

Ginsberg Here for Love Fare

Sheil Salasnek

1967

On Feb. 26 a holy celebration was held here in Detroit. The stark grey coldness of the Administrative Services Building at Wayne State University was transformed for a few hours into a magic theater and the secret price of admission was your mind.

People came for many reasons that night. Some were there out of curiosity and some, despite the unfortunate lack of advance publicity, came because they heard that the poet Allen Ginsberg was going to be there. Some came with hope and some with contempt.

Whatever their reasons for coming, the point is that they were there. Five hundred strong they poured into the magic theater and mixed among themselves. Young nymphs in miniskirts smiled at greying men in suits and ties. Young men with shoulder length hair smiled at visitors from Birmingham. Children were running in all directions involved in the games of five year olds. Psychedelic priests in long flowing robes were smiling at everyone and soon the magic began to work.

Strangers were sitting together on the floor holding hands. Those who had brought food invited others to share it with them. Candles and incense were being sold, but this didn't last long and soon they were passed out to anyone who wanted them. Everything was shared.

Allen Ginsberg came in and moved among the milling crowd as another worshipper. Fingering his prayer beads he lowered his head and marched around the perimeter of the room chanting in an undertone. When finished he looked up and smiled, satisfied that the room had been made holy.

Overhead light projectors poured their organic colors onto a row of sheets strung up in the middle of the room. Both the High Society and the Bulging Eyeballs of Guatama handled the light show and in one corner a strobe light clicked its hypnotic message courtesy of Uncle Russ.

The Joseph Jarman-Roscoe Mitchell group began the music. Standing on the small raised platform with prayer bells around their necks and diffraction grids on their foreheads, these makers of the new music poured the message of love through their kazoo, saxophone, bells, sticks, drums and other tools. Neo-symbolic sounds to convey neo-symbolic experience.

The people were listening. They drew even closer now. Huddled together as a tribe they listened as a succession of temporary chiefs at the center delivered their messages with words and music.

Bill Hutton, who had flown in from Buffalo, read several of his poems to the crowd. In his "Manifesto" he gently reminded the audience that the only way to make the evening a truly holy celebration was for them to open up and make love to one another. Participants joined hands while observers scratched their heads wondering what this madness was all about.

Jim Semark read two rhythm ballads and by now it was apparent that there wouldn't be time for many of the participants to read.

Jim was followed by Billy C and the Sunshine, a shouting, stomping blues band that gave everyone a chance to get up and dance for a while.

As the guest of honor was introduced he seated himself between two large prayer candles and began his reading by chanting three mantras. With finger cymbals clashing and voice wailing, Allen Ginsberg proceeded to chant away the evil spirits and bring love and trust into the whole room.

The audience gathered at his feet and sat in silence as he chanted. Here, to me, was the only disappointment of the evening. As Allen began the beautiful Hare Krishna chant he was joined by only ten or twelve people in the room. This chant, which has proven to be such an effective binding force for groups in New York and San Francisco, seemed to go almost unnoticed here in Detroit.

Perhaps people here hadn't heard the chant before and weren't familiar with it or perhaps they weren't aware that chanting is a group effort. Whatever the reason, I can't believe that it was through any lack of spirit that nobody joined in.

Following the chants Allen read from his large repertoire of poetry and the audience remained attentive to his interpretation of the message. He spoke of love and hate, death and rebirth and tolerance, all seen from the driver's seat of a Volkswagen lost somewhere in the middle of a Kansas night.

As he finished he bowed to his audience and then stepped down to become part of them again.

After the peace of Allen Ginsberg came the intensity of the MC-5. Screaming through their amplifiers the electronic voice music translated everything Allen had said into their language and repeated it again.

When it was time to close the doors and go home there were still 200 people holding hands and running to the music of the MC-5 as the great hairy magician cavorted in the center of the huge snake dance.

In retrospect the evening was an even greater success than most had hoped for. Pragmatically it had raised some money to help out the Artists' Workshop, GUERILLA and the 24th of January Defense Fund. More important than this it had made an important point.

The theme for the night was love and trust and the children of the acid generation had come to prove they could make it work. They showed that even with four police cars at the door, six police in uniform and countless undercover agents present they could still smile at the person next to them and talk of building a better world based on love and trust.

Further.

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