

The Legendary 6 Pak; Grand Rapids' 1960s All-Girl Rock Band

There were several female singers performing and recording in Grand Rapids during the 1960s. These talented ladies included Ruth Ann Lubinkas (Scott), Lin Nowicki, Patsy Stevens, Kathy Kahler, Diane Maxim, Cindy Marsh, Mary Rudolph, Sue Greiner, Ann Godfrey, Cheryl Woudstra, Cathy (Gail) Heeringa, Eileen Sarafis, and Trudy and Nancy Westbrook.

Despite this surplus of female musical talent in Grand Rapids, there had never been an all-girl rock band. Six West Catholic High School sophomores assembled in early 1967 and named themselves the 6 Pak. Their drummer, Cindy Grey Obetts maintains that "because we were girls we got all kinds of breaks." Bass player Rochelle Geluso Mudrey concurs, "we were a novelty. People were definitely curious about an all-girl band. It brought the boys out to hear us. We got all kinds of publicity because we were girls. We were all teenagers, still living at home, with no heavy responsibility. Our parents allowed us the trust and freedom to do something fun like this."

There were other all-girl rock bands performing in other parts of the United States, however. Among the earliest to obtain a recording contract were Goldie and the Gingerbreads. While they were together, The 6 Pak visited the Place in Grand Rapids to meet a fellow all-female Michigan band called The Pleasure Seekers which included Suzi Quatro. Cindy recalls that the Pleasure Seekers seemed "pretty rough compared to us, and we did not feel totally comfortable about the Place, either. We were clean cut Catholic girls that were not involved with sex, drugs or drinking," despite the fact that the name of the group implied at least one of these connotations.

Guitarist Mary Arbanas: "There was a good music department at West Catholic. We were surrounded by music all the time. It was a big part of our lives." Yet they did not learn their songs from sheet music. "We had all belonged to St. James church youth group. We all had a deep appreciation for music." Cindy explains how the band got started: "Steve Moschetti lived across the street from me. We attended grade school together so we were close friends. I used to go watch Steve's band called Stix and Stones rehearse and they would come visit me at my parent's house. One day Steve gave me a broken drumstick. I took it home and started working out rhythms on my pillow! Mary recalls that it was about that time that she brought her acoustical guitar over to Cindy's house. She played the guitar while Cindy beat out the rhythm on a pillow with her drum sticks. Mary's Dad was an influence on her, as he played mandolin and she, in turn, had learned the guitar. She was a good friend of keyboard player Andrea Halas Sullivan at the time they were assembling the band. She invited Andrea to join her and Cindy.

Cindy: "I wanted to play the drums so bad! My dad was a drummer, too. I became obsessed with drumming from watching Steve play and I knew I just had to do it, too. An opportunity to play at the Guest House on Stocking Avenue and a talent/variety show at St. James School surfaced in April. We knew there wasn't any other girl bands around so we just thought it would be neat to give it a try. We borrowed some of Stix and Stones equipment for our first few jobs. There wasn't much else to it. None of us made a big deal out of it. Once we played in public we all decided to it was so much fun that we wanted to go further with it. We were all hooked. So we realized that we had better get busy and learn some more songs."

Mary also recalls that “though we practiced almost every night, it was never a chore. It was not like that. We were like sisters. We had so much fun! There was no competition, even though our singer, Marcia and bass player, Rochelle, attracted all the boys.” The band members agree that there was very little dissent and no one dominated the group’s decisions. They thoroughly enjoyed each other’s company on a social level, in addition to their musical camaraderie. They enjoyed double dating, going to the beach and shopping together, as well as attending parties with each other.

The St. James School talent show was staged during April of 1967. Cindy’s father created a “6 Pak” sign for them to display. Their first few jobs were school and church related. By May, honor student and glee club member Marcia Boruta became the lead vocalist for the band. She also knew how to play the piano, but did not play this instrument for the band. Her first job with the 6 Pak was at a Holy Spirit Church Auditorium dance. Local D.J. Bill Merchant was the M.C. for the event, and the girls shared the stage with another local band called Reasons Why. This band included Pat O’Brien, Paul Grey, Vince Palazollo, and Denny Kaminski. Rock groups were springing up everywhere in Grand Rapids during the middle and late 60s, including more bands from Grand Rapids’ west side, such as The Mafia and Joe Banana and the Bunch.

Steve Moschetti helped Cindy learn how to play the drums as well as loaning her his drums for the 6 Pak’s first jobs. Cindy: “Steve’s whole band helped us, but primarily Steve and Dan Purdom. We were anxious to learn from anyone that would help us.” Mary recalls that Dan Purdom, the guitarist for Stix and Stones was in her biology class. “Dan would make drawings of chords on the frets on the neck of a guitar for me and I’d take them home and learn them.” Another musician named Pat Kozak also helped Ann Halas with her keyboard technique.

