

## **My Musical Journey with The Ventures**

From my earliest childhood memories, I know that music (especially instrumental music) has always been a big part of my life. I remember that, as a little boy of 4 or 5 years, my father had 78-rpm records that I liked to listen to. One of these was a sort of recorded fairytale in which a boy who was learning to play the piano is sucked into a world inside the piano and has an adventure there, something like Alice going down the rabbit hole or into the mirror. I wish I could remember the melody or the name of the song that was so central to that story. I often wonder if it was something I would like today.

I also remember that, around that same time, my father had a record with the song “Ebb Tide,” which I wanted to hear over and over again. It began and ended with the sound of crashing waves and seagulls calling, and the melody was hauntingly beautiful, even for this little boy. In later years, I searched high and low to try to find that exact version of “Ebb Tide” but I never did find it. I think “Ebb Tide” was the true beginning of my love for instrumental music.

[Note: I just looked up “Ebb Tide” on wikipedia and saw that it was written in 1953 by lyricist Carl Sigman and composer Robert Maxwell, and that one of the best-known versions was by Frank Chacksfield & His Orchestra. I then went to amazon.com and found Chacksfield’s version, which sounds like my childhood mystery version of the song. I’ll be ordering that CD tonight!]

Another early musical idol of mine, again thanks to my dad’s 78-rpm records, was Glenn Miller. The sound of the instruments playing off one another in intricate patterns just captured my imagination and my senses. My father also had records with other big band orchestras from the 1940s, but the Glenn Miller Orchestra was my favorite. My passion for Glenn Miller grew even more when, sometime later, I saw “The Glenn Miller Story,” a 1954 movie adaptation of his life which starred James Stewart as Glenn Miller and June Allison as his wife. (It airs frequently on Turner Classic Movies.) I was heartbroken to learn that Glenn Miller died when his military transport plane disappeared over the English Channel in 1944. “Moonlight Serenade” still remains one of my all-time favorite songs from any era. Thanks to modern technology and the internet, the music of Glenn Miller lives on and just last year I found a 10-CD boxed set on amazon.com that included 200 classic Glenn Miller tracks, at a cost of only \$30. Most of those tracks are now part of my iPod playlist.

As stereo began to grow in popularity during the early 1960s, my father replaced his old 78-rpm record player with a 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ -rpm stereo console and started collecting stereo albums, many of them by more recent instrumental artists, such as Enoch Light’s “Persuasive Percussion” series on the Command Records label and themed boxed sets from the Longines Symphonette Society (which I was able to salvage from my parents home after a 1989 hurricane -- more on that later). Again, I was fascinated by the interplay of the musical instruments, now with the added novelty of having them bounce around from left to right in stereo.

My father had an auto repair shop on the island of St. Thomas, where we lived, and I would hang out there doing odd jobs on Saturday mornings. Always playing in the background

was our only radio station at the time, WSTA, and on Saturday mornings they counted down the week's Top 40 Hits. This was probably my introduction to pop music. I liked most of it and got into the habit of using my small weekly allowance to buy 45-rpm singles with some of the songs that I liked best. Of course, that included Elvis Presley, but also Bill Haley, Paul Anka, Frankie Avalon, Petula Clark, The Beach Boys, Jan & Dean, The Temptations, The Supremes, and The Beatles, among many others. But in 1964, while riding with my father in his car on a waterfront road on St. Thomas called Veterans Drive, I heard an instrumental rock and roll song on the radio that would change my life forever.

It started with what sounded like a rocket blasting off and then an organ, electric guitars, and drums kicked in with a sound that took my breath away. That song was "Telstar," named after the world's first commercial communications satellite. "Telstar" was a big 1962 hit by the British band The Tornados, but the version that I heard on the radio was the much richer and more powerful version by an American band called The Ventures. I knew I had to get a copy of that record and, luckily, I soon found the album "The Ventures Play Telstar and The Lonely Bull" listed in a magazine advertisement for the Columbia Record Club. Now I had a new way to spend my weekly allowance!

