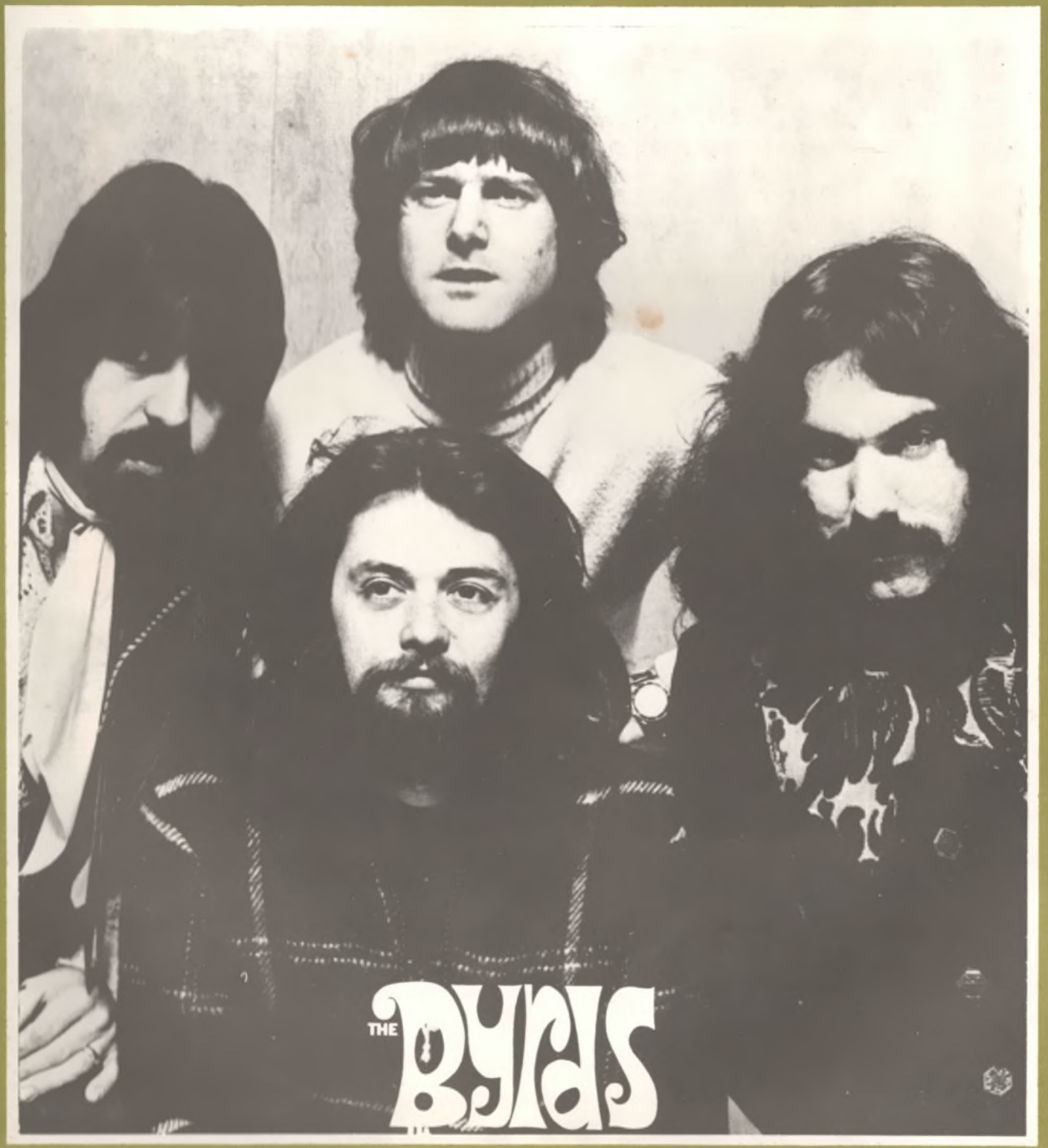
ZIGZAG

No 14 August 2/6

THE BYRDS
BOB DYLAN
COUNTRY JOE
FAIRPORT CONVENTION
A GALAXY OF GOODIES



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ZIGZAG WANDERINGS

Sometimes I wonder how papers with trivia columns like this ever find things to put in them. Invariably we sit here saying "alright what are we going to put in the Wanderings then?" And everyone tries very hard to think what the bloody hell's going on outside North Marston. Well, what is going on? There are scores of good records anyway (that's ways good for a start-off): Excellent ir opinion only) records are by Fair-ort, Wild Man Fischer, Grateful Dead, on Simon, Cochise, Soft Machine, The ectric Frog Nuts, Matthews Southern mfort, Its a Beautiful Day, Fotheringay, over, Affinity, Nice, Barclay James rvest and so on and so on and so on. d we're still plugging John Phillips.

Then we can throw a stone or o at things which depressed us during e month - like the Disco 2 Bob Dylan ogramme which was BAD (I think that ertain people should definitely be dipped the North Marston phlegm vats and left ut in the sun to harden), and the TV ort diarrhoea and their failure to tele-ise a Festival now and then. On the ther hand, Radio Geronimo surges for-ard, presenting vast quantities of inef-able grist three times a week (or so I'm old - our crystal set can just about man-age Top Gear, but has so far failed to ocate Geronimo) and they're featuring programmes in which people like Country Joe and Pete Townsend say, sing, play and do what they like for an hour. Sounds good - might even be worth our lashing out on some more modern receiving apparatus.

The Bath Festival was a drag/so-so/good/too much man and the best account of it was in Music Now, which we always get for its American column, which is excellent. From the descriptions given in the other papers, the writers needn't have been there.

A lot of the straight press vigorously put down the Woodstock film. Someone even called it "a crushing bore". Well, let bigots talk at leisure, and heed them not. Woodstock is an amazing/incredible film and should be seen by all Zigzag readers. Gasp as Joe Cocker whirls like a demon windmill, wince as Arlo Guthrie compresses the complete groover's dictionary into a 30 second monologue, shout as Country Joe invites you to give him an F, laugh as Ten Years After do a wonderful pisstaking parody on trendy progressive bands, marvel at the amazing Who, smile at Richie Havens' helicopter cursing, wonder about John Sebastian, re-evaluate Sly and Santana and so on. Enjoy the film.

Could someone tell me why pre-recorded cassettes are so expensive? They're the biggest con going.

The man from Blue Thumb Records was over here. As well as an excellent Dave Mason album (soon out on Harvest), they've got new stuff from Leon Russell and Chris Stainton coming out soon, not to mention a Love/Hendrix LP. Not only that, but he reckons that lying around somewhere are enough Beefheart tapes to fill several albums, including some excellent tracks of the Captain singing with Howling Wolf. One of the various reasons that they haven't been released is the contract bit - Beefheart is now with Warner Bros. Maybe limited special edition pressings are the answer - write in if you want all this Beefheart jelly released, and we'll put the big hustle on our friends at Blue Thumb.

We must be gaining ground, a character in a Punch pop music cartoon was depicted wearing a Zigzag t-shirt. Pow.

News: Pacific Gas and Electric have practically undergone a complete personnel transfusion. Among the comings and goings is Glenn Schwarz who has left to become a preacher. Mike Bloomfield is reputedly reforming the Electric Flag in San Francisco. Nola Express (New Orleans UPS paper) is considerably disillusioned with Country Joe's attitude and his capitalizing on his obscenity bust. Nevertheless Country Joe remains a Zigzag Hero. Pity he's not with the Fish anymore though. Great pity.

What with summer coming on and everyone whooping it up at the seaside, bands are finding work pretty hard to come by. So are light shows - if any promoters want a good light show they could do worse than try The Mind Alchemists (northern half of the world) on 0925 61804, or Optic Nerve (southern half) on our number.

Other messages - Bob Scarfe of 34 King St, Stony Stratford, Wolverton, Bucks wants to start some sort of weekly goings-on in that area and would like fairly local bands who are interested to write to him. Implosion has a commune benefit on 2nd August - could all communes please contact Release (address on p 45) to sort out stalls etc. There was a message about a DJ wanting work but we've lost it - sorry about that.

This month's Zigzag contains various lumps reprinted from a New York Folk Music Magazine called Sing Out, which like most other specifically aimed minority interest magazines, is not exactly rolling in bread. If you dig folk music ranging from traditional to Incredibles to Joni to Country Joe to Jack Elliott etc why not subscribe? $5 for one year from Sing Out 595 Broadway NY NY10012.

While Dave of Friars rushed off for his annual vacation, I took over the running of the club, though my career as a promoter could hardly be described as successful or distinguished by the time I'd finished. The first week, we got infested and threatened by hordes of brigand skinheads and I was able to experience the dubious thrill of having what looked like a modified breadknife waved in the region of my nose. The second week, the landlords of the hall decided to withdraw our priveleged use of their hall because of noise complaints and the 'disfigurement of their property. Hopefully Friars will get back on its feet soon - it was a good club.

ZIGZAG
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NORTH MARSTON, BUCKS.
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MUSICIANS MAY COME & MUSICIANS MAY GO BUT THE Byrds FLY ON FOREVER

"There's something you ought to know about the Byrds. If the thought of their music has just now caused a flicker of pleasure plus a faint ache of transcendence, then you already know it.... their music penetrates you like the knife of Shiva".[1]

PART ONE: A BRIEF HISTORY

1964

Jim McGuinn (guitar and vocals), David Crosby (guitar and vocals), Chris Hillman (bass and vocals), Gene Clark (vocals) & Michael Clarke (drums) originally came together as The Jet Set.

McGuinn had been playing professional guitar in various enterprises since 1960; he backed the Limelighters, did session work on the first Simon and Garfunkel album (Tom & Jerry), was with a commercial folk group called The Chad Mitchell Trio for a couple of years, was Judy Collins' accompanist for a while (he can be heard on Judy Collins 3), and was guitarist/harmony vocalist for Bobby Darin - who had a folky act at the time - until Darin got discouraged and packed up for a while. Then he did solo gigs at New York clubs and coffee bars, singing folk and pop songs, left for Los Angeles and "scuffled for a year" before meeting the others. He reckoned that folk music had become "very commercial and plastic packaged - a low quality product. The people who were really significant got lost in the shuffle, while these others were given great glory by being plastic".[2]

Crosby had been a folksinger for about 5 years; Gene Clark had been with the New Christy Minstrels; Chris Hillman played mandolin in his bluegrass group the Hillmen and the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers; and Michael Clarke "just walked in off the street". For a few months (according to popular legend) they used cardboard boxes as drums, a £20 red Japanese bass, and acoustic guitars.

They ran into Jim Dickson (later, together with Eddie Tickner, their manager) who was a producer for World Pacific Records. He led them, gave them hamburger money, put them up at his house, and allowed them to make use of his studio for rehearsal. Having subsequently changed their name to The Beefeaters, under a non exclusive contract, they recorded several tracks, two of which were released on an Elektra single (originally released here on Pye International) 'Please let me love you'/'Don't be long'. (Re-released here last month on Elektra 2101-007, due to Zigzag's suggestion).

Last year Together Records put out an album called 'Preflyte' (available here only on import ST T 1001) which comprised 11 tracks recorded under Dickson's direction ("the tracks are sort of like baby pictures - it takes a while before you feel comfortable showing them"[3]) in August 64, a few weeks before they signed with Columbia as the Byrds, to record folk music which was "changing somewhat to meet the nuclear expansion and jet age".[4]

1965

'Mr Tambourine Man', their first Columbia single, becomes an immense worldwide hit, and sparks off several controversies and theories; folk purists rejected the electric folk-rock and wrote yards of condemning articles; the 'drug-song' issues started; and critics evaluated the effect of the hit on Dylan's subsequent national popularity. McGuinn himself seemed to think that the Byrds "were like a booster rocket that got him off the ground as a pop artist" but he agreed that "Dylan was a guru, while we were the students".[5]

The Byrds become international rock and roll stars. McGuinn:"When I was working with Bobby Darin, he was a pretty big star and I was a nobody. 'How do you make it, Bobby?' I asked him, and he told me 'Well the way to start off is to be a rock and roll singer'. I was a folksinger at the time but I thought 'Yeah, OK, I can do that!'".[6]

Following the success of the single came an album with the same title (CBS 62571/21st June/Producer Terry Melcher), and they made enough to repay the £5000 they'd borrowed to equip themselves.

They toured England, where the pop press thought that David Crosby's ace suede cape was "fab groovy gear", but that their music was a shambles. Nevertheless their recorded sound was widely praised and the style they'd evolved from their influences was now being imitated by many others.

Another million seller, 'Turn, Turn, Turn' and another album named after the hit. (62652/6th Dec/Terry Melcher).

"The first group to bring folk-rock through as a solid concept were the Byrds. They had image: they were in fact the first really outrageous group in America, longhaired, arrogant and mean, and their stance was classic West Coast cool. Jim McGuinn wore pince-nez and smiled strange crooked smiles, squinting like some moth-eaten Dickensian lawyer, very devious, and the rest of the group slouched in the background, staring straight ahead, stoned and uncaring, and none of them gave off any warmth, any signs of life at all. Musically though, they started out strong - Mr Tambourine Man was brilliant and their first album even better".[7]

"The familiar saga of children of affluence who rise within a year from artistic penury to infamous wealth had begun in America for the first time".[8]

"The Byrds came out of 1965 very well, their dignity unimpaired. They were the first hair-emancipated American group to make it with integrity and international acceptance".[9]

1966

More hits, more 'drug-songs'; '8 Miles High', '5D', 'Mr Spaceman'.... but then, early in the year, Gene Clark left. "He got uptight on airplanes. He reached the point of crisis - the mounting pressure of the whole gig - and at that point it was pretty intense. We had pressure from the press and we had to be good, but we were shuffled around like cattle and you get that boxed in feeling. That's what ganged up on Gene - he's a country boy from Missouri - a farm boy who got into this high intensity city thing, and the airplanes got to him".[2]

(Clark subsequently made a CBS album called 'Echoes' with the Gosdin Brothers (& Leon Russell) and later became half of Dillard & Clark for a few months).

McGuinn denies the 'drugsong' charges:"Very few people really understood what I was saying, and a great number mistook the songs for a straight play on drug stuff, which they weren't. I was trying to get spiritual....granted, there is a link between spiritualism and drugs - the drugs are a vehicle to spiritualism of one sort or another. But it's only a vehicle. It's not the end result. And I was talking about the end result".[5]

A third album 'Fifth Dimension' (62783/18th July/Producer Allen Stanton).

1967

'Younger than Yesterday' album released (62988/6th Feb/Gary Usher).

The Byrds fly to England for a fan club gathering at the Roundhouse on Feb 25th. Work permit troubles prevented their playing, so they just chatted and handed out drinks.

'Greatest Hits' album released (63107/7th Aug). "The Byrds are one of the 3 or 4 best rock groups, and everything on this album is, in a rock context, great".[10]

One of the few Byrds tracks not included on any album was released - 'Lady Friend'/'Dont make waves' (2924) - the A side of which was written by David Crosby who was sacked from the group a few weeks later in October. "He just got to be a little tyrant".[2]

(Even in the very early days, Crosby was aware that he was the trouble maker - prophetic words as it happened - but not because of the outspokeness that led to his sacking; it was the way he did "this cute little smiling bit and crinkles his nose - causing little girls to flip".[4])

Crosby asks for his sacking to be made public and leaves willingly, with a large cash settlement. He buys a 25 thousand dollar yacht and cruises around Florida, writes 'Triad' for Jefferson Airplane, and goes on to be a part of Crosby

Stills & Nash. Reasons for his removal from the Byrds were his public bluntness regarding Vietnam, acid, Kennedy etc and his failure to help resolve the clash of egos within the group.

Gene Clark returns to replace him but is asked to leave within a month - he's still unable to come to terms with flying.

In december, Kevin Kelley (ex of Taj Mahal's Rising Sons and also Hillman's cousin) comes in on drums to replace Michael Clark, who leaves for Hawaii (later returning to join the Flying Burrito Brothers).

1968

'Notorious Byrds Brothers' released - (63169/15th Jan/Gary Usher).

Jim McGuinn becomes Roger McGuinn, having joined the Subud, an Eastern philosophical, spiritual organization: "They offer an optional name change, which is in correspondence to the verbal sound that your soul has, as a vibration. My sound is Ra...R - it begins with an R and goes somewhere from there - Roger is the name closest to it. I didn't take it really; I sent to Indonesia for it and the head guru picked it".[5]

Gram Parson (ex International Submarine Band) joins on guitar and key boards in April and the group plays 2 gigs at Covent Garden Middle Earth. Line-up is McGuinn, Hillman, Kelley, Parsons and Doug Dillard on banjo. Sneaky Pete Kleinow (according to McGuinn) is also a Byrd now, but didn't come over with them.

In July Clarence White joins on lead guitar, having previously been with his two brothers in the Kentucky Colonels for 10 years playing old time mountain music and bluegrass (album on World Pacific import No 1821). He's done studio work with Joe Cocker, Everlys, Burritos, Arlo Guthrie, Randy Newman etc, and was in a group called Nashville West between the Colonels and the Byrds.

They return for another London gig in August, and 'Sweetheart of the Rodeo' is released (63353/30th August/Gary Usher).

Parsons leaves; partly because the Byrds tour South Africa and he disagrees in principle, and partly because of legal hassles which prevent him from recording as a Byrd. "Ah joined with a friendship an' left with a argument".[11]

Kelley leaves; the Byrds management become "disatisfied with his instrumental ability".

Hillman leaves in October: "It just got stale - we ran through the mill. All McGuinn's doing now is riding it out till it ends, just for the money. It's not a creative, productive thing anymore. I was sick of being in the Byrds, of being a Byrd. I just quit".[11] He forms the Flying Burrito Brothers with Parsons and Sneaky Pete. Around the same time, Gene Clark and Doug Dillard form Dillard and Clark.

New Byrds are brought in and the line-up is now (october): McGuinn, White, John York (bass) and Gene Parsons (drums). Parsons was formerly in an obscure North Western group called the Castaways, and then played with Gib Gilbo and Clarence White in Nashville West.

1969

'Dr Byrds and Mr Hyde' album released (63545/5th March/Producer Bob Johnston). "Bob produced this one. He comes out into the studio and just vibrates - he's beautiful".[6]

Single of 'Lay Lady Lay' released (CBS 4284 - also never included on an album). It flops: "Have you heard it? Johnston backed us with a choir - one of the reasons he's no longer with us".[12]

McGuinn sings 2 songs on the soundtrack of 'Easy Rider'.

Preflyte album released 29th July.

Skip Battin replaces John York on bass in October. Battin had recorded a string of hits between 1959 and 1961 with Gary Paxton under the name Skip and Flip. Played in various other bands including The Interlude and the Evergreen Blueshoes.

McGuinn reveals that he has written 26 songs for a Broadway musical called 'Gene Tryp' (anagram of Peer Gynt), which he had written with Jack Levy. "It's set in the mid-west in the 1800s. It's about this Bob Dylan type cat who steals this bride away from this wedding, goes off into the hills, drops her, and finally falls in love with this other girl and builds a house for her".[6] Tim Buckley may star in the play, and Gram Parsons and Mama Michelle may star in the film, he thinks.

'Ballad of Easy Rider' album released (63795/10th Nov/Terry Melcher).

McGuinn sees the Byrds albums as electronic magazines (cartoons, editorials, features). "They are bi-annual, audio magazines, dating from the time we first started recording. I think of myself as the editor. Even 'Sweetheart of the Rodeo' fit - it was a feature on country music, a special issue".[13]

1970

The group is currently involved in recording their tenth album, a 2 record set of live and studio tracks.

They visit England in June to play an acoustic set (rain prevented their use of electricity) at the Bath Festival.

