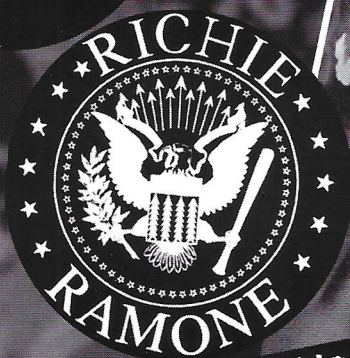


ROCK 77

Issue 19

FLAMIN CROOVIES

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FLAMIN' GROOVIES

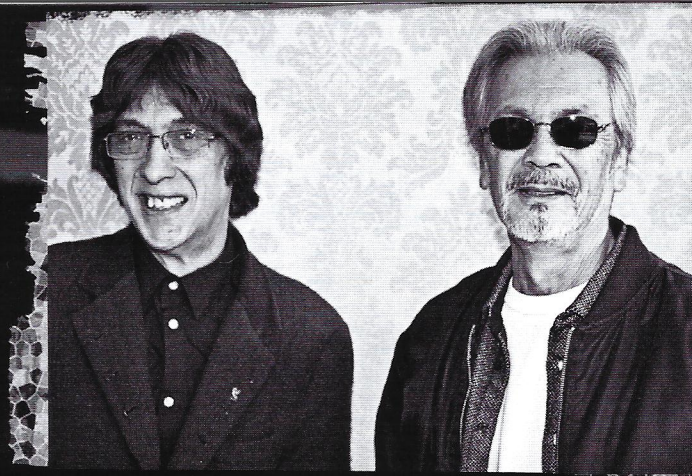
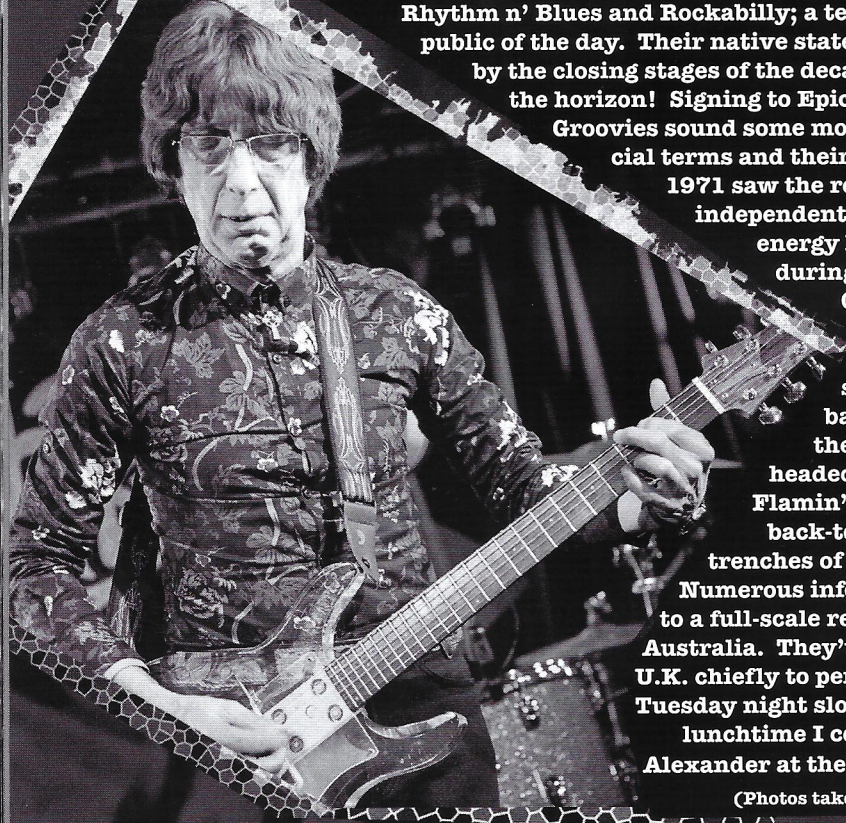
The origins of British Punk Rock are commonly placed in the Pub Rock boom of the early to mid '70's. The roots go much further back however and looking to the United States it's not difficult to identify traces of the sound in many of the Pacific Northwest bands from a decade previous. By 1968 San Francisco's Flamin' Groovies had dropped their self-released, debut 10-inch "Sneakers". More than a little disjointed,

the record was not however without merit. "Sneakers" implicitly set its sights back to classic Rhythm n' Blues and Rockabilly; a technique which failed to resonate with the record-buying public of the day. Their native state of California had all but left behind raunchy Rock n' Roll by the closing stages of the decade, with the dreaded Eagles epoch now looming large on the horizon! Signing to Epic Records, their follow-up LP "Supersnazz" congealed the Groovies sound some more, but despite its promise the record tanked in commercial terms and their short-lived time on a major label drew to a sharp halt.

1971 saw the release of "Flamingo" and "Teenage Head" through the independent Kama Sutra label, with both LPs exemplifying the high-energy Rock n' Roll the Flamin' Groovies became renowned for during the first run of the group. Calling on Larry Williams and Otis Blackwell as much as '60's Detroit Rock, these long-players became prime illustrations of what we now recognise as the Proto-Punk sound. Roy Loney's subsequent departure incited Cyril Jordan to redeploy the band to England, sewing the seeds for the second coming of the Flamin' Groovies as a rejuvenated Power Pop outfit, co-headed by Chris Wilson. As Punk Rock began to rear its head the Flamin' Groovies found themselves aligned to a new generation of back-to-basics Rock n' Rollers, dragging the Ramones into the trenches of '77 Brit Punk, before finally fizzling out in the early '80's.

Numerous informal get-togethers in the intervening years eventually led to a full-scale reunion in 2013 when they performed a small run of dates in Australia. They've continued to tour since and this year saw a return to the U.K. chiefly to perform at All Tomorrow's Party's, but rather unexpectedly a Tuesday night slot at Whelan's, Dublin also formed part of the package. That lunchtime I convened with frontman Cyril Jordan and bassist George Alexander at the Harcourt Hotel, Dublin, for the beneath exchange of words.

