

STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN PART ONE... 10/13/1991

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Photo/Graphic: The only color in Casey's in 1991 is a mural of the Beatles, in Sgt. Pepper regalia, circa mid-1967. The re-opening of Casey's then was advertised with the above poster of psychedelic art. Reading moreless left to right, and top to bottom, it says: Caseys of Lewiston Folk Rock Teen Age Nite Club. Grand reopening Canterbury tales from Seattle, Fri. March 13, Sat. April 1. Happening Lite Show 15 projectors. Admission 1.50. The Hollywood Blow Your Mind Keep Your Cool. Nothing like it from Chicago to San Francisco. Psychedelic -- Pat Patoray

## STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN PART ONE

Byline: Dale Grummert

A lumber salesman turned 1950's rock 'n' roll at Lewiston into psychedelic rock from San Francisco. He made the stairway at Casey's a Stairway To Heaven.

Consider the migratory patterns of your average pop-cultural fashion trend. Let's say it springs into being at a nightclub in London, then sails the Atlantic and spends the night in the East Village. It catches a non-stop flight for Los Angeles, cruises Hollywood Boulevard, then takes a joy ride on Interstate 5.

The general movement is westerly.

By the time it reaches Idaho red-eyed, weather-beaten, hitchhiking on the back of a logging truck it's already considered pass in the capitals it left behind.

Idaho, for its part, is indifferent anyway.

So how odd it seemed, this claim that a Lewiston lumber salesman was making in March 1967. His name was Pat Patoray and for five years he had been moonlighting as the owner-manager of a teen-age dance hall at 848 Main St.

called Casey's Ballroom. For several weeks he had been remodeling Casey's in a psychedelic theme borrowed directly from the burgeoning counterculture in San Francisco. Now his advertisements claimed that Casey's had the only regular, major psychedelic light show between Chicago and San Francisco.

There's no telling how long the claim was valid. Surely by the end of the year nightclubs with light shows were popping up from coast to coast. Yet it's fair to say that, for a few months or so, kids in Lewiston were tripping like no other small-town kids in America were tripping. At least in the non-narcotic sense.

This wasn't entirely out of the blue. Since 1962 Patoray had been doing his best to redraw the rock 'n' roll map to include Lewiston. In the early 1970s he moved to Gresham, Ore., and since then no one has come close probably no one has tried to duplicate his success in importing to Lewiston musical acts of national scope: Roy Orbison, Paul Revere and the Raiders, the Ventures, Moby Grape, Blue Cheer, a group called Sparrow that later became Steppenwolf.

The peak moment came on May 18, 1968, when some 2,200 people filed up the stairway to

Casey's to watch the Yardbirds, who if not the most popular rock band of the 1960s were certainly one of the hippest. By that time Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck had left the group, but the lineup still included a wan, disheveled guitarist named Jimmy Page.

When old Casey's stories are bandied about, this is the fact that most astonishes listeners of a certain ilk, aged 14 to 40: the fact that Jimmy Page the demigod of histrionic guitarists, whose subsequent fame as a member of Led Zeppelin in the '70s carried an intrigue, an underexposure, that is perhaps impossible in the MTV age once played in Lewiston. And they want to know: What do you suppose he did while he was here? Did he eat an Effie Burger? Did he sit on the banks of the Clearwater River and ponder the charms of the pastoral life? Did he stand at the foot of those wide, magnificent steps off Fifth Street, stoned out of his gourd, and gasp, "My God, it's a Stairway to Heaven!"?

\* Patoray, a former test pilot originally from Youngstown, Ohio, entered the entertainment business in the late 1950s when he opened a nightclub called Casey's Corral in New Meadows, Idaho. It was named after his 3-year-old son Casey, now a lumber manager at Grangeville. Even this early Casey's drew musical acts destined for stardom, most significantly Paul Revere and the Raiders, the Northwest band that would hit it big seven years later.

At the turn of the decade, Patoray took a lumber job in Lewiston and began hunting for a spot for a new dance hall. He visited a place downtown called the old Metronome Ballroom, a dilapidated former nightclub whose storied tradition dated back decades. It had been closed for at least 15 years, and the floor was covered with plaster.

