



GRAND

The Astonishing Story
Of Detroit's
Historic Fun House

Photo: Emile Bacilla



BLAM



Revellers congregate outside The Grande Ballroom on its opening night, Friday 7th October 1966, to witness The MC5 and The Chosen Few

Between 1966 and '72, **THE GRANDE BALLROOM** became a hotbed of rock 'n' roll, showcasing the best of Detroit's home-grown blue collar acts before opening its doors to a bewildering array of rock, blues and jazz artists from around the world.

As a new documentary film about the venue is released, **KRIS NEEDS** staggers through the ramalama and dope smoke to find the heart of this unique institution



During 1986, visiting the suburban Michigan home of *Creem* editor Dave DiMartino as the magazine's New York correspondent, my genial host memorably described Detroit as being "like a doughnut", with these 'burbs ringing the abandoned city centre. It was best not to go there as Detroit was murder capital of the US at that time. Soon *Creem*, which had sprung out of Detroit's vibrantly seminal late '60s music scene, would join the escalating migration away from Detroit, following Motown to relocate in LA. By the 21st century, Detroit had become one vast ghostly ruin, its broken skyline dominated by colossal shells that had once been hotels, department stores or the factories of the once-thriving automobile industry. Whole neighbourhoods were now ghost towns, abandoned houses standing like rotten teeth in vacant lots.

While recent years have seen underground artists attracted by the cheap rents and urban regeneration thanks to the billions of dollars pumped into restoring the city, the incendiary music created in Detroit has been one element in the city's history to be increasingly recognised through names such as The MC5, Stooges and the countless others who barged into its golden soul, jazz and blues hall of fame.

At the centre of this revolution lies The Grande Ballroom, which started in 1966 at a time when musicians steered their industry rather than lawyers and accountants. The Grande was the ultimate in wild, never-to-be-repeated one-offs, run by the freaks to celebrate that time at full, Detroit-style throttle. Now on DVD, *Louder Than Love: The Grande Ballroom Story*, by first-time filmmaker and Detroit home boy Tony D'Annunzio, positions it as one of the '60s' most vital rock 'n' roll venues, an unmatched hotbed of excess where, according to MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer, "the whole audience was on one wavelength". For around five years the Grande was the crucible and microcosm of all that was flying at the energised edge of rock 'n' roll in the social revolutions of that incendiary time. Practically every great band of the time played the 1800 capacity venue, which was almost like a final cataclysmic death-gasp of '60s defiance from the beleaguered Motor City, a hedonistic embodiment of bare-knuckle rock 'n' roll attitude already dancing in the ruins of a city heading towards decades of decline, depression and oblivion.

To understand the Grande's essential place in the last century's musical timeline, which could grip The Who as easily as the commonly-documented MC5, it is necessary to look at the city which spawned it. Detroit was never much like other major American settlements, even when it was booming. The city's proximity to the Canadian border made it the last major pit stop for The Underground Railroad which transported runaway slaves from Dixie until the end of The Civil War in 1865. Many ex-slaves found work in the textile factories before the vast automobile plants loomed after Henry Ford founded his company in 1903 and jump-started the city's main industry. While the notorious Purple Gang of Eastern European-descended bootleggers and hijackers ruled the underworld, the 'Paradise Valley' of Hastings Street nurtured blues and jazz in Detroit's teeming bars and clubs during the '40s. The Black Bottom section stood alongside New Orleans, Chicago and St Louis in the '50s jazz age, while John Lee Hooker



"The music had to be strong enough to keep everything else at bay. There was a whole bunch of problems in Detroit which gave birth to industrial strength rock 'n' roll"

Tom Wright, Grande manager

was just one of the bluesmen who settled there after migrating from the south.

The '50s also saw the rise of Detroit natives Little Willie John, Hank Ballard, Bill Haley, Jack Scott, Wilson Pickett and Eddie Floyd, and the family-operated Fortune Records paved the way for Gordy the following decade. R&B giants who came up on Fortune included Nolan Strong and proto-rapper Andre Williams, before George Clinton and The Parliaments arrived in '67.

