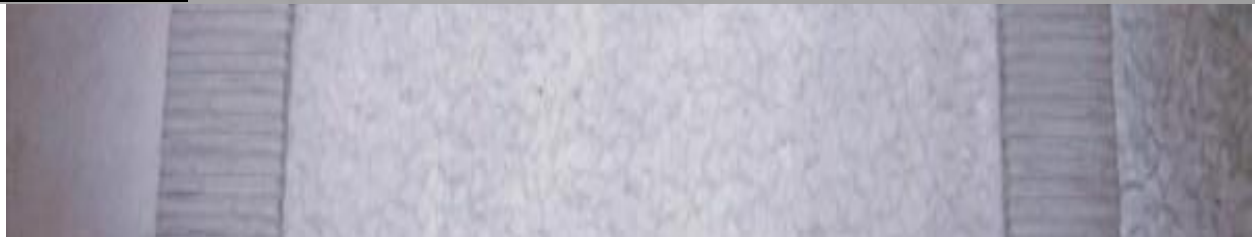




AL-VIS

## WHAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF: ASBURY PARK'S STONE PONY



The complete original MySpace blog series  
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This is the complete, unedited version of a blog series I wrote in September 2008 on MySpace.

Please note that I was basing it all on my personal reflections, and so it is not meant to be an unbiased history, but a highly subjective remembrance of this great venue. I apologize if I have gotten any facts wrong, with the preceding caveat in mind.

The original blog series was posted on MySpace.com beginning in September 2008. Since some time has passed since then some of the facts may have changed, or maybe our memories got better (or worse!). Anyway I dedicate this piece to all of the great acts I have shared the Pony stage with, especially to those no longer with us.

As of this writing I am not asking for any \$ for downloading this piece and spreading it amongst your friends- but why not enjoy the spirit with which it was written and go out and support live music by seeing some of the acts mentioned in it, in Asbury Park or anywhere? That would be more than enough compensation for me and I'm sure for them. Al-Vis 4/30/2010

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This version dated: April 30, 2010

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What Dreams Are Made Of: Part 1 in a series about Asbury Park's Stone Pony

"It's the stuff dreams are made of." Sam Spade (Bogie) in The Maltese Falcon.

There is NO club that an Asbury Park area musician has more of a love-hate relationship with than Asbury Park's Stone Pony.

Da Pony. Was down at Da Pony last Sunday night. Played at Da Pony a couple of weeks ago. A Nice Place To Get A Little A\*\* as the t-shirts used to say.

We all have to face it, we were NOTHING until we played there. Yeah we hated the way the place was arranged, and some of us made so little \$ there we spent it on drinks before we left.

Yeah it was hard to get a steady gig there. And yeah it was about 100 times dirtier and mustier than most of the other clubs. But we still loved it, and most of us still do.

Never mind that now they charge you 20.00 at the door for the PRIVELEDGE of wearing a kiddie bracelet that enables you to buy a Jack Daniels and Diet Coke for 6.00 (or whatever they are charging). Never mind that you can't see the band when more than 20 people are in the place. Never mind that for 20.00 you don't even get air-conditioning (at least not on the nights I was there). Never mind that Springsteen did NOT start out there (it didn't exist until after "Wild And The Innocent" had been released).

It was and is Da Pony.

My own involvement with this Mecca of all rock Meccas started in the winter of 1974. Someone came into the Wonder Bar where I was performing with Sticks and Bones and said "Hey there's a new place called the Stone Pony that just opened, and Southern Conspiracy played there!"

I have been called the "Forest Gump" of the Asbury rock scene, but I really did either hang out at the Stone Pony or perform there at pretty much every milestone. So I am going to spend a few bytes telling anyone out there who will listen some of my experiences, thoughts, recollections and secret knowledge of the Hallowed Hall Of Bruce.

This will be a series (so I can go easy on YOUR eyes as well as mine). And it will not be fact-based, so feel free to correct me if I get anything blatantly wrong, but I am not concerned so much with facts as getting out to you what it was REALLY like, and what it IS REALLY LIKE to perform there, etc etc.

### The Beginning

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As I said the Stone Pony opened in the winter of 1974. What was it before that? Part of Mrs. Jays I'm told (I wasn't part of the Asbury Bar scene until I got my gig at the Wonder Bar in December 1973). The inside part, because as everyone knows, Mrs. Jays was known as a "Beer Garden", and these are usually outside.

Here's something a lot of people might NOT know about Mrs. Jays, by the way: It was one of the longest-lived venues in Asbury's history, open since the 1930's at the end of prohibition. My dad used to tell me stories about how he used to work there during the 30s and 40s (his brothers were in the liquor business).

### Glory Days

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Were from ABOUT 1976 to around 1982. This is the era most speak of when they talk of the heyday of the Asbury Park music scene.

What spurred this on? Simple. Born To Run. After this album zoomed up the charts bands poured in from all over in hopes that some of Bruce's fame would rub off on them. And many local artists who couldn't get much work before (like the Blackberry Booze Band, soon to be Asbury Jukes) now found themselves part of the scene, in demand and caught up in this Bruce whirlpool.

Some of these bands were: Cats On a Smooth Surface, Cahoots, The Shakes, Cold Blast and Steel, The Shots (spinoff of the Asbury Jukes), Phantom's Opera, Kinderhook Creek (southern rock was ALWAYS very big in Asbury), Hot Romance, Lord Gunner (featuring Bon Jovi's Tico Torres and our own Lance

Larson). And on and on. Today I call them (at least the ones who are still left performing) affectionately, "Jurassic (Asbury) Park". Which I guess I am now part of since hitting the big 5-0 earlier this year.

During this time it was common for Bruce to show and even jam with many of these bands. That's one reason why Southside got so big. Later on, he started sitting in with Cats On A Smooth Surface, who performed on Sunday nights. The Bopper (Howard Parker, whom I performed with a lot back in the late 1980s) would join Bruce onstage (boy, if HIS walls could talk! Someone should get Howard to write a book!).

Also, during this time, several other bars opened and flourished: Park Place, Gulios South, The Alamo, The Fastlane. Put this together with Convention Hall, which was still booking great acts like Lynyrd Skynyrd and Aerosmith, and you can see why this era had all the ingredients of a musical renaissance.

