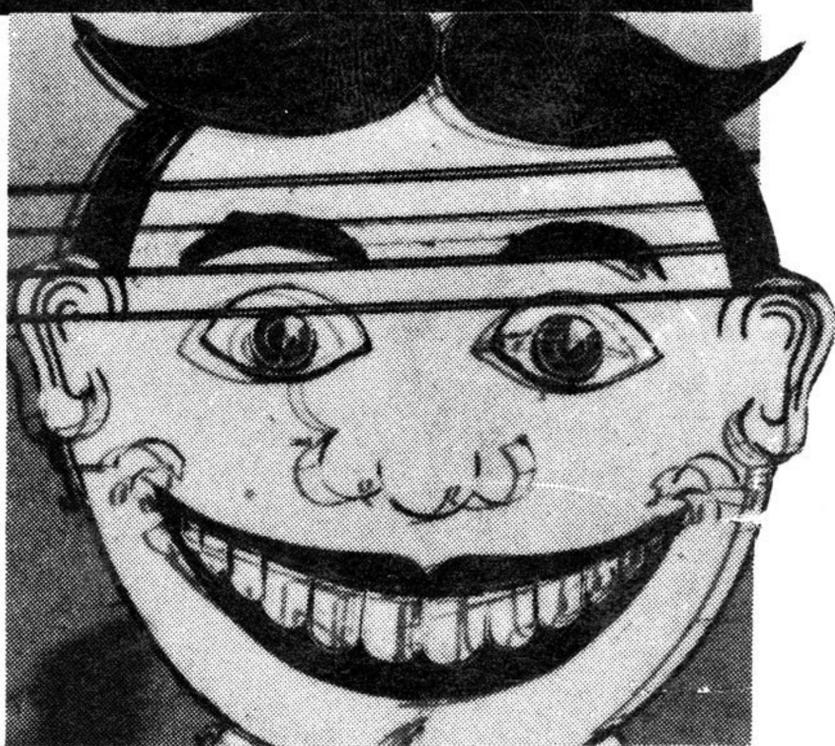


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JERSEY SHORE REPORT

JUNIOR SMOOTS AND THE DISTURBERS POPULAR AT SHORE



by Robert Santelli

OVER THE YEARS THE JERSEY SHORE HAS BEEN KNOWN PRIMARILY for its r&b and soul influenced brand of rock 'n' roll. The reputation, of course, stemmed mostly from those bands based out of Asbury Park in the mid-'70s. Outfits like Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes, Cahoots, The Shots and Whistler and the Wheels, to name just a few, filled their barroom sets with soul and r&b cover tunes as well as originals that borrowed heavily from the Motown and Stax-Volt sounds so popular a decade before.

But today, more and more Shore bands are eschewing the area's rhythm and blues/soul tradition and instead are chipping away at new directions and music forms with only passing regard for what came before them. Insiders cheerfully point out that this is precisely what the Shore needs, since this trend is helping to broaden the music scene here in addition to eliminating the r&b/soul stigma with which many Shore bands in the past were routinely saddled.

One such band which has broken with tradition is Junior Smoots and the Disturbers. Smoots and his seven piece band are the Shore's only reggae/ska band, and for inspiration look to Kingston, Jamaica rather than Detroit, Memphis or New Orleans, the classic r&b/soul towns.

You have to go all the way back to the days when Miami Steve Van Zandt was the band leader of the Asbury Jukes, a good two years before he became a member of Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band, to find a Shore group that would regularly include roots reggae in its set. Van Zandt was (and still is) a big reggae fan and because of his influence, the Jukes in 1974 and 1975—the years they were the house band at the Stone Pony—would do potent versions of Jimmy Cliff tunes like "The Harder They Come" and "Many Rivers To Cross."

Smoots and his Disturbers do nothing but reggae and ska, the predecessor of reggae which has a more uptempo beat and features much more instrumentation and solo spots, although lately the group has also been incorporating some African music in its set.

The Disturbers are: Danny Kroneyer on lead guitar, Judy Joots on percussion and back-up vocals, Rich Rampden on bass, Ken Douyotas on drums, Tracy Lawrence on keyboards, Tommy Meyers on trombone and Vito Roast on saxophone. Smoots handles the rhythm guitar chores as well as lead vocals.

The band began playing out early last year; most of its initial gigs were at the now defunct Fast Lane in Asbury Park when the club devoted one night a week to reggae music. When the Fast Lane booked Toots and the Maytals last Summer, Smoots and the Disturbers opened the show. The gig was an important one for the Disturbers since it exposed the band to those who had traveled down from North Jersey and New York to hear the legendary Toots Hibbert, and it paved the way for the band to venture outside the Shore for additional dates.

In the last six months, Junior Smoots and the Disturbers have made even greater strides. Not only have they become regulars in Shore clubs that usually cater exclusively to rock acts, but they've also recorded a demo which Island and EMI Records are presently considering. Smoots and the Disturbers are also favorites of Bruce Springsteen, and when he recently went out to California to work on new songs for his upcoming album with the E Street Band, he took a Disturbers' tape with him to pass around to record companies in Los Angeles.

The Disturbers' set is comprised of both original tunes and reggae and ska classics—all of which are enthusiastically delivered and highly danceable. Highlights include Smoots' own "Six Million Dollar Man" and "How Come" plus a torrid rendition of the Bob Marley/Peter Tosh gem, "Get Up, Stand Up."

Possibly the best place to catch Junior Smoots and the Disturbers is at the Harbor Inn in Brielle. Located underneath the Manasquan Bridge, just off Route 35, the club features Smoots and the Disturbers on Friday nights throughout the Summer.