

The Many Lives of the



by Tim Hills

The Many Lives of
the
Crystal Ballroom

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Front Cover Art: Lyle Hehn
Back Cover Photo: Troy Dockins
Interior & Cover Design: Candy Lafrenz
Editor: Jane Loftus

Printed by Accuprint, Gresham, Oregon

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Front Cover:

The lifeblood of the Crystal's first half-century (from left: Montrose Ringler, Dad Watson and Ralph Farrier) welcome the next life to their table of magic.

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CRYSTAL

- 1884 The van Fridaghs build a new home on the future site of the Crystal Ballroom.
- 1897 Montrose Ringler comes to Portland.
- 1914 Grand opening of Ringler's Cotillion Hall.
- 1915 Hal Webber relocates his Academy of Music to Cotillion Hall.
- 1920 The Webber Academy of Music leaves Cotillion Hall.
Ringler launches the *Blue Bird*.
- 1921 Ringler gives up Cotillion Hall and encounters troubles with the *Blue Bird*.
- 1923 Rudolph Valentino and his wife appear at the Cotillion and judge a dance contest.
- 1925 Dad Watson holds his first old-time dance at Belland's Hall.
- 1926 Henry Ford's old-time dance book, *Good Morning*, is published.
- 1928 Dad Watson relocates his old-time dance club to the Cotillion.
- 1933 Dad Watson leaves the Cotillion and the ballroom is sold to creditor L. Grace Vial.
- 1934 Ralph Farrier establishes the Portland Health Dancing Club at Cotillion Hall.
- 1944 Dad Watson dies at age 92.
- 1950 Farrier rechristens the 36-year-old hall as the Crystal Ballroom.
- 1959 Vial heirs sell the property to Carl Peters.
Dale Johnson and Robert Swanson take over management of the Crystal.
The first gypsy functions and rhythm & blues concerts are held at the Crystal.
- 1961 Ralph Farrier returns to the Crystal for the year.
- 1962 Sandy Sanders and Arnold Stadum re-establish ballroom dancing at the Crystal.
Carl Peters sells the Crystal to Mune Louie.
- 1963 Ralph Farrier dies just days after hosting the Crystal's New Year's Eve dance.
- 1965 Sandy Sanders and Arnold Stadum give up their lease to the Crystal.
- 1966 Whitey Davis relocates the Folksinger to SW 13th Avenue and Washington.
- 1967 Whitey Davis and Mike Magaurn secure a lease for the Crystal Ballroom.
- 1968 The Family Dog converts the Crystal into a new "Dog" franchise.
Gary Ewing becomes the Crystal's resident light show producer.
The city closes the Crystal.
- 1997 McMenamins reopens the Crystal Ballroom.

THE CRYSTAL BALLROOM'S BAND LIST

The Soul and R&B Years ♦ 1959–1965

NAME	DATE (if known)	NAME	DATE (if known)
Bobby "Blue" Bland		Little Junior Parker	
James Brown		Wilson Pickett	
The Coasters		Jimmy Reed	
The Drifters		Little Richard	
Little Eva		Ronnie Spector and Ronnettes	
Lowell Fulson		The Spinners	5/21/64
Marvin Gaye	5/21/64, etc.	The Temptations	
John Lee Hooker		Ike & Tina Turner Revue	4/5/65, etc.
The Impressions	7/11/65	Jr. Walker & the All Stars	5/17/65
Etta James		Mary Wells	
B.B. King		Jackie Wilson	
Garnett Mimms and the Enchanters			

Eighteen Months of Psychedelic Rock ♦ 1967–1968

NAME	DATE (if known)	NAME	DATE (if known)
The Amazing Charlatans	3/8–9/68	The Charles Lloyd Quartet	10/6/67
Eric Burdon		Country Joe (<i>without the Fish</i>)	10/13–14/67
Big Brother & the Holding Company		The Steve Miller Blues Band	
Blue Cheer	2/16–17/68	Moby Grape	
Buddy Guy	6/21–22/68	Quicksilver Messenger Service	2/2–3 and 3/1–2/68
Buffalo Springfield	3/22/67	Sopwith Camel	2/3–5/67
Electric Prunes	10/28/67	Strawberry Alarm Clock	
The Fish (<i>without Country Joe</i>)	11/18/67	Them (<i>without Van Morrison</i>)	10/17/67
The Fugs	5/3/68	The Junior Wells Band	5/24–25/68
Allen Ginsberg	5/21/67	The Junior Wells Band	5/31–6/1/68
The Grateful Dead	2/2–3/68	(<i>without lead guitarist Buddy Guy</i>)	
Chris Hillman		The Youngbloods	6/14–15/68
Kaleidoscope	5/3, 5/17–18, and 6/14–15/68	Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention	
B.B. King	12/3/67		

Caveat

Every effort has been made to ensure that this list is as complete and accurate as possible, but it is far from being definitive. It was compiled based on concert posters, newspaper reviews, and people's memories. Also, it includes only major bands (local performers are not identified). Feel free to make additions, deletions, and corrections, according to your own recollections!

THE CRYSTAL FORMS

In Portland, Oregon, a simple mention of the name “Crystal Ballroom” elicits big smiles and many stories. At the core of virtually every episode in the Crystal’s eight-decade experience is a dance floor, a band, and a group of people. Beyond this basic trio, though, is a tangle of first loves, police raids, hallucinogenic visions, visits by smoldering silent screen stars and Beat poets, narrow escapes from fire, demolition and neglect, and a listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

In fact, tales about the grand hall at SW 14th Avenue and Burnside cover such a broad range of topics and time periods that sometimes it is difficult to believe the same place is being described. One person recalls that the ornate ballroom opened in 1914, a time when Portland residents could be arrested for dancing. Someone else offers particulars about the years when “Dad” Watson staged his popular old-time dance revivals as a way to raise people’s spirits and provide social interaction during the Great Depression. With some coaxing, stories are told of African Americans’ formal dances at the Crystal, which, because of segregation, were as rare as they were special for this group. Other folks can regale you with romantic tales of how their dance partner at the Crystal eventually became their spouse. Certainly, someone will ask the question, was that really Jimi Hendrix whom Little Richard fired in the middle of a performance at the Crystal? Then, too, groups of people will undoubtedly try to formulate a definitive list of bands that played at the ballroom in the late ’60s: “The Grateful Dead. Yeah definitely, the Dead. Jerry and the boys played two shows. Steve Miller may have played during the Summer of Love—that would have been back when he was still singing the blues. Buffalo Springfield...yeah, I think they headlined at the Crystal. Jim Morrison and The Doors? No, wait, they played the Masonic Temple...”

“Oh, and hey,” a voice will pipe in. “What about Rudolph Valentino’s visit, and the dances of the Russian sailors, and the Gypsy Feasts of the Dead, and the elevator (man, did that thing ever work?)...and...and...and...?”

One experience that everybody remembers is being on the Crystal's "floating" floor. "Like dancing on clouds," is how several people described the sensation. At the time of its construction, the Crystal's mechanical dance floor was said to be the only one of its kind on the Pacific Coast. Today, it may be the only one left in the United States.

Another similarity among the multitude of Crystal experiences is a sense of belonging. The Crystal Ballroom has been a special place for many different groups—groups that wouldn't necessarily want to share the ballroom with one another because of their differences in age, tastes in music, politics, or social identity. But for distinct periods (and sometimes alternate nights of the same period) individual groups have considered the ballroom their own, and to each, the Crystal has provided a haven, a place to escape the drudgery, hardships, or prejudices of everyday life. The experiences of every group that has frequented SW 406 14th Avenue since the 1870s, seem to have been accentuated by a certain energy emanating from the site. The source of this energy may well be the property's location, a phenomenon social scientists call "the power of place."

LIVING IN THE MARGIN

The "place" was different from the start. Four decades before the Crystal Ballroom was even built, its lot at 406 SW 14th Avenue (now 1332 SW Burnside) would not conform to the city's standard. In 1873, wealthy merchant and landowner, Captain John H. Couch, created an addition to Portland, parceling his property that lay north of what is now West Burnside Street and that extended to the Willamette River. Compensating for the river's northwesterly bend, he oriented his subdivision on a slightly different angle than that of the established town. At one point where the old town and Couch's Addition were imperfectly joined—the area bounded by SW 14th and 13th avenues and Burnside and Washington streets—an irregular city block was formed. Its shape was elongated and adhered neither to the community's original plan nor to that of the new addition. In a sense, the lot existed in the margin, an isolated entity wedged between two uniform bodies, and perhaps, for this reason, it offered a unique vantage point or perspective.

The first people to occupy the special lot at SW 14th Avenue and Burnside were refugees of Germany's mid-19th-century revolution. Prosper van Fridagh and his wife, Elizabeth, had aided the rebel cause and escaped to the United

States. Their first home in this country had been in the Midwest, where they engaged in farming until devastating crop failures forced them to seek a more stable existence elsewhere. In 1861, just as the first battles of the American Civil War were being fought, the two German emigrants moved west to Portland. Their first eight years in the Rose City were spent building a successful dry goods business. Then, as a symbol of their prosperity, Prosper and Elizabeth indulged themselves with a new home in 1869. They chose the land surrounding SW 14th Avenue and Burnside as their new neighborhood. Four years later, when Couch's Addition was laid out, the van Fridaghs purchased from the Couch family the partial lot that adjoined their property. It was on this partial lot that the van Fridaghs built a new home in 1884 and where the Crystal Ballroom now stands.



