

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.

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