

Mixed Mead-Ear

Tony Reay

It would seem to me that the country, as a whole (you may eliminate the “w” from “whole” if you wish) is at last beginning to realize that you cannot dictate from which area a certain style of music must come.

I realize that tradition dictates that blues should come from Chicago or the South, and that soul should come from Motown, but now at long last music is spreading. The MC-5 have spread into the bracket-of “national” groups, as did the SRC, but really that doesn’t mean much because all bands are local at some time.

People never really noticed the Beatles until they went to Germany, so how about if one or two people in Michigan stopped moaning about “paying bread just to see local bands” and try to understand that by doing this, and only by doing this, will some fine talent be able to grow national without: a) “selling out” to a major record company and having to change their personality, which, as a band, they have fought so hard to attain, in favor of something more “psychedelically saleable,” or b) turning the whole Detroit scene into another “Frisco-thing (which I’m sure started out as a beautiful thing, but ended up a big hype.)”

Like, when I was talking to one of the editors of *Eye Magazine*, he said, “Well, which is the area of Detroit where the scene is?—i.e. where all the hip people are?” I didn’t know what to say. I tried to tell him that our current environment isn’t centralized mainly because what is happening in this area is not a scene as such which will last X-months until somewhere else has a scene to switch mass attention to, but more a natural evolution from one era of living into another.

Let’s face it. Does it all really happen at the Grande or Plum Street or WABX or Trans-Love, or is it a combination of these plus many others which produce alternative and progressive steps for each other to take, i.e., without Trans-Love, would there have been a light show or an MC-5 at the Grande? Without WABX would there have been the knowledge of groups to prompt people to go to the Grande? Without local groups would ABX be that different from other stations playing the same non-format format?

Without ABX would there have been as many local groups and without the local groups would there have been a Grande? Without the Grande would there be a Trans-Love?

My facts may be exaggerated in some of these examples, but the idea of communal backscratching is still there. In other cities, as far as I can gather, their scenes start out this way, but when the big money steps in, it turns into a case of “you scratch my back and I’ll stab yours!” Only by supporting local bands can we prevent the commercial aspect of mass media turning the environment, yours and mine, into a “scene.”

Speaking of local bands, I noticed that there were more black people at the last Rationals concert than there were for B.B. King and Albert King combined. And I know they didn’t come to hear Procol Harum. (Is Procol Harum really from Ann Arbor, or do they play so cheaply that Detroit’ can afford to make them a resident group?)

Anyway, in that one set on Sunday back two weeks, The Rats played the third best set I have ever heard. Their version live, of “I Put A Spell On You” (the song of The year) puts all others to shame with the possible exception of Nina Simone’s and that’s in a different bag. “Temptation’s ‘bout To Get Me” was another excellent performance.

I believe that “Temptation” is going to be the Rationals’ next single backed by “Sunset.” I left the Grande that night with the theory that the only reason Traffic regained Dave Mason on sitar was because Stevie Winwood had to have an instrument in the group that Scott Morgan couldn’t play.

I hope that many people went along the following week to see Jeff Beck. The Ballroom looked quite crowded except for Sunday. Although Jeff himself had the flu that weekend, the band was still as good as it's last appearance in Detroit.

The addition of pianist Nicky Hopkins is a very wise and welcome one as, firstly, the tinkling piano style that Nicky has developed is just light enough to balance the group without weakening it, and, secondly, because it has been so long since I saw Nicky that I had almost forgotten what it was like to hear one of the finest blues pianists in the world.

Nicky plays on the new Stones album, which is actually something which I see no reason to be very proud of. However, even on the drabness of "Beggars Banquet," he manages to liven up a couple of otherwise very ill cuts.

Nice also to see the bass player, Ron Woods, being given a solo or two. The best one he played actually was on Sunday when string problems set in and Ron played with only three strings. I'm sure that it must be very nerve wracking to be in a band' as hard and fast moving as Beck's and break a string just four bars before your solo.

I saw the Buddy Miles Express in New York, but all of Buddy's bands seem to draw so heavily on his own personality and power that they all seem so samey! (Remember the Buddy Miles Electric Flag?) Also, I watched Larry Coryell and his sidemen gig/jam at Steve Paul's Scene, and although Coryell is undoubtedly a fine jazz guitarist, he seemed too technically clean and disconnected from his music to really say anything.

However, watch for a local group I saw called Cat Mother. I believe they may be in Detroit with Hendrix at the end of this month and they're well worth going to see.

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