The van Fridagh's neighborhood in 1903–1904, looking east. The two-story house at SW 14th Avenue and Burnside (immediately left of the “Owl Cigar” sign) was the home of Prosper and Elizabeth van Fridagh from 1884 to 1902, and marks the future site of Ringler's Cotillion Hall. The cigar advertisement was painted on the back of the short-lived, but beautiful Columbia Theatre at SW 14th and Washington.

OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, ORHI# 72958, AERIAL OF PORTLAND, CROP OF COLUMBIA THEATRE AREA.

During the last quarter of the 19th century, the van Fridaghs' two children, Paul and Hortense, grew up surrounded by wondrous and entertaining distractions. In addition to numerous other residences, several stables dotted the neighborhood, including the one belonging to Henry Weinhard's City Brewery. The brewery itself—with its constant bustle of delivery wagons and pungent smells of boiling hops and malted barley—operated just a block to the east. In the opposite direction a small stream, called Tanner Creek, flowed within two blocks of the van Fridagh home. Lining the banks of the creek were shanties of several Chinese residents and their expansive gardens. The neighborhood also included a Roman Catholic church, a coffee and spice mill, and even a medical dissecting building, all within just a few doors of the SW 14th Avenue and Burnside dwelling.

As the new century approached, the van Fridaghs' neighborhood changed. The Chinese shanties were replaced by more permanent residences, shops, and warehouses. Roads were improved and streetcar lines were installed. The house at SW 14th Avenue and Burnside was quickly being enveloped by a new commercial district within the expanding city. Still, there would always remain a unique, familial quality about the property that existed in the margin.

THE PSYCHEDELIC CRYSTAL

In 1966, on a break between sets at the Folksinger coffeehouse—a second-story, “one-room hideout” located at SW 13th Avenue and Washington—a motley group of young musicians called the P. H. Phactor Jug Band crawled onto the roof and into the adjoining Crystal Ballroom through an unlocked window. With their laughter reverberating around the otherwise silent, vacant hall, they dropped into one of the booths that surrounded the empty dance floor and lit up a joint. Nearby, a poster advertising an Ike and Tina Turner show had settled to the floor and accumulated a considerable covering of dust. Although the Crystal’s last soul show had been held just months earlier, that life was over. Now, the ballroom was about to reincarnate, amidst paisley, projected amorphous figures, and marijuana, as a bastion of psychedelia.

“It was so great and it went so quick,” Greg Kritzberg said of the Crystal’s eighteen-month psychedelic period. Kritzberg was one of many denizens of the ballroom from January 1967 to July 1968. Over a more than eighty-year existence, eighteen months equates to little more than a blink of an eye, yet, today, this is the best-remembered and most legendary of the Crystal Ballroom’s “past lives.” During this blue-flame period, the Crystal hosted the Grateful Dead, Country Joe & the Fish, the Fugs, and Buffalo Springfield, among other bands. It was a veritable “Fillmore Northwest.” Much more than just a stage for name bands, though, the Crystal of the late 1960s became an enclave for the city’s counter-culture.

Piecing together an objective, accurate history of the Crystal’s psychedelic period has been complicated by a dearth of written records and the fact that people’s memories reflect differing perspectives and sometimes differing states of awareness, not to mention the nearly thirty years that have passed since the events took place. Parke Puterbaugh encountered similar hurdles in documenting the Grateful Dead. “There is not a single definitive ‘history’ of the Grateful Dead,” he wrote in the *Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll*. “There are as many valid histories as there are fans...and as many perspectives on a given night’s performance as there are those on hand to witness it—not to



Buffalo Springfield, with Neil Young and Stephen Stills, played at the Crystal on March 22, 1967. This show was just one of the many performances given at the ballroom during an eighteen-month period in the late '60s, by bands now considered to have epitomized the counter-culture sound.

mention those on the periphery who couldn't get a ticket but were nonetheless part of the total experience. Factor in drugs and alcohol, plus all the myriad good and bad trips that attended the trek to the venue, and you've got multiple accounts of the same reality." Puterbaugh's insightful description also fits well

when applied to the Crystal Ballroom's "reality" of the late 1960s, and just as he celebrates the Grateful Dead story's various levels, the stories of the Crystal's experience during 1967 and 1968 are presented here, making connections with overlapping memories and known events wherever possible.

Beginning in the late 1950s, conflicting views over controversial issues—especially race relations, capitalistic philosophy, and, by the 1960s, the Vietnam War—were driving a wedge between parents and their children. In attempts to disassociate themselves from the established order, teens and young adults began to express their differences in many ways, including clothing, hair styles, music, and experimentation with drugs. Prior to 1966, indications of this defiant behavior in Portland were relatively minimal, but in certain pockets of the city a vital underground community existed. It was this subculture—a direct extension of San Francisco's coffeehouse Beat scene of the late 1950s—which produced the Crystal Ballroom's psychedelic incarnation of 1967.

Many Portland residents believed 1967 marked the origin of the city's counter-culture. In reality, a small, fringe community had thrived here for many years prior to that time. Long before the present espresso craze consumed the Pacific Northwest, coffeehouses formed the nucleus of Portland's underground. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, only the Portland Police—who monitored the activities of the fringe element—and someone in-the-know could tell you about the few hundred people who comprised the city's thriving alternative, literate, socially aware, communal population. Among their influences and muses were Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouak, Bob Dylan, Miles Davis, and old country blues musicians. While Portland's alternative scene was small, a former coffeehouse frequenter, Mary Alice Cheesman, said that it had close ties with the much larger Beat community in San Francisco. Because of this Bay-City connection, the hang-outs of Portland's underground were frequently visited by some of the best-known Beats. The most famous of Portland's fringe (anti-) establishments were Walter Cole's Caffe Espresso on SW 2nd and Paul Hebb's 13th Avenue Gallery in the city's Sellwood district. According to Cheesman, common fare included jazz and jug band performances, poetry recitations, and open mike evocations and diatribes. Not advertised in the city newspapers or on the radio, these events passed without most city residents knowing of their occurrence.

There was that one time, though—which Cheesman and others from the coffee house crowd recall with great amusement—when hundreds of

Portland's uninitiated got a sense (or more to the point, a sensory overload) of the underground experience. In 1960, posters advertising a free circus to be held at the 13th Avenue Gallery were put up all around the city. To the dismay of the large crowds that came to the so-called Do Do Circus (or Circus Poeticus), instead of calliopes, elephants, and cotton candy, there were naked ladies, poets, and stoned jug band musicians. To avoid the inevitable fall-out, organizers of the circus-of-sorts wisely skipped town mid-program.

WARMING-UP AT THE FOLKSINGER

Although not one of Portland's pioneering coffeehouses, the Folksinger was an institution among the fringe population from 1965 to 1967. Established by Coleman "Whitey" Davis, the Folksinger was also the inspiration for the psychedelic Crystal. Originally situated on SW 10th Avenue—opposite the Multnomah County Central Library—the Folksinger was relocated at the start of 1966. Its new location, a second-story space on SW 13th Avenue, was just behind the Crystal. The Folksinger's move to 13th Avenue roughly coincided with Sandy Sanders' and Arnold Stadum's final public dances at the ballroom.

Whitey Davis' Folksinger filled a void for a portion of Portland's younger crowd who craved a "scene" with more of an edge. In contrast, many Portland high schoolers in the mid-1960s ritualistically congregated at teen clubs such as the Division Street Corral and the Headless Horseman. Among their favorite musical heroes were the hometown pop phenoms Paul Revere and the Raiders. When the Raiders became national recording stars in 1965, their local following reached almost a cult status. Many moms were persuaded to make their teenaged sons colonial-style costumes, complete with three-corner hats.

"Portland was living in a Paul Revere and the Raiders' world, but we were different," recalled Rena Welsh, a denizen of the Folksinger. She and others came to Davis' coffeehouse to hear such legendary folk blues performers as Lightning Hopkins and John Lee Hooker. Mostly, though, the Folksinger served as the home stage for Portland's own folk- and blues-influenced rock bands. Two Folksinger attractions, the P. H. Phactor Jug Band and the New Tweedy Brothers Vocal and Instrumental Band, were conduits that helped funnel the budding psychedelic scene in San Francisco to Portland. From late 1965 through 1966, Bay-Area bands such as Jefferson Airplane, the Amazing

Charlatans, and the Warlocks (not Portland's Warlocks, but rather the band that soon would become the Grateful Dead), were staging the first rock dances at the now legendary Fillmore Auditorium, Avalon Ballroom, and Longshoremen's Hall. During this period, the P. H. Phactor and Tweedy Brothers split their playing time between those San Francisco venues and the Folksinger.

An integral part of these San Francisco rock dances was the psychedelic light show. Floating, colored, amorphous figures—interspersed with a succession of alternating images ranging from Mickey Mouse to a flower—were magnified by an overhead projector onto the walls. The combination of sight and sound was intended to create a “Total Environment” of psychedelia. The effect was so powerful that, according to a story still told in Portland, Seattle officials banned the presentation of light shows in their city.

With the northern California mecca just a hitch-hike away from Portland, the counter-culture crowd was free-flowing between the two cities, and it did not take long for psychedelic light shows and mind-blowing posters to begin appearing along the Willamette River. “The tide was turning [in 1966]. People didn't want to see folk acts—they wanted bands,” recalled Toody Cole, another Folksinger regular of the mid-1960s. Turned on by San Francisco's spacey, electrified rock sound, Portland's young fringe element craved something besides coffee house folk and commercial Top 40 radio sounds. Signifying the change, the P. H. Phactor and the Tweedy Brothers “electrified” their acoustic jug band sound and Whitey Davis opened the Folksinger's stage to other local electric rock bands, including the U.S. Cadenza, Great Pumpkin, Moxie, and Portland's Warlocks. Fred Cole (Toody's husband-to-be) with his band, the Weeds, did much to encourage the change.

