



The G.T.O.'s, also known as Girls Take Over

# Milwaukee Women Rock Musicians

**R**ose Trupiano, an academic librarian at Marquette University and public radio DJ, biographically surveys some of the significant Milwaukee women's groups and individual artists, rich, albeit understudied subjects. An extended list of references enhances her essay and invites additional inquiry.

## Milwaukee Women Rockers: A Survey

Rose Trupiano

This essay details some of the women who were a large part of the historical Milwaukee music scene. Although rock bands in the 1960s and the 1970s were predominantly male, there were some early, pioneering all-women and mixed gender bands.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the number of mixed gender bands has increased and is becoming much more common.

<sup>1</sup> An early mixed gender band was Methyl Ethyl and the Keytones fronted by Amy Madigan, who later became a renowned actress and Oscar nominee (see <http://sundayswithtodd.com/WebPages/MethylEthylAndTheKeTones/MethylEthylAndTheKeTonesPhotoIndex.html>). Significant duos have included Lightning & Thunder (Mike [d. 2006] and Claire Sardina; Claire still performs), Jack and Jill (Jensen) Grassel, and Paul Cebal and Claudia Schmidt.

With each new decade, more female singers, songwriters, and musicians have emerged to pursue careers in rock music.

## The G.T.O.'s

In 1964, an all-female pop rock group was formed in Milwaukee called the G.T.O.'s (Girls Take Over/GTO/GTO's). The band was comprised of Cindy Lee Williams (vocals, guitar), Rinie Williams (vocals, drums), Wanda Williams (vocals, organ) and Gerry Gibson (vocals, guitar). The real last name of Cindy Lee, Rinie, and Wanda was Wilhelm and Gibson's was Suskind. The G.T.O.'s played at a variety of clubs, bars, hotels and schools throughout the Midwest. In an interview with the *Milwaukee Journal's* Divina Infusino, Cindy Lee commented on the audience's reaction to their music: "First they come to see us because we're all girls. Then they come because they like us" (Infusino 1997 [all citations are at the end of the chapter]).

The G.T.O.'s played a diverse set of music: rock and roll, R & B, Motown, folk rock, polka, country, and even novelty songs such as Cheech and Chong's "Basket of Jones." They covered many popular songs from the time period such as Melanie's "Dandles in the Rain," Them's "Gloria" (in the G.T.O.'s rendition, the name was changed to "George"), Five Man Band Electrical Band's "Signs," the motion picture theme "Exodus," Jean Wright's "Mr. Bigstuff," Janis Joplin's "Me and Bobby McGee," and country standards such as the "Tennessee Waltz." In later years, the G.T.O.'s did some harder rock such as Black Sabbath's "Paranoid." The women took turns singing lead, and group was well-known for its tight three and four-part harmonies.

In 1965, the G.T.O.'s entered the *Milwaukee Sentinel's* "Young America Rock 'N' Roll Revue" and were one of the local bands to make it to the semi-finals. The G.T.O.'s along with other local semi-finalists (predominately male) played to 6,000 audience members at the Milwaukee Auditorium on December 30, 1965. During this time period, the G.T.O.'s recorded a single, "Hi-Heel Sneakers" (originally recorded by Tommy Tucker) backed with a composition written by Cindy Lee, a slower number called "Stardust Come Back." The G.T.O.'s version of "Hi-Heel Sneakers" can be found on the CD compilation of Wisconsin artists, *Wisconsin Rocks Volume 9: 1964-1969*.

In 1970, the G.T.O.'s traveled overseas to entertain the American troops during the Vietnam War after a talent recruiter asked if they would be interested in playing at military clubs and bases in Southeast Asia. The women signed on for the venture not knowing what to expect. The tour would include two months in South Vietnam and two months in Guam and Thailand.

Once there, ferried by helicopters, the group performed three shows a night, seven days a week. In a personal interview, Cindy Lee Williams (now known as Cindy Wobst) spoke of the troubling conditions that the foursome encountered in war-torn Vietnam—the frightening sound of nearby gunfire; the constant fear of being attacked or ambushed; the heartbreaking poverty among the Vietnamese people; the crowded streets; and the irrepressible humidity and heat. However, the G.T.O.'s were very moved by the appreciative armed forces personnel they performed for during their tour. The

group sensed the heartfelt and overwhelming gratitude of the servicemen and women. Their tour was dangerous, but the G.T.O.'s were happy to bring joy via their music.

A touching event happened after the G.T.O.'s returned to Milwaukee. While on their way to play a gig at a bar, they saw a man in a wheelchair going down the sidewalk on South Greenfield Avenue pulling another man on a hospital gurney. The girls wanted to stop and see if they could help, but their car was full of equipment and they were due to perform. Shortly later that evening, a commotion took place in the bar. People began getting up and moving tables and chairs around, making room for two new audience members—the man in the wheelchair and the other man on the hospital gurney. Both men were veterans and were being treated at the Milwaukee VA Hospital. They were in one of the audiences the G.T.O.'s performed before in Vietnam. When they heard that the same all-female rock band would be playing near them at a local bar, the men knew they just had to see them again. Between breaks, the G.T.O.'s had a very emotional visit with the men. The veterans told them how much they treasured the group's performance in Vietnam. To hear and see a live American band playing familiar music brought them a huge deal of comfort especially since the service men found themselves in the middle of a horrific war in a land so far from home.

After returning from Vietnam, the G.T.O.'s became a trio when Gibson left the group. In addition, the G.T.O.'s changed their name to Curtain Lace (because of a Frank Zappa-promoted group called the GTOs) and then to Lace. A year later, Loni James (vocals and guitar) joined the group and they continued to play gigs in the Midwest. Eventually, the band broke up in the mid-to-late 1970s as members started families.

