

# TEENAGE HEAD



**MRR:** We are very honored to have with us the greatest rock 'n' roll band to ever come out of Canada, Hamilton's Teenage Head. Now, I believe Teenage Head started with Frank and Gord. Your guys were wrestling partners in 9th Grade gym class.

Frankie: And Steve. I got into that much later. You guys were into that Greco holding.

Gord: Westdale High School.

**MRR:** So, the three of you were avid wrestlers.

Frankie: Oh yeah, right.

**MRR:** Did you guys share the same musical tastes back then when you were in 9th Grade?

Frankie: Yep.

**MRR:** Right on. And when did you start practicing together? What grade were you in?

Gord: Well, I was the oldest, so I was the only guy capable of going to the beer store on Longwood Road. It was about 10th Grade. Like you said, we had the same musical preferences: Dolls, Stooges, MC5, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent. We were the only guys in school with light jeans.

**MRR:** Back when everyone else was wearing bell-bottoms. A lot of kids don't know that. We used to have to get our moms to take 'em in for us. Frankie, you were originally the drummer with Gord playing guitar, and you rounded out with Steve on bass. What prompted you to move to vocals back then?

Frankie: I broke my wrist and our original drummer, Nick Stipanitz, he filled in and I took over the mic.

Gord: We couldn't find a singer. Nobody wanted to sing. That was the hardest job. Frank started singing when he was playing drums. It was just a three-piece: me, Steve, and Frank. So when Nick came, well, Nick went away for whatever reason and when he came back, Nick could play drums and Frank could move to vocals, so we finally had a singer. Then we just started rehearsing whatever songs off whatever records we were buying at the time, trying to learn the songs, and then eventually we started developing our writing skills.

**MRR:** What cover songs were you playing in the earliest days?

Gord: You name it. Me and Steve were into the Dolls. I think Frank was into the Beatles and Elvis. Steve was into Sweet and Mott The Hoople. Black Sabbath. Anything that we could learn. You know, Hawkwind... Songs that we could figure out. That's what we would play. As long as we liked them.

**MRR:** Now, you guys practiced in the basement of Frankie's parents home every Saturday morning. Tell us about that.

Frankie: No.

**MRR:** Did you ever get complaints by the neighbors?

Frankie: Every Saturday.

Steve: And then the cops would come, but they were really nice. They would say, "Well, look guys, just turn it down a little bit because it is in the middle of the day." And they would actually tell us that we were getting better every time they would come.

**MRR:** Were some cops better than others?

Steve: They were all nice.

Gord: They got to know us.

**MRR:** That must have pissed off Frankie's neighbors.

Gord: It was more his mom and dad and the cat.

**MRR:** Now Steve, back then you started playing bass left-handed on a right-handed Fender precision strung upside-down. How did that happen?

Steve: I didn't know there was a left-handed bass. Gordie had a bass; he

was originally a bass player before he got a guitar, so I grabbed that and I just flipped it over and the big E-string was on the bottom, so I just left it.

**MRR:** I remember you also had a bottle opener on the end of the neck of your bass. It was pretty cool because you could open a beer any place, anytime.

[loads of laughter]

Frankie: Good for the intonation.

Steve: There were no twist-offs back then.

**MRR:** It was either at the end of your bass or your teeth. Your first gig pre-dates the first Sex Pistols gig by six months. Where and when was this gig?

Steve: The high school gig—is that what you mean?

**MRR:** Yeah. That's what I was told it was.

Steve: 1975. October 19th at our high school at Westdale High School in Hamilton.

**MRR:** And how did the crowd react?

Steve: It was just the kids from the school. They called it a Coffee House.

Gord: Westdale was a pretty cool school. As a high school, they let us dress the way we wanted to and let us hang out where we wanted to. We never had any problems. No one ever told us we can't do what we were doing. It was kind of unusual to have a band at that time in high school. It was more folk music and things like that. We were never discouraged. It was a pretty cool school.

**MRR:** I saw you guys play at M&M Robinson and you opened for... I think it was Max Webster at the Delta, and you had these big platform shoes on.

Steve: Platform runners. I got that from Johnny Thunders, but I had to make mine, though.

**MRR:** You made them yourself.

Steve: They didn't sell them in Hamilton.

**MRR:** Where did you make them?

Steve: Just in woodshop class.

**MRR:** In Westdale?

Steve: Yeah, the school was very cool. They encouraged kids to do whatever. This woodshop teacher that I had, he didn't care that I was making speaker cabinets and bracelets and running shoes. I just took a pair of runners and sanded off the soles with a grinder so that it was smooth, and then made the wood platform and contact cemented it to the shoe and then painted it all white.

**MRR:** ...a la Johnny Thunders.

Steve: And then the top ended up ripping and I just pitched them somewhere. I wish I would have kept them.

**MRR:** There is lots of photo documentation.

Steve: I wore those at M&M Robinson, that's right.

**MRR:** Yeah. I think you had them on at the Delta Theatre, too.

Steve: Probably, yeah. I was milking it. I looked cool.

Gord: They were great in the winter.

**MRR:** Now you guys were big fans of the New York Dolls. What was it like? Describe seeing them for the first time. I know you guys all saw them.

Steve: Were you at Massey Hall that first time?

**MRR:** Yeah, I was.

Gord: It was everything we thought it would be. It was great. It's funny. I know Kiss opened up for them and they had all their explosions and fire and it was great. They were great. But, I'll tell you what—I couldn't care less about the bombs, I wanted to see the Dolls.

