ENDLESSLY GROOVIN'

"The Rascals are all nerve, soul and viscera. They possess all the mood and message of a revival, the energy and sounds of the city and the rhythms of a bluesjoint." — Constance Tegge, DETROIT NEWS, 1969

IN MAY 1997, The Rascals —alternately known as The Young Rascals— were welcomed into the prestigious Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. During a ceremony that included the induction of such luminaries as The Jackson 5, The Bee Gees and Crosby, Stills & Nash, one highlight stood apart from the rest: a poignant reunion of all the original Rascals, who last shared a stage together 28 years ago.

The group spun apart in 1970 after an impressive five-year reign atop the charts, turning out one hit after another for Atlantic Records. In 1965, The Rascals were signed as the company's hot prospect for a "crossover" act, one that would find mass appeal with audiences regardless of color. From the beginning, Atlantic ceded creative control over all the group's recordings to the members themselves and provided The Rascals with unlimited time in the studio to experiment, an unprecedented gesture of corporate confidence. Within months, the group demonstrated such a Midas Touch with both albums and Top 40 singles that any reservations about the label's gamble quickly evaporated.

Now all the groundbreaking achievements of these four gifted and disparate founding members are available under one cover for the first time. As these recordings readily attest, the breadth of The Rascals' vision and the magnitude of their accomplishment can still stagger anyone with ears to listen. Sure, they were an instant sensation. But echoes of that overnight success still ring in the ears of Rascals acolytes across the globe. Critics and devotees alike continue to pay homage to the group, leaning on that shopworn "blue eyed soul" catchphrase to describe their raw, R&B-inspired sound. And Atlantic's gamble paid off too, earning dividends far beyond mere profits for the band or the record company. The Rascals marked the label's first tentative foray into the rock group market. In short order, the Atlantic family grew to include Cream, Buffalo Springfield, Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones, as well as soul legends Aretha Franklin and Otis Redding.

Thirty years on, the passage of time has diminished neither the brilliance of these tracks nor their architects: Felix Cavaliere (keyboards, vocals), Eddie Brigati (vocals, percussion), Gene Cornish (guitars) and Dino Danelli (drums).

The Rascals' best work meets the most rigid standards of timelessness. These are tunes cherished and continually covered by other artists, records that pop up on radio playlists and film soundtracks to this day. And when the hits are heard here in context with the album cuts surrounding them, even the most overexposed tracks sound as fresh, as raucous and as buoyant as the day they were recorded.

Their music may have been forged in the simmering street sounds of the day, but years on the stage and in the studio smoothed those edges and allowed them to construct some of the most enduring melodies in pop's grand pantheon. On disc, they melded a cornucopia of diverging influences into a shimmering whole. Their recorded legacy includes a treasure trove of memorable singles: "Good Lovin'," "Lonely Too Long," "Groovin'," "A Girl Like You," "How Can I Be Sure," "A Beautiful Morning" and "People Got To Be Free." After starting out as four musicians who had each fronted his own band, The Rascals proved just how much greater the whole can be than the sum of its parts.

Each of them had one thing in common long before they met: a love for music delivered with equal doses of passion and precision. "For me, the moment of discovering music was seeing a jazz show on television," Dino Danelli recalled sometime later, "and it was a drum battle between Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa. I was in my house getting ready to go out, and this music and these drums came on, and it just blew me away. Once I heard jazz, I didn't want to hear anything else. I stopped listening to rock 'n' roll, and just started learning jazz music. When I used to go to sleep at night, I would put on a jazz record and the needle would pick up and go back to the beginning of the album over and over again."

Danelli took the train into New York, and even though underage, hung out in front of the big glass window at The Metropole as Krupa's band played inside, sometimes until 4 a.m. While Dino peered through that window like a hungry pup in front of a butcher shop, Eddie and Gene were busy soaking up every influence to seep up the street grates of the East Coast — doo-wop, R&B and early rock'n' roll — and were entranced by everything they heard.

Felix received formal keyboard instruction as a youngster that took a sharp turn the moment he first heard Ray Charles. "In the beginning," he says, "my Mom insisted I had a classical education. I wanted to be a producer because of Phil Spector, I wanted to be a singer because of Marvin Gaye, I wanted to be a keyboard player because of Ray Charles, and I wanted to be an organist because of Jimmy Smith."

