

Bach on Rock

Franklin Bach

1966

I remember that there was a time not too long ago when yours truly sat in one of Detroit's few coffee houses wanting so badly to have a good time and hear some good music that I actually applauded the second-rate "musicians" folking off onstage. These performers were the product of a very small and very sick music scene in the city. There was very little of anything exciting attracting customers to hear live music. Consequently, there was very little money for the musicians playing in this city. There was, as a result, very little competition, creativity, or excitement going on in the coffee houses. A vicious circle.

That circle has just been joyously busted wide open.

The psychedelic dance happenings that you've been hearing about have finally come to Detroit. With much fanfare (SEE THE COSMIC LIGHT BEAMS—SEE THE MAGIC THEATRE) the Grande Ballroom opened October 7 and strange, electrifying things have been going on there every weekend since. If you're still wondering if this freak-out is just another fake-out then, friend, you just haven't been there.

I really can't tell you about the lights and sights, you have to see them to believe them. Even if you're blind, though, it's worth \$2.50 just to hear the amazing sounds. The whole building shakes with the blast of a music that I never imagined I would hear in the Motor City.

The most prominent of the groups making all this beautiful noise are the MC-5 and the Southbound Freeway. Three years ago the MC-5 started out as a Rolling Stones-Animals oriented band; they have come upon a sound they call Avant Rock (see this column, last issue). The Freeway are something else entirely.

These cats are able to project a sound of their own, a personality, through their quips, their stage presence, and especially their music. Their version of "Satisfaction, for instance, is a real gas because they have managed to get past the Mick Jagger hang-ups of the tune and have gotten into the song itself and how they feel 'about it. "50 Days in an Open C Tuning" is their trip into raga music, a necessity for the modern rock band. "Crazy Shadows" (one of their many original pieces, released this week on the Swan label) is a "funny" song that is more than a novelty. They call themselves folk-rock, an unfortunately bland term for an exhilarating group.

The SBF's lead guitarist, Mark Chover, was only a year ago considered by many to be Detroit's finest folk guitarist. At present he is the only rock-n-roller to my knowledge who uses the three finger pick method of playing. His improvisations come on with a flurry of notes unlike both folk and past rock styles. He reminds me a little of the Byrd's Jim McGuin, which is interesting because McGuin uses a twelve string and Chover has only six.

The three other members of the group are also ex-folk singers. Marty Somberg sings lead, plays harp and twelve string rythm, tells jokes. Lenny Somberg, the group monolith, plays bass. Jim Wiejecha is on drums.

This is rock at its best, an art form unleashed and unafraid, put together by some of the most creative people walking around our town today. The music fills the air, creates a vibrating atmosphere of sound, flows through the ears into the brain as the visual things flow through eyes. It's easy to lose yourself completely...

What really blows my mind is that groups like this will be much, much more numerous when the local musicians begin seriously competing to get some time on the stage of the Grande amid all those lights and, of course, all that bread. A rock scene CAN happen here. (Detroit is a big city, remember?)...

I almost forgot—it will be the Detroit Contemporary 5 for the concert November 3. Saxophonist Joseph Jarman will be here from Chicago to join the band that night, & you'll be even happier. Joseph just did his first recording session, for Delmark Records in Chicago, last week, and he will bring all of his self over here to join Charles & them. Dig it.

Catch, if you can, the city's newest coffee house, the Opus One (at the Artist's Workshop, John Lodge at Warren). Jazz, rock bands, light show, poetry readings, and films...

Odetta (the REAL first lady of folk) is appearing at the Living End, November 11 to 20, with (I hope) accompanist and guitar genius Bruce Langhorn. Rock fans, don't forget your roots.



Franklin Bach
Bach on Rock
1966

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/17-november-1-15-1966/bach-on-rock>
Fifth Estate #17, November 1-15, 1966

[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fifthestate.org)