**MRR:** Yeah, that was when "Too Much Too Soon" came out. Did you guys see the Stooges?

**Gord:** I saw Iggy at the Victory Burlesque. That show changed my life. There was no doubt about it. I had never seen anything like that before. That was the most incredible thing to ever see.

**Steve:** That pre-dated the Dolls.

**MRR:** Yeah, I think that must have been before.

**Gord:** That was incredible.

**MRR:** Now, the name Teenage Head is taken from the second Flamin' Groovies album. Whose idea was it to use this for your band?

**Gord:** Well, I had the magazine. I had bought *Creem*. It was actually a 1971 issue. That's where I first saw the name of the album and it was the first subscription to *Creem Magazine*. If you paid your \$3.00 or whatever, you had a choice of albums to buy. I mean, you got it for free. One was Fruit, a Detroit band I think. The other was "Teenage Head" by the Flamin' Groovies. And I just remember in '71—I would have been 14 years old or something—I thought "Oh, what a great name for a band." I just kind of held onto it until we got one.

**MRR:** I know at one point Teenage Head was a five-piece with Sparky, and he eventually left. Did he leave you guys to join Simply Saucer, or was it the other way around?

**Gord:** No. I think we decided that for some reason we wanted to just be a four-piece and he was great—I was just kind of a thing that we felt we should do. And actually it was a good move, because that is when we started playing more. We went to New York City. Whatever chemistry we had as the four of us was a big difference.

**MRR:** Now, in the mid-'70s, the Musicians' Union was booking you guys into Youth Detention Centres outside of Hamilton. What do

you remember of those gigs?

**Gord:** We were just glad to get a gig. Again, we were only 17 or 18 years old. Just the fact that we got paid....

**Steve:** That was long before we came here and played Crash 'n' Burn. That was just the genesis of where we played our first five gigs. The first one was our high school and the next four were Detention Centres. One in Oakville, one in Hagersville....

**MRR:** I think a lot of people out there don't realize that Teenage Head was a rock 'n' roll band long before punk rock came around. I don't think you guys intentionally wanted to be a punk rock band. I think the scene here claimed you guys as theirs.

**Steve:** Well, you've got to remember that when Iggy and the Stooges and the Dolls and MC5 were around, it wasn't called punk rock, right?

**MRR:** Yeah.

**Steve:** Punk rock came afterwards when it was the Damned and the Dead Boys and the Ramones and stuff.

**MRR:** On the earliest Teenage Head recordings, Slash Booze was always credited for inspiration. Who is Slash Booze?

**Steve:** Brian Baird. A good friend of ours. We went to high school with him and he was one of the first guys to have a job so there was money for partying. He was really generous with what he had. He liked to have a good time and he would come to all our gigs and he was our number one fan and also had a great taste in music. He turned me onto a lot of music that I had never heard before.

**MRR:** I talked to him about a lot of really old rockabilly gigs in Hamilton; I didn't know that Link Wray played there. He was quite a wealth of knowledge.

photo below: Don Pyle







Steve: Yeah, some guys just really absorb all that stuff.

**MRR:** I always thought that was the inspiration part.

Steve: Well, if you saw him jump off the balcony at the Colonial Tavern, you'd see he knew how to have a good time.

**MRR:** Tell us about that. You guys were playing the Colonial upstairs and I think he used to join you when you played "Pills," the Bo Diddley song.

Steve: He was a guitar player. Frank would always call him up for that. He jumped right off the balcony. It didn't turn out all that well. He survived.

**MRR:** But he did the song before he went to the...

Frankie: That's when he decided to go on pills.

**MRR:** So he could sing the song with true conviction. I know in *Shades Magazine* in 1977, Andy Payne wrote a piece about Teenage Head in there, and he was kind of complaining about Teenage Head's Hamilton disciples who came down to Toronto and messed with the Toronto crowd. The Hamiltonians brought a bunch of roughnecks.

Steve: It was a working town. Let's face it. It certainly wasn't OCA. That's just the people that came from there. They were hardcore. They knew we were their band. You know how we have the Ti-Cats and Argos rivalry. That was that same thing. There was Teenage Head and then there was the Viletones and stuff. Our fans didn't take no shit. There was some pretty wicked Viletones fans, too.

Gord: The Viletones show at the Underground—that was the beginning of the whole punk thing in Toronto. That was it. I know there were things going on at OCA and that's how we were first introduced to it, but the Viletones show at the Underground, that was the first time you saw posters on poles. It was your whole Do It Yourself attitude. It was the first introduction I had. Look it, we got to do this on our own. He found a club where he talked a guy into letting his band play there, playing original music that was totally unheard of at the time. It was all cover bands.

**MRR:** Frank, by this time Teenage Head started getting really popular, and in the *Hamilton Spectator* you were quoted as saying "Everyone we knew were from Hamilton. Definitely a lot of the scene from Toronto came from the art school, and we would trudge in with all our punk friends from Hamilton. There was trouble sometimes." So I guess that was still the crossover effect. Do you guys remember Crazy Harry?

Steve: Oh sure. He was a Hamilton kid. Sure.

**MRR:** He was one of the ones that scared or freaked out the...

Steve: He wore the chain off a chainsaw. He wore it around his neck or something.