Another early inspiration, according to Cavaliere, came from a New Rochelle club, "a black club, where I heard The Mighty Cravers. I had never heard anything like that big organ sound. I couldn't have been any more than 16, and it sounded like an orchestra to me, completely unbelievable. I used to go to the city to Macys, where they had a Hammond organ on display. There was a guy there who used to let me sit and fool around on it, even though he knew I could never afford one, because those things were something like $3,000."

Cavaliere soon formed a working band of his own, and, instead of the Hammond, he wound up with "something for about a third of the price. In 1964, I ran into Joey Dee And The Starliters [of "Peppermint Twist" fame] who

were appearing in the same resort I was working at, which is how I met Eddie's brother, David. I saw they were performing with a similar instrumental arrangement." The elder Brigati was already something of a local legend, and generously provided Eddie his first opportunity to sing on record, a backing vocalist appearance on Joey Dee's "What Kind Of Love Is This?" Around the same time, Eddie began sneaking into a local nightspot called The Choo Choo Club seeking to follow in his brother's footsteps. Somewhere in the maelstrom of the Starliters' constantly shifting roster and the bustling scene at The Choo Choo, each began an acquaintance with the other three. Top-flight players with overlapping tastes, all four members began to see their futures converge.

"I saw a little kid walk into the place. He didn't look old enough to go out of his house alone," Felix told pop journalist Don Paulson in 1967. "He used to walk into the club and no matter who was singing, get on the stage, and bury them with his voice. We made an impression on each other. He used to come around every once in a while, and I loved to play behind his singing. I told him that someday we were going to get together. "

In the days before Beatlemania, money came to professional musicians via one of two routes: gigs or studio work. For either, contact was essential. Felix had played with The Escorts, and met Danelli at The Metropole. Needing a drummer to back singer Sandy Scott on a series of Vegas dates, Cavaliere recommended Dino for the job. "Gene was working with The Unbeatables," as Felix recalled, "then that fell apart and he joined the house band of Joey Dee. And before I knew it, we were all in place."

Eddie picks up the story from there: "The three of us — Felix, Gene and myself — all became Starliters at a certain point. We said to ourselves, 'If Joey Dee's policy [of paying his musicians] with the Starliters was going to continue as it was, we would create our own group. We decided out of all the people we had access to, we liked each other. We mutually designed the idea that we could be a group. We waited for Dino to finish a job, picked him up and rehearsed about 25 songs at Felix's house. The next day, we started at The Choo Choo Club, three blocks from my house."

While many rockers invoke buzzwords like "democracy" to describe their group's inner workings, it's clear none of The Rascals would have settled for anything less. There was a mutual respect, even admiration, among all concerned. Eddie's assessment of Cornish was typical: "Gene was really talented", said Brigati. "He could have done anything. He played very well, he sang very well. He had is own group, The Unbeatables, who were successful in Puerto Rico. He had a good ear, a good idea of what was entertaining, and a good rounded perspective."

As Dino later recalled in an interview with ex-Springsteen sideman Max Weinberg, "We came up with the name Rascals at The Choo Choo Club. One night we were playing there and someone said, 'You ought to call the band The Little Rascals.' We said, 'Rascals, yeah.. well, why don't we dress up like rascals?' The group's Little Lord Fauntleroy outfits were inaugurated shortly thereafter. The band began its reign at the Choo Choo, and was discovered later that summer by promoter Sid Bernstein at The Barge, a floating nightclub in Westhampton, Long Island.

Between their street-smart approach and tripartite vocal acrobatics, some mistook the group as a marketing plot to to cash in on white America's newfound appetite for soul music. But for the Rascals, finding an audience was the

same kind of happy accident that finding their unique sound had been. They came off on record like three dozen crazed R&B fans cramming themselves into a VW Bug because their enthusiasm really was that combustible. Each one of them had something to say, and a very specific way in which to say it, and besides, no amount of wishing could have blessed Felix with a voice so soulful or granted him that uncanny knack for plucking instantly hummable melodies from thin air. There was no calculation, only guileless serendipity. And for as long as any of them could stand it, they got out of their own way and let that collision of fate and talent work its way with them.