By the way, the Stone Pony bought the Empire Bar, at the corner of Kingsley and 2nd at this time and renamed it the Quack Quack. They started booking singles and duos on the small stage in the front. Who played there? A guy name Marty Packin who used to write for the AP Press. A duo called Texas Radio which featured our own Billy Hector. Who played there the most? Me. I wasn't Al-Vis then. I was Snitz (based on my given last name), and I played there solo nearly every Friday and Saturday night and New Years Eve from 1978 to 1981.

#### The 80s and Beyond

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During the 1980s the Stone Pony continued to flourish. The owners, Jack Roig and Butch Pielka, ran a tight (though maybe a bit quirky!) ship. It continued to be THE place for local musicians to 'break on thru' to bigger things. Some of the bands who played there were The Pinch, The Nines (this was the New Wave era), Cats on A Smooth Surface, Joey And the Works (featuring a very long and curly haired John Cavallo), and both JP Gotrocks I and II. And many many national acts.

But the Convention Hall pretty much shut down by the end of the 1980s. And the drinking age had been raised to 21, so the crowds got very thin. One by one all the boardwalk attractions, and all of the other clubs, closed their doors.

Da Pony survived though. After "Born In The USA" it became even more of a local landmark. People still flocked to it on the weekends. But a lot of my friends preferred to hang out at Mrs Jays, which had cheaper drinks and by now, walls.

Sometime around the end of 1991 or early 1992 though, things came to a crashing halt. One day it was open and the next it wasn't.

Again I was there when this happened. There had been an anniversary celebration a day or two before it closed its doors, and Chik-A-Boom was one of the many bands who played at it. Somewhere someone

has a t-shirt from this event I guess- and on it you can see listed most of the bands who had played there from the beginning. This was the last night the original Stone Pony was open.

#### Into The Void

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After the Stone Pony closed, a real void occurred. Though the Fastlane was still open (I believe) and The Saint had opened, there was nowhere else in Asbury Park for live music.

So after a year or two of the closing, a fake Stone Pony opened. It was called the Rock Horse.

I remember when John (of Chik-A-Boom) called me to tell me of a gig he booked there. "A FAKE Stone Pony???" I screamed. "Maybe you should use a fake Al-Vis when you play there!"

But I liked the Rock Horse. It was setup nice (on the SW corner of 2nd and Kingsley), had a great stage and was nicely remodeled. We played there once or twice and I guess the bloom came off the rose, because it didn't stay open too long.

#### The Pony Risin' 1

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And besides, the REAL Stone Pony opened up again after a while. Steve Nassar, who had owned Mrs Jays for a while, bought it. This was around 1993 or 1994.

After he bought it, change was in the air. Bar stools were taken out, the place was ripped apart and made to look like some sort of grunge mosh pit, and new employees were hired (more about the original employees and their stories in a later blog).

The results were not good. Yeah, the Stone Pony was never a model of opulence, but this was too far in the other direction for most. I mean you need at least SOME barstools! And it's The Stone Pony, not a mosh pit!!!

One good thing Nassar did was to build an outside performance area at the site of the old Mrs Jays (which had since closed). He hired former Juke and area concert mogul Tony Paligrosi to book it. And they started having bigger shows than they ever could have had at this arena.

But it was to no avail. Da Pony was no longer Da Pony. It was some dark grunge warehouse. It closed its doors again.

#### The Pony Risin' 2

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And onto this scene came the unlikely "white Knight", Dominic Santana.

He bought the place around 2000. He fixed it up- put some of the barstools back and put in pictures of all the great acts who had played there over the years. It was almost like a museum. And he cleaned it up.

And they loved him for it. And they came back. But (supposedly) he grew frustrated and bowed out.

The Pony Risin' 3 then....

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And then came REDEVELOPMENT. Partnerships replaced owners, corporations replaced partnerships and There You Are, as CMB says.

In the summer of 2008 a massive construction blitz resulted in new buildings all over the boardwalk, new parking lots all around the Stone Pony, and who-knows-what-else is coming.

Rumors have come and gone that the building would be torn down, and The Stone Pony relocated. One thing is for sure: Asbury Partners is now in charge, and Live Nation does all the booking of The Stone Pony, The Wonder Bar and all of Convention Hall.

Is it better now? Well personally I think the MUSIC is the best it's ever been. More variety and more talent than ever.

But is it EVER better to have a corporation in charge? History tells us no. History tells us that the Jack and Butches and Hilly Crystals and the Bill Grahams, who may be quirky but at least they have they have methods to their madness (maybe!) , are the ones who bring greatness to the music scene.

I don't think what is coming will be bad, but I do think Asbury Park and the Stone Pony will take a while to get their "Sea Legs". There may be snags along the way (already there was a HUGE flap over a new parking system this past summer). But I think that the PEOPLE and MUSICIANS will ultimately dictate what happens to Da Pony as well as to Asbury Park, not the corporations. Which means that I really am optimistic that Asbury and The Stone Pony have a great future in store, once it gets here.

Next: A Timeline so you don't have to read all these boring words, you can see at a glance where the Stone Pony has been at over the years.

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What Dreams Are Made Of:Part 2 in a series about Asbury Park's Stone Pony

For anyone who read part 1 of this series or who wants to read more, I decided to draw up a timeline before we go any further.

As I said before I am not trying to make this a strictly fact-based remembrance (for that there are several books and I'm sure many more to come) but I did want to give enough cold information to keep this all

on the up and up. And besides, this gives me a chance to lay out my own timeline with this rock and roll landmark.

And again, please feel free to contact me at my personal email here with any disputes, clarifications or crucial additions to this.

Winter 1974: The Stone Pony opens its doors. Other clubs open around this time are the Drift Inn on Kingsley (PKA The Student Prince), The Alamo next to the Drift Inn, the Pillow Talk up the street on Cookman, Mrs. Jays and next to that the Golddigger. The Wonder Bar was also open at this time and did feature entertainment, mostly on weekends (such as ME with Sticks and Bones and Norman Seldin, with a pre-Bruce Clarence Clemmons).

1975-1976: Two phenomena's merge to create the initial spark that fates the Stone Pony for its eventual destiny: Born to Run is released (which puts Bruce on the cover of Time and Newsweek concurrently), and Bruce begins hanging out there as he jams with his still-local friends. One memorable show includes Ronnie Spector and a new band called Southside Johnny and The Asbury Jukes, recently spunoff from the Blackberry Booze Band.

