Preface

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It took more than two years and the support of scores of people when I originally wrote *Trips: Rock Life in the Sixties*. I was the collector of anecdotes, the detective of detail, a nibbler concocting a feast of my favorite adventures and everyone's pet road stories, tracking down tales, cross-interviewing, drawing on my own travels as a rock journalist, critic, and fan. Except for minor editing, intermittent commentary, and excising things I now know to be erroneous, ill-considered, or gratuitous, this enhanced reissue is fundamentally as originally written, with other *in situ* journalism merged in here and there as additional chapters or portions of chapters.

Trips is a memoir, a sourcebook, and a love letter; a recollection of a time, parenthesized by ambivalence and apathy, a search for the ultimate high, a generation with an irrepressible vision, its art, artists, its audience, and the substance of its statement. Most importantly, it was written during the period it describes, and not subject to analytic hindsight, even in this second edition. It was important to retain

the essence, the enthusiasm, and the naïveté of the era. It was especially important to retain the exuberant feminine *esprit*.

When rock was young, in the 1950s, it was swarms of infatuated girls in the audience that first registered the impact of those songs, artists, and records, and made for cheerfully unruly live shows. Most of the hits were lovelorn songs about or addressed to girls. Girls were the reason for rock 'n' roll. The girls adored the pop stars, so the boys all wanted to be pop stars. From that primal combination of fuel and spark came a lineage of passion and rebellion that resounded exponentially for decades. Rock absorbed rock 'n' roll, integrating a social conscience and a generational call for moral evolution, moving from AM radio to the massive penetration of FM radio, and from there into the consciousness and the imagination of the enormous population of young adults in the 1960s.

I have compiled a smattering of personalities and impressions as events of the rock 'n' roll Sixties were happening into a sampler of rock journalism in its first generation. What came to be known as "new journalism" ignited reviews, features, and cultural commentary focused on rock music. The pain of racism, civil rights abuses, and the Vietnam War inflamed artistic expression in the 1960s. Those years generated the women's movement, black power, gay rights, legal birth control, and the right to vote for eighteen-year-old Americans. Those issues, especially the war and the draft, tore families apart as ferociously as did the U.S. Civil War.

This original work and the additional journalism that has been merged into this edition are part of the maiden run of rock journalism, a pioneering effort on behalf of a dozen or so writers in the Sixties that believed in rock as an art form, as a social force, and as a creative ethic. Our work was not only to represent the music authentically, but also to convince the

DOVER

editors of major periodicals to publish it alongside critical and reportorial coverage of other fine and popular arts.

The alternative press, counterculture peer group reportage, came to prominence with rock coverage during the years this book traverses. Rock criticism, features, news, and rankings are now a part of many more publications in print and online. What has since come to be known as "classic rock"—and writings about it—is taught in universities in American Studies, History, Music, Women's Studies, and Journalism departments. Courses in writing about pop culture are offered by many colleges. If you are a student in one of those classes and your question to me would be "What advice would you give to an aspiring cultural journalist/critic?" this is for you: Write with intimacy, informed context, and abandon. Pop culture is fiercely and intimately beloved by its aficionados. It deserves to be written about with imagination and devotion, ardency, and yearning.

Trips offers a sunlit glimpse of a face of the Sixties—often hilarious, sometimes tragic, rarely in repose, but always erupting. It was a unique time. Its music stands apart in the landscape of American and English popular music and has never—much to my surprise—been equaled, much less eclipsed.

A frontier of changes opened up in the Sixties. No American decade was more rife with cultural and political change than the Sixties and no time more enlightening for its changes. The people intimately involved with its vanguard were talented, visionary, and courageous. There is little left of it but the backlash.

—E. S., 2018

DOVER

Teenism in the Fifties

DOVER

Coming of age in the Fifties was pure pain. Adolescence is hard enough; boys get grabby, gawky self-consciousness invades every waking hour like a lecherous Peeping Tom. So many secrets too intimate to reveal, too terrifying to keep, real agonies everyone around thought were cute or, worse yet, hilarious. Families got divorced; the immediate structure of life was shaken, shattered beyond comprehension as emotional turbulence crackled in crosscurrents through half-homes like mine.

Later in the decade there were Little Rock and *Sputnik*, body blows to the myth of American supremacy internationally and American complacency internally. The smug self-righteousness of the entire social system began to crumble before our eyes. We were jolted, shocked from our troubled, changing insides, TV the perimeters of perception, and our world was set spinning to the edge of sexual awareness and global annihilation at the same time. I don't know how we could have made it through the acceleration of shocks without our trusty companions: transistor radios tuned to the rock 'n' roll in the air and a stack of 45s, as intimate as a diary, the common denominator of a Fifties teen social life.

