

Interview with Ed Sanders

Ed Sanders

1968

Editor's Note: Ed Sanders, founder and lead singer of the fuck-rock group The Fugs, is a legendary figure on the avant-garde poetry-peace-dope-fucking in the streets scene in the Lower East Side of New York City. A native of Kansas, Sanders made his first splash on the national scene as one of the peacefreaks who boarded the atomic submarine *Polaris* in 1962. He served 90 days in jail when he was apprehended and later had his account of the scene, "Poem from Jail," published as a pamphlet by City Lights Books (1963). In New York City in 1962 Sanders founded the mind-shattering magazine *Fuck You / a magazine of the arts*, which published such American poetry giants as Charles Olson, Michael McClure, LeRoi Jones, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, et al.

Sanders: The only thing the Yippies want to do at the Youth International Party Convention in Chicago in August is put on a free music festival. As an event, it's simple, but people are assuming up-front that there's going to be violence. And it's true that there are okie-honkies in Chicago and a lot of angry blacks and a lot of cops who channel all their fear and up-tightness about the whole thing into a stronger grip on their clubs.

But I think that the analysis that there will be violence is essentially false, because the yippie thing is just a free music festival, away from the convention and away from the ghetto area, and it's just going to be music. We have a right to events of an alternate life style. It's our duty to do it.

"The politics of ecstasy" is really loaded with implications, and also the politics of creating a body of light, that has great implications. I think we'll have not only rock but a whole bunch of theatrical events, Broadway shows, the whole thing.

It's just that everybody in America who's tired of buffalo chips, bullshit and puke vectors, everybody who's tired of the creeping meatball, the nefarious barf-suckers...everybody tired of that will rise up. If they just rise up and abandon the creeping meatball, that means a lot.

It means, the creeping meatball on one hand is Johnson's lumpy face, and on the other hand it's the whole sick deathly death-causing middle-class America, it's got to be passed over and risen above. It's not anticipating mass violence.

If we prophesy enough that violence is going to occur, then it will occur. And if we say that we'll stand together and be cool and be sane, and fuck in the streets, then from Our cosmic view we will prevail. I guess; I don't know. I hope.

The essential question is how will Chicago police and the people react to a freek invasion. Will the honkies and okies of Chicago, coupled with the police and the CIA and the FBI and the Daughters of the American Revolution and the White House Press Secretary and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the head of the CIA conspire against a group of a quarter of a million long-haired dope-fiend beast pud-ponder romp creeps? That's the central question.

There's no reason to snuff us because we haven't started out to destroy the family unit yet and we don't have any economic power. We're just a bunch of long-haired freeks that have come out of the confusion of America with

a certain sense of what we want done, and we're going to try to show one aspect of what we want done in Chicago, that is. We're putting an end to hyping, hustling, murder and killing, all those things that people do to each other.

THE FUGS

Being tenacious, we've all of a sudden...there's an incredible demand for us all over the world. Now that we have the opportunity we're going to start doing weird things. We've been singing songs of schizophrenia and malaise but, in three weeks we're going to baptize ourselves in the Pedernales River, on our way back from California we're going to stop in Austin, Texas, and do a routine, there.

We began this thing by having an exorcism three weeks ago at the grave of Sen. Joseph McCarthy in Wisconsin where we had this girl lay down and wrap her legs around the tombstone and offer to ball the spirit, and Allen Ginsberg sang mantras and invoked and cleansed the spirit and sent it back to the gush plasma, wherever that is.

Starting with that, our next Fug event will be the Pedernales River baptism-a-thon. And following that we are going to be in London during May and when we come back from the Germany-England bullshit tour we're going on, we're going to fly around the world the other way and stop off in Saigon. And we're going to have a ballet at Saigon Airport and a press conference.

We'll try to investigate a few things, the black market, opium dens, prostitution, marijuana use among army people, and the CIA and ecological and architectural damage caused by American imperialism, and bullshit like that. And general feedback in the air.

The ballet is called "Homage to Small Arms and Mortar Fire." We're going to get off the plane pirouetting and there will be set up in the bandstand a little chamber orchestra.

They can play any music they want to play—I'll give them a list of traditional French songs. Tuli will dress up like a weird general soldier type and Ken will be dressed like a cattle baron and I'm going to be dressed like a 19th century...with the white suit bullshit and a cane, like a Rudyard Kipling creep shouting jingles...and we are of course going to cable all the leaders and try to arrange meetings and stuff—Ho Chi Minh, Chou Enlai, Mao, Ellsworth Pukesuck or whoever the Ambassador is—try to get on top of that, you know, win the war.

I hear Saigon is really groovy, according to reporters. We're going to try to set it up to entertain the troops. If they don't cooperate with us, fuck 'em, we'll just do what we can, try to get as close to the fighting as we can without getting snuffed.

