

FAST 
FORWARD,
PLAY,
AND **REWIND**

 **MICHAEL
OBERMAN**

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AND REWIND

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MICHAEL OBERMAN



Guilford, Connecticut

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This book is for my brother, Ron
8/28/1943 to 11/21/2019

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PREFACE

AS I FINISH WRITING THIS BOOK, I AM SAD TO SAY THAT MY BROTHER, RON, passed away on November 21, 2019, after a ten-year struggle with fronto-temporal dementia.

Growing up, Ron was my big brother. He is three years and five months older than me, and I wish this book were a collaboration with him. That is what it started out to be. Ron wrote the weekly “Top Tunes” interview column in the *Evening Star* newspaper in Washington, D.C. (hereinafter “D.C.”), from 1964 until February 1967. In February 1967, Ron left music journalism for a job at Mercury Records in Chicago. I took over the “Top Tunes” column (later renamed “Music Makers”) when Ron left and continued writing the weekly column from February 1967 until March 1973.

Between us, we wrote approximately 450 interview columns (Ron 150 and me 300), interviewing a who’s who of rock-and-roll stardom, with an occasional country, pop, jazz, or bluegrass artist thrown into the mix.

If not for Ron, I would not have entered the world of journalism and eventually the world of the music business. More about that later in this book.

Ron’s career path took him from Mercury Records to Columbia Records to MCA Records. When he left Mercury, he was the national director of publicity. His career at Columbia took him from the marketing department to the A & R (artist and repertoire) department, where he became vice president. He left Columbia for a job at MCA as senior vice president of A & R and retired from MCA as executive vice president of A & R.

During Ron’s time at those three labels, he played a major part in the careers of David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen, Warrant, the Bangles, Toad the Wet Sprocket, and too many others to name here.

When Ron left the music industry, he became a serious poker player. Like most other things in life, he did very well at the poker tables.

In 2009, Ron and I decided to write a book together. The working title at the time was “Backstage Pass.” Ron was living in Los Angeles, and I was in Columbia, Maryland. Since there were more opportunities to find a literary agent in Los Angeles than in Columbia, Ron took on that task. Within a week, we had an agent. While the main idea for the book was to publish one hundred or more of our columns and write some remembrances of writing for a newspaper, meet and interview incredible musicians, and paint a picture of the music culture starting with the Beatles’ first U.S. concert in D.C., the beginning of Ron’s dementia brought the project to a halt.

Before he was diagnosed with his illness, Ron and I would send each other chapters we had written. I immediately noticed that Ron’s writing had “no life” to it. Ron was planning a trip back to Maryland for our mother’s ninetieth birthday, so I decided to wait to speak to him in person. When he came back to Maryland, I noticed a distinct change in his personality. I asked him what was going on. He told me he had been diagnosed with clinical depression. He also mentioned that he was separated from his wife. I suggested that we hold off writing the book until he felt up to the task. At that time, I had no idea that my brother had been misdiagnosed. Our mother also noticed the change in Ron’s personality. I told her that Ron was going through some marital difficulties and that he would be okay.

When Ron returned to Los Angeles, I called our literary agent and told her we were putting the book project on hold. She wanted out of the project anyway because she felt that Ron had some mental problems. Shortly after that, the results of a PET scan showed that Ron had “frontal lobe atrophy” (the beginning of frontotemporal dementia).

Ron’s diagnosis was devastating but explained his personality changes and his inability to write anything but simple sentences. Our dream of coauthoring a book was over. Additionally, I became primary caregiver for our mother and decided that authoring a book myself would be too difficult.

Things changed when our mother passed away. I began writing again. Caregiving for my mother had drained me, though I am glad I did it. One of the obstacles that we had to overcome back in 2009 was getting permission to use our music columns that had been published in the *Evening Star*, later renamed the *Washington Star*. The *Star* had been in business from 1852 until it closed in 1981. All editions of the newspaper had been preserved on microfilm and microfiche and were stored in the “Washingtonia” collection at the Martin Luther King Library in D.C.

PREFACE

I spent several days at the library making copies of all of our columns. The *Washington Post* now owned the copyright to all 129 years of the *Evening Star*. I found out that the *Post* was having all of the editions of the *Star* digitized. We were granted permission to use our columns in a book as long as we transcribed them and didn't just put out a book with photocopies of our columns.

I know that Ron would be happy if he knew that I had taken on this project. I only wish that he was part of it more than just in spirit.

Our interview columns were short form, usually 400 to 600 words. I consider them small time capsules of (to me) one of the most important eras in rock 'n' roll, spanning the Motown era and the British invasion and folk, psychedelic, and other styles of music that defined the times.

It wasn't easy for me to pick which of my 300-plus columns to include in this book. I chose a number of well-known artists, such as Joni Mitchell, David Bowie, the Doors, and James Brown. I also have included some one-hit wonders and a few lesser-known groups whose music still holds up today.

