



# OTTAWA ROCKS!

**Cover illustration: Fans cheering in front of the stage at the Elvis Presley concert at the Auditorium in Ottawa, 1957**

City of Ottawa Archives | CA022375

# Ottawa Rocks!

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## Message from the City Archivist

Over sixty musicians, radio personalities, writers, promoters, club owners, booking agents, researchers, and fans contributed to *Ottawa Rocks!* First presented in 2013 at Gallery 112, the exhibit was later reimagined as *Ottawa Rocks, Reunion Tour* for visitors at City Hall in 2023.

Although the text and research cover the period up to the first exhibit, the content still resonates with Ottawa music fans. As a result, we have created this Occasional Series Booklet – rock on!

The Archives, like music, are constantly evolving and changing. They are snapshots in time, authentic and reliable records capturing decisions, rendering evidence, and documenting the breadth of our experiences. The records presented in our exhibits and publications recall treasured memories, tell us stories, educate, and inform.

We hope you appreciate our efforts.

Paul J. Henry, City Archivist

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Elvis Presley at the Auditorium, 1957  
City of Ottawa Archives | CA023038



# Ottawa! Ready to Rock?

“Rock and roll music, if you like it, if you feel it, you can’t help but move to it. That’s what happens to me. I can’t help it.”

– Elvis Presley

Rock and Roll originated in the 1950s, combining the musical genres of country and rhythm and blues, creating an entirely new type of music. It is based around a 12-bar structure, and is performed with a guitar, double bass, and drums. Rock and Roll rapidly gained popularity because of its heavy beat and simple melodies, and later spawned other new genres of music, including punk, heavy metal and hip-hop.

This new sound was embraced by teenagers and college and university students. Each generation created its own sounds, its own ideas.

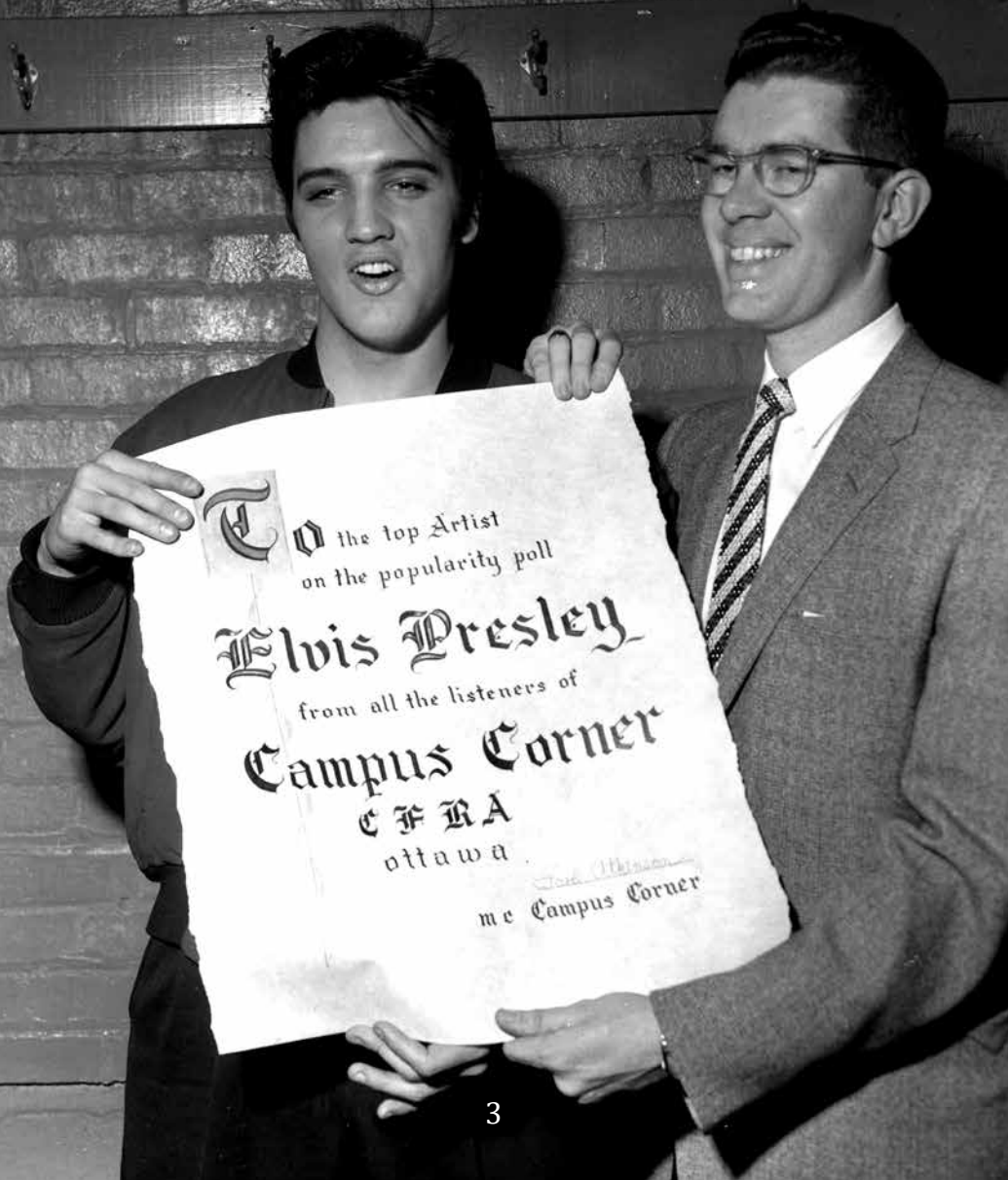
Through a fan’s eyes and ears, explore Ottawa’s Rock and Roll history, the bands, the local haunts, the memorable moments, and the people that made it happen.



