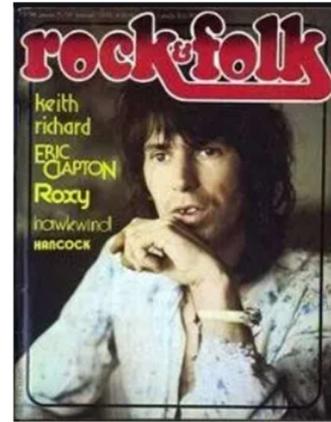


Hawkwind in Paris

Translated by Starfarer

I would never have believed that in 1974 I would encounter a totally original band, that is to say, so fragmentary in its influences that I balk at delivering a boring Critical / Rhetorical jigsaw puzzle analysis of these influences. And yet, I have good reason to dwell on this aspect of Hawkwind. Listening to "Hot Rocks" by the Stones (to the point of sandblasting my auditory canals) was the trigger. By chance, "2000 Light Years From Home" tuned me in to the special vibe of Hawkwind. The same guitar, fuzzy and propulsive, long accentuated drum rolls, rising and falling violins - this is the essence of Hawkwind...



Mad rockers from the psychedelic war, eternally In Search Of Space, they unloaded their twelve tons of equipment in Paris on Saturday 23rd November. At the scene of an Olympia packed out after their last visit, the legend of the Space Ritual for Heavy Metal Kids had become reality once more. And the Hawkwind fans, observers report, signed up for the [drug] trip. Stacia dispelled an old cliché: "It was a spiritual thing, at one time...we saw it as a holy sacrament! I won't say any more with all these policemen around. They'll be distraught not to hear the sordid details of our drug habits!"

Stacia. The legend tells that the Space Desperadoes found her on Uranus, not having returned to Earth due to an epic combat with the blind warriors of the Ice Fortress. A myth which nobody would be brave enough to dispute. At times during the evening, contemplating the cosmos, I heaved a great sigh and wonder if she has not made the group famous all by herself, if these trendy kids who crowd the venues but do not buy a single one of the group's records haven't come solely on her account. In fact, I even wondered whether she wasn't Hawkwind's equivalent of Alice's snake, bringing the band back to a time when the show was the centrepiece, a vital but loose freak-out, warped by the use of stroboscopes frying eyeballs and brains. Those were the days, my young friends.... But: how many of the fans will lose it on account of their overindulgences, how many will run home to take refuge with (erk!) Pink Floyd? And yet, the music of the Hawks is much more varied, relevant, an other-worldly metallic adventure. I am very tempted to label this as a touch of heavy metal, with the guitar and other things.... But... hold on to your hats, here they are!

Del Dettmar sits on his own in front of a jumble of wildly wheezing mellotrons, and Baron Brock chimes in with his Les Paul held tightly against the Death's Head which adorns his T-shirt. These two alone, on the right of the stage, make the Olympia resound, transforming it into a spaceport which they will energise before our eyes. And the others, soaking up the applause, Lemmy The Lurch with his enormous bass, champing at the bit, Nik Turner, a giant bearded Satyr with his lyrical saxophone. At the front of the stage, to acclaim not seen since Amon Duul 2 in 1969, are two fluorescent blue drumkits, rocket motors which lift off into 'Brainstorm'. Nik Turner does a perfect impression of Mick Jagger: "Brainstorm, here I go..." followed by manic laughter.

