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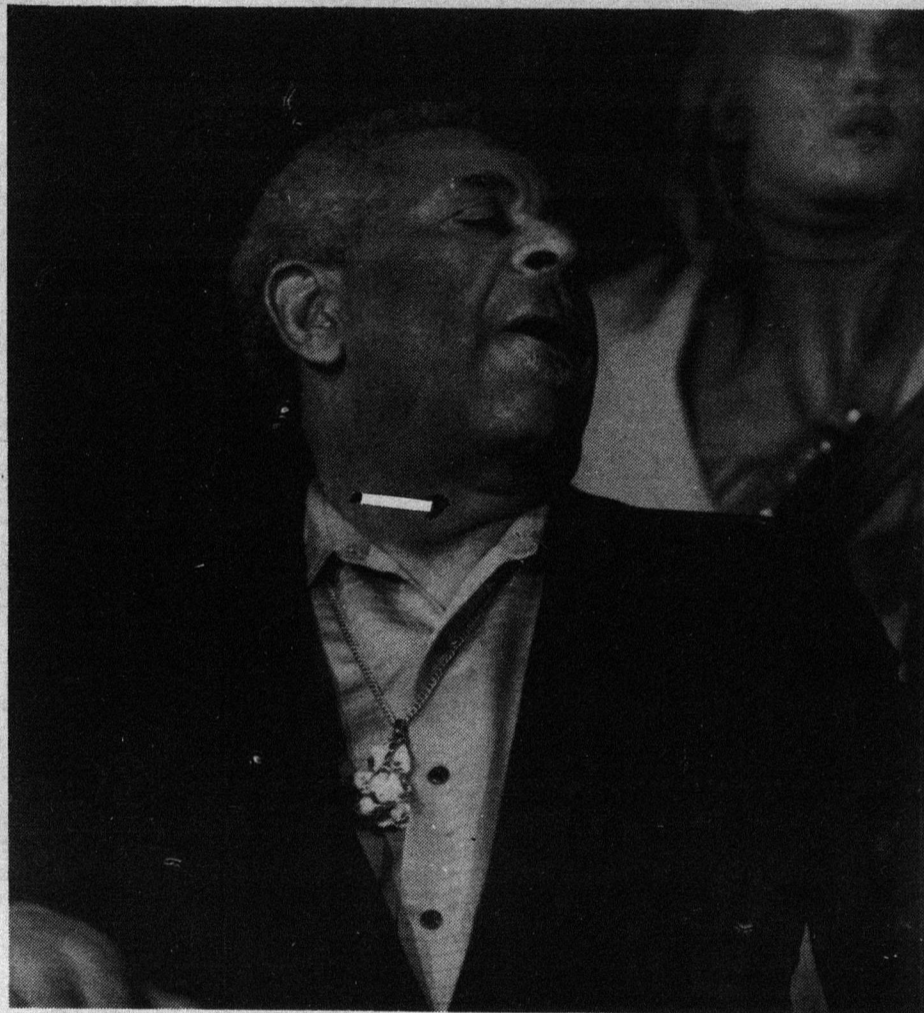
Crawdaddy Johnson

July 1878 - April 1984

Crawdaddy Johnson is dead at the age of 106. His death this past week was mourned all over the world. Candle-light vigils were held in London, Paris, Bombay, and across the United States and Canada. I am writing this article because Crawdaddy was my long time friend and mentor. I've known Crawdaddy since 1983 when he gave me the rights to his lifestory. His autobiography will be published next week.

Crawdaddy was a pioneer in the American blues movement and he wrote the book on how to play the Blues harp. He was born in Mississippi on a tobacco plantation where his father was a sharecropper. His grandmother taught him how to play the harp when he was 2 years old. "She can still out play me when her arthritis isn't acting up" he commented in a *Rotting Stone* interview last year. Crawdaddy, too, was afflicted with a disease: emphysema. After a life long habit of smoking, he developed emphysema and was forced to undergo surgery in 1978. The surgery cured his throat problem by way of a tracheotomy but it didn't cure his tobacco habit. Crawdaddy continued to smoke through the hole in his throat and continued to play the harp with the aid of a specially constructed rubber tube inserted into the hole. The tracheotomy ended his long recording career although he continued to play the occasional club date.

Crawdaddy escaped the drudgery of the farm for the drudgery of the city. He moved to New York in 1900 and got work playing the Blues in clubs and subways. These were very lean years for Crawdaddy since no one had yet heard of the "Blues". Crawdaddy's great talent went unnoticed until 1947 when he joined Muddy Waters' band. He soon became the most popular Chicago Blues man next to Muddy Waters. Finally, at the age of 69, he was given his first recording contract and he put together his famous band The Crayfish. Crawdaddy and The Crayfish went on to record some of the most influential albums ever released. Their first release "Sedimentary Blues" contained the famous "Blue Lobster". "Crustacean Blues" was one of the most influential albums ever released by anybody. Crawdaddy's "While my Harp Gently Drips", clearly influenced the Beatles' George Harrison. During the Watergate scandal, Crawdaddy showed his interest in politics with the release of the "Impeach Nixon" album. While the lyrical content was a departure from the traditional blues of the



previous albums, the music remained pure Blues. The songs from the "Nixon" album were clearly an influence on the punk movement that was to happen towards the end of that decade. His songs "Anarchy Now" and "Kill the Pigs" were standards among the punkers in London's bar scene.

When his tracheotomy forced him to end his recording career he concentrated on his political activity. Most recently, in the 1981 Diablo Canyon nuclear reactor demonstration, Crawdaddy was charged with resisting arrest when he kicked a state trooper in the genitals. Crawdaddy's opinion of Ronald Reagan is well known: "He's the antichrist, in my opinion" he claimed in last year's *Rotting Stone* interview. In fact, it is rumored that Crawdaddy's death might be linked to a CIA plot to stomp out "Communist Subversives".

Crawdaddy's absence will be felt in many areas. His influence in music has been paramount, as evidenced by the harp playing of Magic Dick and John Mayall. Lyrically, he has influenced everyone from The Beatles to the B52's to the Sex Pistols. Politically, his presence will be missed by the various lobby groups he participated in. Crawdaddy was a good man; compassionate, irreverent, idealistic and very old. His death at the age of 106 years was not unexpected but it was dreaded. Crawdaddy represents an age that we, today, have all but forgotten. Perhaps his lyrics will serve as a reminder to us of the age he represents.

*Get off you asses you lazy buggers,
This society's bit the big one.
It's time for y'all to become crazy muggers,
Get on out there and kill someone.*

—TOM WOLFE



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