

Not yet over the hill, but close to the hump

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The long hair has receded, the English riding boots have been retired in favor of comfy sneakers. The fur vests have been shed. And "The Hump" has been set out to pasture now by several generations of increasingly provocative songs.

But there was a time — geologists call it the mid '60s — when The Invictas were the leering, Beatles-busting, garage-rockers of Rochester rock, their song banned in Boston.

"It was at the very beginning of the sexual revolution," recalls singer and guitarist Herb Gross. "We used to have police escorts to many of our

gigs. Girls screaming, wanting to grab your hair. Believe it or not, a bunch of little girls chasing you can hurt you."

The band's first reunion tour in 20 years begins Friday at the California Brew Haus. More concerts are scattered throughout the summer, with proceeds from the sale of Invictas memorabilia going to leukemia research.

Three of the four original Invictas will be on hand: the 61-year-old Gross, who's in the ad business in Charlotte, N.C.; bassist Jim Kohler; and drummer Dave Hickey. Two others from the band's early days, guitarists Bruce Hickey

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and Charlie Bisuito, will make appearances. Filling out the sound are lead guitarist Dave Profeta, who first joined the band during its '80s reunion; keyboardist Sammy Gruttadauria; and Mary Ellen Hayden, The Invictas' first female singer.

And there is a new hearse: a 1984 Cadillac imported from Oklahoma City, with a custom ghost-flame paint scheme by Dan Parsons of West Bloomfield, Ontario County. It'll be parked outside of the weekend's reunions at the California Brew Haus, fitting in nicely with Saturday's pre-concert hot-rod show.

It's all pretty retro, but that wasn't the case 40 years ago. The Invictas were the leaders of the "in crowd," generally gathering at Tiny's Bengel Inn, a long-gone Irondequoit club where St. Paul Boulevard dies at Lake Ontario. The line of fans waiting to get in would start at the Coast Guard station and wind along-



Bruce Hickey, left, Jim Kohler, Dave Profeta, Dave Hickey and Herb Gross (kneeling) appear more sedate than they did 40 years ago.

side the hot rods in the parking lot, and past The Invictas' 1957 Cadillac hearse.

"The Hump" was born one night on Tiny's not-too-steady dance floor. After several attempts to record it in the sterile confines of a studio, the band added rowdy fans, several cases of beer and bail money for an organ player to create a raw-sounding record. Raw was the

word for everything about The Invictas, including its list of cover songs that include "Mustang Sally," "Twist and Shout" and "Devil With a Blue Dress On."

"The Hump" nosed its way into the Top 100, was No. 1 in Miami, out-sold the Beatles here and became the cornerstone of Invictas legend. Such as the outdoor show at Watkins Glen,

If you go

What: The Invictas reunion.
When: 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday (a hot-rod show starts at 5 p.m. Saturday, with the duo D2 also playing).

Where: California Brew Haus, 402 W. Ridge Road.

Admission: \$8 advance, \$10 at door, available at the club and House of Guitars, 645 Titus Ave., Irondequoit.

Call: (585) 621-1480.

More Invictas: The band makes a free appearance at 2 p.m. Saturday at the House of Guitars.

Web: www.theinvictas.com has a complete list of the group's summer gigs.

where "everyone was rolling in the mud and drinking beer," Gross says, and the local folk band that was playing right before The Invictas was bombed from the stage by flying beer cans. Or the night in Newark, Wayne County, when police threatened to shut down a show if the band played "The Hump." The crowd threatened a riot,

"The Hump" was heard and Western civilization remained undamaged.

"The Hump" wasn't the only Invictas song built on sexual innuendo. There was "Do You Wanna," "Finger Lickin'," "Girl Like You" and even a brand-new one, "Big Caddy Hearse."

"I think if the country had been ready for a song and a dance like that, in the mid '60s, it would have gone a lot further," Gross says of "The Hump." "But radio was afraid of it, the police were afraid of it."

Afraid of what? The most salacious line is in the second verse of "put your hands behind your head, push it in, push it out," which is pretty much on every MTV video and exercise DVD today.

The fuss over "The Hump" recalls "Louie, Louie," also banned around the country in the mid '60s because of virtually indecipherable lyrics that were investigated by the FBI.

"There's not a dirty word in the entire song," Gross says of the Kingsmens' classic. "It's all about perception." □

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