As of 2015, two of the original members, Cindy Lee and Rinie, still live in Wisconsin. Gerri Gibson relocated to Florida and teaches guitar. Sadly, Wanda passed away at the age of 51 in 2004. In the years before Wanda's death, Lace would reunite and play for fundraisers or family parties (the last being for Wanda's 50th birthday.) Cindy continued to perform as a vocalist and bassist for the southeastern Wisconsin band, Cheap Date.<sup>2</sup>

## Ruby Starr

During the early 1970s and 1980s, Milwaukee's most famous female rock performer undoubtedly was hard rocker Ruby Starr. She was a fiery, bold, bluesy, flamboyant, and sexy performer. Starr had a very powerful voice in the same vein as Janis Joplin but had her own style. She was small in stature, but her voice and her stage presence were huge.

Starr's original name was Constance Henrietta Mierzwiak and she was born in Toledo, Ohio in 1949. Connie Little, as she was known then, began singing at the age of eight belting out country and western songs. She had been known to sing "on flat-bed trucks in the parking lot of the local theater" and "near the concession stands at drive in theaters" (Yonke 2015).

Determined to be a singer, she dropped out of high school at the age of 16 and in her teens had several groups, including Connie and the Blu-Beats and the Blue Grange

2 With deep regret, I learned that Cindy passed away in 2018. She was a remarkable rocker who generously contributed to this essay.



Ramblers (BGR) (Muskovitz 2003?). In 1969 at the age of 20, Connie adopted the name of Ruby Jones and BGR morphed into the Ruby Jones Band. In 1971, her group was signed to the Curtom Record Label which was owned by Curtis Mayfield. They recorded the album *Ruby Jones* in the same year. In 1972, Ruby Jones released a single from the Ruby Jones LP—“You Better Run” (composed by Young Rascals members Felix Cavaliere and Eddie Brigati) with B-Side, Curtis Mayfield’s composition, “Stone Junkie.”

In 1972, Jim “Dandy” Magrum, the lead singer of the southern rock band Black Oak Arkansas (BOA) saw Ruby perform. He convinced her to leave the Ruby Jones group and join BOA as a back-up singer. It was at this time that she took on the stage name Ruby Starr. Starr was featured on the Black Oak Arkansas song “Jim Dandy,” which became a top 30 hit in 1973. She toured with Black Oak Arkansas and sang backup on a handful of BOA albums.

In 1974, Ruby left BOA and BOA manager, Butch Stone became her manager. She began touring with Blackfoot, a band from Florida. On their tour, they played the Star dust in Los Angeles and *Variety* reviewer Todd described Starr as “potentially one of the most exciting rock acts around.”

After her stint with Blackfoot, Starr met and began touring with the Wisconsin band, Grey Ghost which included Gary Levin (guitar), Marius Penczner (keyboard), David Mayo (bass) and Joel Williams (drums). They then became Ruby Starr and Grey Ghost and released a self-titled album on Capitol records in 1976. Four of the songs were co-written by Starr. In the same year, Starr also recorded her first solo album also on Capitol Records, also self-titled.

Her next recording was another solo LP, *Scene Stealer*, featuring Paul McCartney’s “Maybe I’m Amazed.” This song was also released as a single and was backed with the song, “Who’s Who.” On October 8, 1976, Starr (with backing from Black Oak Arkansas) performed “Maybe I’m Amazed” on the national television show, *The Midnight Special*.

Ruby Starr and Grey Ghost opened for Van Halen, Rod Stewart, Steppenwolf, Peter Frampton, Mahogany Rush, Bachman Turner Overdrive and J. Geils as well as Todd Rundgren, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Black Sabbath and Black Oak Arkansas (Mason 2003).

In 1977, Starr recorded what was to be her final album on Capitol records, *Smoky Places*. Reviewed favorably by *Billboard*, this album contained a number of covers (Buddy Holly, Jackie DeShannon, etc.) and was a mixture of country, rock and pop.

Although Starr was from Ohio, by the end of the 1970s she had made Milwaukee her home. She played numerous gigs in the Midwest, packing the bars and clubs.

In 1979, Starr teamed with Lucy Grey, a band from Mayville, Wisconsin, resulting in a new group—Grey-Star (a.k.a. Grey Star.) Its members were Starr (lead vocals), Mike Findling (guitar, lead vocals), Robb Hanshaw (guitar, vocals), Freddie Hodnick (guitar, vocals), Steve “Pooh” Godfriarx (guitar), John Kerr (bass), and Dave Gruenwaldt—a.k.a. Mudslide (drums). Grey-Star issued two LPs both on Emotion records; the first was self-titled and released in 1981. The LP contained a number of originals and it received favorable reviews. The second Grey-Star album, *Telephone Sex*, came out in 1983; there were several cover songs, “Baby It’s You” and “In Crowd,” but a good number of the songs were originals.

In 1983, Grey-Star won a Wisconsin Area Music Industry award (WAMI) as Best Performers of the Year and Ruby Starr (of Grey-Star) won Best Female Vocalist (Canariato 2015).

Grey-Star toured the country and during their tenure, opened for Van Halen, Allman Brothers, Cheap Trick, and Robin Trower. On December 7, 1982, the band had the honor of opening for the much anticipated Who concert in the Mecca Arena. This was the Who's first performance in Milwaukee and it drew 12,000 audience members. Grey-Star performed songs from their 1981 self-titled LP, including "Silhouette" and the Raganov/Bern song made popular by Janis Joplin and Big Brother and the Holding Company, "Piece of My Heart."

