

Impact! Rudy Cheeks is the inaugural winner of Motif's lifetime achievement award



Times photo by Antoine C. Boulanger

Who is Rudy Cheeks & what is he up to now?

You wouldn't think there were many teenagers living in Pawtucket in the late 1960s who were heavily into John Coltrane, Thelonius Monk and Bob Dylan. But then again, Rudy Cheeks (*nee* Bruce McCrae) has always danced to his own drummer — and quite successfully —

which is why he is receiving *Motif's* Impact Award for his lifetime Rhode Island achievements in music, writing, TV and radio.

Cheeks grew up in The Bucket and became friends with another local unique character who called himself Stevie Thunder. Thunder had transferred to URI, where Cheeks was enrolled, from Northeastern. He was in a band called Pigtown, quite the glamorous name, with folks from RISD and around Providence.

Cheeks got to know the band members, and when Pigtown morphed into The Fabulous Motels, he was on board. The Motels were one of a kind in that era, and featured others who would go on to renown such as Charlie Rocket, Dan Gosch and Jeff Shore, plus their dancers, the Tampoons, Barbara Conway, Bonita Flanders and Beth Claverie.

The Motels evolved into the Young Adults in 1975, who, with Cheeks in a featured singing role, playing his self-taught harmoni



ca and saxophone, made their debut on the Fourth of July in 1976 in the parking lot of the legendary Leo's bar on Chestnut Street in Providence. This wildly popular and unique act moved on to playing throughout the northeast. Both the Fabulous Motels and Young Adults were recently inducted into the R.I. Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. And if there was an iconic picture to mark their clever lyrics, solid music and wild outfits, it was the one of Rudy Cheeks on stage in a white wedding dress, holding his



saxophone.

The birth of the Young Adults kicked off a hot streak for Cheeks locally. He served as a sidekick to a popular radio host Caroline Fox. He began a show called "Club Genius" on the new community access TV show. He began a hilarious cult film performance called "Comediac" in which he voiced over commentary for horrible sci-fi and horror movies. He started a column called "That Proves It," a line lifted from *Plan Nine from Outer Space*, that appeared in the new and short-lived *Providence Eagle*. And he co-authored (with this writer) a satiric social commentary column, "Phillipe and Jorge's Cool, Cool World" in the *Eagle*, then *The NewPaper*, the *Providence Phoenix* and now in *Motif*. It began in 1980 and is the longest running column in RI newspaper history. And as Cheeks always informs people, the only way the writers will get into the R.I. Journalism Hall of Fame is dependent upon the weather: It'll happen when hell freezes over.

If you have lived in RI for even a little while (and have a clue) you will know the name Rudy Cheeks. He has had a hand in the progress of music, the arts, the media and comedy in The Biggest Little. Even with some recent health issues taking a little speed off his fastball, he is still out and about. And the *Motif* Impact Award is well deserved. Even if he has never had a driver's license. He's one of a kind.