Late in 1966, a van full of young musicians from Las Vegas coasted into town. Bound for British Columbia to evade the draft (and diligent truant officers in Las Vegas), they had run out of money, their stash of donuts was depleted, and the gas gauge was dangerously close to “E.” Not knowing a soul in Portland, they asked where they could set up a gig for some quick cash and were directed to Whitey Davis at the Folksinger. Whitey gave them a listen and not only offered them a gig, he also offered his services as a manager. The band was the Weeds (sometimes called “The Wild, Wild Weeds”), and its five members had modeled themselves after the power blues style of the Rolling Stones. With their heavy sound and their Carnaby

Street look, the boys from Las Vegas were an immediate sensation. Initially, the Weeds' monetary rewards were pretty meager, but their new manager did offer the band members the Folksinger's floor to sleep on and a constant supply of day-old donuts. These incentives were enough to keep them from continuing their trip to Canada.

Whitey Davis quickly realized small coffeehouses were no longer practical venues: the new San Francisco-style rock shows required large dance halls. Despite its steady draws for concerts, the Folksinger was not making much money for anybody involved. It held only about 100 people and the usual admission charge was a dollar a head. Box office receipts based on these figures did

not amount to much profit once the bills and the band were paid. Like a beacon that flashed "TRY ME," the empty Crystal Ballroom stood just beyond the back wall of Davis' Folksinger. Whitey was confident that if he could get the Crystal, the Weeds and other acts could pack it.

The hitch was that the Folksinger's manager had bad credit and a terrible reputation with city officials. To get occupancy and city licensing for the Crystal, Whitey needed a "front man." Enter Mike Magaurn, a sharp, clean-cut, and congenial, twenty-three-year-old Portlander. For the previous year or two, Magaurn had managed a club outside Los Angeles. Searching for a club management situation in Portland, Magaurn had earlier broached the subject with Whitey. Now the two men went ahead with the idea of converting the old ballroom into a rock concert hall.



The Tweedy Brothers, a regular attraction at the Folksinger, moved on to headline at the Crystal, as shown on this March 1967 poster.

Magaurn proved to be the perfect man for the job and he scored big: a one-year lease and a two-year Class A food license, both effective beginning January 1, 1967. The lease (made with the ballroom's owner, Mune Louie) was something no other Portland rock-concert promoter possessed. Not having a leased hall of their own, other promoters had to book concerts into facilities such as the Masonic Temple, the Pythian Hall, Portland Memorial Coliseum, and the Portland State College Ballroom, working around the private and municipal functions also scheduled at those venues. With their lease for the Crystal, Magaurn and Davis could host as many shows a week and on any night they chose. Other promoters were lucky if they could fit in one over each weekend.

The restaurant license was also something local promoters sought, but few received. Because dancing was permissible in Portland restaurants, Magaurn's license allowed him to conduct dances at the Crystal. It also officially classified the ballroom as a restaurant and not a dance hall, which made the Crystal's dance operation less susceptible to city censure. In hindsight, Magaurn believes the license probably prevented the hall from being closed on several occasions. That it was issued to him, he is convinced, must have been a city employee's blunder. Needless to say, it was a no-frills "menu" that Magaurn and Davis offered their patrons: hot dogs, pizza, and popcorn.

Magaurn's responsibilities also included public relations, at which he proved equally adept. Early in 1967, when he was questioned by an *Oregonian* reporter about his and Davis' new operation, Magaurn tactfully answered that "the Crystal is neither a hippy hangout nor a teen-age haunt. Both groups are welcome but so is everyone else." Reassuringly, Magaurn emphasized that, at curfew time, "a friendly lady" made sure that everyone was ushered safely from the ballroom (many of the twenty-three-year-old's peers must have snickered at this line).

THE MAIN ATTRACTION: HIPPIES, DRUGS, AND THE CRYSTAL BALL'S DEBUT

At 8:00 pm on Friday, January 20, 1967, the grand old hall, bearing the new nickname Crystal Ball, premiered in its latest incarnation. The night's program featured local groups, the Weeds, the Tweedy Brothers, and the Family Tree, together with a "splendiferous" light show by the Inimitable Purple Chinch Bug, Esq. The cost was \$1.25 per person or \$2 a couple. Similar shows headlined by local bands followed.

DANCE
APRIL
28
29
CRYSTAL
BALLROOM
S.W. 14th
Burnside
Fri.
New Direction
U.S. Cadenza
Pre-Gambrian
Lightning Bolt
Moguls
Eye Happiness
Oaken
Shield
Cameo

1.50
Single
2.50
Couple

The U.S. Cadenza, led by guitarist Steve Bradley, was a regular attraction at the psychedelic Crystal in 1967 and 1968.

While many Portland residents initially may have been unaware of the Crystal's ongoing rock concerts, more visible changes at SW 14th Avenue and Burnside made it clear that the old ballroom was under a new occupancy. The current tenants emblazoned the Crystal's marquee with purple and yellow paint and, to enhance the visual impact of psychedelic light shows, painted its giant, arched windows black. Inside, architectural details like the plaster gargoyles were covered with brilliant colored paints.

In the months immediately following the Crystal's reopening, the psychedelia that had been simmering in Portland over the prior year, exploded. Symbolically spearheading the transformation, Dr. Timothy Leary came to Portland State College (now Portland State University) early in February 1967. The "defrocked" Harvard University professor conveyed his now-famous mantra, "turn on, tune in, and drop out," to a "spellbound," "jampacked" Portland audience that consisted mostly of students. Suddenly, new forms of music, clothing, and drugs pervaded the city's youth scene. Leather apparel businesses, vintage clothing stores, and "head shops"—stocked with incense, entrancing posters, exotic jewelry, and drug paraphernalia—opened in certain pockets of the city. Similar to Magaurn and Davis, other young entrepreneurs presented ballroom-style rock concerts that featured psychedelic light shows intended to "blow your mind." Shows put on at the Masonic Temple, Pythian Hall, and Portland State Ballroom, attracted hundreds of Portland teens and college-age kids. In addition, the second-story space on SW 13th Avenue, vacated when Whitey Davis closed the Folksinger to manage the Crystal, became the new Caffe Espresso, operated by Larry Howard. Given the close proximity of the Caffe Espresso, Crystal Ballroom, and several other new "hippie" establishments, *The Oregonian* dubbed the Crystal's neighborhood the psychedelic center of the city.

The drugs that Leary had encouraged Portlanders to try were the facilitator of the psychedelic explosion. The Weeds' former leader, Fred Cole, recalled that experimentation was rampant at that time. "People were trying to get high off anything: banana peels...swamp weed...aftershave...even brake fluid." Cole, who was often chided by friends for not partaking in the drug scene that surrounded him, said many people at that time had the attitude, "I don't know what it is, but let's smoke it." Citing a philosophical reason for the younger generation's affinity for chemical supplements, a Portland youth stated in 1967, "Science has created many of the problems of modern living...why not take advantage of an aid it has discovered." Conversely, many parents and city officials perceived drugs as the personification of evil, agents that would lead to the corruption of Portland youth.

Early in 1967, Portland's mainstream society took action against the city's increasing number of strangely attired, "stringy, long-haired boys with amulets around their necks and girls with boots and leather jackets." Some say the authorities' sudden awakening was due to Timothy Leary's pro-drug message, others said that the real wake-up call came in the form of a *Newsweek* or *Time* expose' that derided the nation's emerging hippie subculture. Certainly, the appearance of psychedelic dance halls, head shops, and vintage clothing stores had made some Portlanders uncomfortable, but the revelation of widespread drug-use both shocked and frightened most of the citizenry. More than 90 drug-related arrests were made between February and May 1967. A police sweep of Portland's Corbett neighborhood alone netted enough marijuana for 20,000 joints. Concurrently, a media blitz was waged during the first part of the year. Citing psychological, sociological, and police "experts," reporters effectively whipped the city into a near-paranoid state over the perceived plight of young drug-users. In late February, *The Oregonian* initiated an eight-part series entitled "Drugs and Portland Youth." During the first week of April, the newspaper issued a five-page essay, "The Hippies: A Report." Two weeks later, *The Oregonian* ran, "RX: Drug Problems," a five-part series.

If local residents were not already alarmed by the rising popularity of illegal drugs among Portland's youth, then the hysteria generated by the newspaper and police reports certainly pushed them in this direction. The hippie ideal, as defined by one *Oregonian* reporter, was a "Utopia compounded of drugs and dreams, a zero-hour work and/or study day, and freak-outs for all." Portlanders were informed by newspaper accounts that "while freaked out" on drugs, hippies "have been known to engage in some sordid sexual activities." Also, the newspaper reported, drug users "don't wash [and] they let their hair and beards grow." *The Oregonian* emphasized that the hippie lifestyle was "a whirlpool [that] draws these young people into a vortex which has no exit." Believing this, many parents were undoubtedly aghast to read the newspaper's warning that even "good" kids were in danger because "hippies are anxious to make converts."