Still, it was perfect. Contractors hauled away perhaps 10 dumptruck loads of debris, installed acoustical tile and prepared a dance floor measuring about 60 by 100 feet. The new Casey's opened Oct. 5, 1962, billing itself as a teen-age club; the music was live, the drinks nonalcoholic. The first band to play there was a Boise group called Dick Cates and the Chessmen.

By the end of the month, students at Lewiston High School were intent on holding their Homecoming dance at Casey's. They did so, over the protest of school officials, and the publicity was a boon. Initially the club was open two nights a week, but Patoray soon switched to Saturday-only dances to keep the novelty fresh.

His timing was ideal. In the early '60s the Pacific Northwest was a national focal point for the instrumental guitar rock that later evolved into surf rock. The most influential band of the genre was a Seattle quartet, the Ventures, whose two key members, Bob Bogle and Don Wilson, had lived briefly in Pullman. Their "Walk Don't Run" reached No. 2 on the charts in 1960, and they appeared at Casey's on April 20, 1963 a year in which they would produce four hits.

Several other Northwest bands the Wailers, the Sonics, the Kingsmen, the Viceroy's played a similar but more raucous brand of rudimentary rock and collectively turned "Louie Louie" into a regional theme song. Casey's became a regular stop for them. The Wailers, whose "Tall Cool One" was No. 36 nationally in 1959, played in Lewiston every few months, drawing huge crowds. Buck Ormsby, the Wailers' bass player, remembers Casey's as "this almost isolated spot that would draw a lot of people, and you didn't know where they came from."

The town adored live music in those days; from the birth of rock to about 1964, virtually every major bar in Lewiston hired bands. Casey's thrived in this atmosphere.

It also benefited from Patoray's symbiotic friendship with Paul Revere. Both Revere and bandmate Mark Lindsay hailed from southern Idaho, and the Raiders performed at Casey's three times in December 1962 and numerous times thereafter. Meanwhile, a number of acts touring under the aegis of television personality Dick Clark, including Shirley Ellis ("The Name Game")

and the Newbeats ("Bread and Butter"), performed at Casey's. When Clark's company began hunting in 1965 for a prototypically American band to anchor his TV show, "Where the Action Is," Patoray (the story goes) recommended the Raiders, with their novel American Revolutionary War outfits. That was their big break; they scored three top 10 hits in the next two years. Soon Revere was saying Patoray was the first person ever to pay him \$1,000 for a gig.

The psychedelic period notwithstanding, 1963 may have been the heyday of Casey's. Roy Orbison appeared there March 23, 1963, at the height of his pre-Traveling Wilburys popularity. Before the year was out, four of his records, including "Mean Woman Blues/Blue Bayou" (No. 5 on the charts), would reach the top 25.

Story continued on part two.

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## STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN CONTINUED FROM PART ONE

Byline: Dale Grummert

(Continued from part one) On Aug. 10 came the Champs, who had scored a No. 1 hit in 1958 with "Tequila" and whose lineup included Jim Seals and Dash Crofts. The Surfariis, whose "Wipe Out" hit No. 2 in '63, appeared Aug. 24. In the same vein of instrumental rock, the Marketts, a San Diego band known for the '63 hit "Out of Limits," played Casey's on April 11, 1964, and Lonnie Mack ("Memphis," No. 5) performed Dec. 11, 1964. The Liverpool Five, a Seattle-based Beatles facsimile from Britain, appeared several times.

The clientele wasn't entirely teen-age. College students from Pullman and Moscow began spending Saturday nights in Lewiston. Members of the Lewis-Clark Broncs minor-league baseball team, Rick Monday in particular, were regular patrons; they would moan to Patoray at the door, "Do we have to pay?" and the owner would wave them through.

The club was also developing a reputation among musicians. A group called the Cascades drove all night from North Dakota to make a Casey's date in the summer of 1963. And, of course, the vast majority of bands were struggling groups from Spokane and elsewhere, looking for exposure. "It got so that bands were coming here for practically nothing, just for the chance to play at Casey's," says Mike Lucas, who at the time was a disk jockey for KRLC and a drummer for a local band called the Van G's. "They knew Patoray had connections on the circuit. If you played it straight with him, and if you were good, and if people jumped up and down, he'd pass the word on down the line."

Other acts during the early years of the club included Bobby Goldsboro; Dick and Deedee; Bobby Freeman, who had done the original version of "Do You Wanna Dance"; Buddy Knox ("Party Doll"); and the Coasters, probably the most popular black rock band of the '50s.

