

OUT ON THE EDGE

by Art Johnson

WE'RE OUT ON THE EDGE--

hangin on, tryin to live, but tryin to live just a little bit better."

-Chet Helms

It was like, you know, the whole wild, free feelin that was the spirit of America drifting ever west, to the farthest edge of the frontier, till the frontier was no more and we were just hangin on to the edge of the Pacific Ocean.

And there we were, in a coney island dance hall, all these hairy freaks who had come together in a community crisis, to see if we, and our common vision, could hold together: Chet Helms and the Family Dog, Jerry Abrams and the Light Artists Guild, Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead, the Messiah and his World Crusade, Teddy Bear and his Thirteenth Tribe, Ron Poulte of the Wild West Show, Mike Bloomfield, the Good Times, the Berkeley Tribe, and Bill Graham even.

Playland hot tamales, underground concrete johns that stink, the Wild Mouse, powder pancake ladies in furcoats playing pinball machines, the Fun House. "Original sensational enchiladas," salt water taffy and long licorice sticks, lights, noise and carnival music pumping through the salty air--all reminiscent of a 1930's movie. The power of the ocean roaring underneath it all sets a tone of melodrama. Bizarre. To stage left, the curtain of ocean mist rises on--The Family Dog on the Great Highway.

It's Friday night down in Playland, but there's only 300 people inside the Family Dog, hoping to hear the Grateful Dead, who are late as usual. On the street outside the Light Artists Guild has set up a psychedelic picket line, with light show, conga drums, coffee and food.

"If the Dead crosses the line," declares Jerry Abrams at the stage door, "as far as I'm concerned the rock trip in this city is down the drain. We would never cross a musician's line."

The San Francisco light shows, 67 of them, all the major shows except the Brotherhood of Lights (which has a corner on the Fillmore--and intends to keep it) have come together to work for the development of their art form, and their economic survival.

The Guild voted to strike the two San Francisco ballrooms in order to gain recognition for the Guild, equal billing with the bands, and a minimum pay scale.

Chet is out on the street too, maintaining that "I want to deal only with individuals. I don't think I could ever reach an agreement with an organization. I would give my right teeth, man, never to have to deal with another agent or middleman." And here, the lanky, gently-hopping Helms, who looks like he stole his long silky blond hair from the head of the baby Jesus, straightens his shoulders and flips into a crisp baritone, mimicking a businessman: "Now please look here, Mr. Helms, it's like this..."

If Jerry Abrams is anything, he ain't a businessman. He ain't the world's greatest organizer either. By throwing a picket line around the Family Dog, the Guild made a serious mistake. The Dog has been losing \$4000 a week since it opened on the Great Highway June 13. The Guild's asking for a minimum of \$300 a week. Chet has been paying \$400 a week on the average.

"I could use some money too," Helms relates. "I haven't been paid in 4 weeks. I still have a \$50,000 personal liability from the Avalon. Very simply, we put the place together with 6 grand, and we've been given another 12 grand by our investors. I was counting on this weekend with the Grateful Dead to get a paycheck." If the Dog ever turns a profit, Helms will get 30% to feed his Family.

Inside the ballroom Friday night, Glare light show from Palo Alto is shedding light on the situation for 300 bills, but was turning the money back to Helms.

Why didn't Glare join the Guild, or at least honor the picket line? "It's kind of insane," Richard of Glare says. "Chet Helms doesn't have any money. We want to help save the Family Dog. The Guild is a good idea, but if the Family Dog falls down, so does everybody else."

On the dance floor below, the feeling was summed up by one chick who comments: "We got to stand together, brother, it's as simple as that. I came to hear the Grateful Dead--if they didn't play then I wouldn't cross the line."

When the Dead finally arrived, we all trucked out to their Metro van, 50 yards from the pounding surf, lit the peace pipe, and began to rap. It became clear that all of us are "out on the edge, hangin on, trying to live."

Even the Dead are \$50,000 in debt. "The way I experienced this strike," Helms explained a few days later, "was like a run on the bank. It feels like a precursor, you know, of what's going to happen around the country. They're looking at us to see not only what we can do about us, but what they can learn from us."

We started out with the forms that were given, business forms, union forms, but for 3 years the whole fuckin world has been looking at us for new solutions."

"If we work together collectively," Jerry Garcia of the Dead offered, "we can all extend our forms. Right now the bands get more money than anybody else, and that's not righteous."

