



LIGHTS, CAMERA, MAYHEM
A TRIBUTE TO MUSIC MAVEN
JOE LEE

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9
6:00 P.M.



Our dad was one-of-a-kind. He was gregarious, fun-loving, and had a knack for storytelling and jokes. He also made an impact on and changed the course of many people's lives. Using his heart, soul and rich sense of humor, he was an outspoken champion of artists and musicians. In most of what he did, he bucked convention and lived a full life outside the mainstream. As a small business owner, Dad thrived on making suggestions and recommendations to his customers – people who went on to consider Joe's Record Paradise a second home. Growing up in our dad's record store, we were exposed to this incredible world of music and culture. He loved connecting to people through music; you might even say he created a whole community through his love for music. His legacy will live on in uncountable ways.

Our dad also had a quieter side. He loved his grandkids Dimitri, Elena, Sasha and Marion. He was an avid reader, an environmentalist and a gardener, an expert Scrabble player, and a devoted dog-owner to Peanut and Duchess. After retiring, he enjoyed the peacefulness and solitude of his mountaintop home in West Virginia. We miss you and love you Dad and hope you rest in eternal harmony.

Matilda & Johnson

In the 1950s movie *The Wild One*, a gang of outlaw bikers called the Black Rebels Motorcycle Club terrorizes a small town that symbolizes the narrowness and barren culture of mainstream America in the Eisenhower era. Led by Johnny, played by a snarling young Marlon Brando, the marauding gang is described in the trailer as “jazzed-up hoodlums.” In the movie’s iconic scene, somebody asks Johnny what he’s rebelling against:

**“Waddaya got?”
he scowls.**

It was a credo that Joe Lee lived by for most of his 76 years. There is not the space in these program notes to recount the myriad people, places



and things that Joe—along with his supporting cast of co-conspirators—railed against, castigated, satirized, lambasted and sabotaged through decades of public censure and fulmination. But some highlights will suffice, and may offer some comfort to those of us who dearly miss Joe’s relentless warfare against what his fellow Maryland scold and iconoclast H. L. Mencken called the American “Booboisie.”

Whether or not these sacred cows fully deserved the Wrath of Joe Lee is not the point. Joe saw these targets as willfully, even brazenly, asking for his nonstop assault;

it was his way of attempting to, as the saying goes, “afflict the comfortable.”

But we would be remiss to not also pay tribute to Joe’s equally passionate attempt to “comfort the afflicted,” especially in the many benefit concerts and events that Joe organized for musicians who needed a helping hand in their later years .

—Eddie Dean

RECORD STORE PROPRIETOR

Established in Takoma Park in 1974, **Joe's Record Paradise** has been a beloved institution in the DC metro area and beyond. The legendary music shop has not only survived the demise of the corporate record industry but has danced on its digitized corpse. Now operated by **Joe's son Johnson** in Silver Spring, it remains a mecca for vinyl junkies and Northern Soul pilgrims from around the globe. Most importantly, Joe's Record Paradise has been a meeting place and no-holds-barred hang out for local music eccentrics and outcasts, including a diehard faction of the **Keep-Maryland-Weird** contingent of culture warriors. —ED

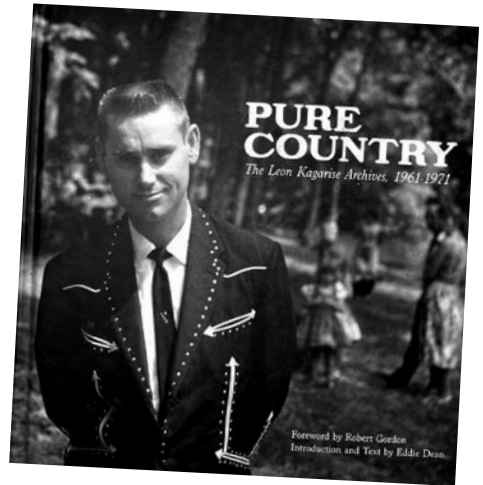


BACK TO THE COUNTRY: A MID-LIFE CONVERSION

A lifelong R&B and jazz head and disciple of Ray Charles and Miles Davis, Joe Lee had a late-blooming awakening to Bluegrass and Hillbilly music. This mid-life conversion came courtesy of **Leon Kagarise**, a Baltimore country-music fan who had amassed a treasure trove of recordings and photos that he'd made at local country-music parks and from radio shows in the DMV. From **Johnny Cash** to **Patsy Cline** to the legendary DC family hillbilly band **The Stonemans**, Joe had a host of new heroes in his music pantheon, and in Leon he found a new friend.