**The Esquires, Uplands, 1965**

John Rowlands

Gord Atkinson with Elvis Presley, Auditorium, 1957  
City of Ottawa Archives | CA023056





# The 1950s

In Ottawa, in the early 1950's, early fans of Rock and Roll had to cruise the AM dial at night hoping to pick up a show out of the United States or drive to another city to buy a 78, 45 or 33 vinyl record. You wouldn't find one at the local department stores like Ogilvy's.

It changed in the fall of 1954 when Gord Atkinson, a new DJ with CFRA, convinced station owner Frank Ryan to broadcast a show directed towards Ottawa's youth called Campus Corner. The two-hour Saturday afternoon show played Rock and Roll hits and was sponsored by Coca-Cola.

Gord brought Bill Haley and the Comets to the Chaudiere Rose Room in the fall of 1955, riding the success of their hit "Rock Around the Clock" featured in the film Blackboard Jungle. An all-ages show was added in the afternoon. If you were under 18 you had to bring a parent.



**Ogilvy's 1947**

City of Ottawa Archives | CA022610



**Vern Craig and the Jive Rockets, 1958**

Gary Comeau



**Chaudiere Club Rose Room, 1954**

City of Ottawa Archives | CA004367

Local kids like the Jive Rockets, the Talkabouts and the Fairmonts would hone their skills playing in the high schools and at talent contests. Campus Corner hosted show once a month at the Coliseum. Members of the Local 180, Canadian Federation of Musicians, professional big band and swing musicians, would be paid to be present but would play only the national anthem or nothing at all. This was not their scene.

The Rock and Roll club scene was on the Quebec side, especially on the Aylmer Road in venues like the Chaudiere and the Glenlea. Ontario's LCBO controlled conduct in restaurants and taverns. In Quebec you could congregate, drink and dance.

Many of the rockabilly bands and performers like Hugh Scott, Maury Logan and the Lauzon Brother would go on to be recognized by the Ottawa Valley Country Music Hall of Fame.

The jazz scene was changing too. Young musicians like Brian Browne, Norm Clarke and Champ Champagne were interpreting and writing modern jazz, playing many of the same venues as the rock and rollers.