"I'm not really interested in the Byrds' place on a historical catalogue. I'm proud of the Byrds but, you know, it's a bit early in history for the race to be over".[6]

"McGuinn is a genius, to say the least".[14] Mac/Pete

References:
1. Antonia Lamb in Crawdaddy 20.
2. McGuinn interviewed in Sing Out Jan 69.
3. Sleeve notes to 'Preflyte'.
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5. McGuinn talking in Jazz & Pop Mar 69.
6. McGuinn in the LA Free Press Mar 69.
7. Nik Cohn in 'Pop from the beginning'.
8. Robert Christgau, NY Times June 69.
9. Derek Taylor in 'Turn Turn Turn'sleeve
10. Paul Williams, Crawdaddy 11. notes.
11. Interview in Seattle Helix October 69.
12. McGuinn talking to Fusion 19/9/69.
13. McGuinn to Herald Examiner Nov 69.
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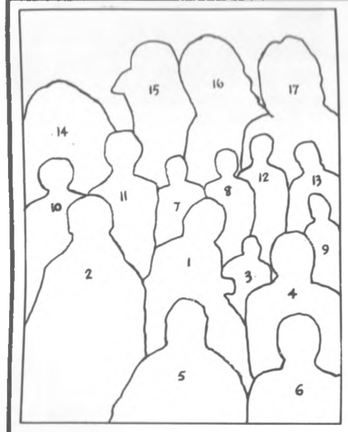

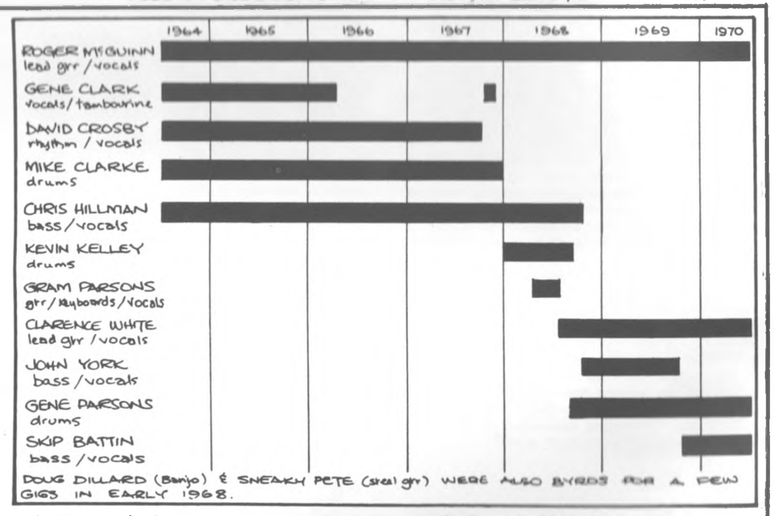

Key to photograph: 1 Jim McGuinn. 2 & 3 David Crosby. 4 Mike Clarke. 5 Gene Clark. 6 Chris Hillman. (all 1965 photos). 7 Gram Parsons. 8 Roger McGuinn. 9 Kevin Kelley. (all early 1968 photos). 10 Sneaky Pete. 11 Chris Hillman. (both early 1969 photos when they left the Byrds to form the Flying Burrito Brothers). 12 Roger McGuinn. 13 John York. (both late 1968 photos). 14 Skip Battin. 15 Gene Parsons. 16 Roger McGuinn. 17 Clarence White. (1970).

THE BYRDS - PART TWO: AN INTERVIEW WITH GENE PARSONS

I went to the Byrds press meeting with the intention of interviewing Roger McGuinn, but there was a long queue of people asking things like "How long have you been in the group? How many records have you made? etc" and I reckoned that by the time I got to him, he would be very fatigued. So I started chatting with Gene Parsons, their drummer, and when I found that he knew enough about the Byrds to answer most of my questions, I got out the tape recorder and interviewed him instead.

Z: People started making amazing claims about the musical ability of the Byrds after Mr. Tambourine Man, but in fact McGuinn was the only Byrd on it and the others were Lou Adler's session men. Isn't that right?

GP: That's right. The other Byrds at that time couldn't make it in the studio. You see, they were only allotted so much time; Columbia was giving them a limited trial period in the studio and their manager reckoned they wouldn't be able to do it, so they used session musicians along with Roger's 12 string, which is what gave it its distinctive sound. The vocal harmony was the Byrds though.

Z: That's strange because they did a fair, albeit inferior, version on Preflyte a few months earlier. Anyway, let's leap on to "Lay Lady Lay", which I thought was one of the few instances of the Byrds following rather than leading.

GP: Well Bob Johnston, who produced it, ruined it. We'd originally recorded it with our harmonies and things and it was pretty good, but while we were on tour he took the tape to Nashville and overdubbed the ladies' voices and re-mixed the whole thing. It turned out to be a piece of plastic crap - so it wasn't us. Anyway, we wanted to do "Jesus is Just Alright" for the single, but he wouldn't let us and gave us a day to prepare "Lay Lady Lay".

Z: You didn't let him produce anything for you after that.

GP: No. The thing was that it was Bob Johnston's interpretation of the song rather than ours - and that's not the way. He's OK - he comes out and tells you old jokes from the South and so on, but he hasn't got much of an ear for music - not for us anyway. I don't particularly care for his treatment of Dylan on the new double album - I don't think he did Dylan justice at all ... he's a much better artist than that. We were going to do that album with Dylan; they set up the studio time and asked us to do it, but we were really upset because they hadn't given us enough warning and we were booked up too heavily - there was no way we could have done it, and Columbia are mad at us now.

Z: I would have thought that the group, in its present condition, would be better if they produced their records themselves.

GP: Well, we're not allowed to. I wish we could, but Columbia stipulate that their groups must have producers. However, Terry Melcher gives us plenty of freedom, but in fact some of the tunes on our next album will be produced by us. But Terry is very much with us, and when it comes to mixing he's got a very good ear. Soon as we get back to LA, he's going to have the album ready for us to listen to. He's pretty good - even played piano on a couple of tunes.

Z: There was a rumour of your doing an album with Doug Kershaw.

GP: Well he's a buddy of ours and we backed him at the Boston Tea Party. He and his record company did want us to do a record, but again we just didn't have time.

Z: You seem to be pretty busy.

GP: Well, Clarence and I used to do a lot of sessions for different people, but just lately we've cut that out and we devote all our time to the Byrds now.

Z: I thought the Easy Rider album was superb, whereas the Dr. Byrds one was scrappy and untogether. Is this because the group is a much more cohesive unit now?

GP: Well, I think the new double album is probably a 100% improvement on Easy Rider - it's much more together as a result of Skip's arrival. There was conflict with John York, who was our bass player, all through that album and I'm surprised that it came out as well as it did. Half our new album was recorded live at the Felt Forum and Queen's College in New York, and the other half was studio. It's going to surprise a lot of people - Clarence sings a couple of tunes. Skip does one, I do one, and so on. The live stuff is old tunes with new treatments - 8 miles high covers one whole side. A couple of the songs are from Roger's play "Gene Tryp"; which has been lying finished for a long time now, and they were too good to waste - I don't know if we'll be allowed to include them in the end, but I hope so.

Z: A little while ago, the Byrds dispensed with management - is it still like that?

GP: No - we've got the Byrds original managers Jim Dickson and Eddie Tickner. Roger had to work his heart out and just didn't have time to take care of every little thing that had to be taken care of - we couldn't help him too much because we didn't know enough about it. Eddie Tickner had been taking care of business transactions for Clarence and me for a while and he agreed to take the Byrds back.

Z: Can you help to clear up a couple of points I can't verify elsewhere. Did Dylan in fact write the lyric of "Easy Rider"?

GP: Yes he did, and Roger did the melody. I think the problem there was that Dylan's publishing contract would let him co-write with anyone and he didn't want his name put on it - much as we tried to persuade him.

Z: And can you tell us if David Crosby was in fact on part of the Notorious Byrds Brothers? I'm sure he was on some tracks, but every source I've been to tells me otherwise.

GP: Yes he was - his high voice is certainly on some tracks if you listen.

Z: Chris Hillman seemed to be full of rancour when he left the Byrds; said things about McGuinn riding it out for the bread.

GP: He used to say that and used to sincerely think that. But just lately he's seen us and changed his mind completely - he's even asked for his old job back a couple of times. At one time it probably was a case of riding out for the money, but it's turned into a whole new thing, and the unity that we have in the group now is hard to describe.

Z: Gram Parsons left the group in bitterness too didn't he?

GP: Well, he used the South Africa excuse to his own advantage. The Byrds manager at that time had signed the contract for the tour without letting them know, and he had the power of attorney - so the Byrds had to perform. They got into a lot of trouble down there for the things they said, they were almost thrown in jail, and they got bad reviews in the papers. But Gram has apologized for that, which doesn't help much because few people know that.

Z: It sounds like Gram on "Sweetheart of the Rodeo", yet officially he isn't supposed to be on that record - right?

GP: Right - Lee Hazelwood had a contract with him when he was in the International Sub Band and he started putting the screws to him. The fact is that Roger had to redo all Gram's vocal parts on that album, which was too bad, because Roger'll tell you that Gram's voice was real good on it. But he does appear on it in concept, because a lot of it was due to his influence.

Clarence White (far right) in the Kentucky Colonels in 1964.

Z: Clarence White was nearly a Byrd in 1965, and in fact played as a session man on Younger than Yesterday and the Notorious Byrds Bros. It seems to me that all the present Byrds have connections from years back.

GP: Well yes, there are complicated connections. I had a hit record with a guy called Gib Gilbo (we were called Cajun Gib and Gene and were on Bakersfield International records), which was produced by Gary Paxton, who was Flip of Flip and Skip, which was Skip Battin's old group. Then Clarence (we call him Flash Le Blanc), Gib and I had a group called Nashville West, which also included Sneaky Pete, when he was working off and on as a Byrd. I knew Sneaky Pete about 4 years ago when we played together in a bar in the desert, and he's on a track I wrote for the next album.

Z: You and Clarence invented this amazing string bending gadget which he uses, didn't you?

GP: Yes - he and I used to do a lot of sessions together, and he used to get a pedal steel lick by chiming the string and pulling it above the nut. Well we sat around thinking about it for a year or so, and I came up with this idea of hooking the string to the shoulder strap. (And we tried out another idea of putting a pedal on which worked under his elbow but he didn't like that after using it for a while). It just pulls on the second string. We got the idea patented and Fender have leased the patent. Leo Fender himself is working on the project; they've got a prototype built and it should be on the market pretty soon. Clarence gets some very good effects with it.

Z: The live Byrds used to be a shambles, though when I last saw them in 1968 they were good, but it's a pity that we couldn't see you in all your glory at Bath.

GP: Well, there were so many internal hassles in the early group that they never did get it together musically. But I think that we'll surprise a few people when we eventually get to play here properly.

Pete.

ALBERT LEE

Albert Lee has been a professional guitarist for over ten years, backing singers from Dickie Pride to Chris Farlowe. Recently he has given up session work to devote his full energy to his own album and his latest group venture, Heads Hands and Feet. He talked to us about his career.

CHRIS FARLOWE

"I was one of Chris's Thunderbirds for about 4 years and played on most of his records, but funnily enough wasn't on 'Out of time' or any of the others that Mick Jagger produced - Jagger saw that Chris wasn't doing too well with the records he'd made with the group and decided to use a big band. . . . so I don't know who played guitar on those tracks. After that, the group came back for songs like 'Handbags and gladrags', but it was all slowly moving towards a dead end - he was on a soul kick and I wasn't really too knocked out by that. He decided to cut back his five piece group to a trio with Carl Palmer, Pete Sheridan and me - and that worked quite well for a while, we were knocking out quite a good sound. But I got more and more disatisfied with the way we were being handled and the way we weren't getting any recognition, so I decided to cut out. He kept the band going for a further six months or so and then he decided to pack it in anyway, though he's lately reformed the old Thunderbirds as the Hill."

JIMMY PAGE

"Yes, apparently Jimmy Page did come down to the Flamingo to watch me a couple of times and made tape recordings of my playing, though I didn't find out until a while afterwards. He and I were old mates from the rock'n'roll era anyway. . . I was switching around from band to band in those days; I was with a band called Nightsounds, I was working down at the '2Is' coffee bar for a few hard months - 18 bob a night, I replaced Page in Neil Christian's Crusaders, who he was with for quite a time, and then I replaced him again - in Mike Hurst's group.

THE EVERLYS

When I was with the Nightsounds in 1963, these Americans came down to see us. It turned out that they were the Everly Brothers backing group - they were on tour here at the time - and I knocked around with them for a couple of weeks. One of them, Don Peake (now a producer and arranger), invited me to go back to the States with them - he reckoned I could really make out over there. But I never went in the end because there was nothing definite and I was wary of taking such a big step. I've seen articles saying that I was actually asked to join the Everly Brothers by Chet Atkins, but that wasn't strictly true - though I did do some rehearsals with Don Everly.

COUNTRY FEVER

"I've always liked playing a bit of everything, but when it came down to it, I knew that if I was going to concentrate on one particular side of music, it would be country rather than soul. So in the end I quit Chris to play in a country band called Country Fever. I stayed with them for about 18 months but it never really got off the ground. We did a lot of work, and we backed several big name Americans who came over to tour US bases in England and Germany - the last we backed were Connie Smith and Nat Stuckey when they came over for an RCA promotional tour.

POET AND THE ONE MAN BAND

"While I was with Country Fever I played on the sessions for the first Poet and the One Man Band album, released just over a year ago. The record was made by Tony Colton and Ray Smith and various friends of theirs, and they tried to get a band on the road. . . . but we only managed a couple of gigs and we had trouble getting an agency, and it all seemed to fold up. So I stayed on with Country Fever because at least I was making a living wage with them - though the only places you can play are various pubs around Hammersmith and up in the north - it's steady money, but you have to work 7 nights a week to make enough.

Then I played with Fotheringay for a couple of weeks but packed that in because there wasn't enough for me to do - it wasn't heavy enough. . . . and at the same time I got offered a job by Tony Secunda, recording an LP with a guy called Steve Gibbon, so I did that.

Then Danny Secunda (Tony's cousin) got interested in Poet and he had the right ideas about handling the group, so I went back with them. The group's changed its name to Heads Hands & Feet, and is Tony Colton on vocals, Ray Smith and me on guitars, Mike O'Neill on organ, Pete Gavin on drums and possibly Pat Donaldson on bass. I mean, everyone was interested in it before, but no-one was actually willing enough to do anything about it - but now Danny's really behind us. . . . he's paying us, he's given us a flat and everything. As well as that, we're working as the rhythm section of Johnny Harris's Orchestra.

After the first album, we recorded a second for an American label, Paramount, who haven't done anything with it. It's a shame, because it's really a terrific album. But Danny's going to try and get it back.

SOLO ALBUMS

We're working on my solo LP at the moment - me singing and playing songs which we're writing. I've already made one solo album for Bell Records in America but they haven't issued it. But I was concentrating on singing rather than playing and it wasn't as successful as it might have been - there's very little of my playing on it. This new one should be much better.

Free at last

About two weeks before Free became superstars, Paul Kossoff, their guitarist, talked to Jerry Floyd about the group.

"Free came together just after Andy left John Mayall. Simon and I had also just left a group - Black Cat Bones, and we two, together with Paul, who was previously with Wilde Flowers, decided to do something ourselves. We were looking for a bass player, and Andy was looking for a group and so he joined us. That was just over two years ago, and Free started out as a blues band, but it's moved on from there - we weren't interested in staying on that plane.

We don't care to remember our first agency, but then after about 6 months Alexis Korner introduced us to Chris Blackwell at Island, and since then I think we've gradually progressed - our new album is certainly the best we've done, probably because we've found our direction.

At present I find myself liking only a small part of the scene as it stands - there's nothing that I want to change or feel that I could change, but I just think that the whole thing is getting stale and is struggling. I think, and hope that good music will prevail however. As far as I can see, Free have in some ways separated themselves from the rest of the scene at the moment, because all these bands like Black Sabbath, Yes, Taste, Edgar Broughton seem to be playing music which relies largely on gimmicks. It doesn't appear to me to be honest - but that's only my personal opinion; I don't want to judge anyone. What I'm really trying to say, I suppose, is that my tastes in music are simple, a lot simpler than what's going on - like all this serious talk about Jazz Rock, Swamp Rock, this rock and that rock - it all seems like someone struggling at something. The sort of music I've got to like recently is Soul - Atlantic and Stax artists mainly . . . Otis Redding, Sweet Inspirations, Isaac Hayes in particular, James Brown. The studio band that plays on a lot of those records plays perfectly, you just can't play like that because it takes so much experience . . . and yet it's so simple and the timing is so easy. It's just great.

So at the moment, soul music is what we are all into and it's bound to influence us. We play songs rather than long pieces with complicated

time changes and rhythm patterns. I accept all that sort of stuff as being valid, but it's not for me . . . and I don't think that audiences find it very acceptable; they want something that's easily understood, easy to grasp - at least most audiences do. Music should be a form of release . . . like it always has been; all the primitive tribes danced, beat drums and went into semi trances as a release of aggression.

As a band, all Free wants to do is go out and play to people, make records and have a good time. We'd rather enjoy ourselves than come out with all this serious stuff about messages, or trying to play anything startlingly new. I don't think that light shows work for us either, because I think the audience comes to see us and hear the music rather than to have an effect of the music and lights . . . I think light shows tend to detract from our performances. I'd rather have warm lights which change colour gradually depending on the mood of the song and the mood of the evening - like someone who's enjoying the evening should be working the lights.

I'd like to see the scene quieten down to the point where people still enjoy themselves, but all the pretentions which are everywhere die off. There again, nearly all of the clubs and dances we play are really good - so I don't think there's much wrong with today's atmosphere. A few promoters should take a bit more trouble over their stage and facilities though.

Everything seems to be very unstable right now - bands breaking up, bands reforming, a new band starting out every ten minutes, but we feel very secure. We've had our ups and downs, but we want to stay together, mainly because we're happy and having a good time".

It is an unfortunate fact of a musician's life that however hard he tries to escape it, the clammy ponderous hand of 'The Business' will eventually start pawing him and get in the way of his music. Not only does it try to control the musical output, but it tries to control the tastes of 'The Market', and the things that happen can be very strange.

Obviously, if a musician believes in what he is doing he wants to get it across to as many people as possible, which involves making and selling records, and getting fairly well known so that people come to hear him. The problems come because businessmen, not musicians, handle the arrangements. It is better now than it used to be, but things still go drastically wrong with monotonous regularity; I doubt if there's one major agency that doesn't have at least one huge great cock-up to its credit, most record companies have destroyed music by trying to mould it to their own ideas of what sells and what doesn't, most publicists get things wrong, and when you think of the number of times dance and concert promoters ruin performances, it is incredible that any music reaches an audience at all. Add to this the faithful band of hyped-up journalists and the army of crushed velvet trendy groovers which makes up the bulk of 'The Market', and it is not surprising that it usually takes a group a long time to get their music through.

Deep Purple have been playing since early 1968. Jon Lord (organ), Ian Paice (drums) and Ritchie Blackmore (guitar) got together in Hamburg, found Nicky Simper (bass) and Rod Evans (vocals), cut a single called 'Hush', had a hit in the States and went over there to tour. 'Hush' wasn't exactly representative of their music, but they found people rather less than willing to listen to anything else, and certainly unwilling to believe that a group who had had a hit single were capable of playing other things.

Ritchie Blackmore: "In a way, we were a big name over there because of the single, but it was more a hinderance than a help. 'Heavy groups' just don't have hit singles, and it was a real drag - we had to go around proving ourselves. We played, I suppose, underground clubs - but all the audiences were there by luck.... they had not come to see us. Once we were there and played, a lot of people just wouldn't believe we were the same group. But then we were playing very 'poppy' on the record - it was the first thing we'd done and we didn't really know each other. But before people heard us, they'd just say 'Deep Purple - pop group'".

