

PowWow #31

PowWow #31 is by Joyce Worley Katz, created for the monthly assembly of Apa V, May 4, 1996. Thanks to Arnie for doing the onerous chores. This is Mailing Number Thirty-One, a glorious day, the jasmine is in bloom, and the swimming pool heater is turned on, as I hope we all be as we start to discuss the Hot Topic of the Month, a drum-beater and war-monger, Revolution and Revellion

I guess all of us can fairly say that we were revolutionaries, each in our own way, for most of our life. It's a standard of human behavior, to attempt to conform for the early mom-pleasing years, then to rebel when we become aware, and finally to stratify as we get older. (I don't consider settling into patterns and grooves, finding one's own level, to be stultifying. Rather, it might be seen as eventual realization of one's actual likes and dislikes.)

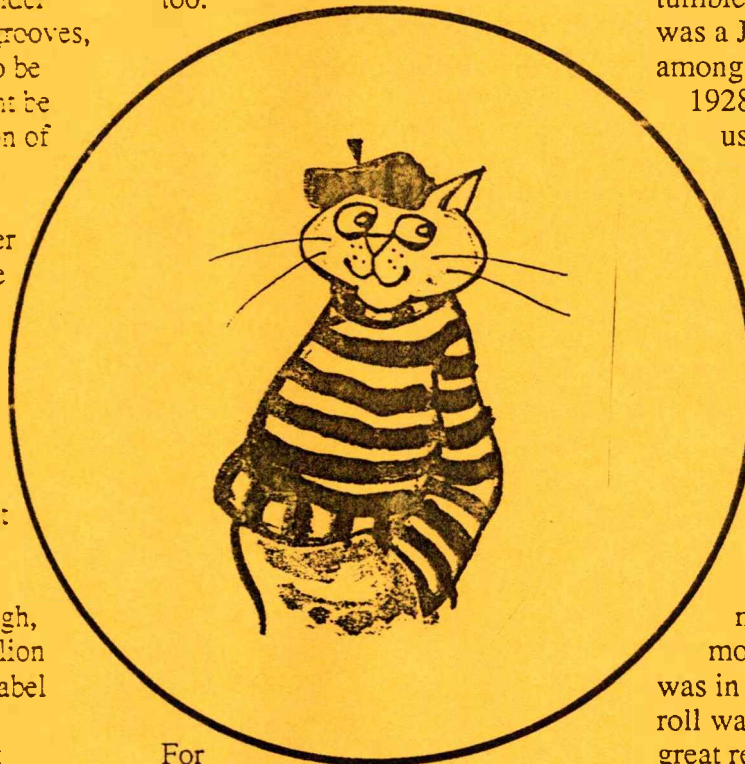
Certainly I remember fondly that time of my life when All Was Perfect, and Mom's Apple Pie was the best thing in the world. But as that gilt-edged vision of perfection tarnishes, as it does for us all, then almost every change in my life could be called Rebellion.

I'm less certain, though, that most of societal rebellion isn't merely putting that label on change.

Conformity didn't sit well on me; my hair-ribbon was crooked, and my shirt the wrong color...whatever the reason, it was easier to rebel and bema my classes' black-wearing beatnik than to straighten up and be nice.

And after the penchant for black came other revolutions: we all number them the same, those

tiny steps away from family roots that broaden our interests. They seem more dramatic to us than to others; often they're not even discernible by others. And later we learn, sometimes very much later, that our parents travelled the same not-so-lonesome road, too.



For example, I've only just recently realized that my mother was a Betty Boop fan. Now, this alters a vision of her I'd held for a long time, and makes me feel closer to the woman she was. I would have sworn she'd scorn Sweet Betty.

But the BB reruns on AMC each Saturday morning proved she was a secret vice of my mom's, because that's where she got the name for our dog, Pudgie. And, I suspect, it illuminates the reason my stepdad called her "Betty".

Similarly, I've recently tumbled to the fact that my dad was a Jimmie Rodgers fan; among the recordings from 1928-32, are several songs he used to sing to me a dozen years later.

Now, that's a peculiar thing, inasmuch as Jimmie Rodgers is one of my own sweet rebellions, against the strait-jacket of more popular music forms. I've often clocked my own growth as a person (call that rebellion against upraising) by the music. And, no wonder: most people do. After all, I was in highschool when rock n roll was born, and that was a great rebellion, at least in the ears of our elders. They certainly did hate it; it was the great divider among age groups, much as (later) the attitude toward Vietnam segmented us. When they heard that backbeat, they felt excluded...which is how we wanted them to feel, after all.

It's a convenience to talk

about The Birth of Rock N Roll, as it sprang forth screaming from that spot where the Mississippi and the Ohio Rivers join. That triangle of muddy cropland is an appropriate birthing spot for a musical form parented by blues and country music. But like most poetic myths, it doesn't take too much research to find that it really isn't true. Rock wasn't born one hot summer afternoon in the sharecropper's fields, nor did it ride up the river to Cincinnati. A good listen to blues from the 20's, 30's and 40's shows that pregnancy was a long one. If you hear Willie Dixon playing "I'm gonna to dust my broom" in 1923, and then Elmore James doing "Dust My Broom" in 1953, you know where "Night Train" came from, and where "Night Train" has been, "Train I Ride Thirteen Coaches Long" can't be far behind. And "Rock Around The Clock" is sure to follow.

If Jimmy Rodgers hadn't sung "Blue Yodel Number Four," Hank wouldn't have written "I'm So Lonesome I Could Die". And if it weren't for Hank, there'd be no Elvis.

So it is with most societal rebellions. You see them coming a long time before they arrive, if you're watching closely.

So here am I, rebelling against popular rock by listening to old blues, which was the force pushing against big band sounds that resulted in the same music my dad liked in 1932.

I've seen a lot of dramatic rebellions, as the History Channel reminds me. I remember the day World War II ended, and I remember going down to the station to see The Boys Come Home, then how there was no work and no housing: a song "No Vacancy" spelled that out clearly.

I wouldn't care to retrace the paths of history for the last half-century in these pages, but it does

seem to me that every upheaval might have some piece of music married to it.

(Future alien archaeologists may decide that music led the society, and that the anthems for the Great Causes actually caused great things to happen. Who can predict the foolishness Future Alien Archeologists might fall for.)

So I became a rebellious youth, like all of us do, and started to like things that seemed different from what had been before. But now I know that they weren't actually all that different, and it wasn't so much revolution as evolution. What a shattering of self-image, to realize that we're mostly just tools of societal conditioning crossed with reflex action.

And, society was changed less by rock-throwing radicals than by Willie Dixon throwing in a clever extra note on the backbeat in 1923.