Everything else happening was beyond us, forced upon us by circumstances beyond our control. But our music was ours; it was us, it represented us and it created us. It gave us something wholly our own, young, youth-oriented, and inviolate.

There was that sweet soul music, the sexy, sassy rubber-bumping rhythm and blues to dance to, those beautiful boys undulating their bodies in a dance of delight. There was the syrupy sentimentalism of country singers spreading young men's fancies and God's good word across the land like hayseed in the wind. Sex and romantic languors, the first pain of love, rebelliousness, the symbolism of youth chauvinism, the fire water and soul of the temper of our times. Chuck Berry was the prophet and Elvis the shaman-God; rockabilly rhythm and blues to set your life a-movin'. Berry with his cars and girls, his guitarboy "Johnny B. Goode," and insinuating beat; Elvis, upper lip and humping hips forever.

History provides for retaliation. Nuclear weapons dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Ten years later to the day, "Rock Around the Clock" was the nationwide number one hit song, *Blackboard Jungle* was showing all over, and we sensed a feeling of identity, an identity tinged with rebellion, resentment, and fired by sound.

It was fun to put the local town movie theater managers uptight by mobbing *Blackboard Jungle* and *Love Me Tender*. Bill Haley and the Comets were originally Bill Haley and the Saddlemen, a country and western band covering race records until Haley sang the title song from *Blackboard Jungle*. The film caused riots in theaters, which became total teen experiences: suddenly there was a movie as noisy and as rebellious as we were feeling, and its music urged us on. That first flash of being in an unruly crowd, that first rush of power. Out of that mob would come a young, contained culture of which rock 'n' roll radio was the first indigenous tonic and weapon. "Rock 'n' Roll Music," "Hound Dog," "Sweet Little

DOVER

Sixteen," "Bo Diddley," and "Rock Around the Clock" were like passwords between us, the movement of our minds and bodies together. We were, after all, just beginning to realize that we were young, misunderstood, tipsy with incipient power, and in it all together.

Somewhere around the time I was approaching puberty I was taught about nuclear power. As if a hormonal crisis erupting into manic moodiness and engrossing daydreams of seduction were not enough, I had obliteration to deal with. Under a tiny nipple, which had all these tomboy years lain so taut and quiet on my chest, a painful little gland about the size of a grape protruded—only one—and I could not be consoled into believing I would ever have another. I was destined, oh woe, to be a unibreasted freak.

I was dismayed as much as relieved when, five months later, the other breast fully emerged and, Lord, to find them so sensitive to pain. Sometimes I'd bump into a chair, clumsy, aware of the eyes of the boys in the classroom upon me and—ow!—chest first then chin, I'd crumple to avoid the humiliation as pain shot through my chest like a comic-strip zinger.

Some of the girls who wore bras already, they laughed. They knew. They were the girls in the locker room who told us less mature ones what it was like to get your period. Those bull sessions were pure hell. How would I ever make it, I wondered.

The world was going through its time of the month. Or was it menopause? At the very least it was in full, flaring heat and we were all virgins. Going to school with The Bomb was as real as dirty jokes, ducktail haircuts, crinolines, marks, first nylons, and jive talk. The social studies teacher tried to be kind. He saw us freaking out. When gunpowder was first invented, he reassured us, they thought it was the end of the world, too.

One day, in "hygiene" class, the girls were shown a film on menstruation. The same day, in "shop," the boys saw a film on V.D.

DOVER

The next day we all saw a film of Hiroshima together. I learned to menstruate and live in terror of The Bomb the same week. The mushroom cloud blazed; it rose and crested in magnificent bursts of fire and power. It was one of the most movingly beautiful sights any one of us had ever seen. Our minds broke in terror and awe. We walked out of the auditorium changed children. Our pants were hot and we were full of paranoia. The cycle of anger, fear, and rebellion had started. We'd had our illusions busted and it was only the beginning.

The original "Sh-Boom" was a rhythm and blues record by the Chords released in 1954. It was one of the first R&B hits to be covered by a white group (the Crew Cuts, in this case). The ad for the single in music trade magazines had a photo of a mushroom cloud, and a huge BOOM ended the song. It sold a million copies on the white pop market.

DOVER

We all danced to it and roared with the boom. We danced so hard we couldn't think anymore; we danced in sexual frenzy and grateful relief. We didn't know whether to be thankful for the interruption of classwork by air raid drills or not. Single file out of the room, down to the basement halls, huddled against walls, waiting for the flash, the boom, the final apocalyptic dance. Was it really happening or were they trying to frighten us into submission for study hall? The lunchtime smell of peanut butter and jelly hung stickily in the air, floating though the cafeteria door. Whom would I crouch with, to whom would I run? Myra, who promised not to tell how I stuffed one cup of my tiny brassiere to make my breasts look even? Or Betsy, who had "done it," and confided that it hurt like hell? Linda, the Elvis nut, at least had her hayloft fantasies to die with. Sylvia was going steady and would die beloved. Donald, the class president, would be blasted to hell, most likely to succeed. I would die alone, relieved at last of the complication of committing suicide.