What is missing from the book are my brother's columns. Perhaps one day I'll write another book and include his columns. For now, to give you an idea of the range and importance of Ron's interviews, a chronological list of his columns will have to suffice:

1964

The Marketts

The Beatles

James Brown

The Four Seasons

The Beach Boys

Diane Renay

Elvis Presley

Betty Everett

Marvin Gaye

Terry Stafford

The Reflections

Peter and Gordon

Mary Wells

The Dave Clark Five

The Dixie Cups

Patty and the Emblems

Chuck Berry

Millie Small

The Kingston Trio

The Carltons

The Chartbusters

The Supremes

Roger Miller

Johnny Mathis

The Animals

Ronny and the Daytonas

The Beatles

The Four Tops

On Tour with the Beatles

The Beach Boys

The Delights

Gale Garnett
Martha and the Vandellas
The Mugwumps
J. Frank Wilson
The Impressions
Jay and the Americans
Sonny James
The Hullabaloo
The Shangri-Las
The Detergents
The Drifters Joe Tex

1965

The Righteous Brothers
The Hangmen
Shirley Ellis
Mary Wells
Gary Lewis and the Playboys
The Newbeats
Gerry and the Pacemakers
Little Anthony and the Imperials
Junior Walker
The Trade Winds
The Kingsmen
Bobby Goldsboro
Jewel Akens
Sylvie Vartan
The Reekers and the Nightcaps
Tony Clarke
The Beach Boys
Herman's Hermits
The Rolling Stones
Gerry and the Pacemakers
Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs
Ian and the Zodiacs
Herman's Hermits

Paul Anka
The Kinks
The Dave Clark Five
Roger Miller
Billy Stewart
The Newport
Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders
James Brown
Sonny and Cher
The Royalettes
Patty Duke
The Beatles in Los Angeles
Smokey Robinson and the Miracles
The Supremes
The Four Tops
The Mad Lads
The Temptations
The Chartbusters
The Toys
The Walker Brothers
Fontella Bass
The Lovin' Spoonful
The Rolling Stones
Marvin Gaye
Ramsey Lewis Trio
Wilson Pickett
The Shangri-Las
Jay and the Americans

1966

The Yardbirds
Stevie Wonder
The Hangmen
The Marvelettes
Otis Redding
Ronnie Dove

PREFACE

Motown	Darrell Banks
S. Sgt. Barry Sadler	Brian Hyland
Deon Jackson	The Capitols
The Isley Brothers	The Happenings
Barbara Mason	The Yardbirds
Dino, Desi and Billy	The Vontastics
The Four Seasons	Jimmy Ruffin
The Epsilons	Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels
Dionne Warwick	The Mamas and the Papas
Peter and Gordon	Petula Clark
Dallas Frazier	The Righteous Brothers
The Outsiders	The Elgins
Chad and Jeremy	The New Vaudeville Band
Nina Simone	The Temptations
Percy Sledge	The Spellbinders
Shorty Long	Donovan
The Swinging Medallions	The Young Rascals
Robert Parker	The Royal Guardsmen
The Standells	Spyder Turner
Walter Jackson and Fangette Enzel	
The Byrds	1967
Tommy James and the Shondells	The Blues Magoos
The Mothers of Invention	Tommy Hunt
Roscoe Robinson	Young-Holt Trio
Bobby Hebb	The Left Banke
The Cyrkle	Aaron Neville
The Beatles	Joe Cuba

-30-

-30- has been traditionally used by journalists in North America to indicate the end of a story. Here, I am just using it to signify the end of my brother's journalism career. When that career ended, Ron went on to become an important figure in the music industry. I am thankful that I had the opportunity to continue the "Top Tunes" column and to witness Ron's many accomplishments in his post-journalism career.



Ron Oberman Interviewing Mama Cass of the Mamas and the Papas
PHOTO BY MIKE KLAVANS

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Introduction: In the Beginning

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS THE PITCH PIPE. I WAS SIX YEARS OLD when my father was transferred from the National Brewing Company's Baltimore office to D.C., where he would take over as branch manager. We moved to Silver Spring, Maryland (a suburb of D.C.). My father kept his position as baritone in a choir in Baltimore. For my mother, my brother, and me, that meant a forty-five-minute drive from our new home to the synagogue in Baltimore where my father sang. The first few minutes of the drive were usually okay, but then my father would take his pitch pipe out of his pocket and blow into it so he could sing the musical scales at the correct pitch. Ouch! My brother Ron and I would look at each other, grimace, and hope the (what to us was) musical torture would be over quickly.

The National Brewing Company's main beer was National Bohemian, a beer that was also known as Natty Boh. The company's mascot, the one-eyed, handlebar-mustachioed Mr. Boh, has been a recognizable icon since his introduction in 1936. "Oh boy, what a beer!" was Natty Boh's slogan along with "Brewed on the Shores of the Chesapeake Bay."

One of the major benefits of my father's job was season tickets to the Washington Senators baseball team and the Washington Redskins football team. National Bohemian sponsored both teams. When we would go to the Senators' games, we knew we were getting close to Griffith Stadium when we smelled the aroma of bread baking, wafting from the nearby Wonder Bread factory.

In 1955, my father surprised the family with the announcement, "We're going to the World Series!" Ron and I were joyous. We already knew that the World Series would pit the New York Yankees (Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra, Whitey Ford, etc.) against the Brooklyn Dodgers (Duke Snider, Roy Campanella, Don Newcombe, etc.). My father had been named "Branch Manager of the Year" by the brewery, and the reward was tickets to three

World Series games, four nights in a New York City hotel, and a round-trip flight from Baltimore to New York on National Bohemian's private plane.

The excitement was too much. I couldn't sleep that night thinking about telling my friends at school the good news. This upcoming trip to New York would be my first time flying and my first time in New York. Our tickets were for games 2, 3, and 4, which ensured that we would see three games in two stadiums. Game 2 was at Yankee Stadium, and games 3 and 4 were at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn.

When we arrived in New York, the first game had already been played and won by the Yankees. Walking into Yankee Stadium for game 2 was the height of excitement in my life up to that point, with more than 60,000 frenzied fans of both teams excited over this local/national rivalry.

We had lower-tier box seats on the third-base line between home plate and third base. After the usher showed us to our seats and we settled in, my mother tapped me on the shoulder and whispered to me, "Do you know who that is sitting in front of you and Ron?" I had no idea. She said, "That's Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. Get their autographs."

