

Music as Revolution

Fifth Estate history

Fifth Estate Collective

2005

The *Fifth Estate* has, since its inception, been inspired by radical music and various collective members have composed, played, produced, and reviewed music. In the first issue, the lead story lamented that Bob Dylan had given up folk music for rock and roll. But soon, almost everyone had. For a long period from the late sixties through the early seventies, the paper was awash with news, reviews, promotion, and—even ads—for rock. Local bands, too numerous to name, but some of whom went on to be famous, eagerly volunteered to play benefits for the fledgling underground newspaper. Without their help, the publication might not have survived.

Whether it was the legendary MC5, the “house band” of Detroit’s revolutionary counterculture, at Detroit’s legendary Grande Ballroom, screaming “Kick Out the Jams, Motherfucker” in 1969, or the Layabouts, pounding out World Beat-based rock during their 1986 “Fuck You Mr. President Tour” and at many benefits for the paper, staff members and readers, plus hundreds more, danced, drank, and sweated along with the bands.

While some consider the MC5 an important precursor to punk rock, others note their connection to jazz, as evidenced by such jams as their cover of Sun Ra’s “Starhip.” The first record, Kick Out The Jams, was recorded live in the Grande Ballroom, and John Sinclair’s liner notes overflowed with the White Panther Party’s revolutionary propaganda. Around that time, Sinclair wrote, “Rock and roll not only is a weapon of cultural revolution, it is the model of the revolutionary future.”

When Hudson’s, a then Detroit-based and now defunct department store, refused to stock the LP, the MC5 responded with a full page advertisement in the *Fifth Estate* saying “Fuck Hudson’s!” The band broke up amidst drug-related problems in 1972. Singer Robin Tyner died in 1991, as did guitarist Fred ‘Sonic’ Smith in 1994. Guitarist Wayne Kramer is still active and has re-formed the band with bassist Michael Davis, drummer Dennis Thompson, and the recent additions of Handsome Dick Manitoba of the Dictators and Gilby Clarke from Guns ‘N’ Roses.

The Layabouts provided a delicious and defiant soundtrack for Detroit radicals during the 1980s and ‘90s. But unlike the MC5, the band was so adamantly anti-commercial that they never sought nor gained a recording contract or national attention. They self-produced two records—1986’s *No Masters* and 2000’s *Workers of the World, Relax*. Plus, they never played gigs for profit and rarely toured. Most of their out-of-town shows were at continental anarchist events such as the 1986 Haymarket centenary in Chicago where a number of women and men stripped off their tops as the dancing got wilder. Mel Most, a then-elderly anarchist who had been at the 50 year Haymarket commemoration, observed, “Big deal; in 1936 we danced naked.” The next year, the band played at the Minneapolis anarchist gathering.

At another steamy dance party during the 1988 Toronto anarchist gathering, the band played again in a room so hot that an even hotter crowd on the dance-floor discarded all their clothes, while moving to songs like “Fuckalot,” “I’m Tired,” and “Governments Lie.” The group disbanded in 2004 after playing together for 23 years.

[Click [HERE](#) for more on the Layabouts.]

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