



The Soundtrack of My

Life

BY JOE RUSSO

A couple of weeks ago my computer became the victim of a virus, forcing me to erase my hard drive and start all over again. And, that meant rebuilding my iPod as well. Fortunately, I backed up all of my files on an external drive and when I was digging around in there looking for my music I remembered reading about 'The Ultimate Playlist' on the website of Philadelphia comedian and radio personality Big Daddy Graham. It gave me an idea: Why don't I create a Wildwood playlist? Immediately I started to categorize certain songs already in my collection into the various stages of my life - childhood, adolescence, teenager, young adult and my current level of rapidly graying middle age. There are so many which hold a place in my heart for one reason or another, whether it be a song I heard

on my new transistor radio that my dad bought for me when I was a boy, a high school party, a night in a nightclub, or one which reminded me of summer. On that note, I will open with the song that will lead off my playlist, the song that brings me back to the carefree summer days of my boyhood: 'Higher and Higher' by Jackie Wilson. Every time I listen to it I hear the captain of the 'Vamp' blowing the air horn to signal the start of another morning of sport fishing, my aunt declaring that the town is "packed" and the restaurant is going to be "really busy tonight," and the smell of suntan oil mixing in the salty air down on the beach. All of a sudden I am ten years old again with three month's to kill doing absolutely nothing.

Another song to be included is 'This Magic Moment' by Jay and The Americans, which sends me to the musty auditorium at the old Philip Baker School in Wildwood Crest on a Friday night dance where the girls sat along the wall on one side and the boys directly op-

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posite. The DJ would announce, "Girls choice," or, "Boys choice," and we would shuffle across the room in search of a partner. Our principal required us to dance at arm's length and once in a while she would turn the lights on just to make sure.

Or, play me some 'Down on the Corner' by Creedence Clearwater Revival and I am back in Snuffy's Luncheonette with my buddies wolfing down corn dogs and cheese fries and playing pinball while the girls are up front line dancing by the juke box.

Certain songs by Earth Wind and Fire conjure up the nights I spent at The Stardust nightclub during the Disco days listening to one of my favorite cover groups 'Wildflower.' And, I would be remiss if I failed to mention any song from Deep Purple's 'Machine Head' (many of you know why) or the torch songs favored by a number of customers that I listened to night after night at Russo's bar. And, what about the

music that guided me through the years of teenage angst?

I could go on and on and fill up my entire iPod with nothing but memory inducing Wildwood songs and, most likely, I would remember a couple more after I was finished. So, it begs the question: "Is it endless?" And, better yet, "Isn't this too good of an idea to limit my playlist to just my own memories?"

Therefore I've decided to invite contributions that will change my Wildwood Playlist into the Sun-By-The-Sea Wildwood Playlist. If you wish to participate, please submit your song nominations to joe.russo75@yahoo.com along with the memories attached to them. I want to traverse the different eras of the Wildwoods; from the Starlight Ballroom to wherever it is that kids go today. All generations, both local and out-of-towners, are encouraged to respond. The results will be published in a later edition of The Sun.

So, good luck and happy listening!

My Wildwood Playlist Update

One Fish

BY JOE RUSSO

Even though it is regarded as one of the great pastimes in Wildwood, I have never cared for sport fishing. I suppose that my youthful impatience might have had something to do with that - sitting in a motionless boat, bobbing up and down on the water watching the fishing line twitch and make tiny ripples on the water and wondering all the while, "What the heck is going on down there?"

With the luck I had, one fish would have meandered by, taken a nibble off of my bait, and then moved on. Back up on the surface I would barely notice, focusing instead on terra firma, shrouded in haze just off in the distance. I could discern bathers in the surf, probably bobbing up and down with joy and not boredom and I envied them because, should they choose to remove themselves from the water, they could simply walk out. I did not have that option.

Suddenly, there came a tug on my line. "At last!" I would yelp while cranking the reel, remembering to keep the line taut just as my Aunt Bianchi always preached. I'd spot a dark form drawing closer to the surface twirling in a lazy circle. Someone would lean over the gunwale with net in hand and when it broke through there would be nothing at the end but an old leather boot. It was just another addition to my collection of rusty cans, fishnets, and sea robins that I have extracted from the Atlantic.

All of these memories have recently sprung to mind because I have decided to go fishing again. This time I am casting my line onto shore, into the masses that live and play on our great island with the hopes of reeling in some songs and memories that I can enjoy and share with others. It was with great anticipation that I baited my hook, fully aware of the rich bounty available for the catch. I was not concerned with boredom because I was on dry land and my laptop computer was my rod and reel. That meant that I could come and go at any time.

I began my expedition last spring, heading to my favorite spot at my kitchen island and eagerly casting away. And then I waited...and waited...and waited for several days until finally one fish, whose name was Bill, meandered by and took a nibble. My

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line twitched and I reeled it in. To my delight, I found not an old boot, but the following reply:

"I am bad at remembering song titles and their singers, but I always can relate to when in my life of 65 years exactly where I was and what I was doing. My best memory of Wildwood was the summer of '64. Just graduated from high school, Vietnam War was here, racial unrest around the country but all I could think about was the Jersey shore. I met the girl of my dreams there, Julie Morro. I'll never forget her name. My first dance was "Lost That Lovin Feeling" by the Righteous Brothers. We danced all night and spent the weekend together. She was the one for me. My parents were so proud that I met a nice Italian girl. But it wasn't to be. With the war, new job, etc. we just never got back again. Whenever I hear that song, my weekend in Wildwood and Julie come flashing back. You never forget your first love."

This was so much better than being 'skunked' (if that is what the fisherman jargon is for bad luck). At least I have one remembrance that I can share and I thank the fish named Bill for his contribution from the Grand Banks of Wildwood folklore. With my lone catch safely tucked away, I debated whether I

should leave the line in a little longer or reel it in and put the rod away for good. However, even as a non-fisherman, I understand the reason why people shrug off the bad times and keep returning to the water: It is why I continually haul my golf clubs out every weekend, despite most of my shots finding the woods - there's always the possibility of that next sweet strike. So I decide to keep on fishing.

One other nugget of fishing wisdom passed down from my aunt was, "When the fish aren't biting in one spot, move to another," so I unplug the laptop from the kitchen receptacle and relocate to the living room couch. Several days and non-bites later I retreat to my desk upstairs. Still nothing. Now on my third spot with no bites I am about to call it quits when Aunt Bianchi's most important lesson rings in my head, "Above all, be patient!" And so, I move back to the kitchen, where my only catch occurred, and wait... and wait... and wait...

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