This nightmarish vision of villainous hippies manipulating the city's innocent youth seemed to motivate Portland parents and authorities more than any other factor during the second half of the '60s. Great alarm was sounded over the increasing number of high-school-age adolescents who were fleeing their homes and families to join the hippie way. Indicative of the views of many parents of the day, one Portland father mourned the "loss" of his offspring, who had cho-

sen to abandon a life of regular church attendance and college prospects. "My son is a mess," he lamented. "He is eighteen. A handsome boy. Too intelligent. He never had a pimple. He calls us all kinds of names. He upsets all the grandparents [and] worries us all the time...It bruises your heart after a while." In the minds of many city officials and parents, the hippies were enticing innocent victims from their safe homes into a dangerous life of drugs and anti-establishment convictions that would lead to their moral destruction.

If this sounds a lot like the fears expressed a half century earlier when dance halls were considered the quickest route to hell, then it should come as no surprise that one of the loudest voices combating the city's runaway problem was the same group that battled Montrose Ringle and other dance hall operators fifty years earlier: the Women's Protective Division. The legacy left by the Women's Protective Division founder, Lola Baldwin, had been carried on. Elizabeth R. Mumford, a disciple of Baldwin's, had spent much of her free time talking with her mentor after joining the Division in 1939. Soft-spoken, strong-willed, and an expert marksman if the need arose (although policewomen did not carry guns in her day), Mumford oversaw the Women's Protective Division with a diligence and devotion reminiscent of her predecessor. In the late 1960s, Mumford's greatest concern was to provide help for the city's runaways. Many of the runaways, however, were not interested in her help nor that of anyone over the age of thirty.

A generational "Them-versus-Us" attitude emerged during the mid-'60s in Portland and across America. Underlying the fears and misconceptions of both parents and children were definite philosophical differences. In trying to pinpoint the causes of the widening generation gap, a local psychologist told *The Oregonian*, "something here is unprecedented. Our whole society is changing... Is it Vietnam? The moral crisis? The atom bomb?" He believed that it was all of these things, but he also recognized a basic perspective that the young and the old viewed from opposite poles. Parents had struggled and sacrificed through the Great Depression and World War II to produce the affluent American society of the 1960s. From this experience, most members of this generation could not fathom why their children rejected everything they had worked so hard to attain. At the other end of the spectrum, hippies perceived their parents' generation as reveling in excesses that had been produced through oppressive capitalistic, militaristic, and mechanized means. Many of the younger generation chose to withdraw from a society that they viewed as dehumanized and overly materialistic. In their own subculture, as one Portland youth explained to an *Oregonian* reporter in 1967, hippies sought "the pure sensation of being alive."

Voicing a similar sentiment, Paul Bassett of the P. H. Phactor Jug Band, told *The Oregonian* that his generation was striving to create “something to symbolize America other than bombing and killing.”

A darker manifestation of the “Them-versus-Us” attitude was the increasing alienation and persecution of Portland’s hippie community. Many of the Crystal Ballroom crowd remembered epithets, food, and even rocks, hurled at them. Fred Cole recalled an even more violent side of this story. He remembered that, in the fall of 1966—soon after Cole’s arrival to town with his band the Weeds—he and several other people witnessed four college-age, clean-cut men dragging a guy down Broadway by his long hair. Cole said that the four men beat the long-haired man to death. Soon afterward, a similar, though fortunately less violent, episode occurred involving the Weeds. He recalled that a car full of clean-cut young men chased down the car driven by Cole and his band mates and they cut the drummer’s shoulder-length hair with a knife.

HANGING AT THE CRYSTAL

Drawn together by their estrangement from the mainstream, as well as by music, drugs, and love, the Crystal’s “partisans of the bizarre”—as *The Oregonian* referred to them—forged a strong bond with one another. The ballroom became the fringe element’s “safe harbor,” where the prevailing attitude was to celebrate the unusual and encourage experimentation. Here they congregated without fear of ridicule or criticism. They dressed as they pleased and discussed any subject without retribution. The music they listened to was their own and they discarded formal dance steps in favor of a kind of free-form style. Often with day-glo designs adorning their faces—which were spectacularly illuminated by black



Denizens of the psychedelic Crystal, 1967.

COURTESY JULIE PAPLOW.

lights set up around the dance floor—people rocked, swayed, jerked, and otherwise interpreted the music they heard coming from the stage. It looked like “bad aerobics,” Rena Welsh said, but nobody felt self-conscious.

While the mottoes “everyone under thirty is o.k.” and “anything goes” generally prevailed at 1332 SW Burnside, doing drugs at the Crystal was one activity that was not acceptable. Everyone there knew that the over-thirty crowd was very suspicious about what occurred behind the Crystal’s blackened windows, and they believed that authorities were anxiously looking for any excuse to close the ballroom. If any drug activity was discovered on the premises, there was little doubt in the minds of Crystal patrons that their psychedelic haven would be eliminated. Of course, extensive drug activity took place before and after coming to the ballroom, but the Crystal itself remained remarkably clean. Steve Bradley, guitarist for one of the Crystal’s most popular local attractions, U. S. Cadenza, recalled that drugs were not very visible at the Crystal and other indoor events. In contrast, he described outdoor festivals as being “like Sodom and Gomorrah.”

The sense of community that developed among the Crystal crowd naturally spilled over into their lives away from the ballroom. The Crystal was open only a couple nights a week for dances, and nobody stayed at the ballroom between functions. During the interim, people put on spaghetti feeds at their houses; vendors organized psychedelic fairs, selling vintage and handmade clothes, record albums, posters, and “head” paraphernalia; or some other get-together was offered. Meanwhile, some Crystal folks shared houses, and others began dating one another.

Exactly who were the denizens of the Crystal Ballroom in 1967 and 1968? They ranged in age from fifteen to twenty-five. There were the “hard-core” hippies who lived mostly in the Corbett and Goose Hollow neighborhoods on the fringe of downtown and the kids who had run away from home. Many of the others were students from the city’s colleges. Portland State College (now University) was best represented, followed closely—at least initially—by Reed College. Reed students, described as “the Bohemians of the Bohemians,” however, became disenchanted early on by what they perceived to be a diminished intellectual quality among the Crystal crowd. (In the summer of ’67, one Reed student was upset to find what he called “mushrooms...in the dark dank of the Crystal...who sincerely wished me to believe they were hippies.”) Certainly, too, the Crystal attracted “Weekend

Hippies.” These folks lived with their parents and went to school or worked “establishment” jobs Monday through Friday. Then, on the weekend, they changed into “beads, Nehru robes, sandals, and peacock feathers” on their way to ballroom. For example, Rena Welsh, who worked at the Crystal for much of its psychedelic period, continued to attend weekly Catholic services (her mother, however, insisted that she wear long gloves to hide her hands that were stained from mixing dyes for the Crystal’s light shows).

Many curious teenagers ventured to the place that city officials and parents were condemning as a den of iniquity. Greg Kritzberg recalled that as a “straight” teenaged transplant from Salem, Oregon, he initially was hesitant about going to the Crystal Ballroom. Once he met the psychedelic ballroom folks, though, he realized that, yes, they were different from his parents and his former school friends, but no, they were not dangerous or threatening. “Most of them were mellow,” Kritzberg said, and he immediately felt at home. For Tim Kern, his experiences at the Crystal were a “turning point” in his life. Remembering his transformation from uninitiated to hip, Kerr said, “I went in wearing penny loafers and English sweaters, but soon after was wearing bell bottoms.”

Bill Keenom was just the kind of teenager that Portland parents and city officials were worried about losing to the Crystal’s “deviants.” Keenom, now a successful graphic artist and free-lance writer, recalls that in 1967, he was a fifteen-year-old hippie wanna-be whose father “wasn’t going to let any son of his go mix it up with a bunch of no good commie hippies in some seedy downtown black light hall, replete with marijuana and God knows whut-all.” Longing to see if all the rumors he had heard in school about the Crystal were true, Keenom began sneaking out to the ballroom when his parents thought he was at an after-school job. Before too long, he had become a “casualty.” Not only was he a Crystal regular—dressed in tall, white boots and a fringed, leather jacket—Keenom abandoned his parents’ home for more hip digs in one of the cool pockets of the city (to his disgust, Keenom was quickly spotted by the police and his parents shipped him down to a relative’s home in Klamath Falls. As soon as he celebrated his eighteenth birthday, though, he bounced back to Portland to rejoin the counter-culture fold).

The familial aura that surrounded the counter-culture oasis at SW 14th Avenue and Burnside was further perpetuated by the way in which the ballroom was run. Handling virtually every task of the Crystal’s operation, short of booking bands and the administrative responsibilities, was an ever-changing cast of

characters who desired little more than to be at the center of the happening scene. They obviously were not there for the money—most of them were never paid a cent. While many of the names and faces are now a blur, there were four former Catholic school girls who formed a consistent core. Rena (Judy) Welsh, Janet Collinsworth, Toody Cole, and Julie “Angel” (D’Angelo) Paplow all had started working with Whitey Davis at the Folksinger. At the Crystal, they cleaned the hall, hauled equipment in and out, stuffed concert posters into student mailboxes, worked the box office, baby-sat performers who were on a bad trip, made occasional covert pot runs for performers in need, and even did light shows for some of the concerts. One other figure who contributed in many ways to the psychedelic Crystal’s success was Ludwig Caminita, III, affectionately known as “Triple.” Almost like an apparition, owing to his bashful and modest nature, Triple was the ballroom’s jack of all trades. He illustrated concert posters, played in various bands, and otherwise helped organize and maintain the general flow of things.

