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NORTH MYRTLE BEACH, S.C.--One of America's last authentic forms of regional music celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. Beach music began in 1945 at a singular liberating jukebox beyond the sandbars of Myrtle Beach.

Young white Carolinans danced to the forbidden jump music of Wynonie Harris and Louis Jordan. As the black rhythm and blues filtered down to the Atlantic Ocean, it became known as beach music -- a sound you heard on the beach -- away from your parents. After all, Harris had a hit with "I Like My Baby's Pudding."

Beach music is not the Beach Boys. Or Jan and Dean.

Beach music is the Tams. And Mickey and Sylvia.

Beach music built cultural bridges over rough waters.

Myrtle Beach is identified with beach music, but its roots are north of town. One of its first outposts was Atlantic Beach, 15 miles north of Myrtle Beach. Pegged "The Black Pearl" for its African and Caribbean influences, Atlantic Beach (pop. 351) was a popular vacation destination for African Americans between the 1940s until the mid-1970s. In 1966 a state charter was given to Atlantic Beach, recognizing "The Black Pearl" as one of the only black-owned oceanfront towns in America. Rhythm and blues reigned supreme here in roller rinks and open-air-with-a-jukebox dance halls along the beach.

Today, this music scene thrives in North Myrtle Beach, a separate community nestled along the Atlantic Ocean between Atlantic Beach and Myrtle Beach. There are six different clubs where DJs spin classics by the likes of the Chairmen of the Board, Billy Ward and the Dominoes and the Drifters. Regional beach music bands play on weekends. The clubs have weird names such as Ducks Too and Fat Harold's. Most of them are along a two block stretch of Main Street, which has a Lake Geneva vibe due to its proximity to water. The Ocean Drive Pavilion was built in the late 1950s in the sand next to the Atlantic Ocean.

"I heard black rhythm and blues as early as 1950 from Hoss Allen at WLAC-AM out of Nashville," said Harold Bessent, owner of Fat Harold's, 210 Main St. for the past 44 years. "I was 17. We were riding from North Myrtle Beach to Little River (S.C.) on Highway 17. We'd listen to him late at night, stop the car and get out and dance to the radio."

Beach music is the state music of South Carolina. The state dance is the shag, which is what everyone does in North Myrtle Beach clubs. They don't drink much. They don't eat. They shag and shag and shag.

The shag has a step and a slide that leads to a shuffle. The dance features a basic eight count step, with partners moving in and then away from each other. "The shag is the jitterbug but a lot slower," said Earl Taylor, general manager of The Surf (94.9-FM), the top beach music station in the region. "The shag was a dance God invented so men could get close to women

without having to ask them out on a date. If you could shag good, it didn't matter what you looked like." In 1990 late shag legend Shad Alberty taught actor-dancer Robert Duvall how to shag when he was filming "Days of Thunder" with Tom Cruise at Fat Harold's. The graceful Alberty was to shag what Hank Aaron is to baseball. Duvall was a willing student. "I don't believe Tom wanted to learn," Taylor said.

Between 1973 and 1983 Chicago radio legend Dick Biondi worked morning drive for WNMB (105.5 FM) in North Myrtle Beach. "Did you notice how when people do the shag, everything from the hip down moves and everything on top doesn't move?" Biondi asked in a phone interview. "Its a unique dance and beach is a unique experience. Down there they also accept something new. It doesn't all have to be the Tams or the Showmen. Chicagoan D.K. Davis got voted 'Best New Artist of the Year' (in 2002 by the Rhythm n' Beach Top 40 countdown)." D.K. Davis has scored beach music hits with "Secret Love" and "Ragtop Down." "He has a smooth, professional sound," added Taylor, a native of Gaffney, S.C. "His music is real polished, like Tyrone Davis and Jerry Butler."

Traditional Chicago soul music is a natural for beach music. Chicago soul is defined by driving horns, tasty guitars and a powerful beat. This is why you will hear Chicagoans Tyrone Davis, Jerry Butler, Gene Chandler and the late Major Lance in beach music clubs. Even R. Kelly's "Happy People" was a beach music hit late last summer. Legendary 1960s Chicago producer Carl Davis employed a brass section that was centered around trombones and baritone saxophone. This defined the dance beat while often minimizing vocals.

Judy's House of Oldies, 300 Main St. in North Myrtle Beach is a friendly clearinghouse for all things beach. Owner Judy Collins (no relation to the folk singer) even sells shag shoes, custom made for shag dancing with leather soles, low heels and a feltlike bottom that prevents dancers from sliding. Female ballroom dancers generally wear high heels. The shag shoes are available for men and women, starting at \$56.95.

"We're a specialized Mom and Pop shop," said Collins, 51. "If you can dance the shag to it, we stay on top of it. People think beach music is about the Beach Boys. But back in the 1950s all the black soul music was being played on the jukeboxes, but not on the radio. Everyone danced to it. It is a straight eight, anywhere from 108 to 132 beats a minute."

Collins was born and reared in Myrtle Beach. Besides running the record store, she is a club DJ and has produced independent beach music records like "120 Soul Street." "Atlantic Beach is the only black beach on the East Coast," she said. "That's one reason we have the music we have now. The guy George Lineberry who owned and operated the jukeboxes here took black music off the jukeboxes at Atlantic Beach and traded them to the white beaches. That's how we -- actually an older generation than myself -- got exposed to that music. He didn't know what he was doing at the time.

