

Rock and Roll Dope

John Sinclair

1968

The following is a press release I wrote for the MC5 this week; we're running it here because we promised to take you behind the scenes in the rock and roll industry, and these events illustrate what bands have to go thru just to do their thing. If you just paid your money and sat and waited for MC5 at the ballroom last Sunday, you deserve to know that it wasn't the band that kept you waiting in the heat—it was the people who took your money. Be advised.

The MC5's freek scene at the Grande Ballroom June 7th (as reported in last week's release) has kicked off a string of creep scenes with club owners around Michigan, starting at—you guessed it—the Grande Ballroom itself. So far only two major incidents have taken place, and if they're any indication you can look for a lot more shit before the fan is shut off.

There was a long line of rock and roll fiends waiting outside the Grande last Sunday night (June 23rd) when the MC5 arrived at 6:45 to play the evening concert with Blue Cheer and the Psychedelic Stooges.

Before he could even get to the dressing room, lead singer Rob Tyner was accosted by building owner Gabe Glantz and warned not to use any "dirty words," no nakedness on stage, and no incidents with the American flag, "real or simulated," during the band's performance.

When Tyner told him that he just wanted to do his show, Glantz threatened him with turning off the power onstage at the first sign of any obscene language or any other tom-foolery. At this point MC5 manager John Sinclair overheard the conversation and told Glantz to fuck off, whereupon Glantz ordered the band not to play the evening's performance and walked away.

Sinclair had been talking with reinstated Ballroom manager Larry Feldmann about the order of performance when the business with Glantz went down, and Feldmann immediately got on the phone to Russ Gibb, who made it down to the Ballroom with his attorney, Roger E. Craig, to see what was going on.

Meanwhile the Stooges were forced into playing the first set—by this time it was maybe 8 o'clock and getting hotter, and the ballroom was still filling up with easily-recognized MC5 fans who began to wonder what the fuck was going on when the Stooges finished and the record player went back on.

No MC5. The band was in the downstairs office with Gibb and Craig, talking it out. Management maintained that for the band to go on stage and kick out the "jams" would result in an immediate bust; not of the band then of the Ballroom. The band maintained that Glantz had created the whole affair (there were supposed to be 3 detectives there ready to snatch the Grande's license if any more un-American shit went on)-because he wanted to get rid of them, and that if they couldn't do their show at the ballroom, it might as well be closed, because they didn't want to play there anyway if they couldn't play what they wanted to.

The MC5 was joined at this point by Leni Sinclair of the Trans-Love Light Co., and Gut, Blue Cheer's manager, who told Russ that the Cheer couldn't go on unless the 5 went on, "because the audience wants to hear the MC5 and won't settle for anything else."

Upstairs the audience was chanting "MC5! MC5!" and getting madder and madder by the minute. By this time it was after 9 o'clock and Russ was still wondering what to do. He had to be reminded that the MC5 had opened the

ballroom, worked there for free to get it started, was still working there for peanuts, the light show still gets \$25.00 a night for 6 people working 5 hours, Grimshaw still gets \$25 a poster, the Ballroom is packed every weekend and it's bad enough that the people who were supposed to share in the profits don't share in them. But now if people can't talk like they want and do what they want there, then the whole thing just ain't worth it. He had to be reminded that the band hadn't started the bullshit about the "dirty words," Glantz had, and that all the MC5 wanted was to do their show or else go home—forever. And take the light show, the store, and everything else they'd brought—including the ballroom's mojo—with' them.

The act of solidarity by the Blue Cheer seemed to have been the decisive factor in the whole thing, and at 9:30 Russ decided that the MC5 had better go on, even though his attorney had advised him that the police could easily lift his license if they wanted to. Actually, the final decision was made when Glantz appeared in the office and told Russ that the alleged detectives were no longer upstairs. This was all he needed to get out of this mess.

When the MC5 stepped on stage the crowd exploded in cheers and screams. The audience, estimated at some 1,500 on a Sunday evening, knew something funny had been going on, but they'd waited for the 5 through a whole hour of silence as the heat level in the ballroom mounted, and when Wayne Kramer kicked off the show with Ted Taylor's old song "Rambling Rose," they were really ready for it. And when Tyner charged onstage and hollered "KICK OUT THE JAMS, MOTHERFUCKER!!" everything broke loose. Hands shot up in the air flashing the "V" for Victory as the band kicked out the jams.

Their original plan had called for an hour-and-a-half set of new and established material, including two new MC5 pieces: John Lee Hooker's "The Motor City's Burning," and a Tyner composition called "Spaceship," which incorporates a Sun Ra poem into its spaced-out vocabulary. But four songs into the set Russ Gibb sent word that his attorney had to leave—(Craig had been "monitoring" the MC5 show to see what the furor was all about)—and that the band would have one more piece to play.

Sinclair relayed the message to Tyner on stage and Tyner blew up. He told the crowd that it was "another bullshit Grande Ballroom scene" and that Russ had cut their set short once more (it's standard procedure for the MC5 at the ballroom), and the freeks in the audience started hollering for Russ' ass. "Kick out Uncle Russ, motherfucker," someone screamed from the middle of the room, and the band went into their closing piece, "Believe It to My Soul"/Black to Comm."

"One of these days/And it won't be long," Tyner sang, "You'll search for me baby / And down the road I'll go...Cause I BELIEVE..." and everyone knew what he meant.

After the end of "Black to Comm," after the p.a. had deteriorated completely and the power had been shut off once, the MC5 received a standing ovation.

On Tuesday (25) the band's booking agent, Mike Quatro, called to report that a job at the Jackson (Michigan) Hullabaloo had been canceled when the police there read about the flag scene (*Fifth Estate*, June 19-July 1), and took the manager of the Hullabaloo to the city council, who threatened to rip up his license if he allowed the MC5 to play his club. The club owner was pissed off because he knew he would've made some money, but he was so thoroughly convinced that the police would pull a stomp scene that he broke his contract with the band and canceled.

Other club owners around the state are beginning to realize that it would be in their best interest to hire the MC5, no matter what they think of the band's show. The MC5's itinerary for the first half of July includes appearances at the Saugatuck Pop Festival, July 4th with the Amboy Dukes and the Rationals; the Pumpkin, in Wayne, Michigan, July 5th; the Lakeland Castle in Caseville, Michigan, July 6th; Grosse Pointe Hideout, July 8th; Ann Arbor Hullabaloo, July 10th; Toledo Hullabaloo, July 13th; Bay City (Michigan) Roller Rink, July 16th; Sherwood Forest (Davison, Michigan), July 17th.

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