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THE FLAMING GROOVIES – *Live 1971 San Francisco* (2017 / Rock Beat)

"*The Flaming F'Chrissakes Groovies?!?! Who the fuck are they? Tucker, you gotta start dialing back the boozy-hooch, you're staring to hallucinate names! What next? Lothar & the Hand People, The Strawberry Alarm Clock, or some made-up shit like that??"* I've, *ahem!*, heard this more than once, but I'm tellin' ya they existed and were one of the late 60s' / early 70s' more obscure combos - not, as you might think, because of critics, who loved the hell out of them, but because of any number of a-holes in the ass end of the business world, Bill Graham included.

Let me take a moment to speak to the collectors in the audience: original Groovies LPs have always been a bear to track down, but I managed to net nearly all of them a ways back when a local record-shop's clueless flunky put 'em in the 'Flame' slot (Marge Raymond's two-shot combo) and priced 'em WAY low. I was paid back, though. In one of my parties, some jerk cuyped all the cartoon-cover ones, leaving me with just *Now, Jumpin' in the Night, and Shake some Action*. Yep, he or she also grabbed *Teenage Head*, and that's where the band's controversies start, with that LP.

As member Cyril Jordan relates in the liner notes to this release, the DJs, the press, and the stars (Elton, John, Rolling Stones, etc.) were highly favorable towards *Head* (who isn't?) but the label, Kama Sutra, was not, purportedly because of the titular sexual slang. *RIIIIIIGHT!!!!*: a label named after the most infamous sex manual in Earth's history, and it suddenly turns born-again. You goin' for it? I ain't. As usual, the witless Wikipedia maintains an antiseptic entry for the gents, so you'd never guess they had some of the biggest damn hassles in rock at the time.

Second lead guitarist Tim Lynch got collared by the cops and removed to the hoosegow, the band's manager ran off with all the money and merch, and the estimable Mr. Graham had a huge, throbbing, purple hard-on against 'em because their first manager had been his right-hand man...who quit to manage the Groovies. *Oy!* In closing the Carousel Ballroom / Fillmore West, Bill, though, inexplicably suddenly *had* to have the Flamers (waitaminnit...isn't that??...ohnevermind!). Cool, right? Not really, because the entire Fillmore staff harbored a huge grudge against 'em due to Graham's poisoning of the waters for so damn long.

In the sound check, Jordan was electrocuted twice and yet again during the performance, lucky to emerge alive. On the other hand, the band itself got to attend the long procession of ceremonial concerts and see many of their idols, but their own gig proved to be the last time Roy Loney would play with 'em, moving on to form The Longshots, The Phantom Movers, and, I'm told, one more band, though I haven't been able to verify that.

The times anticipating punk, on wax the Groovies were an archetypal 3-minute combo who rebelled against the sprawling songs of the progrock ensembles. Few of their studio tracks inched past the trey spot and most were under, but here, in this rescued gig, "Road House" rumbles on for over 10 minutes, the gentz jamming their brains out...with varying sonic quality: there's drop-out all over the place throughout the CD, but, yo, it's pre-punk!, and still a rare treat for aficionados.

I see the Groovies as having influenced the Ramones, Bram Tchaikovsky, Greg Kihn, Earthquake, the Dictators, groups like that. At the time, I was not their biggest fan, being a dyed-in-the-wool progrocker (and, at base, still am), but later came to an appreciation of what they were doing, and I have to say that this release, as uneven as it is, is their by far their best, clearly showing what the band was capable of: pounding drums and rhythm chords, lots of leads, rave-up attitude, etc. In fact, it's obvious The Who were one of their favorite buncha blokes, from whom they stole mercilessly (good!), and *Live 1971* shows 'em hanging cats like Roky Erikson out to dry...even though he was nowhere in all of this (it's a metaphor, son, a metaphor).

If this concert had been fully rescuable, it'd now be the subject of a helluva lot of adulation far and wide. As far as I can tell, that isn't happening, but I'm telling y'all: if you miss it, you'll be sorry. Think of Pezband's hard-chargin' *30 Seconds over Schaumberg* EP in terms of highly undeserved obscurity, and you'll have an idea of just how good it is...and no fuckin' way I'm trading it to anyone, so don't ask. It's going in my massive permanent collection alongside a plethora of headbanging misfits and anarchists whom I find I need every so often in order to juice up on the Rage 'N Rebellion quotient and make it through another day on this misbegotten planet.