Which is better than what people in England were saying - usually 'Deep what?' Perhaps it is fortunate that 'Hush' wasn't a hit here because, as no one had any strong pre-conceived ideas about their music, they were free to play what they wanted on gigs and to make their first real impact with their 'Deep Purple in Rock' album. But the contrast between American fame and British obscurity can be more than a bit frustrating.

R.B. "We got fed up with coming back from America to find everybody saying 'Deep Purple? Who? Never heard of them'. It was a bringdown. We used to get the reaction from audiences in this country, but you would pick up a paper and there's all these other groups and nothing about you. You tend to get very jealous. That's the trouble with this business - everybody's trying to get their faces in the paper, it's terrible".

"We thought right, we're going to stay in this country and get something going here. I think we have now because we've done one hell of a lot of personal appearances and we're getting a bit of a reputation, but it's a weird way of doing it - going to America and making it big over there and coming back to England and starting again".

"Personally, I don't like playing in America. They're great audiences, always give you a standing ovation and things, but it's the travelling where you have to spend three months in a suitcase. I'd much rather stay here, go home every night, go across to the continent for a week at a time. In America it's three months slogging; it's very hard, and of course the drugs scene is bad out there and you tend to get caught up in all that.

DEEP PURPLE

The money is the main thing out there".

Last year, the group went through a fairly drastic change for the better. Rod and Nicky left, and were replaced by Ian Gillan, vocals, and Roger Glover, bass. The group put out three albums with the original line-up, then there was the live recording of Jon Lord's Concerto for Group and Orchestra, with Ian and Roger, and now the new album which is the first one that really does justice to Deep Purple as they are.

R.B. "We decided in America last year that although we were going down very well there was something lacking. Quite honestly Jon, Ian (Paice) and I were going down well, but the other two were really just passengers. So we looked at it from a cold point of view and decided they'd have to go.

"Rod wasn't really our kind of style as a singer anyway. He was more of a ballad singer than an improviser. It took us about 7 or 8 weeks to find Roger and Ian who were both with a group called Episode Six".

Since these changes, but not of course solely because of them, the band's music has improved almost beyond recognition. Compared with their earlier gigs and albums, the music is much better constructed, more confident, and more personal. Now it is Deep Purple playing Deep Purple's music rather than the group adapting things to suit them. This is more the natural growth of the group than anything else, and you can hear the music getting better through each of the early albums. "Book of Taliesyn" is basically a straight rock album with some nice little touches, but it isn't particularly well recorded and the approach seems limited to a few ideas. Three of the songs are by other people; a nice version of Neil Diamond's "Kentucky Woman", a heavied-up version of "We can work it out", and their way of doin "River Deep, Mountain High". The group are not entirely successful doing other people's music, and they don't sound quite sure about what they are trying to do.

One of the most striking examples of how much they have improved is the difference between "Wring that neck" on the second LP, and the same number as they play it on stage now. Though what they achieved on the early LPs came out sounding limited, there are a lot of tentative little steps in many directions. The period before last summer was one of experiment and it is hardly surprising that it didn't always come off. Jon Lord's string arrangement for "April" on the "Deep Purple" album is nice, but it is so much of a contrast with the other styles of their music that it produces a rather schizophrenic effect - the ideas haven't really been mar-

ried together, more placed side by side. While this way of doing things may be ideal-ogically satisfying, musically it doesn't really work that well, and not all the tentative prods in different directions fit into context. The music sometimes sounds just a bit too contrived.

By now, though, they appear to have resolved their earlier conflicts. I thought that on the whole, Jon's attempt to mix the group and an orchestra in his Concerto worked pretty well; it was certainly an enjoyable evening and I like listening to the LP when I am in the right mood. The new album "Deep Purple in Rock" is really very good indeed.

This time they have really "got it together, man". They set out to produce a pure rock album, and they certainly succeeded - it is loud, aggressive, thumping, joyous music that takes you along with it. Really exhilarating. Even in the gentler moments, like on "Child in Time", there is a tremendous sense of latent power, as if they are about to explode again any minute. This album is bursting at the seams with ideas but, in contrast to the earlier stuff, it is all worked into context subtly and naturally so that it doesn't sound contrived or "look-at-us-we-can-play-lots-of-different-things". Some people tend to compare them to the dread Zeppelin, but that isn't really fair. I can't honestly find much beneath the knicker-wetting, lemon-squeezing, and plastic climaxes of the Plant/Page cockrock combo, and though part of Deep Purple's more obvious appeal lies in their musical sex-drive, there is a lot more to them than that. Everyone is contributing so much to the music that beneath the excitement there are a lot of interesting things happening. Technically and emotionally, "Deep Purple in Rock" is one of the most exciting, articulate, and enjoyable rock albums I've heard, certainly by a British group.

R.B. "At the time, we thought we were pleased with the early things, but when you look back they are really a different style altogether, more of a ballad style. It is like it was someone else playing, and I suppose in a way it was. The new album is the only one I really want to be associated with: we haven't compromised at all, we've just put down our music and if people don't like it, well we're going to be a bit worried. All the stuff on the new LP was written by us, which is the only way really, because our music is more in the arrangement and the playing than in the writing - everyone puts more or less the same into it. Usually what happens is one of us comes up with a riff and we develop it from there. The melody come comes last and poor old Ian (Gillan) has to put something over the top".

That is the way Deep Purple normally work - as a group, for the group - but there is a sideline, and it is a sideline that threatened to take over their public image last autumn when they performed Jon Lord's Concerto with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Albert Hall. "The Business" started to get in on the act again, using phrases like "Where Two Worlds Meet, Pop Meets the Classics", and the papers talked about fusions of pop and classical music.

The group weren't all that well known over here at the time and for a while there was a danger that people would be conned into thinking of them just as "that group wot do things with orchestras". I still get people telling me they don't like the group because they are pretentious and try to do a classical thing all the time. In fact, it was the publicity that was pretentious, not the group or what they were trying to do.

Jon Lord: "One thing that annoyed me about the concerto was that so much was made of the fact that I wrote it. OK, so I wrote it, but it was written purely with the group in mind and purely as part of the group, not as an ago trip for me. I wasn't trying to establish that I was really into something else and only play rock music because that's how I earn my bread; that's not the point at all. It was an attempt to project Deep Purple into an orchestral setting - I wouldn't have done it with anyone else.

"I thought it worked about 60 per cent of the time. I wasn't too happy with the second movement - I liked what Ian sang and the way he sang it - but I wasn't happy with the way I wrote it in. I should have brought it in with the group and had the orchestra coming in behind, but then hindsight is very useful.

"The first movement was far too long, it rambled and lost direction in places. The most successful movement was the third because it started at A at a tremendous sort of speed and didn't stop until it got to Z, which is what I really wanted to do with the whole thing. In terms of producing an effect, I think the concerto worked, but if I look at it musically and analytically there are bits I would re-write and certain bits that I wouldn't write if I could do it all over again; but in terms of producing a final effect I was happy with it. I only had about three months to write a 50 minute piece of music for an 80 piece orchestra, and the ink was only just dry when I took it to the first rehearsal.

"I suppose it is a hotch-potch of everything I've ever listened to, probably without my being concious of it. There isn't really one composer that I'm particularly influenced by - I just like music. If I feel like putting in a bit of Santana I do, if I feel like putting in something like Mozart I do. The only 20th century composer who's really turned me on is Vaughn Williams - that's superb music - but I think the concerto had one foot very firmly in the 19th century. It wasn't a concious thing - I don't sit down and say "Right, I'll put in a bit of Tchaikovski now" - it just came out that way because of what I've heard before.

"One of the critics said that I'd obviously been heavily influenced by a composer that I'd never heard of, which just shows you where some of the critics are at, but the only guy to catch on really was Derek Jewell whose point was that a composer usually becomes famous because of his later works, his early things are usually forgotten. If you look at Beethoven's early work you find that it's almost an exact copy of Mozart, or if you take Mozart's early work then it's a copy of Bach. A composer can't just start composing in a void - you can't just suddenly start and become brilliant overnight. Every composer must start somewhere and it's natural that you start where someone else left off. As I compose more it will gradually become more personal, until in 50 years time it's possible that someone will look at one of my works and start from there".

After the Albert Hall concert, some people from the BBC asked Jon to write a suite as part of a week of music they are having at the Festival Hall in September. He is writing a thing called the "Gemini Suite", for Deep Purple and a specially assembled 70-piece orchestra, which will have six short movements - one for each person in the group with the orchestra, and a final one with everybody. He is working with the rest of the group to get an idea of what they would like to play in their sections.

J.L. "It's not finished yet. I've been at it since November and because I've had all this time, I've been able to write whole passages and look at them a month later, decide they don't work, and re-write them, which is the luxury I didn't have with the concerto. But I'm not at all sure that this mixed-media thing really works. I had a long chat with Tony Stratton-Smith who got very involved with it with the Nice, and he made me realise something that had been in the back of my mind but that I hadn't really crystallized. When they do something like this, the group puts itself out - it goes into it scared, trembling, worried, hoping to do a lot of good things, but the orchestra just treat it like a paid gig - like session musicians. We didn't have a lot of trouble with the Royal Philharmonic, but they were only prepared to go so far - like they'll say "put the written music in front of me and I'll play it; I'll enjoy it, but I won't interpret it and I won't put myself out". So at the risk of failing, in the last movement of this suite I'm asking some of the orchestra to improvise: I want them to stamp their feet, clap their hands, and to make music out of their heads rather than just from dots on the paper in front of them.

"There is music to guide them, bars and beats and so on, but at certain points they are asked to make their own music - I don't care if it's a giant cacophonous row, I just want it to be fun for the orchestra and I want them to involve themselves in it. The group don't just treat it as another gig, it's something out of the ordinary to sit with an orchestra, whereas the orchestra get so used to sitting together and for every 20 times they play a Beethoven symphony, they perhaps play one new work, and they get very set in their ways. They wear dinner suits and bow ties, and that's the way their minds get to look as well. I don't care if they come on in jeans, I don't give a fuck about bow ties, but if I ask them to improvise and make a noise, then I want them to do it. I don't know what they're going to say when they see some of the directions on the score, but I hope it works because it will be so much more enjoyable to see 60 or 70 members of an orchestra really putting themselves out rather than just supercilliously playing dots that have been put in front of them. The conductor will be Malcolm Arnold again who is a valuable ally because he belives in music, not different types of music. At rehearsals he bullys the orchestra, shouts at them to put their backs into it, and they do it because he's a good guy and they like him".

The orchestral side of Jon's music is important to him, but it isn't, as some people seem to presume, his main interest. Basically what interests him is music, enjoying music and producing emotional experiences through it. After three years at drama college he went through a period of starving in a 25-bob a week hovel in Archway, and he drifted into groups more or less by accident and because he needed to eat. He spent a time with pick-up bands and, before Deep Purple, he was with the Artwoods. Originally he played piano but bought an organ because "it seemed like a good idea at the time - I used to worship Graham Bond and go to see him every chance I got". He met Keith Emerson when he (Emerson) was with the T Bones.

J.L. "When I first met him I found out that we were both very much into using classical bits for improvisation, completely independently of each other. It's funny that the two of us arrived at the same place about the same time - that was my whole bit until about two years ago but I'm not quite so much involved with that now. I still think that Emerson is one of the finest organists in the world - jazz, rock, not so much classical perhaps - there's nobody to touch him.

"The only thing I think he falls down on is his improvisation - I don't think he can improvise that well, not off the top of his head. He can be playing along and suddenly go into a Bach fugue and really blow your mind, but then he comes to a bit of free improvisation and he falls down. I really envy his technique though.

"I'm very much involved in trying to fit the organ into rock music, because it doesn't actually fit very well. Solos are OK, but in terms of backings and rhythms it's a very difficult instrument. Rock and roll (well what we do anyway, I call it rock and roll) is very much what I'm interested in doing, and I've tried to develop a style that sustains it on the organ, but it is not an easy instrument for that sort of music. I don't really believe in mind music, I believe more in body music, music that works on you. I don't see much point in sitting and appreciating music solely with a kind of analytical type of mind - this is what rock music has taught people, that music doesn't necessarily have to be acceptable on a very technical level.

"That is the sort of kick I get from playing with the group, but writing music is different - there's you, manuscript paper, and a pen, and from somewhere inside you comes music. The actual process of writing is very enjoyable, very tiring but extremely enjoyable. It's a personal thing - I can only write at night, I can't write in the day with the birds singing and the traffic noises and everything, so I usually work between midnight and six about 2 or 3 days a week. It's a great feeling to get something down on paper, a very personal, private little fight. You know how it sounds because you can hear it in your head, but you don't really know whether it will come over right, or whether what you hear in your head is false, or whether what you have managed to get down what you hear. That probably sounds very dull, but I find it exciting and it is a totally different experience from being on stage in front of an audience".

If all that conjures up a vision of Jon Lord as a theorist, The Great Creator Making Music, then the vision couldn't be further from the truth. If he throught like that, he couldn't play music the way he does without sounding flase and superficial. Basically he is a very direct, honest musician who believes that the purpose of music (and poetry, painting, sculpture, anything) is to evoke emotions, to make people sad, glad, or something in between those two emotional poles. There are moves going on to get him to do something with Joseph Eger at the John Dankworth mixed-media mecca for the rich and trendy in Buckinghamshire, but Jon has doubts about it:

"I don't know much about it, but I've got a feeling that it might be a bit dull, a bit cerebral. I keep going back to this, but the whole point of music is enjoyment - it must be, because if it's not then it doesn't live and it can't have any point. If you are just making music for the sake of making an intellectual statement - forget it. You might just as well write it in prose. It's got to be emotional. I hope it happens that I write something for Joseph Eger and John Dankworth, I want to, but I'm not prepared to go to some big intellectual workout: that's not what I'm interested in - I'm interested in people going to hear music and coming out different; it need only be a little bit different, but I want them to have gone through some kind of emotional change. You listen to Little Richard - he's got a new single out, sort of "Rip it up" part nine - and it comes on and you get a nice feeling in your stomach. That's an emotional change. Or you go and listen to something like Tchaikovsky's "Pathetique" and you come out with tears streaming down your face. That's an emotional change, that's something you've gone through because the music has produced a catharsis in you. It's awfully difficult to talk about it without sounding intellectual, but I don't mean to sound that, and I'm certainly not an intellectual - I'm just a person who enjoys different emotional changes and to me that is what "art" is all about.

"I'm not interested in looking at a painting to say "oh, his use of the colour pink is superb"; I want to look at a painting and get a little twist in my guts. Francis Bacon - I can look at a painting by him and get really frightened. There's a thing of his called the "Screaming Pope" - I think - and it's the face of a pope with the papal hat on and a mouth like a big O because he's screaming. It looks like he's painted it and rubbed his hand down it to smear it, but he hasn't, he's painted it like that and it's all fear - it's a melting face. But it's beautiful and it hits you: that's what art is all about. Even with the milder artists like Mozart or a painter like Constable there's something about their work that hits you because it touches off a responsive chord inside you.

"It's the same with rock and roll music, or folk-rock, jazz-rock, schmock-rock, whatever - it must touch off some emotional response otherwise that's it, there's nothing".

Steve Peacock

Shades of Deep Purple....PCS 7055
Book of Taliesyn....SHVL 751
Concerto for group and orchestra....SHVL 767
Deep Purple....SHVL 759
Deep Purple in Rock....SHVL 777

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DON'T FOLLOW LEADERS

Enigmatic is probably the word that has been most often used to describe Bob Dylan and everything connected with him, and it's the most justifiable, however much it seems a journalist's defence against his unforthcomingness and his ceaseless, subtle pisstaking. NME was foolhardy enough, at the height of the Dylan/Donovan comparisons, to send him a "lifelines" questionnaire asking his date of birth, first public appearance and other questions that should be answered by any press handout, and they were even more foolhardy to publish his answer - "walking the dog", "do the dog" and other dog-orientated comments scrawled inappropriately all over the place - claiming that they too were in on the joke. And there was the famous interview he gave to Disc, 22nd May 1965, which was a well phrased, direct expansion of the words: piss off; and Disc too printed it, under the title "Mr Send-up", as if he had been joking, and as if the key sentence "I don't want to be interviewed by your paper" was just a passing pleasantry which no-one would notice. And to see Dylan shredding the London correspondent of "Time" magazine in "Don't look back" was one of the high points of the film, which showed that people really do need a defence against his directness when trying to probe his head in public. He too had his defences in those days, against the pressure of concerts with the tension of admiration, love and expectancy from everybody, from teeny-boppers upwards and downwards, with the possible exception of the management of the Savoy hotel, London. His defences were words, music, drugs, transport from one venue to the next, snatching him away from the outstretched arms of adoring girls, laughter and the friends around him. The Highway 61 period, before and after, was one of great activity, life at high speed, a lot of songs written, a lot of intrepid interviewers crushed, a lot of nervous energy built up and then spent. A period in which some of my favourite Dylan songs were produced. Since that time, very well captured by "Don't look back", he doesn't appear to have looked back, at least, not with regret. "Blonde on Blonde" was followed by a long silence when there was no opportunity to buy other records of him - except the wildly mistitled, mashed-up "Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits" album - so "Blonde on Blonde" got the thorough attention it deserved. After twenty months of untiring listening to it there seemed no possibility of him coming up with anything that could sell. But the enigmatic "John Wesley Harding" did sell, as did the enigmatic "Nashville Skyline" and now the enigmatic "Self Portrait" is selling, predictably, faster than the pill.

If the contents of the album are as enigmatic (last use of that word here) as the cover painting, by the man himself, then the songs won't tell as much about the singer as would be expected from a collection entitled "Self Portrait". Guaranteed to surprise everyone was the choice of songs, the great songwriter singing the songs of his contemporaries when for so long the reverse has been true. Almost nobody has been reluctant to record a Dylan song, and those who haven't done so, like the Beatles, have been recording their own stuff exclusively for a long time, not only because it was more profitable but because it was what was expected of them.

For the seeker of parallels, there are parallels to be found in the album. Not only has Dylan recorded a Paul Simon song, "The Boxer" but he has also done what Simon and Garfunkel did on their last issue, that is, recorded Everly Brothers material: "Take a message to Mary", "Take me as I am" by Boudleaux and Felice Bryant, who wrote most of the Everlys' hits, and "Let it be me", a French song by Gilbert Becaud, released by the Everlys in 1959 as the B side of "Since you broke my heart". The main criticism of any validity put forward against the "Bridge over troubled water" album was about the sparseness of new material. On "Portrait" 14 of the 24 songs are credited to Dylan, but of those "Like a Rolling Stone" and "She belongs to me" have both been officially issued by him, and "Living The Blues" and "Mighty Quinn" unofficially on the "Great White Wonder" bootleg collection, which has been around long and far enough for most people to have heard it. Admittedly, the versions are different, but that doesn't help the search for virgin Dylan material. "It hurts me too" is not new. It was a part of the repertoire of most bands that were part of the mid-sixties R & B bubble, though the John Mayall version, released in 1967 and credited to Mel London, in the Mayall murky dance-hall grope style and the Dylan cabaret/blues style version are sufficiently different for both to survive as near masterpieces.

The song about Sadie appears twice, as does "Alberta". The Sadie variants have a very traditional ring about them and people who used to watch John Renbourn playing, before he disappeared into Pentangle, will remember his memorable way of singing and playing "Alberta", making it as moving as that other girl/state song "Georgia on my mind". "All the tired horses" has no sign of Dylan's voice and, being the first track, is no doubt put there to calm the listener's expectant adrenalin flow as he puts the record on for the first time and waits. "Wigwam" is wordless and "Woogie Boogie" is pure instrumental. "Days of 49" is basically an old gold rush song, so that more or less leaves Belle Isle - reminiscent in theme of John Riley (as sung by the Byrds) and Barbara Allen - and "Minstrel Boy" - which I hope will send Matthews Southern Comfort running for the nearest studio, to do an improved version - improved from the vocal synchronisation point of view, at least.