Ron and I stood up and walked down the aisle one row. Humphrey Bogart turned to us and smiled. We handed him our ticket stubs and the pencil we had with us to fill out our scorecards. Bogart and Bacall obliged us, and each of them signed our tickets. The home team Yankees won that game and were up over Brooklyn two games to none.

The next two games were in Brooklyn and won by the Brooklyn Dodgers. The series was tied, and we were going home the next day. That night, we went to dinner at Jack Dempsey's Broadway Restaurant. (Known popularly as Jack Dempsey's, this restaurant was located in the Brill Building on Broadway between 49th and 50th streets in Manhattan, New York. Owned by world heavyweight boxing champion Jack Dempsey, it was considered by many to be an American institution.) I didn't realize at that time (there was no reason for me to realize) the place in music history the Brill Building would garner. Hundreds of hit songs written there, with offices of music publishers, songwriters, and producers occupying the building above Jack Dempsey's Broadway Restaurant.

I was a young practical joker. At dinner that night, I reached into my pocket and pulled out what looked like a pack of Wrigley's Spearmint gum. A man at the next table had just finished his dinner, saw me with the gum,

INTRODUCTION: IN THE BEGINNING

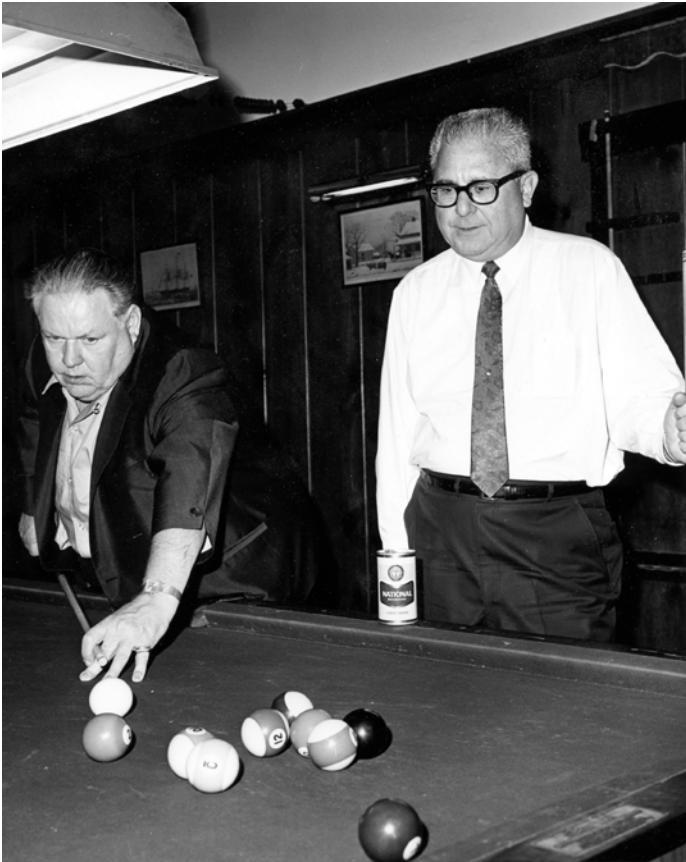
and asked if he could have a piece. I handed him the pack, and when he pulled the gum out of the package, “SNAP,” on his thumb, like a mousetrap—totally harmless, but it took him by surprise. “You gotta do that to Jack,” he said with a heavy New York accent. “Jack is a good friend of mine.”

Well, Jack was Jack Dempsey. The guy I had played the trick on got up and brought Jack Dempsey over to the table. “Mr. Dempsey,” I said, “would you like a piece of gum?” I handed him the pack, and “SNAP,” on his thumb. Dempsey laughed. He chatted with our parents for a minute. The restaurant had a photographer on staff, and Jack called him over. Jack took a seat by the restaurant’s front window and asked Ron and I each to sit on one of his knees. A photo was taken, and the finished print was signed by Dempsey and handed to us before we left the restaurant. I guess there was a darkroom somewhere near the kitchen.



Ron and Michael Oberman in 1955 on the Knees of Former Heavyweight Boxing Champion Jack Dempsey
OBERMAN FAMILY ARCHIVES

There were so many benefits of having a father who worked at the National Brewing Company. In 1956, I decided that for my third-grade show-and-tell presentation, I would show the ingredients that went into brewing beer and tell how beer was brewed. My father obliged and brought home hops, malt, and other ingredients and helped me summarize the brewing process. I think my teacher was somewhat aghast when I started my presentation by saying, “I’m going to explain how to make beer” and I began laying out the ingredients on her desk at the front of the classroom. The presentation went well, and I can only hope that decades later some of my classmates might have become “home brewers” because of my show-and-tell.



Minnesota Fats Shooting Pool With Marty Oberman (Author's Father)
OBERMAN FAMILY ARCHIVES

Later in 1956, there was a musical awakening in our house. My father, Marty, brought home the first Elvis Presley album on RCA Records. Rock 'n' roll had entered my young body and soul and changed my life forever. Elvis was the beginning, but that same year, there were so many new sounds, and I gravitated to them more than riding my bike or playing touch football in the backyard. While my parents were listening to Pat Boone, Gogi Grant, and Doris Day, I was listening to "Blue Suede Shoes" by Carl Perkins, "Honky Tonk" by Bill Doggett, "Be-Bop-A-Lula" by Gene Vincent, "Blueberry Hill" by Fats Domino, and "Long Tall Sally" by Little Richard. While my father opened the door a crack with Elvis, it was my older brother, Ron, who opened the door all the way by building a transistor radio and letting me listen to it.

Ron was thirteen, and I was nine. Record stores had listening stations with turntables and earphones where we would go to listen to new releases by the artists we were listening to on the radio. I was lucky my brother would let me tag along. Ron was in junior high, and I was in elementary school. At that time, our parents gave each of us a weekly allowance: Ron fifty cents and me twenty-five cents. If we pooled our money, we could buy two 45-rpm singles. Usually, we didn't pool our money, and Ron would buy the record of his choice.

