

‘Ear Ye!

Bob Stark

1969

While local music business people continue to hype the Detroit scene as a major center of the pop world the scene itself continues to deteriorate and no one seems to care enough about it to do anything constructive.

Quite the contrary, the trend seems to be toward copying all the mistakes that have been made in every other “major music center” in order to exploit every last nickel to be had from the people.

And most of the people don’t seem to care.

One of the most important reasons that so many Detroit bands are gaining national prominence is that two years ago when most of the successful ones were just starting to get their shit together there were a lot of clubs around where people would pay to see local bands.

The bands had places to work, where they could play for people their own age. The people were interested in the bands and the music they played, and the bands had to constantly improve in order to keep their followings.

Today there are almost no clubs, the people will only pay to see “stars” and hype has again replaced talent as the major determinant of success.

Uncle Russ is moving from the Grande to the Riviera Theatre so that he can more comfortably accommodate the large crowds that flock to see the big name acts he presents. Aaron Russo from Chicago has taken over the operation of the Easttown and in the two weeks since the reopening has booked six acts, none of them local.

The big HYPE is on. If you’re not a star already the chances of you being successful in Detroit are very small, and getting smaller every day.

Even the high schools are being affected. Two years ago a high school could -book a couple of local bands for \$100 to \$150, charge \$1 admission and fill their gym for a Friday or Saturday night dance.

Now if the headliner isn’t the Frost, the MC 5, Bob Seeger, or some other \$1,500 band with a big reputation, the kids won’t come.

Most of them would rather spend \$5 to go to the Grande or the Easttown to see some big “star”. And the music suffers because of this.

Bands without reputations can’t get enough work to really get together, while bands with big reputations get raves and cheers for bad sets as well as good and often loose track of what they thought was good when they started playing.

It took the MC 5 almost eight months to realize that all the cheering was for their reputation not their music. Their playing was actually getting worse not better. Their change in attitude was significant and not at all subtle. They’re getting back to playing music and playing better than they have in over a year.

And because the club owners insist on booking only bands with big reputations, these few bands get so over exposed that people are no longer interested in seeing them play.

The owner of one of the few remaining clubs open in the area told me that he could no longer afford to book several of the better known groups because the price they asked was, while in keeping with the reputations they had achieved, too high for the size crowd they could draw.

But at the same time this man told me that he would not book a virtually unknown local band even though they had gone over very well the day before at a free concert, because people would not pay to see a band that they could see for free. Unless something is done to prove him wrong the results as far as the immediate future is not very encouraging.

The only way to force a solution to this problem is to support the smaller clubs, support bands because of the music they play not the size of their hype and refuse to believe what anyone tells you about a band until you've seen for yourself.

When I was about eight years old this girl who sat next to me in my third grade art class turned to me suddenly one afternoon and asked, "Who do you like better, Little Richard or Elvis."

I had never thought about it before, after all it was only 1955 and I was only eight and neither rock and roll nor me was quite old enough to comprehend the other.

So I mumbled Elvis (because I could at least make a direct connection between him and a song I liked, while Little Richard was just a name I heard sometimes on the radio) and immediately decided that I would never be caught again without an answer.

So, after school that day I began a crash course in radio listening, learning not just the names of the songs and the singers but also the lyrics and melodies of all the songs I liked.

But by the time I learned who Little Richard was and what songs were his it was too late to correct myself because the little girl who asked me had moved away. When at the peak of his career, Richard gave up Rock for Religion it seemed to me a more tragic loss than even the death of Buddy Holly.

Now Richard is back in rock and rock is all the better for it. If Elvis was the undisputed popularity king of rock's first decade then Richard was its greatest star. Their relationship was much the same as that of the Beatles and Stones.

His string of hits stands today as a monument to how good even the simplest rock songs can be. Specialty Records has out an LP of re-issues of all the original tracks (not to be mistaken with two other albums on other labels which are new recordings of the old songs) and if you don't believe me buy the record, listen to it and compare it with most of the schlock being released today.

Last Sept. 6, at Cobo Hall he proved the magic was still there. He sang, he played the piano, he got up on top of the piano and danced, he threw his shoes into the crowd and it was 1957 again. A girl rushed up to the stage to touch him.

He kept up a steady banter with the audience, he made everybody who came happy, but it was the music that was king.

He played all his hits from "Tutti-Frutti", to "Good Golly, Miss Molly", to "Ginny, Ginny", to "Long Tall Sally". No performer anywhere in any popular medium could generate that kind of excitement with twelve year old material that everyone virtually knew by heart.

Only Little Richard.

While John Angelos and Son Roy of Cosmic Rooster wait for their bass player to be released from Northville hospital they continue their search for a suitable drummer. Anyone interested in auditioning can call me and leave a message at Creem Magazine (831-0816).

Are the Rolling Stones coming to Detroit in early November?

New albums by the Stones, Beatles, and Fleetwood Mac to be released soon. Fleetwood Mac on a new label.

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