POETRY AND ROCK

There needs to be a rejuvenation of the whole poetry scene in the nation. But the sense of purpose and greatness that was evinced by the New American Poetry scene and the whole emphasis on poetry during that decade, from '55 to '65, the nation's tension was placed on poetry. Since then the attention of the media and the attention of the kids and the radicals and the energy people has been sluffed on the universe. Another Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, another John Greenleaf Whittier, all those bullshit creeps...yeah, Robert Frost. So anyway, American music is nothing happening.

There's got to be people with iron wills, man, total dedication, and 24-hour-a-day creation. There could be a fucking Wagner rise up, man, some long-haired slobbering maniac with an IQ of 3,000 and a band of 20 people and 35 naked streetfuckers with concern for poetry, politics, ecstasy, fucking, dope, youth, peace, and concern for the problem of the city in polis and ecology, can rise up and make just beast music, genius totality, orchestras and screams, using every conceivable instrument and sound crush and clamor.

Where it's not at is sitting and freezing your balls off in the dressing room of the Grande Ballroom and jumping on stage to beat your meat and destroy your youth a little more and go to a Motel and jack off, that's not where it's at: Also where it's not at is traveling around one-nighters, taking amphetamine and moving around from groupy snatch to groupy snatch.

Also not where it's at is having some fucking slick-headed drooling moron in the production booth overdubbing you...that isn't the situation with the Fugs, by the way, but I'm saying that the situation for a lot of groups, they've got some sniveling, money-hungry fingernail-paring attitude, where you sit silent not really involved—it's important to get involved.

But I don't know if the music...The American music situation is still grim, it defies description. Nothing has ever happened in American popular music, not yet it hasn't. The only way it's really going to happen, if some really first-class composers within the rock idiom and some really first-class poets get on top of each other and get together and do something.

If you're going to view music as a social tool, a civilized tool, you really got to get after it, it's not enough to get up and play 16-bar songs of rock at the Grande Ballroom and jump around and show enough interest and energy that people dig you. That's where so much of it is bullshit. That's why people like the Doors command so much attention. Just like I'm not overly impressed with people — like the Cream and even Jimi Hendrix.

If they have the audacity and the energy to create such an interest in themselves they should stay on social issues and try to write historically important material. The Doors, after listening to their albums after the whole thing has been going on for a couple of years you begin to realize that some sort of monstrous hype has been perpetrated away from poetry into music, rock and roll, peacock feathers, incense, and stuff like that.

How sure can you be that this is right? It was right certainly to get into politics or to get into social reform and concern, to take poetry away from the puss-sucker in the control booth laying down 16 bars of bullshit every once in a while mentioning a peacock feather...or a 51 piece orchestra with one word on their score sheet, "Freak-Out"—that happened at a Monkees session, which is just dog drive.

It doesn't serve history, it doesn't serve anything, it's bullshit. Also where it's not at is the whole...hype, the whole...It's all bullshit, the whole money thing. What right do the Fugs or Jimi Hendrix or the Doors have to make a million dollars off the youth of America? They don't have any right. Therefore, they should give it away or do something with it.

What right does Jimi Hendrix have to go around making \$5000 a day, 300 days a year, he doesn't have any right. Maybe for 20 years in Seattle Washington he didn't have it, but that's no right. It's all involved in ethics. What right do all these people, who are essentially forming some sort of body of light or great new youth explosion, what right do they have to take money from confused Catholic teenyboppers with come down their throats, and use it for dope?

There's never been a record out that's worth a shit, including the Beatles, it's all puke. Who really wants to get freaked out on a record?

The real great music, like Coltrane... do you really have to go back to jazz to get great music? I don't think so. it's just the whole thing that Beardsley told Yeats, Yeats said, man, why don't you take more time with your drawings and why don't you make drawings that are worth a shit, and Beardsley said, beauty is difficult, which is essentially the issue. The reason jazz is great is because these motherfuckers live it, it's their whole existence, it's every little molecule...talk about cellular knowledge, that's where cellular knowledge is at.

Beauty is difficult, it's so hard to create something beautiful, and if you've got a slick-headed motherfucker and all he wants is money that's managing, and you got some jive-ass record company that wants to make money only, secretly, although they might pretend they're in it for culture, then you're not going to have a culture, you're not going to have beauty. Because it's all pressure...

Then there's the bite off more than you can chew problem. Most groups assume, like the Doors, a poetic posture beyond their ability. Jim Morrison couldn't get published in the Anivorous Quarterly if he tried to send some of that bullshit that he puts out as great poetry to the poetry magazines. If you're going to write words to a song you have to go through the same...like it takes eight years to become a great guitarist, you have to practice, so accordingly you have to practice to become a great writer, but these kids writing music and words didn't start ten years ago, they just sat down between sets...

"Let's see...peacock feathers...uh, let's see...uh, mind...corridors, canyons of your brain...you're too young but let's fuck...dope...marijuana is o.k. but LSD is bad..." Everything rhymes.

The Musicians and the poets and the creators are not together yet. That's the situation of American music right now—it hasn't happened yet. And it doesn't appear that it's going to happen. But we'll see.



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