

# Oganookie—electric and eclectic

(By Paul Beatty, VP Managing Editor)

I came away from the interview feeling there has to be such a term as "classical rock" to describe what I saw and heard.

Or a term such as "joyous intensity" to hear it performed.

The interview took place at the rehearsal of the "Oganookie" group, which has played locally during the past year, and lives in commune life style in a beautiful large home on Western avenue in Brookdale.

They are long-haired, articulate, talented, educated, and serious about their music.

Five of them create the music, and Peter Troxell manages the administrative tasks of getting them where they're gigging, and getting them fed and bedded, and whatever else folk music management demands.

About one half the music is written and composed for the group by its electric piano player (and guitar and mandolin) Jack Bowers, and I swear from the song I heard which refrains "I've been missin' . . . easy livin'" you can go away singing the musical lines. (just like the old days, buddy.)

As described by Troxell, "Oganookie is a five member electric band with banjo, violin, bass, guitar, piano, mandolin and drums. Unique to this group is the combination of electric banjo with electric fiddle."

When they perform they are coming up with what they call "some of the quietest rock in the county," but they clarify "we play the volume for the physical set up of the club. We play the volume that is needed."

Spots and cities the group is heard are Town and Country Lodge (Ben Lomond), White Buffalo (Santa Cruz), Fort Ord Hospital, UCSC, Catalyst (Santa Cruz), Monterey, Palo Alto and some others.

The spot I heard them perform in was the "Plantation" their home in Brookdale, which has a large front room, six bedrooms, on a 6 1/2 acre lot. Also included in the Plantation, which

has just been leased for the second year by the group, is a servants quarters (without servants), garage, gardens, chickens, horse-shoe ring and towering redwoods, seen from a deck which is built over a beautiful drop-off.

Introducing the Oganookie group: Timmy Ackerman (drums) has played with big bands, rock and roll, classical and jazz groups in the New York area for twelve years;

George Stavis (banjo), he and Ackerman cut a record for Vanguard called "Labyrinths." Stavis won the banjo competition in the Philadelphia Folk Festival, and in addition has played lead rock guitar, clarinet and piano, and has been playing Bluegrass for over eight years;

Bob Stern (violin and bass), had a long classical background before tuning to electric music. He was a student of music at Julliard, and was offered a chair with a leading symphony orchestra before joining Oganookie;

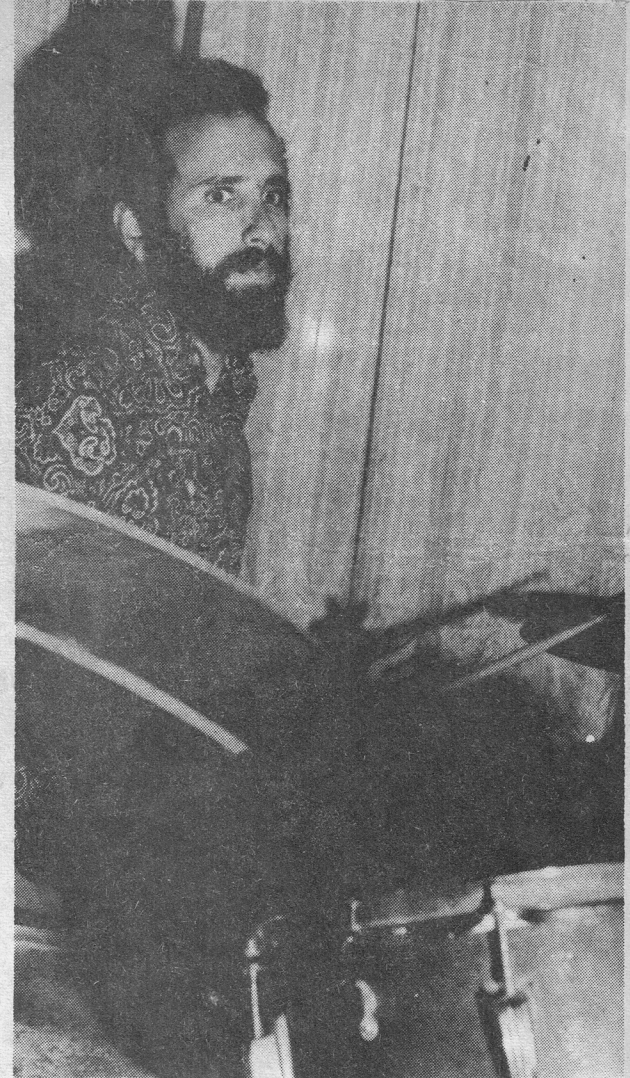
Bruce Frye (lead vocal and guitar) comes from a successful career of folk and blues singing in the San Diego area where he joined the other Oganookie members. He is the winner of the blues guitar contest with the San Diego Folk Festival for two consecutive years. He is also a professional potter.