Listen to the studied abandon that makes these tracks seem effortless. Years of playing and honing chops, stealing a lick here or a hook there let to the deft interplay among these personalities. It's evident from the outset, in the musical telepathy that allows Dino and Felix to play a kind of tag between the drums and organ as the band rips at breakneck speed through "Do You Feel It" and "Slow Down." It's there in Eddie's boundless energy as a vocalist, the kind that turns a simple harmony in "Lonely Too Long" or "A Girl Like You" into an urgent plea. And skittering through the dense underbrush of sound is Gene, his guitar lines wrapping around Felix's organ one moment and ricocheting off Dino's backbeat the next.

Ultimately, though, what The Rascals had over other bands of the day was not dexterity nor even those angelic voices. They simply had better instincts than almost anyone else in the business. The way they heard songs provided them with great material to cover, and more importantly, how to interpret what they were hearing. That meant not only playing, but the good sense to know when not to play. Empty space plays a big part in "In The Midnight Hour" and "Mustang Sally." The records actually sound more spacious because all the instruments are not constantly bashing away in competition with each other. In a decade of artistic excess, the Rascals were blessed with good taste, those Little Lord Fauntleroy outfits notwithstanding.

Certainly The Rascals knew they were more than a gimmick. A short poem by Eddie Brigati published in an early concert program states their mission succinctly:

> *"Once a force more stronger than any ever known united a small number of those who stood alone —*
> *No matter what their reasons, each one was more than sure — that together they would build a world*
> *in which they'd be secure."*

When the doors to Atlantic swung open for them, Gene recalls, "we were on cloud nine. We signed with Atlantic because they had their own studio and they had all the artists that we idolized, like Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett and Ray Charles, who was Felix's idol. Atlantic said 'We can offer you $15,000,' which was still a lot of money in those days. Their attitude was, 'Please come with us, because with The Rascals, we can become a major label.' And that struck us as a good commitment. They were a big label, but they were still hungry."

Eddie agrees: "We had full artistic creativity, that's what attracted us to Atlantic. Other companies were willing to give us more money, but didn't know quite how to treat these so-called street urchins. Atlantic gave us less money, but more freedom, and that was a major concession on their part." The members were barely out of their teens

when Atlantic released their debut single, "I Ain't Gonna Eat Out My Heart Anymore," a smoldering shout-down which climbed to #52 on Billboard's Hot 100 chart, mainly on The Rascals' reputation as a live act. The Rascals entered the television arena to promote the tune on NBC-TV's popular music showcase "Hullabaloo," then released a second single, "Good Lovin'," which darted to the top of the charts, bolstered by an appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show." It became their first million-seller.

Even today, many assume the song was composed by a bandmember. Not so, says Danelli. "Felix and I used to go to record store up in Harlem," the drummer told Weinberg, "and one day we came across "Good Lovin'," "Mustang Sally," which Wilson Pickett covered, and a few other records. We learned them and then changed them around so that they became our songs."

Gene remembers that "I Ain't Gonna Eat Out My Heart Anymore" was released just before the band went to L.A. for four weeks. "That's where we broke the attendance record at the Whisky A Go-Go," he says. "The single broke on the East Coast and they were playing us, but L.A. wasn't playing us yet. The West Coast didn't pick up on the single until after it started coming up the charts on the East Coast. Then it was picked up on the West Coast. So consequently, it never had concentrated airplay throughout the entire country all at one time."

With sales from the first record falling off, Atlantic was ready to try again. Gene left L.A. a week earlier than his bandmates to return home. He recalls the execs at Atlantic "wanted to put 'Good Lovin'" out as the next single. They found out I was in town and me wanted me to okay the mix. They brought me in, sat me down and played what they'd done with the track. In front of me is Arif Mardin, Tom Dowd, Jerry Wexler and Ahmet and Nesuhi Ertegun, five giants looking over me, saying, 'Do you approve it?' Well, what was I gonna say? I don't even remember hearing the fucking thing. I was so nervous, I said, 'Sounds alright to me.' I had to make a decision, so I let the judgment be theirs. When the boys came back and heard it on the radio, Felix and Dino were upset with me, but they understood I was under pressure." In retrospect, Cornish believes "Good Lovin'" is "one of the best-sounding records we ever made."

