

# hard 'n' sweet

**W**hen people come up to me on the street and say, "Hey, Sugar-Tush, what's the Greatest Rock 'n' Roll Band of all time?"—a question I'm asked at least twice daily—my answer depends on my mood and how I feel about British people. If I'm feeling charitably disposed toward our Limey progenitors and partners-at-war, I might say Slade or The Sweet or even Mott the Hoople. If I'm in a nationalistic mood, I'll toss out The Standells or Johnny Burnette's Rock 'n' Roll Trio. These days, I feel confident to announce that The Raspberries—and no one else—are indeed The Greatest Rock Band Ever. I've reached this conclusion for three reasons:

- 1) they rocked harder than almost anyone;
- 2) despite this, their songs were sweeter than a bowl of Cap'n Crunch;
- 3) they weren't British.

It's 2004, for cunt's sake, and "rock band" is synonymous with "nostalgia act." After several years of clinical research, it's undeniable that rock 'n' roll music was never really able to change anything besides people's haircuts. At base—and at its best—it is a mating soundtrack for human insects to hook up and reproduce. Great rock 'n' roll leads invariably to pregnancy, and I'd wager that a few hundred babies were birthed as a result of "Go All the Way," The Raspberries' first monster hit which roared from AM radios in 1972.

Sweet bleeding Jesus, those opening power chords—the massive rusty grinding gears of a dying industrial Midwestern town, the ugly flat Midwest exploding in boredom—and then comes the unmistakable gaybird trill of Eric Carmen, a giant lonely effeminate purple dinosaur roaming the countryside looking for a purple girl dinosaur to love. Above the sonic blast fluttered Carmen's almost-a-girl voice singing about GETTING INSIDE A GIRL'S VAGINA, which is what it meant to "Go All the Way" back in 1972.

(Today, the song might simply be called "Fuck.")

HARD (the penis). SWEET (in most cases, the vagina). GOING ALL THE WAY. The ultimate song for the Urban Mating Soundtrack called rock 'n' roll.

**HARD.** With their massive layered production piling one Gigantor guitar over the next, there was an inherent LOUDNESS to The Raspberries. It was music played in all capital letters, thanks mainly to guitarist Wally Bryson (don't you hate the name "Wally"?), a vaguely Injun-looking Clevelander adept at jet-plane power chords. The 'berries bore the unmistakable lion's-roar of Midwestern power

rock, from Nugent to Alice Cooper to the James Gang, and, yeah, even to the Stooges and MC5, although, let's be honest with ourselves, neither of the latter ever wrote a song as catchy and hard-driving as "School's Out" or "Cat Scratch Fever."

**SWEET.** But despite all the *Sturm und Drang*, there has never been a prettier love song than The Raspberries' "Let's Pretend." I have actually cried—MORE THAN ONCE—at this song, and I state this as a red-blooded heterosexual male and a card-carrying member of most heterosexual organizations. 99% of their lyrics are about love and romance (and the implied vaginal secretions), all purtied-up with sugar-dipped symphonic production awash in cavity-inducing harmonies.

The Raspberries released one album bearing a scratch 'n' sniff patch that smelled like raspberries. And despite the fact that they rose from the industrial muck of Cleveland—a city of horrid ghettos and fine corned-beef sandwiches, a town so polluted that the Cuyahoga River CAUGHT FIRE in 1969—The Raspberries were so shiny-clean, you could eat dinner off them. They inhabited a non-dysfunctional world where injustice and venereal disease and the Vietnam War didn't exist. There's an unflappable cheeriness smeared like raspberry jam throughout their music. They would have been Walt Disney's idea of a good rock band around 1972. They were able to take Cleveland and turn it into Disneyland.

**HARD 'N' SWEET.** It has to be the right balance of hard 'n' sweet. If it's too hard, it's ugly and sweaty and smelly like gay sex. If it's too sweet, it's annoying and nauseating like dyke sex. The Raspberries found the perfect mix. They were harder than Napalm Death and sweeter than The Beach Boys. They achieved an unprecedented collision of raw power and pure sugar. Their sound is simultaneously violent and wholesome. It's like being fucked really hard by Mickey Mouse.

Punk rock is glam rock stripped of all the beauty, an ugly black-and-white carbon copy of the Multicolored Sex Popsicle that was glam. And though it wouldn't be fair—neither to glam nor to The Raspberries—to call them a glam band, they were hard 'n' sweet like the best glam acts, they achieved their success around the same time as glam, and Eric Carmen was a faggy not-a-fag like most of the best glam singers.

## Why the Raspberries might be the greatest rock band ever

Eric Carmen was the sweet vagina to guitarist Wally Bryson's hard penis. And Carmen was, of course, a total dorkasaurus—Freddie Mercury as a heterosexual Midwesterner. Few things are worse than appearing to be a homo and not actually being one. I just feel like slapping him around sometimes. Still, he had one of the purest, most beautiful testicular-soprano voices ever set to wax, probably better than Roy Orbison's, which I'm not afraid to say because Roy's dead now and he can't hurt me anymore.

Bryson had been a veteran of mid-60s Cleveland band The Mods, then as a member The Choir, he and two other future Raspberries had a minor national hit with the jingly-jangly sorry-for-myself garage nugget "It's Cold Outside" in 1967.

Eric Carmen was a purple Mod powderpuff in a silly late-60s Anglophilic combo called Cyrus Erie. Sharing a mutual passion for All Things British, Carmen and the other boys finally joined together as The Raspberries, releasing four albums between 1972 and 1974: *Raspberries*, *Fresh*, *Side 3*, and *Starting Over*. The latter was chosen by the crusty poopstains over at *Rolling Stone* as 1974's Album of the Year.

The Raspberries were the rarest of artists, ones who were

able to improve upon the source materials they plagiarized. They gobbled up all their musical influences, digested them, and shit out a sweet-tasting raspberry pie. It gives me a sense of cultural closure to behold American bands imitating British bands imitating American bands. The Raspberries were simultaneously able to vampirize British Invasion music while upping the ante. Referring to this ability, a *Rolling Stone* critic once wrote this:

*Even more importantly, the end results of their adroit collages of musical knowledge often equal or surpass their models' original creations.*

I'm not kidding. He actually wrote that. And he probably even expected to get *laid* after writing that.

But after four albums came the inevitable implosion, with only Eric Carmen going on to achieve solo success. His whiny 1975 smash "All By Myself" and follow-up megahit "Never Gonna Fall in Love Again" highlight his smooth voice and knack for melody, as well as his propensity for infantile romantic self-pity. Somebody give the boy some diapers.

But for three years, he was in the Greatest Rock Band ever. And back in 1972, he gave me hope that one day a girl would let me Go All the Way.



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