

On The Hollywood Argyles and Kinji Shibuya  
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The Hollywood Argyles were a musical group who were one-hit wonders, as it's called. In 1960, they had a record that went to number one in the U.S. called "Alley-Oop" and never did anything after that. "Alley-Oop" was a catchy, novelty-type song that had been written by Dallas Frazier a couple years before when he was eighteen years old (he's still alive and a Christian minister). Alley Oop was the title character of a syndicated comic strip created in 1932 by V. T. Hamlin. Alley Oop lived in the prehistoric kingdom of Moo, wore a fur loincloth, and rode around on his dinosaur Dinny. The cartoon's stories were considered satires on American suburban life. The lead singer of Frazier's song was Gary Paxton (he was twenty at the time; he died in July of 2016). Paxton was never identified by name; just the group, The Hollywood Argyles.

The information in this last paragraph came out of Google searches this week. I knew none of this back then. I was alive at that time, Gary Paxton was exactly my age, and like Dallas Frazier, who was also exactly my age, I'm still alive, which I'm finding increasingly remarkable. I'd never seen the comic strip when the song came out (and still haven't); more, I'd never even heard of it. All I knew was that the song was being played on the pop music radio stations I listened to constantly in those years (couldn't do it now, deafness has set in). I liked whatever music the disc jockeys played. "Alley Oop" was it? Fine with me. I bought the record—a "45" (for its 45 revolutions per minute), about six inches in diameter, with a big hole in the middle, for 78 cents as I remember. (I've become very discerning with the arts over the years, I'm not mired in the popular culture now; I feel very good about making that happen.)

The lyrics of "Alley Oop" will give you a sense of the song (and it's on YouTube if you want to listen to it

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sz6IpmmYSXA>). The lyrics in parentheses were sung by backup singers.

(Oop-oop, oop, oop-oop)

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

There's a man in the funny papers we all know

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

He lives 'way back a long time ago

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

He don't eat nothin' but a bear cat stew

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

Well, this cat's name is-a Alley-Oop

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

He got a chauffeur that's a genuwine dinosawruh

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

And he can knuckle your head before you count to fawruh

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

He got a big ugly club and a head fulla hairuh

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

Like great big lions and grizzly bearuhs

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

(Alley-Oop) He's the toughest man there is alive

(Alley-Oop) Wearin' clothes from a wildcat's hide

(Alley-Oop) He's the king of the jungle jive

(Look at that cave man go!!) (SCREAM)

He rides thru the jungle tearin' limbs offa trees

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

Knockin' great big monstahs dead on their knees

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

The cats don't bug him cuz they know bettah

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

Cuz he's a mean motah scootah and a bad go-gettah

(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-oop)

(Alley-Oop) He's the toughest man there is alive

(Alley-Oop) Wears clothes from a wildcat's hide

(Alley-Oop) He's the king of the jungle jive  
(Look at that cave man go!!) (SCREAM)  
Thair he goes,  
(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-ooop)  
Look at that cave man go  
(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-ooop)  
He sure is hip ain't he  
(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-ooop)  
Like what's happening  
(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-ooop)  
He's too much  
(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-ooop)  
Ride, Daddy, ride  
(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-ooop)  
Hi-yo dinosawruh  
(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-ooop)  
Ride, Daddy, ride  
(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-ooop)  
Get 'em, man  
(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-ooop)  
Like--hipsville  
(Alley-Oop, oop, oop, oop-ooop)

As I reprinted the lyrics off the Internet just now, it struck me that I had no idea back then what the song was about. That it was about a comic strip character riding a dinosaur, that he was hip; none of that registered. That “mean motah scootah” might be a euphemism went right by me.

The next year after the song came out, that would make it 1961, the Hollywood Argyles were booked for a week, I think it was, to perform at the Flamingo Club in Saint Paul, Minnesota, my home town. The Flamingo Club, on University Avenue, wasn't a big venue. It was basically a bar with a small stage, elevated a couple, three feet. A hundred or so people could pack together in front of the stage. On three occasions, as I remember, the packed-

together audience included me. There I was, drink in hand, watching the Hollywood Argyles play their music. The drink was a gin and tonic. Actually, I didn't like it all that much, kind of sour tasting, but I didn't know one drink from another (and still don't), and I knew a gin and tonic existed, so I'd order that. If the person taking the order asked me if I wanted a particular brand of gin I'd say, no, it doesn't matter, because I didn't know any brands of gin (and still don't).

Wow, the Hollywood Argyles, "Alley Oop," right there in front of me, in the flesh, how about that. It was four young men in their mid- to late twenties, and one attractive young blond woman (she'd be around eighty years old now if she's still alive) who kept time by banging her wrists, one and then the other, against her hips, which impressed me no end, very cool. Even though I was jammed in among people, nobody as much as looked at me as far as I could tell, and I wouldn't have thought to speak to anyone in those years (and wouldn't now either). After one set, an hour, never more than that, I left and went home to the one room rented apartment where I lived alone (right now, I live alone in a two room rented apartment). No matter where I went back then, I almost immediately felt the urge to leave and go home (it's the same now).

