

NOW WE'RE TALKIN

By Helen Marketti

An Interview with Felix Cavaliere of The Rascals

Felix Cavaliere and Gene Cornish, original members of The Rascals, will be performing at The Hard Rock Rocksino in Northfield on Sunday, September 9. Ronnie Spector, who was lead singer for The Ronettes, will be opening the show to get everyone rockin'.

The popularity of The Rascals has spanned over fifty years. Memorable hits include *Good Lovin'*, *Groovin'*, *People Got to Be Free*, *How Can I Be Sure*, and *A Beautiful Morning*.

"I started off as a classical pianist. That is what my mom wanted me to do," remembers Felix. "When I went to junior high, a classmate asked me if I had ever heard of rock and roll. Well, to be honest I had never heard of rock and roll so I had no idea what he was saying. However, so I could fit in, I told him, 'yes.' After that, I discovered Alan Freed and that was when rock and roll was just getting started.

"As a piano player I was really influenced by Ray Charles, Fats Domino, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Little Richard. I was touched by how they played. Their music was something I had never heard in my life. I was influenced by the singers of the early days when rock was getting started. Back then, there were no voice enhancements. I heard magnificent voices that were nameless because they were part of groups like The Flamingos, The Penguins and The Heartbeats. It was an amazing epiphany for me because I was hearing such phenomenal talent," explains Felix.

"My mother was hoping I would be a pianist. She passed away at an early age. My father wanted me to be a doctor because everyone in our family was in the medical profession. I started out in pre-med at Syracuse University. You would never know!" (laughs)

He continues, "I did start a band when I was in high school. It was fun but I



had gone to Germany and before I knew it, we were on the same stage as The Beatles. They had not yet visited America.

"I remember thinking what great music they were playing. I felt like it was something I could do, too. I decided that when I returned to the United States I was going to start my own band," said Felix. "I believe that whatever it is you are meant to do, the doors will open up and you will find your way."

never thought I would be in the music business," said Felix. "The band I was in during college did a show in the Catskill Mountains at a hotel. Joey Dee and The Starlighters were also playing in the same hotel. Their hit at the time was *Pep-permint Twist*. Anyway, they saw me playing with my band and low and behold two to three months later their organist quit so they asked me to join their band! I was still in college. I had to get permission from my father to go to Europe with them. I took a year off from college. We

The reunion of Felix and Gene is a welcome treat for Rascals fans. "For some reason, The Rascals were always popular in Hawaii. We had a close relationship with the people on the island. I was there in 2017 and someone asked if we would consider doing a reunion show. When I got home I started making calls to my fellow original members," explains Felix. "My first call was to Eddie Brigati. I told him it would be a small handful of shows. We would do a few in Hawaii, Los Angeles, and New York. Eddie passed on the opportunity because he was already involved in a project with Steve Van Zandt. My next call was to Gene Cornish. Gene said he would love to do some shows and thought it was a great idea. Then I called Dino Danelli, who was our drummer. After thinking about it for a while, he decided to pass as well because he was focusing more on painting and being an artist. He was the one who designed our album covers. We have a band who will be touring with us. They grew up with our music so they are excited to be joining Gene and me. It should be fun."

Finally, Felix shares his thoughts on why he thinks people are still interested in the music of The Rascals and other music from the 60s era. "We have to remember back then there were not any social media avenues as there are today. There weren't any cell phones, Facebook or the internet. But what we did have was the music and that is how we communicated! We knew what was going on with other bands because what they thought and felt was written in their songs. I believe that created a bond between bands and their fan base, which is why people are still interested. It was a connection and they still feel connected."

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