(Photos taken in the lobby of the Harcourt Hotel and later at Whelan's, Dublin).



RIOT. 77: Chris Wilson was just telling me he's back living in the United States again?

CYRIL JORDAN: Yeah, he's living in Portland.

RIOT. 77: He's from Boston originally?

GEORGE ALEXANDER: Watertown.

RIOT. 77: Oh right. I know that place; it's a dry town (laughs).

CYRIL: Oh yeah, for sure.

GEORGE: They got that Dirty Water though (laughs).

CYRIL: Yup, they love that Dirty Water (laughs).

RIOT. 77: Okay, so you're currently marking the 50th anniversary of the Flamin' Groovies. How does that feel?

GEORGE: Keep it a secret (laughs).

CYRIL: Yeah, it feels very strange and is completely unexpected. Not that I don't love it ... touring actually feels

easier for me now than it was back in the old days. Don't ask me how that happened because it doesn't make any sense. We're old geezers now!

RIOT. 77: ... but all clean and sober?

GEORGE: Oh yeah, except for Chris (laughs).

CYRIL: Well, Chris is clean but certainly not sober (laughs).

GEORGE: I certainly wasn't expecting it when they gave me the call to get back together. I'll be 70 years-old next month.

CYRIL: I'll be 68 this year.

GEORGE: Yeah, that's what Rock n' Roll will do to you, if you do it right. It keeps you young.

CYRIL: Keeps you young, yeah. I have to laugh in a way and I think we

were actually pretty lucky not to have made it back then because its that big money that destroys young people and I'm sure at least a couple of us would've OD'd or something. We're grown men now and can handle it better I think ... though I could be wrong (laughs).

RIOT. 77: You've been performing with Roy Loney again too right? You've played a couple of dates in Spain with him on this tour?

CYRIL: He's done two shows with us in Spain and then when we go back over to England he's going to do another two.

RIOT. 77: How come he didn't stick around for the rest of the tour?

CYRIL: Well, we've got the current line-up which is Chris, George, myself and our drummer Victor and we're cutting an album with that line-up. That is the current version of the Flamin' Groovies. Roy Loney was brought it at the request of the promoter for the festival in Wales. Then the 50th Anniversary show

came up in San Francisco and it just made sense to do a few of the songs off of "Teenage Head" with Roy.

GEORGE: Some of the other ex-members showed up for that show as well.

CYRIL: Yeah James Ferrell who was in the second version of the Groovies and Tim Lynch who was our original rhythm guitar player. It was great; Timmy had a ball and so did James.

RIOT. 77: You still do "Teenage Head" with Chris though, in this current line-up right?

CYRIL: Well yeah, we do that one, but we never cut that with Roy so it's basically Chris Wilson's version of the song.

RIOT. 77: This European tour is pretty much built around your appearance at



All Tomorrow's Parties?

CYRIL: Yeah, well we got a nice offer and when our promoter in Italy heard that we were doing the festival he decided why not set up a bunch of shows around those dates? So we'll be on the road for the next three and a half weeks.

RIOT. 77: Are you doing All Tomorrow's Parties on the same bill as Roky Erickson?

CYRIL: No, I think Roky is playing two days before us. John Cale was supposed to play as well but he pulled out because deposits weren't made at the right time. We're working on faith (laughs).

RIOT. 77: I remember reading somewhere that what first generated your interest in music Cyril was overhearing a Filipino band practicing in their garage across the street from your friend's house. Can you tell me about that?

CYRIL: Yeah, they all had Fender amps and guitars and were a couple of years older than me. Their garage door was always open and we would listen to those amplifiers.

RIOT. 77: You were also taken by how they looked? These people weren't hippies!

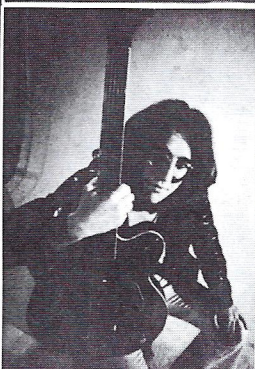
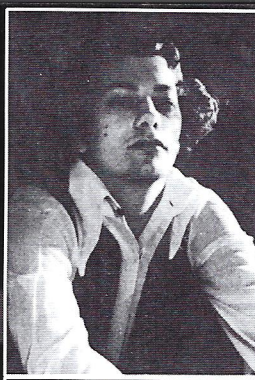
CYRIL: Oh yeah, it was sharkskin suits and Cuban-heel boots and this was before The Beatles ... a couple of years before the British invasion.

RIOT. 77: The image and music you were attracted to, this wasn't the norm for a white person? Velvet collars and Cuban heels?

CYRIL: White people dressed like morons then (laughs). Those of us who were cool knew that the Brothers and some of the Asians and Latinos knew what was going on.

RIOT. 77: How did it go down with your circle of friends when you started to adopt that look?

CYRIL: It's funny; one of my best friends Steve Gonzales still had a pompadour and never crossed over to The Beatles style when it came out, yet he was still a big Beatles fan. I didn't really have a circle of friends at that time, except for maybe the Afro-Americans at school, whom I got to be very friendly with. I realised after my first week at junior high school in the 7th grade that I better start wearing Cuban-heel boots and three-quarter length sharkskin coats with black velvet collars, otherwise I was going to get stomped by the bullies (laughs). It's amazing, I was walking downtown to try and find these clothes to buy and I see Cornel Gunter, the lead singer of The Coasters, coming towards me and he's got this



yellow alpaca sweater over his arm. The Brothers back then never wore the sweaters; they just had 'em folded over the arm when they walked down the street. I just freaked out and was like, "Wow!