In March of 1966, Atlantic launched their first LP, 'The Young Rascals,' a rollicking assortment of just the sort of cover tunes that earned the band legions of fans at live shows up and down the East Coast. Check out the fiery take of "Slow Down" and Eddie's commanding vocals on "Baby, Let's Wait" as evidence that even though the band wasn't writing much yet, they were already a formidable performance act. Flushed with the triumph of "Good Lovin'" a mere four months after their signing, the band issued a second album, 'Collections,' which saw the group limiting R&B covers in favor of self-generated tracks penned mainly by Cavaliere and Brigati, with the inclusion of several no-frills pop tunes from Gene thrown in for good measure. Since the first LP had only one original (the rave-up "Do You Feel It?"), The Rascals clearly had melodic muscles they had yet to flex.

The band's first internally-composed single, "You Better Run" (#20 on Billboard's Top 40), secured them a modest hit, followed quickly by "Come On Up," a scorching rocker which remains today The Rascals Hit That Never Was. "'You Better Run' was just created on the spot," remembers Danelli. "Felix came into the studio with an idea, so we had just the skeleton of a melody, and it was kind of a march at the time. It didn't really have any

kind of a groove to it, but when we got to that section where he had a lyric, "you better run," it turned into a shuffle, and then Gene fell in. Eddie got the words together and the connection between us was just amazing. Tommy Dowd used to roll tape just in case something happened accidentally, and he got it all down on tape at that moment. It was just amazing how quickly it came together. That was actually one of the first, if not the first thing we created in the studio."

On the flipside of "You Better Run," the band offered up "Love Is A Beautiful Thing," another lost gem that found a second life on 'Time Peace/The Rascals' Greatest Hits' LP from 1968. Here, in less than three minutes, the bundled up energy of the band rushes out in a track that floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee. Eddie and Felix are everywhere, singing in tandem, harmony and unison, while Dino, Gene and that magnificent Hammond swoop and soar beneath them.

The song that finally established the band as a self-contained hit machine was next out of the box, "Lonely Too Long" (#16 Pop). "That song was our savior," Cavaliere recalls. "Before that, there was disgruntled talk in and out of the ranks, and thank God, it was a hit. In retrospect, "Good Lovin'" launched The Rascals, but it was "Lonely Too Long" that proved the band was more than a one-hit wonder.

Rock critic Dave Marsh singled out "Lonely Too Long" along with four other Rascals 45s for inclusion in his book. *The Heart Of Rock & Soul: The 1001 Greatest Singles Ever Made.* He wrote that "Holland-Dozier-Holland deserve royalties for the intro, but after Felix's organ comes in, The Rascals are on their own with one of the most distinctive performances in blue-eyed soul. The highlight, though, is Dino Danelli's drumming, which merges Benny Benjamin funk with Keith Moon power."

"You gotta remember, we weren't writers before that," Eddie later confided. "Our creative energy was being developed from that point on. Felix was the music major, and Uncle Ed here naturally was the gabber. So I did the lyrics and Felix did the music. I would be the detective and say, 'Tell me in one word what the song means to you,' and he would say, 'groovin'."

The band also had a number of secret weapons in the studio, among them Eddie's brother David, who helped provide the birdcalls for "Groovin'." In addition, there was Arif Mardin, the band's imaginative producer, and peerless studio bassist Chuck Rainey, who Gene recalls was brought to The Rascals by one of the band's many engineers, Chris Huston. Rainey believes it was a recommendation from the late sax great King Curtis that won him the gig. "Back in those days, Curtis was the A&R person at Atlantic," Rainey recalled, "and I left in his band in late '66 to start doing studio work. I thought Curtis was the greatest, and he thought a lot of me because I could read music. I met Arif through him, and Arif put me together with Felix, Dino, Eddie and Gene."

In retrospect says Rainey, "The Rascals were the best of the lot, a real white soul band. They were not some rock group that messed with R&B like the Stones or Mitch Ryder. Anybody who hadn't seen The Rascals would've thought they were a black band because of that church organ sound and the fact that they had a soul singer up

front. Felix had a knack for playing grooves that made him come off more 'black' — for lack of a better word — than 'white' in his approach. He was obviously listening to Dr. John, Richard Tee and Billy Preston, and it showed in his playing. Gene reminded me of Steve Cropper with a strong connection to that Memphis sound. Eddie was the one with the personality and ideas. Dino was simply one of the hottest players ever. He and I did a couple of sessions as studio players outside the band, and we did some outside gigs together, too. One year, we were at Club 55 all summer, playing jazz three days a week."