This is not to say that the album is a bummer. It is a fact that there is very little really new material, but it should be remembered that Dylan has always drawn extensively on folk tunes and often of folkie themes, and to judge this or any record solely on grounds of originality is as ridiculous as to judge them solely on commercial potential in the style of Anthony Blackburn in his early morning indigestible porridge programme. To write all your own songs is to be inevitably introspective, both musically and thematically and, in a way, it's good to see Dylan breaking out and looking smilingly out at the world. "Nashville Skyline" was a first step and the unhungup qualities of that album, are even more evident here. He's simply chosen a few songs that please him, some his own and some that have been around for some time. In contrast to the tension of the three jangling albums, "Highway 61", "Bringing it all back home" and "Blonde on Blonde", he is relaxed and unbothered. He must have known that the selection of songs and the way he sings them would bring criticism in large volume, but he's in the fortunate position of not needing

1962

photo by John Cohen 1970

to care, and he never has done. "Don't follow leaders", he advised, in "Subterranean Homesick Blues": he doesn't want necessarily to do exactly what is expected of him, and he doesn't particularly want others to follow him. "You go your way and I'll go mine" is a sentence still important to his way of thinking and acting. It's unlikely that he would phone up an opinion poll centre to find out what he should sing next. As long ago as 1965 he was being criticised for not doing what was expected of him. He gave up singing songs like "God on our side" and "Blowing in the wind", much to the distress of his followers. In an interview with Long Island Press in October 1965 he said "I never wanted to write topical songs. Have you heard my last two records, "Bringing it all back home" and "Highway 61 revisited"? It's all there. That's the real Dylan". Asked why he ever wrote civil rights songs he said, "That was my chance ... I wasn't getting far with the things I was doing - songs like I'm writing now, but 'Broadside' gave me a start". (His first published songs appeared in 'Broadside' magazine).

So according to Dylan himself, the real Dylan of 1965 was represented by the period which produced, among others, the songs "Like a rolling stone" and "She belongs to me". That they are on "Portrait" indicates that the "real Dylan" of now and the real Dylan of then have something in common. But most likely he got tired of everybody else's search for the real him, hence the songs from other contemporary sources.

Whatever his intention in recording those songs, he has, in a Godlike way, made the sun shine on the people who wrote and/or recorded them. Gordon Lightfoot (who has just released an average album) will bask in attention, for a while at least. Merely for writing "Early morning rain" he deserves this attention, but it may also serve to attract more detailed examination of some of his earlier songs which are really worthwhile. The same song will also be of benefit to Peter Paul and Mary, who recorded it in '65 (the same period in which they recorded "Leaving on a jet plane", their recent hit single taken from an old LP). The only reason I can imagine for it not selling was DJ's lack of taste, or more likely, lack of interest and knowledge. After "Bridge over troubled water" (which I still think is a great record in spite of its bad reviews everywhere) Simon and Garfunkel hardly need publicity, but they'll get it - and maybe it'll have the desired effect of getting Simon to write a bit faster. Dylan's version of "Gotta travel on" won't do much good for Paul Clayton, the Boston folksinger who wrote it. He's dead. But it would be nice to hear it again in the original version done by Billy Grammar in 1958, and to hear his "Bonaparte's retreat" would be even better. The Everly Brothers, although still touring, seem to be in much the same frame of mind as Dylan - unhungup, singing because they enjoy it - maybe we'll see a Cash-Dylan-Everlys album one of these days! And don't forget Joanie who is the first person I think of on hearing "Copper kettle". Whatever the ups and downs of their relationship in the past it seems that Dylan and Baez are being nice to each other these days - she's still recording his songs and he still says nice things about her.

Anybody who saw Dylan at the Festival Hall in 1964 will remember the way he sang "Don't think twice". He bent the tune completely, as ever in public performance singing a slightly different version each time. The same thing shows up if you listen to "Tom Thumb's Blues" on "Highway 61" and then on the Liverpool live version issued on the back of "I want you" in England. On "Portrait", "Like a rolling stone" and "She belongs to me", recorded at the Isle of Wight have been kicked about like hell, and at first I hated them. But with continued listening - or maybe self-hypnosis - I find them getting better all the time. In fact, the only tracks that bore me now are "The Days of 49" and both the Sadie numbers. I'm thankful that "Alberta" appears twice, and it would even be acceptable to have it three times if the third version replaced "Days of 49". What would have been better than a double LP at 59/11 would have been one at 30s., including as a minimum: "Alberta", "Belle Isle", "Early morning rain", "Copper Kettle", "Mighty Quinn", the Arctic Wesley Harding (mainly for the joy of hearing the shout "guitar!" half-way through), "It hurts me too", "Minstrel Boy" and "Like a rolling stone".

I'm sure there must be many thousands all over the world who - with complete disregard of the "Don't follow leaders" phrase - look to Dylan to find a pattern for their own lives. Whether they are right or wrong in this, successful or unsuccessful, is their business.

Ian.

"I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat:
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked". WB Yeats

TALKING WITH THE FAIRPORT CONVENTION

Bob Pegg talks to Simon Nicol and Richard Thompson.

One friday evening in early February we visited the Fairport Convention in their present home, a converted pub in a tiny village about four miles outside of Bishops Stortford. Lights were burning in various rooms of the long building, but for a long time no-one heard us as we stood in the freezing dark, stamping and shouting, and throwing pebbles at the windows. Then Simon Nicol opened the door, looking friendly, ordinary. He guided us through to the kitchen ("You should have come round the back") where Richard and two roadies were making cabinets for their hi-fi units. Richard wasn't doing a lot, just leaning on his own cabinet smiling and talking, while the other two busily broke a fretsaw blade. We asked if the place was furnished. They decided that it wasn't, but the landlord had lent them some of the furniture. Picking up the coffees that Simon had made, we went into the room that he shares with his wife, Bert. Someone in the room above put on a Band album. We turned on the tape recorder and began to talk.

Z: How did you start?

S: Well, this group's had so many secret identities in the past. Up until the time Tyger left, I'd been with him constantly in bands for four or five years - starting with a jug band called The Ethnic Shuffle Orchestra, and probably best forgotten. The others left and Richie (Richard Thompson) joined, and we started doing other things. It just sort of changed from there on.

Z: When did the folk thing start with you, was it when Sandy joined?

S: I don't know when it started really.... nobody suddenly started listening to folk music. We'd all been listening to it from time to time, along with everything else.

Z: Tyger Hutchings, when I spoke to him, reckoned you were folkies to start with. (Tyger, originally Fairport's bass player, split last autumn to form Steeleye Span with folkies Gay and Terry Woods, Maddy Prior and Tim Hart. Gay and Terry now gone, to be replaced by Martin Carthy and, latterly, fiddler Peter Knight).

S: Yeah, well we couldn't afford the amplifiers.

Z: Why did Tyger split to form his own group?

S: Well, ask him....he knows better than I do.

Z: Was it anything to do with the sound, do you think?

S: Not so much the sound as probably the attitude of the rest of the group. I mean, we're not all that serious a bunch.

Z: There's always seemed to me a fantastic difference between your live and record ed performances.

S: We've always had this levelled at us. It's always been true....I don't know why. I don't know whether we've striven in the studio for a certain kind of musical perfection - a certain end - or whether we've been much freer on stage, and altered the ratio of improvisation. I think things will be a lot different now. The group at present is very malleable and we're still feeling our way on stage. The first few gigs in particular lacked a great deal of confidence, which we've started to recover now. It was a matter of believing that we could sing on stage, which we'd never done for two years or so, and making it acceptable to the people who were coming along in a deliberate attempt to make comparisons. It's a big challenge, and it's nice to know that you can do it. Of course, there are a certain percentage of people who are going to turn their backs on us now, and I accept that. (Remember all last year's changes; big band drummer Dave Mattacks brought in to replace Martin Lamble, who was killed in their traumatic road accident; folk fiddler Dave Swarbrick joining after playing on some of 'Unhalfbricking'; Dave Pegg coming in to replace Tyger; nobody to replace Sandy Denny who formed Fotheringay). We haven't talked about it, but obviously this is something that we're all aware of. We now look very different on stage, as well as sounding different. Before, one could say 'Fairport Convention' and snap!...a picture of Sandy Denny came to mind.

Z: To me, everybody seemed very individual. An astrologer woman in Leeds once told me that when the Beatles had Pete Best as a drummer they could never have made it, because...

S: ...they were incompatible.

Z: Yeah, right. In astrological terms. Ringo Starr absolutely, you know...

S: ...makes the circle.

Z: That to me is what you seemed to be like. Not necessarily getting on like a house on fire but...

S: A complete unit. It certainly felt like that - maybe more than a complete unit. A bit over.

Z: The first record (on Polydor) and the last ('Liege & Lief') seemed to me to capture the excitement that you got on stage. The two in the middle didn't seem to do this, though I like them for various reasons.

S: I think the excitement came with 'Unhalfbricking', when Swarbrick started playing the violin.

Z: Are you considering using any different instruments? Wind for instance? On your first album, there was a recorder which was very, very badly played.

S: Oh nonsense - I couldn't disagree with you more. Judy (Dyble) played it. You're making this mistake of judging everything by your own standards - "If I played it, I'd have played it like this" - you know, which is a pretty stagnant attitude.

Z: What's so good about it?

S: I just like it - it appeals to me. There were a lot worse instrumentalists in the group at the time than Judy, and there's a lot worse playing on that album, even from a purely technical point of view. As far as using other instruments goes, we're not going to use anything we can't play. Nobody's going to go out and buy a saxophone, because we haven't the vaguest idea what to do with a saxophone. On the other hand, of the instruments that are in the group, we're quite prepared to swap them around between us. Like we worked

on 'The bonny black hare' for ages using our own instruments, but it was getting nowhere - we couldn't relax into it at all. So Dave Pegg started playing the viola, and I started playing the dulcimer - instruments which neither of us know as well as our own - and it suited that number so much better. I think we've got a much more liberal instrumental approach now - you know, we're not thinking of it simply as 2 guitars, bass, drums, violin and/or mandolin.

Early Fairport seemed to concentrate on producing a sound, but they were now apparently shifting to emphasise words. Did Simon think their audiences were capable of following the complex plot of 'Tam Lin' for instance? "There's no getting away from the fact that the words of that song probably don't get through to the first time listener, tired of standing up and watching three other groups before we go on. But you know, a fair number of people have heard it now - it's a good one for Swarb to sing, and it's a good stage number. It's got varied interest I suppose, but at the same time, it's hypnotic".

We're great Fairport fans, but, being folkies too, felt some disquiet that, while being heralded as an English-sounding group, their musical roots were a lot more in the folk music of Ireland - its infectious dance music and rambling modal tunes. If you like, the chances are that they'd go down a lot better in Camden Town than at a barn dance in a Sussex village. We tried to make this point.

Z: Do you consider the sound at all? You seem totally unaware that there's a particular English traditional sound - you'll give an Irish sort of treatment to an English song, without realising where it comes from.

S: Well, who cares where it comes from? We're not scholars.

Z: Ah, the old excuse, throwing scholarship back in your face.

S: I'm not deliberately trying to play 'folk music', I'm just trying to do me best lady. I'm just trying to play the music that is happening in the group at the moment.

Z: I wonder if you're going into it deeply enough?

S: I don't know who's to say that. There are people who are going to go into it more deeply than I am - for instance, Tyger's band. What's this insane nationalism that's suddenly got hold of you? We're not going to start getting guilt feelings about doing English words to an Irish tune, because that's a lot of cock, you know. If those in the group like the end of what they produce, then that's it. There's only a certain amount that the present line-up of the Fairport Convention can achieve - there it is, take it or leave it. People shouldn't expect miracles of us. People go around with this idea that we are folk evangelists.

Z: That you're sort of emancipating.... bringing folk to the masses.

S: But we're not! This is the bloody journalists like you that are saying this ....building us up into something we're not. There are people who now take us far too seriously. We spend more time on stage trying to shock people. You can't go on stage now without people saying 'This is profound', which is great - but at the same time you want to be able to fart in their faces.

Z: You want it both ways.

S: No, they should like a bit of variety with their meal. We're getting through to audiences who, in the normal run of things, would be as likely to come across the words of 'Tam Lin' as they would be to win the pools. I find the group either gets called 'underground' or 'pop folk', or else gets bracketed as both. And the average underground audience - generalise, generalise - is pretty jaded.

Z: I think you're wrong about your audience. The people who buy your records are largely middle-class - like yourselves, like us - who are quite likely to have read 'Tam Lin' in a school poetry anthology. There are so many elements in your music that must, by their nature, appeal to middle-class values. A lot of it's terrifically 'tasteful' - it's not Led Zeppelin, is it? It's literate, it needs a certain amount of intellectual concentration.

S: What about lower class music? (laughs)

Z: Well, it exists.

S: Right....what's high-class music, by the same token? Paul Simon?

Z: Christ no. Very middle-class. It's probably people you've never heard of - like these people who play for Prince Charles. Probably cult figures - people like the Cream, that they latched onto because they were trendy. So Led Zeppelin could be upper class as well as lower.

S: No, not Led Zeppelin. But the Beach Boys, that's upper class music if ever I heard it.

There's a lull in the discourse as the probable fatuity of arguing about 'classes' in music sinks in. Simon's wife comes in and sits down. Richard Thompson, lead guitarist, also comes in and lies on the bed, seeming very aware of everything that's going on. Pete Wagstaff, who drove us, goes out to fetch some beer.

Z: So you'll be telling us next that you just play the kind of music you like, and that's all there is to it.

S: (With much irony) No, we happen to be onto a good thing - I read in the papers that there's a folk boom on at the moment, so we're doing this to make money.
Bert: (Equally ironically) We're in it for the image.

Z: Some of the most successful acts on the folk scene, like the Spinners for instance, are primarily really fine entertainers. That's something you never strike me as having been.

S: We're very bad entertainers.
Richard: The thing that I really hate is a band that gets up there and really isn't selling any music, but they're selling themselves.

Z: Yes, but who are you to tell audiences what they should or shouldn't like?

R: That's just it, man, we're not doing that. When you start that, then it becomes political and not musical - like the Doors, right? They're telling the audience they should like this. That isn't so far off Mr Enoch Powell.

Z: But there has been this political image, in the sense that you bring folk music to people who haven't heard it before. I've heard people say 'Think if they convert just two or three people from each concert into more traditional stuff'. This is seeing your music, not as an end in itself, but as an aid for people to get into the really 'elevated' stuff.

R: This isn't how we think. I think that Tyger used to think like that to an extent - in terms of pioneering.

The conversation drifts away again. People talk about their dreams, falling down wells, the new postage stamps, curry addiction, national characteristics and horoscopes of countries. Richard says that astronomy hasn't discovered half the things that astrology has - like the planet Vulcan, which is on the other side of the sun, and the tenth and eleventh planets.

Z: I like the track on 'Liege & Lief' where you and Swarbrick play dance tunes together. Have you heard anything like it before, because some EFDSS dance people told me that Irish showbands sound exactly like this when they play dance music.

R: I find that very reassuring, because there's this fucking great hole in between what's 'Traditional' and what's actually going on.

Z: It's fine in this case, but at times I feel you're taking a conscious step backwards. I felt this mainly through my acquaintance with Tyger - whenever I talked to him about what he wanted to do with the Fairport, I got the impression that it would be done.

R: Tyger's always stuck by his ideals.

Z: But did the group stick by Tyger?

R: Pretty well. Let's say that often it was a case of Tyger dragging us along, because we were too slow. He tried to learn up his subject.

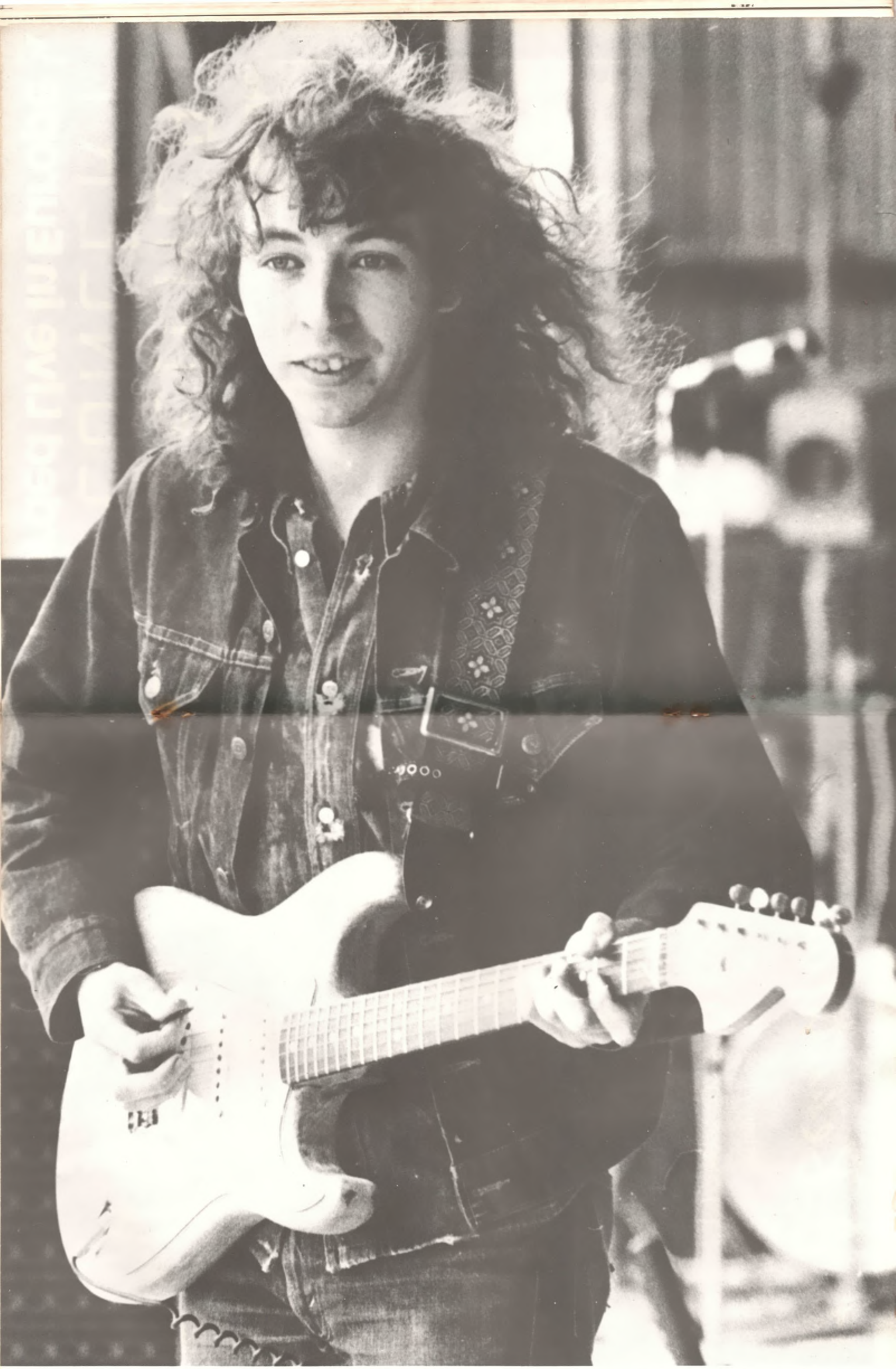
Z: But how can you do this over a comparatively short period of time?

R: How much do you think Elvis Presley knew about the blues when he cut 'Heartbreak Hotel'? I really think that if I fully understood English traditional music, I wouldn't be playing electric guitar.

Z: I feel that by looking consciously at your material you're losing its essence, whereas if you played, say, Chuck Berry numbers, you'd be much closer to any definable idea of folk music - not that I think most definitions have a lot of validity. I think that the group definitely did have the air of a crusade about it, and that this air made it miss the point as far as folk music was concerned.