Ruby Starr at Humpin' Hannah's (1975)

In 1983, Mike Gray (previous known as Mike Findling) left the group and the band was renamed the Ruby Star Band (Note: the second "r" of Starr was dropped in this new band name.) In 1984, their single was released on Emotion Records, "Under Your Spell" (side A) and "Pick up Speed" (side B). In 1985 they released a second single, "Secrets of the Heart" (side A) and "I'll Give You Everything" (side B). Mark Krueger, long-time friend and program director at Milwaukee's WQFM radio station, remembers that a music video of "Secrets of the Heart" was recorded at John Doe's Pub previously located at Vliet and 50th Street in Milwaukee.

*Records & Reviews* reported that two songs from Starr's group would be featured in the 1985 independent movie, *Pink Nights*: "Meet Me at the Same Time" and "You Don't Even Know"; film credits show they were performed by the Ruby Star Band. (*Pink Nights*).

In 1987, Starr was nominated for the Best Female Vocalist of the Year Award by WAMI and in 1988, again won the Best Female Vocalist of the Year award.



Photo by Rich Zimmermann

In the early 1990s, Starr along with her drummer and long-time friend, Mudslide, moved to Las Vegas and played in clubs, casinos as well as hotels on the Strip such as the Riviera and Stardust (Jones 1995).

According to Mudslide, Starr was selected to perform in the Country Legends shows in Las Vegas. This would have been a great opportunity for a steady income and benefits. Unfortunately, before the contract was to be signed, Starr experienced a set of extremely severe headaches. Mudslide brought Starr to a doctor and after tests, learned the shocking and devastating news that Starr had lung cancer and a brain tumor. She had, perhaps, only six months to live. Mudslide moved Starr back to her home in Toledo to be with her family and helped her through hospice care. Starr died a year later, on January 14, 1995 at the age of 45. Starr was laid to rest in Toledo Memorial Cemetery.

Starr lives on through the Internet and YouTube where fans have posted numerous videos of her live performances from decades past. Starr continues to have a strong, loyal fan base. Raging Slab, a country rock group, wrote and recorded the tribute song, "Ruby (For Miss Ruby Starr)." Black Oak Arkansas also performs the Grand Funk Railroad song, "Heartbreaker" as a tribute to her.

After Starr's death, several of her albums have been reissued. The original 1971 *Ruby Jones* album has been renamed *Stone Junkie* and was re-released in 2000 and includes the bonus track, "You Better Run." The 1981 *Grey-Star* LP and the 1983 *Telephone Sex* LP were released as a single CD in 2003 by Mean Mountain Music and were re-titled *Grey-Star and the Great Ruby Starr*. In 1995, Ruby Starr was inducted into WAMI's Hall of Fame becoming the first female (albeit posthumously) to achieve this honor. For an excellent, detailed biography of Starr, see Susan Masino's chapter "Ruby Starr" in *Wisconsin Musicians* (source provided below).

## The Shivvers

One of the best well-known and highly regarded Milwaukee bands in the late 1970s and early 1980s was the female-fronted Shivvers featuring Jill Kossoris (see also Chapter 10). The Shivvers were referred to as a power pop/new wave punk band and were described by OnMilwaukee.com music critic Bobby Tanzilo as "part Blondie, part Raspberries" (Tanzilo 2014).

Kossoris grew up in the Milwaukee area and studied classical piano for a number of years. As a teen, she joined several local rock bands. In the late 1970s, she sought to create a pop punk band which would become the Shivvers. The group featured Kossoris (lead vocalist, piano/keyboard player and songwriter); Jim Richardson (drums); Jim Eannelli (lead guitar); Mike Pyle (rhythm guitar/vocals) and Rich Bush (bass). Bassist-songwriter-vocalist Scott Krueger subsequently replaced Bush.

The Shivvers were massively popular in the Milwaukee area and played venues such as Zak's, Teddy's, the Palms and the Starship. They played numerous gigs in the Midwest especially Madison and Chicago. They opened for such acts as Iggy Pop and the Romantics (Ankeny) as well as for the Shoes and the Stooges (Warner 2006).

In 1980, the Shivvers recorded a single at Gold Star Studio in Milwaukee. Their 7-inch record contained two songs written by Kossoris, "Teen Line" (side A) and "When

"I was Younger" (side B). The single was released on their own record label, Flip Top. The 45-recording brought favorable reviews from a number of music critics nationwide. "Teen Line" was a catchy, upbeat song while "When I was Younger" was an edgier rock number. Kossoris' voice was lively and upbeat. The Shivvers were excellent musicians and their music was high energy, fresh, fun and danceable.

It was the hope that the Shivvers would get a record label contract in the early 1980s. Recording artist Eric Carmen (front man of the 1970s group the Raspberries) expressed interest in them.

Kossoris was a huge fan of Carmen whom she viewed as a large musical influence. Kossoris and Carmen's paths had crossed twice. In the late 1970s, Kossoris, a student at Brown Deer High School, entered and won a contest that brought the Raspberries to perform at her school (Warner 2006).

In 1981, Kossoris, an Eric Carmen fan club member, sent him a

copy of "Teen Line"/"When I was Younger" along with a videotape of the Shivvers performing "Teen Line." According to Divina Infusino in the *Milwaukee Journal*, Carmen saw the video, was impressed and telephoned Kossoris. Carmen produced a demo tape of the Shivvers that was sent to several record labels. He also expressed interest in producing their first album. Unfortunately, the Shivvers did not get the backing of a record label and no album was made.

Although disappointed, Kossoris and Krueger continued to write songs and the band recorded a number of performances on video. In 1982, a *Milwaukee Journal* poll voted the Shivvers as Best Local Band. They were also getting known internationally. The Shivvers have been a "minor indie hit in Japan right from the earliest days" (Schultz 2006).