When my copy of "The Ventures Play Telstar and The Lonely Bull" arrived, it was an instant love affair for me and the music of this exciting instrumental band. I had to have more! I started looking in magazine ads, local record stores (only two at the time), and the Columbia Record Club's monthly catalogs for other albums by The Ventures. I soon found out that The Ventures had been recording since 1960, and I had a lot of catching up to do. Eventually, I was able to get all of the albums by The Ventures before the "Telstar" album, and I continued to order newer albums from the Columbia Record Club as they were released. I clearly remember that one album, "The Ventures Play the Batman Theme," arrived in the mail the same day that the island was preparing for the arrival of a hurricane. I wanted to rush to listen to my new treasure, but I first had to help my dad board up the house for the approaching storm.

The music of The Ventures also inspired me to try to play a musical instrument and, at Christmas in 1965, I received a simple drum set consisting of a snare drum and a set of cymbals. My parents probably soon regretted giving me that gift, because I would lock myself in my room and beat the heck out of that drum, trying to keep in time with whatever Ventures record I had playing. But, although I could keep time with the basic beat of each song, I quickly realized that I really wasn't cut out to be a drummer.

The following Christmas, I got my first guitar, an inexpensive model from the Sears Roebuck catalog. I really don't remember the make, but it had a beautiful glossy sunburst finish and came with a small amplifier. Luckily for me, around that same time, The Ventures started releasing a series of "Play Guitar with The Ventures" albums that included a booklet with diagrams showing where to place your fingers in order to play some of the band's favorite songs. The accompanying record played each part (lead, rhythm, and bass) for each song, first at half speed, then at full speed, and then in a karaoke version with each part missing. Using these instructional albums, I soon learned to play such instrumental rock and roll songs as Walk Don't

Run, Tequila, Memphis, Wipe Out, Pipeline, Let's Go, Diamond Head, Secret Agent Man, and several others.

By this time, I was in high school and I convinced three of my closest classmate friends on the idea of forming a band. We called ourselves "The Screamin' Eagles" and started to get together to practice. Unfortunately, we graduated and went our separate ways before we ever had a chance to become good enough to play in front of an audience, and our musical careers came to an end. I still picked up the guitar every once in a while to practice, but I was going to college and was soon buried in the books and the studying.

Backtracking a bit, in 1958, Don Wilson and Bob Bogle, two construction workers in the Seattle/Tacoma area of Washington state who shared an interest in playing guitar, met and soon became good friends. With the help of Don's mother, Josie Wilson, they formed a band, originally choosing the name "The Versatones." But that name was already taken by another musical group, so Josie suggested "The Ventures" because they were "venturing" into a new career. By 1960, The Ventures had their first hit single climbing the Billboard Top Hits charts. By the mid-1960s, The Ventures had started using a new make of guitar by a company called Mosrite Guitars. These guitars had a very distinctive shape and a raw, overdriven sound that lent itself to the popular music of the time. Even today, owning a vintage Mosrite guitar is the dream of every Ventures fan. The Ventures later stopped using the Mosrite guitars and went back to the tried and true Fender guitars, with other assorted makes thrown in every once in a while. Don's son now sells a line of guitars fashioned in the style of the Mosrite, but bearing the Wilson Brothers name.

Although they released 45-rpm singles throughout their early career and had 14 singles on the Billboard Top Hits charts, including the #2 hit "Walk Don't Run" in 1960 and the #4 hit "Hawaii Five-0" in 1969, The Ventures really came to be known for their albums. These albums usually had a theme and included instrumental cover versions of popular songs of the day plus original compositions by the band members that fit the theme. This proved to be a very popular concept, and The Ventures eventually had 37 albums on the Billboard Top Albums charts during the decade of the 1960s. Three of these albums, "The Ventures Play Telstar and The Lonely Bull" in 1963, "Golden Greats" in 1967, and "Hawaii Five-0" in 1969, earned Gold Record status. Thanks to these accomplishments and worldwide sales of more than 100,000 albums, The Ventures achieved the distinction of being the most popular and successful instrumental band in rock and roll history.

