

The Sixties

As 1964 came and the Beatles swept the music world, the old soul bands didn't change, but rather graduated. That post-war baby boom was turning eighteen and as the old dance spots closed down, their bands graduated into bars like the Tramend at 65th and Broadway, the Peppermint Lounge, the Green Darby on Lakeshore, the Orbit (not Utopia) in Willoughby, Hire's, The Torchlight and so on. Groups had their steady night at a certain club and built up their own following. Joey and the Continentals and later the Returns were at the Utopia. The Sensations and the Monarchs were down at Hire's.

The only band that performed a mix of the old soul favorites and the new English sound was Richie and the Fortunes. Called by several people, "The best band they've ever heard," it actually began in 1963 with Rich Whittington, Geoff Winger on bass, Howie Blank on drums, Terry McCleod on sax and Tony Bodanza on guitar. They broke up in 1964 (more like a lay-off) while Rich and Tony backed up Bocky DiPasquale. In 1964, it reformed with Rich, Tony and Terry while Buddy Maver, picked up in the Bocky band, came in on drums, and Don Schwartz and then Jay Mohler were the bass players. The group rarely played in Cleveland, but held forth for three years at the Sands in Portage Lakes outside Akron. The group played material by James Brown, Otis Redding, the Temptations and the Four Tops—songs like Robert Parker's "Barefooting," plus Beatles tunes.

What really set this band apart was the vocals. Jim Fox, who replaced Buddy as drummer in the band for one summer in 1965 said of them, "All five sang and all five were better than anyone else in town." Terry was a contrabass; Richie and Jay had very high voices. The range of what they could do was extensive.

In 1967, the group, with a name change to Dick Whittington's Cats,

released a single, "In the Midnight Hour" on Rounds Records, a label owned by Roger Karshner at that time in Cleveland. This record was a regional break-out in Billboard in February, 1967, and rode the charts locally in January and February. It was #1 in the Canton/Akron area.

The band split from Richie in 1967, adding John Vossos on guitar and becoming the Charades, whose day was to come much later.