However, in the early summer of 1982, the Shivvers disbanded. Kossoris was in Nashville working as a songwriter and several other members moved to different states to pursue other music interests. In 1989, the band did get back together to record the single "Remember Tonight" (Gilvear 2012).

In 2001, Kossoris recorded an alt-country rock solo album, *Invisible*, which received very favorable reviews. The CD contained fourteen originals by Kossoris and was produced by Mike Hoffman and Kossoris. Kossoris was backed by ex-bandmates, Richardson (drums) and Krueger (guitar and bass). Joining them were fellow Milwaukee musicians, including Violent Femme Victor Joseph DeLorenzo (snare), Hoffman (guitar, bass, and vocals), and melaniejane (cello). Kossoris' CD contains mature, well-written





songs including the beautiful “Rise” and “Beautiful Dream” and the haunting “Back to the Well” and “Invisible.”

In 2003, a Shivvers’ album was finally released *Til the Word Gets Out*. The album was released on the Hyped to Death label and contains 18 of the songs originally recorded by the Shivvers in the 1970s and 1980s. The album also contains six songs from the Orbits, a Milwaukee band in which Krueger and Richardson were in before they joined the Shivvers. *The Philadelphia Weekly* critic reviewed the work calling it “thrilling” and that the song, “Teen Line” is “arguably one of the most magnificent pop singles of its time” (Keyes 2017). *Victim of Time* calls the album “an essential piece of pop history” and that it had received “stellar reviews from *Bomp* and *NY Rocker*” (Cross). Hatch-Miller from *Dusted Magazine* wrote: “Best power pop band that you never heard in your life.”

In 2009, Sing Sing Records re-mastered the Shivvers’ originally recorded material from 1979–1981 to create released LP/CD, *The Shivvers: Lost Hits from Milwaukee’s First Family of Power Pop: 1979–82*. It was also released in Japan as the Shivvers have a big following there (Noble). The album contains the 20 original Shivvers’ songs plus five bonus videos of the band’s 1980s performances. In 2014, a newer remixed and remastered version of the album came out containing 12 of their previously released songs and one newly released song.

Although it took decades for the Shivvers’ songs to be released, their music and lyrics are timeless and just as original and captivating today as they were in the 1970s and 1980s. Their recordings are now being discovered by today’s audiences worldwide.

Kossoris currently resides in the Milwaukee area and has a successful career as a songwriter for Mystery Train Publishing.

## Julie Brandenburg/Julie Niedziejko

Julie Brandenburg (previously known as Julie Niedziejko) is a multi-talented composer, musician, singer and music instructor from Milwaukee. She is classically trained and earned a B.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) in music education/vocal studies and an M.A. from UWM in music theory and composition. Brandenburg has been a longtime member of the Milwaukee rock music scene.

Niedziejko performed with the psychedelic Milwaukee Liquid Pink band in the 1980s before founding in the early 1990s, True Heart Susie, a female-fronted progressive rock band, with herself on piano and vocals along with Tom Dougherty (drums), Jeff Hamilton (guitars), Steve Tyczkowski (bass), and Tom Hansen (violin). They released two CDs, *Three Sheets* (1994) and *Lately Story* (1997). Dave Luhrssen favorably reviewed *Lately Story* in *Billboard* noting that the “songs’ chords have more in common with classical music than rock” and have “memorable melodies with rock energy.”

Brandenburg also created a harder rock progressive band called Quark Quintet and later the Julie B Well whose music was described by *ExpressMilwaukee.com* as “intricate chamber rock infused with full-throttle metal dynamics.” In 2006, she recorded a more pop-oriented solo CD – *Story So Far*. Brandenburg has opened for Green Day and Lowen & Navarro. She has also written music scores for feature films and teaches songwriting



at her alma mater, UWM, as well as voice, piano, music appreciation, and songwriting at the Milwaukee Area Technical College. In addition, Brandenburg owns and operates Be Sound Music Studio offering voice and piano lessons, performance coaching, and group recording services. She continues to write, perform, and teach in the Milwaukee area.

## Ronnie Nyles

Ronnie Nyles is a well-known female singer/songwriter/guitarist in the Milwaukee area and eight-time WAMI-winner. She has performed solo, as part of a duo, and with rock back-up bands. She has played numerous festivals, concerts, clubs, fairs and events all through the Midwest and had also gone on tour through Europe, Australia and Canada.

Nyles' has a distinctive, powerful voice and she is able to sing and play guitar in a number of genres, including rock, folk, blues, country and pop. Nyles won her first WAMI in 1989 when she was part of a country duo with fellow musician, Chris Gerard. Located in Green Bay, they were called Ladysmith and their WAMI was for Best Country Band.

LadySmith disbanded in 1990 and Ronnie joined the country group Sky Harbor Band, which played in Milwaukee and Chicago. Shortly afterwards, Nyles left to perform solo and start several new groups. She founded the Ronnie Nyles & Chix Mix band which included Tina Dimmer (drums, percussion), Mia Montenegro (guitar), and Melissa Beastrom (piano). The band disbanded in the early 2000s, however, Nyles continued as a solo act or with percussionist Dimmer. She has also worked with a number of backing bands including the group, Tallulah Who. Tallulah Who was comprised of Tommy Capponi (drums), Damon Landro (bass, vocals), Guy Crucianelli (guitar, vocals), and Dimmer (keyboards, synthesizer, percussion). In 2016, Nyles and Tallulah Who became the Ronnie Nyles Band, and they perform popular and harder rock songs.

Nyles has been nominated numerous times for WAMI Awards. In addition to the 1989 Best Country Band, Nyles has also won Best Country Artist (1990); Best Female Vocalist (2004, 2007 and 2009); Best Pop Adult Contemporary Artist (2008); and Best Pop Artist—Ronnie Nyles and Tallulah Who (2009.) She also received two Wisconsin People's Choice Awards in 2003 and 2008.