On April 3, 1957, Elvis Presley played to a packed house at the Auditorium, the Ottawa Senators arena. His show was deemed too controversial for Montreal and Ottawa went Rock and Roll crazy as the replacement host city. A lot of kids went home inspired to be the next Elvis.

One Ottawa kid was just about to get his big break. Paul Anka had been singing and recording for three years when he recorded "Diana" in Don Costa Studios, New York and was signed by ABC Paramount. Gord Atkinson spun "Diana" for the first time in July 1957 on CFRA and soon Anka was a star, returning to perform at the Auditorium in November, the headliner of the Alan Freed's "The Biggest Show of Stars for 1957" with Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, The Crickets and others.

Elvis Presley at the Auditorium, 1957  
City of Ottawa Archives | CA023036



**Paul Anka receives Gold Record for 'Diana', at the  
Biggest Show of Stars concert, Auditorium, 1957**  
City of Ottawa Archives | CA024151



# The 1960s

Ottawa's music scene flourished in the 1960s. The sweet vocal harmonies coming out of Ottawa made it the Liverpool of the North. Perhaps this could be attributed to Ottawa Journal reporter Sandy Gardiner managing some of the top local bands. The British invasion sound was certainly front and centre in the music.

The Staccatos, who would become The Five Man Electrical Band, led the way alongside Capitol Records signees The Esquires, each band releasing a full length LP. Many other bands recorded singles. Local CFRA DJ John Poser formed Sir John A. Records and recorded nine Ottawa bands from 1965 to 1968.

The Quebec side was still hopping with its liberal liquor laws but "all ages" venues began popping up in Ottawa. Pineland dancehall on Bowesville Road, the Oak Door on Bank Street and weekend venues like "The Tower" and Parkdale United Church were keeping Ottawa's music booking agencies busy.



**The Staccatos, Lansdowne Park, 1965**

City of Ottawa Archives | CA024150



**The Esquires, Arnprior High School, 1962**

By the start of the 1960s there were lots of choices for Ottawa's youth. CFRA and CKOY were both programming Rock and Roll, competing with stations like WKBW Buffalo at night. By the late 1960s CFRA's evening lineup included: Campus Club, Best Sellers, and the Final Hour, running from 7:30 to midnight. Best Sellers dedicated Friday nights to local music.



CJOH-TV, produced a popular TV show called Club 13 and then Saturday Date which featured dancing, live music and current singles from 1961 to 1969.

**CFRA DJ Al Pascal, 1962**

City of Ottawa Archives |  
MG393/Newton

McKeen Productions, Ottawa's first portable DJ service, played 146 record hops in their 1960-1961 season at local churches and schools.



**Morgan McReynolds and the Dynamic Runaways poster, circa 1960**

Local kids divided into two groups, the Yohawks and Squirrels. Yohawks wore sneakers or desert boots, plaid or paisley shirts and tight fitting jeans. Squirrels wore jet boots, jean jackets and greasy hair. These were Ottawa's first recorded gangs – a local answer to England's mods and rockers.

Opening in 1960, Le Hibou coffee house became the arts hub of Ottawa, hosting French and English theatre, poetry and folk music as well as Blues and Jazz. It's here that Jimi Hendrix came to see Joni Mitchell after playing two shows at the Capitol Theatre, one of the most storied nights in Ottawa music history. It is also the spot where Ottawa's folk scene flourished, headed by the legendary band The Children.

The Auditorium was demolished in 1967, replaced as a venue by the Civic Centre. New north side stands for the football stadium opened the door to large outdoor concerts, especially during the Canada Central Exhibition.



**Modern Rock Quintet, Café Le Hibou Coffee House, 1970**

City of Ottawa Archives | CA026067



MAR. 19—1917—President Wilson called Congress to meet in special session on April 2 for discussion of national policy.  
1945—U.S. troops landed on Pansy in Philippines.  
MAR. 20—1781—Cornwallis retreated to the coast, arriving at Wilmington.  
1929—Marshal Poch died in Paris.