And there is Troxell, an area resident for many years, and Bowers who began his musical career in Madison, Wisconsin, playing progressive jazz and who has been composing for about seven years.

Prior to watching the group rehearse, I asked them to describe their music. (The answers here are not attributed to any one individual, because as I told the Oganookies five of the six in the group wear beards and I couldn't tell them apart. They then threatened to sue me for false attribution.)

They answered the question:  
--Bluegrass and jazz influences that is all electrical. That ties it up with rock, I suppose.

**The sound—  
'joyous  
intensity'**



**The beat**

Timmy Ackerman on the drums for the Oganookie group.



**Stavis-banjo**

We use three-part vocals.

--We're not considered rock, but we're not any other type of group either.

--Rock has become a big umbrella to cover all electric bands.

--Electrified Appalachian music.

--A combination of electric Appalachian and a philosophy department.

--Electrified Bluegrass.

--Electric and eclectic.

--Celebration and reflection.

--Appalachian and Dionysian. (And that is a great gag, if you're smart.)

What does "Oganookie" mean (other than the best some-kind-of-rock you'll ever hear)?

The group would only say, "it doesn't mean what you think it means."

One of the group (Stern, probably) said that for local gigs they might change their name to "The Valley Press."

Ackerman (?) followed with the downbeat, "And our title tune would be "Taking Aim."

Bowers (?), "And we could follow up with "Pot Roast, \$1.45 a pound."

And me, "Which you play with relish."

And the group, "Could we have another reporter for this interview?"

Rehearsal began with a new number, and the

group managed to get nearly through it, then stopped and started explaining it to each other.

Bowers (he doesn't have a beard and is easily recognizable) overrode the five-way explanation and instructed, "Piano introduction, chorus, break, verse, chorus, break, verse, break, chorus, verse, break, chorus, piano and out."

They got three quarters of the way--driving, and smooth and just fine--and then stopped and began explaining it to each other--pointing out with hand gestures what was right and wrong and what was no good.

Bowers clarified his instructions. "Take it this way, A, 2 A, A, A, 2 A."

They nearly made it and it got better.

Bowers stopped the music, "Here's the way to get it--1 break, 3 break, 2 break, 2 break, 2 and out."

Then one of them said, "Sure, 1, 2, 3, 2, 2, 2 and out! It's a zip code!"

And they played successfully, and to the happiness of three or four of the wives and friend who had come into the front room.

One of the players said of the performance, "That was incredibly intense."

And it was enjoyable to the elderly reporter.

Troxell said of the communal living that the

members and their wives work as hard at living together as they do in creating their music.

The home, from my observation, is very well cared for. Their dinner (I arrived early and drank wine while they dined) was some fine looking spaghetti, a rice casserole, beautiful green salad, strawberries for dessert and wine and coffee.

The reason I mention their table, is that I always expect organic sunflower seed steaks to be served at communes.

Their music supports them well Troxell told me, and there are about ten persons living at the home.

The members practice individually during the day, and rehearse every night they're not performing.

Two members of the group have been accepted into the "History of Consciousness" department courses at UCSC.

The educational credits of all the members is impressive, but until they shave their beards off, I'm not going to try to sort out who was at whatever school and studied this or that.

Troxell, during rehearsal, said what best could be said to describe the music of Oganookie, "We put five people together, of different musical backgrounds. We put five fine musicians together, and that's what our music is."