

An Eye For Music

By Helen Marktetti

These are the images of our past, generations of memories to illustrate the excitement of rock and roll and the electricity around it. We can talk about the concerts we've attended, the rockers we've idolized but without the "voice of the photos" the words evaporate quickly. It's the photograph that holds the words together.

Rock and Roll photographer, Janet Macoska, has been capturing images of icons since the tender age of 12. Listening to Top 40 radio and calling Cleveland radio station WKYC to talk to disc jockeys, Jerry G and Big Jack Armstrong is how her career innocently began.

She volunteered at WKYC radio station helping to answer fan mail. She was given boxes of 45's (records) as her "payment". What a dream come true for a 12 year old! The dream, however was just beginning.

"MY father had his law office in downtown Cleveland. It was near the WKYC radio station which also had a

television studio. I would go to the radio station after school for awhile and then go home with my dad," said Janet from her home in Cleveland.

Rock stars would come to the TV and radio station for performances and interviews. Janet had her parents Kodak camera with her on a particular day in 1966. On this day it became clear what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. Sonny and Cher were at WKYC radio station answering phone calls from fans when Janet took their picture. It was her first rock and roll image captured on film. The photo appeared in Teen Screen Magazine. Other artists that she was able to meet and photograph early on included Spanky and Our Gang and Gary Puckett and The Union Gap. She knew in her heart that photographing, interviewing and interacting with her musical heroes is how

she would earn her living. As with most things there are usually some bumps in the road along the way.

Janet joined the staff of her high school newspaper with hopeful enthusiasm to inform the student body on the latest record review or rock star happening. Her high school, however, maintained a straight and narrow path that seemed only interested with the candy bar drive and who won the Betty Crocker bake-off. Rock and Roll did not have a welcomed place there.

She was met with similar resistance once she entered college at Tri-C (Cuyahoga Community

College). She had an agreement with the editor of her college newspaper that she would use her music articles to fill the space when fellow students did not turn in their assignments for publication. She was then able to gradually write about record reviews, music stories and conduct small interviews. This idea worked to Janet's advantage because college students were interested in the latest music sensation. "Things fell into place as they should have," she said.

One of her first assignments at Tri-C was to conduct a professional interview. While her fellow classmates were interviewing former teachers or high school coaches, Janet went for a bigger fish and caught it...

The New York jets were in town for the weekend, scheduled to play the Cleveland Browns for the first network Monday Night Football Game. Staying at the Hotel Marriott

near the airport was famous sportscaster, Howard Cosell. Janet wrote a letter to Mr. Cosell explaining her class assignment and left the letter at the front desk. The next day Howard's wife, Mary, called Janet and arranged a meeting between the two. Janet was always willing to go the extra mile. "No one ever told me that I couldn't do these things...that I shouldn't be doing this...so I didn't know any better," she said. She gives credit to Howard Cosell for giving her some of the best advice for a journalism career. He said to her, "Learn as

much as you can about the person you will interview. It's a matter of respect for your subjects. Listen to what they say." A valuable lesson from someone who knew his subjects for decades.

Janet took photography and journalism classes and while she excelled at both, it was photography that seemed to have a stronger tugging at her heart.

In 1973 the door began to open wider. Through Walt Tiburski, who was the sales director at WMMS radio station, Janet photographed her first concert at

Cleveland Public Hall. The line up consisted of Linda Ronstadt, ELO (Electric Light Orchestra) and The Beach Boys.

Also around that time Janet was working on a music story for the Tri-C campus newspaper. She went to The Agora which is a club in Cleveland that showcases the latest and newest bands with some vintage groups along the way. Janet took pictures of The Alex Harvey Band and also interviewed Alex Harvey. She sent him the photos once the



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band returned to England. A few months later they were back in Cleveland and she met their manager... a big, burly Scottish man and because of her photos he told Janet, "You're like family now."

Through this connection she became friends with Alex Harvey and his family. She often spent summers at their home in London. Alex became a mentor as well as a friend. He encouraged her to keep pursuing a career in photography. He introduced Janet to people who would prove valuable on her professional journey.

For many years, practically on a nightly basis, Janet attended concerts and captured images that have appeared in Creem and MOJO

Magazines among other publications. Her work has been used for VH1 documentaries and many of her photos are displayed in Hard Rock Cafes around the globe.

Her work has also been requested by "her subjects" for use in books or album covers. Artists who have requested her photos are David Bowie, Hall & Oates and Ray Davies of The Kinks, to name a few.

Janet had "auditioned" to be a tour

photographer for Paul McCartney in the late 1980s. She made it to the top three which is quite an accomplishment.

Although she did not secure the position, he was familiar with her work. A photograph of Paul McCartney taken by Janet is on display at the National Portrait Gallery in London, England as part of its permanent exhibit.

Janet has many projects that she is working on which would leave anyone with their mind spinning as to how she keeps up with herself. She is working a good deal as the primary photographer for The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum and Playhouse Square Center. She will be

photographing the first Big Cool Cats Festival at Cain Park on June 20th and The Ingenuity Festival on July 10, 11 and 12.

The Rock Hall's current exhibition of Bruce Springsteen utilized eight of Janet's photographs of him performing at Cleveland venues over the years, from 1974 to 1999. They are also in negotiations to tour the photography exhibit that Janet had of her work at the Rock Hall in 2004. Right now her photos are being combined with Lynn Goldsmith's rock and roll photos and are scheduled to be exhibited at The Women's Museum in Dallas, Texas in September and October of 2009.

She is currently working on a couple of new exhibitions that will tour via ArtVision Exhibitions, who

are currently touring her "Jews Rock! A Celebration of Rock and Roll's Jewish Heritage" exhibition. Janet is also working on an exhibition of African-American musicians, and one that celebrates music in the 70s.

She is promoting her 35 years of photography as interior design elements. The rock and roll photographs, as well as morphed pop art that she has created from

her photographs, are being used by The Hard Rock Café Corporation, Tri-C's new Center for Creative Arts and the new Verso Restaurant in Parma.

These are exciting and detailed projects that involve much time and careful planning but when you are doing what you love, "It's all magical and timeless," replied Janet when asked about her work and what inspires her.

Yes, magical and timeless...just like her rock and roll images.



Deborah Harry (Blondie), 1978
Janet Macoska Photography



Little Richard
Janet Macoska Photography

www.janetmacoskaphotography.com



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