At the same time, the group began to depend more on albums to demonstrate the members' burgeoning composing talents. While the first two LPs were largely studio documents of The Rascals incendiary live sets, by 1967, the band started to augment their shared preferences for rock and R&B with more obscure bits of musical arcana. The first result of this adventurism was "Groovin'," another chart-topper which resonated particularly well with black R&B fans. "White people can have soul, too," mused Levi Stubbs, lead singer of Motown's The Four Tops. "It's stupid to think otherwise. Black, white...it's all the same music. You take singers like Felix. He's white, but blacks love him. Color doesn't mean anything. The Rascals were very popular among black people. In fact, I was a fan of theirs, too. I thought, 'Wow! These guys are right in the pocket!'"

"I think growing up in and around New York, so close to the ghetto and Harlem, allowed The Rascals to really absorb all the sounds that black musicians were making," says Steve Cropper, guitarist and songwriter with Booker T And The MGs. "That's why their music sounds so honest. They sounded the way they did because they grew up there and lived it. Like us, they were basically an R&B rhythm section, with the only difference being that they had an amazing pair of singers with Felix and Eddie."

All four members understood that their drawing power provided an opportunity to give back to a culture that had given them so much. "We were playing down south somewhere, I think, in Alabama," Eddie recalls, "and on the way to the concert for a soundcheck, we saw policemen with their dogs pulling black people out of line. We were shocked to death. So we went to the promoters and told them that we refused to play to a segregated audience. In a press conference before the concert, they asked us, 'Is it true you won't play unless your audience is half black?' And we said, 'Well, if that's the way you're gonna put it, yeah.' Now, there is no such thing as a completely half-black audience, but the point was, if it was segregated we weren't going to play to them, period."

Regardless of what the record company, the promoters or the locals thought, Eddie says it was only a matter of doing the right thing. "When you're in a hall and you've sold your tickets, and during intermission there's still 50 or 60 people outside who couldn't afford to get in, especially if there was room, what did we have to gain by leaving them out? We'd just find a way to open the door for them."

Cornish maintains that throughout their association, the band members believed their music belonged to anyone who cared to listen, black or white. "We were just white people playing good rhythm and blues," he reflects. "Back then, you just didn't hear about white people doing that too much, although it was happening all over. You had English groups like The Animals and The [Rolling] Stones. Here, it was us, The Righteous Brothers and Steve Cropper [of Booker T And The MGs]."

While the group did retain control over its recordings, Atlantic made its corporate presence known in which tracks should be singled out for radio release. Label leaders balked at issuing a 45 of "Groovin'," fearing the tune was too radical a departure for The Rascals' rock audience. Ultimately, the band was vindicated. "Groovin'" earned kudos as a perennial summer classic and became The Rascals' second Number One single. Steve Cropper recalls, "At the time, [producer] Tommy Dowd was staying with me in Memphis and a package came for him after he'd already returned to New York. This was before the days of FedEx. He called, and I told him he'd gotten some mail, and he said, "Oh, that's the new test pressing by The Rascals. Why don't you open it up and listen to it, and tell me what you think?" I put it on, and it turned out to be "Groovin'." I immediately thought 'man, that's going to be a smash.' And we liked it so much, we eventually recorded it ourselves, and it became a hit for Booker T And The MGs, too."

"I knew "Groovin'" was a hit recording it in the studio," The Rascals' session bassist Chuck Rainey remembers. "Half my life with the band was overdubs, with nobody there but me and Felix. They'd play me a track and say, 'We need a bass line here,' and what I remember is that it came out easily and felt very natural."

The Rascals used the 'Groovin" LP to push the envelope still further, incorporating more jazz-inflected tunes to augment two more substantial radio hits. One is Eddie's tour-de-force vocal showcase, "How Can I Be Sure," (#4 Pop), an accordion-laced romance that, from all accounts, took hours of recording time to perfect. In-studio contributions from Eddie's brother, David, added both depth and vitality to the band's three-part vocal arrangements. On the flipside, "I'm So Happy Now" gave Gene Cornish his first foothold in the singles market and revealed yet another facet of a band bursting at the seams with creative energy. With the release of "A Girl Like You" (#16 Pop), The Rascals presided over an embarrassment of riches. At the apex of their power and influence, they were a white-hot commercial juggernaut with the ability to strike gold nearly at will.

