

Leo's Casino

A Eulogy to Billy B.



LEO'S CASINO-A EULOGY TO BILLY B.

Leo's Casino was designated a Cleveland rock and roll landmark on June 24, 1999. For much of the Sixties, Leo's Casino was one of the nation's premier rhythm & blues and soul clubs. Leo's Casino opened on September 23, 1963 in the Quad Hall Hotel at East 75th Street and Euclid Avenue. The club seated 260 people at tables and 31 at the bar.

Leo's Casino hosted the talents of virtually every Motown artist as well as other soul legends. On any Friday or Saturday a patron could hear the throb of the Motown beat against the hissing sound of Dodge hemi street machines dropping off dates at the front door of Leo's Casino.

Inside David Ruffin of the Temptations would dance across the stage and thrill both Black and white audiences. Others like Smokey Robinson and the Imperials, The O'Jays, The Four Tops, The Supremes, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Marvin Gaye, Jerry Butler, Martha and the Vandellas, Chuck Jackson, Dionne Warwick, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, Ray Charles, Sly and the Family Stone, Jackie Wilson, James Brown, Sam Cooke, Ike and Tina Turner would do the same. Even comedians Flip Wilson, Richard Pryor and Dick Gregory were regular performers. Comedian, turned activist, Dick Gregory called Leo's Casino the most integrated night club in the country.

On Sunday night, July 24, 1966 Black people and white people waited in line together outside Leo's Casino. Not far away, the Hough riots were raging, a weeklong racially tinged eruption of looting and gunfire that had taken four lives and caused more than 200 fires. Mayor Ralph Locher had just called in the National Guard. The people, at Leo's, waited quietly. They weren't leaving. They were there to see the Supremes.

"That was the most amazing thing that I ever saw in all the years at Leo's," Leo Frank former owner said. "The sirens were going. And the police are riding by, and there are riots, and they are still waiting in line to get in."

The Supremes sang and shook Leo's for two shows until the police finally canceled the third show and sent everyone home. Diana Ross refused to leave the stage as the interracial audience cheered and sang along with her for the first two shows.

Leo's Casino is an epic interracial love story that needed the nightclub as its venue.

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