MARCH 19

Arrived in Ottawa - Beautiful  
Hotel... Strange people... Beautiful dinner  
talked with Joni Mitchell on the phone... I think  
I'll record her tonight with my excellent tape  
recorder. (knock on wood) Hmmm... can't find any  
wood... everything's plastic. Beautiful view.  
Marvelous sound on first show - Good on 2nd.  
Good recording - went down to the little club to see  
Joni - fantastic girl with heaven words - we all got  
party - Ok. millions of girls - listen to tapes and smoke weed.

MARCH 20

We left Ottawa City today -  
I kissed Joni goodbye, slept in the car and he  
stopped at a highway diner - I mean a Real one.  
Life in the movies - Mitch and I discuss our plans  
for movie. Slight disagreement here and there but  
it will be soon straighten out - Nothing happened  
in Rochester tonight. Went to a very bad  
bad tasting restaurant. Things follow us  
they probably was scared. couldn't figure us  
out - Me with my Indian hat and Mexican  
mustach, Mitch with his fairy tale jacket  
and Noel with his leaped beard hat and  
glasses and hair and accent. G'nite all

### Hendrix diary entry on his visit to Ottawa, 1968

In 1967 the Coliseum was damaged by fans angered by Eric Burdon and the New Animals' refusal to play over a pay dispute. Within a year, the City stopped renting the venue. The impressive Capitol Theatre would host a number of concerts at the end of the decade, including The Who, Cream, Simon and Garfunkel, and Ravi Shankar. Seeing Jimi Hendrix performing live was influential for local kids including guitarist Pat Travers.

# The 1970s

By the start of the 1970s, the British Invasion sound that defined Ottawa's music was changing and diversifying. The Five Man Electrical Band released three records and received international airplay. Bruce Cockburn, formerly of The Children, released his first solo album in 1970, the first of nine in the 1970s. MRQ and Canada Goose were popular local bands with Canada Goose performing as the house band at the Beacon Arms Hotel Tabu Room.

Many of the great 1960s venues in Ottawa were disappearing as the music changed. Pineland Dance Hall, The Oak Door, The Tower and Parkdale United all closed their doors to live music. Even the influential Le Hibou closed its doors in 1975 leaving Ottawa's folk scene without a home. The Capitol Theatre, a local landmark was demolished in 1970, the same year the National Arts Centre opened. The bars on the Aylmer Road, meanwhile, continued to rock.



