

SEX BEATLES IN THE PATIO

BUDA, the manager of the Majorcan-based band The Sex Beatles, approached me in the café recently, handed me a cassette with earphones, and said, "Listen to this, the Sex Beatles' latest song."

He told me that the band was playing at the Patio, in Puerto Soller, that night, and invited me to come along with the group and perhaps write something for the Bulletin.

Let me admit, even before I start, I'm not too crazy about Rock music, especially hard Rock, and that I'm sort of fuzzy about what Punk Rock is. The tune that I heard through the earphones was Todos al Suelo, based on Tejero's famous words.

"We've been getting a lot of favourable feedback on this song," Buda told me. "People are tired of the same old crap. When they hear this, they are impressed, a song that has some content for a change."

When I arrived at the Patio that night the place was packed wall to wall. There were maybe 500 people there. I slipped past the doorman with the help of a drunken friend, and wove my way through the smokey air, dancers and drinkers, to back stage.

I've known the members of the band for quite some time, and it was good to greet them on their own territory. Each member of the Sex Beatles is a unique and highly individual person, which hits at the difficulty of holding any band together. It is like a congress of anarchists.

Even in classical music, as Carl Mansker once said, "A good orchestra needs a dictator for a conductor."

There was Hamish McDonald, lead singer and guitarist; Pedro Colom, gasé guitar; and Jordi Ramon, drummer. The three constitute the core of the band, and have been together since they started on the eclipse of the moon, September 1978. They have been with the band all over Spain and England.

With them that night were Olly Halsall, who is said to be one of Europe's

best guitarists, and who plays with Kevin Ayers; and Zanna, a female vocalist, who played the keyboard that night as well.

And who dat der with the canga? It's Phil Shepherd, sitting in!

The backstage rooms were full of nervous tension. "It's the last ten minutes that kill you," Zanna said. "I feel like screaming," said Hamish. So he and Zanna did: "AAAAAGGG-GHHH!"

"The equipment's ready," came word. Then, "O.K. let's go!" Out they went, and I made my way behind the curtain, careful not to trip over wires.

The sight on the stage was impressive: amplifiers, an array of microphones,

shiny instruments; and the group looked magical in their stage clothes. They took off with "Al Suelo," Hamish moving back and forward from stage front and back, as he sang and played, the whole group swaying, Zanna dancing and leaning on the keys.

It was like watching a stormy sea, glitter and clash, tension and rising, a beautiful and frightening thing to see.

I almost lost my ears. Standing with my face to the stage, it was like hard direct waves blasting over me.

I'll admit again, that I'm not too crazy about Rock. But being fair, I'll have to admit that there is no accounting for individual taste. Different engines for different pigeons; one man's stack is another man's pollution. And I seemed to be in a minority of one among the enthusiastic crowd.

It is the volume that I most object to. Even in quiet settings the Rock musician seems to feel the need to plug in, even when an acoustic instrument would do just as well.

It's true that the electric equipment is a separate music, but also there is a current mystic that to be plugged in makes you a "professional" musician.

In general there has been a tendency for music to

grow louder. The piano is louder than the harpsicord. Most instruments have increased their volume. Classical orchestras have grown larger, and will probably end up with pieces for violin and 40 cannons.

Country Western bands took the Hawaiian guitar. Rock and Roll, born from Blues and Country, plugged in. But, finally, I see Rock as one more manifestation of the modern world, jumpy as a cat being chased.

I prefer to imagine Lightin' Hopkins, whiskey bottle at hand, slumped back in his couch, picking and singing away at the blues.

I took a stroll on the beach to see the harbour lights, and the boats pulled up on the sand. I also visited my friend Mr Templeton, the collector of images, who was taking his usual midnight siesta on the beach. Under the stars I started thinking about my dislike for Rock.

Good music is all the same, whether it be Lead Belly, Woody Guthrie, Om Kalthoum, Hank Williams or Mozart. Bob Dylan once put it in terms of the musician: "Being a musician means — depending on how far you go — getting to the depths of where you are at."

"And most any musician would try anything to get to those depths, because playing music is an immediate thing — as opposed to putting paint on a canvas, which is a calculated thing. Your spirit flies when you are playing music. So, with music, you tend to look deeper and deeper inside yourself to find the music."

But I've known people who couldn't stand Dylan, who failed to hear his power and poetry, simply because he can't sing. There are people who don't like classical or opera music, simply because the hate the

formality and snobbishness that surrounds it, and people who dislike Country music because they were once in a bar in Texas where some "good ol' boys" tried to start a brawl with them.

All this has nothing to do with music at heart, music with a "flying spirit". And those at the concert that night felt a "flying spirit" with the Sex Beatles, even if I was feeling something more like a jet blast.

When I returned to the Patio, Zanna was singing a blues-like song, about how her man always puts her down. It was wonderful singing, a good song, and the music was softer behind her. Everbody falls in love with singers.

Back stage again. Everyone sweaty, talking about notes hit and notes missed, heading for the shower, changing clothes.

Buda comes in: "Anybody want champagne?"

Friends show up and sit around, the champagne arrives and slowly starts to disappear. It's cozy sitting in the relaxed atmosphere, behind the scenes. The band, relaxed now, starts to disappear like the champagne. Phil asks, "Could you hear the canga?"

I tell him that I couldn't hear it over the amps.

"Well," he says, "it doesn't matter. It's doing it that counts."

Finally everyone is gone. Back to the music of the times, and maybe of the future? I leave you with what Lazo Tzu, not Buda, said: "The universe, like a bellows, is always emptying, always full: The more it yields, the more it holds. Men come to their wit's end

arguing about it and had better meet it at the marrow."

RALPH NELSON

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