**MRR:** Yeah. His mother had a beauty salon in Westdale, I remember.

Steve: Yeah, that's right. At the corner of MacLan and King. I don't think he is with us anymore.

**MRR:** No, he's not. He passed away about eight years ago.

Frankie: He was a great guy.

**MRR:** Yeah he was a great guy.

Frankie: Three kegs Harry.

Steve: He used to have a bag of bennies, just to keep him awake.

**MRR:** Who did you guys play at the Crash 'n' Burn with? Do you remember?

Gord: It was just us. We closed the place. They had already lost their liquor license—if they ever had one—and we were the last band that played there.

**MRR:** And you guys played at David's also?

Gord: David's came in after and that lasted for about a year. We played there about two or three times. That did go on for about a year.

**MRR:** They had all those funny statues in there and stuff.

Gord: Yeah. DOA played there, so Toronto was starting to become known as a center for this type of music.

**MRR:** The band was getting really popular. It seemed in Toronto more so than in Hamilton, and again, Frank, you told the *Hamilton Spectator* around that time that "Hamilton was a bed and a stove to us. We do most of our playing in Toronto. There just isn't the market for our music in Hamilton." But that changed quite soon after didn't it?

Frankie: Yes. I miss Toronto, but I love the Hammer.

**MRR:** Yeah, I do too. I think that's what makes you guys the great rock 'n' roll band that you are coming from a place like that. The people from Hamilton do listen to pretty hard music, especially back then, as you said, it was all Dictators, MC5, Stooges....

Gord: Yeah. And the record stores had those albums, too.

**MRR:** I remember there used to be a pretty weird guy at Star Records that wore a Star Trek outfit or something. He did like a solo thing.

Gord: Wheel Base.

**MRR:** Yeah, Wheel Base. And I remember, when I was about 15, I went in there and I bought King Crimson *Red* and the first Stooges album, and he told me I couldn't buy them both. I had to put one back. So I kept the Stooges. He wanted me to buy the King Crimson record.

Steve: Can I answer your question earlier about who opened up for us at Crash 'n' Burn? It was Wheel Base.

Gord: You're right. All he had was reel-to-reel tape recorders chained together.

**MRR:** Why do you think it was easier to play in Toronto back then, as opposed to Hamilton?

Gord: Because there was something going on. There was a downtown core. The punk thing was developing. There was a place to play. There was an audience. There may have only been 100 or 200 people, but still an audience. And a lot of people don't realize that Crash 'n' Burn only ran for about six weeks. It wasn't a very long time, so it would be the same 100 people each week.

**MRR:** And it was just weekends too.

Gord: And then the suburban kids, that's what I noticed... The suburban kids started to come from North York and Scarborough.

and that's when you can start to tell that this thing was growing.

Steve: And there was a lot of media attention in Toronto. There were lots of sub-grade newspapers that were always writing about punk. You could always just pick up a magazine anytime and you would see a picture of Leckie or Frank or whatever. Hamilton just had the *Spec*. That was it. It took them a long time to write that article. So that summer, everybody knew that new wave and punk had hit. It landed here.

**MRR: December '77, I think, was the first time they quoted you guys.**

Gord: Like you said, we were already playing for a couple of years. We kind of had a head start on everybody anyways, so when we joined the scene we already had two years under our belt. We had already written ten songs. It was very easy. It was perfect timing for us. It couldn't have been better.

**MRR: I thought it was very cool the way you and Steve had never cut your hair.**

Gord: No, but Frank did. We were mad at him for doing that.

Steve: He had cut it for all of us.

**MRR: When I saw the pictures at Star Records, as a five-piece, Frank sort of had more of a David Bowie haircut back then.**

Steve: Great Bowie haircut.

**MRR: When you guys were all glamed-out.**

Gord: Well, no, that was still the New York Dolls influence.

**MRR: In the summer of '77, you guys jumped in a car bound for New York City. Along for the ride was Nazi Dog of the Viletones. The mission was to confront Hilly Kristal and secure a gig at CBGB's.**

photo below: Don Pyle

**Tell us about that.**

Steve: Mission accomplished. It took about ten seconds. We went to the front door. There was Hilly sitting there on his stool. We told him about our band and our idea and he goes "Sure. Come on down and play."

**MRR: Now, you guys just drove down there...**

Steve: There was no money. It was just like, "Of course you can come and play." Maybe he knew who we were. Maybe it was already set up. We don't really know. There was certainly no flack. It was just like that. "Sure, you guys can play."

Gord: And we were lucky enough, because whatever happened, whatever he did, he put us on the bill with the Cramps—the original Cramps, who didn't have a record deal at the time but were pretty hip as far as that New York scene was. And so therefore we played two nights at CBGB's and it was packed because it was a great bill. And there was media there. *Melody Maker* from England was there, *Variety* was there. So somebody told somebody about something and for some reason that whole Toronto thing going down there meant something to somebody for Hilly to put us on a good bill like that. He could have just tossed us on a Monday night, you know, "Here you go."

**MRR: So what nights did he give you?**

Gord: We did a weekend. It was a Friday and Saturday with the Cramps.

**MRR: So it was the Viletones, Teenage Head, and the Cramps?**

Gord: Yeah. That was the bill. I think some other bands were added later, but that was it.

Steve: Didn't the Diodes go and get their car stolen?

Gord: Yeah, I think something like that.

**MRR: And the New Yorkers, how did they take to you guys?**

Steve: Great. I thought. There was never no...