**David Wiffin, circa 1970**

Gary Comeau



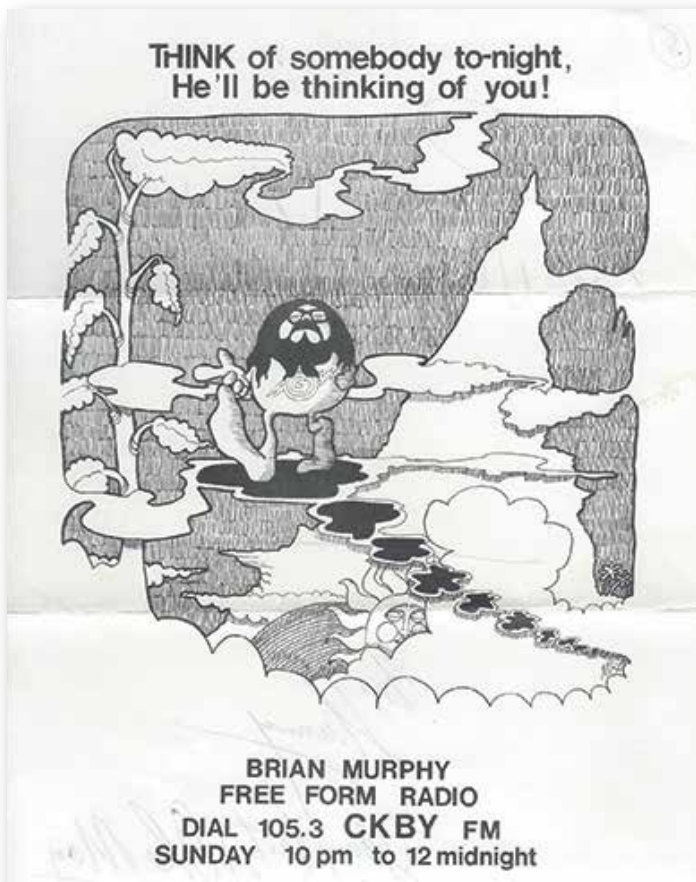
**Canada Goose, 1971**  
Gary Comeau



**James Leroy, circa 1974**

By the mid '70s, it was James Leroy and Denim's pop-rock that was resonating with national airplay followed by the Cooper Brothers southern rock. Heaven's Radio was one of Ottawa's most popular bands of the 1970s playing a mix of blues and reggae, a new sound for Ottawa. They released two albums at the end of the decade.

In the late 1970s, the LCBO loosened its liquor laws related to bars and restaurants, creating opportunity for aspiring club owners. In 1978, Barrymore's music hall opened its doors in the old Imperial Theatre and former Pandora's Box strip club. It would become one of Canada's premiere music venues.



**CKBY Free Form Radio poster**

Kathy Kilburn

The High School of Commerce was the unlikely venue to host one of Ottawa's most influential shows in the 1970s. In 1977, Ottawa's first punk band The Action opened for The Stranglers, Ottawa's second 'punk' show. Like the Elvis concert in the 1957, many of the kids went home thinking: "I can do that."

The emergence of FM radio created more choices for Ottawa's music fans. Existing since 1939, the FM dial was not on most radios until the 1960s. Ottawa's first FM rock music show was Brian Murphy's Freeform Radio, an overnight weekend show on CKBY which aired from 1972 to 1975 until CKBY chose a country music format. The Ottawa Valley was loaded with country talent including Ralph Carlson and the Country Mile and the Family Brown.



**CKCU DJs at the Central Canada Exhibition, Lansdowne Park, 1977**

City of Ottawa Archives | CA028124

Carleton University's CKCU 93.1 FM took to the airwaves in November of 1975. Sixteen months later, longtime Ottawa scene mover and shaker Harvey Glatt launched CHEZ 106.1 FM, and hired many of CKCU's DJs and Brian Murphy to program his new Album-Oriented FM station.

Lansdowne Park was home to most of the big concerts in the 1970s including Led Zeppelin, Queen, Bruce Springsteen and Bob Marley and Wailers at the Civic Centre. The Football Stadium added a second deck on the south side increasing seating capacity to 30,000. The Central Canada Exhibition began booking the biggest shows Ottawa had seen, including Supertramp.



**Frank Clair Stadium during Supertramp concert, Lansdowne Park, 1979**  
City of Ottawa Archives | MG011/CA022349



**Spectators with police officer (1977)**

City of Ottawa Archives | MG011-9-19-3



**Rock concert on Parliament Hill (1971)**

City of Ottawa Archives | MG011-10-1-J402-1

Stevie Ray Vaughan, Barrymore's, 1984

© photo Jean-Marc Carisse





# The 1980s

Ottawa's live music scene flourished in the 1980s. Liberal liquor laws and a thirst for live music saw downtown Ottawa explode with music venues. The Quebec bars were still popular for live music. Open until 3 am a steady stream of Ottawa club goers would head across the bridge at 1 am to keep the parties going. But times were changing. The Chaudiere Rose Room, scene of the original Bill Haley show closed down in 1983.

Barrymore's was Ottawa's biggest club, bringing in bands you would expect to see in larger venues. The 1981 U2 concert is one of those storied shows booked just before the band broke out. As owner Gord Rhodes said of bands that played Barrymore's, "We caught them on the way up and we caught them on the way down".

The folk scene found a new home in Rasputin's, a small club on Bronson Avenue. Blues was thriving at the Rainbow, the Penguin and the Saucy Noodle where artists like Tony D and Sue Foley honed their trade.