All of the girl’s parents were supportive of the band. Mary’s parents contributed generously. They loaned the band money for equipment and allowed them to use their new station wagon for hauling equipment to their jobs. Mary’s older brother, Paul, served as manager. Danny Brown, a close friend of Paul’s, always travelled with the band, assisting with the driving and hauling of equipment. He drove Mr. Arbanas’ station wagon every weekend that they had a job. Lead guitarist Karen Delehanty and Cindy rode with Danny and the equipment while Mary, Rochelle, Marcia and Andrea rode with Paul in his Thunderbird. Andrea’s parents owned a grocery store and donated food for the band when they performed out of town.

Initially, they began practicing in Cindy’s parent’s basement. Once they had acquired their own equipment and Paul Arbanas became involved, they moved their rehearsals to a little back room located near Mary’s parent’s living room. Eventually, the equipment was stored and practice sessions were held at Danny Brown’s house. They typically practiced until 9 or 10 P.M.

Bass player Rochelle Geluso Mudrey was considered to be the musical leader of the group and assumed the role of arranging the music and making sure it sounded good. “My Dad was Italian and had dreams of being an accomplished accordion player. He was my teacher, but I also took accordion lessons at Kaminski’s and at Wendlandt’s music stores on West Fulton Street. Mary suggests that “Rochelle was a

natural. She just picked up the bass and started playing it well.” Rochelle also sang a few songs for the band.

The 6 Pak created their own outfits to wear at their performances. Most of these were jumpsuits of various colors and patterns, including one that was made of purple velvet with white laced collars. (SHOW PICTURES) Marcia recalls that “one of our outfits was a shiny blue fabric, but there wasn't enough blue material available for six outfits, so my outfit was green. So I acquired the nickname "Peter Pan" because of that outfit.” They made lighter outfits for the summer months. Marcia: “we had some publicity photos taken in my parent’s basement where we were wearing black and white checked outfits.” They often wore black ‘flats’ with their uniforms, which were in style at that time.



6 Pak photo shoot

The jobs that the 6 Pak began to secure in the summer of 1967 through manager Paul Arbanas and “word of mouth,” were higher profile engagements that were coveted by the more established boy bands. There was competition between the various bands for these engagements, and the 6 Pak occasionally encountered some jealousy. Many of these bookings were located at teenage nightclubs, which were extremely popular in the 1960s. These “clubs,” or more accurately, teenage dance venues, existed in many Michigan towns, both large and small. They began to emerge more predominantly during the era of the early popularity of the Beatles and Rolling Stones, although there were a few in the Grand Rapids area that predated this period which is often referred to as the British music ‘invasion.’

The Eschelons played at the Skyline in the Morton Hotel 1959 as well as at the Bluebird, in Ada, in 1960. Guitarist Mick Noonan also played at The Tones on West River Road, before it burned down, in the early 60s.

The 6 Pak worked at several popular teenage nightclubs around Michigan including the Platters, Johnny's Bandstand, the Sweet Note, Club Ponytail, Shelby Pavilion, and the Teen Chalet. They also performed locally at the Phoenix Position, at 44th and Kalamazoo S.E., and the 25th Hour on Pearl Street. While they were at the Platters, the house disc jockey recommended that they learn the Rational's version of Respect. He gave them this recording, and they took it home and learned their own version of the song.

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The 6 Pack performed on Sunday September 1, 1968 at Platters in Cadillac



The 6 Pak performed at Shelby Pavilion on August 23, 1968

Tonto and the Renegades drummer, Tom Kirby, also played in many of Michigan's teenage nightclubs. "The popularity of the Beatles and the British music 'invasion' had a lot to do with the multitudes of bands that came into existence in the 60s. Teenagers needed a place of their own to congregate. These kids felt the same pressures as their siblings that were older than them. There was the fear of nuclear war and being drafted into the Vietnam War. There were various other problems and turmoil going on around us, like the Cold War, assassinations, riots and war demonstrations, and the general distrust of government. The kids needed an outlet from all the scary stuff that was going on."

"There was also big money to be made for the teen club owners. The kids poured into these places and wanted to hear the good bands. But eventually they got tired of the teen 'scene,' abandoned these clubs and started getting into other things. The music was constantly changing, and it changed again in the late 60s with the new psychedelic music. For a few years the clubs were as fresh and exciting as the new music."

