

ROCK MUSIC AND THE FILM

by Nick Ferguson.

Since its beginning, rock music found its way into the medium of film. At first it seemed to be nothing more than typical Hollywood capitalization, exploitation of a "fad". But rock was more than a fad, it was a (sometimes successful) life-style. As the music (and its listeners) matured, film-makers found it necessary to deal with rock seriously, even understand it. Unfortunately, to date, success has been only occasional.

The first major film to use rock significantly was *Blackboard Jungle*, a better-than-average (for the times) study of juvenile delinquency. The song was Bill Haley & the Comets' *Rock Around The Clock* (still rock's all-time best selling single). As the song was used in the film, its effect was brilliant, super-charging the intensity of the plot. It conveyed the restless mood of teenage gangs in the 1950's; intense, violent, looking for kicks. The song was a vital part of the environment the story created.

THIS, THEN, IS THE
"MUSIC PLAYING IN MY
HEAD"

The Fifties also provided us with the first of the Elvis films. Presley was (and still is) one of the greats of rock music. Yet, he has never come across in film. His earlier films, such as *Jailhouse Rock*, while poor movies, had infrequent clips of Elvis in action, pure gut-bucket rock and roll. But most of his films, especially the later ones, are mindless and plastic, certainly not at all indicative of Elvis' magnetic performing power.

Tons of films were released in the Fifties that either featured rock or had it as theme music. The majority were abortive second-raters. The music wasn't presented intelligently, but shoved into a showcase, a freak sideshow. Films like *Rock Around The Clock* (based on Haley's song), *The Girl Can't Help It* (with Jayne Mansfield), *Don't Knock The Rock*, *High School Confidential* (title song by Jerry Lee Lewis), and naturally, *Rock, Rock, Rock*, are low camp today. But these insipid losers often contain short segments of great rock and roll performances. Seeing Eddie Cochran, Buddy Holly, Little Richard, Ritchie Valens, etc., is worth the banality of the plots.

The first artistic rock films were the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!* Just as the Beatles gave the music a new potency, they also

lent it to rock movies. Both films exhibit a sensitivity and understanding of the music that is uncommon in film (an "A" for director Richard Lester). Although the songs aren't used to musically translate the dramatic action, they do communicate the frenetic pace of the Beatles brank of comedy. Either film is a lesson in rock movies, definitive of the genre and absolute giggles to boot. (The Beatles' cartoon, *Yellow Submarine*, also has good use of rock and shows the sheer happiness inherent in the music.)

The scene with the Yardbirds in Antonioni's *Blow Up* is, conceptually, rock/film's masterpiece. The suspense of the surrealistic plot is maddening and peaking. The photographer (David Hemmings) finds himself at a rock concert where the audience is stoned on their ear. The song is *Train Keep A Rollin'*, a perfect choice, full of tension and energy. But the Yardbirds can't pull it off, their performance limp and lackadaisical. This song should have had us careening off the aisles. At the conclusion of the scene, the group smash their instruments, which in context of the plot, is an expert directorial move. But it is contrived, a simpering parody of the Who (the group Antonioni originally wanted until he found he couldn't direct them). This scene could have been dynamite, a powerful dramatization of the power of rock and a climatic moment in the film. It was neither, but a lame joke.

Other misguided attempts have been Donovan's track for *Poor Cow*, the boring varoom-beat of the motor cycle epics; the bubblegum beach party films; idiocy such as *To Sir With Love*; and quasi-rock like the Association's pallid schlock in *Goodbye Columbus*. (Why did they even bother?)

But rock has worked elsewhere. In Lester's *Petulia*, a sardonic view of the jet-set, the Grateful Dead do an outasite, but all too short, bit. Bruce Brown's surfing (the real thing) documentary, *The Endless Summer*, had muzak, but pleasant stuff. Even Paul Simon's usually pseudo rock-poetry was tasteful and relevant in Mike Nichols' *The Graduate*. (One of the finest scenes ever done was in an underground film, *Little Match Girl*, a grown-up teeny bopper sees her jaded reflection in a toy store window and through the past darkly, the poignant echo of Mick Jagger's laconic voice sings *As Tears Go By*. All the pretension possible was avoided and the scene was moving and genuinely artistic).

Pennebaker's *Monterey Pop*, a semi-documentary, portrays the spirit of rock. It's people playing, listening, grooving, relating the

ALVIN AILEY INSPIRES DANCERS

by Stacy Rizer

Friday, the thirteenth of February, two partial busloads of NCSAers traveled to Greensboro to see Alvin Ailey's dance company perform. The modern dancers, at least, were somewhat depressed since it had been the last day of classes with Richard Gain who had formerly been with the Martha Graham Company, Joffrey Co., and ABT. Mr. Gain had been guest-teaching here since before Christmas, and all of us needed to get away for an evening. Most important, we needed to see a really good professional company once again, to rekindle our inspiration and hope.

Alvin Ailey's dancers didn't let us down; the program developed sufficiently to leave those who appreciated it, exhilarated.

First presented was *Dance for Six*, choreographed by Joyce Trisler, with music by Vivaldi. To be frank, the dance world has seen better choreography. Initially, I was struck by the bright white leotards on the dancers' shining black bodies (it is mainly a Negro company)--large, strong bodies. But as the bodies began moving, all I saw were arms and legs, no substance, and step-step-step with no sense of flow -- a bad barefoot ballet. Even the movements for the men were merely "pretty". Nevertheless, the dancers made some attempt to make it work, and as I watched, I noted "involved mature smiles". A couple of sections of the dance did project some cleverness: interesting relationships between one woman and several men, their manipulation of one another, and a tender, natural dance of a man and woman.

The second piece I anticipated as something special: *Poeme* was choreographed by Pauline Koner, with the second movement of Samuel Barber's *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*. I originally saw the dance performed by Gyula Pandi and Georgiana Holmes. It is a lovely poem, and Gyula and Jordie danced it with a quality

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vibrations of the best rock festival ever. Great scenes of Janis, Otis Redding (WOW!), the Who, Country Joe, Mamas & Papas, Hendrix raping his guitar (phallic rock), and an exquisite Ravi Shankar portion. See this one.

In many ways, *Easy Rider* is the best, most ambitious rock film. Steppenwolf's *Born to be Wild* is a bitch. Fonda and Hopper take off and you hear: *GET YOUR MOTOR RUNNIN'!* Pure speed, heavy metal rock. I always want them to turn up the volume. The Byrds *Wasn't Born to Follow* is a lyric poem of the characters and the landscape. *Don't Bogart that Joint*,

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