

Rock and Roll Dope

John Sinclair

1968

In the past two weeks since the last issue of this paper a bunch of new developments have taken place: Almost every job for the MC5 brings a new and different creep scene into being.

At a Wednesday night job in Tecumseh, Michigan, at the local teen center, guitarist Wayne Kramer ripped a pair of pants early in the second set and went off to change them. Later in the same set he ripped the second pair of pants, this time accidentally exposing his genitals to the tender crowd.

We didn't think anything of it until the musicians' union and our booking agent both sounded us about it, claiming that some insane Tecumseh woman had written them a letter describing the accidents in lurid detail, and among other claims asserting that Kramer had "exposed his personal self" to the dismay of the teen-age audience. Anyway, the union made vague threats about "expelling" the band, etc., but so far nothing has been done about the matter.

The 4th of July brought the Saugatuck Pop Festival on the west coast of Michigan, and there was no creep scene at all—but there was a huge freek scene that warmed the hearts of everyone there.

The Festival was presented by Mike Quatro and featured a cop-less performance area, and with no pigs and a cooled-out promoter the band's natural chemistry was free to work its magic on the crowd without interruption. The audience, a mixture of stoned-out freeks and drunk frats numbering over 3000, called for the MC5 throughout the afternoon and were finally satisfied around 9 o'clock when the band took the stage over from the UP, following sets by the Tikis, Girls Inc., the Finer Things, and the Fruit of the Loom.

The crowd was really up for this one and cheered their asses off all the way through the show, and when Rob Tyner called out "Kick Out the Jams, Motherfucker!" so many arms shot into the air that it looked like the end of World War II. The jams were truly kicked out for 45 minutes and by the time "Believe It To My Soul" surged into "Black to Comm" the whole audience was on its feet, screaming and waving their arms in the free night air for the MC5 to bring it all back home now.

The band was ready for them. Kramer had had his new Stratocaster decorated (by Robin Sommers of Trans-Love) for the Independence Day festivities: red and white striped body, blue pick-guard with white stars, a flag hanging from the tuning pegs: truly an all-American guitar, and fit to be freed. The energy built up and up and up until people couldn't stand it any longer, and finally Kramer stepped back, unstrapped his star-spangled Fender, and began mashing it against the low ceiling beams of the stage until it cracked, and then finished it off against the floor and against the bank of Sunns behind him.

Then the drums went over, sprawling across the stage, and Fred Smith lunged for his speakers and leapt on them, kicking over everything in his path. The crowd hollered and screamed and surged at the stage as the band staggered off, and their victorious vibes filled the night with feeling.

The Thyme, the Rationals, and a Chicago group, the Flock, finished off the evening before a sharp rain cut it short without the scheduled appearance of the Amboy Dukes, who could be seen gnashing their teeth after waiting all day to do their thing just to have it canceled out by the weather. But for the people there, the MC5's triumphant

showing made everything all right, and the people were still talking about it as they drove home in the rain after a long day in the sun.

Friday night took the band to the Pumpkin out in Wayne, Michigan, for “psychedelic night,” and a groovy time was had by all, with no funny shit going down, just good music and good vibes. Saturday night it was Caseville, Michigan, at the Lakeland Castle, for 1500 eager fans, and although the place was surrounded by cops of every description—state pigs, county sheriff pigs, township pigs, and hired guards—everything went off smoothly.

Sunday night took us to Mother’s, a great new place in Romeo, Michigan, owned and operated by a bunch of young freeks who call themselves United Peach, and the vibes there were so groovy we thought the funny shit was all over with. We’ve never played in a better place, and people who live out in that part of the scene should check it out.

On Monday night we returned to the Grosse Pointe Hideout, where the weird stuff had started early in June, and it just got weirder. The fire marshall was there, the Harper Woods pigs were there, the same rent-a-cops were there, the owner was running around in circles from all the hassles he was getting. Mike Quatro was there trying to cool him out, and the kids were there—in full force. The fire marshall made the Hideout management turn people away and keep all the lights on throughout the band’s two shows. The police lined up outside the doors complete with helmets and grim pig faces, the heat mounted, the management kept breaking in with announcements during the show: “Please stop smoking grass in the girls’ toilet,” “You’ll all have to fold up your chairs and sit on the floor,” “No obscenity or they’ll take our license away,” “You’ve got to turn it down, it’s too loud for the fire marshall,” etc. Warnings and threats cluttered up the air, but the kids were right there and didn’t wanna hear no shit—they wanted the 5 and nobody was going to stop them from getting it.

Kramer kicked off the second set with “Ramblin’ Rose,” and when it came time for the magic moment Tyner strolled onstage and told the kids he needed some help. Everyone knows what comes next, he said, and we need your help in calling off the tune because we’ve been hearing all kinds of weird stuff about it. Everybody knows it’s all right now, don’t they? The crowd cheered. All right now, there’re just 5 words, and when we count three let’s hear everybody kick ‘em out. When the count went down the whole place exploded: “KICK OUT THE JAMS, MOTHERFUCKER!” The pigs were infuriated, but they would’ve had to arrest everyone in the place on the phony rap to get anyone. And after that it was freedom all the way.

Tuesday night we rested. Wednesday night we drove down the street to the new Ann Arbor Hullabaloo for a scheduled gig, our first in Ann Arbor. Everything was cool while the first band, the Sugar Cube, did their thing, although we noticed that there were a lot more rent-a-cops than you would expect in such a small place. The shit hit the fan when the MC5 started playing: by the time “Borderline” was over, at the start of the first set, the squad cars had started to turn into the parking lot, and before five tunes had been played there were 7 squad cars, at least two cars full of plainclothes detectives, Lt. Staudemire of the Narcotics Bureau, and other assorted officials hassling the club owners about the “noise.” When the band refused to alter their amplifier settings and protested what we saw as an attempt to artistic censorship, the police moved inside and shut off the power to the stage.

The enraged audience started chanting with the band: “Power! Power! Power!”

The power stayed off. Rob Tyner started running it to the audience about the pigs and how they’re trying to cut off our power on all levels as the saxophones and gongs and drums came out, and then everyone merged in a non-electric orgy, chanting and dancing around and jumping up and down with glee. A police official in a white shirt and gold trim came up to the stand and handed me a ticket! I looked at the offense—“noisy (sic) band”—and ripped it up and went on playing just like everyone else.

We matched our magic against the pigs’ and it worked—any respect people had had for “law and order” as represented by the police force disappeared, and their futile tricks were exposed to the light. We carried on for the rest of an hour and then packed up and went home, grinning.

All of this bullshit was totally unnecessary: we just wanted to do our thing and let the people do their thing, but each time there was trouble it was initiated by the police and other authorities. The old people seem to want to pretend that the world is just the way it is on television, and that other lives have no validity.

They don’t want people to know—or if they know, they don’t want it acknowledged—that men have cocks in their pants, that women have tits and cunts under their clothes, that people can say whatever they want wherever they want as long as it doesn’t HURT anyone, that their guns and honkie power and orders and phony laws are

bullshit, that there's no way any common words can "shock" and "corrupt" kids who are really hip to the whole deal and who are instead shocked and hurt by the insane disregard for human freedom that the police and other authorities practice as a matter of course.

People are getting hip to all of the old peoples' lies and perversions, and they aren't going to stand for it much longer. We sure aren't!

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