

GOGO MUSIC ORAL HISTORY

“D.C. was always a band town. I came from New York in the early '70s. In New York, you'd see a kid walking down the street and he'd have a basketball in his hands. Well, down here you'd still see the kid with a basketball, but you'd also see a kid walking down the street with a horn, or you'd see him with a guitar or drumsticks. When I first came here, it was all about the Young Senators and Black Heat. You could not tell me that there wasn't a turntable on the stage—the groups were that good Go-gos—and we're talking about the place—have always been a force in Washington. This has always been a cabaret, go-go city. So people here have always been into live groups....You can go all the way back to Duke Ellington and some of them guys. Live music has always been important to the social and cultural fabric of this town, and that hasn't changed.” - CHARLES STEPHENSON, FMR. MANAGER, EXPERIENCE UNLIMITED

“The first time I heard go-go, I was 14. I went to the Club Lebaron, and TroubleFunk and EU were there And I had a tape recorder with me. A week later, I caught Rare Essence out at Anacostia Park, and I was just taken away because of their style. EU and Trouble played, but Essence had the style because of all their gimmicks and tricks. Essence just seemed smooth, and once I saw them, that was it—I was gone. And if you ask anybody who knew me then, I walked around with a Rare Essence notebook. If you read my caption in my high school yearbook, it's a quote from a Rare Essence rap. I was just hooked. I was a head.” - KEVIN “KATO” HAMMOND, PUBLISHER, TMTOTTGOGO MAGAZINE

“People who don’t live in D.C. don’t understand that go-go is a musical event that you may not be able to capture in the digital and analog realm. Go-go didn’t take off nationally because of a combination of outside producers who don’t understand go-go and local producers who were underfunded. But it’s not easy to translate go-go into the recorded medium. When I teach at GW, I try to explain what it’s like to be in a Pentecostal church by playing recordings, and it just doesn’t convey the experience. Go-go is the same.” - CHRISTOPHER “KIP” LORNELL, PROFESSOR, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

“Now D.C.’s got their own sound. And it’s based right here, and it’s been all over the world, and it’s still going around the world. It’s a lot of bands that ain’t been around the world; it’s a lot of bands that ain’t been out of D.C., because they gotta keep the music interesting. You gotta come up with some new ideas, so it’ll be unique.” - CHUCK BROWN, LEADER OF CHUCK BROWN AND THE SOUL SEARCHERS, THE FIRST GO-GO BAND

From “Dropping the Bomb,” as told to Ta-Nehisi Coates for Washington City Paper. Published January 14, 2000.