"We had traveled quite a ways from the initial sound of the band," Cavaliere later mused. "And there was always one magical ingredient in our favor: Arif Mardin. We had ideas for songs, and here was a guy who could really bring them to life. You want a song to sound like it's set in a French bistro? He could help you make that happen. It was like having a musical encyclopedia. He knew both strings and horns, and I was like a kid in a candy store with all of it. I'd had all this music latent in me for years and thanks to The Beatles, we weren't inhibited anymore. That was the most important thing they brought to our world. When Atlantic brought strings into some of those Drifters records, that was part of it, but in a limited way. Once The Beatles opened the doors with sitars and tape loops and concept albums, that really did it for us."

Work began in the fall of 1967 on a new LP, heavily influenced by the swirl of psychedelia that had crested with the release of 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' the previous June. Synthesizing the advances in recording technology and their own quirky sense of humor, The Rascals delivered a charging pop ditty of their own, "It's Wonderful" (#20 Pop). In a radio interview, Felix allowed, "Our sound would change as a result of the times. What was happening at that time or what we were listening to at that time."

The ensuing concept album, 'Once Upon A Dream,' was dedicated to "peace on Earth and good will toward man," replete with sitars, superstar session players and sound effect segues connecting the tracks. All the members were

charting new territory, paramount among them Danelli, whose sculpture graced the cover and subsequently won an award for graphic design. "It happened just at the beginning of the album art revolution," says the sculptor. "People in the art department at Atlantic loved it, and the Erteguns loved it because they were art freaks. But it was meant to represent the individual dreams of the members, Eddie with the house on his head ... everybody was represented, everybody's ideas and thoughts. I did represent myself, the little man in a cage, an artist who had no head with his hands on the bars."

The collection now stands as an aural collage of the psychedelic era's sights, sounds and sensory impulses. In "My Hawaii," Brigati offers up a paean to paradise awash in french horns and strings, and in "Rainy Day", the Cavaliere/Brigati songwriting team paints a picture of city life at its most seductive: "A perfect time for romance and you," Eddie intones. "Curtains of raindrops falling, people in doorways strolling, Strange faces brought together, chased in by stormy weather..." The Temptations would soon revisit these compelling images with "I Wish It Would Rain," and The Dramatics would take them to the bank with "In The Rain" nearly five years later.

The atmosphere was cooperative and generous, according to all present. David Brigati accepted an invitation to provide a lead vocal for "Finale: Once Upon A Dream." Meanwhile, Mardin and the others pieced together a mosaic of Indian and nursery sounds, Salvation Army brass and gibberish to lend the album its loosely connected structure, as if the band was inviting listeners into their private creative workshop. In "Singing The Blues Too Long," Felix pays direct homage to the supperclub soul of Ray Charles with such authenticity his voice seems wreathed in a smoky blue halo as he sings. The horns sputter a series of riffs while Gene and Dino lock the song down into a gut-bucket groove. Another smash single, "A Beautiful Morning" (#3 Pop) soon graced the airwaves, and later surfaced on their Number One —and platinum-selling— LP, 'Time Peace/The Rascals' Greatest Hits.' A mid-tempo springtime gambol, it was a perfect musical bookend to "Groovin'," and set the stage for the band's brightest and darkest days to come.

The most important —and the most successful— record of The Rascals' career followed. Born in the frightening aftermath of the murders of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the third multi-million seller, "People Got To Be Free" (#1 Pop), wrapped the hard truth of Eddie's call for equality in Cavaliere's most soulful melody.

This time, Atlantic was even more skittish. "'You can't put this record out,'" Cornish recalls the execs saying. "'Why not?' 'Because you're not black. You *are* free.' We said, 'Who's talking about just being black? We're talking about freedom of speech, artistic freedom, freedom of religion. People got to be free.'" Not long after, Felix told a reporter from *Cashbox*, "The Rascals have decided not to appear in any concert unless half the acts on the bill are black. We can't control the audience, but we can be sure the show is integrated. So from now on, half the acts will be white and half will be black, or we stay home."

