Vendetti’s Soft Rock emerges after decades of ‘goodtimes’ in CNY

By Katrina Tulloch
ktulloch@syracuse.com

In 1957, Buddy Holly performed at the Onondaga County War Memorial in Syracuse. Two years later, the legendary rock ‘n’ roller would be dead — an accident famously chronicled by Don McLean. Chuck Berry played there, too. So did Elvis, Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, The Who, Johnny Cash and countless others. And that’s just one venue. U2 played on Erie Boulevard. John Lennon and Yoko Ono performed at the Everson Museum. Lou Reed played all around SU.

“Syracuse was an important enough stop in rock ‘n’ roll that most of the big names played here at one point or another,” says Ron Wray, a music historian and author of the “History of Syracuse Music” website. “The Stones, Bruce Springsteen, even Shania Twain, if you’re going to that era. They all came to Syracuse.

Yes, Syracuse has earned its small spot in the annals of rock history. The Onondaga Historical Association is paying tribute to that history with its latest exhibit: ‘The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll in Syracuse.’ The exhibit runs for the next six months and admission to the museum, as always, is free.

From Lou Reed to Polar Bear Club, DHA Museum looks back at the history of rock ‘n’ roll in Syracuse

By Chris Baker
cbaker@syracuse.com

“This isn’t the Civil War.”

During the adolescent age of rock ‘n’ roll, Syracuse emerged as a prime market for the nation’s biggest acts. As the genre came of age, the city featured prominently, due in large part, to the War Memorial.

And while rock legends were blowing away at the Syracuse arena, local rockers were plugging away at scores of clubs and bars, developing a thriving scene.

The exhibit begins with the 1950s and creeps up to modern rock. It’s emphasis is on Syracuse, but it serves as a window into the cultural revolution that swept the nation in the ’50s, ’60s and ’70s.

“The music scene really reflected how kids were growing up,” says Jon Zella, who curated the exhibit. “There are cultural signifiers. We’re not teaching rock history. People were there.”

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The Rolling Stones, at the Onondaga County War Memorial, in 1966.

— JON ZELLA, EXHIBIT CURATOR

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We’ve been thinking about Central New York’s most prominent and bars with well-known namesakes. We’re exploring the stories of the people behind those businesses.

Today, we continue Vendetti’s Soft Rock at 2026 Teall Ave.

“This is the name.”

In 1970 and never looked back.

Since 1977, he’s owned or managed staff at Hillside, Bistro and Bar, Mother’s Cupboard diner, Mother’s Goodtime Saloon and New York State Fair food stand, Moby Dick Deli, Harbor Lodge Restaurant, Vendetti’s Lakeview Restaurant, Barney Goodtime Bar, Gilligan’s Goodtime Bar and Goodtime Banquet Hall and catering services.

Most of his bars and venues had the “goodtime” name attached (one word) to let customers know what to expect.

Vendetti’s Goodtime Band has played hundreds of weddings, anniversaries and birthday parties around Central New York.

Growing up

Even after 45 years, Vendetti never wanted to move his businesses out of Central New York. He’s named his new bar The Soft Rock, until he was finally named his new bar The Soft Rock,威胁着他的生意。Vendetti’s Soft Rock emerged after decades of ‘goodtimes’ in CNY.

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Rock history in Syracuse reflects ‘how kids were growing up’

ROCK, FROM PAGE I-1

history. People were there. They lived it. This isn’t like the Civil War.”

Zella collected old 8-tracks and 45s, a double-neck guitar from the 1960s, drum heads, concert posters, ticket stubs, newspaper clippings and even some old car radios. The exhibit combines memorabilia from local acts like the Flashcubes to big names that stopped here, like the Rolling Stones.

ROCK, THEN AND NOW

While cobbled together relics of rock history, Zella tapped Wray as well as some notable musicians, including Gary Frenay, who played with the Flashcubes and Screen Test in the 1970s and 80s. He also found traces of how and why rock culture in Syracuse (and nationwide) has changed.

“The ’60s was an amazing time around here,” Frenay says. “Five or six nights a week the clubs were packed. It was such a scene.”

It’s true, clubs and music halls were plentiful in Syracuse during the heyday of rock ‘n’ roll. Today, you’re hard-pressed to find packed rock halls every night of the week. So what happened?

On Dec. 1, 1985, New York State raised the legal drinking age from 19 to 21, in order to comply with the National Minimum Drinking Age Act. The change put a stranglehold on a movement promoted by youthful culture.

“We would play college events that we’d played the year before and there were maybe 30 people when there’d been 200 the previous year,” Frenay said. “Everybody was going to keggers instead. It took the heart out of the scene.”

But rock endured — though it would (arguably) never rival the scene developed in the ’70s. Bands like Polar Bear Club, Earth Crisis or Perfect Pussy have superseded the city limits to earn acclaim on a national stage. Local rock still perseveres in the bars, clubs and hidden-away halls of Central New York.

And the OHA exhibit covers it all — the good, the bad and the rocking history of Syracuse music.