Detroit had been a haven for outlaws, outsiders, activists, subversives and lunatics for

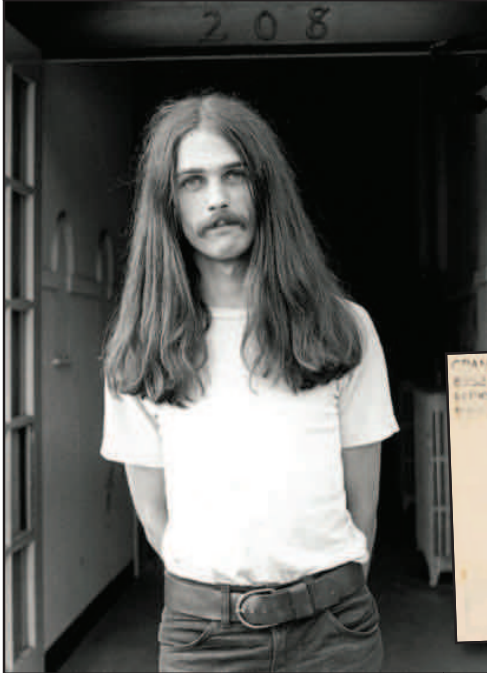
centuries. By the mid-60s, it was a magnet for hippies and draft dodgers, who could sneakily commute between Detroit and Toronto, and hard-line rockers. Detroit's rock scene had given its energised answers to The Beatles and Stones in the form of a garage-rock scene which spawned bands such as Unrelated Segments, Terry Knight & The Pack, The Pleasure Seekers (featuring a young Suzi Quatro), energised white soul boosters The Rationals and the awesome Mitch Ryder & The Detroit Wheels.

The Grande was one of around half a dozen ballrooms built in the '20s during a particularly healthy time for Detroit's entertainment industry. The Moorish/Art Deco building at 8952 Grand River Avenue was designed in '28 by local engineer and architect Charles N Agree, after he was approached by its local businessman owner Harry Weitzmann. The building originally had retail stores on the ground level and an elegant ballroom, which was renowned for having the biggest sprung hardwood dance floor in the country on the second floor. But the jumping ballroom scene was poleaxed by the depression then World War II. The last big bands played there in the early '50s, before it became a shuttered hulk used for storing mattresses.

In '66, Dearborn high school teacher and local radio DJ Russ Gibb went to visit a friend in California and was taken to see The Byrds at The Fillmore Auditorium. In the movie, he recalls being stunned by the light show and sufficiently struck by Bill Graham's advice about running clubs to consider starting such a club in Detroit. After scouting vacant ballrooms, he settled on the Grande, cutting a deal with the owners and asking local writer, activist and jazz critic John Sinclair for help, along with local underground paper, *The Fifth Estate*. Their mission was to give Detroit its own Fillmore-style teenage rock 'n' roll hub.

