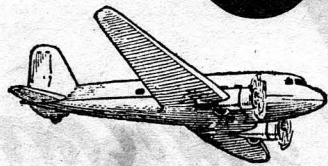


OZZIE



NEW WAVE, August, 1977

The World's Only Rock and Roll Swimwear

by Mike Farrace

While a clammy but happy crowd of underweight hipsters witnessed a luke-warm set by a band of nervy youngsters called Rockestra, members of Ozzie had taken their respective places—in their homeward bound station wagon. Since the boys had a ninety minute drive back to Sacramento that night, they opted to go on before Rockestra, though they were billed second under the Nuns. Within a few short weeks of playing the Mabuhay for the first time, Ozzie had gained respect and admiration from lovers of "Reich und Roll."

Earlier that evening: One lone man walks to the drums. He begins to pound a hypnotizing beat. Soon, a bass player appears, and they combine to turn the crowd into a pulsating, seething mass.

Suddenly, a slight, bearded, spectacled man springs from his seat in the audience weaving and

bobbing to the music like a cobra, arms outstretched, knees rising, chin barely clearing the floor as his head dips sharply to the beat. He ambles to one side, where neatly printed cards indicate that seats are reserved. "FM Productions" says one, "Columbia Records" says the other. Quick, nimble hands whip out and rip the cards to shreds, flinging them with abandon into the crowd. Several pale, lean types fill the chairs. The stage is complete, and Ozzie breaks into the first of the three short medleys they called songs that evening, "Cookies Crumble" and "Geometry."

Five or six years ago, Ozzie was known merely as *Girlfight*, a group of eight or so pals who met to play spontaneous music, sometimes without real instruments. They played no gigs, earned no money for their music. They were in it for...well, for kicks. Gradually, they progressed to occasional gigs at a place in Sacramento called Campus Pizza, the name of which, at least back then, was misleading. Between the poolroom and the stage, there was more tempered steel than in the front window of a Mission Street pawn shop.

The crowds at Campus were not large, as Ozzie played at first on off nights, but they were dedi-

Continued on next page

cated advocates of the band's R&R. Ozzie was the first band in Sacramento that came out and did what they did, without regard for...well, for anything. The act was 90% originals (tunes like "Needle Row," a tragic tale that differed every night, and "Your Love is Like a Gas Chamber," a tune Ozzie still does as an encore) coupled with copies of such notable American traditions as "Dead Man's Curve." Sometimes they were paid, sometimes they were not, but then, in those days, people described Ozzie in terms of how lovably incompetent they were. While they seemed to be stumbling around up there, this tremendous music would seem to happen just by chance. In the midst of it all, they would be visited by strange persons wielding puppets that made gestures to the crowd, and keyboardist Cell would regularly receive calls on the Ozzie request line (conveniently located on top of Cell's Farfisa Compact, an instrument that still serves to define a large part of Ozzie's sound) getting requests for songs like "White Rabbit" which were never played.

Gradually, other clubs booked the band to play on off nights, and Ozzie's rather devoted following had further opportunities to see them play. One of the highlights of this era was a single concert they did at the pizza place, where a total evening was conceived and executed to a full house with help from a mysterious personage, the ubiquitous M.C., Doctor Gestapo (who, according to bassist Happy Jack, "came to us in a vision and stayed for lunch"), who still assists in the oblique Ozzie productions.

Ozzie has since recorded two simply brilliant tapes, which have spawned a single scheduled for late summer release. To be included on the disc are "Android Love" and "Organic Gardening," two of their finest numbers.

When the Mabuhay Gardens began booking New Wave (Ozzie is, incidentally, closer to Glib Metal than New Wave), it was a natural for the band. Though they had been burned (by both crowd and venue) at a certain Stop Sign in Berkeley, they were anxious to get their music out there. Their regular zips west on Hwy 80 are welcome trips into the heavy fantastic.

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As Cell finishes his dance at the bench of the Farfisa, the music has reached a fever pitch. His nasal voice bites through the volume as an index finger shoots into the air, punctuating with Jerry Lee cool. Guitarist-vocalist Spencer Sparrow tempers the effect with a strange, maniacal smile aimed at the first row. He plays the slide guitar with a rough-hewn, but entirely eloquent finesse. Bassist Happy Jack Hastings (author of the terrifying anthem to all-consuming affection, "Your Love is Like a Gas Chamber") strides the stage, dwarfing his instrument with a huge body. The rivets on his overalls scratch the back of his axe, but he doesn't care. Guitarist Zone chooses a visual backseat, concentrating on beckoning forth crushing chord progressions and melodic leadwork that has made him the crux of Ozzie's musical framework. Drummer Armando Vasquela's powerfully compelling percussion acts like an ocean wave to Ozzie's note in the bottle. It is a successful evening, and the station wagon is a good place for the ninety miles home.

The question is, of course, will Ozzie continue to "burn up the bamboo," so to speak? One of Ozzie's most prized advocates, who knows them as a band better than anyone, puts it this way: "We'll stay the same, but you'll change."

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