As for the Crystal’s two managers, Mike Magaurn and Whitey Davis, their roles were both important and very different. Magaurn’s responsibilities quickly went beyond the front man position in which he started. He handled much of the financial business and did some of the band bookings. Also, image-repair and other public relations activities remained chief duties for him. With a seemingly constant barrage of parents and city officials striving to rid the city of the Crystal Ballroom, Magaurn—even with his all-American charm—faced a challenge in trying to keep the ballroom a viable operation. To ward off the opposition, he held weekly meetings with the fire inspector and Captain Mumford of the Women’s Protective Division. Magaurn recalled that he had to make assurances that no illicit activities were being conducted at the Crystal and, more specifically, that no runaway youths were being harbored there. Meanwhile, Whitey Davis was busy making the scene. With Magaurn keeping the authorities at bay, Davis spent most of his time setting up show dates and playing the “family” man. He schmoozed with the in-crowd—meaning the concert-goers, his volunteer employees, and the performers—making sure that everyone was content.

Whitey Davis is somewhat of an enigma, and recollections of the man are hazy and jumbled. Even the statements of people who knew him well or worked closely alongside him often clash with one another. By all accounts, Whitey Davis was older than most everyone in the Crystal crowd. How

much older is not clear. Some people say that in the mid-to-late 1960s, Davis was in his mid-to-late 20s. Others say that Whitey was in his 40s during this period. Similarly, opinions of his character range from “the sweetest man you’ll ever know,” to “the famous rip-off.” One person believed that Davis was raised as a fundamentalist Christian, but exactly where he was raised, nobody knew. He surrounded himself with an entourage of women, most of whom were barely of legal age. Supposedly, he married several of them. Both Toody Cole and Rena Welsh, who worked with him at the Folksinger and the Crystal, said that they always had a friendly, platonic relationship with Whitey. “He was like a big brother to us,” Toody recalled. Most everyone agreed that Whitey possessed the ability to sell water to a drowning man. Drawing on his experience as a used car salesman and contacts he had made while running the Folksinger, he lured some of the hottest acts to the Crystal.

Beyond Whitey Davis’ rapport with visiting bands, socializing between all of the Crystal denizens and performers was common, adding yet another dimension to the ballroom’s kindred spirit. In the days before fame, fortune, and egos necessitated that rock musicians ride in limousines and be pampered with room service in hotel suites, many of the groups stayed with Whitey Davis (and later, with the Crystal’s light show artist, Gary Ewing). Even when bands were playing somewhere else in town, they often came to the Crystal on their free nights to check out the scene. Some of the more famous “drop-ins” included Frank Zappa, Janice Joplin, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Chris Hillman (from the Byrds), Eric Burdon (from the Animals), and Buffalo Springfield.

The recollections of Crystal folks demonstrate that a general camaraderie existed among performers and their fans. There was little of the reverence that many of today’s rock stars have now come to expect. Steve Paplow, Whitey Davis’ housemate, remembers that while at the ballroom, the late, great Frank Zappa let him try on his leather jacket. “It was huge. Nobody really knew how big a guy he was,” Paplow said. Julie “Angel” Paplow—Steve’s wife—said that James Gurley of Big Brother and the Holding Company left his two-year-old toddler, Hongo, with her while he mingled with the ballroom crowd. Julie and her Crystal compatriot, Rena Welsh, also recalled the night when members of Buffalo Springfield dropped in to the ballroom. Neil Young, one of the many talented artists in the group, fell to his knees upon seeing the glare of reflected light from the dance hall’s mirrored ball. No one, besides the two women, expressed much

concern for the ailing Young, who suffers from epilepsy, and, according to the two women, appeared to be under the influence of other substances that night. His band mates left Young in the care of Julie and Rena for the evening while they checked out the show. The two Portland friends both remember that their charge was not too strenuous, they simply plopped Neil Young into a seat in the balcony, where he remained in a near-unintelligible state the rest of the evening.

Incredibly, the Crystal denizens even found a friend on the police force. Just as in years past, city ordinances required a police presence at all Crystal functions for security reasons. While most of the police officers who supervised late '60s shows at the ballroom never felt comfortable around the strange dress and behavior, one (whose anonymity shall be preserved) developed a friendship with the Crystal regulars. Unlike many of his colleagues, he seemed to understand the importance of the ballroom to Portland hippies and perhaps recognized that not all of the suspicions about hippies' conduct were well founded.

On concert nights, the friendly officer usually stood guard outside the Crystal's box office, ensuring that no harm came to the money-taker or the money. Because the box office was situated in the ground-floor lobby, he had a clear view of everyone as they entered the building and ascended to the ballroom by way of the three flights of stairs or the elevator (but more often than not, the elevator was broken). This vantage point and a system the officer worked out with the ballroom crowd undoubtedly kept the Crystal from being closed by periodic, surprise city inspections. Any time inspectors appeared at a Crystal show, they were greeted in the lobby by the officer before proceeding upstairs. Once the "intruders" turned the first landing, the policeman signaled the crowd on the dance floor by flicking a nearby switch that turned the ballroom's lights on and off. By the time the inspectors hit the top stair, the dance floor was filled with people looking as innocent and hospitable as they possibly could.

Everyone who has ever been to the Crystal Ballroom seems to have some memory of its elevator. From the time of the ballroom's opening in 1914, it has elicited talk. Back then, any elevator was a novelty and people were impressed by its plush interior and efficiency of movement. Following three decades of reliable use, however, the elevator's novelty and efficiency had diminished.

It seems that the elevator's mechanical troubles originated during the early 1940s. Roberta Howden, the elevator's operator at that time, recalled

that during World War II, soldiers often came to the ballroom in large groups. Disregarding her warnings, they sometimes crowded the elevator, filling it beyond its weight capacity. More than once, the car dropped to the basement, overburdened by the excessive weight. Undoubtedly due in part to these unplanned trips to the basement, city inspectors found the condition of the Crystal's elevator to be suspect. With replacement parts being hard to find because of war-time metal shortages, the inspectors recommended that it be shut down. Instead, the ballroom's manager, Ralph Farrier, successfully contested the recommendation and kept it operational. He argued that the great number of elderly dancers that regularly attended his functions made the elevator a necessity to his business. (Apparently, city officials chose to ignore the contradiction in Farrier's argument: if the ballroom's patrons were not fit to climb steps, how could they spend an evening dancing? Perhaps Farrier recounted for them the virtues of his "floating floor.")

In the post-War years, the elevator's faults became more exaggerated. Its creaking, jolting journeys from the lobby to the third-floor ballroom became infamous. That is, if it ran at all. For the great r&b singer, Bobby "Blue" Bland, one unnerving ride was enough. After his first of several dates at the Crystal in the early 1960s, Bland swore off using the elevator and, ever after, kept exclusively to the steps.

By the late 1960s, when Toody and Fred Cole were hanging out in the Crystal, the unreliable elevator provided a reliably secluded spot for passionate interludes. In the Coles' own words, their extracurricular activities at the Crystal quickly earned them a reputation for being "a notorious couple." Also, their dalliances often made Fred late for his band's performances. More than once, Whitey Davis scoured the ballroom looking for the Weed's singer/guitarist just before the band was scheduled to take the Crystal's stage. When the mood inspired them, Fred and Toody slipped into the elevator, stopped it between floors, and then crawled onto its roof for a tryst. Later, if they needed an excuse, they just said the elevator got stuck. Because it was always breaking down, this was the perfect alibi. Then one time, with Whitey hollering at them for holding up the show, they fed him the line about the elevator breaking down. Unfortunately, the parallel black lines running down the back of Toody's long white dress told a different story: they were grease marks from the elevator cables.

While there are only fond remembrances of this one city policeman, such is not the case for his colleagues. People recall one officer who, not wanting to be regarded as a square or just not wanting to be recognized at all, wore a long-

haired wig when he was assigned to the ballroom detail. Another popular tale of the period involved a cop (no one could remember his name) who never warmed up to the Crystal crowd. The story goes that one night while supervising a dance at the ballroom, someone slipped him a hit of acid. Next time he was seen, the unpopular officer was sporting a pig mask while racing down West Burnside Street in a convertible. He was later discovered passed out in the car, which had been abandoned in the parking lot of a local television station.

Whether true or not, the story at least reflects the sentiment that even antagonistic cops could not disrupt the harmonious character of the Crystal Ballroom. For the assemblage of musicians, devotees, radicals, and the curious, the fifty-year-old dance hall was a source of strength and unity. Of course, another reason for the ballroom's popularity among the counter-culture crowd was the music. The psychedelic sounds that reverberated around the Crystal's cavernous walls between January 1967 and July 1968 were new and fresh. Local groups played weekly performances and regularly drew decent crowds. Then, periodically, a nationally known band headlined a show at the ballroom and packed the house. Today, many of the rock acts that played the Crystal Ballroom during this period are recognized as the preeminent creators of psychedelic music.

EMANATING FROM THE BLACKENED WINDOWS

At the start, the Crystal was run on a shoestring budget and for that reason, the first "name bands" to play at the ballroom did not leave a lasting impression. Working with almost no money, Mike Magaurn was able to bring Sopwith Camel (does anybody remember that name?) to the ballroom for two shows over the first weekend of February 1967. He assured the band's New York booking agency that the check was in the mail. Touring on the strength of their current hit single, "Hello, Hello," Sopwith Camel did generate enough box office revenue for Magaurn to pay for the performances. About a week later, local-musician-turned-national-pop star, Drake Leven—of Paul Revere and the Raiders fame—brought his side band, the Golden Hind, to the Crystal. Leven's shows may have bolstered the Crystal's coffers, too, but they did not inspire many long-term memories.