1977-78: Young Al-Vis begins haunting the Stone Pony as he follows around The Shots, who are a spinoff of the Asbury Jukes formed by their horn players Carlo Novi and Tony Paligrosi. The guitar player for the Shots was our own Billy Hector. Also around this time the Stone Pony buys a small side bar on the southeast corner of Kingsley and 2nd Ave called the Empire Bar and renames it the Quack Quack.

Fall 1978: Now attending Rutgers University, Al-Vis is hired by the Quack Quack to perform there solo on weekends. This gig will last until the summer of 1981. Since we are still in the Glory Days of the Stone Pony here many prominent local musicians come into the Quack Quack and sit it with Al-Vis after their sets at the Stone Pony. Al-Vis also has a couple of local musicians who perform with him regularly at the Quack Quack: Cook Smith (who now runs the Original Traveling Open Mic Show) on bass and future Chik-A-Boom guitarist Bobby D'onofrio.

1979-1980 Bruce starts sitting in the Cats On A Smooth Surface on Sunday nights. Also joining them is Howard Parker, AKA The Bopper (no, not THAT Bopper), who will be performing with Al-Vis steadily in a few years.

1981: By now the Stone Pony is well-established as the rock Mecca it will be known as, but unfortunately for reasons that are largely based on misconceptions. One reason why it has become so famous is the false notion that it is where Bruce got his start (it wasn't around back then!). Another false notion is the so-called Sound Of Asbury Park. Earmarks of this sound were horns, bluesy vocals and a steady Stax-influenced R&B beat. Yes La Bamba and the Jukes had this Sound but they formed after Bruce was already playing Madison Square Garden. Yes the Shots had this sound but they were a spinoff of the Jukes. And others had this sound but it was NOT typical of what you would ever hear at the Stone Pony or anywhere in Asbury Park on a given night.

What kind of music were the bands of the Stone Pony playing at this time? Kinderhook Creek played Southern Rock. Yagurs Farm played 60s and 70s hard rock. Phantoms Opera played metal. Maxx, led by Jas Smith and Gary Grant, played a more glittery form of metal. None of them were horn-based, none played much if any R&B.

But whatever sounds HAD been heard at the Stone Pony, it was clear by around 1980 that New Wave dance music was becoming the norm. Bands like Cats On a Smooth Surface, the Pinch and The Nines were playing B52s, Cheap Trick and the Cars, and these are the types of bands that the Stone Pony was beginning to feature more than others.

Fall 1981: JP Gotrock I begins a several-month stint at the Stone Pony on Tuesday nights, warming up for Lord Gunner. Lord Gunner's drummer (not sure if it was this lineup) was Tico Torres, who later went on to perform with Bon Jovi. Usually in the audience at this time while Gotrock performed was Bruce Springsteen, quietly awaiting his chance to jam with his pal Lance Larson in Lord Gunner.

Also around this time, Jack Hurley's Alternative Entertainment starts booking original showcases at the Stone Pony on some of the off nights. These are some of the very first original showcases ever done in Asbury Park.

Fall 1982: Gotrock begins a several-month stint sharing the night with Shots spinoffs Back To Earth on Tuesday nights at the Stone Pony.

1983-84: Al-Vis performs at the Stone Pony with a few Alternative Entertainment showcases with an original act called Kino. Kino was the brain child of songwriter Steve Betts. Steve dresses the band up in new-wave like attire and rehearses them to play behind him as he sings his songs.

1986: The Asbury Park Rock And Roll Museum opens at Palace Amusements. It is to feature wall after wall of pictures and other memorabilia from the Asbury area from the early 1960s thru to the 1970s (and of course they had a picture of ME at the Quack Quack, wouldn't be a complete history WITHOUT THAT!!!).

A huge grand-opening party is held at the Stone Pony by museum owners Billy Smith and Stephen Bumball, and includes most of the performers who are featured in the museum. JP Gotrock II, with Vini Lopez and Vinnie Roslin, performs at this event. And... somewhere there is a video of it.\*



Poster for the AP Rock n Roll Museum opening show 1986 (c. Billy Smith)

Also in 1986 JP Gotrock II opens up for Greg Allman at the Stone Pony.

1988: Big Danny Gallagher, who performed in Dr. Zoom and the Sonic Boom with Springsteen, films the video for "Don't Stop Dreamin'" on the roof of the Stone Pony. In the video is Steve Schraeger, Al-Vis, Vinnie Roslin and Danny, The Power 13 Band. Again, someone, somewhere has a copy of it but I have never seen it.



Big Danny and the Power 13 Band outside the Pony 1988.

At this time Cats On A Smooth Surface are still a big attraction on Sunday nights at the Stone Pony, but Joey and The Works are packing people in also. The bass player for Joey And The Works is John Cavallo.

Summer 1990: Chik-A-Boom's debut performance is warming up for Bobby Bandiera at the Stone Pony on a Sunday night in August. I have a recording of this here. Chik-A-Boom does several weeks of this as they prepare to perform elsewhere.

1992: The original Stone Pony closes its doors for good, due to unpaid taxes the rumor has it. A marathon anniversary celebration featuring many of the Stone Pony's best-loved bands had just taken place hours before (which Chik-A-Boom performed at).

1993-94 The Rock Horse opens. This ersatz Stone Pony lasts a few months, supposedly quenching the locals craving for ANY establishment with an equine-related name.

1994 The Stone Pony Re-opens and Mrs Jays Closes. The new owners removed the barstools and tear out the walls, and, effectively driving a final spike in the Sound Of Asbury Park by booking all original grunge-related acts.

Mrs Jays is replaced by The Stone Pony Big Top, which is just a big tent thrown over the remains of the Asbury's former longest-running beer garden. National acts are booked under this tent.

April 1994: The Society Of Associated Performers holds a huge tribute to their founder and mentor, recently deceased Margaret Potter at the Stone Pony Big Top. Margaret was Tom Potters wife and Tom Potter owned the Update Club. SOAP, as it was known, was Margarets attempt to get the Asbury area musicians to band together for the common good. She was thinking health care, negotiating better prices, etc.

Performing at this event were several of the best-known Bruce-related acts from the past twenty years, paying tribute to this well-loved figure. I didn't think I performed at this event but I did put together a several-page tribute to Margaret in the SOAP newsletter, which I was editing at the time with Ellen Carroll of The Coaster.

2000: After a period of decline the Stone Pony is taken over by North Jersey businessman Dominic Santana, who vows to bring the place back to life.