**Cooper Brothers, 1984**

Photo courtesy of John Rowlands

The punk and alternative scene flourished in the early 1980s in Ottawa fuelled by community radio like CKCU's No Future Now, Canada's first punk radio show. As in the 1950s and 1960s, high schools and community centres became the stage, except this time it was organized on a grass roots level. Porcelain Forehead, Randy Peters Band and the Red Squares were a few of the many bands playing this scene.



**Last Prayer live at the Wave Club (Riverside Hotel), 1982**

Photo courtesy of Janine Frenken

Most alternative clubs that did open, didn't last for long but left a lasting impact. Club Zinc, The Rotters' Club, The Jungle Club, The Roxy and The Underground were bringing top underground talent to Ottawa. In 1989, Zaphod Beeblebrox opened at its original location on Rideau Street.

Ottawa's 1980s metal scene produced two influential bands. Exciter, one of the pioneers of speed metal headlined a show at the Central Canada Exhibition in 1982. Annihilator would become the highest selling heavy metal group in Canadian history. Ottawa's Hip Hop scene began in 1983 with the founding of Canada's first Bboy crew, The Canadian Floor Masters and artists like Men of Base.



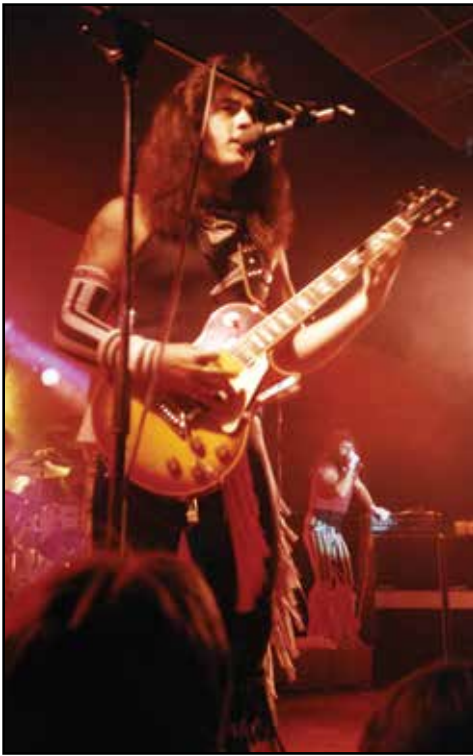
**Canada's oldest active Bboy crew, The Canadian Floor Masters, 1983.**

Photo courtesy of Steve "Buddha" Leafloor

**David Bowie, 1987**

© photo Jean-Marc Carisse





**Antix, ShareChez concert at Lansdowne Park, 1985**

City of Ottawa Archives | CA024179

CHEZ 106 was growing in popularity as listeners left the AM dial. CFRA and CKOY changed formats in the mid 1980s leaving CHEZ as the only commercial rock station until AM54 Rock began programming in 1989. CHEZ supported local music through ShareChez, where local bands would compete to win a recording session in a studio or to produce a video.

One of Ottawa's most successful bands of the 1980s, Eight Seconds won ShareChez in 1983 and used the platform to make the award winning video of their song "Where's Bulau?". Also popular at a national level was the duo One 2 One. The big shows were all going to the Civic Centre and the Football Stadium at Lansdowne Park like David Bowie's Glass Spider tour, in addition to Pink Floyd, Aerosmith, The Cure and The Jacksons.

Yearly festivals started to appear on the scene with the establishment of the Ottawa Jazz Festival and the Ottawa Folk Festival.

# The 1990s

Ottawa had many acts touring nationally and internationally in the 1990s in a variety of music genres.

Popular local band Furnaceface became MuchMusic favourites, with a following large enough to bring their own Furnacefest to Lansdowne Park, spotlighting local as well as nationally-known Canadian bands. The festival debuted in 1993 and returned each year for much of the '90s. Alternative music was in.