Buffalo Springfield was the first rock band of lasting prominence to play the Crystal. Featuring Neil Young, Stephen Stills, and two future founders of the

country-rock band Poco, Buffalo Springfield possessed an abundance of talent. The band's first album had just been released and one of the album's most provocative songs, "For What It's Worth" had quickly risen to anthem status. Portland's affinity for both the song and the band was demonstrated by the tremendous outpouring for the Wednesday, March 22, 1967, show. The fact that Buffalo Springfield drew a capacity crowd on a week night did not escape the attention of *The Oregonian* music critic. "[S]omething of a feat in Portland," he noted.

Later in the spring of 1967, Portland Provos, a volunteer organization committed to aiding the city's indigent, coordinated a "Peace Rites" at the Crystal. The event was a fund-raiser for the Vietnam War protest activities of the Society for New Action Politics (SNAP). While a lineup of hot local bands was featured, the main draw was Beat-poet-turned-hippie-spokesman, Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg, whose prose frequently dealt with "drugs, homosexuality, madness, mysticism, and four-letter words," typically generated controversy wherever he went. That he often disrobed at climactic points in his readings also made Ginsberg a target of public condemnation. For his Portland stopover, which also included an appearance at the Portland State campus, local officials went to great lengths to ensure that citizens would receive only a minimum exposure of Ginsberg. He conceded to the city and school's request to sign a propriety agreement, but the poet got in a symbolic jibe by returning his confirmation postage due. Ginsberg's performance at the Crystal was described as being one of the hall's stellar nights. "People left feeling that things weren't really so bad and might soon get better," one reviewer observed.

For the months that followed, collectively known as the Summer of Love, few details about events and activities at the Crystal are certain. This may reflect a general preoccupation with politics, love, and chemical agents. One tangential event that did leave a lasting impression on the psychedelic ballroom crowd that summer was the closing of the Midtown Ballroom, the place where some of the city's first psychedelic rock dances had been presented. To their disgust, a U.S. Armed Forces Examination Center was established in the old downtown dance hall in July 1967. Mike Magaurn recalled that, around this time, he began branching off into other concert ventures and Whitey Davis was not consistently around. The bulk of the Crystal's booking responsibilities fell to Melvin Olsen, proprietor of the neighboring Psychedelic Shop. Not being familiar with the business, Olsen apparently was not able to bring many top acts to the ballroom. Contrary to Magaurn's memories, other people remember the Electric Prunes,

Moby Grape, the Steve Miller Blues Band, and, possibly, Big Brother and the Holding Company playing the Crystal during this period.

The first big show of the 1967–68 school year was the Charles Lloyd Quartet. A respected “new wave” jazz act, the Lloyd Quartet was a departure for the Crystal, though not unprecedented in the psychedelic scene. Lloyd, a tenor saxophonist,



The jazz sound of the Charles Lloyd Quartet headlined at The Crystal in October 1967.

COURTESY JULIE PAPLOW

flutist, composer, and arranger, had just recently thrilled audiences across Europe and Russia, headlined the Monterey Jazz Festival, and become the first jazz act of the rock era to perform at San Francisco's Fillmore Auditorium. His latest album, *Love-In*, stood at number four on the Billboard charts. The Quartet, which also featured pianist Keith Jarrett, bassist Ron McClure, and drummer Jack DeJohnette, was called "the best thing that has happened to jazz in the last year." Of the band's penchant for a blend of jazz and rock, it was said "you can come dig the Quartet like you would Miles Davis or get up and groove as you would for the Dead."



The Family Tree at the Crystal in 1967. No doubt their version of the "Slow Trot" was different than the band shown on page 58.

COURTESY JULIE PAPLOW

The show's openers, Family Tree, the Weeds, Clockwork Orange, and Blues Interchange, got the crowd dancing. Everyone took their seats, though, as the Lloyd Quartet took the stage. Not entirely hip to the jazz act's brand of music, the audience talked through the Quartet's first song, which featured pianist Jarrett plucking the wires inside the piano. By night's end, though, the crowd was entranced. When Whitey Davis came on stage to announce the show's close, the audience pleaded for an encore. Charles Lloyd responded by leading his band through a six-minute, house-wrecking finale.

The week following the Lloyd Quartet's triumphant performance, the blues-jazz-rock gurus, the Electric Flag (featuring Mike Bloomfield) were scheduled to play the Crystal. However, just days prior to the show, the band members were arrested in Los Angeles and were forced to cancel. In their place stepped Country Joe *without* the Fish. Even if the audience had overcome their disappointment about the Electric Flag's no-show, the performance of Country Joe

MacDonald was a let down for many who attended. Absent were the satirical folk-based rock songs, colorful costumes, and *@#! cheers, that Country Joe and the Fish fans had come to expect. Instead they got a subdued, albeit melodic, Joe. A reviewer for the Reed College student newspaper was not impressed with the evening's events. In debuting new songs, like his upcoming single, "Janice," Joe's voice was fine, according to the reviewer, but his six- and twelve-string guitar playing was clumsy. Between songs, Country Joe attempted to explain that he and The Fish were separated, but not likely to divorce. A month later, with their differences still unresolved, The Fish played the Crystal sans Country Joe. The volatile group would break up and reform four more times over the next four years.

In between the Fishless Joe and the Joeless Fish, a band from Belfast, Ireland, Them, stormed into town for a Friday night appearance at the Crystal. People swear they remember seeing Van Morrison, with his fiery red hair, propel his band mates through incendiary versions of "Gloria," "Here Comes the Night," and others. Morrison, however, had quit Them during the previous year to start what has since become a successful and prolific solo career. Whoever it was on vocals that November night got the hall shaking when the band blazed through its best-known lyric, "G-L-O-R-I-A...GLORRRRR-I-A."

The last big show of the year was a return engagement by B. B. King. He had previously played the Crystal during the ballroom's soul period. In December 1967, King was on the cusp of a career resurgence, powered by his recent "discovery" by white teenagers. Just before his show at the Crystal, the master guitarist told *The Oregonian* about the "thunderous applause" he recently had received from a mostly white audience at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco. "It was so exciting, something [I] never had before," King said proudly. At the Crystal, his reception was not so impressive. The revelation of King's talent had apparently not occurred in Portland yet, and the show was poorly attended.

For those people who did turn out, King gave them a great performance despite adverse conditions. Portland blues musician Jim Mesi, at the time a teenaged guitarist with the local band Moxi, recalled that it was a cold and rainy winter evening. An unfortunate leak developed in the Crystal's roof, dropping beads of water onto the stage and sometimes right onto King himself. Also, as was often the case, the ballroom's heating system was not working. "You could see your breath," Mesi said. Still, King persevered, and the teenaged boy was held spellbound. "That show turned me on to the blues," Mesi stated emphatically.

On February 2 and 3, 1968, events took place for which the Crystal is perhaps best remembered. The Grateful Dead played two shows as part of the Great Pacific Northwest Tour, nicknamed “The Quick and the Dead” because the bill was shared with the Quicksilver Messenger Service. Also featured on the tour were Portland’s own P. H. Phactor, and the light artistry of Headlights.

These 1968 shows took place before the Grateful Dead’s change to a mellow, laid-back sound typified by “Uncle John’s Band,” “Casey Jones,” and “Truckin’”; before the band’s eerie succession of keyboardists’ deaths; and way before the mass-marketing of Dead t-shirts, bumper stickers, and (gulp) neckties. In fact, in February 1968, Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir, Ron “Pig Pen” McKernan, Phil Lesh, Mickey Hart, and Bill Kreutzmann were still largely unknown to most Americans. The band’s debut album, *The Grateful Dead*, had been released just months before, peaking at only seventy-third place on the record charts. However, within the psychedelic Haight-Ashbury circle—which in some ways extended north to Portland—nobody was cooler than the Grateful Dead. In 1965, the band members had first drawn attention by joining with Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters to initiate a series of “Acid Tests,” events that have since been called the inspiration and motivation for the counter-culture. They also were among the featured musicians at the original psychedelic rock dances held in San Francisco in 1965 and 1966.

Apparently, by 1968, parents and city officials in Portland were also clued in to the Dead’s reputation. Late in January, Dead manager Rock Scully came to town to promote up-coming shows at Portland State and the Crystal. However, in the wake of the band members’ recent arrests on marijuana possession charges, Scully engaged more in image repair than promotion. “We don’t take drugs anymore,” the Portland State *Vanguard* quoted him as saying, apparently with a straight face. The manager then tried to put the band’s sound in the best light. “The Dead [has] never played psychedelic music,” Scully said. “Like all San Francisco music [it] is impossible to classify...not blues...a basic, full sound...It’s weird.” Scully’s words probably provided Portland mothers and fathers with little reassurance, but the shows were allowed to go on.

The Grateful Dead’s first performance in the city was at the Portland State Ballroom on Monday night, January 29. A snow storm kept many people away, but the *Vanguard* reported that the band’s performance was phenomenal. Because of the newspaper’s glowing review and the better weather, people flocked to SW 14th Avenue and Burnside in record numbers for the Dead’s two shows at the Crystal Ballroom; the line of people waiting to get into the third-floor dance

hall wrapped around the block. As each passing person paid the high admission price of \$2.50 a ticket, Rena Welsh recalled that she collected dollar bills and coins in amounts never before seen at the Crystal. To keep the evening's cash receipts safe, the band let Welsh bring one of its drum cases into the box office. Periodically, she stashed a wad of bills into the drum case, and then sat on it. As a thanks for her night's work, the Dead's leader, Jerry Garcia, gave her a joint. Although she didn't smoke, Rena considered it the best tip she ever got. (O.K., it was the only tip she ever received at the Crystal, but it was still special.)