The door broke loose in the spring wind, sprang open, and cracked sharply against the inside wall. We yipped and started. Our minds leaped to the ultimate conclusion. Could it really be? We huddled next to the walls, arms over heads. It was fearing not just being killed, but the end of the meaning of life, and we never outgrew it.

We experienced a planetary anxiety that was awakening a global consciousness in every adolescent of the time. We not only knew of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, we saw it on TV. We experienced it; we felt the lapse of time and space over distance and instantly identified with those students, rocks in hands, being mowed down by tanks and machine guns. It was instant, that change: our awareness was increased geometrically and everything that touched that awareness was evil, destructive, and frightening but the one thing we had for ourselves, that rock 'n' roll. It sustained us. And more.

We were television children, the first generation of them. We would be the last generation to remember way back in our childhood the tiny lapse of time before TV. We'd been placed in custody of the living screen almost from our earliest memories. *Howdy Doody, Dragnet, Sky King, Disneyland, The Lone Ranger*—they would all figure prominently in our fantasies as we broke free to wander in a rock 'n' roll world. *American Bandstand*, hosted by good clean Dick Clark and guested with contemporary Philadelphia teens all dippy and dancing, was our show, a media mirror with which we checked ourselves out each day. No generation before us had that.

And we rocked and rolled, and we petted in cars, and we talked of Elvis and Connie and Dion and Annette, and we grew into one another in self-defense against The Bomb, against the fear of Soviet supremacy in space, sexual discovery, and having to let the junior high guidance counselors know of our choice of

DOVER

college. If we wanted admittance to The World we had to decide and begin planning for it at fifteen.

It struck some of us that it was their world and we didn't care much about admittance to it. There had to be a better way and we had to find it. We looked in other directions. The only thing specifically and exclusively for us was that rock 'n' roll.

We trembled on the brink of self-awareness while TV, movies, rock 'n' roll, and other media were introducing us to the shuddering of the world. The music grew louder, raunchier; dancing grew crazier, and our bodies and minds convulsed in a rapturous motion that was both an escape from, and a direct response to, the precarious spasms of events. We were a generation cut off from the past by total absorption with the present. And our parents thought surely that it was a phase, that we would outgrow it.

DOVER

Fat chance.

Teenism had been born. Teenism means running silly and scared, the result of an information assault, the world pouring in on us from every orifice of the media and all of it bad news. It is idealism coming smack up against reality, impatience, frustration; being more than children without the power of adults; being a part of something—*special*!

Entire industries bend for your favor; singers wail tunes you alone would understand and appreciate. There was a whole language, a colorful vernacular jive of black musicians, an ethnic parlance hip kids understood. It was the birth of hip, the birth of cool, a newly discovered road away from the path leading into the quiet desperation to which our parents and teachers resigned themselves, a direction away from chaos. Teenism was being a part of a special subspecies, an age span of irate, affluent white kids, a culture born to the renegade ballsy beat of rock 'n'

roll music, half-put-together outcasts learning to make the best of it together.

"I don't care what people say, rock and roll is here to stay!"

It was a metaphor for our commitment to one another and to finding another way to live. And the bond that held us together distinct from the rest of humanity was the smug, deep-down certain knowledge that that was the truth, baby, you betta believe it!

Music would break off an absurd edge: the stupid "See You Later, Alligator" (after 'while, crocodile), the goony "Flying Saucer" record. Sweet harmonies of the Everly Brothers, like sliding between satin sheets. Paul Anka and his problems with "Diana." The Coasters' "Searchin'"—we knew what that was all about. Woo-woo. "Peggy Sue-oo-oo." Goony falsetto of "Little Star," David Seville and the "Witch Doctor" (*oo-ee-oo-ah-ah, ting-tang-walla-walla-bing-bang*). You want lyrics with Significance? Those are lyrics with Significance. Oh, yes, there was the "Purple People Eater," who wanted to be a rock 'n' roll star, and "Yakety Yak" (don't talk back!).

Is it any wonder we got a little strange behind it all?

DOVER

"Way Down Yonder in New Orleans" reinforced the sensation of being part of something teenistic and nationwide. The music gave spunk to our belligerence; adult distaste kept it going. The most unique and repercussive generation gap was busy being born between the throbs of a big black dirty beat.