By the early 1970s, The Ventures' music had mellowed a bit from the hard rocking, overdriven guitar sound of the Mosrite guitars, but they were still producing wonderful music that kept pace with the changing trends in popular music. But the record labels with which The Ventures had begun their career, Dolton Records and its parent company Liberty Records, were eventually bought out by Universal Artists, which seemingly did not promote The Ventures as prominently as had Dolton and Liberty. It became harder and harder to find The Ventures' new recordings, and the last one that I bought was a 1973 double album called "Only Hits."

I was now out of college, working full-time in a new job, and dating my eventual wife, Helena (who I embarrassingly tried to serenade with an acoustic guitar). I lost touch with The Ventures and believed that they must have broken up, because I just wasn't seeing any new albums by them in the music stores or in magazine ads. Little by little, my musical interests went in other directions, but always to bands that included a strong guitar line -- Santana, Steppenwolf, Led Zeppelin, Iron Butterfly, Three Dog Night, Fleetwood Mac, and many others. At one time, I was on a business trip to Washington, DC and, during a lunch break, stopped into a downtown record store to see what was on the racks. Over the store's PA system was playing an other-worldly guitar instrumental piece that included a section of Ravel's "Bolero" like I had never heard it before. The song was called "The Bomber" and the band playing it was The James Gang (with lead guitarist Joe Walsh). I've never regretted purchasing that album, "The James Gang Rides Again," on the spot. I later had the opportunity to see The James Gang and Santana performing live, in separate concerts.

Although my musical tastes had broadened since the 1960s, I still loved and listened to those classic Ventures albums in my collection. Sometime in the early 1980s, I dubbed my entire Ventures collection to compact cassette tapes. I also made a second copy of the tapes to play in my car stereo. Little did I know that in 1989 almost my entire record collection, including my prized Ventures albums, would be destroyed by Hurricane Hugo. Hugo tore through the Virgin Islands in September of that year, pulling the entire roof off of our home and scattering almost all of our personal belongings everywhere. I was devastated, but at least I still had one set of cassette tapes in the car with a copy of my prized Ventures music.

It wasn't until 1990 that I had any inkling of something new being released by The Ventures. It was a compact disc (CD) called "Walk Don't Run: The Best of The Ventures" with 25 classic Ventures tunes, sounding crisp and new in this new electronic medium. After that, I again lost track of the band and mourned the fact that my musical heroes were no longer in existence.

Luckily, with the advent of the internet, a few years later I started to search for information about The Ventures. What ever happened to them? Were they still together? Had they recorded any new albums? Eventually, I connected with several other fans of The Ventures who were asking the same questions. Then, in 1996, news broke that Mel Taylor, the band's drummer for most of their history up to that time, had died of lung cancer. This news brought out other fans and, in 1997, an unofficial online fan club called "Underground Fire" (after one of The Ventures' 1969 albums) sprang into existence. I'm happy to say that I was one of the founding members of Underground Fire and that this unofficial online fan club is still very alive and very active as of July 2012.

Again, through internet connections and correspondence between the Underground Fire members, we learned that, in fact, The Ventures had never broken up. As their popularity in the United States started to decline in the late 1960s/early 1970s, they concentrated their recording and live performance efforts in Japan, where they were musical idols to almost the entire country. Through the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and continuing today into the 21st Century, The Ventures have been recording new music that is being published mainly by Japanese record labels and

performing concert tours of Japan every summer. We fans in the United States had a LOT of catching up to do!

Thanks to two budget record labels, See for Miles Records in the United Kingdom and One Way Records in the United States, in the late 1990s the entire back catalog of The Ventures' albums from the 1960s and 1970s became available in CD format, with two albums on each disc. These were originally available at budget prices of about \$10-\$15 each. Also, thanks to online outlets like amazon.com, ebay.com and several Japanese sources like cdjapan.co.jp and hmv.co.jp, I was able expand my Ventures collection with copies of those rare Japan-only albums released by The Ventures throughout the 1970s and beyond.

