

Honkies Can't Dig Soul Music

Bill Kerby

1967

FE note: The following is excerpted from an interview with Mike Bloomfield, lead guitarist of the Electric Flag. In deleted portions of the interview, which will appear in its entirety in the next issue of *Scene* magazine, Bloomfield traces his musical development and his split with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band to form the Flag. He discusses some of his favorite musicians, tells why he canceled his recent Bowl appearance with the Mamas and Papas, and some of the joys and hangups of his art.

MB: You know what I'd really like to do, man? I'd really like to work in places with colored people in them. I'm so sick of working in front of honkies man, I just can't stand it anymore.

BK: I saw about three or four blacks out in front tonight and I was thinking about you in relation to a mixed audience.

MB: In Chicago, where I first started getting together was a club called Big John's. It was a hippie club that was completely integrated. Just every sort of humanity possible and it was definitely integrated and everybody would get grooving together and the groove would get so mellow—it was the only club that I had ever been in my life that was like that. The onliest, onliest one and I dug that and I even dig more working in straight Negro clubs. Straight spade clubs because that is the music that I play and that's the language, the dialect that I am speaking and those are the people that understand it.

I don't dig freaking out people. Freaking out the kids is not where my head is at. If they get freaked out and enjoy the music that's lovely, I'm very happy, but blues is a language and it is spoken and it is called a response thing. When I speak the language I expect a response, I expect screams, yells at appropriate moments, just like in bull fighting when an extreme hip varonica is going down, man, that audience screams because they know the language, they know the dialect, they know what they are supposed to do.

Did you ever hear of Charles Kyle's book *The Urban Blues*? When you're playing blues or R&B or a certain type of music it will invariably reach people who are familiar with that music, really familiar, man. For me with the social implications of the lyrics, the feeling and everything, you know, will freak them out, we will be telling it like it is and that's what we do. I want to tell it to ears that understand what we are talking about.

White people just don't know, they just don't know about anything. They suck entirely. Really generally, in everything, but in music it is a horrible thing. I'm glad that they're freaked out, I'm glad that they're enjoying themselves, but it's not where I would like to be, you know. I think if we played in exclusively colored places we'd be crow-jimmed half the time right out of the fucking scene, man.

In Chicago when I started learning how to play there was so much dues I had to pay, just so many cats rapped so badly and so hard that it just made me so up-tight—but there was just as many cats that took me by the hand and said, "Young man let me show you where it's at." Great famous blues singers just took me aside and said, "I'm going to straighten you out."

It straightened me right out, man. They did their best to do that and that's where I want to be but in this economy, in this fucked up country, the black man will forever be down unless a revolution takes place which it should, armed revolution.

Thank God there are Malcolm Xs and Rap Browns around who are finally, finally getting the people together into revolution, because this economy and this country will never, ever, ever, ever allow the black man to get anywhere. Like all Civil Rights bullshit, you were trained, I was trained, from birth to not be prejudiced. Yet these crackers up front who say, “fuck man I don’t dig it, they’re animals, man,” they’re up front enough so you know where they’re at.

Like me, I pre-judge. Intellectually, I can cancel out bias, but in my heart I have been so conditioned by this fucked up society that I pre-judge. I cannot look at a man and say “You are a man,” just a plain man. I will pre-judge him. I’ll say, “You are a faggot, you’re a Jew, you’re whatever.” I just spend half of my time just trying to clean my head up and really look at things in reality but of course the white community will never do this, man.

That’s why we will never make it economically. That’s why this country is so totally destroyed. You’ve got a stupid fucking cracker for a President. I mean there’s no doubt when you hear the way he talks with a southern accent, he’s a stinking lousy fucking cracker. I’m sure he attended a great deal of lynchings, and got off and came in his pants behind the thrill of seeing that body hanging there. Right in the music thing it’s the same thing because the language we are speaking will never get across to the people who are supposed to hear it, it’s just going to get worse and worse.

BK: That’s really sad.

MB: In a way I really feel that I have learned well, that I’ve really paid my dues and that I can blow the blues with as much depth and soul and feeling as any man, yet I feel it is the black man’s music and the fucking honkies have been capitalizing on it for years.

Man, do you know when John Coltrane died that the President didn’t even talk about him on television? Can you believe that, a major American artist, fucking Carl Sandberg died who is a great genius cat and who has been vestigial for twenty years, has been impotent, a used up scrotum of a man, you know, and like a living breathing genius of the highest caliber, one of America’s finest artists of all time died and the President didn’t even speak about it. I didn’t even hear it on the radio, I didn’t even hear it on the T.V. I’m really expecting L.B. Cracker to get up there and he should have made a speech, you know, “Today all America should hang your heads in sorrow because a great, great artist died.” A hundred years from now they’re going to know Coltrane. After L.B.J. is dead they’ll probably know about that artist.

BK: You say you’re playing Negro gigs. Eventually don’t you have to spread the language or experience?

MB: No, because it’s an-enormous thing, man, it’s too hard to understand a whole cultural dialect, to understand what lyrics mean. Like B.B. King’s song “I Don’t want a Sole Hanging Around My House When I’m Not Home” or “Laundromat Blues” by Albert King—those things have a valid, incredible meaning, like “Back Door Man,” the cats that actually go out when the husband goes out to work and cop some pussy, man. This happens everywhere, every culture. every race; it happens.

The cat can write a song and understand exactly what you’re talking about. I’ve seen shootings go down in clubs, I’ve seen shootings for that very thing, a very simple matter of adultery and you sing these songs and kids will listen to it and not understand a word. They’ll know the lyrics intellectually in their minds and they try to comprehend some meaning of those words, but they really don’t understand.

When B.B. sings “I Don’t Want A Sole Hanging Around My House” it’s such strong lyrics, you know, “if you’re sick, man, don’t call the doctor, you just suffer until I get home.” That’s strong shit, that has some strong messages, man.

BK: What’s the difference between The Doors doing “Back Door Man” and Wolf doing “Back Door Man”?

MB: Both people know what it is, they both really understand what it is. Wolf is singing it because Willy Dixon wrote it for him and told him to sing it, but he knows because he IS a “back door man” and a real pussy creep, and he’s really into that.

Kids are getting more hip. Soul music is really moving them. I have never seen a more integrated radio thing. I’m amazed that Otis Redding is selling to white kids and Stax is an entirely integrated shop.

Reprinted from *L.A. Free Press*.



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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/39-october-1-15-1967/honkies-cant-dig-soul-music>
Fifth Estate #39, October 1-15, 1967

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