

Grit, Noise, & Revolution

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**the birth of detroit
rock 'n' roll**



david a. carson

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Published in the United States of America by
The University of Michigan Press
Manufactured in the United States of America
☺ Printed on acid-free paper

2008 2007 2006 2005 4 3 2 1

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A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Carson, David, 1949–
Grit, noise, and revolution : the birth of Detroit rock 'n' roll /
David A. Carson.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Discography: p.

ISBN 0-472-11503-0 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Rock music—Michigan—Detroit—History and criticism. I. Title.

ML3534.C34 2005

781.66'09774'34—dc22

2004030698

This book is dedicated to all the rock and R & B musicians who played and sang with a passion that would always be identified with Detroit. It could not have been written without the love & support of my wife Laura, and my daughter Erin.

Contents

Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
1. Boogie and the Beat	1
2. Fame and Fortune	11
3. Freewheelin' in the Motor City	18
4. Motown and Other Sounds	33
5. The Village Is on Fire	57
6. On to the Hideout	68
7. So You Wanna Be a Rock 'n' Roll Star?	75
8. A Whole Lotta Soul, a Whole Lotta Funk	90
9. Birth of the Noise	98
10. A Mythical Figure	107
11. Summer in the City	120
12. Hippies and Head Shops	127
13. Hits and Misses	131
14. Something in the Air	142
15. Seger on the Rise	150
16. A Night at the Grande	153
17. Enter the Stooges	158
18. On the Front Lines with the MC5	164
19. Total Assault: Kickin' Out the Jams	174
20. Up against the Wall and Beyond	183

Contents
viii

21.	The Detroit Pop Festival	195
22.	Voices of the Counterculture	202
23.	I Wanna Be Your Dog	215
24.	“Uncle Russ”	218
25.	First Train out of Town	223
26.	1970	228
27.	The Big Bust	260
	Epilogue	278
	Notes	297
	Bibliography	331
	Selected Album Discography	345
	Index	349
	Illustrations <i>following page 192</i>	

Preface

On April 7, 1969, over sixteen thousand fans turned out at Detroit's Olympia Stadium for a ten-hour rock concert event called the Detroit Pop Festival. Although there were no "national" acts on the bill, kids were lining up to see Motor City stalwarts such as the MC5, the Stooges, SRC, the Bob Seger System, the Amboy Dukes, the Rationals, and Frost.

Two years earlier, as Detroit burned during the urban riots in the summer of '67, San Francisco's music and cultural scene had drawn national attention with its laid-back image of "peace, love, and flowers in your hair." Now, hard-driving, high-energy Detroit bands were breaking through with major label record contracts. Their reputations were forged through performances that intimidated many of the touring acts forced to follow them onstage at venues such as the Grande Ballroom. It appeared to many observers, including those in the national press, that Detroit was on the verge of becoming the next big music scene.

There was no denying Detroit's reputation as a tough, gritty, unheralded industrial metropolis most associated with a colorful band of gangsters, automotive assembly lines, and a famous R & B music label. By the late sixties, the city's bands began to mirror that image, and fans began taking pride in it. Their attitude was, "Yeah, we make the cars, and the best damn rock 'n' roll anywhere—just try and outplay our bands."

Berry Gordy's Motown empire had emerged from the heart of the city to put Detroit on the music map. Now, influenced by their R & B heritage, the Motor City's aspiring rock musicians were redefining what *Time* magazine was describing as "a real Detroit sound, pulsating with the belch of its smokestacks and the beat of its machinery."

Fueled by the radical social and political stances of activist John

Sinclair, the controversial and quintessential Detroit band MC5 was at the center of what looked like a musical and cultural revolution at the height of the Vietnam War and the civil rights struggle.

Although it took place primarily during the period between 1965 and 1972, the roots of this explosive musical scene can be traced all the way back to the forties and fifties. And that's where we'll begin.

Preface

x

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation to my wife Laura and to Chris Hebert at the University of Michigan Press for their assistance in editing. I would also like to thank my daughter Erin for her support and assistance with computer troubleshooting. Thanks also to Strother Bullins for his technical assistance with photos.