Alanis Morissette, a local teen who attended Glebe Collegiate and had a cover band called New York Fries, released two dance albums in 1991 and 1992, co-writing all of the music. After graduating high school she moved to Toronto, signed with Maverick Records, and released the album "Jagged Little Pill" which sold 33 million copies, produced six singles and was certified 12 times platinum in Canada, winning six Juno awards.



**Furnaceface, circa 1993**

Photo courtesy of Tom Stewart

**Alanis Morissette, 2001**  
© photo Jean-Marc Carisse



The popularity of Blues led to a new festival in 1994, Bluesfest. Headlined by Clarence Clemons at Major's Hill Park the festival's first year drew 5,000 people. By the end of the 1990s the festival had moved to Lebreton Flats, broadened its music scope and attracted 95,000 fans.

Rasputin's became the focal point of the Ottawa Folk scene and a place where local singer/songwriters could play and grow musically with a network of musicians. Local artists like Lynn Miles and Ian Tamblyn performed here.

Hip Hop artists like Clarence Gruff and the Half Sized Giants found limited venues for their urban music. Organized Rhyme, with future comedian Tom Green was nominated for a Juno in 1993.

In 1996, Ontario extended the drinking hours to 2 am putting Ottawa's bars on par with Quebec's drinking hours. The Hull strip continued its decline.



**Peter Fredette, Lansdowne Park, 2001**

City of Ottawa Archives |  
RG026



**Lister at Zaphods, 1991**

Marco Rayes

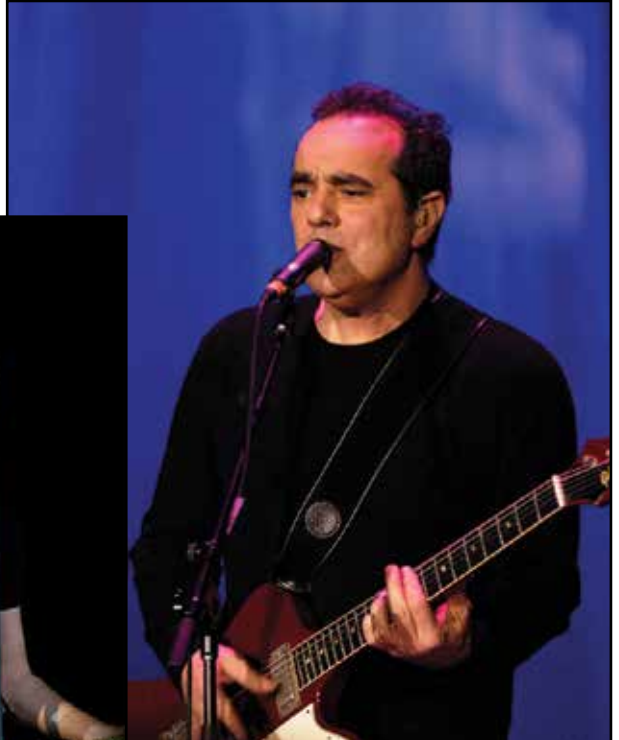
Home to the Ottawa Senators hockey team, the Palladium, now the Canadian Tire Centre, opened in Kanata in 1996. This multi purpose venue had seating for 20,500 making it the largest indoor concert arena in the city's history and creating a space large enough for any of the biggest touring acts, from Madonna to Paul McCartney. A concert by Bryan Adams, who went to high school at Colonel By Secondary School was the first event in the building.

In 1993 54 Rock moved to the FM dial at 106.9 and changed its name to the Bear competing with CHEZ 106. When CHEZ was sold to Rogers Radio in 1999, it was the last major independent radio station in Canada. The University of Ottawa's campus and community radio station CHUO FM 89.1 operating since 1984 on campus, moved to the FM dial in 1991.



**Bryan Adams, 2004**

© photo Jean-Marc Carisse



**Daniel Lanois, 2003**

© photo Jean-Marc Carisse



# The 2000s

The 2000s saw a dramatic shift in Ottawa's music scene. Electronic music and DJs have replaced bands in many of Ottawa's venues. Barrymore's no longer hosts live concerts, instead concentrating on DJ nights. Zaphod's also features DJs at the end of each night, but continues to focus on live music, having recently celebrated its twentieth year of operation in the ByWard Market. Venues in Hull and along the Alymer Road, which were once so prominent, have disappeared.