Cornel!!" and he asked me what I was doing down here and I told him I was shopping for clothes. He said "Follow me!" and took me to a place called Leo's Clothes For Men and I got outfitted completely in sharkskin and Cuban-heel boots. The next week in junior high I was embraced by the Brothers (laughs). I didn't get a new circle of friends until two, maybe three, years later in '65 when I met George and his crew.

RIOT. 77: ... and what was your background George?

Were you from the same neighbourhood?

GEORGE: We weren't really that far apart, but we went to the same high school. My contribution to the culture that was changing at that time was that I was a full-blown hippie (laughs). My hair was halfway down my back and I looked like an Apache Indian.

CYRIL: Yeah, George was already into pot when we saw "A Hard Day's Night", but I didn't get into it until about '65. George, Tim and Roy had about three years on me. They were going to college and had cars and girlfriends. I felt like a kid waiting for Timmy to pick me up in his TR4A Triumph every day after school. Tim was a little wary of the boys turning me on to pot; he thought I'd freak out and the police would get my parents involved (laughs).

RIOT. 77: What was the turning point for you George, to go from the hippie stuff to Rock n' Roll?

GEORGE: Probably Cyril (laughs).

CYRIL: I had studied guitar and taught myself after four weeks of lessons. When I found out my guitar teacher didn't know who Chuck Berry was I realized I was never gonna learn what I needed to. The only way was to figure out how to do it myself. In those days our record players had four speeds - 78, 45, 33 and 16, which was usually used for spoken word. I got an Orson Wells reading record on 16 rpm (laughs). So anyway, I found out if I took an LP at 33 rpm and slid it down to 16 rpm I was in the same key. That's how I learned how to play "Johnny Be Goode". I learned all the intros to Rock songs but I knew nothing about chords. I had the intros to "Tallahassee Lassie", "Sweet Little Sixteen" and "Baby Please Don't Go" down. Then I met George at a pool hall one night while I was on the phone to my girlfriend. I seen this guy with long hair and wanted to introduce myself. George had his friends who were Roy and Tim and they were looking for a lead guitar player and a drummer. So I brought in the lead guitar and the drums and we had our first rehearsal one night in Tim's living room and I was the only one with professional gear - I had a Gibson 235 ...

GEORGE: I borrowed my cousin's amp and his bass (laughs).

CYRIL: From one song to another we'd be standing around wondering what to do next and I started playing "Baby Please Don't Go" which everybody knew and they started playing along. Then I'd go into The Yardbirds "Heart Full Of Soul" and this just went on all evening until finally after about an hour and a half we had about seventeen songs that we could play and we were now a real band. That was the beginning.

GEORGE: You asked about a change from one culture into the next and my introduction to pot started with a Beatnik who was full

blown with the beret and the goatee n' all that stuff. He took me to North Beach in San Francisco to see a movie and asked me if I wanted to smoke a reefer. I got real silly and went to the theatre to see "A Hard Day's Night" and when I watched that stoned for the first time I walked out and realised that's what I wanted to be.

CYRIL: He was totally reborn (laughs). That was Joe Caplan?

GEORGE: Joe Caplan yeah.

CYRIL: Joe had a friend from the East Coast who was a little older and we called him Lice Malone and he looked like Jerry Orbach from Law And Order, without the soap. He was extremely filthy (laughs). He'd be sitting in the coffee shop at the pool hall at four in the morning when we'd go there to buy pot and acid. In those days LSD was still legal; it didn't become illegal until

WHO PUT THE BOMP!
THE MAGAZINE FOR ROCK 'N' ROLL FANS
\$1.00 (SPRING 1978)

The Flamin' Groovies
Will '75 Be Their Year?

The History of Michigan Rock
Bob Seger, MC5, Mitch Ryder, S.F.C., Rationals, Suzi Quatro, ? and the Mysterians, Terry Knight

Beatle Novelties
A Complete Listing

The Rockability Revival
It Must Be Goin' Round
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about '66 I think.

GEORGE: They had no clue what was going on (laughs).

CYRIL: Yeah, it was the U.S. Army that was doing the experimentation. There was a guy who was working as a janitor in the Veteran's Hospital and that's how he found out about the acid. It's funny because when you think about it the U.S. Army actually created the whole LSD generation. It was like a Frankenstein that turned on 'em big time (laughs). By the time we were the right age to be drafted we were all flaked out on it.

RIOT. 77: Oh right, so none of you got drafted?

CYRIL: Nooooo (laughs).

GEORGE: I dropped LSD and then showed up at the Draft Board. I got to the psychiatrist's section with my long hair and head tilted to the side, not making eye contact and he asked me a bunch of questions. The final question that got me out was when he asked me if I liked people and I said "No" and he asked me why not and I said "Cos they're always picking at me with their eyes!". When you're on LSD you're going to conjure up things like that so he handed me a piece of paper and I was out.

CYRIL: Same thing happened to me. We had a lawyer back then who was a pretty cool guy named Brian Rohan and this is one of the great secrets of the San Francisco music scene ... everyone who got a major record deal from Jefferson Airplane to us to the Grateful Dead or whoever ... Michael Stepanian and Brian Rohan were like vice lawyers, so if you got busted for like pot or something those guys would come up to you and go, "You got a record deal? You got any money" and if you said no they'd arrange a record deal for you and that was how they'd get paid. That's how and why we all got signed (laughs). These are great stories that have never been told by anybody (laughs).

RIOT. 77: Your first gig was James Brown in '63. What are your memories of that night?

CYRIL: Oh yeah; me and my cousin had to go to Oakland for that one. We had already purchased the right gear that would allow us to hang out in a place that had three thousand Negroes in it ready to stomp your head. They were actually flattered to see these two white kids dressing like them and having the guts to hang out in their arena. So nobody messed with us and this was Oakland in '63.