In the ensuing years, the **Leon-Joe collaboration bore fruit in PURE COUNTRY: The Leon Kagarise Archives 1961-1971**, an acclaimed coffee-table book of Leon's vintage country-music park photos and releases like **The Bluegrass Champs: Live from The Don Owens Show** on Yep Roc.

—ED



ROOT BOY SLIM & BUTCH WILLIS

Foster MacKenzie III walked in to Joe's Record Paradise with a demo and walked out into a brief but glorious career as Root Boy Slim... built around the great **Sex Change Band**, sharply-turned, caustic and generally hilarious pop-culture critiques and flamboyant on-stage and off-stage antics that the word "legendary" is simply inadequate to describe. All those stories you heard? Probably true. Amazingly, he "Foster-ed" a young **Butch Willis, who would become an exemplar of primitive/outsider rock and roll** in his own right, albeit without a glimmer of the "success" Root Boy experienced. The two were briefly housemates on Carroll Avenue in Takoma Park. Too bad there weren't any television

cameras there to capture what might have been called **"The Surreal World."**

—Richard Harrington



SCREEN LIFE OF JOE LEE

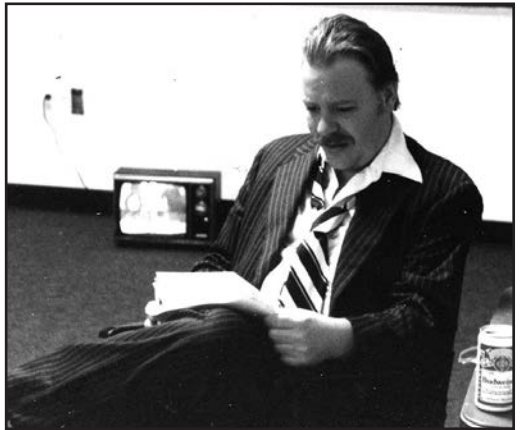
**As his son Johnson Lee put it,
"Joe always kept it interesting."**

And Joe Lee was never more interesting than when he was in front of a camera, a master of channeled mayhem and unhinged, improvisational energy: provoking, showboating, hectoring, pontificating, clowning—and also celebrating the musicians he treasured from the greatest American artists like Ray Charles to fringe characters of mainstream society like Butch Willis etc.

—ED

Joe Lee and Travesty Films

While Joe was by nature a part of most scenes in the D.C. area and beyond, his participation in various Travesty projects came about due largely to the fact that **Pat Carroll**, co-founder of the **Langley Punks**, was one of his employees at Joe's Record Paradise. So when it came time to cast comically oppressive authority figures or long-suffering cranks, Joe was a natural choice. His performance as the world-weary gravedigger in **Hyattsville Holiday** lent the film a sad gravitas. That triumph led to a larger role as the abusive slumlord Mr. Loomis in the 1950s sitcom homage **The Travesty Show**. When the Travesty brain trust was making the **Slickee Boys' Life of the Party** music video, there was nobody but Joe who could capture the snobbish outrage and bitter obsequiousness essential to the role of Butler.



Some actors chew the scenery; Joe made a four-course meal of it. He could go from snarly to simpering with an ease unmatched by Streep, Olivier, and Daniel Day-Lewis combined. The cinema has lost a master.

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—Dave Nuttycombe


Of Flesh and Blood

Seven years before Paul Thomas Anderson's acclaimed 1997 film "**Boogie Nights**" told the tragic, tawdry tale of '70s porn icon Johnny "Wadd" Holmes, store alum **Jeff Mentges** told a hilariously tawdrier version in "Of Flesh and Blood" featuring a cast drawn from the **Joe's Record Paradise Repertory Ensemble**, populated by current and former employees, customers, friends and eccentrics and outsiders who found a safe haven at the store.

Director/writer/producer/editor—Mentges cast throat guitarist **Al Breon** as "Johnny Wade" and Joe Lee as violent, generally underdressed drug dealer Eddie Nush. Things deteriorated quickly! Though the film celebrated its 20th anniversary at the AFI Silver, it likely won't be added to the Library of Congress' National Film Registry of historical, cultural and aesthetically important films but it is considered something of an exploitation punk-noir classic. As Nush, Joe goes full-tilt to depict low-life evil, bellowing and berating in an over-the-top performance that makes De Niro's Oscar-winning Raging Bull portrayal of heavyweight boxer Jake LaMotta look as tame as a pussycat.