After one early show by a singer who had recently scored a national hit, the young performer

asked Patoray to pay him his \$200 fee entirely in \$1 bills. Patoray did so, and while the crowd was leaving Casey's the singer walked downstairs to the sidewalk and cried "Look how much money I made money, money, money!" He tossed his earnings into the air, prompting a mad scramble.

Patoray asked him, "What did you do that for?"

"So people would remember me," he said.

It apparently didn't work. Patoray can't recall his name. "Donny somebody," he says.

In some ways, Casey's brought a tiny essence of the '60s the pop trends, the individual expression, the racial confrontations to a community that might otherwise have gone straight from rockabilly to Elton John. It became a scene of clashing values.

In the middle of the decade, the Job Corps, the federal job-training program, opened two centers in north central Idaho, one at Cottonwood and one near Lowell. Every Saturday night, two busloads of corpsmen aged 16 to 21, chiefly troubled urban blacks would arrive at Casey's for a night of entertainment. Until then, the dance hall had been the province of white, middle-class kids with little conception of racial politics.

There was immediate tension. Parents of Casey's clientele were offended by the corpsmen's suggestive "alligator dances." Patoray himself was offended by their profanity.

One of the security guards during this period as if to add to the subsequent mystique of Casey's was Ray McDonald, the All-American running back for the University of Idaho who later played for the Washington Redskins and then disappeared from public view, at least in Idaho, for two decades. One of his tasks, which he reportedly carried out in no gentle manner, was to keep the more exuberant corpsmen in line.

One night in October 1966, an argument broke out. Patoray says it was the usual disagreement: a corpsman had asked a white girl to dance, and she declined. Either the boy took this as a racial snub or the girl's boyfriend felt the need to step in. Tempers flared. Several corpsmen were escorted outside, but 40 or 50 refused to leave. They demanded their money back and Patoray refused, fearing a mad rush for the cash box. A melee mostly shoving, yelling, kicking ensued in the hallway; police arrived and the fighting continued. Eventually every available city, county and state officer had arrived. Twelve people were arrested, including six members of the corps, and two people were treated for minor injuries.

If that incident wasn't the catalyst for the transformation Casey's was to undergo in 1967, maybe it was a bar in North Lewiston, the Blue Hare, which earlier in October had relinquished its liquor license and reopened as a teen-age nightclub. The competition nearly ruined Casey's.

It was time for a change.

By 1966, Patoray had developed musical connections with San Francisco. Sir Douglas Quintet, a Texas band that had moved to the Bay Area and reached No. 31 with "She's About a Mover," showed up at Casey's on June 11, 1966. Also during this period came Sparrow, a blues-based Toronto band that would move to San Francisco and change its name to Steppenwolf.

At some point, Patoray, now about 36, paid a visit to Seattle, whose counterculture was only a step behind San Francisco's. At the University of Washington he witnessed his first psychedelic light show, and was amazed.

So in early 1967, when he attended a lumber convention in San Francisco, he explored the ground from where this art form had sprung. By this time, young idealists were descending upon San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood from all over the country, preparing for the Summer of Love and developing through their music, their art, their use of hallucinogens a

unique psychedelic mode of expression.

Patoray visited the famed Fillmore Auditorium, a huge second-story dance hall that in some ways resembled Casey's. He met Bill Graham, the rock impresarios who owned the Fillmore, and learned from him the tricks of the light-show trade. He met Joan Baez and other musicians. He bought as much light-show equipment as he could.

When he returned to Lewiston, the remodeling began. He hired a Lewiston artist, Bill Weir, who turned out to have a flair for black-light paintings and other psychedelia. Patoray painted the ceilings black, covered the walls with black cloth and hung Weir's artwork, which eventually included a large velvet rendering of the Beatles in Sgt. Pepper regalia. Patoray brought in five 16-millimeter projectors and about 25 slide projectors; in the coming years he would make perhaps 20,000 slides. He hired an engineer at O'Hare Airport to construct three large strobes of the type used for aircraft landings.

When Casey's reopened March 31 and April 1, 1967, with a Seattle band called Canterbury Tales, the place was hardly recognizable. Patoray employed the light-show techniques he had learned at the Fillmore. He poured mineral oil and food coloring into glass dishes with slightly raised edges the cases of large clocks, for example and, using an overhead projector, covered the walls with swirls of radiant, kaleidoscopic designs. He would supplement the show with slide projections of everything imaginable musicians, landscapes, family vacations or perhaps a movie or newsreel running backwards. Meanwhile, the strobes splashed the dancers with staccato light.