As of 2015, Nyles has released two CDs, one EP and a single. The CDs *Leaving Rome* (1990) and *January Weather* (2002) both contain original songs by Nyles and fellow musician Greg Girard. Girard also produced portions of both CDs with Nyles and fellow musician, Kevin Patrick. For the *It's Christmas* EP (2013), Nyles teamed up with local musician Greg Lathe to write and record five holiday songs including the "Let Freedom Ring" holiday tribute to the U.S. armed forces. In 2014, Nyles released a new single, "Movin' On" and in 2016, "Where does Love Go?" Nyles has shared the stage with Joan Jett and the Blackhearts, Melissa Etheridge, Lucinda Williams, The Indigo Girls, Night Ranger, Kansas, Death Cab for Cutie, Daryl Stuermer, and Cheap Trick.

As an activist, Nyles has supported a number of causes (including animal rescue groups and equestrian rights advocate groups) and has volunteered to play at numerous fund-raisers. In 2012, she founded SheRocks Wisconsin whose "goal is to support,

connect, promote and recognize women in all music genres and all areas of Wisconsin's Music Industry." SheRocks Wisconsin also provides educational and developmental programs as well as opportunities for emerging talents to perform.

In addition to continuing to write, record and perform, Nyles is co-owner of a successful recording studio, Stella Productions / Stella Studios in Milwaukee.

## Sue DaBaco

In 1998, Chicago native, blues/rock singer, songwriter and guitarist Sue DaBaco moved to Milwaukee. For seven years prior, DaBaco was part of Buzz Kilman (a regular on the Jonathon Brandmeir's WLUP 79.9 FM radio show) and the All Bubba Blues Band. DaBaco played lead and rhythm guitar as well as fronted some songs. The band played all the major festivals and venues in Chicago and opened for such headliners as Jefferson Starship, Koko Taylor, The Fabulous Thunderbirds, Dave Mason, Eddy Money and Lonnie Brooks. When the band dissolved, DaBaco moved to Milwaukee and started her own band.

In Milwaukee, DaBaco created the Sue DaBaco and Wise Fools band with local musicians, Scott Walters (bass), and Darrel Douglas (drums); they played many of the famous festivals in Milwaukee including Harley Fest, and have opened for major acts such as Lynyrd Skynyrd, Peter Dinklage, Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings, Koko Taylor, Jeff Beck, 38 Special, Sue Foley, and Milwaukee blues guitarist Greg Koch. DaBaco continued playing lead and rhythm guitar and was the band's main vocalist and songwriter. She is an excellent lead guitar player. Her only formal education on guitar is tuning and chord structure. She learned everything else by ear and by watching other musicians.

DaBaco and Wise Fools were a very high-energy blues rock group. They played original songs by DaBaco and covered Hendrix, Muddy Waters and other rock and blues artists. In May 2008, they participated in the Grafton Blues Challenge held in Grafton, Wisconsin, and took first place. This success led to an invitation to compete with blues bands from all over the world in the 2009 International Blues Challenge held in Memphis, Tennessee. DaBaco's band won the Club Favorite honor and was ranked in the top 20 of over 200 competing bands. In 2010, DaBaco's band was nominated for a WAMI for Best Blues Band.

DaBaco has also traveled to Eastern Europe and has played with blues bands in clubs and festivals in Poland and Lithuania. While in Poland, DaBaco made a solemn visit to the Auschwitz death camp, inspiring her to write and record a very haunting beautiful instrumental called "Notes from the Underground." This song appears on Sue DaBaco and Wise Fools' CD titled *Voodoo Juice* released in 2007 on Happy Accident Records. The CD features 10 original songs penned by DaBaco and one cover, Jimi Hendrix's "Voodoo Chile."

In 2010, DaBaco released two new songs—"Crucify" and "Ten Feet Tall" (a beautiful slower rock and blues number with meaningful lyrics and excellent musicianship). "Crucify" was recorded at Limelight Studio with WAMI nominated producer Joey Har-

bur, mixed by Steve Hamilton of Makin' Sausage Music, and produced by DaBaco and Steve Hamilton.

After Wise Fools disbanded, DaBaco formed Sue DaBaco and the Double Down Band which includes Craig Omick (percussion, drums, vocals), Darrel Douglas (drums, percussion), Randy Strumberger (bass, acoustic guitar, vocals), and Michael Caldwell (saxophone). In 2014 the band went on temporary hiatus. DaBaco was hoping to pursue a possible different path in music, focusing more on songwriting and production as well as progressive and acoustic guitar playing. Since then, DaBaco has created a number of excellent rock/blues originals including the psychedelic-tinged instrumental, "Hypnotique." In 2014, DaBaco earned an M.B.A. at Alverno College.

Currently Sue DaBaco and the Double Down Band continue to perform in the Milwaukee area, playing blues festivals and other venues.

## Michelle Anthony

Originally from Kansas City Missouri, Michelle Anthony moved to Milwaukee in 1992 to attend Marquette University. She earned a bachelor's degree in English in 1996 and a Master of Physical Therapy degree in 1999. During that same year, Michelle, her husband, Scott Anthony, along with two other musicians formed Capital 8, a popular Milwaukee band. The group was comprised of Michelle (lead vocals, bass and keyboards), Scott (lead guitar), Mike Christiansen (lead vocals, rhythm guitar), and John Chipman (drums, percussion). Capital 8's music was primarily pop rock with some alt-country. They released two albums on Sparkler Records, *Reason* (2001) and *Payola* (2002). With the advent of the Internet, Capital 8 was able to get their music directly to the public. Capital 8's songs, "Love in the Title" and "100" both from the *Reason* CD were on MP3.com's pop/rock charts, reaching the top 50 of the national chart and topping the Milwaukee chart in the spring of 2001. The band's songs were well-crafted, catchy and melodious originals. Their recordings displayed excellent musicianship and there was variety with two lead singers. The band performed at many venues in the Milwaukee area including Shank Hall, Summerfest, the Globe, and Reed Street Station, and opened for national acts such as Shelby Lynne, k.d. lang, Ben Folds, Mindy Smith, Amy Rigby, Robbie Fulks, the Silos, Junior Brown, Bob Schneider, and Sophie B. Hawkins.

