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JOHNNY AND THE DISTRACTIONS

In Portland, Oregon, the rains start around October and continue all through the winter. It's foggy. People spend a lot of time inside, searching for a distraction. In the summer of 1978, five local musicians found a shelter from the storm when they formed Johnny And the Distractions.

The band has been living up to its name ever since, diverting the attention of thousands of local clubgoers to a unique brand of high octane rock & roll that, it seems, flourishes best in the sodden Northwest.

"Places like Portland and Seattle," explains Johnny Koonce, Distractions guitarist-singer-writer, "aren't real glamorous. They're gritty, blue collar cities. After a day's work, the people there like to pile into clubs, get tanked up and just go wild, rocking out to a band that's cranked up to ten. That's where we come in."

Unlike the laboratory-tested supergroups or the flashy newcomers who so often proclaim their closeness to "Rock and roll!," Koonce and the Distractions remain modest about their origins. They live rock, play it, work hard at it, and rest secure in the knowledge that they know from where they came.

"The experience of playing to those audiences, in that region, that's what makes us what we are," Koonce explains. "The people who came to see us wanted their three bucks' worth. We always tried to give it to them."

The saga begins farther back. Koonce happily admits he "couldn't concentrate on anything else" once he heard his first Fats Domino side at age 5. He gravitated to Portland (he's originally from Washington, D.C.) and eventually fell in with fellow Distractions Kevin Jarvis (drums), LaRue Todd (bass), Gregg Perry (keyboards), and Mark Spangler (guitar, songwriting). All four are alumni of classic Northwest stomp-and-shout outfits like Gentlemen Jim & the Horsemen, Tank & the Septics and others—part of a continuum that started with Paul Revere's Raiders, The Sonics, and the Wailers, and extends right up to—Johnny & the Distractions.

Let It Rock is about as lively a document on a hard-working rock band as one could ask for. Koonce says, "The inspiration for most of the songs on the album is that intense club scene," and the music bears him out. The pace is non-stop, the playing tight, the vocals full of passion.

"In The Street" and "Shoulder Of The Road" ache with desperation and sing of the need to move and make action. "Guys Like Me," Koonce explains with a laugh, "is an insulting song directed to a girl who once insulted me." "City Of Angels," with its stinging guitar and pointed references, grew out of an impulsive trip to Los Angeles Koonce made not too long ago. "Break These Chains" makes its point clearly, though Koonce says the tune may be "open to interpretation, it might mean 12 different things to 12 different people." On record, the tune speaks to "the haves and the have-nots" about idealism and the need for satisfaction in an often cruel world: "I never dreamed that I could have everything that I wanted/Nobody made me any guarantees. . . ."

Picking up on the band through its independently pressed album last year, *Rolling Stone* cited the Distractions' music for its "eagerness rather than anger, urgency rather than anarchy."

The Distractions' music is nothing if not driven. Their concerns are nothing if not deeply felt. "Take the job you can't get/The bills you can't pay/The things you can't buy/Throw 'em all away," Koonce counsels on "Let It Rock," and the message isn't wasted. The Distractions' foremost bit of advice is, "You only go around once, you might as well have a good time."

"That's the way I feel," Koonce says candidly. "That's what 'Let It Rock' is all about. It's about that moment when the crowd is out there in that club. They've been drinking, and waiting for the band. You come out and that first song tells them what the whole night is gonna be. They're ready. You're ready. You hit 'em with that first song and it's like a movie starting or a plane taking off. That's really where we're coming from, and that's it."

