



Tiger Sharks swam with some big fish

Rockabilly veterans recorded at famed Sun Studio

In his storied career as a member of the legendary, hard rockin' rockabilly band The Tiger Sharks, one memory sticks out for Brent Freeman. And he shares it with the same relish as someone telling you they hit the jackpot.

The memory is recording their album, *Walk With Me*, at the famed Sun Records Studio in Memphis in 1991. Sun, of course, is where Elvis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis, among others laid down their hugely influential sounds.

"Recording there was certainly a little intimidating," says Freeman, who formed The Tiger Sharks with Derek Winkler 25 years back. "You have pictures on the wall of all the greats who recorded there staring down at you while you're trying to record."

"I even got to use Jerry Lee Lewis' piano — the one he



ERROL NAZARETH

Rhythms N' Rhymes

used to record *Great Balls of Fire* and *Whole Lotta Shakin'* — and that was really cool!"

Even cooler was finding out who was recording an album at Sun at the same time. Now, I believe there's a groupie in all of us and the hardcore fan in Freeman emerges in an endearing way.

"Carl Perkins, Scotty Moore (Elvis' original guitarist) and D.J. Fontana (Elvis' original drummer) were recording an album that Carl had dreamt up," The Sharks' lead singer/guitarist tells me. "Their engineer (James Lott) was the same as ours so he tipped us off when they'd be arriving so

we could meet them.

"Next to the studio is The Sun Studio Cafe and this is where they gathered before going in to record," adds Freeman, who grew up listening to Elvis. "Well, we were there and I had my 1952 Gibson ES-295 with me hoping Scotty would sign it. So there we were, watching Carl Perkins staring at a huge picture of the Million Dollar Quartet (the nickname that Sun Records' founder Sam Phillips gave Perkins, Cash, Lee and Elvis) on the wall.

"I was horrified I'd say something stupid so I said very little," he says. "But Carl played my Gibson and both he and Scotty signed it! It was a surreal afternoon and one I'll never forget."

Tomorrow night, Freeman and the rest of The Sharks — Winkler, Dave Fearnely and Phil Barker — will headline

the second annual Rock-A-Billy Shakeup! at the Cameron House.

Joining them for what promises to be a cracking night is the Hank Gordon Express, who'll be performing its first show. Comprised of husband and wife Jesse James Dale and Kerry Dale from Buzz Deluxe and Tennessee Voodoo Coupe's Steve Good, the Express describes its sound as a mix of "bluegrass harmonies, hillbilly yodels, down-home bass slap-pin' and Nashvillian licks."

In between sets, Rockin' Dave Faris will spin "red-hot rockabilly, vintage rock 'n' roll and R&B, psychobilly, instrumental twang and hillbilly" platters.

Freeman says the Stray Cats were a big influence on him and Winkle and says that shortly after the Cats disbanded, he proposed starting a band to Winkle.

"At the time, however, I actually didn't know how to play the guitar but I figured, 'A lot of people do it, how hard could it be?'" Freeman says. Conjuring up a sound that acknowledged his influences without copying what they did was next on the agenda.

"I always liked how the Stray Cats weren't just churning out copies of '50s versions of songs," he says. "They amped them up and made them relevant and their own, and that was kind of our original vision. The songs weren't as important as the sound — nice delay on a big fat hollow-body guitar and a double bass."

"You can play any song, but with these instruments it can't help but sound 'rockabilly.'"

The second annual Rock-A-Billy Shakeup! happens Saturday at the Cameron. 9 p.m. \$8. 408 Queen St. W.



ERROL'S CAN'T MISS LIST

- 1 The Swinging Blackjacks bring their blues-infused rockabilly to the Dominion on Queen tonight. 9:30 p.m. 500 Queen St. E. 416-368-6893.
- 2 The fourth United in Flow hip-hop showcase, featuring Sinotra, Thrust, Travis Blackman, Conspiracy and Mindbender, happens at Sneaky Dee's on Tuesday. 9 p.m. \$5. 431 College St. 416-603-3090.
- 3 Lauren Best celebrates the release of her super eclectic new disc, *Sticker Collection*, at Supermarket Thursday. 8:30 p.m. \$8. 268 Augusta Ave. 416-840-0501.