Up to this time (late 1990s), although I had been a fan of The Ventures for almost 35 years, I had never actually seen them perform -- live or otherwise. They had appeared on Dick Clark's American Bandstand and other TV music shows like Shindig in the early 1960s, but I hadn't seen those performances. I did catch a short glimpse of them in a 1985 ABC-TV summer special produced by Dick Clark, but they basically were on a beach stage "finger-synching" to recorded versions of a medley of some of their biggest hits followed by the "Hawaii Five-0" theme. Again thanks to the internet, I eventually was able to obtain several concert videos that were produced and released in Japan. The first of these that I got was "Japan Tour '93," a 2-hour performance on stage in Japan. It just blew me away to actually be seeing and hearing my long-time musical idols performing on my living room TV. Of course, they played many of their popular hit songs, but they also had an acoustic set where they put down the electric guitars and played some wonderful ballads, including several beautiful Japanese songs. Wonder of wonders, the two of the band members also each sang two songs, including "Runaway" and "Pretty Woman." Late in the performance, the lead guitarist played a beautiful, soulful instrumental version of "House of the Rising Sun," going down into the audience while he was playing and letting the audience members lovingly touch his arms as he walked by! The grand finale (as it often is for The Ventures' live performances) was an extended version of the old classic "Caravan" that included a brilliant 10-minute drum solo by drummer Mel Taylor. This was very poignant because I was viewing this video a year or two after Mel had died of cancer in 1996. Although it was just a video I was watching at home, it was produced with such loving care and the performances were so dynamic that I felt like I had just seen The Ventures on a live stage.

Around the same time, the members of the Underground Fire online fan club decided to mount a petition campaign to try and get The Ventures inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. We all knew that, although The Ventures' popularity in the United States had declined to the point where almost no one (except lifelong fans) knew anything about them, they had played a very important role in the development of rock and roll music. We had read articles in countless guitar and other music-related magazines and seen TV interviews where many of the current guitar gods commented on how they had been inspired by The Ventures to take up the guitar and become musicians. Among these were such notables as The B-52s, Jeff Baxter (Steely Dan & The Doobie Brothers), Steve Lukather (Toto), Lindsey Buckingham and Mick Fleetwood (Fleetwood Mac), Jeff Lynn (ELO), Jeff Cook (Alabama), Jimmy Paige (Led Zeppelin), Rick Derringer (The McCoys & The Edgar Winter Band), Buster Poindexter, The Pretenders, Dire Straits, Joey and Marky Ramone (The Ramones), Elliot Easton (The Cars), Gene Simmons

(Kiss), John Fogerty (Credence Clearwater Revival), Stephen Stills (Crosby, Stills & Nash), Kathy Valentine (The Go-Gos), Peter Frampton, Billie Idol, Joe Walsh (The James Gang & The Eagles), Max Weinberg (Bruce Springstein's E Street Band), Robert Kreiger (The Doors), and "yes" even George Harrison (The Beatles). After compiling that "who's who" list of rock and roll royalty that had been inspired by The Ventures, how could The Ventures NOT be in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?

The Underground Fire members nominated Canadian member Richard Wilson and myself to head up the petition campaign. Richard and I drafted a formal petition and had it approved by the other Underground Fire members. I set up a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame petition page on my personal website and invited fans of The Ventures to send us emails with their comments on how The Ventures had influenced them or somehow been important in their lives. We ended up with almost 6,000 emails from fans in all 50 United States, the District of Columbia, 3 U.S. territories, and 56 other countries on every continent except Antarctica! Between September 1997 and November 2006, we submitted eight packages of petition signatures and fan emails to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Foundation (which oversees the induction process). You can see all of the information on our petition drive, which is archived beginning here:

<http://www.sandcastlewi.com/ventures/fhall.htm>

I know that similar petition drives were mounted by at least one radio station in Washington state and that either the Governor or Lt. Governor of Washington state also personally petitioned the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Regardless of who's efforts were the most productive, fans of The Ventures around the world were ecstatic when, on March 10, 2008, The Ventures were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame! I watched (and recorded to DVD) the entire induction ceremony on VH-1 Classic. (Clips from the ceremony were later posted on youtube.com by other fans of The Ventures.) I'm very happy to have played at least a small part in seeing this dream of The Ventures themselves to become a reality. You can see some screen captures from the induction ceremony beginning here:

