



Oldies specialists Steve King and the Ditties rock with the music of the mid-1960s.

BILL DRESLER/staff photographer

## Lost in the '50s and '60s tonight

Today's music isn't got the same soul, I like that old time rock 'n' roll.

— Bob Seger

By Wayne Peal  
staff writer

In the beginning, there was the sound. Beamed out of Dearborn via WKNR-AM or wafting across the border from KJLW-AM, it was a heavenly mix of smooth soul, stylized and blustery blues shouters, of polished pop stars and raw rockabillys.

In short, it was good old rock 'n' roll — the kind of music that first hooked Steve King in his Livonia living room; that first grabbed Benny Speer while tooling around Plymouth.

And it never let go. Both men have built their adult careers around music they first loved as children — music that spawned dreams of rock 'n' roll stardom that never died.

Old time rock 'n' roll is back. And it's bigger than ever.

For King, leader of Steve King and the Ditties, and Speer, frontman of Benny and the Jets, the revival vindicates career choices made long ago.

Fixtures on the local music scene, both men have exclusively played oldies for more than a decade — keeping the faith even when polyester-clad hordes screamed out for disco.

"It was tough," Speer recalled.

King's five-piece band leans toward the mid-60s Liverpool Motown Southern California axis while Speer's three-piece combo dips back further to recapture the Chuck Berry/Bo Diddley beat.

BOTH MEN say they hew as close as possible to the sound, look and feel of '50s and early '60s rock. Neither has much regard for latecomers who have recently crowded their turf.

"A lot of oldies bands have been cropping up, but many of them are just disco bands or country bands

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BILL DRESLER/staff photographer

Benny Speer is frontman for Benny and the Jets, who try to recapture the Chuck Berry/Bo Diddley beat.

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### As you bike it

The mountain bike has added a new twist to bicycling. Mountain bikers sit tall in the saddle as they tackle gravel roads, hiking trails, fields, stream beds, even abandoned railroad tracks.

### Apartment complexity

Apartments extol the virtues of their splashy swimming pools, lovely tennis courts and sparkling dishwashers. But they never seem to mention those water-thin walls.

### Back to the future

Classical music is music for the ages — not to be confused with music for the aged. Our beginner's guide to classical music is for those ready to roll over for Beethoven.

### Twangs for the memories

What happens when a feller who normally doesn't care a lick about country music is sent to write a story about a country and western competition? Why he finds he's downright likes those down-home tunes.

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## Some solid golden oldies

Those oldies but goodies — here's a list of Steve King's and Benny Speer's favorite crowd pleasers.

Steve King, Steve King and the Ditties:

1. "Mony, Mony," originally recorded by Tommy James and the Shondells, 1968.

A lot of these songs have been re-recorded, so younger audiences will know them, too. Billy Idol re-recorded this one.

2. "Shout," originally recorded by the Isley Bros., 1959.

That's been a biggie ever since *Animal House* (a version was included in the soundtrack.)

3. "Twist and Shout," originally recorded by the Isley Bros., 1961 but more famous for the Beatles' 1963 version.

Everybody's done this one, even Rodney Dangerfield.

4. "Louie, Louie," though originally

recorded by its author, Richard Berry, the Kingsmen's 1963 version is the classic of many Louies. Rumor has it the song contains a few naughty words, though no one's ever been sure.

Do I know the words to Louie, Louie? I know the words to my version. Once, they printed the original words in the newspaper. But that's not what I sing.

5. "Build Me Up, Buttercup," originally recorded by the Foundations, 1969.

This is another one that's been re-done several times.

Benny Speer, Benny and the Jets:  
1. "Willie and the Hand Jive," originally recorded by the Johnny Otis Show, 1958.

Surprisingly, we get an awful lot of requests for the hand jive. Everywhere we go there's people who want to hear it. I guess it's be-

cause of the movies (it was featured in the 1978 smash, "Grease").

2. "The Twist," Hank Ballard recorded it first, but Chubby Checker made it a No. 1 hit in 1960 and again in 1962.

"The twist, the ever-popular twist. People never get tired of hearing it."

3. "Shake Rattle and Roll," Big Joe Turner's classic blues that became an early rock hit for Bill Haley and the Comets in 1956.

4. "Roll Over Beethoven," originally recorded by Chuck Berry, 1956.

5. "Johnny B. Goode," Berry again, 1958.

These are all guitar songs. And since we're a basic unit — guitars, drums and bass — they fit in pretty well with our style.

