

Wind Power Sounds - 6 November 1982

THE WAY WE WERE...

KEN KESEY, author of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes A great Notion*, was also, in his heyday, the Zorro of the love generation.

With a busload of young people in a state of foaming chemical derangement and a year's supply of Day-Glo aerosol spray paints, he set out to forge a paisley trail across the American interior, pausing only to voice some cryptic Zen utterance that would magically resolve the absurdities and contradictions of the psychedelic left in a phrase of perfect unintelligibility.

Back in 1971, it was my contention that Ken Kesey and the members of Hawkwind were the persons most ideally suited to take over the reins of global power.

One of Kesey's most poignant theories was that the human race could be loosely divided into two major categories: those of us that were 'On The Bus', and those of us that were 'Off The Bus'.

Of course, it later turned out that a great many of us had actually been under the Bus, but then you never think of these things at the time...

MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE

THE WORLD is on the brink of war and things are tough all over. Our national leaders all have congenital syphilis and John Lennon bought the farm. Quite frankly, civilisation has been going downhill since the Romans.

But that's no reason why vicious crypto-fascists should be permitted to manhandle our cultural giants. Just because senior officials of Milan's Banco Ambrosiano keep going out of the window, that's no reason for manners to go out of the window too!

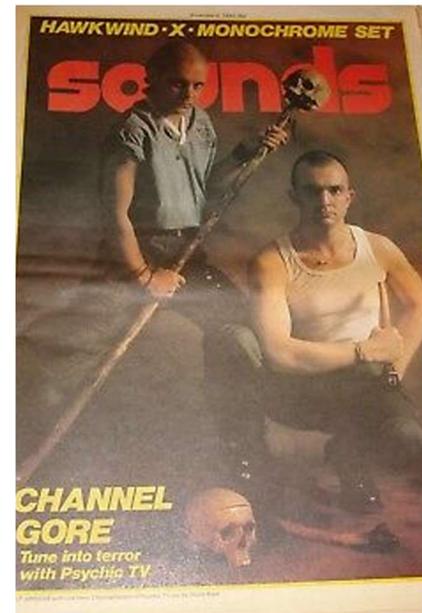
Dave Brock, Captain of the Ship and Master of the Universe, was recently ejected from the lobby of the RCA offices by an over-zealous lackey who clearly did not care a fig that he was jostling a master Sonic Assassin and a vicar of the Church Of Hawkwind.

Despite the fact that Mr Brock had a perfectly legitimate appointment with his RCA connection, it was decided that his presence was soiling the spotless lobby and he was cast into the outer darkness. Spurned and discarded, he was forced to trudge the ignoble streets in search of a phone booth by means of which to correct this terrible indignity.

I mean, have we all gone raving mad, or what? Has our sense of values gone completely down the tubes? This is Dave Brock we're talking about! This is a man who has given freely of blood, sweat and brain cells in the pursuit of the perfect brainskewer chord progression! This is our heritage, rejected and despised, sent packing down the boulevards of ignominy in search of a Jesus-bloody-Godforsaken phone booth! Mothers, read it and weep.

So anyway, he found the phone booth and got in contact with his man at RCA, informing him of the miscarriage of decency that had so recently taken place four floors beneath his very feet. The response was, needless to say, one of deepest mortification. Dave Brock? Brock of Hawkwind, whose every recent vinyl offering had charted respectably, whose only sin was their blatant lack of fashion sense? That Dave Brock? Tossed aside at the mere whim of a brutish Jobsworth?

Murmuring his profoundest apologies he assured the dishonoured Hawklord that the horrific situation would be put to rights immediately and that the unutterable smear responsible for the outrage would be pushed shrieking, an inch at a time, into the document shredder. Justice would be done.



So Brock did return unto the Halls Of RCA armed with the sanction of the mighty and unassailable in his righteousness.

And stone me if the bastards didn't sling him out again.

RCA: IF YOU WANT TO GET INTO IT, YOU'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF IT

NOT TOO happy with RCA then? Or is that classified information?

Dave Brock: "Nah, no, it's not classified information. I mean, there are some nice people up at RCA. There's Sean Greenfield, who's a great guy. He's really behind us and he tries his hardest, but...

"See, it's a great big company, bringing out 20 albums a week and anything a bit unusual tends to get pushed to one side. Now on the other hand you've got Flick Knife who brought out the 'Urban Guerilla' single, and they're a small independent label.."

You're happier with a little label like Flick Knife?

Brock: "Well, I think we're happy with the personal touch that you get with Flick Knife. I mean, you can get on the phone and get straight through to Frenchy and Gina, people who put out Hawkfan, the people who run Hawkfriends... with RCA there's no contact with people. Oh, you'll have a guy on the case for a couple of weeks and then it'll just evaporate."

Huw Lloyd Langton "I think there's things both for and against the Independent network. On the one hand it's more intimate and there's greater freedom, but on the other hand you don't get the same distribution"

At this point the sleeve artwork that RCA have decided with adorn the band's 'Choose Your Masques' album arrives for their approval. Those with a greater well of human charity than myself might describe it as 'lacklustre'.

