

EYE MIND

The Saga of Roky Erickson and The 13th Floor Elevators, The Pioneers of Psychedelic Sound

Paul Drummond

Foreword by Julian Cope

Q & A WITH THE AUTHOR PAUL DRUMMOND

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN AT WORK ON THIS BOOK?

Since 1998. Nine years in the making.

HOW DID THE IDEA FOR YOUR BOOK ORIGINATE?

Conversations with Julian Cope about how little was actually known and how much was myth.

DID THE BOOK INVOLVE SPECIAL RESEARCH?

I compiled every known article on the Elevators and realized the timeline was a contradictory mess. I made loads of transatlantic phone calls but none of the band was interested in being interviewed. I half-heartedly headed to Texas primarily to attend the 1999 SXSW in the hope I might find something extra. Before I knew it my research and English accent was opening doors and breaking 30 years silence, I tracked down most of the band in Austin and the Hill Country but not Roky, who was desperately ill at the time. I returned to England and planned a follow up trip before Christmas.

Tommy Hall had refused an interview but I decided to buy a plane ticket to San Francisco anyway and turned up at his Tenderloin flophouse. Not sure whether I would be met by a "Syd Barrett" wall of silence. I surrendered my passport through a grill to gain access before I ascend a staircase held together by rotting carpet. When I found Tommy he was lecturing a fried 'Nam Vet on synapse function. The room was stacked to the ceiling with tape cassettes, tinned clams and cobwebs that hung like huge hammocks. Next it was my turn. After passing Tommy's interrogation we settled into "cool conversation" ...soon the room blurred and the cockroach on the back of my neck didn't matter.... It was, as Tommy said, "just protein."

Next I flew to Austin and once again tried to pass Roky's gatekeeper, his mother. This time I was in luck, she'd been paid by a documentary crew and access was possible. I was persuaded to meet Roky on film in the desperate hope he might speak to me. He sat there, toothless, beaming in a chair with an egg McMuffin in his hand exclaiming, "Mother! What IS this THING?" as the yolk dribbled down his arm.

I realized I had my work cut out and what I thought was two years work turned into eight. I traveled everywhere they had, from endless miles of microfilm at the newspaper archives and court house...to tracking down their family, friends, fans and the vice cops who busted them. I visited every possible location: where they played, the hill cabin they hid in during the summer of '67, the house where Stacy Sutherland was killedI witnessed Roky regain his life and return to the stage... it had been a long strange trip. Having traced their lives there came ominous task of piecing it all together....

HOW DOES THE ELEVATOR'S STORY DIFFER FROM MOST ROCK BAND BIOGRAPHIES?

Most music books are plain simple tales of rags to riches. Nothing compares to the Elevators tale...all other bands are boring. No one was THIS extreme.

IS THERE ANY SCHOOL OF WRITING OR PHOTOGRAPHY THAT HAS INFLUENCED YOU?

Almost every generation there is an attempted cultural revolution. Antonin Artaud wanted to investigate the rift between the mind and body to further understand the human condition. His life and struggles parallel much of the Elevators story.

In the new age to talking cinema Artaud wanted to revive the "dead" medium of the theatre as a vehicle to psychologically effect and provoke the audience into higher realms of understanding. He traveled to Mexico and experimented hallucinogens/Peyote, and was incarcerated in a French mental home where he was subjected to electric shock treatment, before his friends rescued him.

Had Artaud lived into the late sixties it would be interesting to see how he viewed rock'n'roll gigs. Would he approve of them as the bastard son of theatre he was searching for—the highest form of low art that could affect and communicate new ideas to an audience?