Gord: Yeah. We met all types of people there. People from Boston. Whatever was going on in New York, it was a great time. It was fantastic. I am so glad that I was able to go down there at that time because that is when New York was New York and that is when CBGB's really was CBGB's. It was just after the Ramones, so it wasn't in the raw time. They had already established themselves as being this cool place to be. And we were lucky enough to play there at the time.

**MRR: Was Joey Ramone at those gigs? I know he was a big fan of you guys.**

Gord: I don't recall if he was.

Steve: I think they were probably already on tour by then.

Gord: They played so much.

Steve: They were gone.

**MRR: What about when you went down to book the gig with Hilly? Did you go down there, book the gig, and come right back? I mean, it would have been one of your first times down there.**

Steve: It was the first time. We stayed at the Times Square Motor Hotel and Steve was with us. It was an eye-opening experience.

Gord: It was pretty bad and we were only twenty years old so it was quite established as far as a memory. No doubt about it.

Steve: Was that when we went to see Suicide? Did we go see Suicide play somewhere?

Gord: At Max's.

Steve: Was that on the same trip possibly? Like, "What are we going to do tonight? We got the gig, now we are here in New York for the night."

Gord: We went to Max's.

**MRR: Was Alan Vega swinging his chains around?**

Gord: No, he was just Frankie Teardrop [starts humming].

Steve: Me and Gordie saw Andy Warhol and Cyndia Fox on the



street right around the corner from Max's. We were just walking along and Gordie recognized him. I recognized Cyrinda Fox right away. And, as it turns out, I got Cyrinda Fox's autograph. I didn't even think about asking Andy Warhol for his autograph [laughter].

Gord: Who is he?

**MRR: You were just looking at Cyrinda.**

Steve: I forgot we even met Andy Warhol until Gordie reminded me a couple of years ago. "Remember who she was with? That was Andy Warhol."

**MRR: Actually, I think Cyrinda died a few years ago. She had cancer unfortunately. It's too bad. I guess she would have left Johanssen by that time...**

Steve: Her autograph says 'Cyrinda Fox-Johanssen.'

**MRR: OK. That was back when Roxene was doing all those pictures.**

Steve: She was in so much. She was as famous as any of the bands were.

**MRR: Yeah. She was really quite striking. Now, in Boston, you guys tried to play at a club, but got kicked out after you spilled some beer on borrowed equipment. What happened there?**

Steve: Isn't that stupid to think that we would go all that way to play in Boston? We had a radio station guy, Oedipus, some huge DJ who was hip to the band, and then because of something like this beer getting tipped over on something, obviously not intentionally...

**MRR: And probably does happen quite often during rock 'n' roll shows.**

Steve: Somebody had it in for us, when you really think about it. Here we are in this hotel room in Boston...

Gord: Yeah it wasn't quite the CBGB's trip. It was a little reality check.

**MRR: This was the Rat club?**

Gord: Yeah.

**MRR: And what was the band that gave you the hard time?**

Steve: Johnny Barnes. Did you say you saw his name in a Boston compilation? He was probably somebody in the Boston scene.

**MRR: He might have been on the *Live at the Rat* album, but you know what? I'm not really sure about that.**

Steve: Nice guy. [laughter]

**MRR: We won't say anything more about Johnny Barnes.**

Steve: We never ever did go back to Boston.

**MRR: I heard a story, though—I remember, back in the day, that you guys played in Boston. Maybe it wasn't Boston, or maybe it was fictitious, but Frank, you were swinging on some water pipe in a club and it broke while the gig was going on and water started squirting out.**

Frankie: Boston.

**MRR: So that was Boston? So, you guys did play there a second time, maybe, because I heard back in the '70s about this.**

Gord: I think that was during a sound-check. Were you swinging on water pipes during the sound-check? I think so. And it wasn't just a beer spilling, it was... You know, Frank is right. It was Boston, and that was it.

Steve: We *did* deserve to get thrown out.

Gord: And I don't think this Johnny Barnes guy...he was just a guitar guy and I don't think... I get the feeling that he just didn't want to have us on the same bill after that.

Steve: Had he done this pipe thing, I can sort of see, maybe... You know, boys, it is a little bit too much.

Gord: We were asked to leave.

Frankie: But we did stay the week.

Steve: Well, the weekend.

**MRR: So much for Boston. Do you guys recall New Year's Eve, 1978, the Welland Hotel?**

Steve: I do. I think about that a lot.

Gord: Did the Forgotten Rebels play too?

**MRR: I think... Well, I was going to ask you. I remember the Forgotten Rebels, the Existors, and the Sophisticatos.**

Steve: Good archiving.

**MRR: And I remember most of the crowd there was from Toronto.**

Steve: You're right.

**MRR: And then after the gig we all went to a motor inn and had a party until about 9:00 o'clock in the morning.**

Steve: Yeah, there were people there from Toronto that didn't have a room, and were just like, "What do we do now? It's January 1st. It's kind of cold out." In the summer, you can kind of just crash in the woods but...

**MRR: I remember that night, too, after the gig I saw Tank, who was passed out in the lobby with a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken. Why did you guys play Welland? Was that the only place you could get a New Year's Eve gig? I thought you would have been in Toronto or Hamilton.**

Steve: We might have been in between playing Toronto and Hamilton. I don't know what would have been the Toronto place to play at the end of '78. I don't know what was left. We might have already just been there and hitting the Southern Ontario circuit.

