

WHAT'S ON THE SHELF

By Helen Marketti

Good Lovin': My Life as a Rascal

An interview with original Rascal band member, Gene Cornish.

The Rascals were a well-known and well-loved rock band during the 60s, with signature hits such as "Good Lovin'," "A Beautiful Morning," "People Got to Be Free," "How Can I Be Sure," "I've Been Lonely Too Long," "Groovin'", and many more. Original member Gene Cornish discusses his recent autobiography, *Good Lovin': My Life as a Rascal* (Gene Cornish with Stephen Miller) (S and G Publishing, 2019). Foreword written by Felix Cavaliere of The Rascals.

Gene was originally from Canada. He moved to the United States with his mother Ada and his stepfather Ted Cornish when he was very young. His real father had left the family before Gene was born. As Gene grew up, he became interested in music and more particularly in playing the guitar. The first song he learned to play on the guitar was "Singing the Blues" by Guy Mitchell. One day he was stuck inside his home due to a snow storm in Rochester, New York, playing checkers with his grandfather, when a cool looking guy with a guitar slung over his shoulder came on the TV. This was a defining moment for Gene because this young man on television was Elvis Presley. "He sang 'Heartbreak Hotel' and that was an enlightening moment, the beginning of my own journey. I was hooked. Then it went from Elvis to the Everly Brothers to Ricky Nelson to Jerry Lee Lewis," remembers Gene. "It was about Rockabilly at the time. It was the style of music I first learned to play."

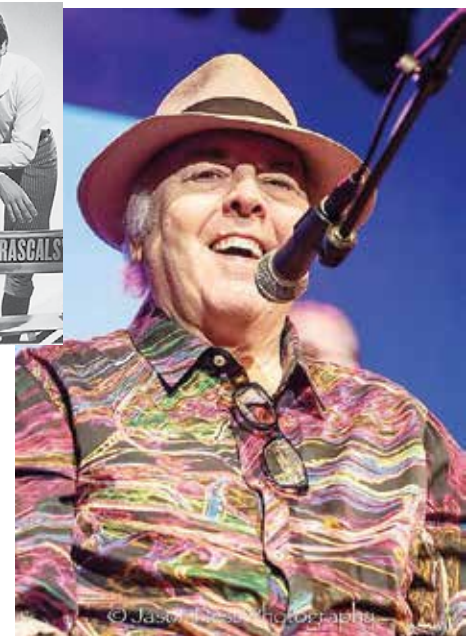
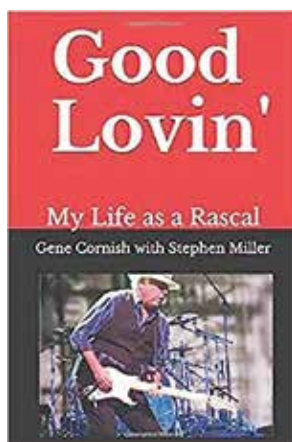
"My mom took me to see Buddy Holly in 1958. I was fourteen years old at the time. He was playing at The Auditorium Theatre in Rochester. On the same bill was The Everly Brothers and Duane Eddy. I remember it was Phil Everly's birthday. The entire audience sang Happy Birthday. I was thrilled," recalls Gene. "There were two shows that day. I asked my mom if we could come back for the evening show. The tickets were only \$2.50. I remember turning to my mom and telling her that what these guys

were doing was what I wanted to do with my life, that I was going to become famous. I promised her I would be on the Ed Sullivan Show. I was going to buy her a Cadillac. And several years later I did exactly what I said!"

Gene had a wonderful relationship with his stepfather Ted Cornish, so much so that Gene refers to him as his dad. Ted was a huge supporter of Gene wanting to be a musician and encouraged him to follow the pathway he wanted. "We had a bait and tackle shop," said Gene. "My father worked sixteen hours a day. We sold hunting and fishing equipment. He made sure I had everything. He did it all for me. When I became famous with The Rascals it was my joy and honor to buy a new home and a new car for my parents because of all they had done for me."

While Gene was enjoying great success in the mid to later 60s with The Rascals, his biological father had surfaced. "My real father worked for the Canadian government as a courier. I think I met him once when I was about four years old. Anyway, he found out where I lived and had left a letter. He wanted to let me know that he was proud of me and my success. He said he never wanted to impose upon my life or make me uncomfortable. I didn't respond to his letter. I didn't know what to say. And to be honest, I regret that now. I guess I didn't want my stepfather to know my real dad had been in contact. I never told my mom. I did learn from an uncle how my dad was doing from time to time but we were never in direct contact."

Gene said The Rascals had five years of



being together and making an impact with their music. It was a great experience for him to be part of a band with bandmates he considers brothers. "The Rascals were Felix Cavaliere, Eddie Brigati, Dino Danelli, and myself. It's grateful and humbling when people approach me and say how much they have enjoyed the music of our band. Felix and I are extremely close to this day. These were my brothers through thick and thin," said Gene. "The late 50s through the entire 60s was the greatest music generation. If you listen to the music, which are too many artists to mention, but you had The Four Seasons, The Beatles, The Beach Boys, Motown, Cream, The Lovin' Spoonful, Aretha Franklin, and on and on. The artists were there and present. It was a friendly competition between all of us. But everyone including The Rascals kept their eye on The Beatles because they set the pace. They set the bar."

The Rascals missed out on playing at The Monterey Pop Festival, as they were scheduled to play for the Henry Ford family. They missed out on Woodstock too because they were recording an album. "We had no idea these historical events would be filmed and would start a movement," said Gene.

Gene had several "dark" years where drugs took over his life. At one point he was nearly homeless and sold his guitars to support his habits. Remembering what his dad told him at an early age regarding opportunities: "Opportunity comes silently at night. If you're prepared, it hits you on the head. You have to have sense, faith and trust. If you're not prepared or tuned in, it will go by silently and you will never know. My dad was a smart man."

Gene has fond memories of Cleveland. It was a thrill for him to be inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame with The Rascals in 1997. For a while Gene was in a band called Fotomaker with Wally Bryson

of The Raspberries. "Cleveland is such a great musical town. I remember when Fotomaker debuted at The Agora in 1978. I have good memories of Cleveland."

Gene had been touring with Felix Cavaliere during the summer of 2018, when he went into cardiac arrest onstage in Billings, Montana. "I remember not feeling well that day. When we started the show, I started to feel dizzy. The room began to spin and then everything went black. That's the last thing I remember. The next moment I am waking up in the hospital. Right now, I am taking it easy. I am currently in physical rehab to regain muscle strength. I can't tour at this time but I plan on returning to the stage, God willing, one of these days. Instead of making music, I am telling my story."

Gene's autobiography is quite a detailed journey and he holds nothing back. It's honest and open with reminiscences of great times and dark days. It's a book for every Rascals and music fan. "I am a humble guy from Canada. I was able to make my dreams come true through the love and support of my parents. I was prepared for the opportunity. It was all about the music and wanting to be a rock star. It was a lot of work, too. (laughs) I am blessed to have been in The Rascals and grateful to Felix for writing those great songs. Whatever your dreams are, work on them because they can come true. You have to put in the work but it can happen. We carry on. Felix, Eddie, Dino and myself. We were The Rascals."