

Through the Past—Darkly

A not-so-brief (or objective) primer on South Florida's new music scene, then and now.

By Walter Cz.

"In the beginning, ELVIS created the heavens and the earth, South Florida was waste and void; "Album-Oriented Rock" covered the abyss, and the spirit of Mascaro was stirring above the beach waters." or at least that's what Eddie O'Brien told me.

That is to say, in the summer of '79, as the whole of the rock world was in revolt, South Fla. had the Cichlids, the Eat, and the Screaming Sneakers, breaking down barriers at Clubs willing to take the chance, like THE TIGHT SQUEEZE and THE BLUE WATERS - both since have sadly departed.

There had been earlier salvos fired in various forms of Z-Cars and Critical Masses, but the original music scene did not really spark to life until the emergence of the Cichlids and manager Robert Mascaro. Almost single-handedly, they opened up clubs to "punks", gave new bands

showcases, and served as a rallying point for hundreds of fans who felt disgusted by the live music scene here.

The Cichlids were raw, noisy, funny, good-looking, and most of all: exiting. In the late months of '79, there was a very real happening of Cichlid-mania permeating the local scene, inspiring scenes of mass hysteria wherever they played; with everything from bubblegum to bodies flying through the air.

However, as time passed, the long-awaited album continued to be awaited, their repertoire grew stagnant, and the sound got slicker. In fact, when the LP did appear, the sound was so squeaky clean as to be unrecognizable to their club following. Internal dissention followed; slowly and steadily, the band fell apart.

The Eat followed shortly after The Cichlids, but edged them out by releasing S.Fla's first punk vinyl, the infamous "Communist Radio / Catholic Love" single. Hi-Fi it was not, but the music leaps off the turntable with its maniacal urgency. God Punishes The Eat followed a few months later with 5 more of their guitar-crazed, witty worded ditties.

The band became a fixture at Hollywood's PREMIER club for months in 1980, after the AGORA banned them for an alleged lapse of good-taste in their onstage banter. They were not boring enough, y'see, as Eddie O'Brien will say just about anything he pleases, and it is usually very funny - but the AGORA is not one of the most open-minded of establishments...

In the months since the PREMIER closed, The Eat have played in N.Y.C., Raleigh N.C., Atlanta, and Tampa, as well as a few well-chosen local appearances (such as ROCK-N-ROLLski I). They have a new bass player, Kenny Lindahl (former Egg) and an album in the works. Watch this space.

The only other band to rank with



The Eat photo by JIM JOHNSON

those two in impact would have to be The Reactions. Appearing in early 1980, they hit the ground running with a sound that was tight, aggressive, and FAST. Starting out at the BLUE WATERS, and cutting their teeth at the PREMIER and the AGORA, by the end of 1980 they were arguably the biggest band in town. They'd amassed an impressive number of first rate originals; mostly about teenage lust, love, and anguish, but with an occasional political zinger like "In Society" on Official Release, their first EP.

Tony Suppa's lyrics had potential to be sappy little melodramas, but he also had the voice and sincerity to make it work - teamed with Issac Baruch's crazed guitar work, the Reactions were a rare mixture of power and innocence. Their downfall was impatience, as they became frustrated over the lack of a major label deal - this in a time when the labels have sent their A&R men on long furloughs. They packed it all in on July 31, 1981 in a chaotic bash at THE BUTTON, and released one last EP, shortly after, entitled The Reactions Love You.

Enough nostalgia, though ... Among the bands currently functioning (other than the Eat) Charlie Pickett and the Eggs are easily the most prominent. His two singles on OPEN RECORDS are strong slices of ageless, untrendy rock'n'roll, and have garnered him attention in the British rock weeklies and numerous American magazines including the widely-read TROUSER PRESS.

Most of C.P.'s repertoire consists of well-chosen, but obscure rock classics he's dug up, and anyone but the most literate historian-type are likely to come away thinking the show was mostly originals. (That'll teach you to rely on the radio...) The Eggs lineup is always fluctuating, but Charlie has a knack of attracting good players and making the most of them. Pickett is supposedly building up a lot of originals and threatens to replace the oldies with them. I'm looking forward to it, But if you

haven't seen him yet, this may be your last chance to hear some of this stuff.

Among the other bands of recent vintage, the Bobs were set to release a 12" EP on OPEN last year, but Bobby Tak (former Cichlid) split from the band suddenly in October, and no replacement has been found. Their funky syncopations have been compared to the TALKING HEADS and THE POLICE, and their absence is an unfortunate blow to the scene.

The Throbs are South Florida's answer to the L.A. and D.C. punk resurgence, specializing in hyper-speed and highly political lyrical stance. Gary Shaft is an imposing presence on stage and when they are good (as they were at the NEW WAVE LOUNGE, Nov. 25) they're very, very good. They are working on an LP, where their reggae influences should get a more thorough workout.

The Front have recently lost their lead singer but remain intact and I'm sure will return to their cozy set-up at the AGORA playing their devolutionized heavy-metal for the AOR crowd.

The R.A.F. haven't gigged steady since the BALKAN ROCK CLUB closed in June, but have a number of fine originals and their rendition of "The Rapper" is one of the scene's best unearthings.

Larry Joe Miller is an original rockabilly rebel, going back a long way. His single (especially the A-side) is great, and if his set seems a little standardized, at least you know it's the real thing.

I can't be objective about the Essentials, mainly because I sing, play guitar, and write most of the music for them. But if their fast, aggressive "power-pop" sound reminiscent of mid-60's R'n'R filtered thru 70's punk, it's because they have a particular fondness for both eras. (They're working on an EP.) Like I said, I can't be objective about them, so I'll just say they are incredible (at times) and leave it at that.

Futurisk plays electronic mechanopop; Monkey Farm, modernist funk; The Neutronics are undescrivable; Rubber Thongs, Urges, Weasles,

X-Conz, Used People, Spanish Dogs, Cult Heroes, Radio Berlin, Cookies, Chaos, Roy & The Hayheads, Violent Love & The Dead Whores, Smegma, Breakers, etc. etc. etc.; all names from the past, present, and future that play a part in the local original music scene.

In no way is this as comprehensive a history of the S.Fla scene as it might've been; but instead use it as an introduction to a happening that's all around you. There's more to music than radio and conglomerate record stores, and it's there for those free enough to look for it. (SONG AND DANCE, an "alternate concert hotline" is a good place to start - 522-3588.)

And the most important aspect of having a scene like this (however small), is that anyone with a real sense of purpose and something to say can get a band together and carve out a niche for themselves. YOURSELVES! That is what it's all about.


That's Rock'n'Roll.

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