"But he was making a huge mark on society."

The House of Oldies opened in 1963 in Myrtle Beach and has been at its current location since 1987. Judy runs the shop with 100,000 CDs and 20,000 albums and 45s with her sister Jeannie. The House of Oldies even stocks

offshoot items like the Sammy Davis Jr. boxed set, Jimmy Buffett (who recorded with the Tams) and Willie Richardson, "King of the Phone Pranksters." The house selection for a classic beach music starter set is the four-CD compilation "Ocean Boulevard The Ultimate Beach Box" (\$49.95). Collins' late father, Rufus, started the business, which now does mail order worldwide via www.judyshouseofoldies.com.

The House of Oldies is a block away from Ducks Too, 229 Main St., my favorite beach music club during a Saturday visit to the strip. And that's not because the 20-year-old club is owned and operated by a heartfelt character named Cooter Douglas. Or that the club's Web site says "We welcome shaggers of all ages and most Yankees." Cooter's is a loud and compelling museum of Southern history. In a distant back room Douglas still has possession of an original flyer that circulated around Myrtle Beach when the jukeboxes became integrated:

Help Save The Youth of America

DON'T BUY NEGRO RECORDS

(If you don't want to serve Negroes in your place of business, then do not have Negro records on your jukebox or listen to Negro records on the radio).

The screaming, idiotic words, and savage music of these records are undermining the morals of our white youth in America.

Douglas, 55, bartended at the original Sand Flea Beach Music Club in Greenville, S.C. The since-closed club's wooden sign hangs among the Club Savoy, Courtney's (Atlantic Beach) and other dead beach music clubs in what Douglas called "The Posthumous Room" at Duck's Too. "In the 1950s (legendary shag dancers) Chicken Hicks and Charles 'One Lung' Blackwell would go to clubs that actually had a fence in the middle of the dance floor," he said. "Blacks danced on one side, whites on the other. The now-defunct Charlie's Place in Myrtle Beach was a successful black club during the late 1940s and early '50s which was one of the first places to book Little Richard. Joe Turner played there. White lifeguards and others would go to Charlie's at night. They'd say you could almost see the damn old building breathing there was so much jumpin' jive going on."

In 1950 the Ku Klux Klan got wind of interracial dancing and told owner Charlie Fitzgerald -- who was black -- to close the club. He refused. The Klan returned. According to The State newspaper in Columbia, S.C., more than 500 bullets were fired into the club. The club's jukebox was shot out. Fitzgerald was beaten and taken away in the trunk of a Klansman's car. He survived. "It was never mentioned," Douglas said. "You know how it was back in those days." Fitzgerald died in 1955.

Douglas walked out of the narrow room into what appeared to be a happier place with the DJ spinning the Showmen's bouncy 1968 hit "39-21-46." A miniature circular train track hung from the ceiling and a model train merrily chugged along to the beat.

Douglas pointed at the Southern Pacific train and said, "We got six people's

ashes up there on the train urns on flatbed cars. They've had so much fun here they want their ashes there." By request of her mother, a small color picture of Beth Mitchell also rides along on a flatbed car. Mitchell and her partner, Brad Kinard, were the 1998 Non-Pro National Shag Dance Champions. She was killed in a 1998 tornado that roared through Stoneville, N.C. Mitchell was an elementary school teacher. She was 25.

The complex is called Ducks Too because of the add-on restaurant, serving burgers, chicken wings and shrimp plates. The restaurant used to be Fat's Pool Hall. "When they tore the wall down everyone asked, 'Are you going to call that Duck's too?'" Douglas explained. "It was easier than calling it Duck's Also. But Duck's has always been a place that tries to preserve the history, camaraderie and lives of beach music."

The club side of Ducks Too has three upstairs dance floors and a downstairs dance floor. "At night we have a DJ doing the blues crapola downstairs," Douglas said. "Upstairs it'll be more for the shaggers, people who like dead black people music. Like Hank Ballard. The Flamingos."

Douglas is from Charlotte, N.C. "But Myrtle Beach is where everybody came after high school or for spring break," he said. "I'm the last of that generation that grew up listening to beach music and dancing the shag." Douglas purchased the 7,500-square-foot club two years ago. He never had been in the music business -- "outside of drinkin' beer and listening to it." Douglas quit drinking 18 years ago.

Live music can be found in Myrtle Beach area lounges and VFW halls, but most clubs stick to DJs spinning beach from the '60s and '70s. Taylor said, "There's 20 or 30 good bands out there and they're all fighting for the same piece of pie, which is shrinking. There's good new bands like Shaggie Maggie, whose lead singer sounds raspy like Janis Joplin."

The drive along Ocean Boulevard between Myrtle Beach and North Myrtle Beach incorporates non-beach music venues like the House of Blues, 4640 Highway 17 South in North Myrtle Beach.

But as late beach music legend Bill Deal sang, "What kind of fool do you think I am?" Don't fool yourself. A trip to the Myrtle Beach area is wasted without checking out beach music. The dance beat is penetrating, but the history is eternally profound.