He refurbishes the main building, hires new staff and adds an inspired touch: Pictures of all the past performers are put into tables and onto the walls all over the room. This accomplishes two things: gives the audiences a sense of just how important this venue has been to the Asbury Park area, and adds a sense of reverence and respect to the venue for the first time.

The Stone Pony by this time is not just a hyped-up tourist attraction. It is a living, breathing tribute not only to Bruce but to the local musicians such as moi who toiled for years for the chance to get a spot there.

Fall 2000: the Stone Pony hosts a fundraiser for Helyn and Rich Chrobocinski. Rich has just been diagnosed with Huntington's disease. Many of the bands who performed at the Clearwater Festival are there to help her raise money and support her, and Chik-A-Boom does a set.

2001: The Clearwater Festival moves from Sandy Hook to Asbury Park, punctuated by a surprise impromptu set by Bruce Springsteen. The Stone Pony becomes one of the sponsors.



Bruce w/Helyn Chrobocinski 2001 Clearwater Festival at Asbury Park

2003 (or so) The newly emerging Madison Marquette take over the Stone Pony. Dominic supposedly has tired of the political battles involved in trying to make the Stone Pony profitable while re-development has slowed to a near-halt.

December 2007 My most recent performance at the Stone Pony, at a Christmas party for Work Out World with Chik-A-Boom.

2008 Redevelopment finally arrives, along with ubiquitous 20.00 admission prices at the Stone Pony. A build boom overtakes the boardwalk and parking lots spring up all over between Ocean Ave and Kingsley Street. Madison Marquette buys the Wonder Bar and Howard Johsons, effectively ensuring that the Stone Pony is no longer located at the corner of 2nd and Ocean, it is located EVERYWHERE.

Next: What's it REALLY like to play at the Stone Pony?

\*The video of the grand opening of the opening show for the Asbury Park Rock n Roll Museum is now found and clips can be seen at [www.YouTube.com/Alvis1515](http://www.YouTube.com/Alvis1515).

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What Dreams Are Made Of:Part 3 in a series about Asbury Park's Stone Pony

Whether you have grown up here at the shore, moved here from out of the area, paid your dues for year after year in all the other local bars or just passing through and happen to get booked there, there will be a "first time" that you perform at the Stone Pony.

Maybe you've been to the Stone Pony for years, or maybe you've just heard of it. Or maybe you've played all over the country but not here. In any case, you will be absorbed by the Stone Pony's place in history. You will feel reverence for this rock Mecca of Meccas, and maybe just a little intimidated.

But There You Are, you ARE booked there. How will you feel, what will it feel like and what will it be like? Well, I can't speak for everyone who's performed there at every point in the Stone Pony's existence, but I have played there many times over the years, and several times regularly.

I played there with JP Gotrock regularly in 1981, every Tuesday with Lord Gunner. And I played there again regularly with JP Gotrock in 1982, after we held our record release party there.

I played there with JP Gotrock II and with Big Danny at the opening of the Asbury Park Rock And Roll Museum in 1986, among other times. I played there with original acts at the Alternative Entertainment showcases that were the fore-runners of the original scene we know and love today in Asbury Park.

And, with less than half an hour of rehearsal, Chik-A-Boom debuted there in 1990, warming up for Bobby Bandiera for several weeks. And I even played on TOP of the Stone Pony with Big Danny (see my other blogs for that).

My most recent performance there was with Chik-A-Boom at a Christmas party for Work Out World in December 2007.

What was it like? How did it feel at first?

To try to answer that I am going to give a play-by-play description of a typical night's performance, maybe even your first performance. So get ready to walk in Al-Vis shoes for a few hours (size 11eee) as I take you with me for an eyeball view of what its like to play at the Stone Pony.

Testing 1, 2, 3

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The gig usually starts with a sound check (unless it is a multi-band showcase or other special event), which means you get down there in the late afternoon, say 3 o'clock.

You bang on the side door by the stage. The sound man will likely be the only one working at this un-Godly early time of day (for musicians) so he will open the door and you will load in.

You look to the left as the door opens and notice that the stage is fairly low off the ground for such a large venue, open a couple of feet at most (which we'll talk about later), so putting your stuff up onto the stage is no big deal. Once you are on the stage, what do you see? Well, I don't know how often they ever vacuum it but the stage of the Stone Pony has never seemed all that clean to me. You might see broken strings, set lists from the night before, guitar picks and little pieces of duct (which as you know being a musician, is pronounced "duck") tape everywhere.

So you setup and the sound man is ready to go around the stage setting the volume. If you are warming up for someone, you will be told emphatically to DO NOT TOUCH ANY EQUIPMENT that was setup for the featured act. Your sound check comes after theirs so they are already setup and good to go. It doesn't matter that Greg Allman's B3 takes up MOST of the left side of the stage, you can't move any of it so setup where you can. So much for the advantage of playing on a big stage!

Your sound check over, you head back out to your hotel room, tour bus or home to rest up before your grand performance later on.

I'm With The Band, Man!!!

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You do have one last obstacle beforehand though. The guest list. I have no idea how the Stone Pony handles guest lists these days (except that its probably different for each type of show), but as sure as the boardwalk has sand, some of your friends will want to be on it.

My own feeling about guest lists is that I don't really like them. If I appreciate someone enough to want them to FORGO the admittedly steep 20.00 admission, I'll pay it myself. And that includes maybe my wife, and my parents if they were still alive and since they aren't, not even them.

The only others who shouldn't have to pay IMHO (other than maybe a cheap groupie, which I don't have anymore either) are the press or maybe "industry people". But don't worry about them anyway, they don't need YOU to get them in free.

Les Entrance Grande'

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OK now time for your big entrance! You park your car (or crawl out of your tour bus) and go in the side door (never the front!). Hint: NEVER arrive when the doors open, Arrive either ridiculously later (like I used to do on Tuesdays because I had a Tuesday night Music History class at Rutgers) or anytime before the doors open.

Here's why: You don't want anyone to actually stop you and talk to you. You're playing the Pony, man!!! You don't talk to ANYONE in the audience before you go on.

Either way, you go straight to the back room...

Talking Walls

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So NOW you're backstage. If you are a guitarist, bass or horn player you have your "axe"\* with you. You'll spend a few minutes tuning it up, and either way you'll talk to the stray musician or two who are

playing in another set that night who might be back there, and maybe have one last band pow-wow (but it's a little late for THAT).