Again, there was a time lapse while the community assimilated this latest development of the '60s. Some people didn't quite understand. "Don't drink beer and look at the strobe," was a common warning. "It'll make you sick."

Yet the teen-agers quickly embraced psychedelia. They eventually ran the light show themselves and immediately provided Patoray with a stream of weekly posters with suitably abstract lettering often creative, sometimes truly unreadable and slogans reflecting the times: "Electric music for the mind and body"... "Surrealistic therapy in strobe and color."

At the time of the reopening, Patoray claimed that only five other cities in the country were putting on light shows of similar scale on a regular basis: New York, Chicago, New Orleans, San Francisco and Austin, Texas. By all accounts, that was true. In September 1967, a San Francisco group opened a psychedelic dance hall in Denver, but it bombed.

So why would a town the size of Lewiston be at the vanguard of such a thing? Certainly the Casey's crowd borrowed from San Francisco only the aesthetic tenets of the counterculture, and perhaps a bit of the idealism. Very little of the politics. Probably the only common vibration between Lewiston and Haight-Ashbury, excepting a lumber executive with a fondness for black light, was the Idaho town's proximity to the Nez Perce Indian Reservation: Chief Joseph of the Nez Percés was a hero to certain leaders of the counterculture.

One explanation for this second phase of Casey's success lies in the fact that the light-show fad indeed began in San Francisco, not London or New York. Actually, it was introduced in 1952 as a serious art form, accompanied by jazz or classical music rather than rock. It was well-known in the Bay Area but nowhere else. When it transformed into a pop trend 13 years later, it couldn't follow the usual westerly migration. It dispersed slowly, randomly. Lewiston was as good a stopover as any. For one thing, acquiring a dance permit in some cities was a strangely difficult process; Patoray had no problem in Lewiston.

It also helped that Patoray, despite his conventional background, was enamored of the visual

aspects of the psychedelic revolution. He was convinced that the light show's atmosphere of disorientation had a calming effect.

"With the first session, from '62 to '66, when we started getting older kids 21, 22 we were pretty well-policed," he says. "I always had two hired deputies with me; we watched for drinking quite a bit. Beer and a tough teen-age kid is dynamite. You can't control them. We didn't have big trouble, but near the end (1966) people were drifting between the Blue Hare and Casey's, and they'd been drinking.

"When this psychedelic thing came in, we could have gone on for four or five years and never hired a cop there at all. There was never a sign of trouble the love generation and all that. It was just a different attitude."

Meanwhile, his Bay Area connections spawned fresh musical acts for Casey's. Two of his biggest catches were Moby Grape, a seminal San Francisco psychedelic band whose first album had reached No. 24 on the charts, and Blue Cheer, a noisy precursor to heavy metal that scored big in 1968 with a remake of "Summertime Blues." Two eras of Casey's were united on Dec. 30-31, 1967, when the Wailers played with the San Francisco acid-rock band West Coast Natural Gas. Prominent Northwest acts like Merrilee Rush ("Angel of the Morning") and the Bards ("Never Too Much Love") performed several times.

But none of these bands prepared the Lewiston rock 'n' roller for the Yardbirds and Jimmy Page. It seemed something of a revelation when this anemic-looking guitarist ran his guitar strings over the top of his microphone stand or hoisted the instrument over his head. "It blew people's minds," one Casey's regular says. "Page was obviously onto something."

As it turned out, the Lewiston gig was one of the Yardbirds' swan songs. The band broke up two months later.

By 1969, the Haight-Ashbury scene had disintegrated. Some of its residents had moved to the country; some had become heroin addicts; some perhaps had been sent reeling by their own vision. Or, to paraphrase a lyric by the Electric Prunes, a band that had booked and later canceled a show at Casey's, the counterculture had perhaps "had too much to dream last night."

On Oct. 5, the Lewiston Tribune ran an Associated Press record review that declared in the lead, "Psychedelic music is dead." Elsewhere was a report that the daughter of television personality Art Linkletter had plunged to her death on a bad LSD trip the previous night in Hollywood.

