

The Ride, Jive & the 105

By Kenn Hartmann

I'm on my motorcycle heading to the library to write this story. I turn north on the Kingery Highway, Route 83, the sun at my back. The light turns red & I slow, the traffic in the right lane is already stopped, but a hand waves frantically out of the driver's window as I approach. It's Gina Woods, from Open Road Radio, a bike aficionado & owner of a late 40's Panhead. I wave back. Before I go into the library I call & ask her how she knew it was me barreling up from behind. Was it the distinctive syncopated sound of my straight pipes as I throttled down? 'No, it was the sunlight,' she says, 'reflecting off your head.'



The Motor Company is having their 105th anniversary bash August 29 & 30. There's so much going on from the 'Ride Home' which originates in 25 different cities across America to grassroots motorcycle mania blossoming in every corner of Milwaukee this time every year. For a company that once tried to patent the unique 'potato-potato' sound of its engines, it is appropriate that the music event is superb. Springsteen tickets at the Roadhouse are available only to Anniversary ticket holders. Foo Fighter tickets are available to anyone. Kid Rock at Miller Park is free to HOG members.

Milwaukee's Summerfest Grounds is a stunning array of talent from Big Head Todd, Los Lonely Boys, Foghat, ZZ Top, Dr. John, BRMC, War, (Joan Jett is either here or at Miller Park depending on how you look at the event webpage). Even Daughtry, the cast off American Idol rocker, will play. Peter Frampton, who has developed into a distinguished handsome gentleman, will be doing his blisteringly commercial homage to himself. I guess in a good way. He was once in a band called The Preachers & later Humble Pie (ah, the 60's!) But it was the 70's when he came alive. Back when I lived in this cold water flat on Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis, a building infested with characters like Heart-Attack Larry & the certifiably mad Chopper, my singular solace in the eerie neon night was a tiny AM transistor radio that only played Frampton, Fleetwood Mac, & Springsteen but mostly Frampton.

Long before Frampton was War, but this isn't the real War. I assume it's the Lonnie Jordan version; the other original members are dead or in the Low Rider Band. But for nostalgia, I played the hell out of 'World is a Ghetto.' When quad speakers first came out it was a real trip to sit & listen to 'zoom, zoom, zoom in my 4-cornered room.' While bullets ripped through the alley out back, War put a positive spin on living the life.

BRMC - Black Rebel Motorcycle Club got their name from Brando's movie, The Wild One. They play great music & their cool motorcycle themed posters are available on eBay. About the worst thing anyone says about them is that they're 'Beatlesque.' Like that's a tragedy. Oh, by the way, do yourself a favor & don't end up kicking yourself in the ass for missing Buddy Guy. Whatever you may think of authentic Chicago blues - just extrapolate that scene's evolution into Clapton, the Stones, Hendrix & the whole rock renaissance. That's the legacy of Southside Sweet Home blues. Just take a long hard listen, there's not many originals left.

I've already told you about Dr. John (FRP March 08 - 'Good to the Max'). It's impossible to do a decent motorcycle show without homage to New Orleans. It's the whole Easy Rider/Then Came Bronson thing lurking in our collective consciousness.

In fact, a lot of the Harley mystique from both those movies involves a heavy musical heritage. Los Lonely Boys, man, I'd go to just see them. If you've read more than a few of my stories, you already know my insatiable fondness for rockafied Tex-Mex, Tijuano, Tornado music. For me it goes way back to Richie Valens, Sir Douglas Quintet, Augie Meyers, Flaco Jimenez & Los Lobos.

Go to see the bands as they are, not as they were. If you're picturing Joan Jett, like Rodney Bingenheimer's pubescent fantasy, well, just enjoy the music.

-Kenn Hartmann

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