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## Anniversary show creates Grande memories

By **BRIAN McCOLLUM**

Free Press Pop Music Writer

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An old institution got coated with a fresh batch of memories Saturday night.

A spirited crowd of more than 1,000 convened at the Royal Oak Music Theatre to mark the 40th anniversary of the Grande Ballroom's opening as the epicenter of Detroit rock, treating themselves to an evening of classic music, sentimental conversation and even a few tears.

If the Grande faithful weren't exactly on home turf -- the old hall on Detroit's west side has lain abandoned for years -- they were certainly amid familiar company: Old friends reconnected and swapped stories, dosing on hits of nostalgia as they recalled youthful glory days at one of the country's first psychedelic rock palaces.

"We all survived," said Mike Crawford, 58, of Pontiac, who said he was at the Grande virtually every weekend four decades ago. "We went through some good times and some bad times, but we've all survived. It's really good to get back and see some old faces."

The Grande, built in the 1920s as a classic ballroom, became the hippie hotspot for local and touring acts during its six-year rock life in the late '60s and early '70s, with a hallowed gig list that included the Who, Cream, Led Zeppelin and the Stooges.

Venue founder Russ Gibb, now 75, was treated to a hero's welcome Saturday as he made his way through the lobby midway through the evening before being escorted backstage. Gibb, who opened the Grande on Oct. 7, 1966, with a show by the MC5, was later moved to tears when presented onstage with a plaque commemorating his contribution to Detroit's cultural legacy.

Other fabled Grande personalities included poster artists Gary Grimshaw and Carl Lundgren, venue manager Tom Wright and emcee Dave Miller, who harked back to his colorful past by strolling the venue with a small boa constrictor in hand.

"We were all a very, very special part of history," Miller said from the stage, eliciting a roar from the crowd during one of several stints between band sets.

Wright drew laughs by touching on one of the night's popular themes: the graying Grande fan base.

"This is like a cross between 'Jurassic Park' and 'Spinal Tap,'" said Wright, who has spent his post-Grande days as one of the country's preeminent rock photographers.

It wouldn't have been a Grande reunion, of course, without music: The night opened with appearances by the reunited Detroit band Third Power and offbeat British act Arthur Brown, whose quirky art-rock set evoked the left-field Grande vibe. Los Angeles outfit Canned Heat delivered a solid performance of organic groove rock that was, by wide consensus, the evening's best set, while Big Brother & the Holding Company closed

out the evening with a shot of vamped-up blues rock.

"The atmosphere was fantastic," said Gary Lacrosse, 51, of Howell. "You walked in and it was like an old-style concert."

Howell said he would welcome enthusiastically attend similar shows in the future. Tom Gaff with concert promoter Old Stoner Productions said it's a good bet he'll get them: Gaff is considering a monthly series of shows featuring bands from the Grande era, and is already looking ahead to a 2007 event that would celebrate the 40th anniversary of the venerable Summer of Love.

"It's been a big success for everybody. Everybody in the Old Stoners is really, really happy," Gaff said late Saturday night. "The talk throughout the crowd is that this has been one of best concerts they've been to in a long time. It went unbelievably well."

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