

Walking Down Pleasant Street with Tim Buckley

Guan Kosemach

1967

A telephone call at noon on September 29 from Elektra Records confirmed our plans for an interview with Tim Buckley. His second album (GOODBYE AND HELLO) was just released and Tim was here to play the Canterbury House in Ann Arbor.

Elektra Records said we would all meet later that afternoon and cross over to Canada where Tim had to tape a "Robin Seymour Show" on CKLW.

Introductions were brief and before we could ask Tim any questions, he asked us if we heard the new John Handy album.

After we admitted our ignorance, he recommended Handy's first and third albums. He mentioned Coltrane, speaking of the beauty of his 'organized chaos.'

After we crossed the bridge to Canada, the customs official looked into the car and came on like he was auditioning for a German war movie:

HIM: "Pull Over There, Please."

TIM: "Pull Ova Zer, P-leeze."

ME: "I Vant To See Yor Credentials."

TIM: "If You A Spy, Vee Will Shoot You."

Anyway, we tried to compose ourselves as we entered the customs office. "What outfit is this?" questioned the officer. Tim mumbled, "I'm not going to sell my guitar." The cop found a form from CKLW mentioning Tim's arrival, so he let us go. Saluting as we left, we sped to channel 9.

It was "Hard Days' Night" all over again we entered the studio. The receptionist pointed to a TV screen with Bozo the Clown cavorting on the screen. Walking down the corridor to the studio, some mini-teens asked us if we were a singing group. When we found the right set, we also found thirty teenyboppers smiling at the camera and applauding themselves after each record. A young producer sprang up to us and looked like he was ready to pinch his cheeks as he said to Tim, "Look, baby, you're late. I don't know if we can fit you in. Will you lip-synch (mouth) something from the first LP?" Tim said no, he'd sing a song from his first album. But there was no union employee around to install the necessary microphones for a live performance. His segment was canceled and Tim autographed albums for the CKLW record collection. He signed each LP "With Love and Faith," Tim Buckley.

Leaving Canada, we headed for the Canterbury House. Arriving there at 6:00, we saw a group of about thirty people waiting to buy tickets. Leaving Tim to practice, we went out to dinner with Danny Fields, a young, hip promotion man from Elektra.

We discussed the pop scene and Tim's relation to it. Elektra expects Tim's second album to make Tim a "top-ranking" performer. They had just received their first golden single and LP with the Doors and expect Tim's to be "their next big album." They envision Tim as a solely concert performer with a more elaborate backing. Now he travels with his electric guitarist, Lee Underwood and Conga player, Carter C.C. Collins.

Danny mentioned the immediate popularity of the new album; in its first week it was sold out in places like Albany and Seattle where Tim has never appeared. (At Detroit's Mixed Media it was sold out in two days).

Back to Canterbury House, an overflowing crowd awaited the first set. A young priest with long hair, with corduroy pants, introduced Tim. The audience, reluctant at first, grew in its enthusiasm as Tim sang. After the first set, the crowd buzzed with excitement. Almost everyone remained for the second set.

Between sets, Lee and Carter received invitations to parties and flirted with the Ann Arbor girls. In the dressing-room, Tim was pleased with the audience and his performance. Relaxed, he answered our questions. When asked about musical origins, Tim told us that when he was young he listened to Sinatra, the Big Bopper, Lefty Frizzel, Merle Travis, and Sam Cooke. He mentioned that Cooke's "Change is Gonna Come" was the inspiration for an unrecorded song "The River." Now he listens to Mingus, Jimmy Smith, Gabor Szabo, and Handy.

We asked about his first album. It was recorded in only three days—"a rush thing." He was most pleased with "Song of the Magician," "Strange, Strange Affair," and "Song Softly Sung." Both he and Elektra knew that the album was poorly produced. In contrast, "Goodbye and Hello" took a month and a half to record. Tim had a large backing that included Dave Guard (formerly of the Kingston Trio), and members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. When asked if there was unity to the new album, Tim Described his scheme:

The songs taken as a whole form a poem. On the first side, he begins with war and carnival, with life being too real. With "Pleasant Street" life becomes "too much"—then there are "Hallucinations." This side ends with "I Never Asked to be Your Mountain." Tim believes "Mans' basic aspirations are to be a mountain and to fly. " Side two "tells it like it is." There are two love songs, a comic relief before the powerful "Goodbye and Hello." Tim said the "new children" are not the flower children; that he's not speaking "youth-wise but enlightened-wise." "I'm not anti-American, its a beautiful place, but there are other cultures, other ways of looking at things...I'm depressed about the situation (the war, both in and outside the U.S.) but I'm looking for the good." He mentioned receiving a letter asking why "Goodbye and Hello' wasn't the last song. "But things aren't final." He emphasized that he was "not a poet, I don't claim to be." His songs are little letters put together. They are personal but not profound—not like Dylan."

About the future, he said "I'm not going to stay in Rock and Roll too long." He's into "weird things...I'd like to write a Broadway musical where everything would be interpreting each other, dance music, poetry and drama...I want to write something that will last."

After hearing him at the Canterbury House, there's no doubt in my mind that Tim Buckley will last.

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