In 2004, Capital 8 disbanded and Anthony created another music group, Stick Pony comprised of Amy (lead vocals, piano, bass, organ), Scott Anthony (lead, rhythm guitar), Chris DeMay (guitar, harmonica), Ryan Stang (bass, organ), and Nick Verban (drums, percussion). Stick Pony backed Anthony on her successful, euphonious 2004 solo alt-country CD, *Stand Fall Repeat* released on Burn and Shiver Records. Anthony worked with the late former Wilco member, Jay Bennett, on the CD and it received very favorable reviews. In 2005, Anthony performed at the prestigious South by Southwest concert.

In 2011, Anthony moved to Austin, Texas and continues to write, record and perform. In 2006, she released *Frozenstarpalace* which received positive reviews from *Austin Chronicle*, *LA Daily*, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, *Pop Matters*, and other sources. In 2010, she released the *Tornadoes* CD which also received positive reviews. In addition, Anthony's

music has been featured in the “independent film *Black Cloud* as well in releases of the television series “*The Wonderfalls*” and “*Roswell*.” Her songs have been heard in the MTV shows “*Pimp My Ride*”, “*Making the Band*”, and “*Operation 17*” (Musicxray).

As a solo artist, Michele has performed hundreds of shows around the country including in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City, and West Virginia.

## Other Significant Women Rockers

Other significant performers entered the music scene in Milwaukee in the 1990s including (Kelly Ann) Keedy and Marie Ulsberger of Wanda Chrome (Ulsberger) and the Leather Pharaohs. Dropmore Scarlet was formed in 2001 and was comprised of Kari Bloom (lead vocals), Kristen Kakatsch (guitars, drums and vocals), Laura Proeber (bass), and Ginny Wiskowski (drums, guitar, vocals). In 2004, the group released a self-titled CD on their independent label. Dropmore Scarlet later disbanded with three of the four members forming an all-female rockabilly band, Crazy Rocket Fuel (Snyder 2015). Crazy Rocket Fuel consists of Bloom (lead vocals, guitar), Ginny Wiskowski (lead guitar, vocals), Laura Proeber (stand-up bass), and Deb Bricault (drums and vocal). In 2010 the group released a CD filled with fun, hard-driving, original rockabilly numbers. As of 2015, Crazy Rocket Fuel was performing at numerous clubs, bars, and festivals in the Midwest.

Other recent female Milwaukee bands include The Barrettes, a punk rock band featuring JoAnn Riedl (vocals, guitar), Kari Lynn (bass, vocals), Joolz (drums) and Jey Zocher (vocals, guitar); the Addy Janes with Ashley Dolhun (vocals, keyboards), Cassan Johnson (guitars), Stacey Zwirlen (drums, vocals); and Vic and Gab, two sisters originally from Texas whose pop and rock is becoming known nationwide. There is also singer/songwriter/pianist Jayme Dawicki who has released three CDs and whose songs have been “licensed on television shows on MTV, NBC, the CW, the Style Network and the Lifetime Network” (Johns 2015). Peggy James released her fourth album in 2013. In addition, there are numerous mixed gender bands such as Annie B. and the Complication; the Whips; Red Knife Lottery; the Sugar Stems; GGOOLLD; Call Me Lightning; the Delphines; the Altos; Old Earth; Hello Death; Body Futures; the Twang Dragons; October Soul; Sin Bad; Rocket Paloma; Rocket Cat, and Heidi Spencer and the Rare Birds (a group getting international attention [recently featured on the BBC]). The number of female rockers continues to grow adding to the diversity of the Milwaukee rock music scene.

## Conclusion

In addition to Nyles’ SheRocks Wisconsin, there are several other Milwaukee organizations to help support the music careers of Milwaukee women—Milwaukee Chick Singer Night, providing opportunities for local female artists to perform and Ladies Rock Milwaukee, a three-day intensive music band camp for women musicians over 21 years of age. In addition, Girls Rock Milwaukee is a week-long day camp for girls aged 8–16. Girls



Rock Milwaukee was founded by businesswoman, Valerie Lucks, and local musician, Ashley Smith (the Whips and Red Knife Lottery) and its mission is to empower girls of all backgrounds through music education and performance. Organizations such as these will help to ensure a strong and vibrant future of female artists in the Milwaukee rock music scene.

