

Rock and Roll Revival!

Dennis Frawley

1969

Detroit's 1st Rock and Roll Revival held Memorial Day weekend at the Fairgrounds significantly began the summer's slew of pop festivals across the country.

The actual attendance is unknown but it must have drawn at least 25,000 to 30,000 together for the two days of rock and roll.

The set up of the festival was not ideal since there was no place to slip away and get laid but you could lie on a blanket on the sand between the grandstand and the stage and hope that the wind didn't blow up a sand storm.

The Revival displayed to visiting pop luminaries the significance of Detroit's rock and roll scene. Where else in the country do rock-and-roll crowds turn up 16,000-strong to hear local bands as occurred here at Easter. It couldn't happen on either coast right now.

The Rock-and-Roll Revival could have been another "dust bowl festival" without the support of the rock crowds of the community.

The cultural event displayed to the unfamiliar the vital, visceral shock value found in much Midwestern rock music. Nowhere are the musicians more outrageous or the music more primitive.

The Rock and Roll movement in Detroit is led by a new, younger, more exciting crowd who are becoming increasingly involved in the drama, excitement, and life of their music.

This was a rock and roll festival, not a pop festival.

There was no Blood Sweat & Tears playing 1950s big band jazz with inoffensive '60s watered-down pop.

This was a raunchy rock festival headlined by MC5, Johnny Winter, Chuck Berry, Dr. John, Sun Ra, David Peel, the Stooges, Bonzo Dog, all who were ideal for Detroit's rock community.

The concise boring fusion of rock and Bach by the New York Rock and Roll Ensemble seemed painfully out of place to the crazed rock fanatics of Detroit.

The glamorous urban decadent style of British performers was to be captured by Terry Reid but the English dandy didn't have enough bookings in the States and was forced to cop out of his tour here.

The Revival began Friday afternoon plagued by technical difficulties due to the sound man showing up three hours late and poor stage management by Jeep Holland. This forced the bands to run behind schedule and to cut their sets. Saturday overcame the initial difficulties and turned into a vibrant, exciting day of music and fun.

Saturday was dampened by threatening rain and drizzles which were temporarily halted at one time by a "fuck the rain" chant led by the Amboy Dukes. It finally stopped for the MC5 and Chuck Berry and then culminated with a torrential downpour minutes after the festival closed.

"The Albino"—Johnny Winter—gave the best performance of his career for the enlivened crowd on Friday night. Even with lackluster sidemen, his albino blues brought the crowd to its feet and even drew one admirer, unable to restrain himself to the stage where he embraced the "phantom of black blues" with a hug and kiss before being whisked off stage.

After Winter brought the crowd to its feet, the MC5 culminated the steady rise of energy with one of their top performances kicking them out so hard that one psychedelic-induced youth leaped on stage nude for what was termed by Wayne Kramer a “testimony by skin.”

Sun Ra’s appearance was one of the most significant musical contributions of the festival. Unfortunately the Sun God’s appearance Friday closed the show after much of the crowd had left and on Saturday he arrived too late to play his futuristic space music. His “crowding out” was one of the musical disappointments of the festival.

The father of rock and roll Chuck Berry closed the Revival and was again remarkable even though playing with a bland local white pick up band.

Dr. John was mean and bad in his first appearance here with his Cajun Rock and fit perfectly into the context of the show.

The Stooges played on Friday with Iggy’s bumps and grinds comparable to burlesque stripping and his contemptuous seductive riffs.

Lyman Woodard was one of the most surprising bands heard. His professional soul-jazz-rock unit was far more exciting than the popular Booker T and The MGs.

Of the unsigned bands, the Wilson Mower Pursuit with their strong female vocalist Stoney are just a step away from being ready to record.

The 3rd Power and The Red, White, and Blues Band were also strong and ready to join the crew of already signed bands from the area like Vanguard’s Frost—the smoothest professional pop band in the area, Mainstream’s Amboy Dukes, Capitol’s SRC, Atco’s Teagarden and Van Winkel, Elektra’s Stooges and Atlantic’s MC 5.

The Karma Award for Rock and Roll purity in the event went to the Brownsville Station who dusted off the old charts to recreate “Rumble,” originally done by Link Ray and His Raymen, “Jailhouse Rock,” “The Walk” by Jimmy McCracklin and other 50’s favorites.

Savage Grace displayed a fine lead vocalist and good instrumentation but as is the case with many undeveloped groups their material was rather trite with unimaginative tunes like “Season of the Witch” and “With A Little Help From My Friends.”

With the combination of local and so-called name bands, the weekend became a Revival which brought back the happy spirit of rock and roll with a crowd not forced to sit with legs crossed listening politely to the alleged “super stars.”

Detroit—the crotch of the nation—is bringing back the spirit of rock to the music.

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