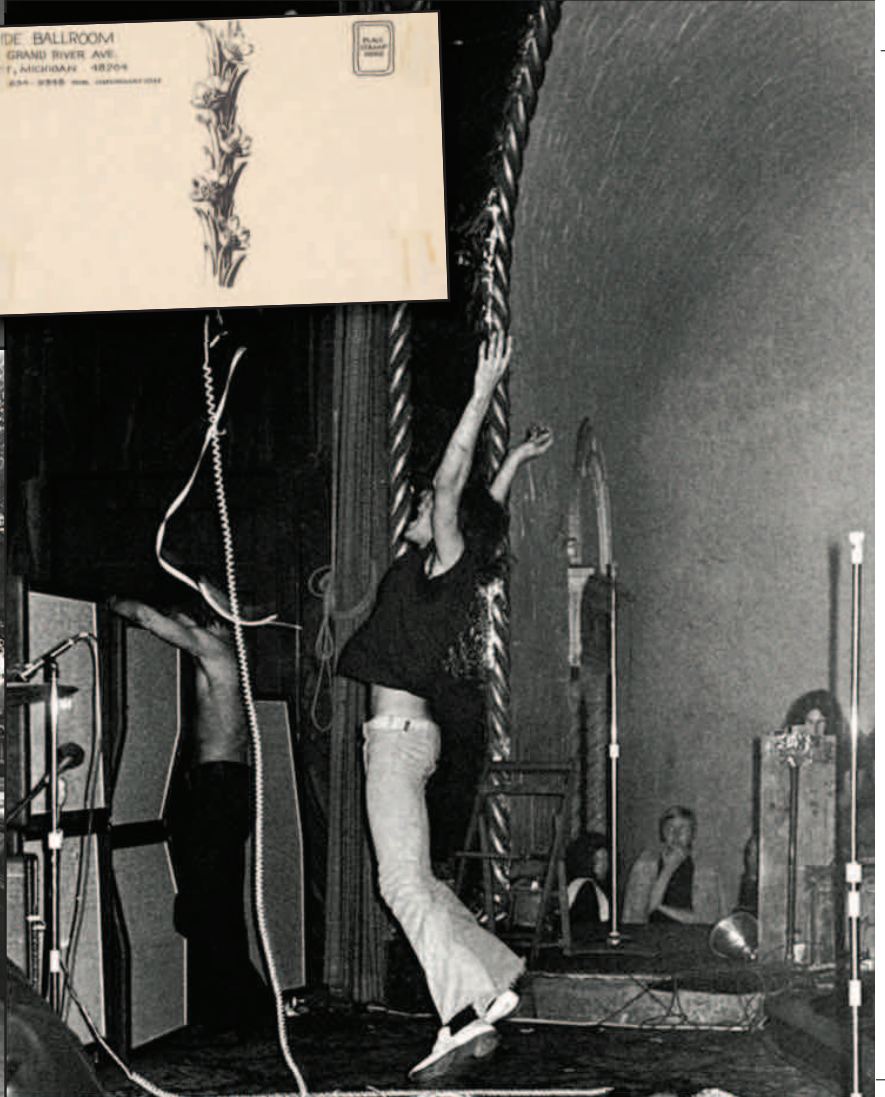
Sinclair had started The Detroit Artists' Workshop and Wayne State University Artists' Society back in '64 and published several volumes voicing his love of free jazz, along with underground papers. (He was also a founder of The Underground Press Syndicate of which Pete Frame's *Zigzag* was a member.) After Sinclair was busted for two joints, it ignited a legal battle that would go on for years, ending up with his incarceration. He had already done six months for possession, with the recently formed Motor City 5 playing a festival supporting him. "We were a tiny sect of weirdos with long hair that smoked pot and took LSD, listened to rock 'n' roll and equated music with jazz and poetry," says Sinclair in





Grande schemers.
 Left, top to bottom:
 founder and promoter
 Russ Gibb; poster artist
 Gary Grimshaw, many of
 whose works appear in
 this feature; kids outside
 the Grande.

This row, top to bottom:
 The MC5's Wayne Kramer
 on stage at the Grande in
 '68; poet, writer, activist
 and MV5 manager John
 Sinclair enjoys a smoke;
 Ballroom postcard; The
 Stooges' Iggy Pop and Ron
 Asheton at the ballroom,
 '69





the film.

Detroit was then a tough, industrial city with declining employment but a passionate rock 'n' roll scene, which had to be as tough as the crowds it attracted. "The music had to be strong enough to keep everything else at bay," says former Grande manager Tom Wright. "There was a whole bunch of problems in Detroit which gave birth to industrial strength rock 'n' roll." Adds producer Don Was, "You've got people who basically are impervious to trend," and wanted "honest gritty music, without affectation".