Music and sports stayed a constant in our lives. By the time I entered junior high, Ron was in high school and became interested in journalism. He merged his interest and knowledge of sports and his newfound interest in writing and became sports editor of his high school newspaper. Ron was also into hot rods. He bought his first car in high school, a 1956 Chevy convertible. The first thing he did with the car was have it painted midnight (metallic) blue. The second thing he did was get some hot rod friends together and further customize his car by "lowering" it and taking the horizontal chrome bars out of the grill, leaving the vertical bars in and giving the car a more menacing look.

Even though Ron and his friends were into customized cars, I leaned toward wanting a sports car, though I was a few years away from getting my driver's license. Ron's hot rod days seemed to end when he was eighteen. His best friend, Carl Bernstein, helped Ron get a part-time job as a copyboy at the *Evening Star* newspaper in D.C. Carl was already working at the paper.

I'm going to digress here and rewind a year or two to muse about "Carl Bernstein and the Halloween Raid." Seeing Carl as a "talking head"

on CNN brings back memories of the night six teenagers were arrested in Silver Spring (two of them being Carl and yours truly, plus my brother Ron and a friend named Louie Singer; the other two will remain unnamed). I was only thirteen, Ron and Carl were seventeen, and Louie was sixteen (much more about Louie later).

Ron and I lived with our parents on Admiralty Drive. Carl lived (I think) on Harvey Road. Louie lived somewhere in Silver Spring. Ron and Carl were best friends. They played poker together and hung out at the Silver Spring Pool Hall and a small convenience store on Eastern Avenue called Mousie's (Mousie's draw was its pinball machines).

Anyway, on to the Halloween night raid. I still am ashamed of what we did but not totally unhappy about it. One street over from Admiralty Drive was Saxony Road. We had friends on Saxony: the Greenstones and the Fleishmans. We also had enemies: elderly Mrs. Nehus and her even more elderly mother. Mother and daughter hated Jews (probably hated others too). When Ron and I would ride our bikes or walk by the Nehuses' house, mother and daughter would come out their front door and call us "dirty kykes" or "g-d damned Jews" and sometimes squirt us with their front-yard hose.

Carl and Louie were also harassed by both women when they walked or rode with us. So, that fateful Halloween night when I was thirteen years old, six of us got together and decided we had had enough of the Nehuses' anti-Semitism. Three of us got in one car and pulled up in front of the Nehuses' house with headlights turned off. The other three drove two blocks over to Dameron Drive and left their car, went through some backyards, and threw small stones on the metal roof of the Nehuses' back porch to draw the two women out their back door. When the Nehuses went out back, the pebble throwers yelled, signaling the three who were in the car in front of the house, and those three threw rocks (not pebbles), smashing all the windows in the front of the house. Then both parties got into their cars and sped off down Forest Glen Road.

I didn't realize that the driver of the car I was in had covered his front and rear license plates with hand towels. Before we made it six blocks, we were pulled over by Montgomery County police for obscuring the license plates. Police had already been called by the Nehuses, so the police put it all together and realized we were the vandals. After being taken to the Silver Spring police station and lectured by Detective Pey, we were released to our

parents. The police were well aware of the Nehuses' bigotry. Our parents had to pay for the damage to the windows, and none of us ended up in court.

Carl, my brother, and I all went on to write for newspapers, with Carl becoming ultra-famous for his and Bob Woodward's Watergate coverage. Carl was later portrayed by Dustin Hoffman in the film *All the President's Men* and Jack Nicholson in *Heartburn*, Nora Ephron's book turned into a movie about her marriage to and divorce from Carl.

Earlier I said there would be more about Louie Singer. Louie was a total goof-off. He worked at his uncle's liquor store, Circle Liquors, on Pennsylvania Avenue in D.C. Finally, his uncle became fed up with Louie and fired him. A few weeks later, Louie bought an Afro wig, painted his hands and face black, and held up an employee of the liquor store as he was making a night deposit of that day's cash receipts. Wielding a .38-caliber revolver, Louie was tackled by a passerby and arrested.

Fast-forward a year. I was in Georgetown (a neighborhood of D.C.) and had witnessed a purse snatching. The police asked if I would come to the Volta Street police station and look at mug shots. The purse snatcher happened to be African American, and the mug shots were in two different books, one labeled "white males" and the other labeled "colored males." The police handed me the colored male book. Leafing through it, there was a photo of Louie Singer in blackface and Afro wig. I stuttered, "Hey, that's Louie Singer. He's a white guy." At first, the police didn't believe me. Then laughter rang out through the mug shot room. Louie was eventually killed when he wrapped his speeding car around a telephone pole.

Rewinding to 1963, a big year for me: getting my driver's license and getting my first real part-time job as a copyboy at the *Evening Star* newspaper in D.C.

I was a sophomore at Northwood High School in Silver Spring when I turned 16. I wasn't happy about going to Northwood. When new school boundary lines were drawn after the Washington Beltway was built, only seven of my classmates from junior high school would be going to Northwood. Almost everyone else from Montgomery Hills Junior High would be going to Montgomery Blair High School. Blair was where most of my friends were going. Blair is where my brother went.

It wasn't that Northwood was a bad school, it was just that I felt that Blair was a better school academically, in sports, and in terms of my friends

going there. There were some positive things about Northwood, in particular, two of my teachers. My tenth-grade English teacher, Mr. Teunis, graduated from Harvard and was what I would call at the time kind of a beatnik. He had a full beard, which was unusual for a teacher in those days, and occasionally he was barefoot in class. Instead of the normal tenth-grade English class curriculum, Mr. Teunis turned things topsy-turvy when he told us at the beginning of the school year that we were going to study mainly William Shakespeare's play *Richard III*. What great memories I have of memorizing stanzas from the play and at the end of the school year acting the entire play out in costume.