—RH

★20TH ANNIVERSARY SCREENING!★
FRIDAY, AUGUST 20, 9:30



A JEFF MENTGES FILM
BREON AS JOHNNY WADE IN "OF FLESH AND BLOOD"
DICK BANGHAM • JOE LEE • STEVEN LORBER • GLORIA MEJIA
JOHN F. SIMMONS • BRIAN WILLIAMS • EARL THOMAS
MAUREEN SIMMONS • JEANNE KESKINEN • ALFRED ERCOLANI, JR.
AND INTRODUCING CHA CHA LEMEAUX AS "COCO"
PRODUCED & DIRECTED BY JEFF MENTGES
© 1990 OOOO0MM OOOO0MM FILMS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

AFI Silver
THEATRE and CULTURAL CENTER
MARS: MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL SHOWCASE
AFI • A DIVISION OF THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES



PRANKSTER & PROVACATEUR

As part of his ongoing battle against the polite and hypocritical Straight World, Joe was a merry prankster and merciless provocateur of a gullible, unsuspecting public and their sacred cows. Utilizing his connections in the local media, Joe perpetrated various hoaxes and elaborate Inside-Joke ruses, mostly through his DIY operations of pop culture sabotage, often gleefully assisted by Record Paradise employees. He managed to pop up with particular frequency on Channel 4 with “insights” on Elvis Presley, from the 1993 Young Elvis v Old Elvis Postage Stamp Wars **to a series of hilarious (fully orchestrated) area Elvis sightings** that for years made Joe a staple of breathless local TV news coverage of the purported Second Coming of the King of Rock N Roll. —ED



Ratso, Joe, Evan Johns

Rock N Roll Psychosis with Joey J

As “Joey J,” the uber-smarmy host of the cable TV show, Rock N Roll Psychosis, Joe Lee was in his element. It was a deftly conceived composite portrait of a PG County bowling-alley scuzz ball with a Late Night with Tom Snyder unctiousness that oozed show-biz sleaze in its lowest form. The show’s theme song was a raucous early ‘60s Link Wray gem, “**Vernon’s Diamond**,” and when he hosted local Elvis interpreter **Blevis** and Ray “**I’m Bob Dylan**” **Wallace**, Joey J wore a snot-colored golf shirt, checkered pants, and purple Elvis socks. “Where do you come from?” he asks Wallace, whom Blevis had discovered busking on DC street corners. “Illinois,” mutters Wallace. “I was gonna suggest a different PLANET, but I guess that’s close enough!” cracks Joey J. —ED

WHFS RADIO

From the moment Joe opened his record store, he forged a strong, enduring alliance with WHFS, the legendary FM station closely aligned with his myriad musical passions **and underground outlaw, David vs Goliath spirit.**

He'd bring visiting artists to the studio and enlist assorted deejays— **Weasel, Josh Brooks, Cerphe, Adele** and especially kindred soul **Damian Einstein**—for his shows and promotions. In 1989, after new station owners decided to remove Damian after more than 20 years on the air

(less two as he recovered from a near fatal car accident in 1975), Joe organized local and national protests and staged a "Save Damian" rally in the parking lot outside his store, then in Plaza Del Mercado. It attracted more than 10,000 people, including scores of musicians they'd both championed and befriended. Damian would get his job back 18 months later before moving to WRNR in 1994. Years later, he would close the

circle—by working part-time at the store. The Joe Lee-WHFS connection, **as well as one with WPFW and deejays Jerry Bama Washington and Nap Turner,** was yet another example of Joe's gift for bringing people (usually misfits of all stripes) together in the cause of better, or at least more interesting music.

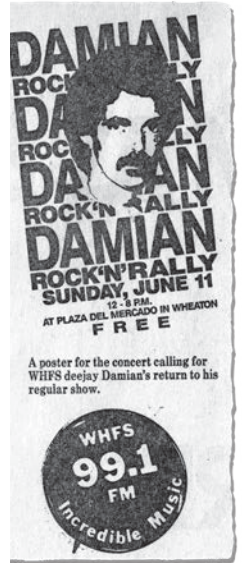
—RH

PATRON OF THE ARTS: JOE LEE MEDICI

Joe had stints as a manager to such infamous ill-starred DC music acts as **Root Boy Slim, Evan Johns and Bl Elvis.** None ended well, but they left a cultural legacy that endures. In the case of Bl Elvis, one of the few ever banned from Joe's Record Paradise, there was a reconciliation at the 1998 Night of 1000 Elvises, an event organized by Joe, who booked Bl Elvis, provided a free haircut worthy of 70s Vegas-Era Presley (which Bl Elvis preferred to the Young Elvis) and lent him **DJ Cerphe's** Official DC 101 leather jacket.

Not to be overlooked, though, was Joe's generosity and loyalty to musicians in need of a helping hand. He organized benefits for seminal R&B performers **Bull Moose Jackson** (in the parking lot of the record store) as well as several for DC rockabilly maverick **Billy Hancock.**

Joe also championed and help spread the word for marginalized artists like outsider country musician **Zane Campbell** of Elkton MD, a fellow black sheep from a distinguished Maryland family (in this case Hillbilly music instead of politics) —ED



BAND IN THE BARN

Instead of merely marching to a different drummer, as so many of the young generation did during the late '60s, Joe Lee became a drummer and singer for a hippie garage band called **Beverly Pureheart**. Their mission was to offend anyone within earshot of their music, and they hit a bull's-eye before they even had a public performance.