With eye-blasting posters designed by his friend Gary Grimshaw, Gibb's opening nights featuring "Detroit's only *avant*-rock minded manifesting MC5" took place on October 7th and 8th. Audiences visibly increased every week as '66 passed into the happening '67, going particularly crazy on the frequent Five nights. As the film recounts through its many eye-witness accounts, The Grande was bathed in thick layers of marijuana smoke, with many on acid as they craved the ultimate in high-energy no-nonsense rock 'n' roll and lived up to the White Panther manifesto of "dope, rock 'n' roll and fucking in the streets" with salacious abandon, against backdrops of swirling psychedelic lightshows or experimental German movies being projected on the walls. Several of the Grande veterans in the film agree that the energy was in the air. "It was much more powerful than anything that was going on in LA, San Francisco and New York," states Alice Cooper, whose own boundary-smashing band was still in its formative stages when the Grande opened. He does give the movie its title when he declares, "Louder than love; love was on seven, The Grande was on 10... We wanted to be in the Grande."

As a veteran of Friars Aylesbury, the UK's own equivalent to the Grande in terms of hip, receptive crowds (if they liked the band) when it opened in '69, it has to be said that nothing compared then to the feeling of having a club ran by likeminded individuals rather than faceless money men, separate from the music biz mainstream and that, most importantly, was all yours. That long-lost form of unity also marked local scenes at The Cavern and Ealing Club, The Roxy and CBGB's – proper scenes where respect had to be earned by bands that played there. This was Grande law; if bands didn't cut it, they were told in no uncertain terms, through an attitude likened by Wayne Kramer to The Colosseum in ancient Rome. "You better deliver the goods," recalls Stooges guitarist James Williamson.

By July '67, after finding its feet with local bands, which also included SRC, Jagged Edge, The Rationals and Unrelated Segments, the Grande started booking acts from outside the city walls. Tim Buckley was one of the first and saw his Detroit debut coincide with one of



"Without The Grande
I don't think there
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Stooges"
James Williamson

the biggest riots in US history. When flower-power wafted in and hippie chicks were filmed sticking flowers into soldiers' gun barrels, America's ghettos were feeling anything but peace and love, which turned The Summer Of Love into a season of riots. The time had come today and Detroit's riot that year would change everything for the city. Detroit had been regarded as taking a progressive lead in race relations with a large black middle-class that had worked its way up over the decades in different professions. But lower down the totem pole, unemployment was rising and black workers were treated badly if they managed to land a job at the auto plants. There was widespread disaffection with social conditions, underfunded schools, unfulfilled promises and, particularly, with the predominantly white, racist police force. After unrest had started in Nashville, Tampa, Cincinnati and Newark's large African-American population went off like a powder keg for six days, with the National Guard sent in, the Detroit riots ranked as one of the largest in US history in terms of destruction and body count. It all went off in the early hours of July 23rd, when police raided an unlicensed after-hours drinking club in the office of The United Community League For Civic Action. Such clubs were an important part of Detroit's black social life as discrimination excluded African-Americans from many of the city's bars and clubs.

After the heavy-handed raid, the police were met with mild opposition, to which they

over-reacted, sparking an orgy of looting and arson. After an estimated 10,000 rioters had smashed, pillaged and fought for four days, the carnage ended when Governor George W Romney sent in The Michigan National Guard, and President Johnson deployed the army. "My home town is burning down to the ground, worse than Vietnam," rumbled John Lee Hooker in 'The Motor City Is Burning', written two months later. The aftermath saw 43 dead (33 of them black), 1,189 injured, over 7,000 arrests

and 2,000 buildings destroyed. Many black businesses were burned out, affected areas staying ruined for decades, while white flight to the suburbs intensified and swept Motown and the auto industry out of the city. Like everywhere else, the rioters looted their own local businesses such as the corner shops, many standing burned out for decades afterwards.

Louder Than Love gets underway with LBJ citing "pillage, looting, murder and arson" on a news broadcast. But, like George Clinton's barbershop in Newark, they didn't touch the Grande, which had been open for 10 months when the riots erupted nearby. The place was a funky key artery in the neighbourhood's cultural bloodstream whose incineration would have benefitted nobody more than the establishment they were rebelling against.