Gord: It was probably nice to just go do another town. Big time. Spreading our wings.

**MRR: Now, there was a really cool gig at the Horseshoe in 1978 where you guys played with Destroy All Monsters featuring the Stooges' Ron Ashton, and Suicide. The crowd was clearly there to see you guys, from what I could see. Do you guys remember anything from that night?**

Steve: It's interesting because I didn't know that all three of those groups were on that same bill. You told me that earlier. Suicide?

**MRR: No, you guys played with them. I remember people were throwing chairs at them one night and another night...**

Gord: That was great. I mean, the Horseshoe and the bands that came from New York. Every week there would be some cool band playing in downtown Toronto. It was fantastic. The Heartbreakers, the Dictators, Blondie.

**MRR: And it was almost seven nights a week back then.**

Gord: To see the Heartbreakers at the Horseshoe...

**MRR: ...doing their twenty minute set.**

Gord: Yeah. With a lot of tuning. It was still great.

**MRR: They were fantastic. I remember, again, the night you played with Suicide and Destroy All Monsters, that Mike Nightmare of the Ugly kept squirting Alan Vega with a squirt-gun and then he got really upset and walked off stage.**

Gord: Yeah, well.

Steve: Welcome to T.O.

Gord: I remember Mike Nightmare getting hail-bailed by Phil Lynott of Thin Lizzy. Cuff him. Like, hook him and he was out cold. I guess Mike said something to Phil and Phil being the tough Irishman just whacked him.

**MRR: Did you see that happen? Because I've heard different stories.**

Gord: Oh, I was there. I just remember the commotion going on...

Steve: It was at the Crash 'n' Burn, wasn't it?

**MRR: Thin Lizzy played Seneca College that night with Be-Bop**





Deluxe and he came down to the Crash 'n' Burn. I thought he had his roadies with him too, so I wasn't sure. Some people have said that they helped take Mike out. I wasn't there so I didn't see it. Now, you guys toured the US, I guess it was your first official tour of the US. What was it like when you guys

would get to a truck stop or something like that? Was everything cool?

Steve: Well, actually we were just talking about that on the way here. It was more the Canadian West that you would have us going into a tavern in somewhere like Red Deer to get a six pack, and Gord has got pink ostrich boots on and he's got make-up from the night before...

Gord: All dolled up.

Steve: And we would walk in and there would be a "Where did these guys come from?" Hurry up. Get out of here. In the States, not so much.

MRR: I heard this great story about you guys returning from one of your US tours—you tried to cross at the Detroit border and as you were going through customs, the guard discovered your cache of alcohol and said you had no problem coming in but you had to pay \$115 duty. So what did you guys do?

Steve: Well, we said we will drive through the States and come back through Buffalo.

MRR: So you could consume the alcohol instead of pay for it.

Steve: Yeah.

Gord: We'll show you. We'll just go back and drink it all and then we'll come back across.

MRR: Did you drink it all?

Gord: Well, yeah, and we did take the long way home.

MRR: Down to Miami and back.

Gord: All I remember is being in Cleveland and trying to figure out how to get back. But that was our attitude. We'll show you.

Steve: That was probably Slash Booze and he probably had mega money so he probably bought lots of good stuff. That was the 4th of July, because when we drove back up through Buffalo, the Stones were

playing at Rich Stadium that night. I remember that. That was whatever year that Stones gig happened.

MRR: "Black and Blue" or "Some Girls."

Steve: I don't know.

Gord: That was in about the tenth hour to get home and we would have been home in three.

MRR: Who was driving the van on that?

Steve: It might have been Kovac.

MRR: So there would have been Kovac, Stewart, Pollack, Slash Booze, and the four of you guys.

Gord: Yeah. That's a lot but that's very possibly it. Like I said, a lot of Pabst Blue.

MRR: In the summer of 1978, you guys released your first 7" single, *Picture My Face/Tearin' Me Apart* on Epic/IMG. These were different recordings than the versions that would be released on the debut LP. Tell us about those recordings.

Gord: At that time, 45s were still a viable way of selling music. I understand what would have happened was, "Let's record two songs. Let's put out a 45." You know, see how it does. You tested the market with 45s sometimes. And so we just went in and recorded those two songs and that was the whole idea. It was just more to test the waters, I'm pretty sure. That's why we went in and just did those two songs separately. And then, we went in later and did a five-song demo, preparing for a full album.

MRR: So the five-song demo, has that ever been released?

Gord: Actually, that is where "Picture My Face" comes from on the original album—from that five-song demo.

MRR: And what about the other four tracks. Have they ever been by the public?

Gord: No.

MRR: Wow. Well, I hope they do.

Gord: Yeah, well, there is a lot of stuff like that, and the idea is to get that somehow and make that into something tangible. Actually, we have tons of material that has never been released.

MRR: There are some incredible live tapes that I have heard. Live at the Delta Theatre doing "Little Doll" by the Stooges and a lot of really cool covers. Is there any chance that we will see that stuff come out?

Gord: Oh yeah. Especially now in the digital world, you don't even have to release something. You can put it out digitally as well, make it available. Once we get a handle on more of how that all works—it is very time-consuming and it is new. I think there is an opportunity to make that stuff available. It is a lot more realistic today than it was ten years ago.

MRR: There is incredible stuff. There are tapes flying around of Teenage Head live at Heatwave that are unbelievable. That is super cool.