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Photo by Maurice Seymour; courtesy of Ron Seymour



The G.I.O.'s



Photo by Rich Zimmerman

Methyl Ethyl and the Keytones  
(with Amy Madigan) at the UWM Union  
(1972)



Courtesy of Jill Kossoris



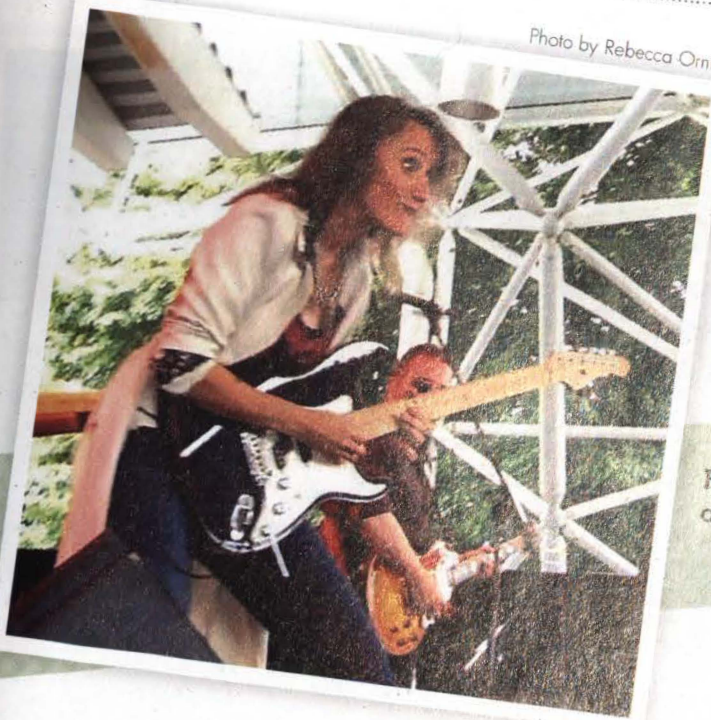
The Shivvers, a Milwaukee powerpop and punk group (1970s)



Courtesy of Ronnie Nyles

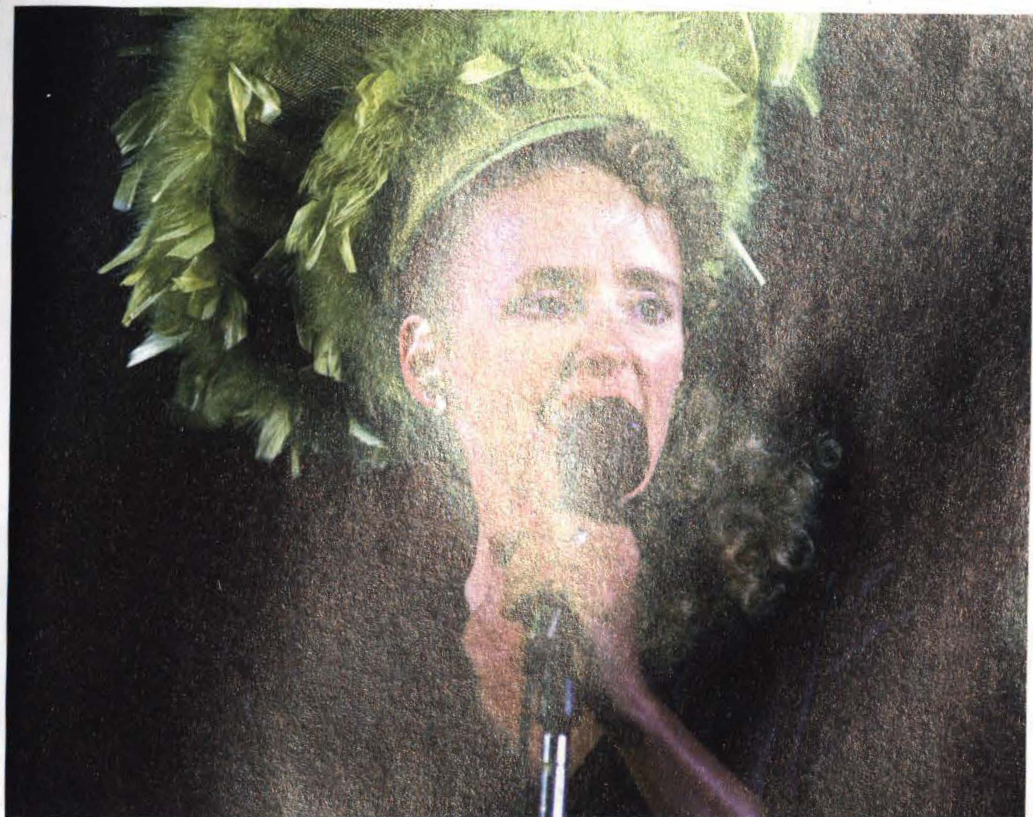


Photo by Rebecca Ornick



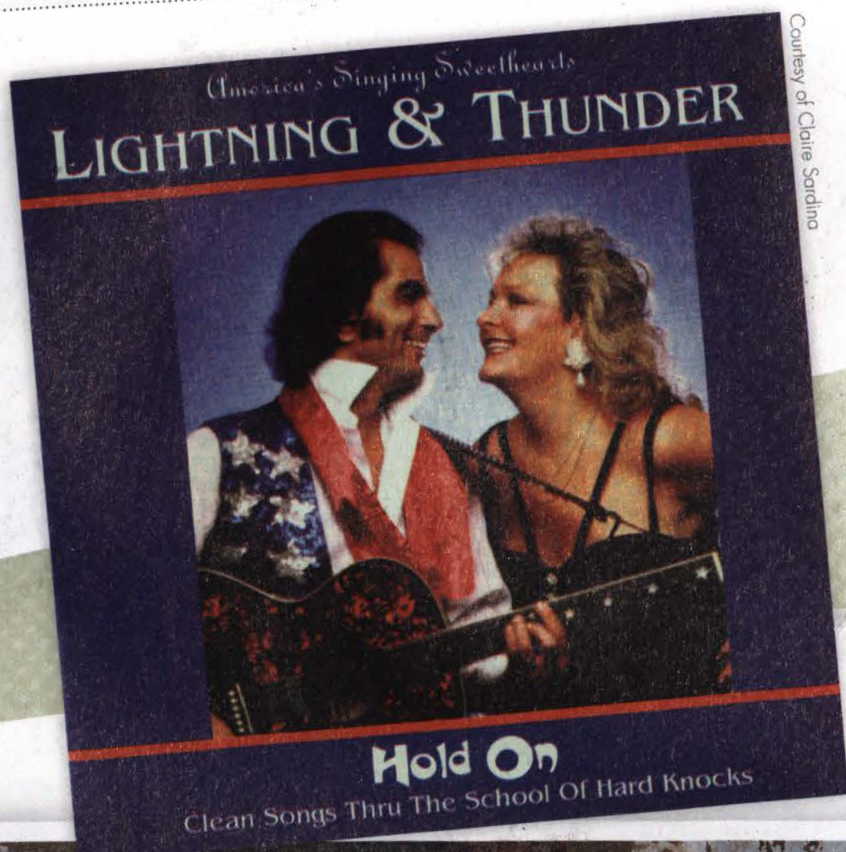
Blues/rocker Sue DaBaco  
at Summerfest 2012