In the 1960s, many American teenagers were questioning the values of their parents and the older generations, as well as the political and military leadership. Seemingly inexplicable and fear-invoking events were occurring such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the assassinations of President Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King. There was an emerging suspicion among some young people that the American public was being misled. The questioning themes of some rock and roll lyrics, though often inane, addressed and reinforced this perplexed and untrusting mindset.

A general relaxing or 'loosening' of old social and religious values, which occurred in the 60s, provided increasing tolerance and acceptance for the "new music" which had originated only a decade before. Many parents eventually began to agree to allow their teenagers to assemble regularly in the teenage nightclub settings, even on some school nights. Although there were teen rock and roll dances in the 1950s, they were usually restricted to weekends and were more tightly supervised.

Regardless of the changes and uncertainties of the 1960s, the 6 Pak's positive attitude and composure remained unscathed. Mary Arbanas: "Life was so simple for us then compared to what it's like now for kids. We lived a sheltered existence. We all had a good solid Catholic upbringing. None of our parents were divorced. I guess it was a lot like the "Leave it To Beaver" TV show."

By the summer of 1967, area rock bands named the Headhunters (from Lowell), the Chevrons and the Fugitives (from Grand Rapids) and Black Watch (from Cedar Springs) had heard the 6 Pak at their practices or their engagements, or shared the same stages, and some members had become friends with the girls. Their paths were crossing during that summer. In August the Chevrons and the 6 Pak sat together during a talent contest in Lowell, which the 6 Pak won. The girls also worked at the 25th Hour on Pearl St. with the Chevrons during this same month. On August 18 they played with the Headhunters in Freeport. They were on the same program with Black Watch at a dance in September as well as at the Grand Haven Beach Bash during the following month. In September, Black Watch members came to a 6 Pak practice session and taught them "I Can't Keep from Crying," by the Blues Project. Cindy: "It was not as simple as the rest of our songs but we thought it was cool to play it. " That same month, they also played with a Grand Rapids band called The Aardvarks. This engagement was at the Platters, which was on Lake Mitchell, in Cadillac. They finished out the year by working with the Chevrons, again, at the 25th Hour.

Marcia Boruta recalls the excitement of these times: "the band was a really great experience. While many teenagers were cruising up & down the circuit on Monroe Avenue on Friday and Saturday nights, we were working at a really cool 'job.' The most important thing I realized from this experience is that it's not the performers who make a performance great, it's the audience. I mean, I can sing really good walking down the street, but a crowd of 500 teenagers having a good time is what created the positive energy."

Another unforgettable experience for the 6 Pak occurred during the summer of 1967. During August, they auditioned at the downtown WZZM -TV studio for one of seven positions that were available to perform at the Lowell Showboat. They passed the audition and played for the festivities that same

month. They also met and talked with legendary jazz pioneer Louis Armstrong and his band at the Showboat festival, and received autographs from all of them.



The 6 Pak at the Lowell Showboat

The 6 Pak's performance at the Civic Auditorium's Black and Silver Room for a Junior Achievement dance was "recorded by Mary's cousin, Roger, who brought a reel to reel recorder to the dance. WHEN WAS THIS He plopped a microphone down in front of us on the stage." Fortunately, this recording was preserved. It clearly demonstrates their personal and musical composure.

Mary Arbanas: "We didn't have butterflies or get nervous before we went on stage. We did not play loud. People appeared to prefer to slow dance and would sometimes stand around when we played our faster songs. We were a "cover" band, and did not even try to write our own music."

Their recordings are well-rehearsed and the background vocal harmonies are concise and in pitch, with all holding their parts well, which is not easy to pull off, especially in a live setting. Their presentation seems generally more poised and less frenzied than the recordings of many of their local male "garage band" counterparts. Furthermore, Marcia Boruta maintains that they never rehearsed in a garage.

Andrea's cousin Jerry Panek states that he "remembers at least one practice which I attended in 1968 (at Mary's house) where I recorded two or three songs that the band was practicing." These recordings have also been preserved.

In 1968 the 6 Pak Midwestern Sound recording studio owner Phil Roberts, who was also the guitarist for a band known as the Kingtones. They recorded a Jack Keller Ford radio advertisement. The jingle was adapted to the music of Petula Clark's "Downtown," but it was never used because of a copyright

conflict. The band returned to Robert's West Leonard Street studio in August of 1968 to record a few songs. They recorded the instruments first and then they added the vocals.

Phil was impressed with the band and invited them to play at the Boxtops concert at the Civic Auditorium on Sept 18, 1968, which he was financing and promoting. Also featured on this show were the Fredric and Band X, who had also recorded at Phil's studio. Cindy recalls picking up the Boxtops at the airport and going out to Longeliere's for dinner with them after the concert. When the 6 Pak played in town, it was a standard policy for the band to go to this restaurant after they finished playing and use their pay to buy pizza for everyone.