RIOT. 77: The Black Panthers came out of Oakland, right?

CYRIL: Yeah, but that would have been a little later. They might have been happening then but the media wasn't aware of it.

RIOT. 77: You were heavily influenced by The Kinks and the British Invasion bands generally. Given that you'd already seen James Brown live at this point, you must've been aware that the British invasion was repackaged Black American music?

CYRIL: Well that's another reason why I think we all fell in love with those bands. I mean The Beatles had Smokey Robinson's "You Really Got A Hold On Me" in the charts maybe six months after The Miracles version. "Please Mr. Postman" too and that was a killer version they done of that song. I still marvel at the energy of those records. The other thing about the British Invasion was that the bass and guitars on those records were loud as hell compared to American Rock n' Roll records. They made an immediate

impression on all of us. That year of '63 ... I had been playing guitar since '62 ... I had fallen in love with the electric guitar in about '59 because of The Ventures, so by 1960 I had gotten all the Gretsch catalogues. Rickenbacker ... I knew about The Beatles gear, except for the Vox amps. A cousin of mine in Holland had sent me a catalogue of Vox amps in October of '63 and they were like pencil drawings of the amps. When The Beatles came out I recognised that this was the gear they were using and I went down to a neighbourhood music store called Angelo's and showed him the catalogue. He said "So what!" and I was like, "What do you mean? These are the amps that The Beatles use". Well, Angelo was a representative of the Thomas Organ Company and two months later they got the franchise for Vox amps in America ... because of ME (laughs). I'm sure The Beatles would be very pleased if they found this out (laughs).

RIOT. 77: You vacationed in England early on.

CYRIL: Yeah, in 1966. I came over to Hull because I had relatives there and stayed with my aunt for the summer. Then I took a three-week trip to Great Britain with my cousin, but me and him split up after the first night. We booked ourselves into a Youth Hostel for the first night and when we got there it was full-up. He didn't have any beds but he said he could give us some sleeping bags and we could sleep in the boxing ring in the gym. I remember trying to get to sleep at two in the morning with three hundred other punters in sleeping bags in this gymnasium. Then during the night a riot breaks out between the Germans and the Italians over a soccer match. I seen this guy

just go flying over my head and I got real pissed so I went down to the owner and demanded my money back since I had paid for a week up front. He wouldn't do it but eventually I got my money and went walking down Kensington High Street at four o'clock in the morning trying to find a place to stay. I split up with my cousin Paul and spent those three weeks in London by myself. I thought I only had \$300 but the rate of exchange was so good that I actually had about three times that and went crazy buying coats, shoes and a Hoffman bass (laughs).

RIOT. 77: I imagine England must've felt like a 3rd World country compared to San Francisco at the time?

CYRIL: Ha! Well I had fallen in love with England in the '50's because of Sherlock Holmes and "The Wind In The Willows" and all these crazy stories. By the time The Beatles came out they kind of reminded me of my love of England from when I was younger and now I was doubly in love with the place. England had the best clothes back then too and you couldn't find that type of gear any place else. I got subscriptions to magazines from England and would order clothes through them.

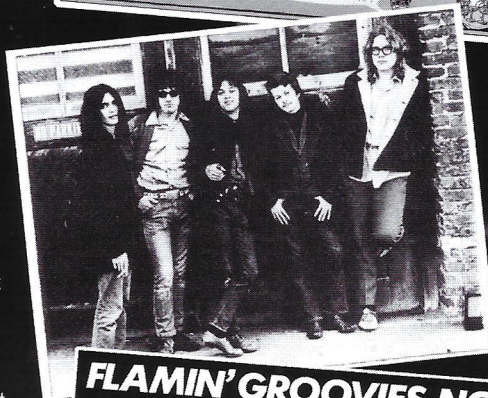
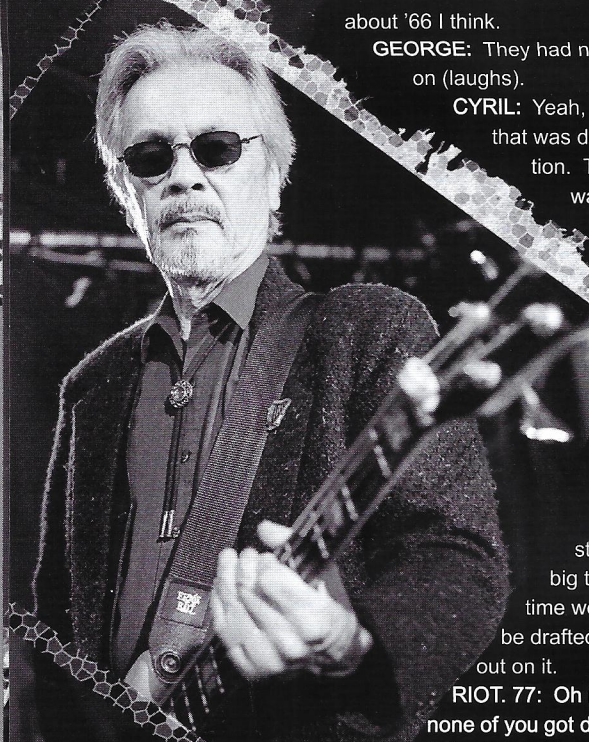
GEORGE: My memory is not being able to get a cold Coke; that was a culture shock (laughs). I went into a deli one time to get a sandwich and I asked for a ham and cheese sandwich and I turned around, picked up some crisps and then went back to the counter and there's two sandwiches sitting there - once cheese and one ham (laughs).