With the city licking its wounds in the wreckage, the Grande upped gear and brought in The Grateful Dead in August and the supercharged psych-soul of The Chambers Brothers in September, whose rendition of Curtis Mayfield's 'People Get Ready' and their own 'Time Has Come Today' chimed with the time and blew the old roof off. "Detroit is turning into rock city before our eyes and we love it!" proclaimed the local *Rock & Roll Crusader*. The first appearance by Cream that October signalled the kind of buzz that would prod certain British bands to adopt the Grande as their favourite US venue. The trio, who enjoyed the local hospitality nearly as much as the ecstatic record-breaking crowds, stretched out on 'Spoonful' and 'Toad' after the crowd had been primed by The MC5. Afterwards, a dazed and delighted Jack Bruce said playing the Grande surpassed any other gig in the US, including the Fillmore.

That month saw the first appearance by Grande faves The James Gang, before a first appearance by The Paupers from Canada. They were followed by The James Cotton Blues band and three nights from New York's infamous Fugs who, at that point, had released the ribald anarchy of their ESP-disk albums. The third show, on Sunday November 26th, was a benefit for John Sinclair's legal fund, but only 88 stumped up the \$3.50 admission. Moby Grape were still riding their seismic debut album when they appeared on





This is my jam!
The 5 and friends at the
Grande in '69

Five Go Mad

KRIS NEEDS and MC5 singer **ROB TYNER** remember the Grande's original house band

When the Grande opened, The MC5 were its house band for the first two years, leading The Motor City's front-line charge with blistering rock 'n' roll fuelled by the aural turmoil of jazz warriors such as Albert Ayler (captured in all its impossibly exciting formation flash in tantalising snippets in the *Louder Than Love* movie).

Getting together in 1964, singer Rob Tyner, bassist Michael Davis, drummer Dennis 'Machinegun' Thompson and guitarists Wayne Kramer and Fred 'Sonic' Smith played Stones, Who and Yardbirds covers before hooking up with John Sinclair, who became their manager and turned them into a manifest reaction against racism, police oppression, The Vietnam War, repressive drug laws and laziness in the community.

In July '77, I spent an afternoon with Rob Tyner, who recalled, "Now we would be looked on as middle-of-the-road but in those days we were the maniac fringe. We were faced with the situation where we were, stylistically speaking... I hate to say this... ahead of our time. We tried to change people's musical and social beliefs too quickly and too radically. Then there's this vast social backlash that happens... You're talking about a new social order, and I know new

order sounds a little ominous. There's always been this resistance to change, especially when it comes to rock 'n' roll. I wanted us to be totally original. I thought what we were doing was totally unprecedented, at least in rock 'n' roll. There was plenty of jazz music, like Sun Ra, where people improvised and played for free. When we started doing it with electric instruments, the energy levels that we achieved were so profound that audiences either absolutely hated it or went crazy. I thought that it would be a long term effect."

The years have eroded incidents related in Sinclair's prison letters, such as the band being forbidden by a Grande manager to take the stage at

"We were ahead of our time. We tried to change people's musical and social beliefs too quickly and too radically"

Blue Cheer's June '68 debut unless they drop the nudity, swearing and flag-burning in their act, requiring an ultimatum from Blue Cheer's manager Gut before they could go on. Sinclair responded by answering Black Panthers honcho Huey Newton's declaration that white people who want to help the struggle should form their own party by setting up The White Panthers towards the end of the year. Sinclair's manifesto was based on the creation of "a cultural revolution through a total assault on the culture by any means necessary, including rock 'n' roll, dope and fucking in the streets".

The police stepped up their persecution of The MC5, putting them under surveillance, under pressure and under constant threat of arrest. The group's reputation as drug-crazed harbingers of free love and black power-sympathising revolution boiled down every element of the establishment's paranoid hatred of the counter culture into one loathsome entity.

