

USCO Turns On Federal Drug Conference

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1967

The Conference on Drug Abuse at Oberlin College sponsored by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) came off not quite as planned. The weekend of Feb. 17, 18 and 19 found a gathering of the drug elite crowded into this tiny collegiate community with the purpose of presenting an objective view on the abuse of drugs.

Included in the gathering were Ralph Metzner, Richard Alpert, a contingent from USCO and a sprinkling of straight psychiatrists who were supposed to make the psychedelic proselytizers look foolish. If the conference accomplished nothing else it at least succeeded in making the point that the babble of the data-processing psychiatrist becomes meaningless next to the love of a Richard Alpert or the primitive intensity of an USCO experience.

It became apparent to anyone who followed the various conferences and presentations that the young people present could be divided into two categories; those who had already been turned on and those who came to find out how to get turned on. The young people turned a deaf ear to the psychiatrists and turned to Alpert, Metzner and USCO with open arms.

The psychiatrists sat on stage in their ivory towers of academia and spoke of chromosomal aberrations, hospital admissions, brain damage and all the other nightmare information they could fish up. They were so insulated from the people in front of them that they failed to realize that they were addressing an audience that was living proof of the efficacy of the psychedelic experience.

The high points of the weekend were the smiles of Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner and the program that USCO presented in Finney Chapel on Saturday night. There is no point in trying to describe the effect that Alpert and Metzner have. They are truly shamans in the most beautiful sense of the word and if you ever have an opportunity to hear or meet them you shouldn't miss it. Feel for yourself the magical qualities that emanate from these men.

The USCO program is somewhat easier to describe. At least we have ways of describing the physical actions that took place even though in doing so we run the risk of completely missing the point. Beware the intellect in these areas. Don't fall into the trap of trying to understand. Simply open your senses and feel.

As the crowd began filing into the chapel they were greeted by USCO representatives who were handing out flowers and sticks of lighted incense. The huge room was darkened except for two powerful strobe lights on the stage. Sandwiched between the strobes were two people playing ping-pong and a young girl going through some acrobatic antics on a trampoline. From huge speakers placed in different corners we heard the deafening sound of gunshots ricocheting around the room.

People continued filing in and they were soon sitting in the aisles because all the seats were taken. The eight o'clock starting time had come and gone and gradually people were becoming aware of the fact that the "show" had been going on for some 30 minutes now.

From here on in it becomes more difficult to describe what happened because it kept changing so rapidly. On stage were three movie screens and just to the sides of these were two clusters of weather balloons suspended from the ceiling and rotating. Long strips of mirrorized mylar were hung on the walls and tapestries were draped over the edge of the balcony and hung loosely over the aisles.

The back wall had a 5 foot square tie dye done in luminous colors and illuminated by an ultraviolet lamp. Indian bells were suspended from everywhere and any movement in the chapel led to the melodious sounds of the bells.

The ping-pong players and acrobat disappeared and the sound track broke up into separate directions. Croaking frogs blended into heartbeats and the words of Timothy Leary merged with a woman breathing heavily. Suddenly there were four 16-mm projectors shooting images at the stage. The rotating weather balloons became a dancing play of oscilloscope images being projected on them.

Other movies were projected onto the screens up front. These varied from the electronic images of a programmed color TV tube to the exquisitely beautiful "Shiva-Shakti," a movie of merging human forms done with multiple projections and image overlap.

At some point along the way the 4 movie projectors were joined by 4 slide projectors which splayed mandalic images on any part of the wall that wasn't in use. Colors bounced off the mirrorized mylar and shattered into thousands of pieces clinging to the walls and ceiling.

The slide projectors were hooked to pulse lights and instead of simply projecting an image they pulsed an image—they took on life and breathed images onto the screen.

A no-ow-now box on stage clicked its incessant message as it alternately vibrated its spinning diffraction grids and an infinity machine poured its endless variety of colored images into the receptive minds of the audience.

Separations broke down and slides and movies overlapped. Images were no longer distinct and those in the audience who were symbol-oriented found themselves grasping for something to hold on to.

The huge six-foot weather balloons which were monstrous lumbering blobs fell from the ceiling and were thrown out over the audience to be played with until they broke and sprayed everyone with the talcum that had been placed inside.

Almost imperceptibly the whole process began to slow down. Instead of 4 movies there were only 3. One or two of the slide projectors had died and something was shifting. A change was going on. All that was left was one large pulsating mandala in the center screen with the beam from a laser in its center.

The mandala kept pulsating with no change while the audience waited expectantly, but nothing happened. The same mandala kept pulsating. People began getting restless and coughing. Some started to applaud and a few began leaving. Still the mandala pulsated. More and more people got up and left and still the mandala pulsated until finally it pulsated for a few final moments in a nearly empty church and then went blank.

People found themselves outside a church on a chilly Saturday night trying to figure out what they had just been through for the last 2-1/2 hours. Most laughed at themselves for getting up and leaving, especially after they realized that they were supposed to do exactly that.

Many milled outside and discussed what they had seen. Some tried to justify the new art and others questioned the use of particular symbols. But these were the people that USCO had failed to get through to. The others—the ones who had gone home quietly and smiled all the way—were the ones who saw the show.

USCO had presented a cycle. A cycle which went from birth to death over and over again. A cycle which recognized love and hate and man and woman and black and white. A cycle which held opposites up to you and made you realize that there are no opposites and "we are all one."

Like all cycles, the USCO show had neither beginning nor end and it allowed as much or as little involvement as one chose. Ralph Metzner best summed it up after the show when he shook hands with members of USCO and commented that "it was a beautiful trip."



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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/25-march-1-15-1967/usco-turns-on-federal-drug-conference>
Fifth Estate #25, March 1-15, 1967

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net