Steve: Thank you. That was done on eight-track by Doug Comfort of Comfort Sound.

MRR: That is great. You guys were really, really good that day. And also there is a Q107 live gig and I believe you took a B-side for one of your singles from that.

Gord: That was in 1978.

MRR: Less than a year after you put out the single, you released the full-length on Epic/IMG. I remember back then that you had enough material to put out an album much sooner. Why did it take so long? I mean, you guys had the material before so many other bands. Even before the Diodes,

**I think you guys had stuff.**

Gord: Well, you had to get signed. You had to get someone to put up the money to get recorded. You have to remember, back then, it was very expensive to record. We had to go into 24-track studios, you had to pay top dollar. There was no way around it. You couldn't do something at home on a computer, which you can today. It was a very expensive venture, so you couldn't actually... To do a full-length album was a major project.

**MRR: I don't think kids nowadays realize what it costs. It is so easy to get a CD out there now.**

Steve: It's a different world.

**MRR: It was just really expensive to put things out back then. IGM I guess financed the first single, along with the album.**

Gord: Yeah.

**MRR: So it was more of a financial thing. It could have been a blessing in a sense, where you guys just kept on getting better and better and better and by the time you recorded it was...**

Gord: And also, you think of the bands that were around at the time, nobody really did get signed. Everything was all very independent. It was all very different in Toronto then, say, it was in New York and London. The labels weren't signing bands. They kind of just wanted this thing to blow over. Make it disappear somehow. And it didn't. So therefore that's why you don't see a lot of bands. They were all actually independent releases. They all did them themselves. Even our album was independent. It wasn't signed to a major. The only band that got signed to a major was the Diodes.

**MRR: CBS.**

Gord: Yeah. And when you think about New York and you think about London, think about all the bands that got signed to majors. In London, the Sex Pistols, the Buzzcocks, Clash, and on and on. Think about New York. Talking Heads, Blondie, the Ramones. I mean, in Toronto, there was nothing.

**MRR: Yeah, you know, it's funny, too, because a lot of the bands, the New York bands, the first place they would come and play would be Toronto or Boston, but we never... Do you think the bands here got a fair shake? Do you think we got slagged off because we were Canadian?**

Gord: I think the industry wasn't really paying attention just by the fact that they didn't sign anybody. I think all you have to do is look at the Juno Awards in 1978, 1979, and 1980, and see who won the Juno Awards, and you see if there is anything on there resembling...

**MRR: I wouldn't even have the wildest guess who was on.**

Gord: Yeah, well, take a look. I really believe that was the attitude of the industry towards this music.

Steve: You think of a guy like Seymour Stein. He had the smarts to hear what Blondie was doing. Madonna, too. Same with the Ramones. There were no guys like that in Canada that were hip to that street-level stuff. A band that had actual, real talent. You had people signing Zon or somebody. Nobody had any sense of that cool sound.

**MRR: Now, a lot of critics, Toronto people, more of your hardcore fans, had the opinion that the recording of the first album didn't represent the live spectacle, and I am sure you guys got that feedback.**

Steve: That's a really common sort of observation that people have about high-energy kind of bands. You could say the same thing about the MC5. You could say the same thing about the New York Dolls. You could say the same thing about...you know, the Stooges records were great but it's never the same on the record. They always say that. Well, they are two different things.

**MRR: See, I was told you guys hated it. I love the way it turned out.**

Gord: But then we were young and naive. I listen to it now and I wouldn't change a thing on it. But 30 years ago, I couldn't stand listening to it. It's perception and you don't realize...

Steve: I think in all honesty, what you like are the performances and songs. But it was never put together with the right guy to produce it. Whereas, with the Ramones, they had people in New York that understood the way the Ramones record sounded was awesome. We kind of felt like shit. We played as good as those guys.

Gord: That was the attitude. There is no doubt about it. They are going to chince on your presentation and production, and again, I think back to what the producer Alan Caddy did and where he came from. What he did as a producer, I don't know. I think his hands were tied as far as tones, but the production value is there. There is a lot of good edits. There is a lot of dynamics on that album, musically. I really do think it was him. He got me to do little harmony lines on guitar, things that I wouldn't have thought of. So he did really try. But he was in the same boat as we were. He was probably not with the right people. The cheap record company, you know—let's just do this thing and put it out. They didn't chince on the artwork though.

**MRR: The artwork is good and it is incredible the dynamics that you did get. Even with the way something like "Curtain Jumper" kicks in. That's beautiful.**

Gord: That's it. That is a very good comparison. If you compare "Curtain Jumper" off the original as compared to the remixed version, there are no dynamics. There is nothing there. The original has got something from beginning to end.

Steve: He had something going.

Gord: Yeah, he did.

Steve: But as far as re-tracking that album, there is this guy in the booth and we knew he wasn't into it. You just got that vibe.

Gord: Those days, if you brought a Marshall cabinet into the studio, you would get "You're not going to play through that, are you?"

**MRR: That's what we were saying last night about playing here.**

Gord: But now it is an industry standard. Every studio has a Marshall cabinet and a head. Back then, it was like you were bringing in the most offensive amplifier ever created by man.

Steve: "And why are you using that to record with? Come on, you can get a low wattage amplifier to do the same thing." Until we got Stacey Headon... There was something that happened with Stacey and that's when we had a good working environment, when we made *Frantic City*. You can tell the difference in the sound, right?

