

HARVEY'S LAKE HISTORY

Hanson's Dances



Introduction

The Lake and other ballroom venues in the Wyoming Valley were energetic magnets for evolving musical styles in the twentieth century. The Oneonta and Sunset Pavilions (at Sunset) belonged to the jazz age. Similar settings, especially Fernbrook Park in Dallas, saw the great dance bands of the 1930s and 40s.

Three decades after the “dance band” era had entranced the Nation, a new musical craze, rock and roll, breathed new life in the Lake’s amusement centers. Local musical talents providing weekend retreats for teenage crowds, were stationed at area parks, including Hanson’s Amusement Park. From the early 1960s to the early 1970s, dances featuring local and national talent were regularly held in the second-floor dance hall above the restaurant.

A weekend dance at Hanson’s could draw two thousand people to enjoy emerging national talent which included Bobby Goldsboro, Chubby Checker and the McKays. The dark hall, built to serve the musical dreams of much earlier youth, jumped to the raucous beat of a stimulating but uncertain generation, many of whom lost themselves to the wonderfully deafening music.

Many others milled along the outside of the dance floor searching for fun and sometimes a little trouble. Hanson’s dances were able to draw considerable local talent from the Wyoming Valley; the most popular area attractions were Joe Nardone and the All Stars, and Eddie Day with both the Starfires and TNT.

Part I: The 1960s

In the 1960s the dance nights at the Lake were owned by Eddie Day and the Starfires. The group was originally formed by junior high school friends Richard Grumbravich (drummer) and Rodger Griffith (bassist). The Back Mountain team was later joined by other young musicians including Bob Gardner (saxophone); Howard Dymond (piano); Freddie Kirkendall (guitar); and Charlie McCuen (vocalist). In their college years Eddie Day Pashinski joined as vocalist and John Hall replaced Kirkendall (later Richard Rodieger replaced Hall).

The Starfires played throughout the Wyoming Valley including the Spinning Wheel (which closed December 24, 2007); the Starfire Ballroom (once the old Grant Market, South Main St., Wilkes-Barre), and, of course at Hanson's. At Hanson's the Starfires joined rising musical stars of the 1960s in special nights which never quite left the 60s generation and would emerge again in the 1980s. National talents like Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, Bobby Goldsboro, Gary Bonds, Freddie Cannon, Patti and the Emblems and the British group, the McKay's, appeared at the park.

Bobby Goldsboro originally played guitar for Roy Orbison. He began his solo career in 1964 with 9 Top 40 hits in the 1960s. He appeared at Hanson's on June 12, 1964, for years before "Honey," a No. 1 hit in 1968. He later hosted his own TV variety series in 1973-75, moved into country music in the 1980s, and currently he produces children's entertainment.



Photo Courtesy of Shirely Hanson

The Rock and Roll Allstars from left to right: Leo "Lefty" Harkins, Bill Brown, Joe Nardone, Ray Nataitis, Jim Shatter

Chubby Checker appeared with the Starfires on July 15, 1966. His No. 1 1960 hit The Twist has become an American iconic musical image. He was paid \$1,000., rather steep at the time for his Hanson's appearance. Born Ernest Evans in South Philadelphia his Twist created "dancing apart from the beat" with "The Jerk", "The Hully Gully", "The Fly", "The Pony" and others. Despite the novelty Checker continues to perform more than 45 years after his initial hit record. The Starfires appeared with the McKoys on August

17, 1966, who were composed of brothers Rick Zehringer A/K/A Derringer (guitarist) and Randy Zehringer (drums) with Randy Jo Hobbs (bassist); Sean Michaels (saxophone); and Ronnie Brandon (keyboard). They were best known for the October 1965 No. 1 hit "Hang On Sloopy." In the 1970s the Zehringer brothers and Hobbs joined the Johnny Winter rock band. Hobbs died in 1993. The McKays made their last album in 2003.



