

Bach on Rock

Franklin Bach

1967

Two records which have reached the top spot in the charts recently are the Beachboys' GOOD VIBRATIONS and the Monkeys' I'M A BELIEVER.

GOOD VIBRATIONS is a very interesting single due to an excellent and intricate arrangement of music and vocal parts; and the Monkeys come across with a rather nice, early Beatleish simple, clean sound. Both songs are listenable, but on both 45s, featured performers do not play most of the instruments.

I seriously doubt if we will ever hear these songs done the same way on stage anywhere. Both records are, in effect, strictly studio cuts. It is apparent that the trend toward depending on studio men for good recordings has firmly reestablished itself in the rock business.

One need only look to England for reassurance that the studio has gained enormous importance in the last few years. The Beatles, who have usually recorded rather "natural" or "honest" (i.e., they make most of the music on record themselves and can play it again live) have cut one much talked about song on their last album—Tomorrow Never Knows—that is one hundred per-cent a studio creation.

The Motown Sound is tremendously popular in England; and it is commonly known that the essential ingredient in all Motown products is the complex recording and mastering and filtering equipment in the hitsville studios.

The personnel of the established groups is changing so rapidly in England that one can no longer expect to hear the same performers in concert that were heard on a record made only months beforehand. English musicians seem to have accepted the large rift between recorded and live music and are working with it on a large scale.

If some English musicians have adjusted, many Americans have not yet, are frightened, and are not sure just how they can adjust. To start with, the musician realizes that he must depend on recordings to give him initial popularity on a nation — wide basis. He remembers, too, that there was a situation only a few years ago when the big men in music were un-creative, un-talented performers who earned a lot of money for themselves and their manipulators who made them what they were in studios—while musicians were kind of left on the outside looking in. All of a sudden the Beatles came on the scene and then it was really important to be in a group, a good group, so that the musician could actually sell the music he played live and on record and get lots of money and fame etc. for himself. Now, however, much of the music being put on sale at the record store can't be sold at the concert hall. The musicians sense a real change in the scene happening, and it makes them uneasy.

I questioned the members of the MC-5, a local rock group, about their feelings on the live versus studio thing. (The MC-5 are an interesting case in point for, although they are considered in most circles to be Michigan's top rock-n-roll group, they have not recorded to date and won't until early January.) Fred Smith, the rhythm guitarist, said he didn't want to do anything on record he could not reproduce on stage. "I'd like some day to take about twenty technicians and lots of equipment on stage and really make some wild electronic music. But that won't happen until the musicians and the kids (the public) are ready to accept it." Robin Tyner, lead singer, said the best solution to the dilemma was to "forget the studio completely. Do all your records live." Mike Davis, bassist, seemed to reflect the attitude that he didn't like what was happening to the musician in the studio and that he wanted to stay away from it as much as possible. The lead guitarist for the MC-5, Wayne Kramer, had other ideas. Anxious to get into a

recording studio, Kramer said, "The studio is really the best place for the musician to create. The live performance is a communication between the musician and the audience. The recording is a different thing altogether. It's a complete and personal statement of the musician's art."

Although most of the modern studio cuts are of rather poor quality, there are enough outstanding records and big hits to force the artist to pay attention. If he accepts the trend, then he must ask himself questions about his identity he may not have faced in the past: Am I a studio musician, or a live performer, or a recording engineer, or all of these things? New questions always present a challenge to the artist; and how the rock artist meets this challenge in the near future will be important to the record business, to the listening public, and especially to the musician himself..

There is a radio station in New York, WOR, which plays something they call "non-chart rock," in other words, music from albums and scarce singles and R&B and such which is not heard on the top 40 stations. The idea sounds like a good one (as thinks Murray the K, who has moved to WOR) and looks commercially successful. There is some talk of starting a similar station on Detroit FM. If anyone is interested, contact me through the Fifth Estate or Barry Kramer at Mixed Media..

I'm sorry, but the rumor IS true. There ARE 10,000 Jewish blues bands, and most of them are pretty bogue.



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Fifth Estate #21, January 1-15, 1967

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