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Presented By Midwestern Sound Studios, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Poster for the Boxtops concert featuring the Fredric, Band X and the 6 Pak

CINDY –
Drums


KAREN –
Lead Guitar

MARY –
Rhythm Guitar

ANN –
Organ

ROCHELLE –
Bass

MARCIA –



THE 6 PAK

We would like to take the opportunity to introduce to you The "6 Pak."

The name is misleading but let me assure you that this new rock group consists of six lovely and talented musicians. These six girls brewed today's new sound with their talents and came up with an exciting treat.

Performing at the Lowell Showboat, enumerable high schools, colleges, and teen-age night clubs including "The Platters" in Cadillac, "Club Ponytail" in Petoskey, "The Beach Bash" in Grand Haven, and various youth clubs throughout the state, teenagers drink in their looks and talents.

To become inebriated from the sight and the sounds of these girls is indeed a pleasurable experience. We guarantee no hangovers in the morning, only memorable moments of the night before.

Unlike other six packs, there is no deposit but they are returnable.

So now sit back, relax and enjoy A – that is the "6 Pak".

Page featuring the 6 Pak from the brochure for the Boxtops concert

Phil lost his entire investment in this show when over 5,433.80 in gate receipts was embezzled by Jim Harrison, according to a September 25, 1968 Grand Rapids Press article. Harrison was supposed to deposit the gate receipts in the bank, but instead, he fled town with his wife and his five year old daughter. Roberts never heard back from Harrison.

Cindy: "This concert was a big deal to us. We wanted to get our hair done but that meant that we had to leave school early. They made all six of us serve a detention in order to get the time off. Paul Arbanas arranged for us to be picked up at school in a limousine. The driver drove all around the school parking lot for us. The Boxtops used some of our equipment for their performance; the sound system and my drums, because it was better than the rented stuff that was on stage." We played a medley of the Beatles' 'Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band' and a Little Help From My Friends as well as the Grassroot's Midnight Confessions."

Marcia also recalls singing at the Boxtops concert: "I can still see the curtains opening and the big room with the huge audience sitting in the dark. The first song was very slow and seemingly endless. Yet I have no recollection of how many songs we did or what ones they were, only that first one! And I have no idea in what order the bands performed, other than the Boxtops being last, of course."

From the fall of 1968 to the summer of 1969, the 6 Pak kept so busy with their band work that they missed many school functions such as sporting events and dances. But they did take a weekend off to attend their Homecoming game and dance in the fall of 1968, partially because Rochelle was the voted in as queen of this celebration. They all wanted to be there for her.

In the last nine months that they were together, their jobs were primarily located at teenage nightclubs and college dances. In 1967, the band started working for 25.00 for the entire group, and they gradually worked their way up to a maximum of 200.00 per night, which was typical pay for a good bar band in 1975.

In early 1969, Paul and Danny proposed a plan to the girls which involved bringing the band to California in an attempt to become more successful. "But we knew we had to go to college and that was all there was to it." Without many tears or other emotional fanfare, the 6 Pak disbanded when they all graduated from West Catholic in June of 1969. Their last performance was at Grand Valley State College in late May.

Marcia left Grand Rapids in the fall to attend college in Detroit. She served as a D.J. at a radio station while in she was in Detroit. She moved to California in 1974 and finished up her degree at the University of California in San Diego, where she still lives. Marcia still sings with a group of women on Sunday mornings. Andrea attended Ferris State College and Grand Rapids Junior College. Mary also attended GRJC. Cindy went to Chic University of Cosmetology and became a beautician. Rochelle went to nursing school and became an R.N. She worked in Grand Rapids for one year and then moved to Kansas City for a while. Karen moved to Denver and lived there for awhile. She eventually became a golf professional in South Carolina.

The 6 Pak entered the local music scene in early 1967 without hype and pretentiousness, and exited in June of 1969 with the same humility and poise. Yet, in less than three years they accomplished so much more than they ever imagined they would .

I want to extend my appreciation and gratitude to the 6 Pak “girls” for answering so many questions.

The Six Pak is:

Mary Arbanas- guitar

Marcia Boruta- lead singer and tambourine

Karen Delehanty -lead guitar

Rochelle Geluso Mudrey- bass guitar

Cindy Grey Obetts- drums

Andrea Halas Sullivan- organ(that's what we called it then)

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Thanks to Phil Roberts for clarifying issues pertaining to the Boxtop’s concert in September of 1968.