

R&R Crusader

John Sinclair

1967

Out of a crop of albums these stand out for one reason or another:

PINK FLOYD: “The Piper at the Gates of Dawn (Tower 5093). The Pink Floyd has enjoyed in London roughly the same position as the MC5 holds here: the Floyd made itself known through working at the weekly UFO dance/concerts at the Roundhouse, under the sponsorship of the London UPS paper, the International Times.

I’d heard of the band long before I got to hear its music, and when I did (on a single that was released in the U.S. but never played on the radio, “Arnold Layne,” “Candy and a Current Bun”), the Floyd knocked me out.

The Pink Floyd comprises Syd Barrett, lead guitar and vocals (Barrett also writes almost all the band’s material); Roger Waters, bass and vocals; Rick Wright, organ/piano; and Nicky Mason, drums. Their material has a sameness to it that can be irritating—after a while it sounds like most of the tunes use the same changes—but their vocal and instrumental approach is fresh and exciting.

Rick Wright is a monster organ player and really makes the group what it is. The instrumental arrangements are more interesting and original than the vocal parts, which are pretty much stock British high-pitched unison-sounding lines, but the totality of the music more than makes up for such shortcomings.

“See Emily Play” is the strongest vocal track for me, and on “Interstellar Overdrive,” which seems to be totally improvised in the manner of the MC5’s “Black to Comm,” the Floyd explodes all over your head. This is the first record I’ve heard that really gets into FREE rock improvisation, i.e. without a constant repetitive rhythmic reference by any of the players.

I’ll tell you what—pick up this record, take it home, get plenty stoned, and turn on to “Interstellar Overdrive” before you do anything else. I don’t think you’ll regret it.

MALACHI: HOLY MUSIC (Verve 5024). This looks and feels like another “psychedelic” exploitation record in the manner of “The Zodiac” or “West Coast Love-In” or any of those other hard-sell flipped-out advertising specials. A weird multi — colored cover, a pulsing colored mandala in the centerfold, and statements by Allen Ginsberg and a music professor on the liner. The last time I saw that kind of thing was on Peter Walker’s “Rainy Day Raga,” where they had Tim Leary say that “Peter Walker plays on the ancient protean strings of the genetic code” or some such bullshit, which just proved how little he was really into music at all. So I put it on reluctantly, sat back and had my mind quietly blown.

Malachi is a young San Francisco holy man/musician, it seems, who went into the Verve studios and recorded this music on Wednesday, August 17th, 1966. Verve held on to it for over a year and then brought it out with the big sack-a-doolie push. The “tunes” are called “Wednesday-Second,—“Wednesday—Sixth,” etc.—five takes in all. It sounds like it should have been released on ESP-Disk, but then that just shows you how far the “psychedelic revolution” has gotten—and Verve seems to be the one major label who will consistently “take a chance” on weird material, which is making them some money I guess, and at least gets the music out.

The music is Malachi playing guitar, occasionally accompanied by Steve Cunningham on Jews-Harp. Much of the record is very quiet, sit-and-drift meditative music—which is very nice -and when Malachi gets into it a little he is able to transfer a very peculiar and exciting musical energy through his playing. I think everyone ‘who likes to

relax, anyone who can listen to music that goes beyond straight back-to-back rock and roll into his non — regulated space and time explorations, will love to have this record on his machine.

THE DOORS: “Strange Days” (Elektra 4014). I’ve never really been a fan of the Doors, although there are things on their first Elektra album that I can listen to (“Light My Fire,” “Break on Through to the Other Side,” “Back Door Man”) without wanting to take it off. It’s just that the group has weaknesses that can’t be overcome: Jim Morrison’s vocals, on record at least, are not soulful at all—they sound flat and exaggerated to my ears. Ray Manzarek on organ is shallow and can come on like a roller skating rink too much for my taste.

They don’t have a bassist in the group, although they’ve added a Douglas Lubahn on “occasional bass” for the new album. Lead guitarist Bobby Krieger is adequate and can play some, viz. his solo on “Light My Fire,” but is still only into note runs. Overall their sound is shallow, lacks depth, and can get very irritating if you’re used to listening to really strong groups with a full rhythmic complement.

In their second record the Doors don’t go any further than the first, though there’s some good screaming from Morrison on much of the material. With a voice like his, it seems to me that the only time he’s really exciting is when he screams—I can’t get too upset over his normal delivery or even his reading of the lyrics. I don’t know—this gets rid of some of my feelings about the Doors, who are getting very popular indeed, but I don’t know how much it might help you in dealing with this album—like, whether you should buy it or not.

I did, but I’m a sucker for almost any music. If you flipped out for the Doors as many of my friends did over their first record, you’ll probably like this one. But I can’t recommend it.

fifth Estate

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