

Back on the Trail

Sounds - 30 June 1973



HAWKWIND are touring again. Again? Back on the trail of halls in this little island Empire of ours, still the best-known of the "underground" bands, which came out of the long-defunct hippy community, though, as we could tell you, there are still odd outposts of resistance.

But that's as maybe: our heroes have dispersed from the Communications Centre in the Grove, although when in London it draws them back like a magnet. Dave Brock lives like a farmer in Devon and Simon King is somewhat snootily placed in Kensington. This is the tale of an expedition from London to Guildford for the opening night of the tour, not to be sure a showbiz opening night, but still a pleasant reunion and a chance to check out whether this here underground still turns out to support the oldest assassins you're likely to find in the biz.

It starts out at the London offices of United Artists, Hawkwind's record company. Simon is chatting to a Welshman who misspells his name, and the time is around 5.30. Late again (me, that is). I'm informed that there is a cab outside awaiting Simon's instructions. Very well, out in the car then. The cab turns out to be a Ford Escort driven by a powerful looking blonde lady, who hustles the diminutive vehicle out through the rush-hour traffic and up to the Marylebone Road.

Simon says that here's a revamped light show in use for the tour, designed by John Perrin and operated by John Smeaton alias Liquid Len, and John Lee. Too many Johns, very confusing. The effect of the new lights is to throw large shadows of the group on to the backcloth, they are stage footlights and side lighting. The strobes have been cut down in importance; strategically used they are effective but overused merely become a strain on the eyes.

What about the Wembley gig? Was the set roughly the same as that? "Up there we had a bit of jam with some of the old numbers which we went into. Last night (a pre-tour warm-up in the same hall as tonight) we did about a third of the Space Opera, a couple of the old numbers and three or four new ones. The new ones are different in the way that they're getting away from that rather monotonous sort of rhythm, you know (demonstrated Hawkwind's monotonous rhythm on a phantom kit). There's more varied rhythms and tempo changes now. I think we've got more confidence now, all of us. Before I don't think we had had that confidence, so we stuck to the same thing. Now we're getting into jams on stage. We're a lot more relaxed"

At this point we hove in view of the celebrated Westway, under whose shadow most of us live or have lived at one time or another. We both agree that it's an abortion as me slide under the Harrow Road underpass. "But there's one good thing about it, it does give you somewhere to play near Portobello Road." Simon reckoned, referring to the Westway Theatre, a thriving concern holding itself up, like the thin man's trousers, by will power. There had also been another enterprising gig hosted by this unnatural ramp of elevated concrete flying across the coves of the not-so-reputable burghers of Wests Ten and Eleven, in the natural amphitheatre populated most of the year by the gypsies and formed by the circling roads of the White City interchange.

Safely arrived at Great Western Road, where Hawkwind's office is located in a building near the canal which inevitably must receive a compulsory purchase order in the next year or two we transfer to another slightly better-appointed motor, which is all to the good as our numbers have swelled to five, soon to be six when we pick up Douglas's wife Ellie at their house in Acton. Now normally we ignore managers for public view, but really Douglas is quite cuddly and he seems, by dint of long service, to be a part of the Hawkwind travelling showband, so we really cannot ignore his presence in the car.

He it is who explains that Bob Calvert has once again retired from the band, having hospitalised himself, recognising the onset of the demon within and withdrawing from public view to cool out. It was during the last British tour that he started to get too high an adrenaline level : and at the time of the Wembley Party he was observed capering demonically in black gear with a sword and Olympic torch which failed to light. "He was just going over the top then, but he recognised it in time which is nice. But that's when he's at his most amusing," says Doug.

Another withdrawal is Dik Mik : they seem to think he's left. But nobody quite knows where he is or what he's doing apart from taking pictures of people instead of playing for them. One positive result of Calvert's presence in the material world has been the realisation of the first part of the Captain Lockheed project, which like the Space Opera, was announced long before they had thought of ways and means of implementing it. But soon you will be able to buy Captain Lockheed's "Ejection" single. "I don't know what's going to happen to that thing now," says Simon. "We'd done some really nice things. It'll probably be shelved for the time being. But we had the 'Space Opera' planned a long time before we did it."

By now we are howling through the lush green country near Guildford. Simon has told us that Dave used to cycle down here to see Eric Clapton many years ago (or so Dave had told him); we have heard why Simon does not try to ignite his cymbals any more (covered the cymbal with lighter fuel and then gave it a flick with the lighter; packed it up because it ignited his arm instead): discussed the possibility of recording Hawkwind in quadraphonic, not so far-fetched as there's a new studio being built in Battersea with quad facilities, apparently something to do with that far-seeing gent Pete Townshend; Doug has informed us that he's starting a magazine to answer the queries and push out information - it will be its Barney Bubbles' idea.

"There's nothing cosmic about me," declares Simon, as Douglas gibbers bout the public image. - "All I'm interested in is racing and football. Well, it's true, I don't know what people are talking about when they come up to me at gigs and ask me about this and that. Now if they came up and asked me about the 2.30 at Ascot I could give them the rundown," says Dave, who has had two winners today. We agree, though, that living In tile country would be impossible, laziness, you see. Hard enough to get out to Holland Park and dig the peacocks (no relation).

We arrive in Guildford, where the support group (led by one of Hawkwind's old roadies. Bruce - all in the family, you see are playing a pleasing set which sounds like oops! the Grateful Dead already?). Hawkwinders drift in backstage. Nik (greeted by Simon with a "Hello you great pouf") and Michael Moorcock, composer of some of the lyrics and the creator of the inimitable Jerry Cornelius. Stacia. Many roadies whose names I don't know.

The gig : yes. Just as Simon said. Gradually the band are moving out of that continuous throb, the pace changes once in a while. There are the occasional ragged moments, but they go unnoticed by a capacity, crowd (of 1200) who dance wildly in the aisles.

The lights are good, Stacia dances admirably, the white-suited Moorcock, a feathered hat jauntily over his brow, reads spoken links with a certain menace : he is not Jerry Cornelius yet, but by the end of the tour, who knows? Who knows anything about this tour, indeed, other than that Hawkwind are playing again?

MARTIN HAYMAN