In 1969, Joe had graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore and moved back to Silver Spring into a furnished room in the barn behind the Lee family residence. It became Beverly Pureheart's house, too, a sort of Silver Spring version of The Band's legendary Big Pink: in it was an old out of tune upright piano, cheap drum kit, electric guitar, microphone and a reel to reel tape deck.

One evening around dinnertime, the band was banging out some 'experimental' tunes. The racket reverberated, echoing across the lawn and into the sturdy frame of the Lee residence. It didn't take long until the barn door flew open and there stood Joe Lee's highly agitated dad, **Blair Lee III**, the soon-to-be governor of the Free State of Maryland. "This is the closest thing to total non-music I've ever heard," he announced to the now silent bandmates. "Kindly turn the volume down 75 percent." Then he turned and left in a huff, slamming the door behind him.



Joe's dad Blair Lee III

As it turned out, the tape on the reel-to-reel machine was still running. The band knew the stern warning of Joe's Dad that was preserved on that tape was pure gold, and would make excellent fodder for a song. After gleefully playing it back over and over and over, the band was inspired to compose a song titled "**Never Trust a Person Over Thirty**" inserting his words with echo effects as the instrumental break. The lyrics bear repeating more than six decades later.

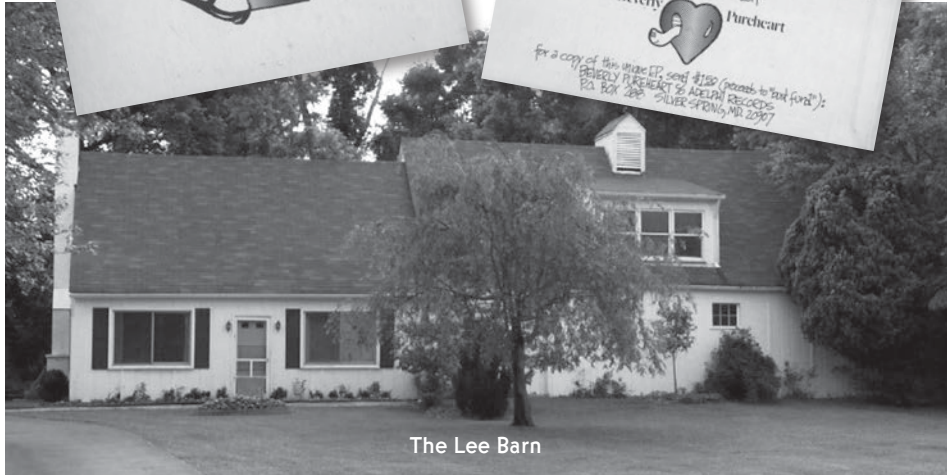
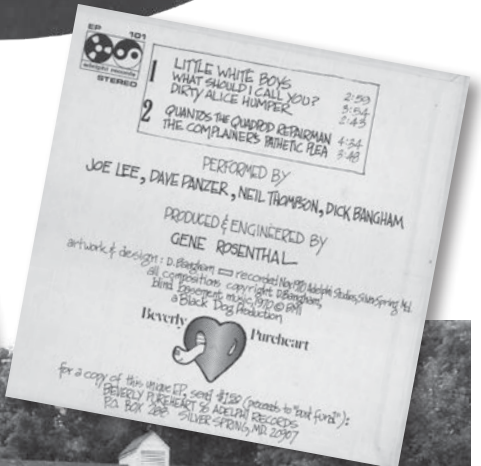
*Never trust a person over thirty
They're always doing something low and dirty
Never be upstaged by some guy who's middle aged
Never trust a person over thirty

Stay away from people who are older
They'll stand around and stare over your shoulder
They'll devour modern culture like some evil starving vulture
Stay away from people who are older*

—Dick Bangham, as told to Eddie Dean



L-R: Dick Bangham, Joe Lee, Vince Bobbino



The Lee Barn

This celebration brought to you by
 Jeff Krulik, Dick & Linda Bangham, Richard Harrington, Eddie Dean,
 Dave Nuttycombe, Brian Horrorwitz, Brad Dismukes and of course Matilda & Johnson Lee
 Cover by Josh Gardner. Thanks to the AFI Silver.



Cathy Pepper Lee
9/11/1953 - 9/13/2021

Joseph Wilson Lee
8/17/1947 - 7/4/2024