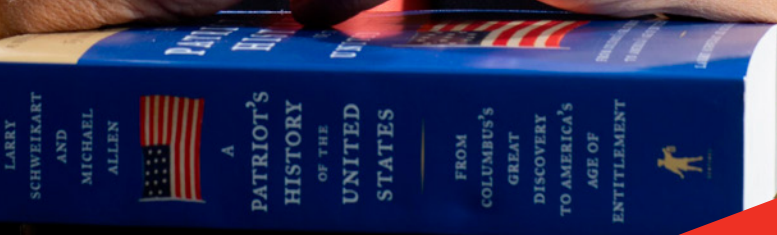


THE RHYTHM OF HISTORY

The autobiography of
LARRY SCHWEIKART



EXCERPT

REAGAN LARRY SCHWEIKART

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INTRODUCTION

The Beat of History

Two main loves have dominated my life: music and history. Only recently did I really pay attention to the fact that history has its own pace, its own life, and even, perhaps, its own requirements. History can change on a dime—think of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in 1914 and how that led to a cataclysmic war, or the Battle of Midway, where in just over an hour, the outcome of the War in the Pacific was forever decided. History can also be slow and relentless. The unyielding expansion of governmental authority in the 20th and 21st centuries, the unstoppable spread of Christianity, and the ubiquitousness of modern communications. When someone says you're "on the wrong side of history," you might want to wait a while. No less than the sun, tides, or weather, history will not be controlled or manipulated. It can only be ridden like a giant wave.

But it does have patterns, ebbs, and flows that we can recognize. It has a beat. When Sonny and Cher sang "The Beat Goes On," they knew of which they spoke. Finding exactly where you are in such a moment can be challenging but exhilarating. For me, the two—music and history—finally came together in 2010 when I was able to produce the documentary film "Rockin' the Wall" (with a lot of help from investors and supporters and my director Marc Leif). Here was music actually playing a major role in changing international politics and in ending the Cold War.

I mostly am writing this down because I don't want to forget it, nor do I want to forget the people. The names who shaped me—Earl and Eunice Schweikart, Virgil Chandler, my bandmates in Rampage, especially Aundra Browne, my long-time friends Bud (Ian) Kirk, Randy Gage, John Fulton, Joyce Peters Larned, Robert Loewenberg, John Tatum, and some of my newer friends, like Steve (Esteban) Lopez, Alan Peterson, Lincoln Forrest Phipps, Steve Olds,

Marta Lisle, plus too many of my friends and relatives who have died, including John Kunkel and my cousin Jan Ashby. I don't want them to be forgotten if I can help it.

So . . . let the story begin.



People can point to a lot of special or memorable moments in their lives. Many say the birth of a child; others say their wedding day. Those were important to me, but no other moment was as seared in my mind, almost literally, as the time I almost burned up the Yuma Convention Center with about 5,000 people inside while performing my first-ever flaming drum solo.

A little context. At the time, my band (called Whip) was a standard copy band. Yeah, we had some remote aspirations of doing original material, but we didn't work very hard at it. I think we only had two songs—both written by the singer, Corky Allread—that were originals. They were good, but probably not top-of-the-charts stuff. Hey, he was young, and we were young, so it was par for the course.

Along with Corky, we had Paul Wilke on bass—a solid player with a good high voice—my friend Kevin Staley on keyboards, and a legendary guitarist in the Phoenix area, Forrest Webb. We played good straight-ahead rock and roll hits of the day, including Bachman-Turner Overdrive, Edgar Winter, War, and Doobie Brothers. While we could play (and Corky could sing) harder material such as Led Zeppelin, we pretty much stuck to the top 40 and threw in some white man's funk versions of songs such as "Brick House." We were all good players, with Forrest the best, but no one was eye-dropping spectacular.

On the night in question, we somehow got the opening slot in Yuma for a concert with the James Gang. They had just lost Joe Walsh—who would have a solo act for a while before he joined the Eagles—but had replaced him with another guitar whiz, Tommy

Bolin. (In another band, we had played the same venues as Bolin and his band at the time, called Energy. Which they definitely had. They were one of the loudest groups I had ever heard, including the legendary Blue Cheer.

Whip had played all over Colorado and New Mexico and even reached up into Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Scottsbluff, Nebraska. I have powerful memories of the Cheyenne Electric Company, the club we played in Wyoming. As part of our contract, we were given housing above the club, and on a Saturday night, with a packed house, I had a terrible case of food poisoning. Fortunately, Corky had started his career as a drummer and could fill in the rest of the night.