The other teacher who influenced me greatly was my art teacher, Frances Davila. She taught me in the eleventh and twelfth grades, and she seemed like the oldest teacher I'd ever had (she died at age 100 in 2007). She was quirky in a good way. She once was married to the president of Chile. She was a very wise woman with a good sense of humor and loved music. We had a record player in the classroom, and she allowed us to bring into class whatever albums we'd like to play while we were doing the artwork that she taught us so well. In my senior year, in her class was a girl named Anna-Lou Lebovitz. I don't think she was at Northwood very long, but I remember her well. If I fast-forward now to 1970, she started her career as a staff photographer, working for *Rolling Stone* magazine. She was better known then, and is still better known, as Annie Leibovitz.

In 1963, my brother, Ron, was going to journalism school at the University of Maryland and had moved from copyboy status at the *Star* to become a dictationist. You have to understand that the bottom layer of the totem pole at a newspaper, at least in the newsroom, is copyboy. The next step up is dictationist. Dictationists sat at a long desk with headphones on and a typewriter in front of them, and when a reporter called in a story, they typed the story and, when finished, yelled "Copy," and a copyboy would scurry over, grab the story, and take it to the appropriate editor.

I asked Ron if he could get me a job as a copyboy. He did. During the school year, I would work every Saturday as a copyboy. Over the summer school break, I would work full-time, with the exception of two weeks when I would go to the beach. A copyboy's day could start at 6 a.m., 9 a.m., 10 a.m., 1 p.m., or 2 p.m.; in the worst-case scenario, you could pull the 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. shift. The exception was that if you were under eighteen years of

age in the District of Columbia, you couldn't work past 10 p.m. The first two years as a copyboy, I never had to work past 10 p.m.

It was really, really a cool job for a sixteen-year-old. I was in the newsroom. The pace could be frenetic with small periods of calm. You were never bored for long. One day you might be working in the wire room. Another day you could be working on the copy desk. Another day you could be driving to the White House, the U.S. Capitol, or elsewhere to pick up press releases or a story written by a White House correspondent. Copyboys liked to get out of the building and drive anywhere they were sent. The newspaper allowed us to charge cab fare for driving to any of those places and then back to the *Star*. D.C. was split into cab zones, and the newspaper office was in a part of town where you knew that wherever you were driving, you would cross several zones and be able to put in an expense report for anywhere from \$5 to \$15. That was great because our salary was \$1.65 an hour. A short drive got us out of the building and could bring us \$10 or more.

On Friday, November 22, 1963, I was in my high school metal shop class when an announcement came over the public address system that President Kennedy had been shot. There was utter silence in that classroom except for some sobbing. We didn't know the president had been killed, only that he had been shot. I think that if the school could have, they would have let everyone go home, but school buses were on schedules, parents weren't expecting children home, and so on. At the end of the day, I went home. When John Kennedy was elected, I did a pencil sketch of him that hung in the family recreation room. I took it off the wall and back upstairs to a television in our den. By that time, my father had come home from work, and my parents, my brother, and I were glued to the television news. I think that up to that point in my life, I had never experienced the sadness that I experienced when we learned that the president was dead.

The next day was a Saturday, and I had to be at the newspaper. Chaotic does not describe the scene in the newsroom on that Saturday. It was orderly chaos mixed with total sadness and a lot of overtime hours put in. Vice President Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as president on the plane ride back from Dallas, where Kennedy had been assassinated. Johnson's official inauguration was in January 1965. The day of his inaugural parade is another day that I'll never forget. I was asked to drive two or three reporters on the parade route (actually, in the parade) with a pass on my windshield allowing me to be

there. As a copyboy, I had been to the White House many times, and it was always interesting to see the tourists staring at me and my little Alfa Romeo convertible riding through the White House gates. The day of the parade was totally different. I knew I was going to be driving reporters, so I left my two-seater sports car at home and took my mother's car into work. That car held four or five people. There were more than 5,400 police and soldiers guarding President Johnson during his inauguration and the parade. There I was, only seventeen years old and still grieving over the loss of President Kennedy, but now I was driving in the new president's inaugural parade.

On April 6, 1965, I turned eighteen. That meant several things: I would be graduating from high school and preparing to go to the University of Maryland, I could work past 10 p.m. at the newspaper, and, saving the best for last, I could legally drink beer and wine in D.C. If you lived in Maryland (as I did) or Northern Virginia, simply driving across the district line into D.C. meant that you no longer had to be twenty-one to drink or get into establishments that required you to be of drinking age to enter. Many of those establishments had live music.

The D.C. music scene was thriving. My favorite band was the British Walkers, and my favorite club was the Roundtable in Georgetown (where the British Walkers was the de facto house band). My brother had started writing the weekly "Top Tunes" column in the *Evening Star* newspaper in 1964. He turned me on to the British Walkers.

Rewinding to 1964 for a moment. The Beatles came to town on February 11, 1964, to play at the old Washington Coliseum, their first U.S. show ever. I was at that debut, thanks to my brother getting me tickets. The same time as the Beatles concert, Washington's top forty AM radio stations were still blaring such hits as Lesley Gore's "You Don't Own Me" on WEAM, Diane Renay's "Navy Blue" on WEEL, Andy Williams's "A Fool Never Learns" on WPGC, the Rip Chords' "Hey Little Cobra" on WWDC, and Dionne Warwick's "Anyone Who Had a Heart" on WINX.