Later in the 1960s Eddie Day formed his own band, the Night Timers, playing at the Kunkle Fire Hall (once a school), but later as the Eddie Day Groop at Sandy Beach. By 1967 it was Eddie Day and TNT. In 1973 Sandy Beach was closed and the band was regularly at the CYC, Wilkes-Barre. Day left active performing in 1982. During his years of performing he was also on the faculty of Nanticoke Area High School as music teacher and choral director. Eddie Day would return to performing with the R.P.M. Old Stars and his All Stars at revived Hanson Dances in 1988-91. In 2005, Eddie Day Pashinski was elected State Representative from the Wilkes-Barre area.

But Hanson's did not feature exclusively rock dances. There were other talented musical artists at the park certain evenings or in the bar/dining room. Tex Valen was a gifted country artist who regularly appeared at the park.

The dances at the Lake in the 1960s were also identified with Joe Nardone and the All Starts. Joe Nardone began his music career while still a student at Coughlin High School. His group was originally called the Four Stars and played at the CYC, Wilkes-Barre. Graduating from Coughlin in 1955 Nardone attended the Wyoming Seminary Business School. In 1957 the band was renamed the All Stars. The area's earliest "rock and roll" band the All Stars began playing at the CYC, Wilkes-Barre, in 1957 and the city's Granada Ballroom in 1960, but they



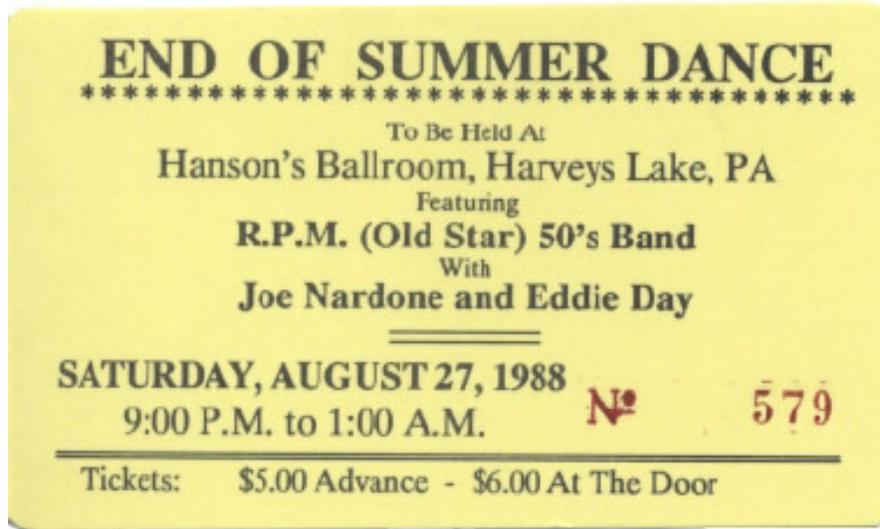
Tex Valen

were most identified with Sans Souci amusement park and opened for concert tours by Danny and the Juniors, Gary Puckett and the Union Gap – and Neil Diamond in 1966. Diamond appeared at Sans Souci five times between 1966-69.

While Nardone's All Stars played for 12 years at Sans Souci, the band also played at the Lake at both Hanson's and Sandy Beach and at the Stardust Ballroom, later named the Naked Grape, on East Market Street near Public Square. Joe Nardone and the All Stars disbanded in 1974. He founded a successful chain of music stores in 1960 and later was a local concert promoter for stars like Barry Manilow, Kiss, Billy Joel and Chicago. In the late 1980s Nardone and the All Stars regrouped for area concerts and he continues to perform with the All Stars annually at the Irem Temple Country Club.



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Part II: The 1980s Revivals

In the late 1980s the Baby Boom generation, two decades after the Hanson's dances of the 1960s, embraced a series of reunion dances at the park. On June 25, 1988, a "blast from the past" publicized as a "Happening on the Lake" featured the R.P.M. Old Stars and the Anzalone Brothers. The brothers Attorney James Anzalone and Dr. Ang Anzalone, were a folk duo who in their pre-teens were talented singers performing at Catskill resorts. As the Nolen Brothers at Penn State in State College, where they attended college, they continued to perform at fraternity houses, town pubs, and on Penn State radio. Years later they had a well-received reunion performance in November 1985 at the Wyoming Valley Mall.