R: Well I'll tell you what, that thing has definitely disappeared. I feel better now not being pushed, just because it's unnatural to be pushed. As far as I'm concerned, I've found more or less what I want to do, after a long search. If you like, I've come home. I don't have to push in that way anymore - I think that most of us feel now that the music we're doing is exactly what we want to do. You can't be completely happy or you stagnate, but I'm as happy as I can be. For the first time now, I don't have to sing about Louisiana, which is quite a breakthrough.

We talked more about ghosts, beer and related subjects, then sounds of amplified instruments pierced the wall of the vast practice room next door. Simon and Richard drifted in and began tuning. They played two songs vigorously, over and over again. One was a Swarbrick composition, the other a horrific lust - lyric with the line 'Dr Monk unpacks his trunk'. They seemed very happy playing together, smiling and sympathetic. Dave Pegg in his carpet slippers at two in the morning. We left at about three and went out to the car through the snow, and beneath a barn where a man had once been lynched.
(A variation of this interview, conducted by Bob Pegg (who has a Ph D in traditional music), originally appeared in the magazine Club Folk, of which he is editor).



RICHARD THOMPSON of FAIRPORT CONVENTION (Photograph by Peter Sanders)

COUNTRY JOE

("a"lewd, lascivious & wanton person in speech & behaviour")

& THE FISH

(suppliers of high quality electric music since 1966)

"Somebody's going to be raving to you about Country Joe and the Fish soon, so it might as well be me". That was Peter Stampfel writing in Broadside Magazine in 1966.

Well, we kept our ears and eyes open, and sure enough we got to hear more about Country Joe and the Fish.

"Their music sounds best in the country, wafting across the cool dark field where the air is clear: on a highway near Big Sur with bonfires for light, or on the meadows of a mountain in Marin County", said the Village Voice, sharpening our appetites and anticipation.

"When the album ('Electric Music for the mind and body') arrived at the office it was immediately inscribed 'This record is to be played on special occasions only', and certain factions suggested that it would be in poor taste to even review such a sacred work", said Crawdaddy a few months later.

Meanwhile, in those last few weeks before the Marine Offences Act destroyed the Perfumed Garden, John Peel (thoroughly hooked on Barry Melton's work) was introducing their electric music to England (and he continued to do so on Top Gear, playing 'Not so sweet Martha Lorraine' on the first programme), and eventually Fontana got it together to release the first album.

During 1966, when the San Franciscan rock revolution was gathering momentum, Country Joe and the Fish were already the favourites across the bridge in Berkeley, which had always had very strong folk music roots (and still has through the likes of the Cleanliness & Godliness Band, the Diesel Ducks and Mad River). Joe had previously been leading the Instant Action Jug Band, a very politically orientated group which used to provide music at the demonstrations and protests in the area (see chapter 16 in Tom Wolfe's 'Electric Koolaid Acid Test'), as well as being the resident band at the Jabberwock Coffee House. "When they needed a jug band, we were the jug band; when they needed a folksinger, I was the folksinger; when they needed a comedian, Barry was the comedian"!

Simultaneously, Joe was editing a local folk magazine called 'Rag Baby' with Mike Beardslee and Ed Denson, and one issue was put out as an EP. The record contained two tracks by one Pete Krug and the other two ('Feel like I'm fixin to die rag' and 'Superbird') were by Joe's jug band which had not only plugged in, but had also changed its name to Country Joe and the Fish (reputedly derived from a quotation from Chairman Mao's Thoughts: 'Revolutionaries are like fish in the ocean'). The sleeve notes stated that 'the war heard on this record is entirely fictitious and is not to be considered as actual recordings of any war being carried on by the US Govt or any of its agencies'. A further Rag Baby record featured early versions of 'Bass Strings', 'Love' and 'Section 43'.

Under the management of Denson (also John Fahey's manager and co-owner of Takoma Records), the slightly modified (slimmed from 6 to 5 members, with Chicken Hirsch replacing the old drummer) band went on to work the San Francisco dance halls, then at their peak, and with the spreading of their reputation and the tightening of their sound, playing benefits, concerts, love-ins, be-ins and smoke-ins up and down the west coast.

During the early part of 1967, they signed with Vanguard Records, and, with Sam Charters (author of 'Poetry and the Blues' and 'The Bluesmen') producing, released an album called 'Electric music for the mind and body', which to this day stands as one of the finest albums to come out of the Bay area. The band at this time consisted of Joe (vocals), Barry Melton (guitar), Bruce Barthol (bass), David Cohen (organ/guitar) and Chicken Hirsch (drums).

October 1967. Tragedy strikes! Having recorded a beautiful second album (subsequently released at the beginning of 1968), Joe split to become a solo artiste - the administration of the band had got on top and he wanted to revert to the relatively uncomplicated life of the folksinger. He was, happily, back with the band within a few weeks, and they even became the first West Coast band to reach England when they played a couple of badly underpublicised and underpopulated gigs at the Round house in February 1968. There they played selections from their first two albums and introduced us to 'Rock and soul music' and several other songs which they were recording for their third, which, when released that summer, turned out to be pretty bad in comparison with its predecessors. Some people blamed the instability and prior disintegration of the group, others blamed the claustrophobia of New York where it was recorded, but producer Sam Charters reckoned it was their inability to cope with the horror around them: "You can't cope with what's happening in the world today, you just can't and so you respond. This record, we feel, is the response.... it's a mad, aggressive, kind of belligerent record that has quiet moments, but it's nothing like the first".

As it was they never recorded together again. The original Fish (except Barry) finally split after their gig at the Fillmore West on January 12th 1969. David Cohen, having briefly visited London with the intention of forming a group, is still planning his future; Bruce Barthol is with Formerly Fat Harry in England; and Chicken Hirsch packed in music altogether to open an artist's supplies shop in Oakland.

For a while Joe toured around with the Pitschel Players, an improvisational theatre company with whom his wife Robin had been acting for a couple of years, and then later in the year (around June) he formed what was to be a temporary Fish with Barry Melton, and Pete Albin (bass) and David Getz (drums) who'd both been in Big Brother & the Holding Company until Janis Joplin had left. This band came to England and played the ICA, and was also the nucleus of a makeshift Fish which recorded a fourth album 'Here we are again' (summer 1969), which also included, on some tracks, Airplane bassist Jack Cassady.

The last band of Fish (which also nipped over for an Albert Hall concert last autumn) was together for just exactly one year, which was Joe's original prediction. As well as Barry Melton, the new members were Mark Kapner (organ), Greg Dewey (drummer from Mad River) & Doug Metzner (bass). The only album to be recorded by this line-up, C J Fish, has yet to be scheduled for release here.

There have also been two solo ventures from within the band; Joe's own 'Thinking of Woody Guthrie' and his soon to be released 'She's a Lover, She's a Friend, She's a Wife'; and Barry Melton's Tamla/R&B appreciation album 'Bright sun is shining'. As well as that, Joe and the Fish have appeared in three films: 'Revolution' a story/documentary about the hippie days of San Francisco, 'Monterey Pop', and 'Woodstock', in which

Most recent Country Joe & the Fish: Mark Kapner, Joe, Barry Melton, Greg Dewey, and Doug Metzner.

Joe's 'Fish Cheer' and 'Fixin to die' are highlights, and they were due to appear in a forthcoming comedy western -'Zacharia' - as a band called the Crackers.

Joe's notoriety in the eyes of the establishment springs from his political convictions (on 'Hey Bobby'(CJFish) he rebukes Dylan for his apparent abdication of responsibility 'Where you been? We missed you out on the streets'). His performances in G I coffee bars and his anxiety to play to the troops in Vietnam have led to a paranoid Pentagon banning the sale of his records in Army stores.

Called as a witness for the defence at the Chicago conspiracy trial, he was forcibly restrained from singing 'I feel like I'm fixin to die rag', and recently he got into a spot of trouble with the friends of rock'n'roll music in Massachusetts after performing the 'Fish' cum 'Fuck cheer'. He was convicted of being a 'lewd, lascivious and wanton person in speech and behaviour' by a Boston jury on March 18th 1970, and fined $500. The charges had stemmed from his concert at Worcester a year earlier.

"The absurdity of the paranoia of the establishment" said Joe after he'd been charged for the offence under a 1783 statute, "has been carried so far that after the Worcester date we were met in Boston by 1 police captain, 3 lieutenants, 75 uniformed patrolmen equipped with guns, clubs and mace, several squad cars, 25 plainclothes detectives and a paddy wagon, and we were informed that we couldn't do that thing which we had done in Worcester - but no-one would articulate what it was that we had done".

"It is really an infringement on the constitutional rights of the audience to have the police decide what we can and cannot hear, particularly when this is such a small issue; it is generally the tendency of the establishment to treat young people as if they were second-class citizens - as if they are not capable of making rational decisions which would lead to moral conduct. The kids are finding out that the real obscenities and the real immoral acts are committed by the establishment - the adult community which chooses to manifest its hang-ups in poisoning the rivers and oceans, and the food we eat, by smoking themselves into alcoholic stupors and by forcing their own children to go off into a foreign country to murder for them (because they don't have the courage to do it themselves). And then, in the light of all this, they expect - not only expect, demand - the right to be able to censor what their children do and do not do, see and hear".

"It is surprising to me that at a time when all man's energy should be focused towards solving the important issues, like problems of war, poverty, unemployment and education, that the establishment tries to focus in on their very small unimportant issues such as the length of people's hair and the words that they say. The whole issue is a nickel-dime issue, and just an excuse for the establishment to harass me, the band and the audience. I think it is pretty clear that the older generation has disqualified itself from any right to supervise the activities of young people".

Well, Country Joe has split the Fish to go off on his own again, which may be the birth of a fine solo performer, but it's the end of one of the world's most excellent bands. Listen to 'Silver & gold', 'Porpoise mouth' and 'Here I go again'.... It really will be sad if McDonald and Melton have parted for good this time.

"Here I go again, off down the road again, thinking thoughts of days gone by".

Alan Lord/Mac Garry

The following interview (reprinted from Sing Out magazine) is two years old, but is the most informative we've seen on the band. The cast is Joe (JM) and Barry (BM) for the Fish, and Barbara Dane (BD) and Irwin Silber (IS) for Sing Out.

IS: Someone said recently that there was a revolutionary movement in this country and its music was rock. What do you think about that?

JM: If there is a revolution going on and it has a music, I would say that it's going to be electric, amplified rock-and-roll music, I guess. It'll have a beat, too. It'll be played by electric guitars and bass. Because that's the popular music that's happening. Also some horns, too. Probably saxophones, trumpets. Like, there's a black revolution going on and its music is usually done by a one star singer or a team of two. Backed up by a band. The band may have one electric guitar and an electric bass in it. But the rest of it is, like, saxophones. And piano, trumpets, trombones.

IS: Do you think there's a revolution going on?

JM: Well, something's going on. It's not under control. Stokely Carmichael seems to be the only person of my age who has control over a large segment of the population. But it's almost as if he wasn't there, someone else would do it. There seems to be an incredible amount of energy coming out of the ghetto, coming out of the young kids in this country -- from the black ghetto and from what's now a white ghetto. I guess a white hippie ghetto. They're all there, and if someone can come along and tell them which way to go or what to do, then I'd say maybe we got a revolution. Revolution meaning you've got a structure and some way to control it. Right now, I don't see anything. And the popular music of this time is rock-and-roll. It's called rock-and-roll music. And revolutions are made by young people, and young people are listening to soul music and rock music.

IS: When we talk about revolution, usually that means a process whereby a structure of society is destroyed and something else replaces it. I mean, like the American Revolution. Before the American Revolution, the British ran the country, and after the American Revolution, the Americans ran it. So there was a change of power. From one decisive group to another decisive group. In that sense, do you think that there's a revolution taking place?

BM: Yeah. I think it's a revolution — a tribal revolution: a sort of returning to a tribal way of life. It seems to emerge from part of the hippie thing, and maybe even the Yippie thing. And it's tribal — sort of making the structure smaller. I mean, getting away from large structures. Like, one of the things the youth scene, or the youth protest scene, seems to manifest itself in is revolt against the large media — the government, IBM cards, you know, the machine. And returning government and maybe the way of life back to tribal society.

JM: I feel as though the people I hang around with, the people I come into contact with — my peer group and myself — had something happen in our heads. You make basic assumptions in order to function, in order to have thoughts. Somewhere along the line, we adopted new assumptions, the basic assumption being a philosophy which can be summed up in one sentence: You can do anything that you want to do as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else. And then, you try to apply this, and you find you have to go away together somewhere because people get really freaked out.

BD: You mean they won't let you?

JM: Yeah, they won't let you, and they act real weird and they just do strange things. Their behavior ... That's why it's not a matter that we want to go out and change everything. That's a revolution. The only reason I want to get anything changed in this country is kind of self-survival — so I can function without being afraid and uptight sometimes. I can't even imagine why people want to live the way they do in this country. I know that, at one time, I didn't know any better than that. ... When I was in the navy, I went through a period of maybe about a year when I could see the justification for violence. You know, it seemed all right then. Now, when people ask us about whether peace marches are okay or what about drugs or do you think they ought to stop the war in Vietnam or anything, just almost answering the questions becomes absurd. Because, well, we say, "Of course," you know ... Of course, all of those things. Of course, anything that you want to do. If you want to go have a demonstration in the streets, of course, you just go out there; and, of course, the cops don't come because there aren't cops with guns. The cops don't have any guns anymore. Nobody shoots anybody anymore. Because that's just not an effective way of dealing with each other. It hasn't ever worked. So we just take all guns and throw them away and ... There's a lot of problems after that, but we deal with them in a different way. We argue with each other and we yell a lot, I guess, maybe, and we actually work some things out. But we don't shoot each other anymore. We don't put each other in cement and steel cages anymore because we did things wrong. We just sort of live together. Anything goes. It's all right.

If I could somehow transfer the reality of Vietnam to my brain, I think I'd probably go insane. I can only take data from the newspapers in little bursts. And occasional pictures and sometimes a movie, maybe. Although there are some movies I deliberately haven't seen because it's just very frustrating. I mean, what are you going to do about it, you know? So what you do about it, you take drugs, you turn up the music very loud, you dance around, you build yourself a fantasy world where everything's beautiful, where you're an Indian — or you build yourself a fantasy world where you're the great American crusader fighting for his country to defend it against all — you know. Whatever is going on in this country is totally insane. Either way you look at it. I mean, we're definitely not Indians, everything isn't beautiful, and there is no Communist threat to fight. And drugs aren't immoral and sex isn't immoral. I don't know. It's just crazy. It's a crazy time. We're all crazy, I think. We can't remove ourselves from the condition.

IS: But you guys do more than that.

JM: Well, in a sense, how could we not? What could we do? Could we refuse? Refuse to play benefits for peace and civil rights causes?

IS: Well, how about other rock-and-roll groups? I don't see them advertised so very often at these kind of programs.

BM: In San Francisco, there's a lot of active bands involved.

IS: I mean the big ones. The ones that are really well-known.

JM: Oh, they don't ever do that. But neither does James Brown. James Brown just finished a tour of Vietnam.

IS: Otis Redding was on his way to Vietnam when he got killed.

JM: It's like I said. We are a strange breed.

IS: You mean the Fish.

JM: The Fish — and the Fugs and the Steve Miller Blues Band.

BM: The Grateful Dead.

JM: Not the Grateful Dead so much. They're not very political.

BM: No. But they play for hippie causes. They play for free medical clinics. They don't play for — let's say I wouldn't expect to see them at a peace rally.

JM: But Jerry Lewis does mammoth marathons every year for cerebral palsey and things like that.

IS: But why wouldn't they play for a peace thing, an anti-war thing?

JM: They don't trust them. The Left Wing has alienated itself from them. I don't blame them. We've had some bad scenes. If it wasn't for my childhood background of politics, I think I would just have said, Fuck you!

You get tired after a while telling everybody, man, you better fix everything up because you're feeling miserable. Pro-

test isn't valid anymore. We're discussing our problem now. Our problem is getting very close to us.

IS: What is our problem?

JM: Our problem is that the country is just going to go beserk. Some time in the next five years. Probably starting with this summer.

I used to believe, at one point, in holding hands and "We Shall Overcome." Oh, boy, we really were going to do it. And LSD. Oh boy! If we could just give everybody in the world this LSD. Everything would just be out of sight.

IS: You don't think that's the answer anymore?

JM: You get tired of LSD after a while. Some people take it and turn into raving maniacs. I mean, wherever your head's at, that's where it's going to put you at. I wouldn't turn on the New York Police Force. Believe me. Whoooo! Some of the most bizarre things would happen that you've ever seen in your life. Turn on the Green Berets.

IS: In other words, you think LSD would accentuate the characteristics that are already there.

JM: Yeah, it would.

BD: Cats in the Pentagon are taking LSD for problem-solving. How's that? It was in Life magazine. It just goes to show you that wherever you're at, that's what's going to happen. Maybe it helps you out. Probably fucks you up.

JM: It's kind of a superman drug. Just like amphetamines — speed is a superman drug. But this is a different one. This is incredible. Speed is like a superman, very domineering, but LSD is like a magic drug, — whatever you're doing is holy, you become a prince among men. You become whatever you want.

BD: You sure LBJ isn't on it?

JM: LBJ uses drugs. We don't use LSD anymore. None of us. Not for four or five months.

IS: And this was, like, a conscious decision you made?

JM: No. No.

IS: You just found you were drifting out of it.

JM: Yeah, we just all sort of stopped. We took STP, most of us. Around the last time that we took LSD. That really did it. Boy, if you wanted to get your reality switched around and put your head in a different place, that old drug really did it.

BM: It was good the first few times.

JM: It put you in a really out-of-sight place. It was just like John Cage's music. It puts you right about there. You really lived in that world. Everything looked like his music sounds. Sounded like his music.

BM: After a while, you realize you're blowing your brains out, I think. I've taken LSD about 300 times. And then, the last few times became torturous. I could actually feel myself disintegrating.

IS: You don't build up a resistance to it?

BM: I don't think so. You get loaded every time.

JM: It's hard to go through psyche transitions under the use of drugs. Unless you have someone, a trained analyst, with you. Who you really believe in or something. What happens with LSD, I think, is that, in the beginning, you go into a different place in your head and you like it and you have a good time. And then, you have a better time and a good time and a good time and a good time — and then it comes to a time where you want to change that place where you go to with a drug and a conflict arises in your head between where you want to go when you're into the drug. Then you start going on a bad trip. The trip can no longer be enjoyable because you realize that where you're going is like a real fantasy just like Disneyland. You don't want to go there anymore, but you don't really want to go to the place that you need to go to that fast. Like it takes you there — pow! just like that! So you've got to lay off the drug and kind of let your head settle back in. And then, you get straight.

IS: Do you think that the kind of music you're making has changed as a result of your being off acid and heavy drugs?

JM: It's really hard to tell. It's like we just had this experience, which was taking drugs, and I think it affected our subject matter and our style. Our style became kind of drug-oriented. It was a kind of head music. What we're do ing now, we're starting to get into body music. It makes you want to move. Heavy Motown kind of rhythms. And I think maybe one of the reasons we're going into that is because we've stopped taking LSD.

IS: Is this happening with other groups?

JM: You mean that they stopped taking drugs? I think so. We don't know any old heads that are still taking it. Still smoke grass, though. Grass and hash. That's all over the place. I think there's so much of it in the country that it's impossible to bust enough people. There's just so much marijuana —

BM: And in Vietnam.

JM: Everybody's just smoking.

IS: Talking about some of these rock-and-roll groups a little bit more. And out of your own experience, too. When we were talking last time up in the hotel, you said, "Listen, no matter who you are, it's still show business." And, like, here we are, talking seriously, right? People projecting ideas about music influencing their times and their generation — and yet, you also say it's show business. That sounds like a contradiction.

