

# The B-52's: A band that just happened

By Denise M. Reagan  
■ The Independent Florida Alligator  
U. of Florida

The B-52's are a rock band in the great tradition of fun and "so what." They didn't plan to be The B-52's. It just happened that way. And it's turned out better than a real job.

That's how Kate Pierson, Fred Schneider, Keith Strickland and Cindy Wilson put it.

"We just sort of came out like a blue streak of spontaneous combustion," said singer/keyboardist Kate Pierson in a recent phone interview.

The beauty of The B-52's is they just sort of fell into their rather envious position. One day they started jamming together, then writing songs, then a gig at a Valentine's Day party, then New York City clubs and the rest is history.

History meant "Rock Lobster," a favorite party request that quickly moved from the grooves of an independently released single to a full-length, self-titled, wildly-popular, major-label record. History meant a second album, *Wild Planet*, selling even more copies. History meant four more albums with varying degrees of critical acclaim and popular acceptance.

Yet one event scars their history. Guitarist Ricky Wilson died of an AIDS-related illness in 1985, just before the release of *Bouncing Off the Satellites*, which was dedicated to Ricky. After that, no one was sure The B-52's would come back.

"After Ricky died, it seemed like maybe we'd stop," Kate says. "We didn't know what was going to happen. We were just playing it by ear. Then we started writing together again and it really became a healing process to write together and be creative again."

Every once in a while on MTV, the song "Summer of Love," from the last album with Ricky Wilson, filters through a Beatles-esque scene as celebrities smile above a simple message: "Be Alive." It's The B-52's contribution to the American Foundation for AIDS Research's awareness-raising campaign called Art Against AIDS.

# MUSIC



DESIGN BY DENISE M. REAGAN, THE INDEPENDENT FLORIDA ALLIGATOR, U. OF FLORIDA

The funky style of The B-52's has endured and endeared for more than 10 years.

*Cosmic Thing*, the band's latest album, may have been one of 1989's best. The songs are rural and reminiscent of lazy Georgia afternoons, flowing with images of utopian idealism and a lush environment.

"Some writers move to the South and write about New York, and some writers move to New York and write about the South," Kate says. "We didn't really plan it or pore over our old albums and say, 'How can we make this like before?'"

What it sounded like before was the best house party you ever attended. Thumping, gyrating, hopping, squirming, rocking. "When we recorded the first album, that was the whole concept," Kate says. They stuck with that patented sound on *Cosmic Thing* even with production wizards Don Was and Nile

Rodgers, who Kate says were good about not branding the music with superfluous effects.

They don't need them, just the best of disco: the beat and the clothes. The B-52's are aptly named for the infamous bouffant hairdo that put Athens, Ga. — and the band — on the map. Kate agrees the music is what's important, but they still dress as wild as ever — because they want to, not because they have to.

"I really love wearing party clothes and dance clothes on stage," she says.

Those clothes used to place The B-52's among the fringe element, but record sales indicate a broadening audience. "I think we appealed to people who felt kind of weird," Kate says.

"But now I think everyone feels like an outsider."

# Teacher rocks students with history course

By Elizabeth Graddy  
■ The Red and Black  
U. of Georgia

The instructor stands at the piano and fingers the chords to "In the Still of the Night."

Five young men in the second row rumble the bass line. "Yeh-up...yuh-yep...yeh-hup...yuh-yup..."

About 10 young women scattered around the classroom sway and purse their lips, doo-wopping. "Shoo-shoo, shoo be doo ... shoo-shoo, shoo be doo ... shoo-shoo, shoo be doo wop, wop, wop, wop..."

Bill Ramal, a part-time lecturer at the U. of Georgia Music School, points at a young man near the front. "You look like a falsetto," Ramal says.

Of course he is. And without further ado, he breaks into the first line of the song. "In the stiiiiilll ... of the niight ... hold me darlin' ... hold me tiight ..."