At the same time, "She Loves You" and "I Want to Hold Your Hand" had already begun making inroads into radio stations throughout the metropolitan area. Before that first Beatles concert, the Fab Four held a press conference, sitting inside of a boxing ring in the Washington Coliseum.

My brother had a several-minute conversation with John Lennon. He asked him how he and Paul McCartney wrote the group's songs. "Generally,

we like off-tempo, happy songs,” he said, little anticipating the sophistication and universal appeal of so many of their more mature later efforts. “We just sit down, bang them out, and hum the tunes.”

Ron also asked George Harrison, “Do you currently have a girlfriend?” His reply? “Yes, love, you.”

Later in 1964, prior to the Beatles concert at the Baltimore Civic Center on September 13, Ron waited for an hour outside their rooms at the Holiday Inn with Carroll James, the late WWDC disc jockey who was the first to play the Beatles’ music in Washington. Eventually, all four came out and schmoozed with them and posed for pictures for several minutes.

Getting back to 1965 and drinking beer and seeing a lot of great bands in D.C., I often thought about how lucky my brother was, writing the weekly music interview column and meeting a lot of beautiful members of the opposite sex. Yes, interviewing acts like the Beatles, the Dave Clark Five, and the Mamas and the Papas had the effect of drawing young women to my brother. Some became girlfriends, while others just wanted to hang out with Ron on the off chance that he would get them into a concert or take them backstage to meet an act.

My mind wandered to my someday writing the “Top Tunes” column and getting the perks that came with the territory. In 1967, my dreams turned into reality. My brother was offered a job as assistant director of publicity at Mercury Records in Chicago. Ron had been in contact with many record companies when he wrote his column. It was usually the publicity department of those companies that arranged for Ron to have access to their artists. Now, Ron was getting the opportunity to work for a major record company. He accepted the job.

I would miss my brother, but I also realized I needed to act quickly and try to grab the golden ticket. The day after Ron gave his notice to the *Evening Star*, I went to the editor of the “Teen” section of the paper, Fifi Gorska, and said, “I want to write the column.” Fifi reminded me that I was only nineteen and still in college. I reminded her that my brother was only twenty and still in college when he began writing the “Top Tunes” column.

Fifi said, “Mike, write three columns and I’ll make a decision.” I thanked her and went to my brother and said, “Help!” Ron responded, “It will be a piece of cake for you. Start at the Howard Theater. Everyone there already knows you.”

Ron was right. I had gone with him to the Howard to see James Brown, Martha Reeves & the Vandellas, Marvin Gaye, Mary Wells, the Supremes, Stevie Wonder, and many other R & B artists. Often, I would go to their dressing rooms with Ron when Ron would interview the groups.

I listened to my brother, conducted three interviews at the Howard, handed them in to Fifi, and waited. A week later, she said, “Good job. The column is yours.”

THE *EVENING STAR* INTERVIEWS

Musings . . . Phi Zappa Krappa

“PHI ZAPPA KRAPPA AND THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND.” IT SEEMS LIKE such a long time ago, and it was. I was a sophomore (1967) at the University of Maryland. I was studying journalism and was also on the concert committee on the Student Union Board. One of the concerts we booked was Frank Zappa. Now, a little of the backstory. None of the toilet stalls in the men’s rooms at the Student Union had doors on them. There were no dressing rooms for acts that played the Student Union Ballroom, so the artists had to use the public restrooms. Picture the night of the concert: much excitement, lights in the ballroom dimmed, and Zappa walks to the center of the stage (spotlight on him) and says, “I just took a crap in front of a bunch of students. The first time I’ve ever sat on a toilet in a public bathroom and there was no door on the stall. Thanks a lot University of Maryland!” Several months after that, the “Phi Zappa Krappa” poster and T-shirts were in stores.

When the Mothers of Invention’s first album, *Freak Out!*, was released in 1966, my brother, Ron, received a call from Sol Handwerker. Sol was an “old-school” record company publicist. He worked for MGM Records, and the Mothers were signed to Verve (a subsidiary of MGM). For several weeks, Ron had received an envelope in the mail from Verve Records. Each envelope contained one piece of a jigsaw puzzle. When the final envelope arrived, all of the pieces came together as the cover of *Freak Out!* Now, Sol was calling to say the real album was on its way. He hoped Ron would interview the group, and the group would be in D.C. to do some promotion in a couple of weeks. Sol was hoping that Ron would show them around town.

Freak Out! was released on June 27, 1966, on Verve Records. Often cited as one of rock music’s first concept albums, the album is a satirical expression of Frank Zappa’s perception of American pop culture and the nascent freak scene of Los Angeles. It was also one of the earliest double albums in rock music and the first two-record debut album.

The album was produced by Tom Wilson, who signed the Mothers, formerly a bar band called the Soul Giants. Zappa said many years later that Wilson signed the group to a record deal under the impression that they were a white blues band. The album featured Zappa on vocals and guitar, along with lead vocalist/tambourine player Ray Collins, bass player/vocalist Roy Estrada, drummer/vocalist Jimmy Carl Black, and guitar player Elliot Ingber (later of Captain Beefheart's Magic Band, performing there under the pseudonym "Winged Eel Fingerling").

Ron took Sol up on the invitation. That led to Ron interviewing Zappa for his column that appeared in the *Evening Star* on July 16, 1966. In that interview, Zappa said the main problem with youth on the West Coast was drugs. "I don't use any and I've never encouraged it," Zappa said. "Anyone who takes acid [LSD] is taking his mind in his own hands.

"The same state of psychedelic happiness can be induced through dancing, listening to music, holding your breath and spinning around, and any number of the old, easy to perform and 100 percent legal means—all of which I endorse."