The tracklistings are garbled to a pinnacle of incomprehension unequalled even by the exquisitely mad Japanese. 'The Scan' has become 'The Scam'. 'Fahrenheit 451' has simmered down to a relatively tepid 'Fahrenheit 45'. The title track is mis-spelled. 'Silver Machine' presumably escapes transmogrification into 'Sewing Machine' by the skin of its teeth.

Brock: "This is terrible. On the last album Harvey Bainbridge turned into Harvey Burbridge. I don't think they know who we are."

The interview pauses while Dave Brock and Huw Lloyd Langton cross out the mistakes with magic markers. After a while it occurs to them that the negatives are quite possibly already with the printer. Brock makes a frantic last-minute mercy-dash phone call to prevent this spectacular abortion. I sit staring at the publicity photographs that have been used as reference for the masque-faces that adorn the album sleeve (presumably because they are the only four publicity photographs that RCA have of the band)

The photographs have been taken with the subjects looking directly into bright, glaring sunlight. Their eyes are screwed up and their faces are seemingly crawling with wrinkles. They look like rough studies for the Picture Of Dorian Gray.

ROADHAWKS

LASER DEATH Terror is not a phenomenon that brushes the lives of many of us.

Hawkwind, pioneers of Lysergic Armageddon, do not share this happy condition. It transpires that all across our island home there are Town Councillors with anxiety problems who live in stricken. blanching dread of that apotheoses of all things daring and contemporary, the Laser Light Show.

Their infrequent hours of sleep are troubled by clammy nocturnal visions of fresh-faced young pop-pickers shrieking in pathetic agony as a stray laser beam neatly slices off the top of their skull like a soft-boiled egg, merely because they have been incautious enough to stand up on their seats in a frenzy of adulation for their teen idols.

Brock: "We had lasers on tour with us back in 1979. Every I night we'd have these people from the council coming down to check out whether they were safe or not. They thought they were Death Rays. At one gig In Sheffield we had this guy turn up, from the council, and he was really friendly. asking for our autographs to give to his kids and all that. Three hours before we were due to go on he suddenly changes his mind and decides that we can't use the lasers.

"The roadies grabbed him and locked him in a cupboard backstage. Didn't let him out till after the show"

In my experience, there is a threshold point that one reaches in pursuit of Reefer Madness. Even a conservative observer would be hard pressed not to own up that Hawkwind most probably reached that point half a decade ago. I, Sounds' On The Spot Acid Casualty correspondent, am at a complete loss to explain the mad integrity that keeps them moving.

Brock: "When it comes down to it you've got to be in charge of the ship. There's got to be one captain. Back in '76 there were seven captains and it was going all over the place.

"I remember there was one gig towards the end of the American tour back then, it was really bad. Calvert had flipped out again arid it was terrible. Paul Kantner from the Airplane came to see us and afterwards he said that it was just like a shell of a band. Next day I sold my guitar.

'There'd been this guy who wanted to buy it. I was totally depressed. I walked off the stage and said 'You still want that guitar? It's yours'. He gave me a hundred dollars for it. It was the end of the line, the end of the band...

"Course then it's three months later and you're sitting there and thinking 'We'll really all have to get together soon and have a rehearsal... ' "

WARRIORS ON THE EDGE OF TIME

WHAT I used to love about Hawkwind was that sense of Amphetamine confidence and the sort of basic, down-home righteousness that could prompt them to play a free gig outside the wire at the Isle of Wight festival in a White Pantherskin gesture of protest against the festival's exorbitant admission fee. (Probably about £4.50. This was a long (this ago...)

I remember going to see them in Wellingborough once. Bundles of joss sticks were passed out. Copies of Frenz were passed out. Hepatitis sufferers in greatcoats were passed gut. The Day-Glo Hawkwind insignia blazed in the ultra-violet light, bouncing metaphor flashes off of the retina. Christ, I had one hell of a time.

Emerging into the cold night air afterwards, I found myself in the throes of terminal acid utopianism coupled with the classic Heinrich Kley rampage syndrome. I evolved to pour LSD into the reservoir system and develop a plan whereby I might be instrumental in springing Dr Timothy Leary from jail.

Please note that I was in deadly earnest concerning these enterprises at the time. Who knows what terrifying bloody atrocities I might have wreaked in the name of Playpower Culture had not the powers that be chosen this approximate time to expel me from school for allegedly ministering to the petro-chemical needs of minors?

WHAT'S SO FUNNY 'BOUT PEACE, LOVE, UNDERSTANDING, MANDRAX, CRABLICE AND SUCKING THE CORNER OF PAGE 46?

WHO ARE your audience these days? I would have thought that Hawkwind functioned best against a backdrop of a semi-established 'counter culture'... Oz. IT Frenz, the White Panthers and so on. Now that culture isn't around any more, who do you find yourself catering to?