"At one time," said Helms, "people would come to the Fillmore just because it was happening. They didn't know exactly what it was, but knew it was exciting. Then the record companies came in, put \$50,000 on it, sealed it, packaged it, and said here is what it is."

"I think essentially people don't come to see this band or this light show--people come to have a good time. Billing is the linear structure we have to leave behind, I mean the draw game, man, where this group is best, this group next best, and so on, you dig?"

"I think, though, that light shows, you know, in their relative importance to the whole thing have come down over the past few years, you dig? It isn't necessary to say any more, lights by--"

The Dead did not play Friday. But a temporary settlement was reached Saturday afternoon, so that the Family Dog could be open that night.

Saturday night on the Great Highway was one of the best gigs since opening night, when the Airplane played. With the strike over, the Dead, Albert Collins and the far out Afro-Haitian Ballet played to a full house. The scene there gave off comfortable vibes.

Bill Graham, at the meeting the following Tuesday, would rail on about his "rights" as a businessman, and his right to run the Fillmore exactly according to his whims, as the individual with the bread. "Why do we have light shows?" Graham would ask. "Why do we have apples in the cafeteria? Because I like them. The man with the dollars, and not the man with the art form, has the negotiating point."

All well and legal. Yes, Bill Graham, the Fillmore is your personal trip, and that fact that it may be our trip too don't bother you. Maybe that's why I never go there, because I always feel the heavy presence of somebody's personal money trip.

But at the Family Dog Saturday night, I felt as free and comfortable as I would in a friend's home. "We're all locked into games--the Family Dog, the Grateful Dead," as Chet Helms said, "When are we something happening, but it doesn't have to be called the Family Dog--it can be The Common or whatever."

Chet Helms is a businessman. But more than that, he is a member

see p. 4



photo by Copeland



JERRY GARCIA

photo by Anne

LAW TANGLES BARB WIRES

The question of "who owns the Barb?" was garbled a little further this week as Max Scherr, Allan Coult and their respective attorneys had another day in court.

Both sides lost. Coult managed to extend his temporary restraining order prohibiting Scherr from publishing the Barb. Scherr imposed a ten-thousand dollar bond on Coult to ensure payment if Coult finally wins the case.

The whole thing was put off until trial ten days to two weeks in the future.

At this time Coult can continue to publish a newspaper called the "Berkeley Barb" only so long as he posts the ten-thousand dollar bond, and puts all "Barb" receipts in a trustee account administered by

a third-party attorney.

In addition, Coult must pay five thousand dollars immediately into the trustee account. Coult cannot draw from this account to pay printing and other bills without the prior agreement of Scherr's lawyer, Robert Treuhaft.

"It's ten thousand dollars that I don't have" complained Coult. "I don't see how I'll be able to put out a paper this week." Somehow or other, I think he'll manage.

The court process was rushed, because an accident case had to come to trial. This seemed to benefit Coult in that the Judge didn't have time to go into certain questions concerning possible breach of contract regarding the trustee account.

-P.G.

WEST FEST STRUCK

Last week (on Thursday), the Haight Commune voted to call a nationwide boycott and community strike on the Wild West Festival. This crashing end was arrived at only after the collapse of alternatives.

To clear any confusion, the two principles in the case are the Haight Commune, a gathering of tribes and peoples from the Haight area (that's the area the Festival will center on, both life-wise and geographically); and the San Francisco Music Council--8 men from the rock industry who control the Festival.

The San Francisco Music Council is a fox in sheep's clothing. Thruout the PR hype which Festival strongmen laid on the Establishment media Wednesday night, spokesmen for the Council solemnly declared the festival to be art for art's sake. The musicians, dancers, and lightshow people were at last to be given the opportunity to put a festival together on their own.

Yet the Music Council from its start has been made up of three promoters, three managers, an editor, and a columnist. The only instrument these decision-making 'artists' play is lead bullshit.

In addition, although the Music Council 'conservatively' that a quarter of a million kids will get here from around the country, housing has been left hanging and legal self-defense has not been dealt with. These problems in particular will center in the Haight community because of its reputation with the coming kids and its proximity to the Festival.

On the question of money, council member Donohue explained to the press: "We have two major expenses; \$12,000 for the rental of Kezar, and \$10-20,000 for PG&E. That's why the top-billed shows in Kezar must cost \$3 a head."

Now dig this. 3 nights at Kezar, at \$3 a head, with 50-

see p. 4