The evening of the interview, Ron took the Mothers of Invention to Georgetown to "check out the scene" and drop into the Roundtable nightclub. I don't know if the British Walkers were playing at the club that night. I hope they were. One of the best bands in D.C., the British Walkers featured guitar legend Roy Buchanan for a time. Roy's guitar prowess drew many musicians to his gigs, where all they could do was sit in awe. Rumor has it that the Rolling Stones asked Roy to join the band after the death of Brian Jones.

After their night in Georgetown, I asked Ron how it went. "The interview was great," Ron said. "Our jaunt to Georgetown wasn't so good. Seems like not even the hippies in Georgetown could make heads or tails out of the Mothers. We weren't really welcomed there."

In 1999, *Freak Out!* was honored with the Grammy Hall of Fame Award, and in 2003, *Rolling Stone* ranked it among the "500 Greatest Albums of All Time." In 2006, the MOFO Project/Object, an audio documentary on the making of the album, was released in honor of its fortieth anniversary.

1967

THERE WERE THREE DIFFERENT WAYS THAT I COULD ACCOMPLISH WRITING a weekly interview column. The first was to sit down with the artist or group I was interviewing—in a dressing room, at a hotel, at a press conference, or wherever the act felt most comfortable. Often, the interviews were done at venues like the Howard Theater, the Cellar Door nightclub, or local concert halls like the Alexandria Roller Rink. Occasionally, when an act was playing in town for a few days, the interview would take place at my home. Face-to-face interviews were always what I aimed for.

The second way was a phone interview. Often, concert promoters wanted an act they were presenting in concert to do an interview with me before the act came to the D.C. area. Preconcert publicity saved promoters advertising dollars. These were the days before the concert industry was monopolized by companies like Live Nation. I had a very good rapport with a number of independent concert promoters like Durwood Settles (the Doors at the Washington Hilton Ballroom, Cream at the Baltimore Civic Center) and Mike Schreibman (the Who at Georgetown University, Led Zeppelin and the Who at Merriweather Post Pavilion). While I always liked to help out promoters like Durwood and Mike, I had a way of giving them preconcert publicity and interviewing the acts the night of their performances. The last few paragraphs of my column were subtitled “Notes and Halfnotes” and talked about upcoming concerts in the area. That gave the promoters some free publicity and kept open the opportunity to interview the acts in person.

The third (and my least favorite) way to get an interview was from press kits that record companies sent out. In a pinch, I could pull quotes from an artist’s bio or other promotional material contained in a press kit.

For the purposes of this book, I am omitting the “Notes and Halfnotes” portion of my columns. It’s probably of little interest to most readers that DJ

Jack will be bringing Jay and the Techniques to T. C. Williams High School on January 28, 1968.

I tried to choose certain interviews and exclude others for this book for a variety of reasons. Those reasons probably only make sense to me, so I'll leave it at that.

My interviews were "short form," ranging from 400 to 700 words with few exceptions. They are a time capsule of the years 1967 to 1973. Since I also managed artists, worked for record companies, and had and have a life outside of music, this book fast-forwards and rewinds to my life before and after writing my column. The "play" part of this book is my columns. Each one will be a fast read.

Freddie Scott

February 18, 1967

WITH SUCH FRIENDS AS SAMMY DAVIS JUNIOR, LOU RAWLS, GENE Chandler, and James Brown, why should Freddie Scott choose to sing about loneliness?

Whatever the reason, there's no doubt that Freddie has come up with what probably is the biggest hit of his career, "Are You Lonely for Me?"

Asked why he had not had a hit since his first smash, "Hey Girl," four years ago, the singer, who recently appeared at the Howard Theatre, replied, "There was a difference of opinion between me and the record company and I left the company with no hard feelings." Then, Freddie said he worked with another record company but was not successful until he joined his present label, Shout.

Freddie recently sang on a stage show with the Monkees and he was quick to point out what he says is the truth about the talents of the foursome. The rumor that the Monkees can't sing or play their instruments isn't true, he said. The boys are talented musicians and great guys.

It doesn't matter to Freddie what type of crowd he sings for, as long as he's well-received. "English people are beautiful," he said. "They appreciate an artist for what he does and they don't follow trends. They have respect for everyone." He believes his type of music, rhythm and blues, will last forever. He figures that as long as there is music people will ask for soul, and there will always be a legitimate rhythm and blues singer to supply it.

The sudden rise of Latin American rhythm and blues, with such artists as Joe Cuba, Hector Rivera, and Jimmy Castor, excites Freddie. As he puts it, the public is no longer one-sided. There's now room for everyone. Washington, D.C., and Memphis, Tennessee, are two of his favorite cities, although

Freddy attributes much of the success of “Are You Lonely for Me” to the city of Charlotte, North Carolina. It was there that the record broke big, thanks to the help of a female disc jockey, Chatty Hattie.

Freddy was born in Providence, Rhode Island, and now lives in New York City. It was in Augusta, Georgia, where Freddy lived most of his life, that he met and worked with James Brown in various talent shows. Freddy hopes there won't be another long break between hit records. Whether or not there is, he nevertheless plans to tape a future *Ed Sullivan Show* and put together a lively nightclub act.

Gene Chandler

March 4, 1967

UNLIKE MOST SINGERS WHO MUST WORK HARD TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS, GENE Chandler had it comparatively easy.

The singer, who recently appeared at the Howard Theatre, explained how his big break came about.

"I'd been singing with a group of guys at clubs and parties in the Chicago area, but I never had any desire to record or go solo," he said. "This lady came to us with some songs, and within a matter of months she had us recording.

"A production company leased our first record, 'Nightowl.' Another company had publishing rights to our songs. This company, Vee Jay, decided to record one of our songs."

