

*I'm gonna break out of the city, leave the people here behind,
Searching for adventure, it's the kind of life to find.
Tired of doing day jobs, with no thanks for what I do,
I know I must be someone, now I'm gonna find out who.*

These are the opening lines of a 1977 hit record. Reaching the top 10 of the UK singles chart, it is instantly recognisable to anyone who was a teenager at that time, and is still played frequently enough to be familiar to music radio station listeners. The song and its performers may have influenced many other bands from the punk era onwards, but its relevance here is that it is possibly unique (as far as the author is aware) in mentioning opticians in its lyrics.

The group responsible for the song was a four-piece band that was formed in Southend-on-Sea, Essex, in 1975. There was a fifth 'member' of the band, a dummy called Eddie, who used to appear on stage with them; and he gave his name to the outfit, Eddie and the Hot Rods. They developed a cult following on the pub circuit playing hard, fast rock and roll, following the path stomped by their near neighbours from Canvey Island, Dr Feelgood. Their style, somewhat more raucous – and more popular – than some of their contemporaries, helped to create an opening for the punk movement in the UK by persuading venues to book acts such as the Sex Pistols and The Damned. It was also to be their downfall because, as punk took off, the Hot Rods' brand of pub rock came to seem outdated.

*Why don't you ask them what they expect from you?
Why don't you tell them what you're gonna do?
You get so lonely, maybe it's better that way,
It ain't you only, you got something to say.
Do anything you wanna do,
Do anything you wanna do.*

The addition of guitarist Graeme Douglas to the Hot Rods' line-up seemed to provide the spur for their breakthrough into the singles chart. Signed to Island Records, their first hit, *Teenage Depression*, reached number 35 towards the end of 1976. There was a moderately successful album of the same name, and the *New Musical Express*' February 1977 prediction of the Hot Rods as being the 'most promising emergent act' appeared

Play it again, Eddie

Which is the only pop song lyric that mentions opticians?
David Baker has the answer, unless you know better



Eddie and the Hot Rods' vocalist Barrie Masters

prescient as the band reached a high point of number nine in the singles chart that August with the single from which the lyrics quoted above are taken: *Do Anything You Wanna Do*. In addition to breaching the Top Ten, it was named single of the week in much of the music press.

The music was composed by the aforementioned Douglas, while the lyrics were written by their manager and erstwhile Southend DJ, Ed Hollis (the elder brother of Talk Talk lead singer, Mark Hollis). The lyrics were a nod to the work of occultist, magician and all-round bad boy Aleister Crowley. Born in 1875 in Leamington Spa to members of the puritanical Plymouth Brethren sect as Edward Alexander Crowley, he revelled in the moniker applied to him as 'the wickedest man in the world' thanks to his debauched lifestyle. In a work entitled *The Book of the Law* he set out his philosophy of "Do what thou wilt" shall be the whole of the law.' (It is arguable that the wickedest thing he did was to name his children Lola Zaza, Aleister Atatürk and Nuit Ma Ahathoor Hecate Sappho Jezebel Lilith.)

Do Anything You Wanna Do was marketed with a record sleeve featuring an image of the bald Crowley with

superimposed Mickey Mouse ears. What was intended as a joke ended up causing the band a certain amount of grief. As The Hot Rods' bassist, and later member of The Damned, Paul Gray, relates in his online memoir at his paulgraybass website:

'It wasn't long afterwards that what was to become known as the Curse of the Hotrods struck. In retrospect it wasn't the best of ideas to mess about with Aleister Crowley ... It wasn't long before the letters started coming from his followers, saying we were playing with fire and threatening dire retributions on us all. At the time it was unnerving and we tried to laugh it off, but uncannily enough we suffered our fair share of tragedies soon after. In no particular order one of the guys responsible for the cover committed suicide, our manager died of a drug overdose and all other sorts of trouble befell band members that I won't go into here.'

Despite a huge tour of America – 57 gigs in 52 days – and recording sessions enlivened by guest appearances from Jools Holland, Linda McCartney and others, the Hot Rods' time had passed now that punk had taken hold. They parted company and disbanded in 1981. But that was not the end of the story: a brief reprise of the band was followed by reforming in 1985 and a reunion of the original line-up in 1992. Indeed Eddie and the Hot Rods are still touring now, but with just the one original member, vocalist Barrie Masters.

If anyone knows of another track that mentions opticians, let them come forward. But it is humbly suggested that *Do Anything You Wanna Do*, this rousing song with its optical reference, should become a standard at any self-respecting student optical ball. And what price a rendition at the Optician Awards? All together now (with apologies for the grammar):

*I don't need no politicians to tell me things I shouldn't be,
Neither no opticians to tell me what I oughta see...
...Do anything you wanna do,
Do anything you wanna do* ●

● David Baker is an independent OO