September '69 saw the band sign to Elektra Records after being spotted by A&R field man Danny Fields, then recording their *Kick Out The Jams* album at the Grande over two incandescent nights in October. Stoked by the hellfire testifying of 'Brother' JC Crawford, (heisted from Eldridge Cleaver), the Five powered through their incendiary repertoire, setting new templates for stampeding high-energy rock 'n' roll. The energy of their performance ensured their place in proto-punk's pantheon, although the ensuing controversy with the music business and FBI saw them moving to Atlantic to record their second album in May '69, dropping the politicising for retro-rock 'n' roll and splitting with Sinclair, although they continued to return to the club where they made their name and cut their teeth.



Ballrooms Are For Operas

THE WHO were welcomed with open arms when they hit the Grande in 1968

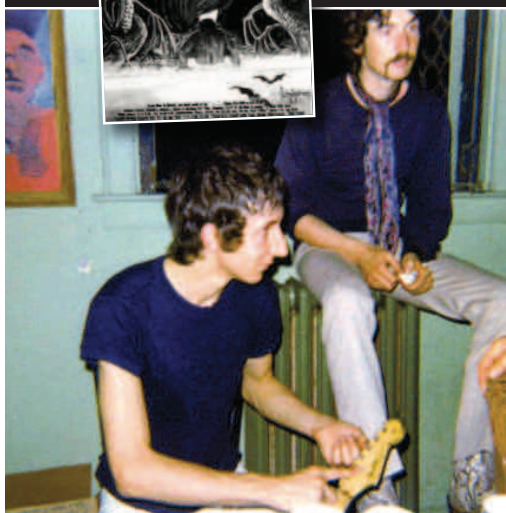
The Who's debut at the Grande in March 1968 was the big one, packed with the ballroom's biggest crowd yet and cementing a mutual relationship with the band as their favourite venue in America. Speaking in *Louder Than Love*, Roger Daltrey says that, on first impression, the band were expecting "just another scuzzy ballroom" but walked into "a wave of pot smoke" and onstage to a deafening standing ovation. Enjoying the best sound they say they ever had, The Who plugged into the crowd's energy with such passion that, after their set of hits and Eddie Cochran staples, Townshend smashed two guitars during 'My Generation'. "It turned our heads around... music really should be all about feeling where you come from," says Daltrey.

Road manager Tom Wright later said he had "never seen The Who work harder" and described the Grande as "where we've wanted to play ever since we've been on the road." He had been at Ealing Art College with Pete Townshend and is credited as the US music fan who turned the band on to the blues. Wright was so smitten by the gig he soon became its manager. When he phoned the band to announce his decision, they thought he'd moved up in the world.

The Who returned to the venue on July 13th, then again for three nights in May '69 when they chose it to unveil *Tommy*, Townshend's about-to-be-released new rock opera. The Grande movie contains a recording of Townshend's explanatory announcement "about a chap being born in Shepherds Bush". It went down a storm, clinched the band's confidence in the new work and foretold The Who's coming elevation

into the big league after the enthusiasm expressed at the Grande spread throughout the world.

Below: Pete Townshend and Pink Floyd's Nick Mason backstage at the Grande, July '68



December 8th and 9th. The next week saw Vanilla Fudge make their Grande debut on the back of the previous August's smash debut album, before the scorching Paul Butterfield Blues Band, who were promoting their third album, *The Resurrection Of Pigboy Crabshaw*. Cream were back for two nights the following day and the year ended with two performances by John Lee Hooker, whose ominous chicken shack boogie-stomp sounded like the precursor of everything.

With the dust settling on a tough new era, '68 started with Clear Light becoming the first LA band to play the Grande, before blues legends Buddy Guy and Boston's Beacon Street Union showed what happened when baroque-flavoured psych was booked to follow The MC5. Equilibrium was restored a week later with Detroit son Dick Wagner & The Frost, who had only had a single called 'Sunshine' released but were already a local fave. A week later Canned Heat made the appearance that would establish them as Grande regulars, having been a hit at Monterey, gained drummer Fito de la Parra and just released the career-boosting *Boogie With*

Canned Heat. Two days later, The Byrds were, by all accounts, blown off by The Rationals and greeted with silence by a packed house, despite previewing the new *Younger Than Yesterday*. Like local outfits The Thyme and SRC, The Rationals were booked by Grande-connected A-Square Records supremo Jeep Holland.