I learned from the Google checking this week that, really, there was no such band as The Hollywood Argyles. Gary Payton made "Alley Oop" on his own with some studio musicians he picked up the day he recorded it. Contractual commitments prevented him from releasing the record under his own name, so he thought up the name of a group on the spot. The recording studio was in Hollywood on Argyle Street, thus the Hollywood Argyles. With Payton's OK, bands, which didn't include him, traveled the country posing as the Hollywood Argyles. So essentially the band I was seeing at the Flamingo Club were imposters.

In the 1950s I watched wrestling on television every week out of Minneapolis in prime time, like 8:00 p.m. on a Wednesday. I

understand now that televising the matches was a good deal for both the local television station and the promoter of the matches, Verne Gagne (Verne died last year, Alzheimer's or dementia, somewhere in there). The event was going on anyway—people were paying to see it at an arena--so there were no production costs to the station beyond the outlay for a single camera, one announcer, and a technician, and the wrestling shows got good ratings. For Verne, since only the preliminary matches were shown on television and the main events and star wrestlers were hyped during the telecasts, it enticed people to come to his shows. That I could attend the matches in person never crossed my mind.

There I'd be, week after week, I suppose I was fourteen-fifteen, sprawled alone on a couch in front of a black-and-white 17-inch Zenith television set, which was big; it looked like a small refrigerator. It never occurred to me that the wrestling matches were rigged. I've looked at old kinescopes of some of the matches (this was before video tape; a kinescope is a film of the television image). The matches were so obviously phony, and yet I bought the ruse completely. (I tell myself that I'm not taken in by baloney these days, but deep down I know I believe just about anything anyone says with a straight face.)

A regular on those wrestling shows was Kinji Shibuya. Nothing subtle about the personas of the wrestlers in those years (or now): Shibuya was a sneaky, evil Jap straight from Japan. This played well then because this wasn't long after World War II, a time when we had been conditioned to hate the Japanese. Check out the 1943 Hollywood film "Gung Ho" on YouTube sometime to get a sense of what anti-Japanese propaganda looked liked in those years.

Kinji Shibuya, short and stocky with a burr haircut, would enter the ring before his matches in bare feet wearing some kind of Japanese robe, a kimono or something, with a sinister look on his face to a chorus of boos from the crowd. For sure, I didn't like him, lounging there on my couch. (It's fifty-five years later on a Sunday afternoon and I'm writing this on my living room couch

where later on today I'll watch Sunday Night Football on NBC, can't wait.) Before a match started, Kinji Shibuya would squat in his corner and raise one leg in the air and slam his foot to the mat, bam! and then do the same thing with the other leg, bam! and then, smirking, malevolence personified, rub his hands conspiratorially together in front of his chest; the whole business an alien, scary Jap ritual of some kind.

The actual match was basically given over to Kinji Shibuya and his clean-cut, all-American opponent shuffling sideways in a circle eyeing each other, and then they'd grab one another around the back of the neck and tussle a bit and then break apart and start shuffling in a circle again. The entire match they rarely left their feet. During the brief episodes of action, typically Shibuya would be getting his just comeuppance, which felt good for me to watch there on the couch in the safety of my living room. A common example, he'd have his back up against the ropes with his arms out to the side and his hands grasping the upper rope and be taking punches to the stomach and grimacing and grunting grandly with each punch—ugh, ugh, ugh! For some reason, he was completely immobilized and helpless on these occasions.

Punches with closed fists were against the rules of wrestling; that's what the announcer said (open fists where you hit people with your lower palm were OK, but no knuckles). Even though closed fist punches were illegal, with dirty Japs they were entirely justified, plus there was something American about them, John Wayne and all that, so we--which included me on the couch--were cheering our hero on.

The referee, taking note of this transgression of the rules, the punching to the stomach, would ever so gently pat our surrogate, the good-guy American wrestler, on the back and shake his head no, you can't do that. When that mild reminder had no effect, the punching still going on unabated, ugh, ugh, ugh, the referee would start counting in a slow, deliberate fashion, raising and lowering his right arm, way up and way down: One! ... Two! ... Three! ... At some number, a penalty was going to be imposed, but I never

found out what the number or the penalty was, because at four (evidently you could do anything as long as you didn't do it beyond a count of four), the virtuous rule-breaker--not a contradiction in terms in the wrestling shows--would stop and take a step back and the circle-shuffle would start up again.

After the shuffling and punching and a couple of brief headlocks and some bounces off the ropes (I never figured out what the bounces off the ropes had to do with anything), I suppose this went on for ten or twelve minutes, Kinji Shibuya would pull a sneaky, dirty, Jap stunt, ala Pearl Harbor, and win the match, suddenly it was over, out of nowhere. Why couldn't the referee see the low, underhanded thing Kinji Shibuya had connived to do? It was obvious to the rest of us--the announcer, the paying customers, and me--but the referee had somehow missed it. Then Kinji Shibuya, victorious, would put on his un-American Japanese kimono or whatever it was, and smirking in that devious Jap way of his, leave the ring.

Kinji Shibuya got away with it this time, but just wait until next week's match. He'll get what he deserves then, and I'll be there watching on TV. But next week would come and darned if he didn't fool the referee again and, right at the end, chalk up another unfair victory!

Kinji Shibuya died recently and I read his obituary online this week. He was actually Jerry Shibuya from Utah, a former college football player, who lived a quiet suburban life with his wife and children.