**MRR: For those who don't know who Stacey Headon is, he played with David Bowie on *Station to Station* and I believe he was on the *Lust for Life* tour.**

Gord: No, that was Gardener and the Sales Brothers. *TV Eye*, he was part of that. Do you remember that live album? The red live album? He was part of that.

**MRR: Now, how many times has the first Teenage Head album been mixed? I mean, there is the original IGM, then it came out on Other People's Music remixed. Then I think the CD release from about ten years ago or whatever it was, I think it was redone again. Peter Moore and Chris Spedding were involved in that.**

Gord: Yeah. Yuck.

Steve: But they wouldn't have been able to remix it. They could only put it into the computer and change the treble or bass. It was the same mix as they were working from the tapes. And then they got a hold of a couple of other tracks. There are two versions of "Lucy Potato," I think.

**MRR: Yeah there are. I think there are two versions of "Tearin' Me Apart," too. I like the original IGM the best. A re-mastered version of "Top Down" made it on to radio in the summer on 1979 and made the Top Ten. I guess when that made waves on Q107, I guess that's when you decided to re-master the album?**

Steve: Re-mix. That was us just still being stubborn, you know. This album didn't sound like...



**MRR:** And did that version sell more than the IGM one?

Gord: No the IGM one... That's an interesting thing, too. Steve found this out. That first album, the IGM version, the first original album, it was deleted June 2nd, 1980, the day that we had the riot at Ontario Place. So, here is the label, having already sold 20,000 copies, which isn't too bad, they were punching a hole in it the day that we had a riot at Ontario Place with, whatever, 5,000 or 7,000 people there. There is again the insanity of the recording industry and their perception of this type of music. We had to knock down a lot of walls. And then to start touring and crossing the country, that was the first time. I really think we knocked down a lot of doors for a lot of bands to be able to go into clubs and play. It suddenly was OK to book a new wave or a punk rock band.

**MRR:** Well, actually, when you guys had the riot at Ontario Place, you closed down the doors for DEVO, Biondie, I think. Everything that was remotely considered a new wave or punk was cancelled for that summer. One of my favorite times seeing you play, and I certainly didn't expect it to be, was when you played a huge festival at Mosport Race Track back with the Talking Heads, B52's, the Pretenders, Rockpile. The Clash were supposed to be there but didn't show up. And it was called Heat Wave. You guys went on at 10:00 a.m. sharp and put on a killer show. I always wondered, did you guys stay up all night or did you get up really early and play? Because you guys were pretty energetic and I thought "Teenage Head, these guys don't get up this early for anything."

Steve: I guess we were just young and excited and we got some sleep.

Gord: It was pretty sedate and everyone stayed at this hotel in Oshawa. There was no partying. Everyone was just in their rooms. It was kind of boring and we just wanted to get to our rooms and get to sleep. There was nothing going on at all.

**MRR:** Now, did you guys do a sound check the day before?

Gord: Yeah, we did, for some reason.

**MRR:** What was it like that morning when you flew in on the helicopter and saw that huge crowd waiting for you?

Steve: It was different, that's for sure.

**MRR:** It wasn't like playing Larry's Hideaway... On your live record, I believe it came out on Ready Records, there is a great picture of Frank jumping in the air, looking out at the crowd. That's actually a great live record. That's a really hard record to find, one of the hardest Teenage Head records to find.

Steve: So I hear, yeah.

**MRR:** When you guys played the Last Pogo, that was a pretty crazy night. You went on at the very end, and in the movie, Steve is with an undercover officer and you are having a very heated conversation. What were you guys saying to each other?

Steve: He was saying, "We're done." That was all. He was trying to get us off the stage. And I think that was prior to us even doing the two songs.

**MRR:** I thought you only did one song. I think you tried to play "Picture My Face" and...

Steve: I guess it was my luck because that is where the stage door was. The bass player is the first guy he sees and I was just drunk enough to not give a shit.

**MRR:** And what people don't know was that the place got trashed that night and then the next night was the artsy night with the Everglades and Rough Trade.

Steve: Is that right?

**MRR:** Yeah. They had to follow that one up.

Steve: We were on a train to Oromucto the next day. That's another story.

**MRR:** Well, I was going to ask you guys about that. You guys went on a tour of Eastern Canada that I believe Jack Morrow sent you guys on. I'd like to hear about that, because it was a very different reaction that you were getting elsewhere...

Steve: Yeah, he had three weeks. We had one week in Oromucto, one week in Fredericton, and one week in Rishibuctu.

**MRR:** I don't even know where that is.

Steve: Yeah, well, it is the East Coast of New Brunswick.

**MRR:** Did you guys play Halifax after that?

Steve: Not on that tour. It was just the three weeks. You know, you can imagine a week in one place. They don't even want you there for five minutes and you are there for a week.

Gord: Again, this was just the mentality. You picture that. There is a punk rock riot, a closing of the Horseshoe, and some say we are the top band of whatever is going on, so what do you do? You send them to Oromucto. That's how you get their career going. Oromucto. Big sales. Oh, big college town, Oromucto. Ridiculous.

Steve: You know what happened when we got there? We played one set or something like that, and the club owner just said, "That's it. I don't want you playing here anymore, but you got to show up every night if I'm gonna pay you, you have to fulfill your contract and be sitting on the edge of the stage for the rest of the week." We did that.