Brock: "Oh, it's all still going on to an extent. We've done a lot of benefits for CND, Amnesty International, the Legalise Cannabis Campaign, things like that. By and large we still get the Denim Brigade at our concerts, only these are people who were first coming to see us five, ten years ago. Now they bring their kids along..."

"One thing that I do miss about all that stuff.. 'Oz and Frenz and stuff like that... is that there isn't an adequate national paper covering that sort of stuff any more. They used to keep you informed on the current dope prices, tell you where you could get in touch with a VD clinic and just generally give you a lot of information that would be useful on the street. There's nothing doing that any more.

So what do you reckon to the psychedelic revival?

Lloyd-Langton: "All those revival things are really depressing. You can't recapture a whole way of life just by dressing up."

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

DIKMIK?

"Dikmik's living in Nothing Hill Gate still. I saw him a little while back. He's looking well."

Stacia?

"Stacia left to get married. She married a drummer, a guy named Roy Dykes. I think she's living over in Germany.

Mike Moorcock?

"Oh, I still see Mike quite a lot. He'll probably be reading poetry some time on this next tour. Huw's been down to see him recently, doing overlays on one of his singles... Mike's got some good songs. I just wish he'd take some time with them and finish them off properly. All the records that he puts out are demos, basically..."

Bob Calvert?

"Bob's a funny bloke. He spends half of his time in the loony bin, calming down until he can tackle things again.

"Sometimes he does some strange things. I remember at the Rainbow at the end of the '81 tour I was standing on stage, strumming away, running through 'Masters Of The Universe', and I looked across to the side of the stage and there were Moorcock and Calvert having a fight. They'd got their hands round each other's throats. They were trying to kill each other. I thought 'What's that all about?' "

SONIC ATTACK

HAWKWIND'S MUSIC is a murdering aortal steamroller with swooping synthesized gibber-bats flying from its smokestack, fur on fire. They've still got that psychotropic sizzle cracking on the nerve ends of their music music that, in the most professional sense, somehow manages to maintain an endearing, raw amateurism even after all this time.

Brock: "I think a lot of the electronic music that's about nowadays tends to suffer because it's all electronic and there's nothing to hold it up. It sort of dissolves into a sugary mess. I think you can play electronic music without sounding 'electronic'. I suppose you could describe our music as basic British tribal rhythm patterns with things shooting off. it's got a rawness to it, an edge. I think we've got to keep that edge."

Dave, I understand that there actually is a Church Of Hawkwind, and that you're the Pope?

Brock: "No. No, I'm only a vicar of the Church Of Hawkwind. But I can perform marriages and stuff like that"

ON THE BUS

BEFORE THERE were Garage Bands, there were Squat Bands. The furnishings were no doubt slightly less sanitary, but the basic drive and adrenaline was still as cranked-up and teeth-grinding.

The only things that differentiate a band like Hawkwind from some of today's more ideologically motivated ensembles are (a) a sense of humour that is seemingly privy only to those with a strong sense of life's fascinating arbitrary cruelty, and (b) the fact that they have demonstrated their unswerving loyalty to a cause, however trivial or ephemeral that cause might seem to jaundiced contemporary eyes, through some long and lean years when causes were not popular animals. Please bear in mind that we're not talking about the bloody Pink Floyd here, captain.

OFF THE BUS

HAWKWIND ARE not, never will be and quite probably never were, a fashionable band. They don't change. They stay in exactly the same place year after year after year. But what the hell? Maybe they like it there.

I'm as keen as the next neophyte on all things bright, new and bubbly, but I dunno... Maybe there comes a point where a genuine concern with progress crosses the mark and becomes a mere fetish for novelty. I don't think Hawkwind are ever going to alter significantly, but I don't think that's necessarily anything to do with middle-aged spread and complacency.

I think there's a quaint, old fashioned sense of mission in there somewhere. I think they know what they like doing, and they do it With a complete indifference to the calendar, Warriors On The Edge of Time.

UNDER THE BUS

BROCK: "THE funny thing about Bob Calvert is that he keeps doing these really objectionable things. Like when we were playing the Hammersmith Odeon once, he turns up outside with a placard saying 'All the money from this show is going straight into Dave Brock's wallet' and he's walking up and down shouting at the queue through a megaphone: 'Hawkwind are sell-outs! Don't go and see Hawkwind! Come and see my show down the road!'

"Then just before we're due to go on he drops round at the stage door, puts his placard down and comes in to say hello. Asks us if we want him to play. And we're saying 'Sure, great...'. So he comes on and plays with us and then when we've finished he picks up his placard and megaphone and goes to catch the crowds on their way out.

"A lot of people ask me how I can put up with behaviour like that. But I've known Bob for a long time. We're good mates, I suppose it's just all part of it, really."

If you have to ask what 'it' is, then I'm afraid you're always going to have trouble with Hawkwind.

Alan Moore