The R.P.M. Old Stars were successfully reviving the rock memories for an appreciative generation with dance roots at the Lake and other venues from an earlier era. The group consisted of Bob Gryzniec (vocal/bass player); Frank Hourigan, Jr. (drummer/backing vocalist); Andrea Petroski (vocalist); Bill Brown (vocalist); Rick Blum (keyboard/backing vocalist); Tom Cavanaugh (guitarist/backing vocalist); and Dale Hawk (saxophonist).

Nearly 1,000 dance fans crowded into the old dance hall in late June 1988 which prompted Dance Party II on July 23, 1988, with a return engagement of the Old Stars and the Anzalone Brothers – but now joined by Eddie Day as an added vocalist. Old Stars Bob Gryzniec also would join the Anzalone Brothers for a trio performance. Day had last performed in 1982, generally at the CYC, Wilkes-Barre, with TNT.

Again, the July 1988 concert renewed Hanson's as a major Valley dance venue and the area's "last ballroom." On Saturday, August 27, 1988, an "End of Summer Dance," was held at the park with the R.P.M. Old Stars, Eddie Day, and saxophonist Joe Nardone as special guest.



On August 30, 1988, Debby Higgins, for the Citizens' Voice, shared her memories of this special Saturday night:

In the immortal words of the Drifters, you know, save the last dance for me, it seems Hanson's did just that with Saturday's "End of Summer" trip back in time to the good old days of rock and roll.

The old ballroom sagged with the weight of the many, many people who came to hear Nardone, Day and the R.P.M. Old Stars play that good, old-time rock and roll.

And play and sing they did-for Saturday's crowd was the largest of any that attended the three dances held this summer.

For those who are rapidly approaching middle age, the dance provided a change to enjoy something that was tailor-made for the 30 to 45 and older age group. Nardone was great. He sang and played the sax like it was 1968. Nothing had changed. Day was also up to his usual standard of being terrific. And the Old Stars did what they have proved they can still do better than any other rock and roll band of their era. It was a night made for dancing and reliving the good times.

At this reincarnation of those long-forgotten meccas for the young, Joe Nardone and Eddie Day not only played and sang the songs the crowd came to hear, they also took the crowd back in time when life was simpler and being young was the best age to be. We probably forgot how much fun it used to be until Bruce Hanson and the Old Stars revived dances at the Lake this summer.

Thank You, Eddie, Joe and the Old Stars. Your performances were history in the making. Here's hoping the "last dance" really wasn't. Give us "older" folks a chance to have some fun again. We like you and it's evident you like us. Let's do the whole thing over and over again.

In June 1989 the Hanson dances continued through several weekends including reappearances by Eddie Day and Joe Nardone on July 18 and August 19.

The Times Leader's Dawn Shurmaitis shared her thoughts on the dance revivals in a June 11, 1989, issue of the newspaper:

Heaven.

For thousands of teenagers growing up in the Wyoming Valley in 1963, you couldn't get much higher than Hanson's Ballroom on a Saturday night. John F. Kennedy was president, beer was the drug of choice and dancing was to die.

Hot summer nights meant driving out to Harvey's Lake in the family car to twist the night away to the sounds of Dion, Del Shannon and Sam the Sham.

For many, the good times at Hanson's were among the best times of their lives.

Well, the 60's may be gone, but the good times are back. Rock 'n' roll has returned to Hanson's Ballroom.

The Times-Leader article also carried the memories of Shirley Hanson, owner of the park and Joe Nardone:

Shirley Hanson was a young wife with a 1-year-old daughter when Chubby Checker rocked the hall. She says he took one look at little Donna, who's now 25, and "fell in love." "He was such a nice guy," Shirley Hanson recalls, thinking back more than 20 years to "the good old days."

"There were kids all over the place back then. We had the amusement park, the beach, the boat rides." The Hansons say they're considering holding a dance strictly for teenagers later in the summer. Today, they say, there's really no place for teenagers to go and have a good time.

