

Mike Skill of The Romantics releases new rock single

“67 Riot”

Tune evokes time when Detroit burned during ‘Summer of Love’

From the man who helped craft such hit singles as “What I Like About You,” “Talking in Your Sleep,” and “One In A Million,” comes a new gritty blues-rock single about the riots that forever changed his hometown of Detroit in 1967.

Mike Skill, who has played both bass and guitar for the power-pop rock ‘n’ roll band The Romantics, was a budding teenager in 1967 when five days of racially charged riots tore apart Detroit in July. When it was over, 43 people lay dead, 1,189 had been injured, more than 7,200 had been arrested and more than 2,000 buildings had been destroyed.

Skill lived on Detroit’s East Side and says that although the violence took place several miles from his home, he nonetheless saw its effects up close.

“I remember the National Guard right down the street from my house,” he says. “People watching the riots on TV were afraid that rioters would come into our neighborhood. People were freaked out.”

The riots changed his beloved Motor City forever.

“A lot of my friends’ families took off for the suburbs after that,” he says, noting his family chose to stay in the city.

The riot’s effects – and the fact that many of the issues they raised, from police brutality to economic decay – have yet to be fully addressed in Detroit, stayed with Skill for years, culminating in his desire to write “67 Riot.” Loud, powerful and evocative of tough tunes by such rockers as Link Wray, Jimi Hendrix and Skill’s fellow Detroit rockers, The MC 5, “67 Riot” is both a haunting look at the past as well as a timely allusion to the present, in a world where racial and social tension still threaten to rend our nation in two.

“I wrote the song from a sense of frustration that people never came together after the riots to really address what happened, to look each other in the eye and say, ‘How can we repair this? How can we move forward?’”

The song’s lyrics are written from this point of view. “4 AM/Down the street/Cops roll in/With all the heat/Blind pig roaring/Kickin’ their heels/Soldiers home/Just gettin’ real,” the song opens. “Rooftop sniper/Set the sight/Burning cocktails/Flash in flight/Broken city/Broken dreams/Things aren’t always what they seem/67 Riot!”

Recorded in Skill’s own studio, the song features him on guitar, bass and vocals, and also features drummer Russell Ayers, who engineered the tune. The co-producers sought to create an aural equivalent of what it was like to live through this violent time, Skill says, but he adds that he wanted the song to end on a note of hope because Detroit has rebounded in recent years.

“Try to warm your heart/Dream your dreams/Break the chain/Let’s start clean,” he adds in his song, noting it’s time to break the chain of racism that has shackled generations before, during and after “67 Riot.”

“The news today is still filled with stories of what racism has done to our country. People are still fighting over such racist symbols as the Confederate flag. It’s time to stop passing this from generation to generation.”

-- Rob Cullivan

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