

Cat music...

Landing on their feet

Jolanta Morowicz

Let's go

Come on baby, let's go
Keep a rockin' and a boppin'
And a moving with my baby
Let's go...

And that's exactly what the Bopcats did last Friday, March 20 at the El Mocambo. The Toronto rockabilly band simply went from fast to faster and swept the audience along with them. Their infectiously happy and energetic music resulted in frenzied dancing on the tiny and intimate floor of "the good ol' Mocambo."

The Bopcats began their first set at 11 p.m. with the slow but suggestive number "Let's go". After that first moment of preparation, the speed demon-like, incessant energy of the Bopcats took over. The crowd began dancing immediately and did not stop until the last note faded away. During two wildly exciting 50-minute sets they went from fast number like "Jump Cats" and "High School Bop" to slower seductive songs like "Don't Say You're Sorry", showing what rockabilly is and how to feel it.

Visually they provided a picture of interesting contrasts. Lead singer Sonny Baker is the focal point of the group with his insatiable appetite for fast movement, expertise with the eyeliner and colourful wardrobe (not to forget his incredible vocal chords!). He doesn't stop moving, exuding energy and sex appeal, and giving himself to the crowd with reckless abandon.

Duane Wayne plays guitar with joyous speed, and entertains by doing splits in the air during not-so-quieter moments.

Drummer Teddy Fury, attacks the skins with a happy fury, endangering the downfall of his elaborately arranged pompadour (otherwise known as "The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire").

Cam Marshman plays the bass with quiet authority and assurance.

The Bopcats—a frantic fusion of the 1950s with the 1980s.

After a recent show Fury and Wayne discussed their music and aspirations. Fury, an irrepressible character with a quick wit and interests ranging from *Star Trek* to the music of the Ramones talked about the formation of The



June Dueck

Sonny Baker spits ping-pong ball.

Bopcats a year and a half ago:

"Duane, Sonny and I were drinking buddies who loved to listen to Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent and Carl Perkins. We loved rockabilly music so we decided to play it. We put an ad in the *Toronto Star*—'Rockabilly band needs a bass'—and the Bopcats were born."

Fury doesn't consider the band a copy of the fifties rockabilly movement. "We are influenced by rockabilly but we are originals and not mere copies," he says. "Sixty per cent of our material is original. Besides, you can never copy rockabilly music effectively because it is best in its original form. Singers like Robert Gordon brought rockabilly to people's attention and revitalized the interest in this type of music."

"We love playing rockabilly and will continue playing it regardless of changing music trends because we believe in what we are doing and enjoy ourselves thoroughly doing what we believe in."

Adds Fury with a ready smile: "You don't really have to know rockabilly to love it. The audience enjoys our energy without necessarily being rockabilly fans. Our audiences vary from new wave fans to lawyers. We want to keep up that kind of energy forever. Audiences inspire us, especially in small clubs. The message in our music is "no message"—rockabilly is fun music, not a vehicle for political propaganda."

Wayne, the soft-spoken guitar

roll is basically here to entertain people, to make them enjoy themselves and there is nothing wrong in just having fun—rock and roll lasted for decades without musicians trying to be politicians.

Rockabilly is *cat music*, a mixture of country, blues and rock and roll popularized by such people as Elvis Presley who at first was billed as the *hillbilly cat*. It has lasted for 28 years and always will have appeal."

Fury and Wayne emphasize that the Toronto music scene is quite varied. However they would like to see more local rockabilly bands in order to expand the limited appeal that rockabilly has at the present time.

When asked how members of the band feel about Sonny Baker's dominating presence on stage, Duane laughed and said:

"Sonny's flamboyance and flair for the dramatic come naturally to him. He is an extension of himself on stage. Because he doesn't play an instrument, he reacts to the band. His job is to spark the energy in the audience and insinuate the sexual undertone of rock and roll. Basically we have a 'band mentality' with Sonny's charisma and smooth control helping the band to communicate rockabilly wildness to the crowd."

The Bopcats are working on their first album, still untitled, and due to be released in about seven weeks. The album will contain a number of original tunes as well as some reworked older songs such as the great Jackie Edwards' tune "Please Give Me Somethin'".

Hopefully, their excellent performance live will make a smooth transition to a listening medium. They hope the band will expand their audience and boost rockabilly music. In fact 'rockabilly' and 'Bopcats' are interchangeable terms.

The words of an old Tiny Bradshaw tune provide a suitable conclusion:

"I caught a train, I met a dame,
She was a hipster, from New York City

And we tracked on down that old fair lane

With a Heave, and a Ho;

Well, I just couldn't let her go."

The train kept a-rollin' all night long.

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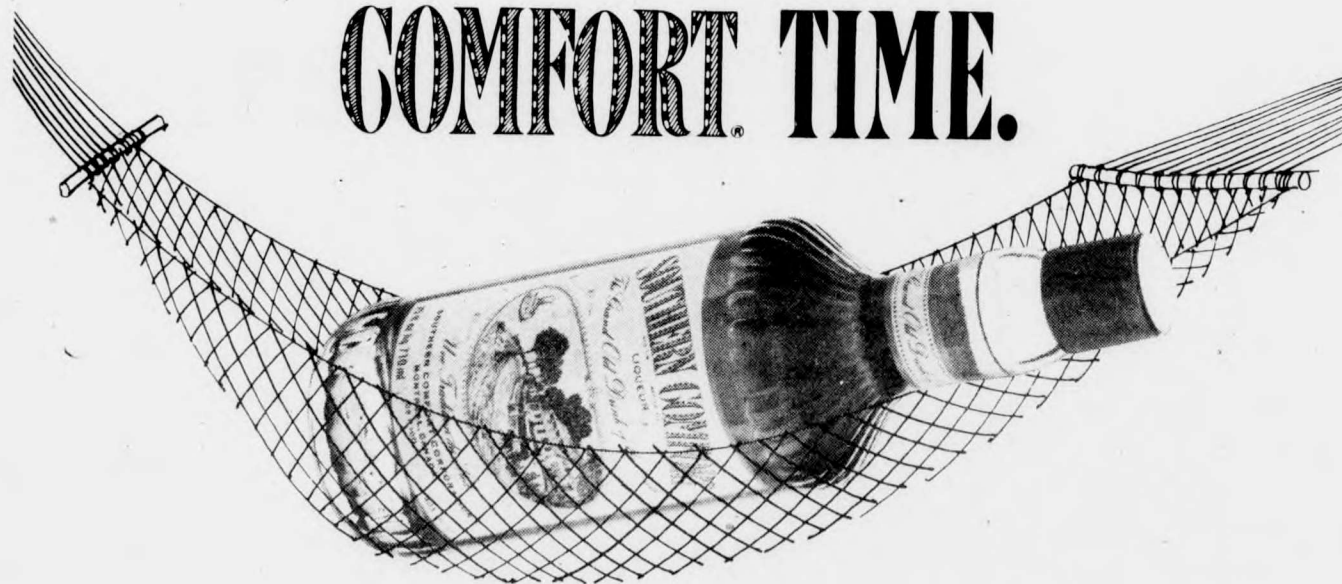
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