Gord: He had probably paid a deposit or paid in full, so he couldn't get his money back, so what he did is made us show up every single night to drink beer or eat pizza and play pool, but we had to be there from 9:30 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. Just forced to be there for the next six nights.

photo below: Don Pyle





**MRR:** Yeah, it's five songs and I think they re-recorded it again. They were also on Ready Records.

Steve: Wasn't the A-side the whole side of a 12"?

**MRR:** No, it had one 30-second song called "Oh Well."

Steve: I would love to get that. It sounded great.

Gord: Didn't you steal that from Kovac?

Steve: No. But that is haunting me.

Gord: I've got it. Maybe I did.

**MRR:** Gord, you have lectured at McMaster University in Hamilton on the history of punk rock music for the 2AA3 Popular Music course. What's it like lecturing at University?

Gord: I was scared to death.

Frankie: Oh, Professor "Crazy Legs" Lewis.

Gord: No. I really was scared to death. For whatever reason. I was just taking some music courses, so I went to the different schools at McMaster and Mohawk in Hamilton. I just wanted to learn and so that was one of the courses that I took, and because I happened to know the instructor a little bit and I saw in the course curriculum that there was a whole part on punk rock. I just said, "Look, I play in a band called Teenage Head. I was there. If you want me to say anything to the kids..." I was the oldest one there, obviously. And he said "Sure." And so I did. Like I said, I was scared to death, but it was pretty easy because once I got up there, I just kind of related the whole thing about Elvis dying in '77 and Sid Vicious dying and that's what I related to what was going on in punk rock. Those were two very pivotal moments. So once I got that going, then I knew what I was talking about and so it went OK, but I had to talk for 50 minutes. And the kids loved it. They told me they liked it. It was very positive.

Frankie: Can you take me and him for show and tell?

Gord: They would love you.

Steve: Yeah. I could use the slide projector.

**MRR:** Professor Venom and Professor Marshall. Now, people out there know that there is [teenagehead.ca](http://teenagehead.ca) and there is information there to get the first two albums which have been re-released on CD.

Gord: The first album, *Frantic City* and *Some Kinda Fun* are distributed by a company called Unidisc in Montreal. It is a very small company. And that was the result of song corporation bankruptcies a few years ago.

**MRR:** And can people get those through your website?

Gord: They will be able to. It's still a website in development. But it's OK, you know. It's getting there.

**MRR:** And people should check it out because there are some amazing pictures of Teenage Head there with their platforms and long hair. Really cool stuff. Steve, on New Year's Eve of 1981, Teenage Head opened for Saga and Triumph at Maple Leaf

Gardens. You knocked over a complete section of Triumph's lights, which fell onto the security barrier. Did you guys get docked for your pay that night?

Steve: I don't think so. I think we just got away with that somehow. I don't think much damage was done and it certainly was not intentional.

**MRR:** Yeah. I think you were just too close. You were standing up at the front of the stage.

Steve: That's where the opening bands get shoved, in that little six-inch space of the front of the stage.

Gord: It's a postage stamp.

**MRR:** What are the chances of us seeing a new album coming out from Teenage Head? The last one we had was *Head Disorder* and that really surprised a lot of people with how good it was.

Steve: I kind of like to wait about twenty years between releases. I think we have another five to wait. We're just having a lot of fun playing our set now. We've got six albums to pull songs from, and we just started practising a couple of songs off our first album that we don't play live too often, like "Ain't Got No Sense" and "Tearin' Me Apart," and it is great to have such a great catalogue of stuff.

Gord: Resources, yeah.

Steve: Not to say that it's not a great thing to put a new record out and it's great that we have twelve new songs, but...

**MRR:** Is there any chance that the live album will come out?

Gord: Yeah, for sure. We own that one.

**MRR:** Is there any stuff that didn't get released with that live recording, or is it a complete thing on the album?

Steve: There were other things taped that night but they didn't get produced like the album did. They were just left raw.

**MRR:** And one thing that I have been hearing about for ten years now and I really hope it is happening is there apparently is a documentary in the works for Teenage Head.

Steve: For quite some time there have been different people filming and interviewing, and nothing seems to really gel. Everybody has great ideas, but there is never any real finish line. You have to be patient in this business.

**MRR:** Are you guys maintaining or keeping the footage for yourself, or does somebody else have most of it?

Gord: They've got the footage that they did. We haven't come to terms with it and we gave them carte blanche to do stuff and so they have got it all. I think what we are hoping to do is marry the stuff that we have been doing the last few years with that and archival pieces. That is what I am hoping for. But whether everyone is going to agree to that, I don't know.

**MRR:** How far back does a lot of the footage go? What is the earliest footage? I have seen some stuff from *Crash 'n' Burn*.

Steve: Good question. When did they start sticking cameras in our faces, '96 maybe?

Gord: Oh, you mean them, Bob and Rick. Yeah, probably mid-'90s, because they were there for *Head Disorder*.

**MRR:** OK, because I have seen stuff where CBC were filming you guys in '77.

Gord: Again, it is just kind of a Herculean task to put all that stuff together, and what I am finding out is the whole editing process is quite elaborate. To put all that that stuff together is quite a job. You have to watch everything in real time, right, to know what is on there.

**MRR:** Well, it would be a story that could be at least a two-hour film at this point.

Gord: And that is what I am hoping to do. Again, that is another project, a DVD of some sort. Just something put together and it will grow from that. We'll get something and just move on from there.