JM: Well, it is a contradiction. You get up there on the stage and you do your thing, you know; you think that it's the music and that. What's happening is who the audience is, what they're thinking about' if there's a lot of chicks out there, they're looking at you with a sex thing in their head. It's just going to happen. And the cats are looking at you as something to identify with, probably. They want to see hippies, so you happen to be hippies. You say some words and you think they mean one thing, but by the time people get them, you don't know what they mean. All that comes out is that they like you. Also they're looking for some ... some guide to their life, I think. Some guide to wherever they're at. And we happen to be adult sort of people who represent what they want to do in their fantasies maybe, where they want to be: we take drugs, we enjoy ourselves, we have a lot of fun. We seem to be very honest. We have definite opinions. Which they probably have, too. They share our opinions. They're probably using drugs or considering it, or like the idea of resisting -- flaunting authority.

IS: My feeling is that for a lot of the people in the audience, it's more like a secret life or a fantasy life.

BM: Yeah. We're a bravery trip for them. Every once in a while, we'll play in a very, very straight place. We went to a place called Napa, where two of the band got beat up. They're going to get the lousy, long-haired hippies. So the three hippies in town showed up. Because we sort of give them courage. You know, we stand out there and we jump up and down — really exposed and open about the whole thing — and they have to sneak around corners in the towns where they live. So we sort of give them courage. Like Pete Seeger, right? When I was growing up, I'd be all alone in this big school, and from my leftist-oriented youth, the teacher would say, Plastic plastic plastic, and I'd say, Wood wood wood. Or whatever it was. Right? And then, I'd go see somebody like Pete Seeger, who would give me affirmation to all this stuff I believed in. And he would stand on stage and you knew he was important and everybody clapped a lot. Like, he was a hero image. And I couldn't get that affirmed anywhere, like in my classrooms, my friends, you know. Just maybe a very few friends.

IS: Do you think you have any influence on the straight kids?

BM: Yeah, I think we are. Pushing them to understand us and people who look like us. And maybe expressing opinions. By being famous. You see' being famous is a term of respect. Even the squarest kids in the world sort of have the idea that you're a rock-and-roll musician. And the American dream of success has reached you. That sort of thing.

cont on p 43

Bob Hite has done it again!

Canned Heat are a busy group -
how Bob 'the bear' Hite finds time to seek out
these vintage tracks we'll never know -
we're just very grateful, hope you will be too

VOL.2
RHYTHM 'N' BLUES
SWEET N' GREASY

SHA-WEEZE · SAVOYS · JEWELS
SHADES · PELICANS (KIDDS)
FIDELITONES · CRYSTALS
ROBINS · AVALONS
LBL 83328

VOL.2
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NEW ORLEANS BOUNCE

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FATS MATHEWS · JOE TURNER WITH
FATS DOMINO · ARCHIBALD
LITTLE SONNY
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VOL.3
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DOWN HOME STOMP

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is a track from the new RHINOCEROS album 'Better Times Are Coming' on

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with apologies to Fox & Theda Bara

The answer is blowing in the wind:

"I think they're going to have to get more kites"

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART

Beefheart is and always was a Zigzag Hero; we get more letters about him than any other artiste, I should think - asking for news and articles. This piece, reprinted from Creem Magazine, contains a lot of information which will already be known to Zigzag readers, but there are some interesting quotes from the Captain and news of his new band and next album.

Although they appear to be fading somewhat, the rock and roll audience lines of demarcation are still very much in evidence. On one side are the bubblegum kids, with their transistor radios and Christian Youth Fellowships, stuck in the grooves of the latest B J Thomas or Archies hit. Little needs to be said about them because all of us, at one distant time or another, were inevitably part of that scene. It was a phase we all passed through, an integral stage in the growth of progress.

On the other side of the fence are those of us who would like to think that our cultural tastes are a bit more mature. We are aware of our bubble-gum roots and Ame rican Bandstand heritage, but we seem to feel that we are above and beyond all that now. We pride ourselves on our openmindedness and the supposed latitude of our cultural inclinations. We think that we (and therefore our music) represent a freedom of sorts from the insular mind rot of our juvenile counterparts.

It would seem to me, however, that we are too quick to pat our own backs, that we are giving ourselves far more credit than we actually deserve. In many respects our musical tastes are just as limited (if not more so) than the bubble-gum kids. It may be true that there exists a certain degree of technical adventurism in much of our music, but even on that plane we have severely confined ourselves. Our conception of excellence is defined with the narrow walls of technical virtuosity and often built upon riffs that were passe long before we ever got to them (see Eric Clapton for a prime example of what I'm talking about). In doing so, we lose sight of truly creative conception, of that which separates man from machine technology. Simple regurgitation of old blues riffs or country licks (no matter what the level of technical competence) is nothing more than egotistical plagarism, and can hardly constitute creativity on any level.

In light of this, have we actually made the progressions we are so quick to credit ourselves with? I think not, and it is perhaps directly resultant from our deficiency of vision; our stubborn refusal to look forward rather than simply wallowing in the eclectic overload of the present. This may help to explain how a band as consistently futuristic as the Velvet Underground could be neglected with equal consistency. Anything that does not neatly fall within our narrow boundaries we tend to ridicule or completely ignore. Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band have suffered more than their sha re of both.

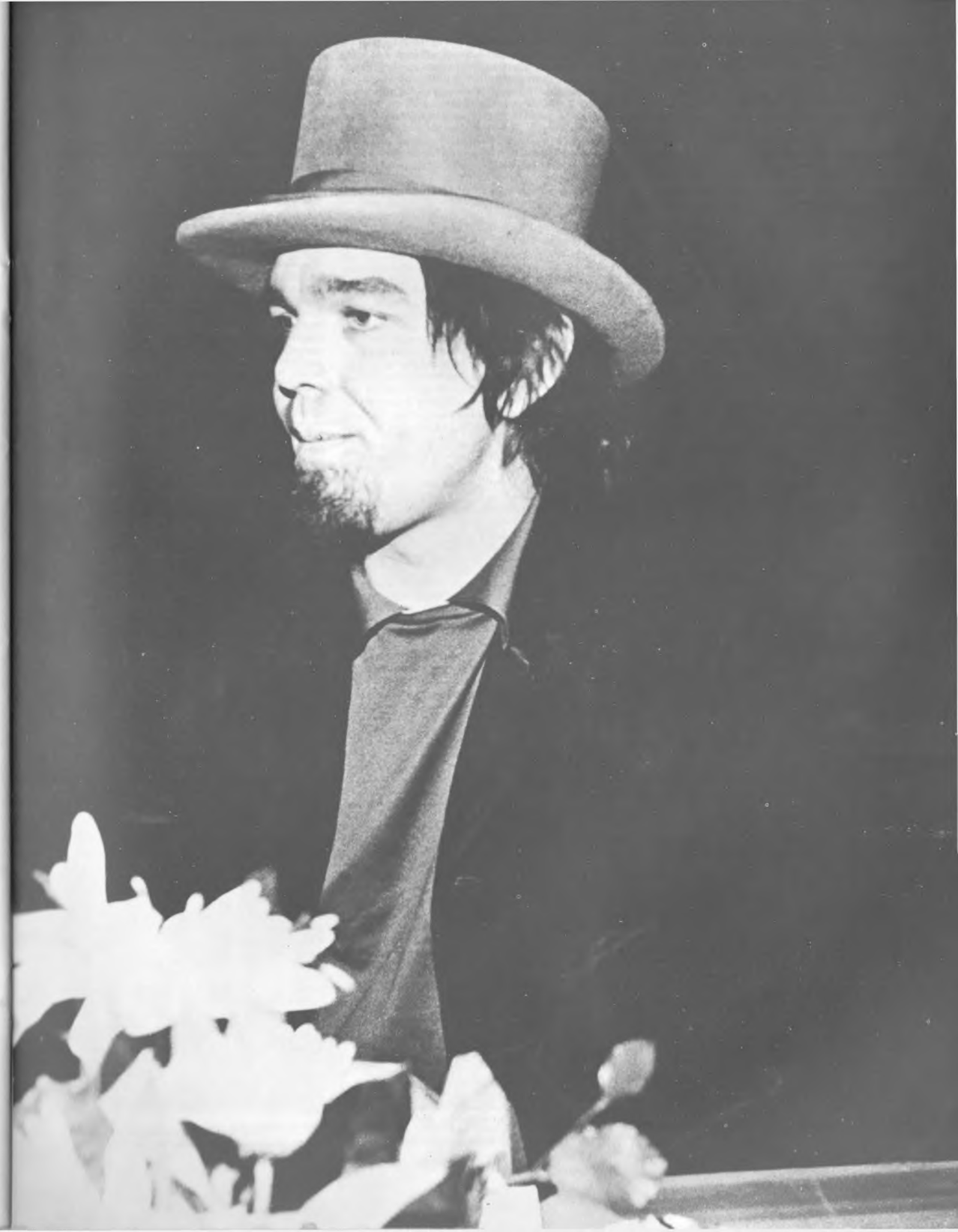
Our music is labeled as "progressive rock", but who among us has been more progressive that Beefheart ? We refer to ourselves as the "underground", but few can conceive of the subterranean depths in which Beefheart dwells. (In fact he has literally been kept a prisoner there). We think of our life-style as being contemporary, but the music of Beefheart ranges far beyond that; he is one of the truly visionary figures in American music. In many ways, however, Beefheart has been the victim of his vision, and he has been crucified in ways that John Lennon can only fantasize about.

Captain Beefheart was born in Glendale, California in 1941, under the assumed name of Don Van Vliet. The youthful Captain displayed an abundance of sensitivity and talent in the fine arts, so much so that by the age of thirteen he had won a scholarship to study sculpture in Europe. But his parents refused to let him go, informing him in typical parent fashion that all artists were queers. To discourage the impressionable lad, they packed up and moved to Lancaster, on the fringe of the California wasteland. It proved to be a strategically poor move, however, for it was there, in Lancaster High, that young Don struck up a friendship with Frank Zappa. This was a relationship that would prove to have a profound effect on the Captain's later career.

Zappa recalled the pattern of that teenage friendship. "Don and I used to get together after school and listen to records for three or four hours. We'd start off at my house, and then get something to eat and ride around in his old Oldsmobile looking for pussy - in Lancaster! Then we'd go to his house and raid his old man's bread truck and eat pineapple buns and listen to records until five in the morning". From all appearances this was nothing more than a harmless comradeship, but it was during this period that the seeds of Beefheart's musical aspirations, and the later collaborations of the two men, were planted.

Although it has been widely reported that Beefheart played briefly in high school with a black rhythm and blues outfit called the Omens, this was not exactly the case. The Captain related to me the actual story behind the story: "I bought an alto saxophone and went to rehearsal and just started playing. They told me to get out. They said that I wasn't playing, that I was just moving my fingers. In other words, they thought I was a little too weird for them". It wasn't until his post-high school days that he really became interested in music, but this is a fairly accurate indication of the mythology that has been built up around the amazing Captain.

A brief encounter with higher education (Antelope Valley College) terminated his association with formal art. "I realised that sculpture was too pointed", he says, and he began to turn increasingly to music as his chief creative outlet. His principal interests were authentic blues and progressive jazz. "I've always liked human noises", he reflected, "like animal noises and things like that, natural sounds. I got a more natural feeling out of say, country blues, field hollers, and things like that and progressive stuff. I was looking for something that extended rather than caging, you know what I mean?" It is not unusual, therefore, that his first Magic Band was rooted deeply in the Delta (as opposed to slick Chicago) blues style. Even at this early stage, Beefheart had a lucid vision of the kind of music he wanted to do, but his musicians at that point would have no part of it, and Beefheart found himself trapped in the forr. he had hoped to use as a launching pad. Nevertheless, the brand of raunchy blues rock that the Magic Band excelled at was



a vanguard form in the year of our lord 1964, and they attracted the eye of an A & M Records scout, and were soon thereafter signed to that label.

His venture with A & M was short and hardly sweet, a recurring pattern in the Beefheart career. His first single, "Diddy Wah Diddy" (the old Bo Diddley tune), was a Los Angeles breakout, but failed to sustain its success in other parts of the country. When he approached the company with tapes for an album, he was told by Jerry Moss that his approach was "too negative". It seems that the good Captain's image was not deemed suitable for a company headed by the decidedly wholesome Herb Alpert. A & M released another single, but by that time the Captain was long gone.

Embittered by this painful rejection, Beefheart sat out a year in self-imposed retirement. It took Bob Krasnow, then of Buddah Records, to lure the Captain out of exile, and he did so with a promise to release the "negative" A & M material. It must be remembered that Buddah, at that time, had the Lovin Spoonful and the Charlatans and were not distinguished as the monarch of the bubblegum empire. The first product of the Beefheart/Krasnow coalition was the album Safe as Milk (Buddah BDS 5001), released in 1965.

The Magic Band (as heard on that album) consisted of: Don Van Vliet (vocals and harp), Ryland Cooder (guitar), Alex Snouffer (guitar), Jerry Handley (bass) and John French (drums). The album payed obvious respects to Delta blues, but employed a broad range of diverse styles and effects. Ry Cooder was, and still is, one of the masters of bottleneck guitar, a talent he shows to full advantage on this album. His thick Delta texture is perfectly offset by the rock-based guitar of Snouffer, a wonderfully imaginative complement. The rhythmical line was carried by Snouffer, thus leaving drummer John French free to accent rather than merely occupying the bottom of the beat. But to my mind, the most important instrument in the band was the voice of Vliet himself. His vocals are an ever-changing descriptive force, and his lyrics, even then, a natural flow of image response. The music was a precise amalgam of musical influences, but was considerably more than the sum of its elements. Although they may start a song from within some easily recognizable framework, the course of that song is likely to see some startling progressions and changes. Beefheart is never satisfied to rest protected by form, and his music is an enchanting wellspring of innovation.

Safe as Milk opened up with "Sure 'Nuff 'N Yes I Do", an uptempo blues that featured Cooder's fine bottleneck technique. But it was Beefheart's lyrics ("I was born in the desert/Came on up from New Orleans/Came upon a tornado/Sunout in the sky/I went around all day/With the moon sticking in my eye") that told us that something very magical was being done to the blues riff. "Dropout Boogie" gave us an unprecedented example of the extreme plasticity of Beefheart's voice. Accompanied by a fuzz rhythm, his voice incredibly blended and complimented the guitar, until it seemed that he was a lyrical fuzz box himself. He has often said that he was not influenced by rock and roll ("Actually, I wouldn't say that I was innocent of it," he told me, "I have heard it, and I've shut off enough radios to not hear it".), but the song "I'm Glad" would seem to say otherwise. It's a syrupy rock number, complete with falsetto backing, and it so essentially captures what songs of that nature were about that only a person with fastifious insights into that music could have created it. The song made perfectly clear that rock (or any form, for that matter) offered few possibilities for a man of Beefheart's unique gifts, and it was only natural that he should grow in a very personal direction or no perceptible direction at all. People today still refuse to recognize that fact, and the refrain of "Plastic Factory" was prophetic of his whole relationship with the industry: "Plastic factory ain't no place for me/Bossman leave me be".

The hard amalgam of blues and rock, the distinctive use of the theramin, and the emergence of Beefheart himself, all made Safe as Milk a revolutionary album in the truest sense of the word. The harbinger's lot, however, is often a very suicidal one; and the album died almost immediately upon release. People who pass it by in the discount racks of this nation's supermarkets will possibly never know what they have missed. Perhaps the listening public has finally gotten to the point where they can begin to relate to what was going on in Safe as Milk, but subsequent events took Beefheart and his Magic Bands forever out and far beyond the dull mainstream of contemporary American music.

The departure of Ry Cooder (who refused, and still refuses, to tour) was the decisive factor in the breakup of the first Magic Band. Beefheart assembled a second Magic Band in Los Angeles and headed for England, where response to Safe as Milk had been considerably better. In the interim, some questionable dealings on the part of Bob Krasnow resulted in the release of a second Beefheart album. The album (allegedly recorded for two separate record companies) was titled Strictly Personal, and released on Blue Thumb, Krasnow's own fledgling label.

Held over from the first Magic Band were Jerry Handley and John French, but guitarists Alex St. Claire and Jeff Cotton were both new additions. But despite the holdovers, the sound of the new Magic Band was a cosmic departure from Safe as Milk. They were slowly beginning to overcome the senseless restrictions of conventional form, and their playing was refreshingly liberated and adventurous. The Delta still imposed itself (due in part to St. Claire's blues background), but eclecticism meant less and less as the band found themselves. The transitional process was not an easy one for these professional musicians but Beefheart was always there to help with the de-contamination process. "The way I did it was, I went note for note with them", the Captain recalled, "It was like pulling up a shirt-tail, you know, it was a really difficult thing". The effort was well worth it, however, for Strictly Personal was a monumental step toward the realization of the Beefh eart genius.

The centrefold was an incredibly bizarre photograph of the band, and made a direct reference to the music on the album. The black and white photo was a darkly magnetic portrait of the Magic Band in metallic masks and space helmets, galactic guides for a cosmic excursion. Given more room to work here than on Safe as Milk, the band began to assume a more cosmic outlook themselves; or at least this time around they didn't restrain Beefheart to quite the same degree. The guitars successfully broke the old lead/rhythm pattern and explored the possibilities of strongly disjointed relationships, fighting each other and at times themselves in a wonderfully nonsensical battle. But, as usual, it is the overpowering presence of the Captain that makes this record go. The band had advanced, but Beefheart was still far ahead of them egging them on and begging them to catch up. His lyrics and vocals both intensely reflected the release quality of the album, as is evidenced by the extreme urgency of his vocal on "Trust Us" ("You gotta trust us/Before you turn to dust"). He meant it.

Strictly Personal begins in much the same way as Safe as Milk, with a blues number ("Ah Feel Like Ahcid"), but vividly draws the line of distinction between the two albums. And by the time the voyage has ended, with the chaotic "Kandy Korn", any comparisons one might have been tempted to make have been utterly obliterated.

Yet despite the excellent music, it appears that before the album was released, Krasnow got his hands on the tapes and added a few touches of his own. Many parts of the album were phased and otherwise electronically reprocessed, a cheap device to try and capitalize on the Captain's supposed freakiness. The bare honesty of the original sessions was gone, and although, in the Captain's words, the music "shines through like a diamond in the mud", the damage was done. Krasnow's butchery and Beefheart's innovation added up to no sales and little recognition, and the Captain had been burned again.

To top things off, his second band quit in the middle of a European tour, and Beefheart was once more on his own. This was not an unusual occurence in the Beefheart scheme of things, and he explained it this way: "They went up to a certain point, and then when the money didn't keep coming they split. It's sure a shame, but I guess they got that damn ruler in there somewhere. That old golden rule". He had no alternative but to retire to Lancaster and try to regroup his forces.

Enter Frank Zappa. The two teenage chums ran into one another, somehow appropriately enough, at a Colonel Sanders chicken shop. Zappa had been doing well with his Mothers, and was in the process of laying the groundwork for Straight Records. Things being as they were, an agreement was reached and Beefheart was back for another go at it. "He told me that he would give me complete freedom, as far as freedom goes," Vliet recollected, "when another man tells me that he'll give me complete freedom, all I can think is that he's in a cage. But since he was in a cage, I thought maybe I could run around the outside and play a little bit". That "little bit" turned out to be Trout Mask Replica, a monster achievement and Beefheart's most representative work to date.

The Magic Band on Trout Mask was an entirely new assmblage, made up of artist friends of Vliet's, all non-musicians. The band was comprised of Vliet (bass clarinet, tenor sax, soprano sax, vocal), Zoot Horn Rollo (glass finger guitar, flute), Antennae Jimmy Semens (steel-appendage guitar), The Mascara Snake (bass clarinet, vocal), Rockette Morton (bass, narration) and Drumbo (percussion). Being non-musicians, Beefheart had to teach them all from scratch. "The thing is that I found out that I couldn't use anybody that was a musician", he says. "I tried to school them in sculpting, you see, by letting them school themselves as far as I could without going over into that form. In other words, they didn't leave the house for two years". As a result, this Magic Band gave the Captain the most empathetic and innocent support he's yet had.

