

**Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic
and Other Satisfactions**

By Michael Hicks. University of Illinois Press, 2000, 162 pp, illustrated, two appendices, extensive notes, index, index to song titles. ISBN 0-252-02427-3. Price: 16.95 (paperback), and

**Tomorrow Never Knows, Rock
and Psychedelics in the 1960s**

By Nick Bromell. University of Chicago Press, 2000, 225 pp, two appendices and extensive notes, index. ISBN 0-226-07553-2. Price: \$22.50 (hardcover).

As someone whose hormones were running rather high in the 1960s, I took a keen interest in the rock music of the period. Consequently, I could barely wait to open Michael Hicks' *Sixties Rock*, with its stoned cover art and intriguing subtitle *Garage, Psychedelic and Other Satisfactions*. Although the opening chapter made me wonder if the book's musicological premise and academic style were appropriate to the subject, I must admit that after seven chapters and two appendices of Mr. Hicks' admirable writing, I'm a believer.

By beginning the book with a chapter significantly devoted to an acute analysis of Mick Jagger's singing, the author seems to adopt a "sink or swim" approach. After all, there are many here among us, to paraphrase Mr. Robert Zimmerman, who feel that Jagger's voice is but a joke. However, I would admonish skeptics to read on.

Although he uses enviable documentation, and clearly is intimate with his subject, I don't always agree with Mr. Hicks' conclusions. For instance, in discussing the vocal forms of '60s rock singers, Hicks asserts that singer Jack Ely "subtly echoes [Buddy] Holly's baby talk" in the Kingsmen's 1963 record of "Louie Louie". Hicks hears "baby talk," an ironical singsong delivery that Holly had popularized in songs such as "Sheila" (1962). My ears, however, recognize in Ely a prurient, languorous frat-boy sneer that, at the time, was commonly associated with both "Louie Louie" and the Kingsmen. Again, Hicks suggests that Mick Jagger whined his way through the Rolling Stone's version of "Walking the Dog" (1964). I would describe Jagger's performance as another example of the aforementioned post-adolescent sneer. Furthermore, Hicks comments that Jagger's singing evinced "an ambivalence toward pitch, as though the pitches that emerge are *still being considered* [emphasis his]..." I would observe that Jagger seemed more unsure of what his limited singing abilities might be capable of achieving, rather than contemplative of a range of vocal choices.

In his second chapter, Hicks discusses rock instrumentation, principally the evolution of "fuzz" (distorted) guitar and its antecedents in the playing styles of pop ensembles of the late 1940s and 1950s. Though his fuzz guitar family tree is sketched with thoroughness, I'm surprised the author doesn't include the recordings of Louis Jordan in his history of instrumental distortion. Jordan's later 1940s novelty blues records, emphasizing his rough-voiced saxophone, had an "over-miked" sound in which the original recording levels seem to have been set too high. In the resultant electronic distortion, I have heard inklings of the ragged manipulation of Jimi Hendrix's psychedelic guitar.

A chronological exploration of recordings of the song "Hey Joe" is one of the most interesting things I've read on pop music. A subsequent discussion of LSD-inspired rock is

positively transcendental, but a long, intricately-detailed examination of the Door's "Light My Fire" and its variants never ignited my interest – perhaps in part because I've never been particularly impressed by that oaf in Orphean clothing, Jim Morrison. The body of the book appropriately concludes with an examination of '60s rock song endings that is so well written that one is sorry that this is the end, my beautiful friend.

In a world where it sometimes appears only under-prepared, self-important twits write about rock music, Mr. Hicks has taken on the difficult task of trying to tell a stranger about rock and roll, as the Lovin' Spoonful once put it. His success is that his serious musicological approach is made convincing and accessible through the strength of his talent for writing.

Nick Bromell, on the other hand, shuns the purely musicological approach in his book *Tomorrow Never Knows*, in favor of a sociological view of '60s recorded music. For those who might not be familiar with the final song on the Beatles' *Revolver* album (1966), from which the title of this book derives, John Lennon gave millions of middle-class youths their first taste of the peculiar detachment of an acid trip through the bizarre lyrics and instrumentation of "Tomorrow Never Knows". I was one of those young fans, just turned eighteen and on the brink of college. Although I had recently written my final "current affairs" term paper on LSD and the controversy provoked by psychedelics, I hadn't a clue what an actual drug experience might be like. Therefore, I was puzzled and somewhat put off by the decidedly un-"yeah-yeah-yeah" song "Tomorrow Never Knows". According to Mr. Bromell, I was not alone among Beatle fans, as yet uninitiated in the secrets of mind altering drugs, who heard the song not as a Pied Piper's invocation, but as an unsettling anomaly. That was to change, both for me and millions of others, as the crest of the '60s broke and swept us into uncharted territory, musical and cerebral.

Although I have some criticism to offer, let me establish at once that this book is an important contribution to the study of recorded music and society. The author has plenty of firsthand information to impart about that time period often referred to as America's (and much of the world's) "turbulent decade". Bromell, as an historian of the '60s, feels himself disenfranchised by conventional opinion – as he puts it: "So maybe it's fitting that this [meaning his personal] '60s hasn't been integrated into the nation's history. I don't believe strongly enough... in the honesty of sweeping epics about 'the American experience' to wish for the vision expressed by rock and psychedelics to be woven into a seamless story about national progress or national decline." Clearly, Mr. Bromell has not lost that "outsider" quality of youth, and therefore he brings a palpable immediacy to the text.

The book is focused on recorded music and the response it inspired in its listeners. He refers to this connection as "living to music". If you are one of the many who have embraced the popular notion that the '60s were a vast, self-indulgent exercise in futility (or worse), you will not like this book. Mr. Bromell very cogently shows that the '60s may have been a spike on the sociological meter (as the '20s had been), but that the changes provoked in ourselves and our world were important and have been lasting.

This is not to say Mr. Bromell's conclusions are altogether sunny. After giving us a very vivid picture of what it was like to be young, stoned and carried away by the songs of Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix and others, he passes into gloomier territory in his chapter "Evil" is 'Live' Spelled Backwards". Like many who reflect on the '60s, he is finally touched by melancholy as he considers what was commonly expressed at the time as, "we have met the enemy and they are us". Mr. Bromell avers that the "radical self," promoted by rock music and altered states of consciousness, was unable to endure in middle-class youths