Photo by Erol Reyai



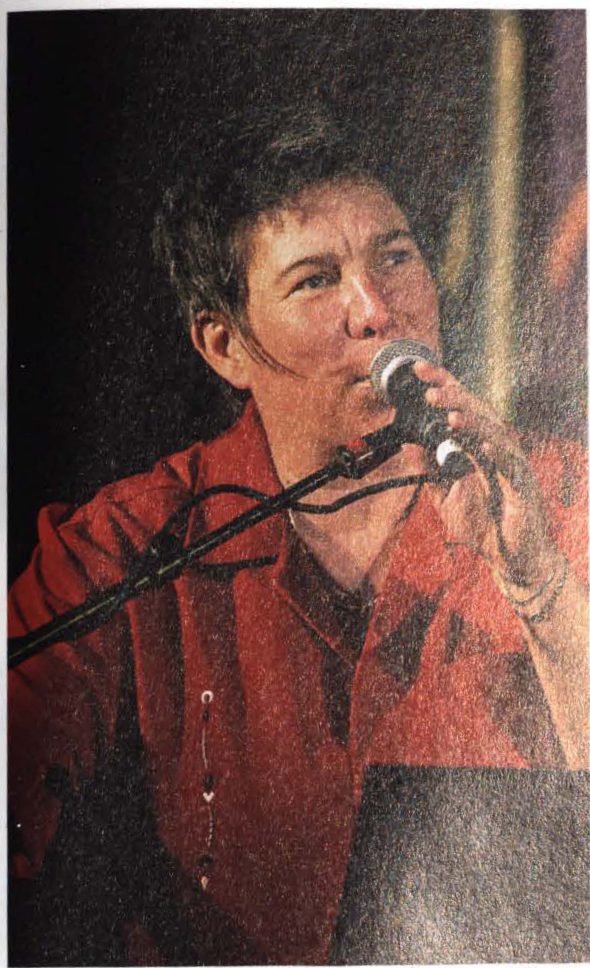
Robyn (Robin) Pluer





Jack and Jill Jazz (Jill Jensen and Jack Grassel)  
performing at The 35th annual WAMI Awards, held at  
Turner Hall Ballroom, Milwaukee, WI (2015)





Connie Grauer from  
Mrs. Fun performing  
at Bastille Days,  
Cathedral Square (2003)

Photo by Erol Reyai

Kim Zick from Mrs. Fun  
performing at Bastille  
Days, Cathedral Square,  
Milwaukee (2003)

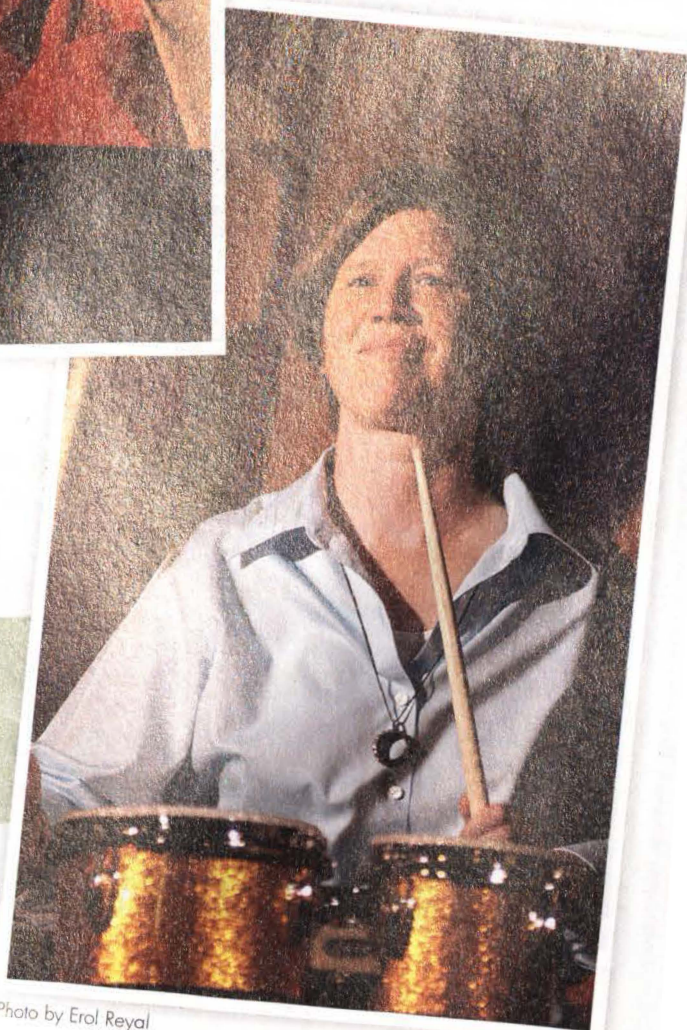


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