

There are shelves filled with cassettes and CDs of vintage R&B, blues, and jazz. "When I'm working in the garage on my cars, I always have music playing in the background," Rod said. "If I hear a song that catches my ear, I listen to the words a few times and try to remember them. I'll try 'em spur of the moment, and the rest of the band will fall in behind. It takes two or three nights of doing that, then everybody kinda knows where everybody's going with it and they play accordingly."

He carefully restores classic cars, like the 1965 pure white Chevy Malibu he's working on, with the same meticulous eye for detail that he brings to restoring the classic blues he loves. "I don't want to lose any authenticity with blues fans because I restore cars or surf. Authenticity comes from the life you live and how that comes through your music," he said.

"The music is one unto itself. It's a love and art form that's the main ingredient of what you are. People interpret you as what they see you doing. Sometimes it's not exactly all of what you are. There are other parts of you that need fulfillment. Most people have a lot of interests or sidelines that round out their personality. Those parts don't necessarily need to be thrown in people's faces.

"People interpret you as a serious artist when you've done something for a long time. The artist himself is just trying to pursue the same thing he was after all along. When you are playing traditional blues with spirit and fire, it's gonna be a slow climb. I've been doing it since 1965. The Mighty Flyers have been together since 1980."

Honey is the centerpiece of every Mighty Flyers show. She is the glue that holds sets together, the engine that drives their blues. "I really love to watch the crowd's response to Honey's boogie," said



**"When I play, I'm full of fire. But then there's the other me, in cutoffs and ponytails with no makeup, planting in my garden listening to some old jazz. I would miss my wild night life, but I need the quiet time at home to bring out the best onstage."**

**-Honey Piazza**

Rod. "For so many years, she was vastly overlooked. There were guys who didn't want to play in a group with her. Now she's getting her rewards."

Honey studied classical piano from the age of 7 until her teens, but it was her great-grandmother in Texas who exposed her to piano's earthy side. "Everyone I was around was a musician," said Honey. "I was 19 when I heard Otis Spann. That's what made me fall in love with the blues. I went out and got his albums, and I started playing along."

After Spann died in 1970, Honey traveled to Chicago, where she stayed with relatives of Spann and played with Louis Myers. "I even went to a séance to try to call his spirit. I wanted to be an overnight prodigy. It didn't work; I still had to work at it. I did capture a small percentage of his licks, but it's the passion, attack, and heart that's in the spirit of his music. Much later, I developed my boogie piano as a sidebar. It's ironic that now I'm more identified with that, but it's really not what I started out to be."

Every night, Honey feels she must fight for her right to play. "I hate always trying to prove myself," she said. "That's what I've been trying to do since the beginning of my career. People thought when I showed up that I must be the singer. Guys go out night after night and just play with no pressure. I want to feel that freedom.

"Music is a challenge I put on myself. I have very high standards for myself. I'm always trying to be better than the night before, to outdo myself. Succeeding is wonderful, but sometimes I wear out under the challenge.

"To be able to play a solo song was a huge step for me. I don't know how I pull that off. I put on a confident, outgoing appearance, but I'm really shy. I think there are people just waiting for me to make a mistake so they can criticize me. It's like we all have these feelings of doubting ourselves. Once I start playing, the adrenaline kicks in and the stage fright goes away. I get so much support from the band. They're my shield and my strength."

At home, Honey relaxes in her garden. "When I play, I'm full of fire. But then there's the other me, in cutoffs and ponytails