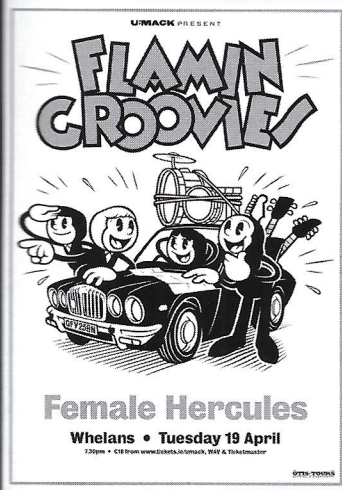
CYRIL: There was another time we were at the Tara Hotel in London and I ordered a Bloody Mary and they brought back a bowl of tomato soup and a bottle of Vodka (laughs). But these were just small freak outs (laughs). We adapted very quickly.

RIOT. 77: That reminds me of the Ramones stories about touring England early on. They said there was no such thing as ice for their

drinks (laughs).

CYRIL: I don't mean to brag but I was responsible for introducing the Ramones to the world (laughs). Linda Stein, Seymour Stein's wife, and I became very good friends. She was a heavy pothead and the only woman I knew back then who loved pot because most women hated it and were too self-conscious. Of course I had California pot so Linda was all over it and we





became really good friends. One night she told me about this band she had called the Ramones and asked if I'd help her out and take the band over to England and I later decided that I'd have them open for us on that tour. We had already done a deal with Sire and because of that Seymour signed them, so for the next two and a half years we took the Ramones with us. The last time I saw Seymour, which was about six years ago when Linda had been murdered, I bumped into him at an airport having not seen him in thirty years and I think the only Ramone alive at the time was Tommy and Seymour mentioned that

Tommy had said to him, "If it wasn't for Cyril, the Ramones never would have gotten out of New York". The thing about England back then and one of the reasons I eventually moved the band to England ... I found out from Ike Turner's manager Gerhard Augustin who was the head of United Artists that in those days you would get signed to a major label if you had opened for someone who was on a major label and they liked you. Ike Turner approached us at The Whiskey in L.A. one night with Augustin and asked us if we'd like to open for them every time they played California. I remember doing cocaine with Ike one night backstage at the Haunted House on Sunset Boulevard and I asked him how he found out about us and he done a big line and said, "Ray told me!". I said "Ray who?" and he goes, "Ray Charles". Then I remembered we had opened for Ray Charles the year before at Basin Street West in North Beach and for the occasion Roy Loney and I had ripped off the intro lick to "I Don't Need No Doctor" and wrote "Headin' For The Texas Border". Obviously Ray must've heard it and said "Hey Ike ..." (laughs).
Riot. 77: Around the time of recording the first album "Supersnazz" you were spending a lot of time down in Los Angeles - L.A. really took a shine to the band, didn't it?

CYRIL: It did; Los Angeles was our second real home. We got to a point in San Francisco where we became the black sheep because we were playing Rock n' Roll in a hippie-orientated society. We needed to find out whether we were in fact the worst band that had ever lived or if perhaps these people in San Francisco were just crazy. So we went down to Los Angeles and got a show at the Whiskey with Barry McGuire headlining. Of course Barry was roaring drunk and pissed off Mario Maglieri - the owner of the Whiskey and a Mob guy from Chicago ... lovely guy (laughs). Mario came into our dressing room after his set and said "McGuire's opening tomorrow night. You guys are headlining" (laughs). And then we became the house band. We opened for John Mayall when Mick Taylor was in the band, we opened for The Chicago Transit Authority when they came out, Pacific Gas & Electric, Spirit ... God the list is endless. Canned Heat was another one and their manager Skip Thomas really liked us and helped us out a lot down there. We actually did three shows on The Yardbirds last tour and I became good friends with Jimmy Page. A year later I remember one day he asked me to pick up John Bonham and John Paul Jones from the airport. It's weird; I had a picture of how they would look when I went to collect them, but when they came off the plane they had on jeans, white t-shirts, tennis shoes and motorcycle jackets - dressed exactly like the Ramones and this would have been 1970. I rolled up a couple of joints and took 'em to Knott's Berry Farm and we had a great time (laughs).

Riot. 77: Kim Fowley also came to your gigs while you were in Los Angeles. It was Kim who gave you the "Teenage Head" title, right?

CYRIL: Yeah, I met Kim at the Big Sur Folk Festival when I was on LSD one weekend. Kim was one of the funniest people I ever met and had me in hysterics the entire time. We were going around trying to pull birds and his line was, "We're looking for teenage head!". People were outraged; Linda Rondstadt got very angry (laughs). My mouth was locked open the next day because I had spent the previous day laughing for eight hours non-stop. Kim was acting as though there was a booth at this festival where you could get teenage head and we were looking for directions to it (laughs). When I got back to the city and showed Roy and George this lick I had, they asked what I was gonna call it and I said, "Why don't we call it "Teenage Head"?" and I told them about this wild weekend I had with Kim Fowley. We wrote "Teenage Head" at a time when Led Zeppelin was just coming up and we were on the ground floor. Jimmy Page had already influenced me big time; I got certain

guitar plects because of Jimmy, I got the right clothes because he told me about Granny Takes A Trip and I spent five hundred bucks on a pair of custom boots with half-moons on them (laughs). We were right in the centre of this new avant-garde that was coming up and because of my connection with Led Zeppelin we heard "Whole Lotta Love" six months before it was released. I said to Roy that we should do a Mothers Of Invention take off of Led Zeppelin and that was the idea for "Teenage Head". Really it was supposed to be a parody; it wasn't supposed to be an anthem for the Punks, which is what it turned into (laughs).

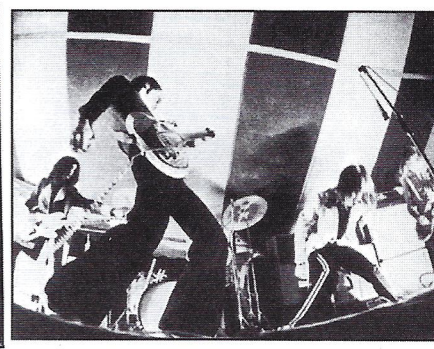
RIOT. 77: Neither of you had any idea about what was happening in Detroit with the MC5, right? How did you feel when you first discovered them?

