

Epiphanies And Influences From Music In My Life

Story and Artwork By Rick Ray

At the age of 4 years old I sat in front of the television with my older brothers and sister waiting for the

Ed Sullivan Show to come on in February of 1964. I had gotten excited about it due to hearing all the talk from my siblings. I was already aware of who The Beatles were from AM radio and records being played. When Sullivan introduced The Beatles and they started playing, I knew what I wanted to do the rest of my life. Play guitar. It was mostly George Harrison who had the biggest impact on me. The energy level The Beatles maintained during that concert was phenomenal. A lot of sound for four young guys and that was it, my fate was sealed.

I got my first guitar in February 1967, a hollow body Les Paul copy (Silvertone) with one pickup. The days of playing the tennis racket were over. My older brother taught me some chords and a few songs and I was on my way. I had been given worn out Beatle albums from my older sister of which got worn out even further by me. Christmas 1967 at the age of 8, my soon to be sister in law gave me every Beatle album made up to that point in time, even the rare records. I was then holed up in the basement for quite a while with those albums. Friends would come over to see if I'd come out to play but most of the time I'd tell them, "I can't, I'm playing guitar". Sgt. Peppers was an album I didn't quite understand at first, being only 8 at the time, but after about the tenth listen, I understood. "A Day in the Life" proved The Beatles were of the genius realm.

One day in 1967 I woke up in the morning and turned the AM radio on already tuned in to WIXY 1260 and heard 'Light My Fire' by The Doors. It was only the 45 version but what an eye opener. Jim Morrison's voice over that hypnotic music made me want to learn that song as soon as possible. I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

In April of 1970 when I was 10 years old, The Beatles had broken up, I remember being a little devastated at the news and it left a big

hole in the world. Paul had released 'Maybe I'm Amazed' around that time and I thought it still sounds like The Beatles and there's always hope they could patch things up and get back together.

About that same time period my older brother John who would later play bass in my band Neurotic ('73 to '85) turned me on to an album that was released a year earlier. 'In The Court Of The Crimson King' by King Crimson. The first song, let alone the rest of the album, blew my mind. I hadn't heard anything like this before. '21st Century Schizoid Man' is still in my band's set list to this day.

Although I wasn't able to play it as a 10 year old, about six or seven years later that I was able to. Thank God for the 16 RPM setting on the turntable. You could slow the album down and it would still be in tune, one octave down.

Sometime after that mind blowing experience of listening to that Crimson album, my Dad bought a UHF antenna for the TV and we were checking out a new station, channel 25, PBS. They said a band was going to play live, The Mahavishnu Orchestra. The concert started and John McLaughlin and company left my jaw on the living room floor. That was definitely the fastest guitar work I had yet seen and heard in my life and the rest of the band was as good as he was. Unbelievable, I knew I had some work ahead of me.

In 1973, at the age of 14, a band I already liked very much released an album titled 'Brain Salad Surgery'. My first listen to this album by Emerson Lake & Palmer was like an Atomic Bomb going off in my brain. The "Karn Evil 9" trilogy was spine chilling from beginning to end and still is.

My first real concert was a year later, Roy Buchanan at the Agora. I wasn't old enough to get in but my older brother talked them into letting me in. He told them, "He's a young guitarist wanting to learn from this guy, he's

not going to do anything but sit and listen." They said OK and what a guitar lesson that was. Roy could make his guitar cry, sound like seagulls and scream. He was also another quick fingered guitarist. That same year I hitch hiked down to the Cleveland Stadium with two friends. It was a "World Series of Rock" concert with ELP, The Climax Blues Band, The James Gang and Ace. Seeing ELP play the "Karn Evil 9" trilogy live changed my life forever. Greg Lake's lead work in the "First Impression (Parts 1 and 2)" inspired me to really start taking lead guitar seriously. Previously from 1967 to this point in time I was into chord work, always searching for the lost chord but Greg Lake, not Harrison, McLaughlin or Buchanan was the one who got me to play lead guitar. Knowing the thousands of chords I learned previously helped out a lot. The rest of that summer I spent in my bedroom using 'Closer to It' by Brian Auger as a background band just playing lead guitar over top of it until I thought I was kind of "up to speed".

In that same year, 1974, my friend Brad who had moved from Euclid to Madison, had me come out to stay with him for a week. We had just got back to his house from walking around a plane crash site that happened a day earlier at Dock and Chapel Roads. We were sitting on his front porch, it was a misty gray day and WMMS (who was still a good station at that time) played "Child of Novelty" by Mahogany Rush. I cranked up the radio and knew I had to find out about this band. What a sound. When I got back to Euclid I went to the store and picked up some Mahogany Rush. I came to the realization the Frank Marino was probably the best guitarist on earth. Also that same year a friend of mine turned me on to 'Bridges of Sighs' by Robin Trower. I already was aware of him from his work with Procol Harum, I liked that band a "lot" but, this was different. This album had an atmosphere that no one had ever even come close to before. I still to this day can't quite describe it but I still get that same feeling every time I listen to it. It's spine chilling and kind of spooky at the same time. There's a mysteriousness to

it. This album had such an impact on me, my band plays it in its entirety.