And if those walls could talk!!! You are in the not-so-likely room of rooms, the throne of thrones: The back room of the Pony!!! Just think of ALL the famous acts (not even including what-his-name) who passed thru that room...

But don't take too much time to think. You'll be onstage before you know it, no matter HOW late your show is scheduled for.

The Walk

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And now- The Walk! (cue Dire Straits). The Stone Pony's backroom has always been situated so that you HAVE to WALK THRU the crowd to get to the stage!!! How cool is that???!!!

Some rules are in order here:

- 1) Do NOT talk to the audience members on your way, except for a brief "hello", etc. This will slow your arrival at the stage, and goes AGAINST the main purpose of the walk, which is to put you ABOVE their level.
- 2) Be sure to give a condescending glance or two to the other poor schlubs (could be me!) who paid 20.00 to wear an armband to see you (OK, I'm being facetious here, but it is the Pony, condescension is very much allowed from performers).
- 3) Whatever you do, KEEP WALKING (is that Dire Straits song still playing?). DO NOT STOP for anything other than gunshots (which I don't think have ever been heard inside the Stone Pony but I just threw it in there).

And Now, Ladies and Gentlemen, The World Famous Stone Pony PROUDLY

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PRESENTS....

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You can hear famed and storied Stone Pony announcer Lee Mrowicki say those words about Chik-A-Boom on my clip on [AlvisRocks.com](http://AlvisRocks.com), by the way, at our debut there in 1990.

But now they will be saying it about YOU.

The time has come, you're on the stage, you look around, you look down (better yet, don't look down, its mostly broken guitar strings, old set lists, guitar picks and LOTS OF DUCT TAPE), then you look OUT at the audience and WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Well, if the lights are turned on, probably NOTHING. The lights are so bright they get in your eyes.

Sorry Nicole, Ashlee, Cindy. John Eddie CAN'T be winking at you because he PROBABLY CAN'T SEE YOU.

By the way, unless you are one of the lucky few standing right in front of the stage THEY CAN'T SEE YOU EITHER. The stage at the Stone Pony is a little low off the ground, and one of my beefs has always been that it is hard to see a performance unless you stand directly in front of the stage.

But that's OK, us musicians are focused on our set anyway and we'll have time for Nicole, Ashlee, etc later on (maybe).

So- the set list is in front of you on the monitor. The mic is in front of you, usually on a boom stand. Your amp (if you play an instrument that uses one) is behind you and its set to go, or better be.

If you are a guitar player, better check now to make sure that extra set of strings or extra guitar is ready to go. Most likely you WON'T be able to stop for too long so any string changes will have to be fast!!!

Then its two-three-four: Wham!

You glance out into the crowd while you're playing. You don't see much (see above) but you do see bodies moving in time to the music. To the right are some lights (the fussball arena), to the left a very dark bar, and in front some bodies (WHO are they???).

Since you can't see much anyway you decide NOT to look out at the crowd. You focus on your performance and HOPE you are rehearsed enough not to worry about blowing it (Chik-A-Boom wasn't, we had 20 minutes of rehearsal before that first gig, and MAYBE 20 minutes more in the 18 years since!).

Then song after song, applause after applause (see? They LOVE you, otherwise you wouldn't have gotten booked into here). And SOMEONE is watching the clock and then:

Wham! Its over. (no encores unless you are a headliner or performing last).

You quickly pull your stuff off the stage to the right (the Stone Pony is one of the FEW venues that has a pretty good area set aside for this). Then you either unload it to your vehicle or leave it if they let you (say maybe if you're next to last and the last band is already setup).

The Afterglow

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And now, YOUR THERE. You've made it. The set is OVER. The people LOVED you- you've rocked the walls off of one of rock and rolls greatest music halls!

So celebrate! Don't be a wallflower (even if you ARE one normally like me), tonight you are A STAR!!! Now you talk to your friends (just stand there, they'll come over, at least I THINK someone came over to

talk to me when I played there), talk to the poor 20.00 a pop schubs! Network a little (and not just with Nicole and Ashlee), meet some new people.

Hopefully, you'll be back soon to do it ALL OVER AGAIN, except you'll be a little wiser, wisdom that only comes from experience, and that experience was tonight's performance of: [fill in you band's name], "for the first time ever at Asbury Parks World Famous Stone Pony!!!"

\*Axe: Musician talk for your instrument. Why, I have no idea why it just is, OK.

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Hi Bruce, Al-Vis here:Part 4 in a series about Asbury Park's Stone Pony

Hi Bruce, Al-Vis here. No, you never met me, though we've sat shoulder to shoulder and stood eyeball to eyeball many times over the last 30 years or so.

The first time we stood eyeball to eyeball was at the Shots shows at the Stone Pony around '78. Then we were sitting next to each other when you used to come down on Tuesdays to see Lord Gunner and my band JP Gotrock was the warmup.

The last time we saw each other was the (Clearwater) festival in '01. I still didn't meet you, though you met everyone else when you barged in and did that 45 minute set and stayed to sign autographs.

Technically, I could have met you then. I was in charge of the entertainment at the festival that year and it was really up to ME whether to even ALLOW YOU TO PERFORM. (As if I WOULD HAVE said no! Can you imagine THAT conversation: "Come on Bruce, you show up here without being invited, want to play on the BAND stage even though you didn't bring a BAND, I got 7 other bands to get on stage here today, you didn't even bring a stage setup form!!!").

But (and I don't mean ANY disrespect by this) I never really felt like I needed to meet you. It just wouldn't have excited me.

I have gotten excited about meeting other rock stars. This past summer I finally met Christine Martucci at the Clearwater Festival after practically STALKING her shows since April.

And I have been excited about KNOWING locally-bred celebrities before they were famous. Since I'm from Neptune that means Scott Bigelow. I mean how cool WAS IT to grow up hanging out with the Beast From The East????!!!

I guess I really SHOULD WANT to meet you. We have so much in common, and not just a lot of the same friends!

- We both play guitar and sing

- We both play guitar and sing at the Stone Pony sometimes
  - We both had bad relationships with our dads (I'm told MY dad actually threw you in jail when he was a judge in Freehold, sorry about that if it's true!)
  - We both had the delicate task of actually bossing around Vini Lopez, you back in the early '70s and me in JP Gotrock about 12 years later
  - We both got to sing "Rosalita" with Vini (OK so YOU wrote it, I STILL don't think I need to meet you).
- and on and on and on.

