SouthernMusic

The Playing Field

By Dan Schlafer

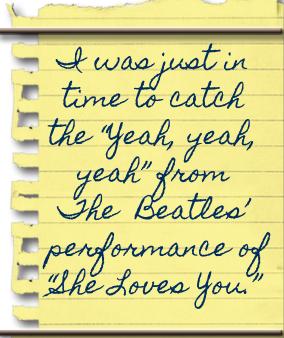
grew up in the home of a Southern Baptist pastor and his classically-trained, symphony-loving wife. Consequently, rock and roll music didn't stand a snowball's chance in August in our house.

If you look up "VICTORIAN CONSERVATIVE" (yes, capital letters, underlined, decorated with glitter), you'll find a picture of my parents. That's not to infer that they weren't good people. . They cared for, loved and nurtured their five children and strived • to raise them in their own image, and the focus of this image was "all things spiritual." True to this notion, they tended to look down their noses with great disdain at the 1960's music scene. I witnessed several sermons warning the faithful flock about the danger and evil of swinging hips and that "Satanic beat."

Unbeknownst to them, I snuck a peek at The Beatles on "The Ed Sullivan Show" that life-changing Sunday evening in 1964. I was just in time to catch the "Yeah, yeah, yeah" from their performance of "She Loves You," barely audible over the hysterical voices of the screaming, love-sick girls. It didn't matter; I was hopelessly hooked from the first chord. But, I knew better than to ask if I could go to the record store. The only music played in our home included hymns, Bach, Beethoven and Mozart. To her credit, my mom taught us kids music theory and piano. At what she thought was the appropriate time, she asked each of us what instrument we wanted to play, going forward. "Electric guitar!" was my immediate and excited response to her query. Mom was not pleased with my answer. "No! You'll play the violin!" came the stern reply, explaining guitars were played in bars where people smoke and drink.

However, being the resourceful child they had raised, I pocketed some of my lawn-mowing cash and rode my bike to the local drug store to procure (without permission) the next best thing a small transistor radio and ear plug, and, undetected by the powers that be, I hid it under my pillow each night to get my rock 'n' roll fix. To this day, I still have that little radio—my one-time window to the rock 'n' roll airwaves coming into my Knoxville bedroom from the outside world.

As for sports, football was tolerated, but just barely. In high school, I started on the varsity squad, and on the occasion that





SouthernMusic

my father would pick me up from practice, ests with others. My freshman year was filled he would sometimes hear the profanity-laden . with football and music; I joined a folk-rock commands from the coaching staff. It may have band (Contents Under Pressure—see ePubbeen meant to discipline and "encourage" me . lisher's column, page 2) and we concentrated and my teammates, but it also reinforced my on CSN&Y-type harmonies, covering some of father's negative opinion of the "worldliness" of . their songs and writing our own. Ironically, the environment. Consequently, he was hardly · the church choirs of my youth—plus my ever present in the stands to see my perforimental mother's music theory lessons—gave me a mance on the field. Although I didn't quite · foundation for lead and harmony vocals. And,

understand his stand on football and music, I tried to do my best on the field and I continued to explore the world of music that was evolving during the late '60s.

I loved the Beatles, but when I first heard the harmonies created by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young-along with their political activism their music grabbed my soul and would not let go. I longed to experience them live, but I may as have well had yearned for a round trip to the moon.

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After I graduated from high school, I was ·

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on several of our songs (although my bandmates insisted on calling it "a fiddle"). What may have seemed like a contrast between playing football and playing music was actually more similar than not; both meant learning how to work with others as a unified force to achieve a common goal. Meanwhile, education-wise, I studied to be a coach...just in case our band fell short of a record deal.

My sophomore year, our band began gain-With five kids on a pastor's salary, we had · ing popularity, but I was sidelined on the very little money in my home. My mom taught i football field. It was a devastating blow, but occasional piano lessons to kids in the neigh- I could hear my father's words echoing in borhood to help make ends meet and I kicked 'my head to "Be the best you can be." I was in lawn-mowing money to help out (which . determined to follow that advice—just not justified my aforementioned purchase, at least 'necessarily in the "field" he had in mind. in my mind). Consequently, going to a live. After I graduated from college, the reality concert wasn't even on the radar screen; even that there would be no recording contract, if the resources had been there, the permis- i nor NFL offers led me to pursue my "third" sion to attend would never have been. What's · dream—that of being a coach and mentoring young players.

One of my first opportunities came in an finally free to continue my love for football ' unusual package—being a teacher and head and music. Plus, my ability on the field earned . coach of Tennessee School for the Deaf in me a scholarship to a small, Christian college. Knoxville. I knew it would be a challenge—I I was determined to share both of these inter- . had always played and coached using verbal snaps and play calls. But, as my father . stage left, on the slim chance that we might would have said, the greater the challenge, ' get a closer glimpse. While waiting outside the greater the reward. I was able to coach . the dressing room door, a young man and his two deaf national champion runner-up teams, · lady exited. When I asked if he had met the and in 1980, I was named National Deaf band, he affirmed that he had and gave me Prep Football Coach of the Year by The Deaf · his backstage pass. A minute later, I was get-

American Magazine. More importantly, some of my players went on to greater things. One of them, born with birth defects and one leg shorter than the other, was an outstanding kicker, and he went on to become a high school All-American, something that (in addition to being on stage with CSN&Y) I only dreamed about.