A number of clubs have closed, including Rasputin's, Ottawa's home for folk music. The lack of venues is pushing smaller acts back into unconventional spaces, with folk and punk shows alike moving in some cases back to community centres, legion halls, and people's houses. Other venues are outside the City in towns like Wakefield and Burnstown.

Ottawa Bluesfest continues to grow becoming the largest blues festival in Canada and second largest in North America drawing over 300,000 fans to Lebreton Flats each summer. Both the Jazzfest and Folkfest are also presenting strong lineups making Ottawa known as a festival destination. The festivals book many local acts to perform each year.

The Coliseum and parts of Frank Clair Stadium were demolished in 2012 to make way for a revitalized Lansdowne Park and Civic Centre. The Central Canada Exhibition, whose grandstand series had long been in decline, held its last fair at Lansdowne Park in 2010. The park's final major concert, in 2005, featured The Rolling Stones and drew a record 43,000 to Frank Clair Stadium. The Stones would also record their video "Streets of Love" at Zaphod's while here. They had last been in Ottawa in 40 years earlier, in 1965.

There is still a demand for new live music venues. In 2009 the Shenkman Arts Centre opened, joining CentrepoinTE Theatre as dedicated city-run performance spaces . The Chaudiere, meanwhile, was revived for one night, hosting a reunion of Ottawa's seminal early Rock and Roll bands in 2012.



**Ian Tamblyn and Fred Guignon, Elmdale House Tavern, 2010**

Jake Morrison



**Silent Order, Kent House, 2013**

Darryl Reid



**Amanda Rheume, St. Brigid's  
Centre for the Arts, 2012**  
Benoit Aubry



**Rolling Stones, 2005**  
© photo Jean-Marc Carisse



**The Flaps, Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2007**  
Emily Chen



### **Bluesfest, circa 2013**

Live 88.5, Hot 89.9 and DAWG FM joined the crowded FM dial. Live 88.5 now hosts the Big Money Shot contest with local bands playing live shows to win recording time in the studio, and has awarded over \$3,000,000 to Canadian artists, including up and coming local band Hollerado.

Ottawa continues to produce great musical talent with the support of local radio, club owners and promoters. Local guitarist Dan Kanter is now the musical director and lead guitarist for Justin Bieber. Keshia Chante was signed by the age of 13 and has won a Juno for R&B/Soul Recording of the Year. Kathleen Edwards, is one of Ottawa's favourite musicians, a singer-songwriter who has been playing and honing her trade for more than 20 years. And many people are saying that Ottawa's scene is entering its golden age.

Who will be Ottawa's next big thing?

# Ottawa Rocks!

Ottawa's music scene, like the City, is continuously changing. The bands, the people, the sounds and the venues are different from one generation to the next. What is constant is the excitement from seeing live music in a small club or with 20,000 other fans.

Get out there and support local music and promoters. And while you are at it, explore the sounds of Ottawa's past. Ottawa has a rich music history.

"... little clubs, halls, gymnasiums. Those are the places where you find out what you are made of. You don't make it right out of the box – nobody ever does. You really need all that experience before you become something."

– Paul Anka



**Paul Anka and Pierrette Dupont Pye (with guitar), Fairmount Club, 1956**  
© photo Jean-Marc Carisse



Keith Richards, Auditorium, 1964  
John Rowlands

# Acknowledgments

The City of Ottawa Archives would like to personally thank the more than sixty musicians, radio personalities, writers, promoters, club owners, booking agents, researchers and fans who contributed to *Ottawa Rocks!* Thank you for making Ottawa's music and wanting to share it, promote it and preserve it. Your guidance, interviews, contacts, and donations and loans of archival material and artefacts to the project are greatly appreciated.

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