The music played by the Grateful Dead on its Tour of the Great Pacific Northwest has since been described as the ultimate example of the genre: "the apotheosis of psychedelic music," according to *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll*. While no reviews were published for the band's Crystal shows, the Portland State newspaper described the band's performance at the campus hall just days earlier. According to the *Vanguard* reporter, the Grateful Dead's concert of January 29 consisted of one album-length song that "kept hitting climaxes, bursting, sense tearing climaxes, until on some magic cue [the band members] relaxed, dropped back to reality, stringing us along on a slow, tantalizing, quivering rhythm until...another crescendo, another chain reaction of exploding box cars of nitroglycerine." Accentuating the musical experience, Headlights provided an amazing light show. The *Vanguard* exclaimed, it "strobed, Fellini'd, Walt Disney'd without a break for over four hours. If you blinked your eyes you missed a universe."

At the Crystal, parts of the Grateful Dead's performance were lost to a blinking of the power. Greg Kritzberg remembered that in mid-song, the electricity feeding the band suddenly stopped. Since the Dead's two guitarists, bassist, and keyboardist all needed power for their instruments, "all they could do was fire up the drums," said Kritzberg. Everyone took the ballroom's electrical faults in stride, though, and the band even used the results on its second album, *Anthem of the Sun* (released later in 1968). To the dismay of listeners of that album, except those who were at the Crystal that night, the recording stops in mid-song.

THE CRYSTAL GOES TO THE DOGS

Around the time of the Dead's two shows, several original members of the psychedelic Crystal's close-knit family departed. Among those who moved on to other things were musicians, workers, and the two managers. Toody Cole, Rena

Welsh, and Julie (D'Angelo) Paplow all left around this time. The Weeds, whose unique appeal had motivated Whitey Davis to leave his coffeehouse for the larger ballroom, signed with a major record company, changed their name to the Lollipop Shoppe, and relocated to Los Angeles. In addition, Mike Magaurn left the ballroom's operation to promote concerts at Portland's Memorial Coliseum and other, more sizable venues.

Whitey Davis also moved on that winter, giving up one family to join another. Like the Weeds, his career move took him south to California. In San Francisco, he became the newest member of the Family Dog, the concert promotion group that had largely been responsible for the Bay Area's first psychedelic rock dances at the Longshoremen's Hall, the Fillmore, and the Avalon Ballroom in the mid-'60s. Davis assumed operation of the Family Dog's main venue, the Avalon, and took on the responsibility of coordinating the group's new West Coast enterprises in Vancouver, British Columbia; Anchorage, Alaska; and Portland. This is the last thing many Portlanders have heard about Whitey Davis. Stories have since circulated that he became tour manager for a rock band, followed by a rumor that, in the late 1970s, he took his own life in San Francisco.

Being fond of relic ballrooms, the Family Dog's natural choice for a Portland venue was the Crystal. On February 16, 1968, *The Oregonian* announced with little fanfare that the "San Francisco cultural institution" had assumed the lease of the ballroom. With decidedly more enthusiasm, the Portland State *Vanguard* proclaimed that, "with nostrils flaring, the Family Dog is sniffing out the market for big name rock bands in Portland." The *Vanguard* reporter seemed to be holding his breath in anticipation, saying that if the Family Dog's Portland franchise, appropriately named the "Crystal Dog," prospered, then the San Francisco production company would bring top-name psychedelic rock groups to the ballroom *every week*.

One of the most successful hippie-owned businesses of the 1960s, the Family Dog was organized by four, young, San Francisco friends in 1964. Living amongst the city's budding rock stars, the four friends—one of whom was Luria (Castel) Dickson, more recently of Portland—were inspired to create music, light, and dance extravaganzas. Family Dog rock shows, enhanced by the ambiance of the Avalon Ballroom and other old dance halls in which they were staged, featured plenty of space to dance, a psychedelic

light show, and evening lineups of several top acts, which often included the Grateful Dead, the Amazing Charlatans, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, Jefferson Airplane, and Janis Joplin with Big Brother and the Holding Company. The shows were a wild success and the concept was quickly imitated in cities across the country. The psychedelic concert posters that Family Dog created to promote upcoming events became a creative and lucrative sideline to the rock shows. The posters' intriguing designs, reminiscent of the art nouveau style, fetched decent prices back then (and since, of course, have skyrocketed in value).

By 1966, two of the original 'Dogs,' including Luria Dickson, had left, and the enterprise came under the leadership of Chet Helms. Prosperity continued under Helms, and in 1968, he seized opportunities to expand into other cities. The group's first franchise opened in Denver and came close to being a quick failure because of hassles with the city. According to contemporary reports in *Rolling Stone* magazine, attendance at the Denver Dog's initial shows was low because narcotics agents were searching everyone waiting in line and the city began enforcing an obscure ordinance requiring minors to have parental permission to attend a public dance. By spring, ruffled feathers had been smoothed and the "Denver Dog" reversed its misfortunes. The parent group then established its other West Coast ballrooms, including the Crystal Dog in Portland.

The conversion of the old ballroom at SW 14th Avenue and Burnside to a Family Dog franchise had mixed results. Infused with the San Francisco group's comparatively deep financial reserves, name bands were lured to the Portland dance hall on a more regular basis than before. Similarly, professional light artists with state-of-the-art equipment replaced the well-intentioned, but inexperienced Crystal denizens who previously had put on light shows for the ballroom dances. Also, posters for the Crystal's Family Dog shows were of a better quality than those of previous shows (although, they were not always as innovative as some of the locally crafted Crystal posters of 1967). As intended, the bigger names and flashier advertising attracted greater visibility and packed houses to the Crystal events. On the downside, the operation's greater visibility elicited more intense scrutiny from Portland parents and city officials, while the Family Dog's long-distance management diminished the ballroom's family atmosphere. Fred Cole recalled that in 1968, when he returned to the Crystal with his band The Lollipop Shoppe (formerly the Weeds), there was less of the communal

feeling, and the irreverence to common business standards that had previously characterized the ballroom's operation was gone. Instead, Cole encountered a more impersonal, business-like atmosphere; he even had to sign contracts, something he had never been asked to do for Crystal gigs in 1967.

The test case scheduled for the Crystal Dog's premiere was a bill that featured San Francisco bands Blue Cheer and the Nazarre Blues Band, as well as Luxsit and Dance, a "new concept in lights." On the surface, Blue Cheer was the epitome of San Francisco psychedelia. The band was named for a brand of LSD and promoted by renowned LSD chemist and former Grateful Dead patron, Owsley Stanley. The band's sound, however, was something of a departure from the music that had been coming out of the Bay Area. Blue Cheer's three musicians played heavy blues-rock and played it VERY LOUD! Blue Cheer's 1968 album, *Vincebus Eruptum* (Latin for "to make order out of chaos") had been released just the week before the band came to Portland and its first-day sales totaled 35,000 copies in San Francisco alone. The album's debut single, a heavy blues-rock cover of the old rockabilly tune, "Summertime Blues," was also climbing the charts.

"They are exciting...[and] play hard, fast music and telegraph the punch with nine amplifiers and eight-foot high speakers," was the Portland State *Vanguard's* animated description of Blue Cheer. Rena Welsh was not so enthusiastic about the oversized sound system. She and other young women working at the Crystal had to lug the nine amplifiers and speakers up three flights of steps to the ballroom. She recalled, "they were as big as a house." Of course, the elevator did not work, and roadies and stagehands were unheard of in these days.

Blue Cheer's reputation for high volume is something Rena can vouch for, too. The afternoon before the Friday night show, the three band members created more chaos than order by rehearsing with their amps cranked all the way to eleven (as Nigel Tufnel of Spinal Tap would say). Rena and some friends were on their way back to the Crystal, strolling along the Park Blocks, when, from a distance of at least six city blocks and probably more, they could clearly hear Blue Cheer's version of "Satisfaction." Motivated by visions of the city closing the Crystal on noise violation charges, she sprinted to SW 14th Avenue and Burnside and leapt up the ballroom steps. She was in time; the power trio deadened their sound for the rest of their sound check. With no hassles from the city, the shows went on that night and the next, as scheduled.

The biggest drawing and perhaps most eclectic performance ever held at the Crystal Ballroom was the show of May 3, 1968. An estimated 2,300 people

packed the ballroom to experience dramatic poetry recited to music and Far Eastern rock. The evening featured the performances of the Fugs, Kaleidoscope, and the light show artistry of Dr. P. H. Martin's Magic Medicine Show. Adding to the distinctiveness of the night, a troupe of belly dancers performed between acts. Those who came knew what to expect. It was not a crush of teeny boppers waiting for a serving of bubble gum pop rock. The Portland State *Vanguard* concert reviewer marveled that everyone there was "pretty much already convinced that beds are better than back seats and that there can be something rotten in mom's apple pie." Greg Kritzberg, who was helping with the light show that evening, recalled that it was not a night for dancing. "It was so cool, so mellow," he said. "Everyone sat on the floor."