In the hallway, passers-by peep into the room where Ramal teaches Music 418: History and Analysis of Rock Music. "And that," Ramal says, "is doo-wop. See how easy it is? Well, that's it for today."

An older woman at the back of the room interrupts. "Elvis!" she calls out. "Talk about Elvis."

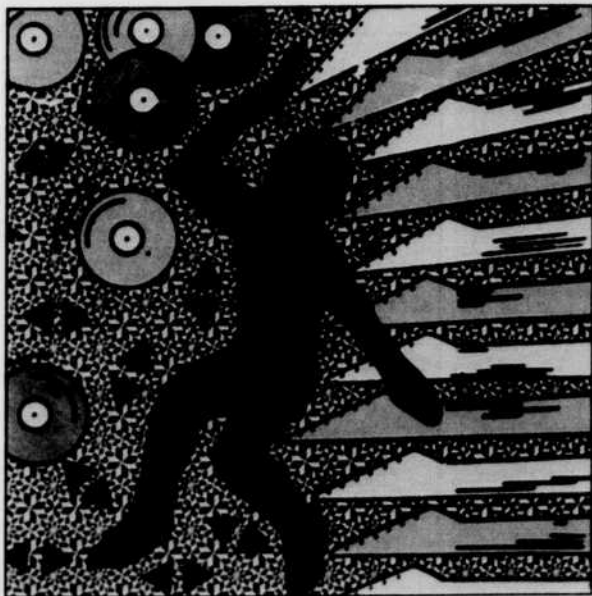
He clears his throat and smooths his thinning, dark hair back with a ringed index finger. "Elvis was a truck driver who made a record for his mama, sold a lot of copies, became a big star, got fat, took dope and died. Any questions?"

Not everyone agrees with Ramal's views — especially Elvis fans — but you can't escape the fact that he knows rock 'n' roll.

Ramal, who attended the Juilliard School of Music and earned a doctorate in music education from Columbia U., began his music career in the 1950s, playing the saxophone in New Jersey nightclubs while still in high school. "I was really goood," he tells his classes. "I was making a lot of money — it'd be about \$2,000 a week now." He winks. "And dope was really cheap then."

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# Derogatory song lyrics creeping into music industry



BILL SMITH, THE DAILY COLLEGIAN, PENNSYLVANIA STATE U.

By Gregory Roth  
■ The Daily Collegian  
Pennsylvania State U.

Derogatory song lyrics aimed at women, homosexuals and various ethnic groups suggest a trend toward tolerance of racism in popular music.

Guns N' Roses created controversy with its song "One in a Million" on *GNR Lies*. The song includes the lyrics: "Immigrants and faggots/They make no sense to me/They come to our country/And think they'll do as they please/Like starting some mini-Iran or spread some fucking disease." The song goes on to put down "niggers" and mock their "gold chains."

Guns N' Roses lead singer Axl Rose, in a recent Rolling Stone interview, said it is his constitutional right to say what he wants. He also said the lyrics are good for society because they create a more open atmosphere.

But Rochelle Louderback, president of Yachad, a Jewish student organization at Pennsylvania State U., said "his message is very closed-minded and I don't see

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how that could create more openness."

On the other side of the color line, Public Enemy's liaison to the black community, Professor Griff, said in an interview with *The Washington Times* that "Jews are wicked. And we can prove this." He said Jews are responsible for "the majority of wickedness that goes on across the globe."

Another rap group, Heavy D and the Boyz, takes shots at homosexuals on its recent album *Big Tyme*. The album climbed to No. 1 on the black music charts while promising in its lyrics that if you listen to the album, "you'll be as happy as a faggot in jail."

There are still far more non-racist and non-homophobic songs in pop music, but these examples are at the vanguard of what looks like a new trend.

Norman Eric Bigelow, public relations officer for Pennsylvania State U.'s Black Caucus, said the evolution toward open racism has been gradual. "After April 4, 1968, it was no longer acceptable to be overtly racist,"

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