

# Rock 'n Roll Revival

but is it art?

## Nostalgia and good vibes . . .

Well, Richard Nader's 1971 Rock and Roll Revival has come and gone. Time to settle back down to (combination groan/sigh) The Present.

Perhaps I should preface my remarks with the statement that I have never wanted to write a review less than I do this one. This is not because I didn't like the show, although I don't think that I was as religiously affected as some of the folks I saw. Nor is it because of a shortage of words on my part, a malady that has never (many would qualify that with "unfortunately") struck me with serious problems.

I think it is rather because the show has managed to set up an almost complete dichotomy of feeling deep within my little music-loving soul.

The raw power of the music (especially by Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry) and the bouncing, happy simplicity I found most appealing.

But there was something missing. Exactly what that is, it is unfortunately beyond my verbalizing powers to say. But what it amounts to is that, in 1964 the show would have been utterly unbelievable. It would have left me gasping for air.

However, this is 1971. And something was missing. Intellectual lyrics? They would have been nice but they really wouldn't have fit the music and besides lyrics lyrics are never really essential anyway. Fuller instrumentation? Probably, especially considering what I found to be amazingly low quality of the back-up band (more diatribes along these lines later). Greater complexity? I think so. Except in Bo Diddley's 10 minute, one-chord bonanza and Chuck Berry's fine improvisation, the music

provided simply wasn't enough. The performers made a valiant attempt to alleviate this shortcoming by performing most of the numbers in medley fashion, stringing them together in a kind of a collage of nostalgia.

And maybe that's what upset me the most, the appeal to mass nostalgia. I've always rather been of the opinion that nostalgia should be treated in much the same way as good ol' Johnny Keats treats melancholy. It should be quietly savored, almost cherished. It should not be turned into a circus. Perhaps that's a little strong. Anyway, on to the individual performances.

Bobby Comstock and the Boys in the Band were disgusting. They were tolerable while they stuck to basic early sixties rock and roll, but when they tried to mimic three of the giants of rock music The Beatles, The Stones and The Who, if you can feature that) they fell flat on their mediocre faces. Such pieces as *Hey Jude*, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, *Satisfaction*, and *Pinball Wizard* simply wilt in the blunt and clumsy hands of such halfway "artists" as these. It was a very disappointing way to start the show.

Gary U.S. Bonds managed to patch things up in his set that followed without a break. He at least managed to project some of the old rock'n roll power although it did have to wind its way around the Boys in the Band, who functioned (well, sort of) as the back up band all night. It was a fair set that set things up nicely for the rest of the night.

The Dovells gave me the impression that Richard Nader had fished them out of their



photo by Don Stanton

Chuck Berry: swinging the cord, playing the chords, reviving the crowd

Beverly Hills swimming pools one day and said "Hey, how would you like to play one more concert tour for old time's sake."

They at last got back into the old rompin', stompin' style of the golden age of rock 'n roll. They were fun, but not particularly moving or anything like that. But then they never were.

And then along came Bo Diddley. His was a fine set full of all of the old ingredients that made rock a potent musical force. He had all of his old fire and swaggering self-assurance which he coupled with driving, rhythmic guitar breaks that often consisted of nothing more than full chords played in syncopated patterns that blasted their way through the main beat. He provided the highlight of the show in his closing number where he jammed for around 10 minutes on one chord, toying with its rhythmic possibilities and accompanying his own playing with some foot stompin' stage movements.

He also did a number with an unidentified black female singer (remember when she would have been called a Negress?) which did a fanciful job of portraying the "battle-of-the-sexes" on a tantalizingly physical level. His well-conceived guitar breaks served to accent the often "earthy" dialogue-duo.

After a 20 minute 15-minute intermission, Shirley and the Shirelles came bouncing on stage and proceeded to play a happy little set that was the most carefree of the evening. Performing such old hits as *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow* and *Dedicated to the One I Love*

they got the audience with them almost immediately.

The show wound up with a set by Chuck Berry. The old master of the hard chord has lost none of his skill. *Roll Over Beethoven* and *Reelin' and Rockin'* came over just as strong as ever. And it was obvious that Mr. Berry was enjoying the enthusiastic reception that his music was receiving. He was enjoying so much that at one point he decided to launch into an improvisation that the band had not previously practiced. It was here that the full measure of the back up band's incompetence came to the fore. While Berry tried valiantly to turn his improv into a viable musical presentation, the band staggered about their instruments in total confusion desperately eyeing Berry's

chording hand to try and figure out what to play. Berry's playing in the improv was fine, but it was almost ruined by the folks he had playing for him.

And that was the show. Oh yeah, special mention should be made of the Master of Ceremonies. I don't know his name, but whoever that guy was he should get a medal for unrestrained enthusiasm and general all-around good vibrations. He set the mood of the show all by himself and maintained it, for and with the bands, all the way through. Bouncin' and shuckin' and jivin' he was truly a sight to see.

And so Richard Nader's 1971 Rock and Roll Revival has come and gone. Sure, it was fun. But, well, damnit, was it art?

by Ross Harvey

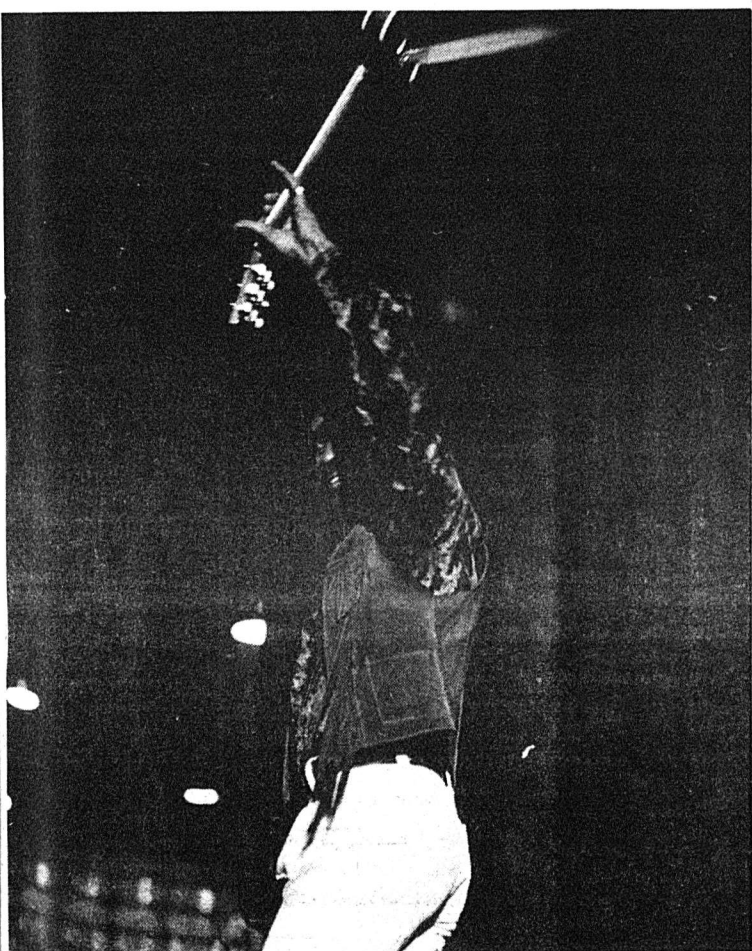


photo by Don Stanton

Chuck Berry: guitar acrobatics and good vibes



photo by John Dao

Bo Diddley backstage: the dapper gentleman