The entire Trout Mask production (a double album) was begun and completed within an eight hour period, due largely to Straight's lack of finances. It was engineered by Dick Kunc, and they both turned in outstanding performances under the existing conditions. "Dick Kunc wasn't happy with the fact that we weren't given enough time", said Beefheart in reference to that session. "He did the majority of the producing and everything. I think that Frank was actually trying to stay out of my way, actually. The band played straight through on all the cuts in one night. It took them four hours to do the entire album. We didn't use overdubs or anything". In many ways this one-take performance was an asset, in that it gives us a clear, untampered picture of exactly what went down that historic night.

On Trout Mask, Beefheart severs all ties with narrow contemporary concepts of music. That people are still trying to categorize the Magic Band's music ("wasn't that an Ornette Coleman lick?") is beyond me. Even those who term the music "dada-rock" are hiding behind a classification, and totally miss the point. The band is actually playing (p-l-a-y-i-n-g) for once, a delightful practice that defies categorization. What seems like chaos is merely non-structure, what seems like no direction is no direction. The bass and drums are not relegated to simple beat-keeping apparatus, but are free to make their own distinctive contributions. The guitars construct, and then harshly bend and rupture, rhythms and progressions seemingly without design. The music works as a whole, yet each band member is allowed to express himself in a very individual manner. And because the Magic Band is not composed of professional musicians, there is always that marvelous factor of discovery involved.

Of the twenty-eight cuts on Trout Mask Replica, Beefheart's voice will invariably never be the same on any two (take your pick), leading one to suspect that he is rooted as much in cosmic vaudeville as the blues. His range is almost beyond human conception, and I still have the feeling that he has yet to really let loose (something that goes for the Magic Band as well). His lyrics, like the music, are beyond definition and not subject to earthly law: ("Pappy with the Khaki sweatband/Bowed goat potbellied barnyard/The old fart was smart/The old fart was smart/The old gold cloth madonna/Dancin' t' the fiddle 'n saw"). Words can be as powerful an instrument to be played as the guitar, and that is precisely the way in which Captain Beefheart uses them.

Zappa made good on his promise of complete freedom, and as a result, Trout Trout Mask Replica is an unparalleled work of musical art. Its importance reaches far beyond rock, and it is doubtful that as paramount an achievement has been equalled in any genre. But, in leaving the musical public so far behind, Beefheart has once again victimized himself; a full appreciation of Trout Mask will undoubtedly be a long time coming.

It appears, however, that Beefheart's troubles with the industry did not end with Trout Mask. He now claims that Straight (Frank Zappa) have promoted his album in an unethical manner. "I was told by Frank Zappa," he states, "that I would not be categorized with anybody else. I was told by Frank that I would have, if you want to call it, special treatment, that I would not be advertised or promoted with any of the other groups on the label. But somehow I guess he got hard-pressed for cash, and decided that he'd round me up and sell me as one of the animal crackers. I didn't like the idea of being labeled and put aside as just another freak". The fact does remain, though, that were it not for Zappa and Straight, Trout Mask Replica would probably not exist; and it is a non-statement of such magnitude that no promotional campaign could ever detract from its worth.

Talking to Van Vliet is not unlike taking a rainbow shower. He is a very honest and open man, with a contagious warmth and good humour that makes you feel immediately at ease. He talks in a very personal and unique way, and I sometimes found myself answering his queries in the affirmative, while at the same time thinking that I really had no idea what he was talking about. In listening to the tapes of our conversation, however, I realized the inherent simplicity of the man, and that I had actually understood the things he was saying all along.

His deep sensitivity was made readily apparent throughout our conversation. Apparently he has had this since his youth, and his life may be seen as the fight for an effective artistic outlet for these feelings. Sculpture was his original outlet, and strong sculptural traces can still be seen in his music. The way the instrumental aspect constantly moulds and shapes the rhythm, the way his voice is kneaded to fit each individual song and the tonally textured quality of his lyrics, are all suggestive of his early sculptural training.

In light of this sensitivity, it is easy to see how his music could have taken its base root in the blues. Authentic blues is perhaps the most human musical form in existence, and would be a logical vent for a humanist such as Beefheart. The problem was that he found himself trapped in this form. In the Safe as Milk period, blues was becoming a culturally acceptable and commercially viable product, and Beefheart had a way with the blues that literally reeked with dollar signs in the eyes of the industry. To allow him personal growth would be a potential liability, and it was deemed much easier (and much more profitable as well) to keep him in a place where he could be readily understood and manipulated. People seem to fear anything that challenges them to relate outside their limited sphere of reference, and the Captain was decidely moving away from anybody's sphere (though he is much more direct and inside than most people are willing to give him credit for).

An understandable outgrowth

Though this photograph decorates the sleeve of the French edition of 'Safe As Milk', it is in fact the Magic Band of the 'Strictly Personal' period.

of the Captain's sensitivity is his concern for nature and what man is so thoughtlessly doing to the earth mother. No trendy ecologist he, for his concern has been a lifelong occupation from the time he made his first sculpture of God's little creatures. It is evident in his music, in songs like "Wild Life" ("Wild life is a man's best friend . . .") and "Ant Man Bee" ("Now the bee takes his honey then he sets the flower free/But in Gods garden only/Man 'n the ants/They won't let each other be"). It is also evident in the course of normal (?) conversation. "Everybody has to start cleaning up their own garden", he remarked. "The thing is, is that if they could only feel that it's their own garden . . . and if it's themselves I guess it is their own garden. I really think that it's pointless, or maybe it's a point, to run out in front of a speeding car. You know, and expect not to be struck down". It is indicative of his good nature that he possesses the essential optimismthat man can and will take steps to correct the situation.

We got talking about speed, the pace of man. He believes that things are moving at a senseless and insensitive rate, that we aren't allowed the time or the means to really learn how to play. He brought up a rather distressing situation: "I have been noticing recently that there aren't any more kites, and there aren't any more jacks. Remember the jacks? They've all just disappeared from the market, all of those nonsensical things that somebody could do by themselves. I mean, I enjoy playing jacks myself. I have a couple of sets. What about cooties? That was a nice sculpture. I think that outdoes Warhol". Children seem to have a marvelous capacity for pure and innocent creation, and in many respects this is what Beefheart is aiming for.

Speed creates distortion, and it is not unusual that the situation here in the United States has reached the grotesque proportions that it has. The solution at this point becomes fairly obvious. "I think that they're going to have to get more kites", declared Van Vliet. "I think that immediately the kite-makers should be sought out, and I think that they should definitely start handing out kites. Perhaps kites should be handed out in school, in high school and college. If they would have a kite class I think that it would be a real help. We'd get them out in the fresh air. I think maybe they'd discover electricity". With all the overblown rhetoric and counter-rhetoric that we've suffered, Beefheart's solution is refreshingly simple and logical. Think about it.

Don Van Vliet is truly the twenty-first century renaissance man. Although his music tends to keep him occupied, his creative spirit literally bursts into many other artistic areas. He still sculpts, and has recently devoted much time to painting. His house in the San Fernando Valley (that outgrowth of Los Angeles that seems to exist only in the eyes of Ralph Williams and a few other car dealerships) acts as a receptacle for his literary endeavours, and is strewn with his prose and poetry (and five novels somewhere among them). Many publishers are reportedly very interested in his writings, so the chances look good that he will be available in hard cover and paperback very soon. It seems that there is no field that he cannot master if he puts his mind to it. And, like your proverbial iceberg, I think that the bulk of his genius still lies submerged, waiting for an effective outlet.

It is easy to see how a man with Beefheart's previous experience could be wary of business and industry dealings, and that it is essential for such a man to be in hands that he trusts and has confidence in. At long last Beefheart appears to have found those hands. They belong to his present manager, Grant Gibbs, of whom Beefheart says: "He's a very nice person. He has integrity". The feeling is mutual. Gibbs treats his client not like a client at all, but more as a close friend and advisor. The delicacy and protectiveness with which he handles Beefheart springs from a genuine concern for, and understanding of, the man's needs. His contractual and financial problems have been cleared up, and by the time you read this article, he should have signed a new contract with Warner Bros. Rumour has it that the Warners people have a tendency to regard Straight artists (whom they distribute) as little more than freaks, but this is apparently not the case with Beefheart. The Captain has every confidence in the Warners people, and feels that they will handle him in an appropriate manner. His first album for Warner Bros, Lick My Decals Off, Baby, is now in the works.

He is extremely anxious to get on the road and bring once again his music to the people. Offers have been pouring in from all parts of the globe, and it is expected that his first appearance will be at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium in the very near future.

When he does hit the road, he will have a slightly altered Magic Band with him. It will include Zoot Horn Rollo on guitar, Rockette Morton on bass, and Art Trip on drums. Trip was formerly a percussionist with Frank Zappa's now defunct Mothers (although Beefheart says, "I don't think he was ever with Frank, because I don't think Frank could have kept with him, frankly".)

The music of Zappa in no way relates to the non-linear Beefheart approach, so how did Art Trip make the necessary transition? "Well, I took an erector set, you know", the Captain told me. "I put the erector set on the floor and I proceeded to have him bend it, and then after he got through bending it and he got tired and his hands got sore, I said that's it. You see, Art Trip was in music college for eight years. And when he got out and found out that he was just cutting up cadavers, when he realized that he was just being an Igor for Frank Zappa, I guess it was quite a shock to him. To come from music college and realize that all they're doing is paying homage to people that aren't living. I'm interested in who's living". Van Vliet has, it seems, been able to infuse his Magic Band with this same vitality and life projection. He considers them to be his best Magic Band yet, and that's saying something.

All systems appear to be go in the career of Van Vliet. He recently married a girl named Jan, and while this is pure speculation, I think that she has had more than a little to do with his healthy optimism. But whatever the reason, Beefheart is out to make it his way this time, and when he sets his mind on something, you might as well consider it accomplished.

It appears that the public, as well, is now ready (or in the process of getting there) to receive the Captain and his friends in somewhat the proper perspective. I have the feeling that seeing Beefheart in person will tell you more about him than any record or any words that I could come up with. There will undoubtedly still be many who will view him in freaky terms (thinking that it's groovy because it's so far out), but this has always been the fate of men of vision. They are either crucified or camped out of existence. Those of us who treasure Beefheart because he is a warmly real human being are still in the minority, but at the very least I hope that he will be appreciated for the depth and range of his artistry.

I could never hope to put down on paper the intensity of this man's presence; the accuracy and humour of his insights can only be fully revealed through personal contact. For those who have long overlooked his recorded legacy, I can only say you would do well to start making up for lost time. Time will prove Don Van Vliet to be one of the most gifted artistes and remarkable figures that our culture has produced, Trout Mask Replica is already ample testimony to that. His vision, always clear, is finally being given its long deserved attention - he will no longer be forced to frequent the underground freak sideshow, and it's about time. Don said to me "If there is an end, then you've already lost", so instead of attempting to end this, I'll merely suggest that you find a kite and go out and begin things for yourself. It just might prove to be worth it.

Ben Edmonds.

TWO GRASSCUTTERS HIT LEBANESE CHARTS

I pinched that headline. I got it out of a Staffordshire local newspaper; but I'll explain its meaning later. You see, I'd been sitting here for about half an hour, absently twiddling my moustache, staring at the wall, trying to concentrate on writing about Medicine Head. I didn't seem to be making much headway - my mind just kept wandering off out of the window, and I found myself looking at the sky and trees moving in the wind. I know just what the matter was of course; I hadn't got the vaguest notion how to start the article, how to approach it, or anything - I suppose I felt that I should relax into a lyrical John Peel-in-Disc sort of style to suit the group, and I just couldn't do that.

Probably one of the reasons for my lack of word flow was that I wasn't hustled or hyped into it. No oily publicist came on the phone to enquire about my health, express pleasure in how the magazine was looking, promise a few adverts and then finally suggest that I might feel inclined to devote several pages to the praises of Medicine Head. Quite the reverse - obtaining much joy from the album, I decided to seek them out myself. And, having done so and talked with them at length, found that I had bitten off more than I could chew. They didn't trot out their lifelines like hardened professionals, stereotype answers didn't flow out of their mouths like Ford cars off the line; they talked of spheres wherein I had little working knowledge, and they weren't particularly after publicity.

But like me, they thought that most of the "pop business" was ludicrous. Like the way all John Peel's invention was being throttled by the sprawling clumsiness of CBS. Their second single (a "pulsating romper" called 'Coast to coast and shore to shore') apparently failed to reach most of Radio One's producers or DJs, but those it reached were able to read how Medicine Head's was "jolly out of doors music". (I wonder if CBS thought, "which group have we got that is nearest to Mungo Jerry?" - you see, 'Mungo Mania" was sweeping the nation when the single was released . . . or was it "Free Fever?" . . . or thereagain it might have been "Cream to reform? mania"). Anyway, CBS's handout made Medicine Head sound like a cross between Trini Lopez and a rainy saturday night with the Butlin's Redcoats. At the time of writing, the record doesn't seem to have reared its head in the bubbling-under charts yet. Nor for that matter has their LP.

The Medicine Head album has 14 tracks, lasts well over ¾ of an hour, is interesting, varied, unpretentious and highly pleasant to listen to or do anything else to. A potential seller, in fact. But the only advertisement I ever saw for it was a handwritten postcard in the window of One Stop Records. Whilst I'm on this train of thought, I might as well widen it to include all the Dandelion albums. Now, I've got no axe to grind for Dandelion, but it seems to me that CBS who control the advertising are giving them shoddy treatment, or possibly thoughtless treatment. If they consider it commercially

worthwhile to record the albums, why do they diminish their chance of selling them by their failure to promote them. If I had anything to do with Dandelion Records, I'm sure that the frustration would have swallowed me in a swamp of helpless misery long ago.

But that is by the way ... or maybe it isn't. Anyway, on with Medicine Head (who look as though they're going to be unfortunate enough to be the vehicle for my gripes).

Wait a minute, I haven't even told you who's in Medicine Head. Well, there are two halves (as you can see in the picture); the one with facial hair and glasses is John Fiddler, who does all the singing, plays guitar, bass drum and cymbal (a veritable hybrid style somewhere between or past Jesse Fuller and Don Partridge) and the other (who bears a fleeting resemblance to either Harpo Marx or Marc Bolan, or maybe neither) is Peter Hope-Evans, who plays jews harp and harmonica. The extent of his virtuosity has been questioned by no less an expert than Ron Watts of the National Blues Federation who reckons that Peter can't play the instrument. On the other hand, Kevin Coyne of Siren (of come back, unvaunted messengers of joyous striding music) reckons that Peter is a phenomenally good harp player ... and I agree with Kevin. He may lack a degree of variation, but then the instrument does have severe limitations - but he really rips it up (there's an antiquated cliche for you) in their "fast stuff" and makes it sound almost like an organ or Northumberland bagpipes on the slow numbers.

At this point, I should point out that their album doesn't show their whole scope. I'd prepared all this stuff in my mind about how their gentle words and music tumbled from the stage like leaves floating on some immensely deep, massively powerful river as waves of sound spread over and through an audience, delighted to receive this harmonious alternative to the wall of sound/volume syndrome. So what happened? They get up on stage and John starts talking about "that dear folk song writer, Carl Perkins". Carl Perkins? Then they lash into "Blue Suede Shoes", poking joyous waves of new life into that clapped out classic. And a little while later they do "Jenny Jenny", one of Little Richard's better numbers - and at this point my opinion of their music changes from the "really nice" category to the "really fantastic/too much man" category. Mind you, it's not the blowing-your-head-off-with-decibels technique that they're applying - they've only got 30 watt amps and it remains controlled, but it's a bit more powerful than the sound they used to get; until they could afford to acquire this dazzling array of 3 30 watt amps and a sparkling Transit wherein to transport it (purchased from the massive royalties they got from all their million sellers), they relied solely on a museum piece of a Vox 15 watt amp, which still never leaves their sides.

Administratively they handle themselves. They had trouble fixing themselves up with an honest agency, so in the end they didn't bother, though they're considering throwing their lot in with a manager any day now.

Recording wise, they are produced by John Peel and friends and would appear to be a producer's dream. Their album was laid down in straight stereo in under 6 hours, a good deal shorter than it takes your average supergroup to get one backing track completed. "If you'd been in the studio" said John ,"you would have seen why it went so well - the atmosphere was just so beautiful". "His guiding hand", their first single was recorded in a kitchen on a domestic tape recorder and cost 30/- to make. It was something of a flop, saleswise, although everyone knew that it cost 30/- even to the extent that people were coming up to John in the street saying things like "is it true that it only cost 30/-?" Mind you, Manfred Mann, Eric Clapton, Pete Townsend and numerous other high ranking superstars got on the phone to enquire about the record after it got played on the Peel/Drummond programmes (the only plays it got), so musically it did have some impetus somewhere. As I say, in England it became a freak product and meant nothing, but "it flew to No. 2 in the Lebanese charts". On the face of it, that sounds ridiculous - for a peaceful, loving song like that to be a smasheroo in a country which always seems to have troops leaping in and out. But it's true ... which accounts for the strange headline. A local reporter interviewed John for 3 hours and when the article appeared, it did so under that heading. The "grass cutters" refers to their employment in a Black Country cemetary, where they temporarily toiled at keeping the grass trim - "it was just so peaceful, with trees, and old well-carved tombstones with lovely verses and moss on them".

The grass cutting spell didn't last too long, and it was fortunate that they've been able to support themselves gig-wise since last November, when the Ministry of Social Security decided that no further weekly payments would be forthcoming, and terminated their depressing weekly visits - something to do with inadequate previous National Insurance stamping. By this time, people were more willing to accept them it seems, whereas before they were regarded with suspicion and scorn because "there seemed to be an emphasis on superduper groups and we hadn't got the requisite mounds of equipment".

When they were at school together, they became addicted to a certain brand of paragoric cough mixture - hence their name. No, I can't tell a lie - that is a complete fabrication - the name has no freaky connotations at all, and just occurred to them (so they say in a vague kind of way) when they were sawing up some timber to burn for warmth in their temporary residence in London's East End. They lived in Dalston for a while, while John's wife was at college in Hammersmith.

At one stage, their name was nearly changed. They threw a hexagram, which determined "Yellow Drum" as their new name, but for some reason their old name remained and the drum, which was appropriately yellow anyway, was decorated with a pastoral scene.

What else did we talk about? How they wrote "Coast to coast and shore to shore" the day before they recorded it; their appearances on Sound of the 70s and the Sunday Show, and their non-appearance on the Jimmy Young Show; religion and their beliefs in basic goodness rather than weekly congregations in a church; Jerry Lee Lewis, Frank Sinatra and the Ronnettes; how Peter had been overcome and lashed out either 50 or 70 bob (he couldn't remember which) on a non-functioning radiogram; Andy, their amazingly loyal ex-roadie who drove them through many a freezing night for no reward; the Dandelion launching trip to Holland; how they'd learnt to differentiate between recordable numbers and strictly live numbers - they agreed that recording "Ooee Baby" was a mistake; how the Cannock leather and stud rockers had become hard core followers after a few shots of Little Richard; and various other things.

Alright. Medicine Head are good. But being good isn't enough these days - to be popular, a band has got to be thrust onto newsprint the whole time. Believe me, these groups you see spread across the pop press every week, have all got publicists who ring up journalists, get them pissed, go and pester them, do anything to keep their clients' faces staring off the printed page. And the ratio between popularity and the qualities which make a band good is distorted, so that the public is really duped in a lot of cases.

I find it a continual drag that the genuine music makers like Medicine Head get pushed into oblivion by yards and yards of garbage on groups who couldn't hold a candle to them. It's all such a shame.