In Lewiston on the same night, a 16-year-old girl had overdosed on LSD and passed out in a rest room at Casey's. She had been taken to a hospital, her condition declared critical, and had been treated for drug-induced paralysis of the lungs. Her condition quickly improved, and she was released two days later.

On the same day, a Pentecostal minister, Raymond Tucker of Lewiston, initiated a petition drive to "close any Lewiston establishment where illegal drugs were sold or where persons under the influence of drugs congregate." Five days later, a petition bearing 1,317 signatures was presented to the Lewiston City Council, requesting that Casey's be closed and sparking an emotion-charged public discussion. In certain quarters, the club had developed a dark reputation.

Patoray issued a statement saying, "Let's close Casey's and the drug problem is solved. But if it's still prevalent, then let's close ... the A&W, the drive-in theaters, the football field, the basketball courts."

The council apparently agreed that the site of the overdose was incidental, and nothing ever came of the petition.

For the most part, authorities seemed to view Casey's as a healthy outlet. Patoray was image-conscious; after dances he scoured the parking lot of the bank across the street, gathering his customers' debris. For security guards he hired off-duty police officers, and at least one of them, Ralph Russell, was extremely well-liked by the clientele. When Russell was slain by gunfire in the line of police duty in June 1970 (in an alley across the street from Casey's), teen-agers spearheaded money-raising efforts for his wife and children.

After the Yardbirds show, the big-name musical acts were big in name only late versions of bands that included only obscure members of the original lineup. On the night of the overdose, the advertised band, cryptically, was the Zombies, who had supposedly broken up a year before. The version of Buffalo Springfield the name was apparently removed from the Casey's ad at some point that appeared in 1969 included neither Neil Young nor Stephen Stills. Some incarnation of the Animals showed up in 1970.

Meanwhile, Tucker was undiscouraged by the failure of the petition drive. He began pointing out fire hazards at Casey's, and to this day he believes he contributed to the closure of the club. At any rate, Patoray made several fire-code improvements and kept the club going on a spotty basis. Lewiston High students continued to view Casey's as a part of their turf; the Class of '73, for example, held its 10-year reunion there, and the Class of '71 tried unsuccessfully to stage its 20-year reunion there this year.

Still, crowds had been dwindling since '69.

The biggest blow, says Patoray, came in July 1972 when the Idaho drinking age was lowered from 21 to 19. Now 16- and 17-year-olds who formerly patronized Casey's could bluff their way into the bars with fake identification. In 1970 Patoray's lumber career had taken him to Grangeville, and by '73 Casey's was open only a few times a year. Patoray moved to the Portland area in 1974 and gave up the lease on Casey's shortly thereafter. Since then, he has concentrated on the lumber business.

His success in the entertainment field, it now seems, was at once heightened and limited by his insistence to remain on the fringe of it. His initial vision to bring big-name acts to a teen-age club in a scantily populated area was probably imprudent; he says he lost \$1,000 on the Yardbirds. Still, he pursued the vision with enough financial acumen, enough empathy with youth culture, to make it work for a decade. He essentially plugged into two underground movements: the raunchy Northwest rock scene of the otherwise placid early '60s, then the Haight-Ashbury counterculture. When he ran out of movements, Casey's lost its energy source.

"I was very dedicated to the lumber business," says Patoray, now 61, a plain-spoken man of a sometimes philosophical bent. "I was a good sales manager. But Saturday was a different day. Saturday was my day off, and it was all entertainment.

"I don't know how many times I was approached to put liquor in there. I know liquor would have made me a millionaire. But that wasn't my kind of life. There are so many hurts in the world. Everywhere you turn, you see hurts. Where do ever see them more than in a bar? .... some guy blowing his money, the family going hungry?

"I just liked doing it for the kids. I just liked to see the kids walk out the door and say, 'Good band, good show, nice place.' That's all I wanted. I never made any money. When it was all said and done, I probably traded dollars."

Except for occasional dances in the late '70s and an ill-fated attempt to turn the ballroom into a disco, 848 Main St. has been dormant for 16 years. On the outside of the building, the painted lettering from the psychedelic period has worn away, leaving the distinctly early-'60s imperative,

"Twist 'n' rock." Also gone are the two plywood dancing girls who used to grace the overhanging Casey's sign. Yet the sign itself, obscured by birch trees, hangs there still, as if to prove the whole thing wasn't a dream.