The Fugs were different. In the words of a *Vanguard* reporter, the New York-based band was "like nothing currently popular in the rock field." They were from another place and another time. Tulle Kupferberg's forty-four years belied his stage antics, which according to one observer, "approximate[d] those of a four-year old in his fairy godmother's boudoir." Lead singer, Ed Sanders was twenty-eight, married, and a father of two children. He was also a prolific poet, the publisher of *F@*k You, A Magazine of the Arts*, and the recipient of a B. A. in ancient Greek studies from NYU. The Fugs had started in the mid-'60s as a practical joke, but people were fascinated with their unusual folk-rock act. Proud of his band's unique qualities, Sanders told Portland's new underground newspaper, *The Willamette Bridge*, that "I think we have an era when the artist doesn't have to compromise."

Kaleidoscope presented a program of psychedelic Indian-influenced music. David Lindley, who more recently has made wonderfully eclectic sounds with Jackson Browne and with his own band, El Rayo-X, anchored Kaleidoscope's East Indian sound. Undoubtedly he, like many other rock musicians of the day, was influenced by sitar master Ravi Shankar, who was very popular in the mid-1960s. Giving Lindley and his band mates a back-handed compliment, *The Oregonian*'s Jack Berry wrote that Kaleidoscope "gets into Eastern music much less embarrassingly than any other band."

Rounding out the evening was Dr. P. H. Martin's Magic Medicine light show. The doctor accompanied and embraced the off-center sounds of the Fugs and Kaleidoscope with liquid colors and flashing, indiscernible images that engulfed and united the crowd into one swirling mass of sound and visuals. The alchemist, the conjuror of these mystical visions, was the hometown-boy-turned-psychedelic-hero, Gary Ewing, alias Dr. P. H. Martin.



A poster for a December 1967 P.H. Phactor concert announces the upcoming Fugs show.

COURTESY MIKE MAGAURN.

From a very early age, Gary Ewing had been fascinated by the visual arts. He grew up just blocks from Paul Hebb's 13th Avenue Gallery, the artist enclave in the Sellwood district, and drew inspiration from the city's underground writers, artists, and musicians that frequented the place in the late '50s and early '60s. At six-foot six-inches, Ewing was undoubtedly recruited by many high school coaches; he chose the discus event because of the aesthetic beauty of the sport and went on to set a city record as a member of the Cleveland High School track team. After high school, he left Portland to study at New

York City's School of Visual Arts, but did not find what he was looking for there. Then, early in 1966, a San Francisco road trip with his friends in the P. H. Phactor Jug Band proved to be an epiphany for the twenty-three-year-old Ewing. At the Avalon Ballroom, the young man experienced his first light show, which he instantaneously recognized as his calling.

Enthusiastic and intensely creative, Ewing was also a quick learner. Establishing a home and studio in the hip Haight-Ashbury district, he soon was a featured light show act at San Francisco's Avalon Ballroom, Straight Theater, California Hall, and the city's Trips Festival. By 1967, Ewing had established a premier reputation and, on occasion, awed his old hometown with his light artistry. For instance, in May 1967, Ewing shared a bill at the Memorial Coliseum with the Jefferson Airplane, the Byrds, the P. H. Phactor, and new Seattle band, the Magic Fern.

His tenure in San Francisco was cut short by a series of armed sweeps conducted by the police early in 1968. Ewing said police officers entered his studio and broke glass plates and other equipment vital to his light show productions. Not wanting to remain in this hostile environment, he left the Bay City for Portland, and the Family Dog snagged him to be the Crystal's resident light show artist for what turned out to be the final months of the ballroom's psychedelic era.

In the spring of 1968, Gary Ewing's concoctions of light and color became a permanent fixture of the Crystal's psychedelic performances. Prior to his arrival, light shows at the ballroom were often more flash than substance. Generally, on nights when the Crystal's program featured local acts, the accompanying light shows were done by members of the Crystal "family." Often, just before a performance, somebody realized an overhead projector was needed for the evening's light show. A mad dash was made to Portland State's audio-visual center, where a Crystal fan would usually allow a machine to be discreetly "borrowed" for the occasion. Mostly, these low-tech light shows consisted of projected images of bubbling colored dyes mixed with vegetable oil. There were mistakes made, but with more experience, these happened with less frequency. For instance, when the word "Pyrex" was inadvertently projected across the Crystal's walls and on the band that was performing, the light-show amateurs realized that they needed to change the dye-and-oil container they were using. The glass pie plate bearing the manufacturer's name on its underside was abandoned in favor of a clock's unblemished glass face.

In contrast, Gary Ewing's light shows were elaborate productions, characterized by spontaneity and synchronized montages of color and pattern. His desired effect was the sensation of being in a kaleidoscope. "My ambition," Ewing told *The Oregonian* in 1967, "is to fill a volume, that is a ballroom, with color the way a glass is filled with water. The people would be dancing in color, covered with color." To produce this effect, he melded images from an overhead projector, a rotating multi-colored gel wheel, strobe and spot lights, and movie and slide projectors. For a four-hour show, he sometimes used 500 painted 35mm slides, which could take as long as four months to prepare. Intriguing photographic or animated images—trees, flowers, Disney characters, and architectural structures—were sometimes supplied by Ewing's fans, such as then-teenaged Bill Keenom. Keenom, now a rock and roll biographer, recently recalled that the ballroom's crowds were "captured weekly by the illusions and visual mazes that Gary's fingers cast forward into space like some metamorphic Dr. Strange...."

Gary Ewing's measure of success was the frequency and intensity of collective gasps from the audience. On those nights when his light formations attained a higher dimension, in synch with the music being performed and the movements of the crowd, Ewing called it "harmonic totality." "The lights have a rhythm of their own and the band has a rhythm of its own," he explained. "When the band is good and the lights are good, it can make people happy."

THE CURTAIN FALLS

The trouble was that not everyone was happy with light shows, whether it was Ewing's production or somebody else's. Many outsiders concluded there was a direct correlation between light shows and psychedelic drugs. As early as 1967, Gary Ewing publicly stated, "I don't want to tell anybody to take drugs or not to." A year later, though, a county judge perceived the preponderance of drug use among patrons of Ewing's shows as being unsafe and ordered him to stop using his act as a way to promote drug use.

Generally speaking, by mid-1968, those in power perceived the entire operation of the Crystal Ballroom to be a menace to society. Although this sentiment was nothing new, a series of events in the spring and summer of 1968 resulted in an abrupt end to the ballroom's hippie incarnation. In May, rumors started percolating that Portland was going to be deluged by hippies during the upcoming summer months. Near hysteria followed a May 20, 1968, *Newsweek* article that

reported that hordes of San Francisco hippies were bound for the Rose City. In preparation for the anticipated counter-culture invasion, the Portland City Council passed ordinances specifically targeting the hippie community. New run-away regulations were imposed that allowed for easier search and inspection of suspicious premises. Next, the city council closed city parks every evening between 11:00 pm and 5:00 am. Passed with an emergency clause that made it effective immediately, the measure aimed to prevent littering, pot-smoking, vandalism and “excessive public displays of affection by hippies,” according to *The Willamette Bridge*.

The city’s next action, as reported by *The Oregonian*, was to bury the Crystal Ballroom “in a landslide of building code deficiencies.” Gary Ewing said the code violations were, of course, not the real issue, but rather the most expedient way the city could achieve its goal of ridding Portland of the hippie enclave at SW 14th Avenue and Burnside. The real issue, as Ewing saw it, was the city’s teenaged-runaway problem. Mike Magaurn agreed that the Crystal was a prime target of city officials because it attracted crowds that were not exclusively minors and not exclusively adults. The mix of teens and young adults was unacceptable to the many parents and authorities convinced that hard-core hippies, some of whom frequented the Crystal, were making converts of naive youths.

“City Closes Dance Hall,” was the modest headline given to a small, less-than-a-column article that appeared on page 14 of *The Oregonian*’s July 12, 1968, issue. The article did not explain that a number of acts that had been booked to play, including Iron Butterfly and Big Brother and the Holding Company, had to be canceled or relocated to other Portland venues. It also failed to note the Crystal denizens’ response to the closing. For some Portlanders, the story gave more than enough attention to the end of an operation that had caused them so much worry and anger. For the Crystal’s counter-culture crowd, though, *The Oregonian* story was a cold, impersonal epitaph for a “host” that, over the previous eighteen months, had served cutting-edge musical performances and, more importantly, a sense of comfort amidst many suspicious eyes.

The city’s termination of the hippies’ lease of the Crystal Ballroom was perhaps more than just the end of the ballroom’s psychedelic life. The Crystal’s

City Closes Dance Hall

Crystal Ballroom Fails Inspection

Buried deep in its issue of July 12, 1968, The Oregonian reports the closure of a Portland landmark.

THE OREGONIAN 12 JULY 1968.

psychedelic period was, in some ways, a culmination of all of the ballroom's past lives. Embodied within its late-1960s incarnation were shades of the controversy generated by Montrose Ringler's "immoral" jazz dances, the thriving community spirit of Dad Watson's and Ralph Farrier's old-time events, and the fleeting, but liberating sense of refuge that Portland's marginalized African American and Gypsy communities must have felt when attending their respective functions at the Crystal. In addition, the city's forced closing of the ballroom in 1968 was an action that had been attempted fifty years earlier when the hall premiered. Seen in this light, in July 1968, a circle was closed, and the Crystal Ballroom finished its initial run. Appropriately, following the completion of this phase, the ballroom at SW 14th Avenue and Burnside went into a period of dormancy, resting and rejuvenating for its next set of incarnations.