Teens wrote millions of fan letters, voted for records, and influenced play lists of major radio stations. They mobbed rock 'n' roll road shows, inside to writhe and scream, fall on their knees, worshiping the makers of music with shrieks of sexual release. Major magazines struggled to bring the crazed antics of teenism into focus. When Elvis was on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in September

1956 and the camera was forbidden to reveal him below the waist where the action was, it was an insult, an outrage. You could tell by the tempo of the screams of the live audience when he would give it a little shake, but they wouldn't let us see it on the screen. In a backhanded way it asserted our power. They were afraid to see, afraid to show, afraid to acknowledge that years of sexual repressiveness in the care and feeding of adolescents were exploding in hysteria and joy, breaking the bounds of acceptable morality, touching every teenager within earshot to his very forbidden genitals. For rock 'n' roll changed our sex lives. It spoke a language that included girls in its frantic, rebellious sexual need, and the response to it was largely sexual. We discovered the delights of each other's bodies and minds through music in the crucible of the Fifties, creating an open arena from which a wholly personal morality could emerge.

Clergy begged that this flood of degradation be stemmed; parents threw up their arms in helpless anger. They couldn't stand the thought that we were getting it, liking it, and doing it, feverishly, happily, and openly. They envied us our lean young bodies and our pleasures, and we dug it all. Along with all that loving and coming it was delicious and fitting spite, the critical slap back at authority losing control of its children. We were spoiled, unrestrainable, and sexually in control. We didn't have to take any of what they were laying out, not even school, seriously. Eccentric attire identified a peer, bosstalk was the language, music was the connecting wave of an age style that would take us from self-consciousness to generational consciousness to global consciousness over the following decade.

Music has always had the power to break down barriers and now it erected one. To be young was cool, to be old was a drag, and we were discovering it all at fifteen, sixteen—with enough time to live in the myth of eternal youth until we saw beyond it.

DOVER

The presence of blackness in the rock 'n' roll of the times, the black rhythm roots and the black performers, integrated our minds. Black kids were white teen sex idols, and, in the alarm adults expressed, we sensed the racist implications. It was action and reaction with no real conscious consideration until much later. TV news would interview a southern cracker during the integration upheaval and he'd bluster about how "next they'll be wanting to marry our daughters." What they really were scared of, and what in fact was happening, was that their darling daughters wanted to get it on with black boys. Miscegenation is not the result of integration; it is one of the bases.

With the music of the Fifties, teens had the first taste of full boogie. Despite everything else happening (because of it, probably), we were learning to feel good among one another. We had to, it was about the only outlet available that consumed as much energy as we had.

Adults agonized over the future of youth. They never knew what the agonies were. They couldn't relate to the increase in awareness we were responding to; it was totally beyond their experience. We got a long hard look at how it was out there, competitiveness motivating a dreary lifestyle, money being an end and not a means, nations hustling ultimate doom, and it stunk. We had the first good full global view of it any young generation was ever given. We could hardly be expected to respond with gratitude. We didn't know what the answer was, but we knew better. With that frame of reference they weren't going to teach us a thing. That's what hip was born as: knowing better. We felt adrift in a sea of utter bullshit and we could really perceive it. Soon we would learn to articulate it.

In a society lacking in values attractive to its horny, idealistic young, rock 'n' roll energized a need to find some.

DOVER

Those needs found some relief in the behavioral accoutrements of being a teenager, those car songs, those Blue Suede Shoes. All those material aspects of teenism filled our vocabulary, our wardrobes, our ears, our dreams, and our lives, only to show us there was something more to be had. There was still so much missing. And we were growing older, high school was drawing to an end. The music, toward the end, began to lag, the industry was manufacturing endless hours of facsimile rock, all those Italian kids and their featureless rock late in the Fifties just didn't cut it beyond a superficial level. Although the culture had seemed superficial to that point, it was beginning to experience a lack of substance, and out of that we began to feel that the rebelliousness of teenism was not rebelliousness without a cause but without a center. It was invigorating but ephemeral, transient, and beginning to sound lousy.

From that partial vacuum college kids were digging on "Tom Dooley" by the Kingston Trio in 1958 and getting into fretted instruments. Pop took a quantum leap, and when it fell to the street, rebelliousness had at last found a cause.

DOVER

In 1977 NASA launched space probes Voyager 1 *and 2 to explore the outer solar system. Aboard are golden records filled with information about Earth, including images, sounds, and music intended to represent our planet. There's only one rock 'n' roll song in that collection, which Carl Sagan curated. It is Chuck Berry's 1958 hit, "Johnny B. Goode." Chuck Berry lived long enough to learn that the* Voyagers *made it to interstellar space in 2012. He passed away on March 18, 2017, at the age of ninety.*