That job led to yet another head coaching position—at Knoxville Catholic High School. Eventually, I went back to

school and got my Masters and accepted the i all my college band's performances of "Suite: I served there for ten years, before mov- : Sweet Judy Blue Eyes"), I felt honored that he School System. But, I never lost my passion . bent down and gave me his pick! my college years.

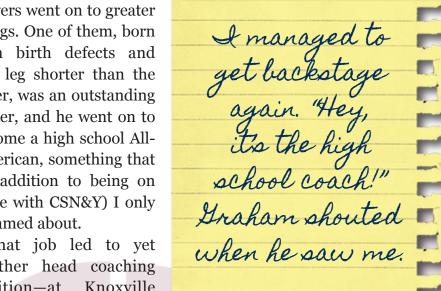
degree at the University of Tennessee, my wife, Coach of the Year award in 1980. However, knowing my passion for their music, bought · even then, he was sparse with his praise and two tickets to a Crosby, Stills and Nash concert i acceptance of my chosen field. I know that it's at the Starwood Amphitheater in Nashville as . not uncommon for father-son relationships to a graduation present. I was beyond elated! ' be tenuous or even difficult. I also know that As the show began, I couldn't control the . there's always the aspect of the son wanting tears that flowed. Having been taught the 'to live up to the "legend" of his father...or scripture verse, "Ye have not because ye ask . his father's expectations. I would have liked not," after the show, we made a beeline to ' to say that my father's expectations—or at

ting David Crosby's autograph. Graham Nash's signature followed with a friendly chat about my work as a high school football coach. They seemed pleased that their music was appreciated by a high school coach. I was simply pleased that they were pleased.

The following year, once again after one of their concerts, I managed to get backstage again. "Hey, it's the high school coach!" Graham shouted when he saw me. After

principal's job at Tellico Plains High School. · Judy Blue Eyes" (and occasionally "Not So ing into the administrative side, as Federal · remembered me. Then, a few years later, the Programs Director for the Monroe County ' perfect and unexpected ending to a Graham School System and then 9th District Board of . Nash concert came after his final encore, Education Rep for the Cumberland County ' when Graham walked to the edge of the stage,

for the band that inspired me so much during . Although my father passed away in 1981 and my mother's death would follow three In 1987, just as I was completing a graduate · years later, they were there to see me get the



48 SouthernReader | Spring 2021

SouthernMusic

least what I thought my father's expectations in missionaries, small business owners, and even were for me—were never a factor in my life . farmers, those who raise the very food we eat and career, but my father was bigger than life. ' to survive—the ultimate harvester. Yes, he was removed from one of his pulpits . Maybe my dad would have preferred for me when I was a child, and I never quite under- to be a minister, but we are called to be our own stood how someone with as big a presence as person. I'm sure my dad would be okay with me my father could have ever gotten thrown out · referencing Romans 12:6: "We have different of his church. In later years, I learned that gifts, according to the grace given to each of

he was dismissed from his pastorate—and run out of town-because of his stance (and sermons) on advancing the cause of civil rights in our little Alabama church...in the early '60s. And, that was followed up by a cross burning in our front yard.

So, it's no wonder his legacy hung over my life. I vividly remember his impact on his congregation, and how his words and actions dramatically changed lives, time and time again. But, it finally

dawned on me; it's not the awards or the · don't say 'Yeah, yeah, yeah'!" trophies on your shelf that make for a sucare the lives that are affected and changed by your words, lessons, and actions. I realized that, just as the music of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young made a dramatic impact on my young life, and my father's pastoring made a lasting impression on so many of his parishioners, I had done more with my life than just win games and coach winning teams. Some of my players and students have gone on to change the lives of their own students, clients and patients. These not only include football coaches in their own right, but also military officers, law enforcement detectives, medical doctors, attorneys, Homeland Security agents, educators, mayors, school board members, .

us." And though my father

might argue that there's no mention of football or rock 'n' roll in either the New or Old Testament, I would counter with the psalmist's reference to the fruits of our labor.

With that being said, I have visions of my parents waiting for me at the Pearly Gates, my father holding up the dusty old 45 of The Beatles' "She Loves You." I imagine my father demanding, "What's the meaning of this, young man? And

"Mhat's the meaning of this, young man? And don't say 'Yeah, yeah'!"

If that happens, I can only hope there's an cessful life. Rather, what's the most important · iPad somewhere around, so I can pull up this article as a sort of explanation. That's the best I · can do as I beg for mercy...and understanding.



Athletic Association Hall of Fame.