Now, here we were taking the stage in front of about 5,000 Yuma-ites, all hungry for rock and roll. Over the previous few weeks, I had worked on a new wrinkle in the act: a flaming drum solo. I stole the idea from another band that regularly played Phoenix called Canary. They were everything we both envied and despised. All pretty boys, they had the poofed-out hair, a light pop sound (vs. our heavier rock sound), and very tight arrangements. Whip, on the other hand, was a jam band whenever possible, meaning we improvised within songs. We were rough. Canary was smooth. But the drummer from Canary, while technically very good (better than me), also had a killer hook. He did a flaming drum solo using tympani mallets set on fire.

I watched him a couple of times and concluded I could do better. As I said, he was technically better than I—he could play tighter rolls and was perhaps flashier (and certainly better looking). But I learned early in my drumming career that I didn't have the "chops" (skills as they were called) to be a session drummer or a finesse drummer. All the practice in the world wouldn't change that. Instead, like the Rolling Stones, who in my mind were a great "groove" band but not terribly good musicians, I had to find a style

that no one else could copy. And I did. Now, I was going to apply my style to the (stolen) flaming drum solo.

Instead of just lighting my sticks on fire, however, I was going to set fire to everything: all my cymbals would be aflame—and I had a lot of cymbals. Moreover, by that time, I had also learned a powerful message about marketing.

To be a success, I once heard a marketing guru say, you had to either take something that was hard and make it look easy or take something easy and make it look hard. As I mulled that later in life, Michael Jordan came to mind. He could soar over defenders as though he defied the laws of physics or hit a jump shot with defenders draped on him like used trench coats. Didn't matter. Jordan always came through. He took something very difficult and made it look easy. Easier than easy. Effortless. One of my friends is a financial genius. A Columbia University professor, he can look at a printout of bank statistics as long as your arm and shout, "THERE! See that?" Of course, I'm going, "See WHAT???"

That pretty much excluded me from following that path. The other path to success, however, was indeed something I could do. My routine in practice was to imagine the lights would go out; Corky would go backstage (as we didn't have roadies at the time) and pull the tympani mallets out of the lighter fluid they had been soaking in. He was to then squeeze them out so that the flame would be minimal. Meanwhile, the other band members—in the dark—would be wiping down all seven of my cymbals with rags drenched in lighter fluid. The plan was for me to keep the beat going on my huge 26" bass drums (in the dark) while these preparations were going on. Then, upon being handed the lit mallets, I would form the "Power X" with my sticks.

Bass drums still going: Boom! Boom. Boom.

On this night, everything worked perfectly. The lights went out.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The crowd stormed closer to the stage.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Corky handed me the flaming mallets as I formed the “Power X.”

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The crowd went even more berserk. All cymbals were ready for ignition. My show was to only hit my left cymbal in one big stroke. CRASH! (Boom! Boom! Boom!) It was all playing out perfectly.

With one major problem.

Corky had forgotten to squeeze out the mallets.

What happened next was a scene reminiscent of *Apocalypse Now*. I struck the big left cymbal, and it exploded, shooting flammable goo across the left side of the stage like a flamethrower. Images of the Mekong Delta came to mind. Forrest’s guitar, in its stand on the stage, was on fire. Convention personnel were blasting the stage with fire extinguishers, adding a white cloud to the nearly smokeless flaming mallets.

The crowd was driven to hysteria. They might witness a human sacrifice tonight. I, of course, realized what Corky had done. I screamed, “CORKY!” He stood behind the stage, grooving to the bass drum. BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! “Yeah, man!” he yelled back, oblivious to what he had done.

Nothing for me to do but press forward. My cymbal was dripping flaming liquid onto my drums like a giant burning mushroom. I now hit the biggest cymbal on my right side.

Mekong Delta. It looked like someone had napalmed the right side of the stage as Kevin jumped out of the way. Now both cymbals looked like the volcano eruption at the Mirage Hotel, dripping their blazing droplets . . . (how long before one landed on my velveteen pants or torched one of the many scarves I wore to perform? How long before I became Larry Steele (my stage name, because no one