And - here's the real kicker. It seems everyone else has met you except me. Vini, Danny, Kevin and little Vinnie played with you. John Cavallo worked for you. The Bopper, Lance AND Cats (and so many others) got to jam with you. Helyn met you several times. Bocci knows you personally, or so he always tells me. And I played at Lance And Debbie's club a lot, including when you were hanging out with Matt Lauer across the street at Convention Hall and told the WHOLE WORLD ABOUT the Wonder Bar.

I'm sorry if I offend you by not caring whether or not we ever meet. I like your music, esp "The Wild And The Innocent..." so it's not that. It's just that I'm not a very star-struck person by nature. So it's not REALLY you.

But if I DID meet you there is one question I would like to ask you, and give you plenty of time to think about it. No, it's not why you don't come to the festival anymore (judging by this year's figures not many others do either.) And no, it's not what it's like to live across the river from me in Rumson, though I'll never know the answer to that one either. And I don't really care about what it was like to know Vini and Danny and Little Vinnie and all the others back in the day, because I guess I have moved on from all that...

So the one question is: Of all the places you coulda picked to hang out at over the years, why'd ya pick the Stone Pony?

I mean the place was OK back then, but the Drift Inn (you played there when it was One Sane Man) had a better stage, The Alamo was bigger, Mrs Jays had cheaper beer, the Wonder Bar had a bigger bar (and me performing there for a while when I was 16 years old).

For that matter, why'd ya even pick Asbury Park to hang out at? The Belmar area had the Royal Manor, Zero's Pine Grove Inn, Jimmy Byrnes. Long Branch had the Long Branch Saloon, the Blue Dolphin, Pistol Pete's, The Tideaway.

None of these places was all that special, but then what was so special about the Stone Pony? Was it the women? The bartenders? The booze? Jack and Butch? The fact that it had a goofy cartoon of a horse with lipstick on its jackets and t-shirts?

You could take all the time you need to think about it. There must be an answer though, none of this "I dunno, guess it was just there..." BS. Of course it was there. So were Mrs Jays and all the other places.

While you thought about that question, you might start to wonder how all of this would have turned it if you HAD hung out at Jays or Zeros instead. Imagine having the whole world travel to Asbury Park for a chance to see you at Mrs Jays, with those 5.00 pitchers. The whole world would know what a Mrs Jays Death Dog is.

And Zero's? It became Bar Anticipation eventually. It was a pretty rough place back in those days I'm told, so you would have probably cleaned it up. And...

Instead of the Sound Of Asbury Park we would have had SOB, the Sound Of Belmar (actually South Belmar, now Lake Como). What would THAT have been like?

Oh well, I'll probably never get the chance to ask it. If any of you really want to meet him, at least you have a conversation-starter.

Next: Lipstick on a Pony! What were some of the quirks of this great Asbury Park landmark?

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Lipstick On A Pony: Part 5 in a series about Asbury Park's Stone Pony

What Dreams Are Made Of:Part 5 in a series about Asbury Park's Stone Pony

Someday someone's going to write a tell-all book about Stone Pone (actually I'm told someone who was connected with it and was VERY BIG is doing just that).

And I'm sure everyone has their own favorite spicy or just plain interesting inside dope about this Rock and Roll Mecca.

But right now I am going to give you just a few of the things I always wondered about, or found interesting as I sat watching John Eddie or Cats On A Smooth Surface or sat in the backroom waiting for MY set.

No, I'm not gonna write about any illegal substances that may or may not have been found in any popular nightspot back in the Pony's heyday. And I'm not gonna "tell all" about who was boffin' who or where they were boffin'- we'll keep this thing at least PG rated.

But there were some things RIGHT off the top of my head...

First, let's start with the way the place is laid out.

Hear No Evil, See No Evil (or Good for that matter!)

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If you come in thru the front (which means you're there to see someone, you're not performing, see my earlier blog about this), the first thing you see is the front bar. OK, today there is a souvenir stand etc closer to the door, but you don't really notice that, you're looking INSIDE the Pony.

Then, walking in further you look all the way to the back and see the foosball arena and the back bar. But then look over to the left- see how close the wall is?

One of the things that always got me was that, with all that equipment on stage, and the huge crowds that the place was known to draw (this was before the Big Top was built), why was so much room wasted? Why couldn't they knock down that side wall and extend the place out a few feet, or relocate the stage to the BACK so it could be made higher?

The layout of the Pony creates two problems: the sound is always unbearably LOUD if you are standing in front of the stage (such as on the dance floor).

And you can't really see the band once the dance floor fills up, which only take a dozen or so people.

This isn't so much of a problem these days, when most bands who draw over a hundred or so people perform under the Big Top, but it created huge problems back in the Pony's heyday.

It seemed that whenever You-know-who showed up, the view from the floor was non-existent. One way to TRY to work around this was to position yourself over by the foosball arena, trying stay clear of any full-turn jabs the players might throw, though inadvertantly, at you. And then you don't get the full throttle of volume as it pours out of those 6 foot high speaker stacks on the side of the stage.

But, hey, you paid your money the same as those guys standing in the front of the stage! Why should you have to endure foosball elbows in order to enjoy this show?

Clique This!!!

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Another thing that was always curious to me about the Stone Pony was how "cliquey" (hate that word, but there is no other word for it) it was. Wikipedia defines a clique as:

"...an exclusive group of people who share interests, views, purposes, patterns of behavior, or ethnicity." and I would put the emphasis on the work exclusive.

Now remember, the Pony WAS born back the days of Studio 54, at the height of the NY Disco scene. And these were all very "cliquey".

But the Stone Pony was never a disco, and really disco music NEVER took hold here at the shore, outside of some isolated venues like the Stoney End in Long Branch. So I always found it curious that here was this gritty rock club, with a largely working-class following of locals and some north jerseyers, acting like it was a high-and-mighty New York hotspot. Lipstick on a pig (or pony) indeed!

I remember some of the people I hung out with saying "Ya know, we graduated high school and were finally done with all those cliques. Then we started hanging out at the Stone Pony and we were back with all these other cliques!"

I suppose at the top of this hierarchy of exclusiveness were the performers (and rightly so, I should say, being one of them). Next were the bartenders and other employees (more about THEM later). Then the hangers-on: those who managed to push themselves in the front of heap by dating the performers or help, or by being related to them. After them were the plain old regulars, who didn't feel like fighting this fight and were content to stand over by the fussball table rather than by the front of the stage.