March saw Canned Heat return, Big Brother & The Holding Company cause a splash, even supported by The MC5, and Blood Sweat & Tears debut a few days later. Two appearances by The Electric Prunes were interrupted by The Who's highly-auspicious debut at the venue (see sidebar).

By the end of the month, the Grande had seen performances by The Youngbloods (riding unifying anthem 'Get Together') and The Fugs, before April welcomed The Troggs, Junior Wells, Traffic and The Mothers Of Invention, whose set included 'Hungry Freaks Daddy', 'Dog Breath' and 'America Drinks And Goes Home'. They were supported by The Psychedelic Stooges, The MC5's "little brother band", then whipping up a wall of feedback-sodden noise partly achieved by using a mutated Hawaiian guitar, vacuum cleaner and miked-up toilet. The band would grow before the audiences' eyes, soon evolving into The Stooges, fronted by the charismatic, crowd-diving figure of Iggy Pop, also including guitarist Ron Asheton, his drummer brother Scott and bassist Dave Alexander, who churned out a racket of stunning brutality, with nihilist anthems such as 'No Fun' alongside their demonic freeform pile-ups. "Without the Grande I don't think there

would have been a Stooges," reflects James Williamson.

Five days later, The Yardbirds appeared, now in the final transition before Jimmy Page formed Led Zeppelin, their heavily experimental set including a version of Jake Holmes' 'Dazed And Confused' (which Page claimed authorship of in his next band). Two weeks later, Procol Harum appeared, still touring the previous year's debut album but invited back several times, followed by Paul Butterfield, then The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown, who opened for LA's Love after two nights. Love had progressed from being what Lester Bangs called "a switchblade reflection of The Byrds" to the Latino art songs of *Forever Changes* but, with line-up changes afoot, were steeling and souling into Arthur Lee's more Hendrix-centred vehicle.

Cream returned in June, followed by The Soft Machine and three nights by the infamous Blue Cheer, named after a brand of Owsley acid and riding their incendiary, bludgeoning debut, *Vincebus Eruptum*, as the loudest band in the world (Supported by a precarious MC5

– see sidebar). July saw The Jeff Beck Group, soon to release

the classic *Truth* album with a line-up including Rod

Stewart, bassist

Ronnie Wood

and pianist

Nicky Hopkins.

Five days later

came the first

appearance by

Fleetwood

Mac, then in

their first

album's heavy-

blues incarnation

and soon to release

Mr Wonderful. The

Grande loved its blues

and they clicked.

After an appearance from

the newly Syd-less Pink Floyd and

return visit from The Who in July, LA's Spirit

descended for three nights in the wake of their

seminal debut album, joined by Fever Tree and

The James Gang, before The Steve Miller Band

followed by Country Joe & The Fish over the

next couple of weeks.

The Grande continued to support the blues

by booking Albert King, Howlin' Wolf and

BB King, who played three nights in

September. Talking in the film, the recently-

departed King says he had never received such

an ovation from a crowd, before even playing a

note. "I cried. I'd never been treated that well

before onstage."

The golden run continued as the following

weeks saw Procol, Ted Nugent's Amboy

Dukes, the UK's Spooky tooth (another

Grande fave, who'd just released their *It's All*

About debut), Ten Years After, John Mayall,

Quicksilver Messenger Service (playing down

their debut album with a set soon

immortalised on *Happy Trails*), The Move and

The Moody Blues in a Brummie double-

header, Blue Cheer, Tim Buckley, Terry Reid

and Jefferson Airplane, who were just back

from Europe with The Doors and pushing

Crown Of Creation. (For some reason, The

Doors never played the Grande.)