Vee Jay decided that the song, "The Duke of Earl," should be recorded by a solo artist. After thinking it over, Gene broke with his group and made the record. His decision was wise, for the "Duke of Earl" became his first hit.

Although he's away from his home in Chicago most of the year, Gene doesn't mind traveling. He says that as long as the money is right and the audiences are appreciative he is willing to do road shows.

When asked what type of crowd he prefers singing for, Gene replied: "I can adapt myself to any type of crowd, adults in a club or kids at a concert. But if I appeared in a whole lot of clubs, I'd probably get tired of it."

Gene said that his type of music, rhythm-and-blues, will continue forever.

"Every now and then, the charts get flooded with British music, but rhythm-and-blues always makes its way back to the top of the charts," he added.

Although he doesn't particularly care for the British music scene, Gene admits that the Beatles have influenced American music quite a bit.

"Any spark to the industry means a lot," he said. "The Beatles and other English groups brought a lot of people back into the record shops. And besides being just a general spark to the industry, the Beatles have produced some standards like 'Michelle' and 'Yesterday.'"

Twenty-six-year-old Chandler has had many hits. Currently under contract to two labels, his last hit was "I Fooled You This Time," on Chess, and his new release is "The Girl Don't Care," on Brunswick.

Explaining why he is on two labels, Gene said that his most recent contract is with Brunswick, but under his old contract with Chess he's required to record a few more songs.

If he ever gets tired of singing, Gene will always have something to fall back on. Not only does he own a publishing company and real estate in Chicago, but he also recently opened his own nightclub, the Algiers Lounge, in the same city.

The Five Americans

March 11, 1967

THE DAYS OF PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY SANDWICHES ARE OVER FOR THE Five Americans.

When the boys moved to Dallas, looking for rock 'n' roll rainbows, they were likely candidates for the President's poverty program. Deep in financial trouble, all five crowded into a tiny apartment and tried desperately to make ends meet.

They had already signed a contract with Abnak record company. When John Abdnor Jr., son of the owner of the company, came to their apartment to talk business, he discovered the mess they were in.

The first thing John Jr. did was move the group into a decent apartment and see that they had enough money to take them off their diet of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

It's been a few years since the Five Americans were just another group trying to make it big and starving in the meantime.

Now they have three hits under their belts. Their latest is "Western Union Man," which was preceded by "Evol Not Love" and their first smash, "I See the Light."

Norman Ezell, rhythm guitar player for the group, explained during a telephone interview from Dallas how they came up with "Western Union Man."

"Mike Raybon, our lead guitar player, was just fooling around with his guitar when he came up with a unique sound," Norman said. "It sort of reminded us of a telegraph key. That's when we decided to write 'Western Union Man.'"

Besides Norman and Mike, who are twenty-three, the group consists of John Durill, organist, twenty-two; bass player Jim Grant, twenty-one; and

drummer Jimmy Wright, nineteen. All the boys except Jimmy, who is still in high school, met while attending Southeastern State College in Oklahoma.

John, Mike, and Norman do all the writing for the group. When asked what it takes to have a hit record, John replied, "The main ingredient for a hit record is a love for the art of pop music. Just like anyone who aspires to be successful, you have to love what you're doing.

"Another thing is that we never argue," he added. "You can't expect to put out hit records if the guys in the group don't get along. We are the same guys who came out of Oklahoma and will always be the same."

The Five Americans have already played concert dates with Herman's Hermits and other big-name acts. They hope to do more of the same in the future. To ensure bookings on the East Coast, they recently signed with Paramount Artists of Washington, D.C., who will handle their bookings in the East.

Keith

March 18, 1967

IT WOULD BE A SAD DAY FOR THE WORLD OF POP MUSIC IF JAMES BARRY Keefer, better known as just plain “Keith,” had decided to carry out his plans to become a commercial art teacher.

At one time, Philadelphia born Keith was a serious student of commercial art at the Kutztown (PA) State Teacher’s College. He had always been interested in music, and suddenly chose to give up his pursuit of an art education to try his hand at singing and songwriting.

His choice was a good one, for the first two songs he wrote and recorded became hits. The first of his two hits was “Ain’t Gonna Lie,” which was followed recently by the even more successful “98.6.” After “98.6,” Keith decided he wanted to change his style.

“After all, you can’t go on with the same shuffle all your life, even if it is an individual style,” he said.

His latest release, “Tell Me to My Face,” a likely candidate for the top of the charts, shows a definite change in style. Written by the team of Nash, Clarke, and Hicks, of the Hollies, the song has an up-tempo, relentless beat and Eastern flavor, unlike Keith’s previous two records, which were soft and gentle.

Until recently, twenty-year-old Keith, whose records bear the Mercury label, was a loner. While he was on the road, he would travel with and pay the expenses for one or two of his close friends.

Then, in January of this year, while on a cross-country tour, he came upon a new group, the Wild Kingdom, whose sound fascinated him. He immediately signed the boys as his backing group.

The Wild Kingdom consists of Ray Witham, twenty-one, electric bass; Mike Johnstowne, nineteen, lead guitar; Steve Swenson, nineteen, drums; and Tom Moore, nineteen, rhythm guitar. Besides singing with the group, Keith plays the harmonica and shakes his tambourine.

“I’m hardly Junior Parker or Little Walter when it comes to harmonica playing, but I enjoy it and I’m listening to harmonica records and practicing,” says Keith.

The singer invested some of the royalties from his records in an apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. “I had to move to New York for business reasons,” he said. “My mentor, Jerry Ross, the Philadelphia artist-and-repertoire man who discovered me and gave me my first chance, advised me to try to reside in New York City.”

Keith is now in the Midwest with the Beach Boys’ tour. When that tour ends, he’ll keep himself busy, joining the Caravan of Stars, Dick Clark’s nationwide tour.