The band continued in the spirit of its single with a double album called 'Freedom Suite.' Again, the Rascals wore their consciences on their sleeves in the most literal way. In "Me And My Friends," Gene weighed in on the

topic of brotherly love while the surging acoustic guitars around him built into a grand psychedelic hoedown. "I was so frustrated because I was looking for an angle to make my songs fit with Felix and Eddie's songs," Cornish said later. "So I had to go a different route. I went with the attitude we had in the beginning, where I did the pop rock songs and Felix and Eddie did the soul songs. That way we all had something to contribute."

A follow-up single, "A Ray Of Hope" (#24 Pop), extended the band's growing reputation as social activists, but began to alienate some devotees wearied by The Rascals' brand of evangelism. A third track chosen for radio, "Heaven" (#39 Pop), marked yet another stylistic departure for the group. For the first time, the band's message began to sound pretentious, obscured by too many horns and overdubs. It was also the second single in a row not to feature Eddie's contributions as lyricist.

Clearly The Rascals were challenging their fans to move past "Mustang Sally" and "In The Midnight Hour." In fact, one of the 'Freedom Suite' LP suites, titled "Music Music," offered three instrumentals that predated the fusion movement of the '70s by at least half a decade. The last of these cuts was "Cute," an elastic jam the group used to end their concerts long before "Good Lovin'" and "I Ain't Gonna Eat Out My Heart Anymore" topped the charts. When the group was in residence at venues like The Fillmore West, performers from The Mothers Of Invention, Vanilla Fudge and Iron Butterfly were often in the audience as The Rascals used "Cute" to create a musical scrapbook of their travels and influences. Those present to hear the jam played live swear that "Cute" was nothing less than a musical treasure map providing ideas that could have easily been appropriated for such famous free-for-alls as "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida" and the Fudge's take on "You Keep Me Hanging On." For the Rascals, it was just another day on the job. "I won't say we influenced those songs, or those bands," Danelli reflects now, "but it was a time when music was really opening up, and we were on the vanguard, putting Latin, pop, R&B, jazz and rock together years before almost anyone I can think of. And we did it without drugs, with only the rush of adrenaline and the buzz of each other's playing to push us further."

Unfortunately, they didn't get the track down on vinyl until 1969, and the studio version only hints at the directions their improvisations might lead on any given night.

The Rascals toured England a second time in 1969. There they met with George Harrison and attended recording sessions for The Rolling Stones' "Midnight Rambler." Europe proved to be a much-needed shot of adrenaline for the band, the guitarist says, because "everywhere we went, we had to prove ourselves because we were unknowns, and we'd always come back revitalized. The real Rascals were the early Rascals, before they became millionaires, organ, guitar and drums."

As the Beatles pared back the production excesses of 'Sgt. Pepper' to "Get Back," and The Rolling Stones abandoned 'Their Satanic Majesties Request' for "Brown Sugar," The Rascals were keeping pace. Their next single, "See" (#27 Pop), was a conscious effort to strip the band down to the original quartet and return to the hard-rocking style that had become their first calling card. *Cashbox* was quick to notice the change: "Brand new

Rascals, or is really the brand old Young Rascals vividly returned to life? Reaching back to their early rock roots, the Rascals have come up with their hardest, fastest, flashiest side in years."

Backing "See" was Gene's progressive "Away, Away." Despite critical acclaim, the single faltered. A few months later, Eddie's impassioned delivery of "Carry Me Back" (#26 Pop) should have nudged the group back into the mainstream, but proved to be their last appearance in the Top 40. The same can be said for "Hold On" (#51 Pop), which boasted an innovative drum track from Dino set into a rock-solid groove. With "Temptation's 'Bout To Get Me," The Rascals returned to their roots as a cover band, recasting the Knight Brothers' classic in the same mold as The Righteous Brothers' "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'," and providing a blueprint for The Delfonics' "Didn't I Blow Your Mind This Time" still to come. The album lingers in memory and on disc as a series of experiments in jazz and pop, a prime example being "Nubia." With its rolling bassline, percolating woodwinds and delicately intertwining vocal parts, the song exists in that limbo somewhere between It's A Beautiful Day's "White Bird" and "The Girl From Ipanema."

