

Assessing the value of vanity fare

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We bickered about the same things we had bickered about 25 years earlier. Who should play which guitar riff? Who should sing which harmony part? This band member's playing wasn't funky enough. That one's amp was too loud.

I had expected long conversations, reminiscing about the past and bringing one another up to date on our lives. We did indulge in some of that. Mainly, though, it was four days of hard-driving music.

It was exhilarating. Typically, I play my bass along with records, which are quite patient with my mistakes and show no interest in adjusting to my playing.

But this was live, in-your-face music with each band member feeding off the playing of the others. The sound of the whole incorporated each of its six parts.

It was the kind of music-making one dreams about, a purity of electric ensemble: Three guitars, organ, drums, bass, vocals. No distractions, other than the interpersonal dynamics.

But the music itself — a hard rock/rhythm and blues blend — was visceral and organic, as if we'd injected pulsating rock 'n' roll into our veins, and were recycling it back into the environment through our instruments and amps.

And it told me that, while we'd gone our separate ways, the music still was in our blood, uniting us.

That alone left me with a tale to tell my kids and, some day, my grandchildren.

But I still needed to try to account for the Storm's celebrity.

We were an average garage band, albeit one that came together at a prep school. In addition to a handful of original songs, our repertoire was heavy on early Stones, Animals and Raspberries, plus a lot of songs by such obscure groups



THE RISING STORM
In the 1967 Phillips Academy yearbook picture, The Rising Storm's bassist, Todd Cohen, stands at far left

as Love and local Boston bands like the Remains and the Ramrods.

By our senior year, we were fairly popular — the band of choice for school dances. We competed in a Battle of the Bands in Boston and advanced to the finals. And we used about \$1,000 that we earned at dances to record "Calm Before." About 500 copies were pressed.

But through some quirk of fate, serious record collectors latched onto the album as the artifact of what they considered to be a quintessential garage band.

These truly puzzling developments were related to me during lunch one day as we took a break from our endurance rehearsal sessions. Why in the world, I asked, would serious collectors be interested in this obscure prep-school band?

The answer I was given: There's no rhyme or reason. It just happened. That's the whole point.

Plenty of bands, many better than The Ris-

ing Storm, made records. But cultural tastes and values, fashions and trends, style and celebrity, are fickle. Why are Andy Warhol's paintings of Campbell soup cans worth a fortune?

I certainly can't explain it. It's curious and amusing — and obviously flattering — to think that something six high school seniors did for fun 25 years ago now is considered valuable to anyone other than those six people.

Far more intriguing, though, is the chance that half-a-dozen middle-age men are getting to live out a '60s dream, playing that old rock 'n' roll one more time.

And while the tunes may be the same, the rhythms have a different feel to them, driven by those 25 additional notches on the calendar — years in which we have punched time clocks, reared kids and watched the lines inevitably etch themselves into the faces in our mirrors.

For the six of us, I suspect, our music may be an acutely accurate mirror.