"The energy was much more powerful than anything that was going on in LA, San Francisco and New York"
Alice Cooper



Top left: The Jeff Beck Group, L-R: Beck, Micky Waller, Rod Stewart, Ronnie Wood (just out of picture); Right: Fleetwood Mac, L-R: John McVie, Mick Fleetwood, Peter Green, Jeremy Spencer. Top: Glen Buxton, Alice Cooper and chicken, October '69; Above: Flamin' Groovies headline a John Sinclair benefit show, June '69

December saw The Grateful Dead, Deep Purple promoting *The Book Of Taliesyn*, two nights featuring San Diego's Iron Butterfly (so worried about how they would go down they started their set with the currently-hot 'In-A-Gadda-da-Vida'), Fleetwood Mac, The Fugs and New Year's Eve with The Stooges and SRC.

The tumultuous '69 got under way with Jimmy Page returning for the first Grande appearance by Led Zeppelin. February alone saw Jethro Tull and Spirit, Mother Earth and Savoy Brown, Procol Harum and The Flying Burrito Brothers, Paul Butterfield and Van Morrison (who had released the transcendental *Astral Weeks* the previous November) and Steppenwolf. April saw The Velvet Underground play three nights (supported by Earth Opera and The Nice). Now in their Doug Yule '69 phase, the Velvets started sets with 'Heroin' and blazed through 'What Goes On' and an epic 'Sister Ray'.

May welcomed Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Who debuting *Tommy* and Sun Ra making his Grande debut, blowing off Led Zeppelin on the 16th before two nights with The MC5, which veterans still talk about in awed tones. Ken Dabish could only exclaim "WOW!!!!!" in his *Ann Arbor Sun* review, before declaring "Sun Ra literally mesmerised the kids." Ra took black culture where it had never been before, remaining aware of their roots and the street but branded "far-out" or

"crazy". Born in racism-clenched Birmingham, Alabama, Sun Ra created his own universe and claimed to hail from Saturn as he led his exotically-clad ensembles through their space chants while declaring "space is the place". Sun Ra enjoyed a special relationship with Detroit after playing with The MC5 in June '67 at Wayne State University. The Five were major fans, having used Ra's 'There' poem as a launchpad for their own 'Starship' on *Kick Out The Jams*. As writer Ben Edmonds observed, "The MC5 and Sun Ra were visionary brothers-in-musical-arms, fearless explorers charting unknown territory the rest of us might one day occupy." They were made for the Grande and should have been featured more heavily in the film.

1969 continued with Chuck Berry and Slim Harpo, Ten Years After, Bo Diddley, Keef Hartley, Johnny Winter, The Move and Moodies and, in September, the Detroit debut of Tyrannosaurus Rex, supporting The Turtles and receiving a rough reception. Acid-altered bongo-player Steve Took would leave Marc Bolan to climb to stardom on their return. "They weren't used to Tyrannosaurus Rex on any level," sighed Bolan on local radio.

That month also saw The Frost release their long-awaited debut album, *Turn On The Heat*, announced thus in the recently-established *Creem*: "The most important music in this country today is coming from Detroit; The Frost is Detroit's greatest rock band."

Although The Kinks appeared in November, the Grande's golden age seemed to be passing with the '60s as gigs got fewer and management changes occurred. These are not mentioned in the movie so best left to a fuller history. Local bands now dominated increasingly sporadic bills (although included The MC5 sharing bills with The Flamin' Groovies and Kaleidoscope). Many were benefits for John Sinclair. Finally, The MC5 closed the venue they'd opened on New Year's Eve '72.

The film, which has toured the world's festivals since opening in 2012, avoids behind-the-scenes shenanigans and the venue's demise too much, instead focusing on the monumental place of the club itself, using teasing clips of The MC5, Leni Sinclair's priceless photos and talking heads, including Sinclair, Kramer, Alice, Nugent, Mark Farnier, Don Was, Lemmy, club staff and misty-eyed punters. D'Annunzio, who took over three years to make his first movie after 30 years as a TV director, heard about the Grande from family who'd experienced it and set about trying to capture its original impact and crazed, hedonistic ambience. His next project is aimed at capturing Detroit's jazz eras. On this evidence, we can't wait. **SI**



Louder Than Love: The Grande Ballroom Story is out now on MVD DVD

