

CHAPTER 12

Giraffe Hunters

NEW YORK—Shapes of things:

Connie De Nave holds a press conference for the Yardbirds (fresh from England) in the Americana Hotel's Provence Room. See—gold provincial wallpaper—that's how it got its name.

Amid the noncrystal chandeliers, the Miami Beach miasma, reporters fire sugary questions at the boys in the Chelsea Antiques Market gear.

Jeff Beck tells us how: "Each of us has his own scene inside his head when we play."

Chris Dreja reveals: "The Carnaby scene is a drag. People realize that whatever they buy—even if it's fresh from the shop—they'll walk down the street and see everyone wearing it."

Reporters cluster around the customary liquor cart in back of the room. Connie De Nave herself puts down the immigration authorities for refusing to consider the Yardbirds unique. The lady reporters size the boys up, and the boys respond with winks and Buster Brown grins.

Keith Relf wins most of the votes for his groupie story: "I had 15 letters from a girl after I told some reporters I liked rhubarb crumble, which is a kind of fruitish pudding. She said she was the best rhubarb crumble maker going. I had people write her and say I was married; I tried everything but she kept writing, saying I had to eat her rhubarb crumble."

The methodic sound of scribbling. "What finally happened?" The answer is lost in another question. The press conference ends that way—as uneventful, as precooked, as soppy as a "fruitish pudding".

This week's reality is a lot like that dismal affair. It stares brazenly at you over coffee and danish when the conversation turns to squinting whispers over an up 'n' coming guitarist slated for a major piece that month. Your informer's eyes narrow, she sips her tea between syllables, and explains in perfect journalese: "That, my dear, is a hard cock to follow."

Reality rings every weekday morning at 10:00 a.m., in a parade of coiffed agents and spangled promo-men who sing the praises of clients on one hand, and offer gifties—FREE FREE FREE—on seven others. The Swarthmore voice confides: "I just had to tell you we're holding a private luncheon, dear, for Peter Noone, and I know you'd . . ."

The real interview: his press agent sits alongside a pile of printed bios—the letterhead bears the greeting: GNUS FOR YOUSE. He grooms and coaxes a budding superstar with combing strokes in his voice. "Tell Dick about the time you slipped Bobby Dylan an exploding cigar . . . you'll really find this story groovy, Dick, I know you will."

In the real world, little red dots tell you which records to watch. In the real world, the crooner of candy-cane ballads is sleeping with his son. In the real world, Dick Clark smiles a sour-cream grin over a pack of bad-breath mints while the Action Kids turn cartwheels over a song about racial discontent masquerading as a cha-cha. The radio station that won't play music that advocates taking "toxins" distributes a record magazine with a "psychedelic special." Very real.

God may be dead. Reagan may win in California. It may finally be proven that a steady exposure to flashing lights and deafening music causes cancer of the coccyx. No matter—they will keep churning out *The Sound*. Like the old man says: between the idea and the reality, between the motion and the act, falls the shadow.

This week's reality is all in the shade.

Who makes a superstar? Who makes a trend? Which makes an art form? Who connects desire with spasm, and meshes need with product? Who tells the kids under the el in Astoria what to sing? Who fills Plato's cave with Martha and the Vandellas? Why are the same kids who ring the registers over acid rock sound lapping up Paul Revere and the Raiders? It's like eating beef Stroganoff with frozen wonton soup, but the kids don't

seem to be getting indigestion. The question is—who taught them to eat like that in the first place?

What's next? Barrio-rock, blue-blood bluegrass, a chamber orchestra playing Chuck Berry, Kate Smith eating avocados?

When I find out, I'll tell. If I don't, I'll guess anyway.

In college, they showed us an anthropology film about a tribe in Africa somewhere. In the middle of a ferocious famine, the men had to go out hunting giraffes, with water slung over their shoulders, and singing, walking for arid days, trying to smell giraffe dung in the clouds, until finally, over a distant ridge, they saw just the neck of an enormous giraffe with spots like brown eyes. As it smelled them its feet churned and its neck waved panicky in the wind—glorious in color—but the men whooped, shook their singing bolos overhead, and ran after the animal; it leaping, careening, and the men tossing their weapons at the animal's legs—legs spread apart for distance—until, hit once, again, it fell straight on its head like the log of the century, fell on its face, waiting, and as the men slashed with their knives, the animal's eyes closed slowly, heavily, lids quivering. When they had sliced it up—they show you this in the film—they ate the testicles for power and then they filled their gourds with blood and slung the hollow animal on poles over their shoulders, and when they marched back to the village there was a feast for days and the giraffe's head, still proud and sleek, adorned the chief's hut as a trophy.

Rock 'n' roll is the giraffe. Public relations men, disc jockeys, emcees, executives, socko boffo copy boys, fabulous blondes, prophets, frauds, fakes, connect-the-dots copies, and under-assistant West Coast promo-men hunt with their snares and bolos, cut, castrate, slice up the meat, and hang shaggy heads in trophy.

I love the giraffe for its color, its coat, and its bobbing neck. I love to watch it run. So I never watch when it falls, and it falls all the time. People like me are good at loving giraffes, but can't save them. That's up to you.

And that's this week's reality.