<http://www.sandcastlewi.com/ventures/ventpic7.htm>

With that accomplished, there was one more thing on my musical "bucket list" -- to see The Ventures perform live and to meet the members of the band. I was able to scratch that off of my "bucket list" in April 2008 and again in April 2009, when Helena and I had the pleasure of seeing The Ventures perform at the American Gardens Theater at Walt Disney World's Epcot theme park. For both years, Disney had arranged for three 30-minute shows each day for three consecutive days. That meant a total of nine shows each year. Helena and I joined standing room only crowds, which included many members of the Underground Fire online fan club. Before, between, and after the daily performances, we all had the opportunity to meet in person and exchange stories about The Ventures. Both years, The Ventures made arrangements for fan "meet and greets" at their hotel, during which they were available to meet the fans, sign autographs, pose for photos, and engage the fans in question and answer sessions. This was a

fan's lifelong dream come true! You can see a small selection of my photos from the 2008 and 2009 Epcot performances and "meet and greets" beginning here:

<http://www.sandcastlewi.com/ventures/ventpic8a.htm>

Tragically, about 2 months after their 2009 Epcot appearances, The Ventures lost one of their founding members, Bob Bogle, to cancer. Bob had retired in 2005 because of his ailing health but, as they always did, The Ventures continued on. As I'm writing this, I'm listening to one of their latest album releases, "Memories of Japan," which was issued by EMI Music Japan just a couple weeks ago. It is a combination of some of The Ventures' most beloved Japanese style music plus several brand new compositions in the same Japanese style. Later this month, The Ventures will be traveling to Japan for their 64th concert tour of that country (counting summer and winter appearances). They have already made over a dozen appearances throughout the United States earlier this year. With the remaining founding member, Don Wilson, approaching his 80th birthday, it is only a matter of time before he retires. Fans around the world are beginning to wonder what will become of our beloved Ventures when that happens. Only time will tell, but I know that my musical journey with The Ventures isn't over yet. I have my entire Ventures collection on the hard drive of three computers, two external backup hard drives, and my iPod. As long as I have those and my hearing, I'll still be on my musical journey.

Arnold E. van Beverhoudt, Jr.  
July 4, 2012

Dedicated to Mike Kuhn, a longtime super-fan of The Ventures in New Jersey, who organized and ran The Ventures U.S. Fan Club during the 1980s. He even appeared in a 30th anniversary video in which many of the "guitar gods" I mentioned earlier, not only provided interview comments about how The Ventures had influenced them, but also performed on stage with The Ventures. Mike died on July 1, 2012 after a fierce 9-year battle against a form of cancer called multiple myeloma. I like to think that Mike is in heaven now, jamming with Bob Bogle, Mel Taylor, and other members of The Ventures who preceded him in death. RIP

### **The Ventures Are:**

Don Wilson ----- Rhythm Guitar (1958 to Now - Founding Member)  
Bob Bogle (+)----- Bass & Lead Guitar (1958 to 2005 - Founding Member)  
Earl Herbert (+)----- Bass Guitar (1959)  
George Babbitt, Jr. ----- Drums (1959)  
Nokie Edwards ----- Lead & Bass Guitar (1960 to 1968 - 1973 to 1984 - 2005 to 2012)  
Skip Moore (+)----- Drums (1960 - Walk Don't Run only)  
Howie Johnson (+)----- Drums (1960 to 1962)  
Mel Taylor (+)----- Drums (1963 to 1972 - 1979 to 1996)  
Gerry McGee ----- Lead & Bass Guitar (1968 to 1973 - 1985 to Now)  
John Durrill ----- Keyboards (1969 to 1972)  
Joe Barile ----- Drums (1972 to 1979)  
Leon Taylor ----- Drums (1996 to Now)

Bob Spalding ----- Bass & Lead Guitar (2005 to Now)

---

(+) = Deceased

Source: [http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Ventures#section\\_5](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ventures#section_5)