participant in this study as well as attached to quotations included in the study.

The audio tapes with your testimony will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office. After the study has been compiled the audio tapes will be destroyed.

Although there may be no direct benefits for you as a participant, you will be taking part in the first academic study focused on understanding the unique attributes of the Detroit culture through oral history. This research will provide new insight into academic literature as well as provide a new context for the perspectives associated with your Detroit knowledge.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may quit, leave, or withdraw your consent at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about this study please contact me at (419) 320-2378, (email: Schmittj@bgsu.edu) or the project advisor Jim Foust (419-372-2077 (email: Jfoust@bgsu.edu). If you have any questions about the conduct of the study, or your rights as a research participant, you may also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (419) 372-7716 (email: hsrb@bgsu.edu).

Please keep this cover letter for your reference, and sign the attached form if you agree to its terms.

Sincerely,

Jason Schmitt
Ph.D. Candidate
Bowling Green State University
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What is unique about Detroit?

Do you think of Detroit as the rock music city of the world?

What has changed regarding Detroit culture over the years?

What is your view of Detroit based rock musicians?

How do you think creativity is kindled in Detroit?

Do you feel that Radio broadcasts affect the Detroit culture? Why?

What stations do you feel play a major role in disseminating Detroit rock music? Do these stations help to cultivate new talent as well?

How do venues play a role in maintaining Detroit culture?

Have venues evolved over the years in Detroit? What has changed? Has the audience changed?

What role have record stores played in the Detroit Scene? For breaking new music? Do you see record stores roles declining?

Is there a current recording studio mindset with Detroit rock bands (i.e. a place to go, gear to use, a sound to obtain?)

How do you feel that record labels have affected the culture both within Detroit as well as broadcasting the Detroit mindset to the world?

Many say that the work ethic of Detroit comes through in the rock music. Do you agree with that statement?

What would you attribute to the great longevity associated with continually breaking new Detroit rock bands?

Why do Detroiters like their rock music so much?

How does Detroit adapt to continually bring new genre modifications to reality?

Do you relate to your Detroit roots through Detroit based music? Do most Detroiters relate to their community through there music? How?
What is one of your earliest memories of Detroit rock music? Why does that stick out?

If you were writing a history of Detroit music what events would you include?

What people stand out in your mind as key players in Detroit rock music?

If you were studying the Detroit music culture and its uniqueness, what would you cover?

POSSIBLE FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS
USED TO GENERATE NEW DIRECTIONAL INQUIRY:

Who knows a lot about this?

Who would you interview?

What do you think a history should do?

What would you like to learn from this study?

Who has a scrapbook or a file on this?

Where would I find the records I need?