And then at the bottom were the casual Pony-goers, who weren't regulars, didn't know anyone specifically connected to the joint, and had to make do with standing in the back of the crowds staring at the bra-straps and whatever else you see when you're looking at someone's rear body. Because they weren't staring at the stage, they couldn't see it!!!

How did all this start? Well, I guess part of it DOES go back to high school, but also there has always been an unwritten rule about musicians. We don't pay cover charges. I mean we do, we have to right? But we don't approve of paying cover charges to see OTHER musicians. I don't know who started this rule (Steve Schraeger maybe?), and I think its a very STUPID and self-defeating rule, but we have always lived with it.

To this day there are certain musicians who WON'T visit certain clubs (YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE!!!) if they have to pay to get in. And woe to any club who TRIES to charge them a cover. They will never return and will complain about it for a long, long time, as if it were some horrible, memory from childhood that will never fade away.

And once the musicians decide they don't have to pay, what about their "significant others?". And then what about their mom and dad, and Uncle George and Aunt Linda?

So... with all the "cliqueyness" going on, all this who-knows-who and whos-doing-who and whos-done-with-who, how to control the inevitable chaos?

Eh you, Urine!

The Urine Card

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Early on (well maybe about '78 or so) someone got the bright idea to actually issue an ID card for all this crass nepotism. It was called, inappropriately enough, the "Urine" card. Almost all musicians who performed at the Pony had one. I had one because I performed next door at the Quack Quack for three years, which was owned by the Stone Pony.

Of course, they weren't good at special events (which was nearly every Friday and Saturday). And they weren't transferable (why would you want to risk someone making off with something that valuable?). And you still had to show ID.

But somehow, having this little piece of plastic (a sort of early version of the Sam's Club card but WAY cooler!) made life much easier for the Pony-goer back in those days. At first anyway. No more "Just ask " [fill in the band or employees name] ", I'm cool, see?" Now just show the card and Your In. Urine. Get It?

So what was the problem with this gimmick? Same problem as before. Just as before, when everyone somehow was schtupping someone (or related to someone) important enough to allow them free access, after a while Everyone had a Urine card!!!

Even me, and as you've guessed by now, I really wasn't anybody special, no matter how much I try to convince you I ever was (LOVE this MySpace!!!). I was just some schlub trying to make enough \$ on weekends and such to get me thru that jungle of academia, Rutgers University, without starving myself to death. Until I could get out and get a REAL band together (and later, join other people's REAL bands, like Danny's and Chik-A-Boom).

So after EVERYONE, including little "Snitz" (my stage and nickname back then, which emblazoned the Quack Quack's marquee all those years I played there). had one, the bloom was off the rose as they say. Urine was no longer useful as anything except to tell people that you were one of a few hundred other people who were too cheap to pay admission.

And Now, Ladies and Gentlemen, Appearing Here Once Again For the 10,000

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night- The bartender!!!???

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One more thing that flipped me out about the Stone Pony was that, after a while, the bartenders and other employees were just as famous as many of the performers!

At the back bar was Jude. Next there was Missy (where the fussball arena is today). Then TR and Tracy at the side bar. Tiny, Eric, Wolfie, Noodles, Buggy and Hogbreath (I just threw those last three in there for fun, they didn't exist).

Walk into any bar or nightspot and talk to some ex-Pony-goers, and they are sure to know most (if not all) of their names.

How do I know this?

Jude is married to Chik-A-Boom's John Cavallo and she and her fellow employees from "back in the day" frequently hang out with us (as you would think they would). And it NEVER fails. Whenever ANY of them come into the place (if anyone there is over 35), heads turn and people say things in each others ears.

How DARE they become more famous than Al-Vis! Just because they make mean a screwdriver? Just because they held their hands over their ears for night after night, week after week, year after year? Just because THEY got their Urine card a year or two before I got mine?

But you know what? Most (I think All) are a lot older than me. So they are getting a lot more older and greyer than I am, even as we speak. Age is the greatest equalizer of all! In a few years we'll ALL belong to a clique alright- That privileged and VERY EXCLUSIVE club of people who get dropped off from busses in front of shopping centers and make the rest of us go "Oh no, the old fogey bus is here- better step out of their way so I don't have to open a door for one of them!!!"

Next: Where From Here? Will the Stone Pony finally ride off into that sunset (Lake?) or will it be around in another 30 or so years for people to make bad puns about on MySpace (or its 2038 equivalent).

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What Dreams Are Made Of:Part 6 (and final) in a series about Asbury Park's Stone Pony

Crawling, creeping, lumbering, like a drunken rabble-rouser circa 1978, trying to make it home from the bars in Asbury after closing, only to have to stop every few blocks to pass out, then lurching forward another few blocks until finally... home sweet home! Nearly 30 years after decay started to set in, redevelopment has finally arrived in our beloved Asbury Park.

And with it, all the amenities of Asbury's sister towns such as Belmar, Point Pleasant and Seaside Heights: Crowd control problems (literally thousands and thousands now make it to the Gay Pride Weekend festivities alone), parking problems (what ARE those numbers for? Hint: don't park there if you have to ask!!!), 50 different varieties of Panini sandwiches, and that proud Jersey Shore tradition, price gouging.

So where's the Stone Pony's place in all of this? Is it a has-been-that-never-was? Did it jump the shark after Jack and Butch jumped town? Is it now just an imitation of its former self, living only on its past glories (like me?)? Or is it just now about to come into its own, as the centerpiece of Asbury parks new post-redevelopment Golden Era?

First I supposed we SHOULD face facts: The Stone Pony will NEVER be the same as it was in its original golden Glory Days. Jack and Butch are long gone, and with them, all the quirks, thrills, warts and rollercoaster rides that this great venue endured during its original 18 year run.

And the music has changed, and the world has changed, and we have ALL moved on. We get our music now from the same place where we used to do our accounting and word-processing and Warcraft tournaments: from our computers. Where we used to go to the midnite madness showings to view "The

Song Remains The Same" or "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" on huge theater screens, we now even view most of our music in hideous little 4 inch boxes on sites like YouTube on those same computers.