"Kids these days just don't know the fun we had," she says. "It's such a shame." Despite the sizable crowds, Shirley Hanson says there was rarely any trouble at the dances. The Kingston kids might razz the Dallas kids, or someone might eye someone else's girl, but that's about as bad as it got.

In those days, grass was still something your dad cut on Saturdays. Coke cost 25 cents and came in a bottle.

Say Joe Nardone: "It was good, clean



Joe Nardone and Eddie Day

fun, a real good time. The worse thing that ever happened was someone snuck a bottle of beer into the dance hall.”

“There was no dope back then, no drugs.”

Nardone’s five-piece band played rock ‘n’ roll tunes popularized by such stars of the day as Cannibal and the Headhunters, Dion and Bobby Vee.

The band wore peg-leg pants tapered at the ankle, and casual T-shirts. Later on, as the ‘60s progressed, the players graduated to bellbottoms.

Remnants of those days are still evident at the ballroom. Green and orange day-glow flowers, throwbacks to the psychedelic ‘60s, remain tacked to the walls. Mirrors and strobe lights, as well as a “LOVE” sign, hang from the ceiling. The ballroom, which measures 150 by 50 feet, has retained its original oak floorboards, and the bandstand still faces the lake. From their vantage point on stage, players could see the lights from the speedboats cruising by.

For Nardone, the best part of Hanson’s was the setting. Open windows framing Harvey’s Lake line the far wall, inviting cool breezes and moonlight to drift inside.

“It was magic.”

Hanson’s Dance Hall in 2002.

A fear that the historic dance hall at Hanson’s would soon be razed did not materialize (it still stands in early 2008). The R.P.M. Old Stars began a new series of dances on June 16, 1990, and Joe Nardone with Eddie Day appeared again on August 18, 1991. Nardone was always a crowd-pleaser with Rare Earth’s “Get Ready,” “Shake a Hand,” and especially Dion’s “Runaround Sue.”

“Rock Back to the Future” was the lead into July 27, 1991, Lake season with Eddie Day and the Dayettes (daughters Amy, Lori, and Mandy) and the New York Times Band. NYT was a very talented group who could equal the Motown sound but also excelled at classic rock.

Following the theme of reunion dances in 1989 and 1990 with now-regular Joe Nardone, a “Quake at the Lake—Part III” was held on August 10, 1991, with Joe Nardone and the R.P.M. Old Stars. Bill Brown, vocalist, who appeared with Nardone in the 1960s, was returning after an absence in 1989-90. With R.P.M. was Charlie Flannery (bass/vocals) and Tony Rasimus, co-vocalist with Andrea Petroski.



Hanson’s Ballroom, January 2002

As Nardone noted at the time:

“We want everyone to come out and have a good time, to relive the memories and keep the tradition of Hanson’s alive. No matter what a person’s profession, the lake dances have a way of eliminating barriers. I don’t care if your doctor, a lawyer or a construction worker. The lake dances tend to unify people from all walks of life who attend these dances with one goal in mind – to have a good time dancing, sing-

ing and reminiscing. It's too bad rock and roll can't be used to unify the world. But, no matter how you look at it, rock music is a powerful force."

The last major musical extravaganza, before the advent of the BudLite Amphitheatre, was a three-day Labor Day event in 1991 which was also the 100th anniversary of the park. On August 31 the evening was dedicated to polka music with Jersey Polka Richie. Saturday night featured Eddie Day, the Dayettes, and the New York Times Band and Billie Brown. Sunday had 10 hours of music with 10 performances including Charles Hivera, Freefall, George Wesley and Iretations, Strawberry Jam and the Village Idiots.

The Amphitheatre concerts cover the 1992-1998 period although the Harvey's Lake Lions Club held an annual fundraising dance event at the Hanson's ballroom beginning in 1994 and concluding with Which Doctor (with guest Eddie Day) on August 10, 2002.

THE HARVEYS LAKE FIRE COMPANY
PRESENTS

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