The Rascals' 'See' album shipped in late 1969, and was commended for all the usual reasons: attention to detail and impeccable musicianship. As Felix mused in an interview on WIBG radio shortly after the album's release, "As far as the main theme of the album, I was starting to get into meditation, and I was starting to '*See.*' My anger was getting a little tempered into a direction. For the most part, these songs are a result of my inner search. George Harrison more or less influenced me, because he was the first musician I could relate to who had decided to become a Yogi. I was getting into yoga, and the lyrics reflect this. 'See' is up, but there are a lot of things there that reflect the peace I was coming into."

But The Rascals had missed out on an important watershed: the Woodstock generation had just been born, and the band did not attend the christening. "During the Monterey Pop Festival [where Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and The Who were launched], we were at society function because it paid more money," Felix says with a sigh. "And it was something similar that kept us from Woodstock. He later added, "Cream and Hendrix were out, and a lot more emphasis was going onto the musical part of the group rather than the singing and lyrics. People wanted to hear musicians play."'

Danelli concurs. "When psychedelics started to happen, the music was changing and we weren't changing with it, and that's when the hits quit coming and that was the beginning of the end." To make matters worse, Cavaliere and Brigati had ceased writing as partners altogether, and managers began to whisper that none of them really needed the others. "It was like Sears and Roebuck having a fight," Cornish says ruefully, "and Sears saying, 'Well, let's close up shop.' You don't do that. We did it."

But The Rascals had too much heart to let go so easily. Tracks from 'Search And Nearness' reveal the band still had its winning ways with a melody, and remained masters at making the most of every production. While "Ready For Love," "I Believe" (#51 Pop) and "Glory Glory" (#58 Pop) don't actually break new ground for the band, they do make for a few enchanting moments on the radio, and a welcome respite from the prevailing guitar histrionics of the day.

As the LP approached completion, Eddie grew increasingly unhappy, disenchanted with the group's direction and management. "We originally became allies because we appreciated each other's music and trusted each other, and somehow that got separated," Eddie reflects. "Whether it was by money or success or pressure or outside forces, whatever. When we lost the belief in the equity of creativity, that was the beginning of the downfall of The Rascals. After that we kept going kind ofjust by momentum."

By the time "Glory Glory" was issued, Brigati's departure was imminent. The record company had broken faith, too, and declined an opportunity to match a competing offer from Columbia for the group's recording contract. The Rascals were released from Atlantic before 'Search And Nearness' could reach the stores. Although the group was snapped up by CBS almost immediately, the reshuffling effectively killed their LP, since Atlantic wasn't about to promote a band signed to its competition.

Before the first Columbia album —there were two, 1971's 'Peaceful World' and 'Island Of Real' in 1972— both Eddie and Gene were gone. There were still occasional flashes of brilliance, but as Danelli told Weinberg, the end really came with 'Search And Nearness.' "It started at the beginning of that album, and by the end, we had disintegrated totally."

Looking back, Cornish says that whatever tensions tore the group apart, he remains proud of its legacy. In an era of pre-fabricated groups and R&B imitators, The Rascals managed to make a lasting contribution through songs that have withstood the passage of 30 years time. "A lot of it does, you know. "A Beautiful Morning," things like that. But when you have young people making a lot of money it happens. A lot happened fast. We'd be playing at a place like The Phone Booth in New York City and have people like Paul McCartney telling us how much he loved our band. He wanted to sit next to us and talk. I guess we just found a way to play that really hit home, and we were the home boys, the Americans."

It's impossible now to access the importance of the group and their records outside the times in which they worked together. Would The Rascals have burned so brightly had their music had not been stoked by the fires of racial injustice in America during the 1960s, or did their presence help assuage tensions between blacks and whites? Considered only on the merits of their music, the Rascals best work remains alchemic, a magical combination of not just sounds, but people. Was the key in Eddie's pop sensibilities or Felix's voice and tunes? Could it have been their buoyant delivery, the one-man "Wall Of Sound" Felix laid down alongside Gene's slash-and-soothe hollow-body Gibson, or the way Dino executed his drum fills with the confidence of a military tactician? The Rascals encompass all of that, but something more, something else, something too elusive to be captured by anything as finite as words. Luckily, it's preserved here in the music, where succeeding generations can listen and look for their own superlatives.

Kevin Phinney / Joe Russo