



A singer tosses his sweat-soaked towel to a teenager in the front row. A drummer loses hold of one of his sticks—and it goes flying into the audience, turning somersaults through the spotlights, right into the grasp of some fortunate fan. These are the moments—and the mementos—that rock 'n' roll dreams are made of.

For Pete Lavanger, it was a moment like this that gave him his life's mission. "When I was about fourteen, I caught a drumstick at a concert," explains the New Yorker, now in his thirties. "The thrill of it was indescribable." Lavanger went on to collect more than a thousand drumsticks—all of them used by famous percussionists, including Charlie Watts, Ringo Starr, and jazz great Max Roach.

A few years ago, Lavanger loaned part of his collection to the Hard Rock Cafe in New York City—flagship of the famous, combination burger joint/rock memorabilia museum chain. Since 1983, the Hard Rock has amassed an inventory of twenty-two thousand rock collectibles, from Jimi Hendrix's guitar to Buddy Holly's glasses. Although the company spends a fortune to obtain most of its keepsakes, Lavanger refuses to sell—even though he could use the windfall. "This isn't about money," he says. "A hundred years from now, these sticks will stand as a testament to the drummers and the bands they played with."

Lavanger's disdain for things monetary is rare in the world of rock memorabilia. In recent years, says the Hard Rock's Steve Routhier, prices have skyrocketed to the point where, a few years ago, two lyric manuscripts—one written by Paul

McCartney, the other by John Lennon—were sold at auction for more than \$80,000 apiece.

These days, almost half of Pete Lavanger's collection is on display in the new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, a chrome and glass pyramid that opened to much fanfare last Labor Day in Cleveland. The drumsticks are once again on loan. But so are many of the other treasures here.

From the beginning, the museum's curators decided to forgo high-stakes bidding wars and appeal directly to the source. Besides Pete Lavanger's drumsticks, most of the items in the collection—Madonna's Blonde Ambition costume, Elvis Presley's first recording studio—were donated or loaned by the stars themselves or their managers, families, or friends.

The museum's collection is impressive. Still, there's something magical about mementos that have passed through the stars' fingers and into the possession of their devoted fans—average folks who managed to be at the right place at just the right time. In 1970, an assistant to a music industry press agent happened to be backstage at a concert when Doors' singer Jim Morrison decided he'd tired of his signature dark leather pants. When Morrison asked, "Anybody want these?" the young man was glad to oblige—and Morrison tossed him the trousers.

Like the instant Pete Lavanger caught his first drumstick, it was a priceless moment. But unlike Lavanger, the young assistant finally settled on a sum for his memento last December—\$43,700. One reason, perhaps, that rock 'n' roll will never die.—*Mitina Morse*.

NEAT STUFF: ROCK 'N' ROLL IS HERE TO STAY, a world premiere, airs Thursday, March 21, at 10 p.m. and 1 a.m.; and Sunday, March 24, at 2:30 a.m. **TLC**

*Collectors of Memorabilia
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