

AYERS and GROUSES

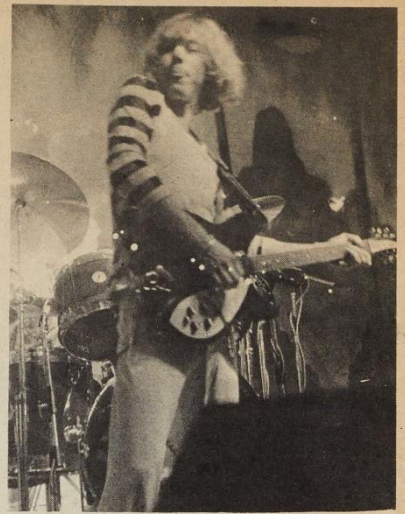
Concert Reviews from Ian Rae



The Canterbury area in the mid sixties spawned a wealth of diverse talent, notably the Floyd, the Soft Machine and Caravan. At the outset, all were oriented towards creating music of a distinctly cerebral nature in the wake of the much vaunted British blues boom. When Syd Barret blew out a significant proportion of his brain cells, the Floyd went on to produce concept albums and acquire an embarrassingly large quantity of cash. Caravan moved on from writing delicate, pastoral songs to music of a more symphonic bent. The Soft Machine recruited Elton Dean, Hugh Hopper and some esoteric time signatures and became a modern jazz combo, but not before Kevin Ayers and his loony mate David Allen had served their apprenticeships.

Both Ayers and Allen went to live in France, Allen to form Gong and Ayers to play at festivals, relax in the sun and write delicate songs about bananas and cafes on the Champs Elysees. Indeed, "May I?" was originally sung in French and sounded much nicer for it.

Ayers' set hasn't changed much since I saw him last year. Most of the songs were old favourites, "Shouting in a Bucket Blues", "Stranger in Blue Suede Shoes", "Bananas" and the aforementioned "May I?". The high point of the set was the atmospheric "Lady Rachel". The rambling, spacey, intro was reminiscent of early Softs who also tended towards extravagant impersonations of flying saucers.



The band had a good loose feel and seemed quite happy to let their boss indulge himself with the best "bad" guitar solo I've heard since "The Canyons of Your Mind". The band showed themselves to be excellent sidemen with the ubiquitous Andy Summers (ex Kevin Coyne) playing some really nifty lead lines and Bill Lucy shining on keyboards.

Ayers is by no means a good musician but this is largely unimportant because he writes superb songs and has an uncanny knack of choosing backing musicians with an intuitive grasp of what he's trying to do. It's just a pity that the amiable loony, Zoot Money isn't playing with him any more.

DAMNED

The Damned concert finished off the Charities Week in much the same spirit as the rest of the proceedings. Overall, the activities were something of a non-event. Doubtless, the concert did much to justify the forebodings of Laura McCaig, sometime Lady Provost of Stirling, but the idea that a group of fifteen year old kids with clip-ons in their noses can seriously detract from the quality of life in this part of the globe strikes me as being ludicrously paranoid in the extreme. The presence of the local blue boot boys did liven things up a bit, though, and provided further incontrovertible proof that Britain is still a free country with complete freedom of speech; the police are free to arrest you at any time for telling them this.

The Damned are currently being hailed by the rock press as the greatest thing to happen to popular music since Pete Townshend gave up writing short pithy statements which encapsulated the angst of being under twenty and hating anyone over it. Notwithstanding the NME's need to build up their circulation figures by hailing everything that holds a guitar as the greatest thing since the Beatles. The Damned are a useful high energy rock n' roll band with a nice line in three minute white heat speed trips. To label them as "punk" is as useful as farting in a hurricane to blow out a match - unless you write for the Daily Record and need the pigeon hole.

The Damned don't sing songs about dole queues and riots, nor are they straight out of school with their first "Top Twenty" in their hot little mitts. They are, primarily, calculating performers and, at least adequate, musicians. The songs are crafted exercises in '70s hard rock with about as much in common with the Jam, the Sex Pistols and the Buzzcocks as Hendrix had with the Beegees.

It was rather unfortunate that the performance was cut short by the appearance of half a dozen beer cans and some two dozen of the aforementioned defenders of public safety. It strikes me that some of those in authority, including the organisers, over-reacted to reports in the gutter press of some of the excesses of Dave Vanian's new wave counterparts. By lining the stage with bouncers, little could be achieved other than further aggravating an audience already mildly annoyed at the idiocies perpetrated in the name of music. It was abundantly clear that the hall would have been cleared without any trouble after the band had left the stage. People were already leaving out of boredom, making the arrival of the police task force, at their own instigation, both unnecessary and potentially provocative. The whole thing seemed to be rather shambolic and ill-conceived.

Rainbow, the support act, showed themselves to be fine musicians and the best copy artists I've ever seen. It's a pity their own material was a bit weak and highly derivative.

STRETCH

I didn't ask to be born. I mean, it's not easy writing these bloody reviews. Some of the things you have to put up with in the name of journalism (*Journalism?*) are really horrid, slipping in pools of beer, falling over bodies, having terminal acid heads puking in your lager and having to listen to run-of-the-mill boogie bands. I suppose Stretch aren't that bad, anyone that plays Peter Green's "Show Biz Blues" can't be completely devoid of taste. Maybe I just missed the point.