CYRIL: We had gone to Detroit in '68 and the first night we saw them we knew that we were not the new hotshot group. Up to that point we were really confident and egomaniacs about it. There we were standing in the Grande Ballroom and Wayne Kramer comes out doing his James Brown step and starts off "Ramblin' Rose" and I just said, "I guess that's it - we're finished!" (laughs). They had Marshall Stacks in '68 man, so when I got back to San Francisco I had to get a Marshall stack (laughs). Our fans couldn't believe it - we had turned into this high-energy Rock n' Roll band. We became kind of like the west coast version of what was going on in Detroit. They really liked us in Detroit too because we had gone up there and done our three weeks in Ann Arbor or whatever and were ready to go home but the people at Creem magazine didn't want us to leave and offered us more work. We told them we had no place to stay and they said Creem magazine offices close at five o'clock and we could stay there. So we ended up sleeping in the Creem offices for three months. But yeah, Detroit had a big influence on us in the same way The Beatles did. We were a changed band when we came back to California.

RIOT. 77: You hooked up with Kama Sutra for the second record "Flamingo". What was that label like ... didn't Freddie "Boom Boom" Cannon work there?

CYRIL: Yeah, he was actually doing PR for the label. I met him one day at 1650 Broadway actually and recognised him straight away ... I love Freddie Cannon.

RIOT. 77: Gene Vincent was involved with Kama Sutra too - there's a story



that the Flamin' Groovies nearly ended up being his backing band?

CYRIL: Buddha Records had signed him and someone there decided that we would be the backing band for the LP, but he died in his mother's arms from bleeding ulcers about two weeks after that decision was made. There was a mention in the San Francisco Chronicle and I think George, Roy and Danny Mihm were in the photo with Gene ... I can't remember where I was for that session, I think I was ill. Do you remember that photo George?

GEORGE: Huh? That's too far back for me (laughs).

CYRIL: I remember some stuff that he can't remember and I hope he remembers stuff that I can't remember (laughs). I'm always asking him because I write a column called The San Francisco Beat for a magazine called Ugly Things. You know it?

RIOT. 77: Of course (laughs).

CYRIL: Beautiful magazine and it comes out about three times a year I think. Each column I do covers a year in the San Francisco music scene and we're at 1972 right now so I'm working on that. Lars has left the band, Timmy has gone to jail and Chris has just joined and I've pulled in James Farrell. We're just getting ready to move to England.

RIOT. 77: Yeah, what convinced you to do that? I know things fell apart in 1971 with Roy leaving, but was it just an impulsive decision you made to move the band to London? It was quite a bold step.

CYRIL: Well, we had lost our manager. He absconded with about twenty thousand dollars of our money and all my artwork, which I'll never forgive him for. I didn't realise it back then but writing this column I'm constantly reflecting back on those times and it occurred to me that the band got discouraged. After three great albums, "Supersnazz", "Flamingo" and "Teenage Head" we



weren't getting anywhere. Both Timmy and Roy were discouraged to the point where they just didn't care about doing it anymore. Well, Timmy got busted for dealing drugs and went to jail, but we had to actually say to Roy "You don't like doing this anymore, do you? You don't have to stay just to please us".

RIOT. 77: Did you ever get your money back from your manager?

CYRIL: No and he actually had the nerve to show up at a gig a few years ago and was like, "You guys need to work on your vocals!"

(laughs). Fuck you mate, you know?

(laughs). Jesus Christ, can you believe that?

RIOT. 77: When you got back to the States, Greg Shaw from Bomp! took you under his wing. How did you come into contact with him?

CYRIL: I think I met Greg at The Whiskey one night and we were talking records, talking shop, and he mentioned that he had five 45s by Del Shannon that I had never heard. He had a huge record collection so I went over to his house to check them out and we just became good friends. Then a few weeks later Greg and Seymour Stein became good friends and Greg was going to become vice president of Sire. It was decided that we would put a single out on the Bomp! label and we gave them "You Tore Me Down" which we recorded at the Grateful Dead's studio in San Francisco and Richard Olsen of The Charlatans was our engineer so we cut "Him Or Me" as the B-side. Next thing we know Seymour Stein is knocking on the door wanting to sign us and flies up to San Francisco to hear us in our rehearsal hall. He asks us to play him something new and I don't write songs unless I know they're gonna be on wax, so I got nothing to play him. Looking back it was kinda stupid because we did have "Shake Some Action" but we didn't really consider it worthy at the time, so we did "Please Please Me" by The Beatles live for him. That happened to be his favourite Beatles song so he signed us on the spot and Greg Shaw became our manager. Greg travelled to Rockfield in Wales with us when we cut the "Shake Some Action" album. He really lived it up too; he was doin' the drugs and drinkin' the wine and we had no idea he was diabetic and a real bad one at that. Unbeknownst to us he was taking insulin three or four times a day and I think it was on the M4 one night when Greg had a convulsion and went into a coma and had to be taken away in an ambulance. He lost his connection with Seymour I believe, went home and recovered and started the Bomp! label.

RIOT. 77: "You Tore Me Down" was Bomp's first record release?

CYRIL: Oh yeah. I produced a single for Bomp! a little later on before we signed to Sire. I flew to New York to produce a 7-inch called "Jealousy" by a band named Poppes.

RIOT. 77: Seymour Stein had a reputation at the time for signing a whole bunch of bands and then using the ones that didn't sell as tax write offs. Was that something you were conscious of before signing with Sire?

