

*Businessmen they drink my wine
Plowmen dig my earth
None of them along the line
Know what any of it is worth*

--bob dylan

drugs and women account for the missing loot; what legend does not say is that most artists are paid very little for their work. The artist may receive a record royalty of two and one-half per cent, but the company often levies charges for studio time, promotion and advertising. It is not uncommon for the maker of a hit record to end up in debt to the company.

Not surprisingly, it is the black artists who suffer most. In his brilliant book, *Urban Blues*, Charles Keil describes in detail how the blues artist is at the mercy of the recording company. It is virtually impossible, he states, for an unknown artist to get an honest contract, but even an "honest" contract is only an inexpensive way for a company to own an artist body and soul.

A star's wealth may be not only nonexistent, but actually a fraud, carefully perpetuated by the record company. Blues singer Bobby Bland's "clothes, limousine, valet, and plentiful pocket money," says Keil, "are image bolsterers from Duke Records (or perhaps a continual 'advance on royalties' that keeps him tied to the company) rather than real earnings." And even cash exploitation is not enough; Chess Records last year forced Muddy Waters to play his classic blues with a "psychedelic" band and called the humiliating record *Electric Mud*.

Until recently, only a very few stars made any real money from rock; their secret was managers shrewd to the point of unscrupulousness, who kept them under tight control. Colonel Parker molded the sexual country boy Elvis into a smooth ballad singer; Brian Epstein took four scruffy Liverpool rockers and transformed them into neatly touselled boys-next-door. "We were worried that friends might think we had sold out," John Lennon said recently, "which in a way we had."

The musicians of New Rock — most of them white, educated and middle-class — are spared much of what their black and lower-class counterparts have suffered. One of the much touted "revolutions" New Rock has brought, in fact, has been a drastic increase of the power of the artist vis-à-vis the record company. Contracts for New Rock bands regularly include almost complete artistic control, royalties as high as ten per cent, huge cash advances, free studio time, guaranteed amounts of company-bought promotions, and in some instances control over advertising design and placement in the media.

But such bargaining is at best a futile reformism which never challenges the essential power relationship that has contaminated rock since its inception. Sales expansion still gives the companies ample profits, and they maintain all the control they really need (even the "revolutionary" group, the MC5, agreed to remove the word "mother-fucker" from an album and to record "brothers and sisters" in its place). New Rock musicians lost the battle for real freedom at the very moment they signed their contracts (whatever the clauses) and entered the big-time commercial sphere.

The Doors are a prime example. Like hundreds of New Rock musicians, the four Doors are intelligent people who in the early- and mid-'60s dropped out into the emerging drug and hip underground. In endless rehearsals and on stage in Sunset Strip rock clubs, they developed a distinctively eerie and stringent sound. The band laid down a dynamo drive behind dramatically handsome lead singer Jim Morrison, who, dressed in black leather and writhing with anguish, screamed demonic invitations to sensual madness. "Break on through," was the message, "yeah, break on, break on through to the other side!"

It was great rock and roll, and by June 1967, when their "Light My Fire" was a number-one hit, it had become very successful rock. More hits followed and the Doors became the first New Rock group to garner a huge following among the young teens and pre-teens who were traditionally the mass rock audience. Jim Morrison became rock's number-one sex idol and the teenie-boppers' delight. The group played bigger and bigger halls — the Hollywood Bowl, the garish Forum in Los Angeles and finally Madison Square Garden last winter in a concert that netted the group \$52,000 for one night's work.

But the hit "Light My Fire" was a chopped-up version of the original album track, and after that castration of their art for immediate mass appeal (a castration encouraged by their "hip" company, Elektra Records), the Doors died musically. Later albums were pale imitations of the first;



trying desperately to recapture the impact of their early days, they played louder and Morrison lost all subtlety: at a recent Miami concert he had to display his penis to make his point.

Exhausted by touring and recording demands, the Doors now seldom play or even spend much casual time together. Their latest single hit the depth; *Cashbox* magazine, in its profit-trained wisdom said, "The team's impact is newly channeled for even more than average young teen impact." "Maybe pretty soon we'll split, just go away to an island somewhere," Morrison said recently, fatigue and frustration in his voice, "get away by ourselves and start creating again."

But the Doors have made money, enough to be up-tight about it. "When I told them about this interview," said their manager, Bill Siddons, sitting in the office of the full-time accountant who manages the group's investments (mostly land and oil), "they said, 'Don't tell him how much we make.'" But Siddons, a personable young man, did his best to defend them. The Doors, he said, could make a lot more money if they toured more often and took less care in preparing each hall they play in for the best possible lighting and sound; none of the Doors lives lavishly, and the group has plans for a foundation to give money to artists and students ("It'll help our tax picture, too"). But, he said, "You get started in rock and you get locked into the cycle of success. It's funny, the group out there on stage preaching a revolutionary message, but to get the people, you gotta do it to the establishment way. And you know everybody acquires a taste for comfortable living."

Variations on the Doors' story are everywhere. The Cream started out in 1966 as a brilliant and influential blues-rock trio and ended, after two solid years of touring, with lead guitarist Eric Clapton on the edge of a nervous breakdown. After months of bitter fighting, Big Brother and the Holding Company split up, as did Country Joe and the Fish (who have since reorganized, with several replacements from Big Brother). The Steve Miller Band and the Quicksilver Messenger Service were given a total of \$100,000 by Capitol Records; within a year neither one existed in its original form and the money had somehow disappeared.

Groups that manage to stay together are caught in endless conflicts about how to make enough money to support their art and have it heard without getting entangled in the "success cycle." The Grateful Dead, who were house and bus minstrels for Ken Kesey's acid-magical crew and who have always been deeply involved in trying to create a real hip community, have been so uncommercial as to frustrate their attempts to spread the word of their joyful vision.

"The trouble is that the Grateful Dead is a more 'heard of' band than a 'heard' band," says manager Rock Scully, "and we want people to hear us. But we won't do what the system says — make single hits, take big gigs, do the success number. The summer of '67, when all the other groups were making it, we were playing free in the park, man, trying to cool the Haight-Ashbury. So we've never had enough bread to get beyond week-to-week survival, and now we're about \$50,000 in debt. We won't play bad music for the bread because we decided a long time ago that money wasn't a high enough value to sacrifice anything for. But that means that not nearly enough people have heard our music."

The Jefferson Airplane have managed to take a middle route. A few early hits, a year of heavy touring (150 dates in 1967), a series of commercials for White Levis, and the hardnosed management of entrepreneur Bill Graham gave them a solid money-making popular base. A year ago they left Graham's management, stopped touring almost entirely, bought a huge mansion in San Francisco and devoted their time to making records (all of them excellent), giving parties, and buying expensive toys like cars and color TV's. They've gone through enormous amounts of money and are now \$30,000 in debt. But they're perfectly willing to go out and play a few jobs if the creditors start to press them. They resolve the commercial question by attempting not to care about it. "What I care about," says Paul Kantner, "is what I'm doing at the time — rolling a joint, balling a chick,

continued on next page