A year later in the summer of 1975 at the age 16 I went to my second "World Series of Rock". I walked into the stadium and Frank Marino & Mahogany Rush took the stage. I was completely blown away. That concert is burned into my memory. Blue Oyster Cult came on after Mahogany Rush and were just about as great as them. Buck Darhma was and still is one of the "all time greats". There wasn't anything the other bands on the bill that day could have done to compare to Mahogany Rush or Blue Oyster Cult. It became anti-climactic. BOC's first four albums are impeccable works. 100% efforts. That same year, a friend, Phil Noch (who would later become lead vocalist for my band Neurotic and later for a little while in The Rick Ray Band) turned me on to Captain Beyond's first album that was released in 1972. What an unbelievable album. A perfect recording. Great songs, excellent playing, outstanding singing and an album I consider to this day one of the best releases ever put out by any band.

As the years went on I would get to see Frank Marino & Mahogany Rush, Blue Oyster Cult, Robin Trower, Emerson Lake & Palmer and some solo Beatles many times over the years. I consider them my music teachers and have told Frank Marino, Buck Darhma and Robin Trower this at some of the gigs we've had the pleasure to open for these great musicians.

In 1980, I went to see The Dregs. They were touring in support of their latest release at the time, "Unsung Heroes". Steve Morse took the guitar to a new level and again, like the Mahavishnu Orchestra, his band was just as good as he was. A superior group of five musicians that kept you on the edge of your seat hanging on for dear life. Some of the arrangements they came up with defy description. You'd actually have to hear and see it to believe it.

The next real mind blower wouldn't come until 1986 at the age of 27. Carl Palmer was busy with Asia at this point in time and Keith Emerson and Greg Lake were writing new material. So, instead of Carl they had gotten Cozy Powell to play drums. They released Emerson Lake & Powell. This album, once I went out



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and bought it, never left my turn table or the car stereo for a whole year and a half. Another album (the original, not the rerelease with bonus tracks) that is absolutely perfect. Beyond perfection actually. An album I can go back and listen to and still get chills up and down my spine throughout the listening experience. I really thought this album was going to turn the music world back around, as punk, new wave and disco had decimated the music world. I always thought punk was the equivalent of failing 12th grade and being forced back into kindergarten. Musicianship and songwriting had come so far and punk was people who couldn't play to save their lives. Even if they could play, it was out of tune, out of time and you couldn't understand anything that was being screamed at you. Anyway, the Emerson Lake & Powell album didn't turn the music world around unfortunately. If that album couldn't do it I don't think anything can.

Around the time of punk, new wave and disco, good bands started becoming something I would've never dreamed they could become. Journey, who was a progressive rock phenomenon had Steve Perry forced on them and they turned into a generic commercial band. Genesis, who were also a prominent progressive rock band and who could "really" write great work, had their lead singer Peter Gabriel leave and Phil Collins took over. They put out one more good release and then became some other band with the same name. Writing songs based on "one note". How could some band that great, revert to such trivial music. MTV (Empty V) helped move the music world into the "wrong direction" and that's putting it mildly.

A lot of the artists I've written about here put out new releases constantly and have absolutely no radio support. FM radio was once great and TV had programs like "In Concert" and "Don Kirshner's Rock Concert". Those are all long gone. If there was some kind of outlet for these recordings maybe people would know of these great recordings that only a small percentage of ears get to hear.

I guess it's OK that things have turned out the way it did in the music world. There are still people out there that "know who's great". Who can really play. Who can really write. Who can really perform. They just have to really dig for them these days.

My band has opened for Robin Trower, The Dregs, Pat Travers, Blue Oyster Cult, Allan Holdsworth, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Steve Morse

Band, Kansas, Michael Schenker Group, Frank Marino & Mahogany Rush, Crack The Sky, Peter Frampton, Lynch Mob, Anvil, Gary Hoey Band, The Mark Wood Band (members of TSO), Eric Gales Band, Average White Band, Michael Stanley & The Resonators,



Black Oak Arkansas, The Happy Together concert [featuring The Grass Roots, Flo & Eddie (from The Turtles & Frank Zappa & The Mothers), Mark Lindsay, Mickey Dolenz, The Buckingham and more. Some of these artists were my music teachers without being there in person when I was younger. I can remember sitting at my record player learning their songs. Trying to figure out how they got certain sounds, slowing down their riffs that were flying by at lightning speed and studying their album covers. Anxious to see the tour for the latest album and anticipating their next releases. That was the best Music School anybody could've ever asked for.

I never got to see John Lennon live in concert, I had tickets for George Harrison in '75 at The Coliseum but he got snowed out, saw McCartney twice. Ringo once and the best solo Beatle concert I saw was The Pete Best Band over at The Winchester in Lakewood. I actually felt like I was in The Cavern Club watching them in 1960. They even played "Cry for a Shadow". The only Beatle song credited to Harrison & Lennon. Cool song, great band and Pete is an excellent drummer, which proves he wasn't kicked out of The Beatles for his drum work.

One last extraordinary moment in the music world for me was Frank Marino & Mahogany Rush's DVD shoot at the Agora in December of 2010. A nine hour concert spanning his entire career. This was really a remarkable feat. As he got more and more intense as the evening went on. While the DVD won't be the entire concert, those who are in search of great music will be able to see and hear what I'm talking about when it's released. It was probably the greatest musical event I've ever attended.



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