CYRIL: No, because after England and being dropped by United Artists in '73 I spent the next three years trying to get a record deal. I owned the master tapes of "You Tore Me Down", "Shake Some Action", "Slow Death", "Tallahassee Lassie", "Married Woman" and "Get A Shot Of Rhythm And Blues" so I went shopping. I spent about three weeks in New York by myself making phone calls, knocking on doors and staying in really dingy hotels. I still have nightmares about those years (laughs). I spent another three weeks in Los Angeles ... I even went to Motown (laughs). I went to Green Bottle Records; remember those assholes? They were the managers that ripped off the Buffalo Springfield and one of the first

independent labels. It was just bloody awful and I remember coming back to my friend Shelley's house, where I was staying, at about four in the afternoon one day and sitting on my sleeping bag on the floor. I told Shelley there wasn't one label that I hadn't been rejected by and she asked if I'd checked out Capitol Records. I asked "Who's the president of Capitol?" and she told me it was Bob Buziak. I'm Armenian too, so I was like "Armenian huh?". I had never met the guy but asked Shelley for his phone number and I called him up. Got through to his secretary and she picked up the phone saying "Hello, Mr. Buziak's office!" and I said, "Hey, this is Cyril Jordan. Is Bob around?" And she replies, "Mr. Buziak isn't in. Can I take a message?". I gave my name and number with her. Ten minutes later Buziak calls (laughs). So I know one of the great secrets of the recording industry world, which is that these honchos who are at the top need to be very careful because they meet hundreds of people every week and this party, that party, the other event, sure Buziak went "I can't remember meeting a Cyril Jordan but I better give him a call!" (laughs).

GEORGE: Well, you're calling on a first name basis, right? "Is Bob in?" (laughs).

CYRIL: That's what did it (laughs). Because of my early days with the Brothers in junior high school I had a lot of street smart and when I had to take on the role of manager after our own manager ripped us off, it came in useful. I got the record deal with United Artists through my connection with Ike Turner and also with the help of George because when we cut "Teenage Head" the producer Richard Robinson told us of a guy in England who loved us named Andrew Lauder who was the head A&R guy at United Artists. When we left Kama Sutra, George wrote Andrew Lauder a letter mentioning that we were available so Ike Turner's old manager Gerhard Augustin set up an interview for me with a guy named Marty Cerf of United Artists down in Hollywood. I drove down there in my '54 Volkswagen and they were right on Sunset Blvd where the House of Pancakes now stands (laughs). I was about five minutes late and he tells me to go fuck myself and get the hell out of his

office. I'm walking down the hallway moping when Gerhardt comes out of his office and asks what's wrong. I told him and he says, "That idiot came into my office". It was about two in the afternoon and he calls up Andrew Lauder in London, waking him up, and tells him he's going to have to do the deal his end. It was decided that I would fly over to London and get a house van, a backline and make arrangements for the rest of the group to follow me. So that's what happened and the option for America was out of the hands of United Artists, meaning we could have the hit record in England and sign to another label in America. It was really a wonderful set-

GEORGE: I remember there was this one point where I guess Andrew was still deciding how much of a commitment he was going to make and I called Cyril and told him to tell Andrew that I had reservations about the rest of the band going over to England, but I just needed his okay.

CYRIL: That's true because I had been over there eight weeks and the rest of the band were wondering what the hell was going on. I said I didn't know but I had gotten the backline arranged and George said, "Well why don't I just book a flight ...".

GEORGE: I actually hadn't booked it yet and I just told Cyril to tell Andrew that I had booked a flight and was on my way ...

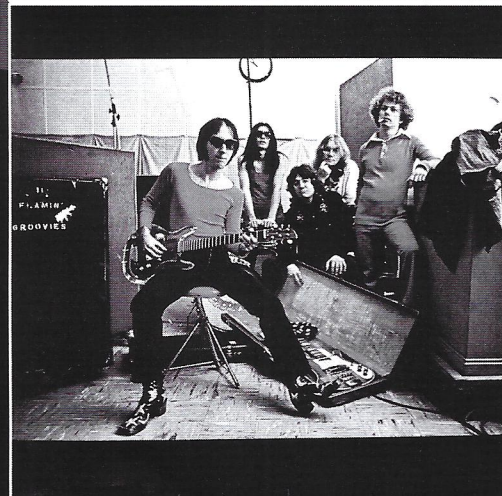
CYRIL: ... which is what I did.

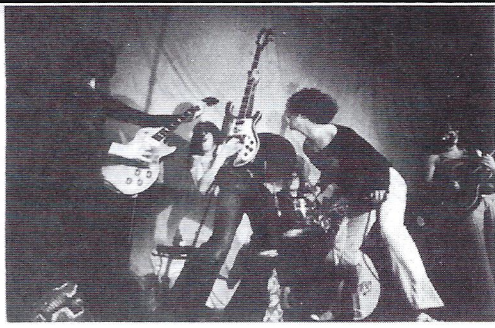
GEORGE: ... and then when he said okay, I went and booked the flights for the rest of the band.

CYRIL: We never signed contracts, yet they gave us over to England and we were there for an entire year and they must've spent quarter of a million pounds on us.

GEORGE: Yeah, we had a house, vehicles, a salary, clothes ...

CYRIL: We did over two hundred shows in England during that time and were with Brian Epstein's agency. At the end of the year they said they were going to send us back home for Christmas and then we were going to come back in the New Year. But we never came back because the label chose "Slow Death" as the song they wanted to take to promote the band, but there were restrictions by the BBC on what could be put in a song and it was