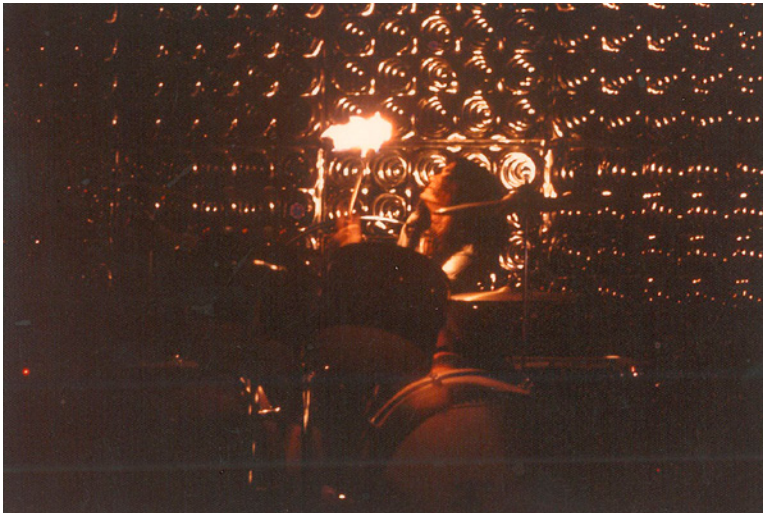
could pronounce “Schweikart”), the Human Torch? Would there be any fire extinguishers for me?

Corky was still bobbing his head. BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!
“Yeah man!”

I gave up. He would not offer help. I was on my own. The mallets were still blazing. The cymbals were still dripping flammableooze. Perhaps I could roll my way out? After all, I had seven tom-toms which were not doused in fluid. Maybe . . . ?

I did a massive around-the-set roll. Now, all seven drums were burning from the head up while the cymbals dribbled from the top down. I was surrounded, encased by fire.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! “Yeah man!”



The crowd was now confident in the human sacrifice element. I don't think any of them bothered to consider what would happen to the rest of the set if I died, least of all what would happen to them if the flames spread much further. Years later, in 2003, a band called Great White, playing in a much smaller, packed venue, lit off fireworks-type pyrotechnics that set ablaze the acoustic foam in the walls around the stage and engulfed The Station Nightclub in West Warwick, Rhode Island. The fire killed 100 people, including

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“As I wound down the Aerospace Plane work, I received an astounding invitation. The Mont Pelerin Society, which had been founded by Ludwig von Mises, Karl Popper, Friedrich Hayek, George Stigler, and Milton Friedman, contacted me, asking if I would be willing to go to Munich, Germany, on an all-expenses paid trip! This was particularly odd because I had no idea why a bunch of economists would want me, especially in Germany, but I said yes. I knew little about the group, but if Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek were involved, I was in. The Society, I later learned, was attempting to recruit young scholars in history, economics, law, political science, and other fields to bring in new blood.

I had never been to Europe—previously only had traveled to Canada, Mexico, and as far away as Hawaii. Flying Lufthansa, I had the best coffee in my life—but it was a grueling flight from Dayton to New York City, then to Munich. And I didn’t speak an iota of German, but was assured that was ok, that English was common there (and it was). They put me up in a nice hotel, but it was, after all, German. The bed was made for one of the Hobbits—and I’m only 5’8” so it’s not like I was an NBA player. In 1991, the television consisted of just a few German channels. Food and other prices were high (as I recall, nearly double here in the states). Worst of all, I was instantly lonely.

After my first day, I called Dee and wanted to come home. She said, “No, you’re there. Make the best of it. You need to stay.” She was right, although I still had a lot of uncomfortable times. However, there were four amazing moments in the visit. First, we were all taken aboard a passenger barge sailing down the Danube River. There was a full spread of food at the buffet, and as I went up

grab a few snacks, I found myself right next to Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman.

Friedman was my hero for all things economic. I had shown his PBS series, “Free to Choose,” to all my students at Brophy and shown clips at UD. As a financial historian, Friedman was one of those whose research I relied on regularly, and of course I had read his *A Monetary History of the United States* as well as his more “pop” books such as *Free to Choose*. However, one thing had surprised me: as an advocate of less government control in almost every area of life, Friedman strongly supported the Federal Reserve Board and its central bank activities. Now, I know the Fed as we call it is *not* technically a “government bank,” but it does operate like an arm of the government and is heavily regulated by the government, as it then regulates other private banks. I could not understand Friedman’s inconsistency on this.

Moreover, I had researched and written extensively on “free banking” in which any one could get a state charter for a bank by putting up a deposit of bonds. The banks were virtually unregulated, and, as I argued, had a strong history of solvency once a couple of small regulatory wrinkles were ironed out.

Right there at the buffet I politely engaged Friedman in a debate, with me advocating the case for freedom, him for government control. Given that the Mont Pelerin members and audience were largely free-marketeters, I’d say I won the debate. (Friedman, if he remembered it at all, would have likely thought otherwise). But to go toe-to-toe with a Nobel Prize winner in economics??? Wow.

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