So anyone who wants THOSE days to come back is truly lost in some pre-80's ozone fog. Those days will NEVER return, and why should they? If anyone knows about those times, surely its old Al-Vis here, and he'll tell you straight that for every happy memory of innocence lost there are just as many dark memories of stupidity, overindulgence and just plain evil. The good old days were also the bad old days, make no mistake.

The Good, The Bad And The REALLY Bad

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First of all, even though there was a lot of great music around back then (and there always WILL be as long as people enjoy good music), there was lots and lots of REALLY BAD MUSIC.

If you walked into a rock club, chances are NOT that you would catch a young Bruce Springsteen or John Eddie cutting his chops on Wilson Pickett or jamming forever on an old Muddy Waters song. Chances are INSTEAD that you saw some top-forty band dressed in monkey suits (as we called them), playing tepid and under-rehearsed versions of "Yummy Yummy Yummy I Got Love IN My Tummy" or that '60s staple, "Itsy bitsy Teensie Weensie Yellow Polka Dot Bikini". Try doing a forty minute drum solo in the middle of THAT one!

And even at that, many clubs didn't even feature rock music, in fact, they would actually THROW YOU OUT if you played it! Remember the Blues Brothers "Good Old Blues Brothers Boys" scene? That could very EASILY have been filmed in ANY shore area town back then, including Asbury Park.

Many bands played what was known as "Lounge" music. This was keyboard heavy dribble with very scarce vocals, ZERO lead guitar and a lot of reverb (pretty much the only effect we had back then, unless one or more of our amp speakers was busted). And very, very soft. Lounge Music is what I was playing with Sticks and Bones when I played at the Wonder Bar in the winter of 1974. The two most requested songs? "I Love How You Love Me" by Bobby Vinton and "Abilene" by George Hamilton IV.

People like Bruce and Southside didn't get to play ANYTHING like they really wanted to in these places. This is one of the reasons WHY after-hours places like the Upstage and the Inkwel were popular- without the pressure to fill the place with normal people (because it was already filled up with musicians), they could play pretty much whatever they wanted for once.

Later .. "Born To Run", there was in fact a type of musical Renaissance in Asbury, but still there was a lot of bad music. The pre-requisite for being a successful act has never been how good you are, it's always been how many bodies you can put into a club on any given night.

So what of the quality of the music during the Stone Pony's heyday? I would say it was spotty at best. I'm sure everyone had their own favorite acts from this time- The Shakes, Cahoots, Cold Blast and Steel

come to mind (my faves were The Shots). But for each one of these there were just as many agency bands, young kids hired for just their looks who dressed to look like the latest sensation (which back in the late 70's/early 80s was pretty much Duran Duran and that ilk).

As I said, probably each era has its good music and its bad, but having lived through several decades now in the Asbury area, I will say this: The music is just as good now, and maybe even a lot better, than at ANY time in the past. If you don't believe me, just go out and see John Eddie, Christine Martucci, Mean Venus, Bob Berger, etc, watch them and SEE the reactions they are getting. These ARE the good old days when it comes to music in Asbury Park, IMHO!

Walking Wounded

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What else was bad about those days? How about a war that was resulting in lots of your family and friends either dead or in pieces, emotionally and/or physically?

In the mid to late 70's when I was performing solo around the Asbury area, I used to teach guitar. I had students all over and some in Asbury Park.

A few of my students live in rooming houses in Asbury Park, and some of these were Viet Nam vets trying to piece their lives back together, with varying degrees of success. The wounds of war last far into a person's life, and Asbury Park was filled with the walking wounded at this time.

Riff and Raff

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All cities have their share of ruffraff and Asbury Park has been cursed with more than its share. For a very long time, Asbury Park has consistently been up in the top tier of New Jersey's highest crime towns. Redevelopment will NOT change this anytime soon, but things are certainly bound to improve at some point.

Back in the late 1970's and 80's you didn't park anywhere west of Kingsley if you knew what was good for you. And even then, once you made it into the clubs, fights and brawling were a common occurrence. Not so much with the ever-present biker crowd (because they usually policed themselves), but with the weekender from out of town or the kid who just got his license or just turned legal (which as 18 years old back then).

So What Was Good About It?

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I don't want to give the impression that Stone Pony's heyday was all bad though, most of the good stuff you have heard about it WAS true. A lot of the music was GREAT. And it was very exciting to never know

who (or when you-know-who) was going to show up.

Together with the panorama of the amusement rides across the street (such as the sky-ride), the smell of popcorn and cotton candy, the excitement of knowing that SOME world-famous band was performing at the Convention Hall that night, and the R-O-O-O-O-O-A-A-A-A-R! of those fuel injectors as they rounded 1st Avenue on Ocean in front of the Golddigger, the picture is just as accurate as it was enticing back then.

The REAL Heroes Of This Story

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Someday they ought to name a street after them. No, not Southside, Bon Jovi, John Eddie, or even Bruce (though I guess it's OK, Asbury got plenty of streets and probably more to come!). I'm talking about Jack Roig and Butch Pielka, the original owner-operators of the Stone Pony.

HOW DID they keep it going for so long? And so strong? Was it just dumb luck? Perseverance? Business savvy? Or maybe a little of all that.

At any rate, I think THEY were the real heros of the Stone Pony's Glory Days. Somehow, some way, they created magic, and kept it going and going and going. Long enough so that a small, otherwise fairly divy club in a town CHOCK FULL of divy and not-so divy clubs made it into rock history, into rock's folklore and beyond, taking Asbury Park with it. The folklore may be bigger than the reality was (it always is). And yeah, Bruce had a hand in it, and yeah so did the musicians (maybe like me???), and certainly the people who LOVED this club made it what it was.

But from now until the big hurricane of 2??? comes and washes ALL of us here at the shore away, or until they retire the name, on any given night some kid right out of high school or college is gonna walk thru that side door for the first time, stomach full of butterflies. He/she's gonna do that first-ever sound check, go to that back room, do that famous walk to the stage thru the crowd for the first time, play that first set, then come off feeling like he/she's finally made it.

And when all is said and done, who will be the ones to thank??? Just go up Butch Boulevard a ways until you reach Jack Street, I'm sure you'll figure out the answer along the way.

This concludes my blog series on Asbury Park's Stone Pony. Liked it? Hated it? Bored by it? Just want some extra attention now that the summer music schedule here at the shore has dropped off? Feel free to comment or add your 2c- any honest and constructive remarks are always appreciated.



Al-Vis w/ some friends from his Neptune HS days at a recent gig with Andy Hughes

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