The band fire up, they quest outward, but their music does not yet paint the colours we were expecting to see. Brock himself slips during '[Psychedelic] Warlords' (from their last album) and Stacia comes over to steady him, her tight satin trousers riding up to affirm that it is her ankle and not her knee that sports a tattoo of a butterfly... Looking at her, she does not dance, mime, pose: but there, in the galactic / astral plane, beyond Altair 2, she is transmuted into a pagan Goddess, the only one capable of encouraging the rest of the band to carry on, and on and on. They are playing well now and there is also the light show, pretty well whacked out, illuminating it all. Hawkwind is a precious surreal experience, an entire dream world which evoked my black years in the prison of high school and the unconnected characters on the Burroughs computer screens. "In case of Sonic Attack, do not panic! You can do nothing...Statistics prove that nine people out of ten have been caught having sex.*** Do not panic. Think only of yourself. You cannot escape!" It was this that pulled all the threads together - I'll be damned if anyone was laughing now! It's

rather like when they disconnected the computer in "2001: A Space Odyssey" except, in place of playing "By The Light Of The Moon", Hawkwind carve their sound into lifting (to their total joy) 2,500 wide-eyed kids, heads full of colour and sound, to new energy levels. This is clearly the effect of the music itself, not acid or other mummeries.

Hawkwind, when tight, can sometimes give the illusion of being a wall of sound. In fact, this is subjective. En masse, no one instrument stands out clearly - they all play in the same groove together. So a Gong fan might pick out the sax, whereas the next person would listen closely to the guitar. Their music should open the doors of perception to everyone who hasn't lost their wits...

Close-up: at one point, all the amplification had blown out completely. No-one batted an eyelid. The two drummers continued "You'd Better Believe It", developing the theme, battering their skins like astronauts launched into the empty void. There was not a second of silence. This incident was a microcosm of the whole, and sure enough, even better than one of those fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants solos, because everyone joined in by clapping in time.

Zoom: one theory is that the seven musicians are a bit comic-book in a hippie / ecology / tripping kind of way. There is nothing more wildly atavistic and crass than believing in Orgone Accumulators, a theory which led to Wilhelm Reich completing his researches from a psychiatric institution, and what's more, suffering a bad case of electroshock therapy. At one point the light show rehashes a Reader's Digest-type of environmental diagram. You start off with a tree, and progress by stages to the Metropolis of Superman, a somewhat silly futuristic city with its' little space vessels and prison-like edifices. It stops there. With an enormous effort, the music turns through 180 degrees and the city cracks and crumbles, returning to the tree. And we get going again... I got totally into it; they always play in the same groove, yes indeed. But it all changes constantly. Here, Lemmy lifts off all by himself, there Brock shakes the foundations of empires, and that sax is a link to New Orleans Jazz back on Planet Earth. What a vehicle! This is what turns cafe waiters into decadents. This is Human music, evolving out of great spoken word pieces ("Do Not Panic"), to raise you up out of your armchair, to participate in every kind of debauched and chaotic happening - this is everything we need on a rainy Saturday night in Paris...

Just as good are their records. For those who even now cannot wait for their return, the high point must be '[Doremi Fasol] Latido', as well as 'Space Ritual', which renders the atmosphere of a concert well, and 'In Search Of Space', which, via Dave Anderson, makes the connection to classic period Amon Duul. If you see it the way I do, you'll know that these albums in which you really lose yourself are practically indispensable.

Tonight, they gave us everything: Silver Machine, Master of the Universe, Paradox. There was of course an explosive standing ovation, with the whole place on its feet, and Nik, bearded like a Greek Faun, howling "Dance! Or Simon won't play!" And Stacia said "thanks" in response to the enormous hysteria of almost three thousand people going mad for her. The only letdown was that they didn't play for longer than two hours, when they are known to have soared for twice as long on wings of falcons. And similarly, I was told about when in London, for lack of space, a thousand Heads and Chicks could not get into the Brixton Sundown, the roadies brought a stack of amplifiers out into the car park, so the less fortunate could still hear the gig. What else would you expect?! This is, to my mind, a "people's band", musicians who will never let their fans down.

Alas, in Paris, city of small profits, they don't play for more than two hours. Then, like Mireille M. after Black Sabbath, it was Julien Clerc to whom the Lords of Space had to give way. (And seeing the losers who made up the queue to see what's-his-name, one wanted to cry. Yeah, it was good to be back in France.) But the last word goes to the Titans of the Cosmos: "Welcome to the Self- Police Parade".

-Philippe Manoeuvre