

The Incredible String Band

Mike Kerman

The Incredible String Band came to town one night, a few weeks ago, to share themselves and their music.

They came courtesy of CREEM magazine, and found that Detroit's people, like those of most cities, were not ready for the peaceful message and music of the ISB.

Although most of the vast Ford Auditorium on May 16 was empty, the stage was filled before Mike Heron, Robin Williamson, Rose, and Licorice came on.

An organ, piano, two amplifiers, bass, gongs, sitar and an array of unusual Eastern instruments graced the large stage with the tremendous and gaudy gold curtain.

The concert did not start on time, but that was of no matter. When the four members of the Band were ready to play-share their music they calmly came to the stage and began.

No slick opening with a plastic DJ, but just Robin saying "Hello, why doesn't everyone look around at the walls, relax, say hello to your neighbor and say hello to us."

They then began to play—Robin with guitar, Mike, sitar and the girls with whatever instrument, percussion or otherwise that seemed appropriate.

Rose is Mike Heron's girl. They have been living together for a year and a half. Her face would break into the most beautiful of smiles when Mike would sing.

Rose had no formal musical training before September, but was moved by the beauty of Mike's music to begin accompanying him. She now plays and sings in concert with the Band, trying her hand at electric bass, organ, tabla and as she says, "whatever is appropriate I just pick up and try to play."

What is important is that Rose and Mike are together in all ways. She feels the music and is able to transmit her feelings to whatever instrument she picks up.

Licorice and Robin have been together for about seven years. Their experiences as reflected in Robin's songs, have been of mutual growth. In one song about leaving home in Wales, Robin wrote and sang:

but me and licorice saw the
last of them one
misty twisty day
across the mournful
morning moor motoring
away
singing ladybird ladybird...
...(Koeoaddi There).

Licorice mirrors her enjoyment of being with Robin and Mike and Rose in her calm and gentleness. Sitting on stage with a soft smile, digging it. Like Rose, she joins in vocals and plays an assortment of instruments.

As their concert and five records show, Robin and Mike continue to grow and gain further understanding of themselves and all that is around them.

They are both technically proficient guitarists, but it is their curiosity of instruments and sound which make them, above all, outstanding artists.

Is it better to have an intense understanding of one instrument or try many, becoming “good” but not “great” on any? There is no universal answer to this.

Their message, in part, is just that—learn, create, try all types of music, not “scholarly” to “broaden your knowledge” but to feel and know more; more music, sounds, human experience.

The concert was like friends getting together to-play the music they felt for friends. Obviously uncomfortable as “performers,” the show they put on was the most that could be asked for from musicians-artists-people. They were relaxed, unhurried, and always warm and human towards each other and the audience.

They were in person, as their songs and stories are: gentle, peaceful, full of love, concerned about living and understanding life and all that is around them.

Most of all, they came to Detroit with a message. “You are the way,” they told us.

We all have power and strength to change our life within us. George Harrison said similarly “Try to realize it’s all within yourself, no one else can make you change.”

The Incredible String Band told us before on records and again that Friday night:

May the long time sun

shine upon you

All love surround you

And the pure light

within you

Guide you all the way on

...(A Very Cellular Song)

Can you dig it?

fifth Estate

Mike Kerman
The Incredible String Band

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/80-may-29-june-11-1969/the-incredible-string-band>

Fifth Estate #80, May 29-June 11, 1969

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net