

Bridging the Generation Gap

By Art Stevens

There is one huge chasm separating our generation from today's teenager – music.

Our generation has fond memories of such performers as Frank Sinatra, Andy Williams, Peggy Lee, Count Basie and Ella Fitzgerald performing the music of Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Stephen Sondheim, Johnny Mercer and Rodgers and Hammerstein.

I remember my teenage dating years when dancing to slow fox trots was every teenager's dream. But learning how to dance was a nightmare. Who knew then that the rewards of dancing with girls would far outweigh the initial awkwardness of learning how? One, two, three. One, two three. That's how the girls taught us to do the fox trot. Slide and step, one two three. Why is it that the girls always knew how to dance before the boys did?

It wasn't that we were retarded. It's because we were out playing baseball, football, and basketball until our mothers would scream. Dancing with girls came in a distant second – at least up to a point. Scoring the winning basket, hitting a home run with the bases loaded or throwing a seventy-yard touchdown pass were the stuff dreams were made of --until girls began to make an impression on us.

How much more comfortable we boys were on a baseball field than on a dance floor. Fielding ground balls was much easier than learning how to fox trot. Catching a football was much easier than learning how to rumba. Yes, rumba. Remember that?

But the day came when, pimples and all, we stumbled into the next phase of our lives: girls. And with it came ballroom dancing. Not a la Fred Astaire, but a la gawky, gangling, out of synch teenager. It did get easier as time went on but oh those first dancing steps. Thank God I don't have to go through that awkward, shy, ego shattering, confidence reducing stage again. Compared to learning how to dance becoming an astronaut in space is a picnic.

Today's teenagers listen to music by such groups as the Pimples and the Blackheads, Gangrene, Delicious Mayhem, Bad Sisters, Swollen Blisters and the Drop Outs.

How can we possibly forge an understanding with the younger generation if we make no pretense at understanding what they think passes as music?

To serve the interests of generational detente I'm devoting today's column to explaining teen music to older generations. I'm going to examine major younger generation music groups and define them. As a result you will now be able to engage in more meaningful conversations with your sixteen-year-old granddaughter.

ACID ROCK: the music that is played while gobbling down an Alka Seltzer following a six-course dinner. Lyrics accompanying the playing of acid rock are variations on the theme "I can't believe I ate the whole thing."

HIP HOP: music based on the act of getting out of bed in the morning with one foot asleep.

FUNK: music usually associated with being laid off, finding a nail in your soup, being arrested for jay walking or coming in last in a potato sack race.

NEW AGE: the direct opposite of old age music. It's music commemorating important birthdays like sixteen, sixteen and a half, sixteen and three quarters and seventeen.

RAP: the musical equivalent of Longfellow, Frost, Tennyson and Shelley. The lyrics are spoken not sung. Among the purists, words are often indistinguishable and guttural. The attraction is that concentration is not required.

ALTERNATIVE ROCK: Elizabethan music with words by Chaucer.

PUNK ROCK: music which accompanies gang fights, hold ups, assaults, apple snatching and identity thefts.

There you have it – the language and understanding you will need about today's teenage music. Now all you will need to do to start a conversation is say, "What's up, dude?"