banned immediately because of the word "morphine" despite the fact that it was an anti-drug song. Now this was Andrew's mistake; he should've known that. How could I possibly know? It shows how out of touch they were in their own god-damned country. Anyway, I end up owning all the masters of what we'd recorded during our time in England. So jumping ahead to 1974 when Buziak calls me back and asked if I have something for him to listen to and I tell him I do but I'm on a flight back to San Francisco in about an hour, but I tell him I'll be back in about a week. He tells me to call Ken Cassano in Capitol when I get back into town and he'll set up a demo. So George, myself, Chris and a drummer called Terry Rae from the Hollywood Stars whose rehearsal studio we used, drive down there for the session. We recorded the demo in the basement of Capitol Records and there were Hal Blaine stickers everywhere. This was where the Beach Boys recorded their vocals, because they had the best microphones. They used a guy named John Wilson to produce the session and he'd worked with Steve Miller and he came out after we did "Shake Some Action" to say what a great song it was but that he had one problem with it and that was the crackling of the amp. He asked that I plug into Steve Miller's amp the he had custom made so that's what I done and it turned out amazing. It's two in the morning and we go back to Shelley's house to go to sleep and Shelley's sitting on the couch with Brian Wilson. He's drinking this Dutch liqueur called Vandermint out of a pint glass and it's full to the top. We walk by and say hello and are in the kitchen going "It's Brian Wilson sitting out there!!". This was '74; well in '72 Brian's wife Marilyn Wilson and her sister Diane had a band called American Spring and they were on United Artists. Because of the Beach Boys being in Holland the whole family was over there and Diane and Marilyn came over to London to U.A. to do a three-week radio tour. Andrew tells us that we're going to go along too and sends a car to pick us up. We get in and there're these girls there and we just become instant friends and are singing "Please Mr. Postman" and all these songs together. They ended up moving into our house after that radio tour and stayed with us for about seven months. I tried to get U.A. to bring Brian Wilson over to Rockfield, but they were just too square and didn't get it.

GEORGE: They didn't want to put the money in and Brian was on for it having been convinced by his wife and was like, "Sure, I don't have anything on, I just finished the "Holland" album".

CYRIL: So we're in Shelley's kitchen two years later freaking our about Brian Wilson being in the living room and Brian walks in and goes "You guys are the Flamin' Groovies?" and picks me and George up off floor, 'cos he's huge, he's like a bear, and hugs us real hard (laughs).

RIOT. 77: In the later '70's when Punk Rock latched onto the Flamin' Groovies, did that connection make any sense to you at first, because you were singing Eric Clapton's praises and talking about The Beatles and covering Cliff Richard. All of these things were considered the arch enemy of Punk.

CYRIL: When we came to England in '72 our first gig was the Bickershaw Festival to twenty thousand people and we were wearing studded leather jackets with Levi's jeans. We were such a success at Brickershaw that Derek Taylor wanted to sign us to Apple. We came back three years later and we found the tailor who made the clothes for the Stones and The Beatles, so we got rid of the motorcycle jackets. We hadn't realised that everybody in England was by then wearing motorcycle jackets but it was when the Ramones came over that they got associated with that look. So yeah, without even knowing it we had started this scene in Great Britain and then cast it off. Like The Beatles in '62 when they were wearing black leather it took Brian Epstein, an immaculately dressed gay man, to give them the Chesterfield collars and suits and they got rid of the leather jackets. That's what we were doing – we were evolving out of that. But yeah, we used to open for Screaming Lord Sutch all the time and his followers were a bunch of Teds. We did one show with Shakin' Stevens opening and we were wearing drape coats but we had long hair and the Teds didn't know whether to jump us or pat us on the back (laughs). We get on stage and we open our show

with Eddie Cochran's "Nervous Breakdown" and within seconds the Teds were loving it (laughs). We were on the cover of one of those Warner Brothers Punk songbooks with the Ramones and the Sex Pistols and even today I look at that thing and wonder, "How the hell ..." (laughs).

RIOT. 77: Were there two distinct sets of Flamin' Groovies fans once Chris Wilson joined or did you notice much of a crossover with the Roy Loney era. As in, do you think you managed to bring people along with you?

CYRIL: No, there wasn't really any awareness that there was a certain cult of Groovies fans. That came because of England. I moved the band there because Gerhard Augustin also told me that if you wanted to get into the Top 40 in America back then you had to sell 35,000 records. There was no way a band like us was going to be able to do that. But he said if you wanted to get in the Top 40 in England you only needed to sell about 17,000 records, so George and I were like, "Okay, we're going to England. By hook or by crook!". Mainly by hook and not by crook as it happened, 'cos we were incorruptible and I never called Derek Taylor from Apple because I didn't want to fuck over United Artists. Martin Davis and Andrew Lauder had shown true belief in us and spent a lot of money. This is the main reason the Groovies never made it – we're not corruptible and the music industry is extremely corrupt and people get used as stepping stones.

RIOT. 77: When I seen you playing in Toronto a few years back I was surprised by how many covers you still included in the set. Was there ever a conflict there where you considered phasing out the covers in favour of your own material or has it now gotten to the point where it's a given that Freddie Cannon, The Byrds and The Stones will always form part of a Flamin' Groovies set?

CYRIL: We don't care what anybody says; we just play what we want to. When we did "From Me To You" and "Please Please Me! we were showing off because we knew how difficult it was to pull off those songs live. At that time people didn't understand the craft of guitar players like Mick Taylor. All of us were really good guitar players and this new wave of children like the Sex Pistols ... this is gonna be in next Ugly Things column; I knew Malcolm McLaren very well ...

RIOT. 77: From when he was in the States?

CYRIL: No, no. I knew him in 1972 in London. He had the Let It Rock shop on the Kings Road and we became good friends. He turned me on to an incredible amount of obscure Rockabilly stuff, which I hadn't heard of before.

RIOT. 77: Okay, just finally, what can you tell me about this documentary that's currently being made about the Flamin' Groovies?

CYRIL: Well, I can tell you one thing for sure; I don't know when it's gonna be finished 'cos they just keep filming it. They've been filming us for two and a half years all over the world. They just filmed us in San Francisco at the 50th anniversary and they'll be at the London date on this tour. Our producer was with us on this American tour about two and a half years ago and we were in Jersey playing a club called Maxwell's doing a soundcheck. They came down and introduced themselves and within a few minutes fell in love with us and they've been filming us ever since.

