

Bach on Rock

Franklin Bach

1966

In the last issue of the FIFTH ESTATE John Sinclair put down “acid rock” in favor of new-thing jazz, implying that Coltrane is really where it’s at and that rock is nowhere. His opinion revolves around the term “psychedelic”. Sinclair feels that jazz is truly psychedelic while rock merely exploits the term. I asked Robin Tyner, lead singer of the MC-5, now appearing at the Grande Ballroom, what he considers to be the true psychedelic music.

“Any music is psychedelic because all music is mind manifesting. The word psychedelic has lost its meaning because it has been totally run into the ground. Soon someone will come out with psychedelic shoe-laces. I don’t like to use the term because of the meaning hang-ups.

In reply to Sinclair, in a sense he’s right. Coltrane is where it’s at, if you’re playing the Coltrane game. Sinclair’s opinion is shallow because he’s only playing the John Sinclair game. The goal of the game, or “Where it’s at”, is relative to the player. Right, Franklin Bach game?

“Sinclair said that if the rock bands were turned on to Coltrane they would blow their minds if they have any, which they do. What is this? I was turned on to Coltrane long before I got into the rock thing. In fact, I was turned on so hard that if someone told me then that I’d be a rock singer someday I would have laughed in their faces. But now, if John Sinclair would give a good hard listen to the MC-5’s avant rock, I think he’d blow his mind, if he has one, which he does. That’s where I’m at, you dig?

“There is no comparison between jazz and rock. They are two different streams of music entirely, each with its own rules and goals. Comparing them would be like comparing basketball and billiards...each are games, but the comparison ends there.”

I asked Tyner to explain how he feels about his music, avant rock. “Soundwise, we’re forcing more of the guitar than would have seemed possible five years ago. I can’t speak technically about this because I’m not a guitar player, but Wayne Kramer, our lead’ guitar, is getting into his instrument and away from it at the same time, because he’s getting away from the note pattern thing and into exploration of the basic sound that his guitar can produce.

“Folk people have a personal involvement with the guitar itself because the sound comes right out of it. But rock people place their personal involvement in the sound that comes out of the amplifier. They explore the sound, not the instrument. This involvement is what avant rock is all about.

“The MC-5, because of our involvement with sound and not with note patterns, has found that feedback can be powerful and effective means of putting emotion across. With the use and control of feedback we can get the sound so big that you don’t hear the music, you feel it; and you don’t dance to it, you dance in it.

“I have my own personal feeling about the music I produce, too. With the sound that the MC-5- makes, I can, with my lyrics, get out of the ‘I’m gonna get you baby’ bag and into the ‘love is real, real, real’ thing. I want people to walk away from our performances emotionally drained, calm, happy, and all kinds of sweaty.”

Perhaps Tyner’s last words are the key to the difference between rock and jazz.



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