Pete

JELLY BREAD

Fairly recently I went to see John Mayall and his latest set of embryo superstars at the Dome in Brighton, where the show was opened by a group little more than a name to me; Jellybread. What I did know at the time was that they had an album on Blue Horizon, which had received the supreme accolade of Blues album of the month in Melody Maker, and that every interview that they had ever done to my knowledge had been dominated by one Pete Wingfield, pianist and main volcalist and apparently spokesman.

My initial impressions seemed to be correct when that gentleman introduced the group, and then played a piece called "Chairman Mao's Boogaloo", a piano tour de force. Then he sang "River's Invitation" and took a piano solo, by which time I was attempting to read Jon Mark's biography on the programme. But I was awoken from my eye straining by a really nice guitar break by the moustachioed Paul Butler, guitarist, who received a burst of enthusiastic applause, and from then on, came more into the picture until by the last number, which was Jimmy Witherspoon's "Evening", Paul was singing and taking the lead. I determined to take more interest in the band, and was pleased to learn that in their next promotion, Blue Horizon were planning to relaunch the album.

Jellybread are in fact a Brighton group by adoption as three of them were at the University of Sussex, and the other member, Chris Waters is a school teacher in Brighton. He is the drummer, and the one whom I have yet to mention is John Best, the bass player. I had initially asked Blue Horizon's Richard Vernon if I could talk to Paul Butler, but was unable to do this, because the only phone number R V had was, wait for it, that of Pete Wingfield. So Pete, Paul and John came to my humble penthouse where we talked for some time, with Pete accepting my invitation to play some sounds with alacrity, such that we were treated to several hours of the type of records which Liberty issue in their Urban/Rural/Rhythm'n'Blues series as selected by Bob Hite. The only interjection was by Paul, interested to hear "Deja Vu". As a result, many of the questions and answers became forgotten, when some particular memory chord was struck by a long forgotten riff. But this is what we talked about.

Jellybread was formed as a result of a notice board advertisement issued by John at the University, the resulting audition being very much as terrible and chaotic as auditions usually are, and Jellybread was born. They have always been managerless and intend to remain so as long as they are able to deal with their affairs effectively themselves. They are also without an agency at the moment, although Chrysalis are apparently interested in them, which could mean a lot of work, to judge by the success of their other artists.

The signing with Blue Horizon was not exactly straightforward. The band made their own album on the Liphook label (named after Pete Wingfield's hometown in the Hampshire delta), because "we thought it would be better than all those endless tapes which so often are probably never listened to". They took the tape to John Curd of Head Records, who thought that perhaps it wasn't sufficiently unique for his label, and signed Harvey Matusow's Jews Harp Band instead. But from there it got to Sandy Robertson of September Productions which, at that time, was physically very close to the Blue Horizon offices, and (Paul speaking) "we'd been on a gig and had just got back when this phone call came. I was too tired to talk,

John Best Paul Butler Chris Waters
Pete Wingfield

so I asked if this Mike Vernon would call back later. Fortunately he didn't mind". There was also a possibility that the band could have been with Liberty, via Tony McPhee, but they were signed with the Vernons before anything definite could be arranged.

We went into the past about previous bands that the individual members had been part of before Jellybread, and the following well known supergroups were mentioned:- The Clique, The Cossacks, Pete's Disciples (guess who), Groove Diggers, Shoul, Style Five, Chicago North Western System, Nazz (not the American band). Pete Wingfield has also played sessions with Memphis Slim, Graham Bond, Top Topham and John L. Watson who has made an album which Pete describes as "as important as the Isaac Hayes' 'Hot Buttered Soul' LP". "The reason I get the sessions and the others don't is simply because there are less pianists about. I find it very lucrative playing on sessions but musically most unrewarding, because I, like all the others in Jellybread, don't read music, so it can rarely attain a high standard of arrangement". One of Pete's earliest musical ventures was a journal entitled "Soul Beat" which boasted the first English article about Booker T and the MGs. Unfortunately Pete became a little confused and in the article mentioned that Rufus Thomas was one of the MGs. A competitor of "Soul Beat" was Mike Vernon's "R 'N' B Monthly", a coincidence which is perhaps not so strange when one considers that Vernon and Wingfield are undoubtedly two of the most knowledgeable people on blues in the country.

At the University, they are not treated by many as being serious students, and the kids-with-expensive-toys scene appeared to be the normal reaction. However, John had heard on the day of the interview that he had gained a good degreee, and Pete and Paul were awaiting their results; they certainly want to go into the music business with something behind them in case they go the way of the many.

Really they have done little of note in the sort of media which would bring them to the eyes of the British record buying public. (There was a Disco 2 complete with Tommy Vance mistake, and a Belgian TV program which also featured Sam Apple Pie), and like all bands in the summer, they are short of bookings at the moment, but hope that their revamped version of Huey Smith's "Rockin' Pneumonia" will get them a little more exposure. As an aging rocker, I enquired whether they were into the real r'n'r; Pete reckoned that they were, but more into coloured rock than the Elvis scene. This brought to mind a splendid story about the Wild Angels, who apparently had expressed some doubt as to the musical validity of the Soft Machine, who appeared to them to play numbers backwards. They then went on stage and introduced "My Babe" as a Johnny Kidd number.

Returning to Jellybread, it is their desire to get better gear when they have the necessary funds, and also to purchase an electric piano which Pete feels may give him more scope. On the subject of pianos found on gigs, they are mostly found to be out of tune, which necessitates Paul and John getting in tune with Pete, obviously not a Utopian situation. Sometimes there are really nice pianos, but Pete has learnt to recognise those which appear all too often flattering to deceive, starting off well, but "cracking up after ten minutes".

Influences on the band were interesting. Pete was into genuine soul, and at one point described Sam and Dave as the greatest band in the world, although perhaps not on record. Paul cited some modern jazz as what he listened to like Wes Montgomery, but also mentioned Duane Allman, Mike Bloomfield, BB King, Albert Collins, Jeff Beck and George Benson, while endearing himself to me by expressing his distaste for the free form guitar thing on Chicago's album. Paul and I must have watched many things in the same audience, for we talked at some length about seeing the Stones at the Crawdaddy, and the record Sonny Boy Williamson made with the Yardbirds, when they were other than a joke. John has no records to speak of, and won't admit to being influenced by anyone.

The next big project is to write some songs for the next album, which hopefully won't have such an uninspired sleeve and a less enigmatic sleeve note. Admittedly it is difficult to capsulate their music, but for me they go into good things, particularly in a live environment. They're not a band with screaming guitar solos, or unnecessary gimmicks, and their material, competently played and interesting, speaks for them best. The fact that they are extremely articulate must be an advantage and their extra-musical qualifications will always be an advantage if they fall into the bad times, which come so easily. Go and see them - they're honest.

John

COUNTRY JOE AND THE FISH

cont from page 30

BD: Well, can I ask a couple of questions about music? It interests me that what's being played - and what you guys play - is still being called rock and roll.

JM: We used to shun the word rock-and-roll which is why our first album is called Electric Music for the Mind and Body. You know, our business cards say "Electric Music." Huh? We try to change the term, but it's still rock and roll.

IS: Do you think that rock and roll bands basically are communicating the same message?

JM: Yeah. They all are. Some of them are into different trips but —

IS: Could you essentialize that message in any way?

JM: Yeah. It's just an experience. You can experience the music. We will have an experience with you. It will be an honest experience. It's a non-verbal experience. It has to be an honest experience. We enjoy making the music, you enjoy listening to it. It's as simple as that.

BM: I think all music is to get somebody together.

IS: Well, in a way, could you say the message was like "Dig Yourself"? Or dig the experience?

BM: Maybe to get an individual together with himself.

JM: We don't know how to dig ourselves, though. Apparently what we know how to do is get together in large crowds and dig somebody else doing something on the stage. We know how to do that.

BD: Can you talk about what was behind all these vacillations we keep hearing — the group is falling, it's gonna split up . . . Joe's coming, Joe's going, all that?

JM: At that time I was acting as the leader of the group and as a result of the way I was leading, or as a result of the times or something, I became incredibly alienated from the group and all communication broke down as far as I was concerned and I felt like I was incredibly fucked over by the band and the band wanted to do whatever it was that it wanted to do in the way that it wanted to do it and the time that it wanted to do it and it wanted to have me fix it up. I was responsible for —

IS: You had to pick up all the pieces.

JM: I was responsible for seeing that the performances were pretty good, the record was made, the arrangements were okay, that we got to gigs on time, that everything happened; new ideas were done, that we rehearsed. At the same time, nobody wanted to rehearse, nobody wanted to work up new ideas, nobody wanted to be at the gigs on time, everybody was stoned all the time; it was an incredible tuning problem. Barry used to play out of tune all the time. Bruce used to play out of tune. We played two phenomenal gigs, one at the Cafe Au Go Go, one set where we played the entire set out of tune and one set at Boston we played the whole set out of tune.

IS: But you're grooving with each other much more now, as compared to that period.

JM: Well, at that time I almost went crazy, as close as I've ever been to going crazy. My world became very solid and rigid and I became very paranoid, very withdrawn and I went through incredible paranoia changes. About a month or so after we came back I started going to a psychiatrist, which I'm still doing and was able to return from that place — wherever it was that I was at — and everything loosened up, and through the course of time, while that was happening, I got back with the group again. I still think that the way we relate to each other as people is incredibly destructive.

IS: Well, in musical terms where do you think you're going?

BM: The songs that seem to have the best beat and the most enthusiasm are the songs that are most likely to be banned. Like to me, Fixin' To Die was the logical single off the last album. Everybody knows that we'd never get that side played. Because it had the most to offer musically and in spirit. Toe-tapping value.

JM: Barry wants us to go on TV. Wants us to go on the Ed Sullivan Show.

IS: Does Ed Sullivan want you to go on the Ed Sullivan Show?

JM: Supposedly. Yeah. The thing is, we couldn't do any political stuff or drug stuff.

IS: Or four letter word stuff.

JM: No. We're not allowed to do anything.

BM: But they'd buy our records. And then they'd hear it. I want to sell those records. I think what's on those records is important. And I think if we go on TV and play some love songs, maybe it's not so bad. If they buy the records as a result.

JM: I can't get excited about it at all. Ed Sullivan is a nothing. I can see where you could go on there and you could do your thing and that would happen but —

BM: I think there's a way to cut through the shit and communicate what you have to say.

JM: Even if we could go on there and sing whatever we wanted to, I wouldn't get excited about it.

BD: I remember when I first heard the "Fixin' To Die Rag" — and I thought it was such a fantastic song, I mean I think it may really be the definitive song of this war. On the other hand I find that I can't sing it. It scares the hell out of me.

JM: It scares you? I remember when we went into Kezar Stadium on the march playing that song — I felt like I was part of some surrealistic dream, a Fellini film or a — We were riding along in this truck. The band was playing. It was like a misty kind of rain. It was early in the morning. The streets were lined with people hanging out of windows and everything. I was just stoned out of my head on LSD, everything was kind of like vibrating and I was looking around and you could see soldiers and people sneering and you see pictures of napalmed children and signs saying "End the War" and we were playing (sings a few bars) this joyous incredible music and people were dancing all around the truck just dancing and throwing flowers up in the air and everything and we were singing, "Whoopee, we're all gonna die." And it was like we were sort of heading off to these beautiful pastoral gas chambers, we were all going to parade ourselves into these gas chambers and then they were gonna wipe us out. I guess, if you gotta go — I can dig it. I can dig that "Whoopee we're gonna die." I mean, if you gotta go, you might as well go out dancing and singing.

BM: It's a pessimistic song.

JM: I don't think it is. I think it's an incredible morale builder.

IS: It's very cynical, very bitter.

BM: Yeah that's what I meant. Bitter. Rather than pessimistic.

JM: Bitter? It's a blasphemous song.

BD: It is.

JM: It smashes through the piety of the Communist Party, the self-righteousness of the radical left who sat around for thirty years spouting bullshit at each other. You laugh at the war and you laugh at yourself and you laugh at the left wing at the same time. I mean something's very attractive about that song. Something's very attractive about drugs, too. Something's very attractive about — rock and roll. There's some kind of insanity. It's an insane song. It's really insane.

BUDGET ALBUMS

One of the things that more than any has devalued the field of budget records is that the material which is supposed to tempt you, costing from 12/6 to £1, is usually such utter crap that if you paid what they want for it you'd be conned. Only a very few budget albums (apart from samplers which are something else again), have ever interested me enough to justify more than the usual cursory glance, and I suppose these were generally on that unlikely label for quality music, Pye, and came out on Golden Guinea and then eventually Marble Arch. When they reached the latter echelon, they became remarkable value. Had anyone bothered to advertise "Safe as Milk" (still the Captain's best album, I reckon), or the two volumes of "The Best of the Lovin' Spoonful" (both total classics), I'm sure they would have hit the album charts. But I expect Pye were pushing the Chipping Sodbury Eunuch's Tiddleywinks team singing "On Winks of Song" or some other unsuspecting bunch of zero talent performers, so many failed to appreciate that just for a change you could get more than your money's worth. Marble Arch to their credit also hustled out Donovan and Kinks albums which were also worthy of purchase, but still most of the stuff was junk. Like I remember a Cliff Bennett album coming out which I read had been specially recorded for Music for Pleasure. That roughly equates to turning up on your wedding night with only one contraceptive. It's as if the only reason your records hadn't sold was because they were too expensive.

So apart from some novelty items like George Formby which were good for Northern humour freaks, there wasn't much in the budget catalogues. Once we were promised a Beatles reissue in MFP, but there's a fat chance of anything worth what it costs coming out of those once hallowed portals these days.

Then sometime last year, Decca floated a "World of" series, since blatantly copied by Marble Arch on a Donovan album. You had to beat your way through fields of Val Doonicans, Bachelors, Kathy Kirbys, and that great rock'n'roll spoons player Monty Mantovani. But suddenly you espied a very fine album called "World of John Mayall". In some ways the same sort of thing as the "Looking Back" album, with a selection from the several Decca albums he made. To be recommended this one, unless of course you happen to be already on to Mayall, in which case it's a complete waste of money, as you'll have it all, and won't want or need reserve copies.

And there are some goodies on the "World of Hits" albums. I was impressed enough to buy these, in order to gain things like "Gloria" by Them, "I can't let Maggie go" by the Honeybus, "Tobacco Road" by the Teens in full very good stereo. At 19/11, it's worth replacing some of your battered singles.

The above was just about the sum total of what was worth getting or even considering. There were other budget labels like the Liberty/UA offshoot, Sunset, but I believe that there were complaints about cheap releases of albums still selling at full price in Australia, so the only product was deletions, generally bad ones at that. Then at Christmas we told you about those hairy sleeves which Track had produced for their Backtrack series. That of course was shelved due to the disagreement about the art work, but hope returned when Polydor really achieved a first with announcements about their new price structures. Briefly this was that the ones which would sell anyway, perhaps Crosby, Stills etc. Doors, Aretha, should be 42/6 or more if necessary, while the less well known or more fringe type material like the David Peels of this world should be available at 29/10. A rational approach at last, but still more so with their new budget series, called 99, because they cost 99 new pence, or in English, 19/10 or 11.

It's all old stuff as far as we're concerned, but it's also the sort of old stuff that we've worn our with constant playing. Let's think about the Backtrack albums first. There are three which have Hendrix on one side and the Who on the other. No need to say more, because you just have to think of "Run Run Run", "Boris the Spider", or "Stone Free" and you can't be without them.

Track's two premier acts are splurged about two of the other albums as well, in company with the Fairport's "If I had a ribbon bow", Thunderclap's "Something in the air", Marsha, Eire Apparent (whatever happened etc), Arthur Brown, and John's Children. All excellent value.

There is a certain joy in having the whole set of the Backtrack series, because they have a rather beautiful sleeve design, with the same picture in each case, picked out in different colours. It would be pointless not to mention the fact that the sleeve shows, according to a Track spokesman, "a very small boy smoking a very large joint". Perhaps it is impertinent of us to enquire of whoever approved these sleeves at Polydor whether they consider dope less offensive than hair. But really the albums are for listeneing to, not looking at, and we mustn't be hard on a company who puts out a budget Buffalo Springfield album, must we? Perhaps the group furthest ahead of its time in the history of rock. Constituents, (as if you didn't know), the meaningful bits of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young and Poco. Material, such magnificence as that found in "For what it's worth" and "Expecting to fly". Genius, and a good compilation by whoever it was.

Also, several exceptionally good soul albums like a Joe Tex with better tracks than his Greatest Hits album, such as "You better believe it baby". Like a Percy Sledge with all the good ones he ever did and is ever likely to do, "When a man loves a woman", "Out of Left Field", you know them. A pretty fair Otis, ditto Aretha, Doris Troy with her two classics, "Just one look" and "Whatcha going to do about it". A complete reissue of "Doin' our thing" by Booker T, and the same with Ben E King's Greatest Hits ("How can I forget", "Stand by me"). And a final goody, "The Best of Julie Driscoll, Brian Auger and the Trinity" containing stereos of "This wheel's on fire" and "Road to Cairo". I'd have expected this to be full price, but I'm not complaining.

I seriously doubt whether more famous hits/classics have ever been released on one day in the history of records. A prolonged round of applause for Track, Atlantic and Polydor, who tried to ruin it with a Jimmy Young LP in the same series, but couldn't.

A smaller but still warm round of applause to Warner Reprise whose Valiant label has also been launched recently.

What at first sight appears to be material as good as Polydor's, is in fact in many cases a ferret in vole's clothing. For example, a Bill Haley album so weak as to be embarrassing, and a most uninspired Duane Eddy.

But what is good is very good. The first time release in Britain of "Fats is Back", one of Mr. Domino's best ever, including amongst its cast the well known Larry Knechtel, piano man to Simon and Garfunkel. It is a little strange to have another pianist on a Domino record, isn't it, but it doesn't matter who's playing it. Treat yourself to a touch of "Lovely Rita" or "Lady Madonna" and you'll see what I mean. Then there's the fabulous Everly Bros. I hope the man who spelt their name correctly on the front of the sleeve and incorrectly on the back is having his genitals removed by a voracious warthog, because that's rather less than he deserves. It seems that if it's a budget album, noone will worry too much about little faults like bad pressing, toilet paper sleeves containing incorrect information and the rest. I mean, you're only paying a pound. You don't expect a real record for only a pound, do you?

But the record is good enough to transcend the man's ineptitude. Included are "Gone Gone Gone" and "The Ferris Wheel" and those two alone are worth at least half a sheet each without the other good tracks like "Donna Donna" and "Ain't that lovin' you baby". Really worthwhile.

It is with some regret that I can register the fact that few if any of you will have ever heard of Tony Williams. That is a shame for Tony was lead singer through the great days of a great group, The Platters, who for one reason and another vanished into criminal obscurity about 1960, and have never really made it since. It has apparently never occurred to anyone in the Philip's emporium that the Platters sold quite a few million records a few years back, and that a Mercury re-issue of their great hits would make some sort of profit. But then they don't even verify the information on their full price album sleeves, so I suppose we mustn't ask too much.

But Valiant have procured some excellent post Platters versions of golden greats such as "Only You", "The Great Pretender" and "My Prayer", and they sound much better than my twelve year old sleeveless EPs. The lack of crackle is pleasant, although to have the originals out again would be better. Until then Tony Williams will do very well, and nostalgic memories of the film of "Rock Around the Clock" where Tony sang notes like H, I and J to the amazement of all, flood back.

Now this is the start. EMI, what about "Best of the Beach Boys Vols 1 and 2" in a double album for 39/11. Pye have just done that with the Kinks again, so why not? What about the full American double of "Freak Out" by the Mothers. What about some Stones, some Beatles, some "Elvis Golden Records"? If you buy these budget lines, to the detriment of the expensive stuff, it is likely that more companies will follow Polydor's excellent example and we'll all be a lot better off.

The only drawback is that second hand shops are destined to be packed with vast numbers of old Who singles, and dusty battered copies of "When a man loves a woman" and "I say a little prayer" by Aretha. But that's a small price to pay.

John

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