

Retina Circus Light Co. Activities Seen

Words and Music by Dan Mortensen, copyright 1951

The words "Retina Circus" and "Eagles Auditorium" and "Long Hair" conjure up an image that is hard to erase. This image, of the dirty long-greasy-haired weirdo, has been created and fed by the nation's mass media.

When the Retina Circus said I could come up to their house and interview them, my mind immediately pounced on the idea that their "house" was a den of filth, dope-addicts, and worse. When I finally arrived, I was amazed! It looked just like a normal house!

Aha, said I, it must really be far-out inside. These kinds always are. The door opened, I went in, and it wasn't!! With the exception

of the mattresses on the floor (to serve as seats), it is no different than your home or mine. Walls nicely painted, windows with no holes in them, a bottle of Ivory Liquid by the kitchen sink, a 1950's-style kitchen table, kitchen chairs, ... EVERYTHING!!! *Their house is virtually the same as any Mercer Islander's. Unbelievable!!!*



In this unposed, unretouched photo the Retina Circus are shown as they really are, from the left: Conrad Keeler, Bill Duncan, John Moehring, and Bob Carr.

NAMES REVEALED

In the house were Lee Graham (bass player for the Crome Syrcus), Max (the female disc jockey for KOL-FM - "disc-jockess," as a member of the Retina Circus called her), and the Retina Circus themselves: John Moehring, Bob Carr, Conrad Keeler, and Bill Duncan.

When asked how they came together, John responded that they were locked up in the mental hospital in Steilacoom, and managed to escape by night disguised as orang-utangs. Sensing a slight untruth in his tale, I was eventually able to ascertain that they are originally from San Francisco. They moved to Seattle, and started putting on light shows in 1967.

ILLCIT LIGHT TRAFFIC

As the reader will recall, back around then it was illegal to put on light shows, because the City Fathers thought a light show would drive the City's youth to the brink of fornication. This law was eventually repealed (as is obvious, since the Retina Circus is in business), but a law is still on the books prohibiting persons under 18 from dancing in an establishment with persons over 18. This law uses the same reasoning as the light show law. That is one reason why Eagles' is a sit-or-stand-and-watch place.

SPONTANEOUS REACTIONS

Nothing that the Circus does is planned. As they listen to the music, they do everything spontaneously. All of them have done light shows long enough so that an impromptu performance looks like it has been carefully planned. Bill said, "Once, when the 'Guess Who' were performing, they said, 'Now we're going to talk about some Bible characters,' and then a picture of Jesus flashed on the screen. It was really trippy."

They said that the quality of a band sometimes influences the quality of the light show. If the band is bad, the light show is frequently bad. The band that most readily came to mind was the MC-5 ("Horrible," they all agreed). The light show that night was okay, though, they said. The only instance where the light show was bad (that they would admit) was the night they ran out of everything (oils, etc.), and figured that the best thing to do was just shut down. So they did. It was in the middle of a performance at Eagles', too. They didn't say what Mr. Grafmyre (Mercer Hi Times, March 7) had to say about that. I can guess.

DRUGS PORTRAYED

In their show, drugs and apparent use of drugs are shown. When asked about this, Bob said, "Drugs are a part of our culture ... we try to put everything in the world into the show." It is hard to tell if they put everything in the world into their show, but they seem to come pretty close.

SEATTLE OPERA ASSOCIATION
As the reader might know, the Retina Circus has recently been doing quite a bit of work with the Seattle Opera Association. Among other things, the SOA hired them

to do 10 shows for sixth grade school children from all over the state. Bob commented that "the city kids really dig it and clap their hands with the music, but the kids from out in the country don't." It might be pointed out that most Mercer Island High School students don't like "that psychedelic stuff" (as it has been called by at least one student) either. A curious analogy could be drawn here, if one wanted to.

So far, the Opera program has been shown to over 33,000 sixth graders, and has been termed a success.

AT EAGLES' AUDITORIUM

That Thursday at Eagles, the Circus put on a show with Lee and the Crome Syrcus and the Collectors. The concert was okay;

not bad, but not particularly great, either. The best part of the entire show was "Elevator Operator," by the Crome Syrcus. This song had extended solos by everyone in the group, and they seemed to be handled very competently. The Retina Circus was really able to get into this one, and dazzled the audience with a display of visual effects that might not be equalled for many moons to come. They got the beat down perfectly, and used the projections and the strobe to enhance the music to a huge degree.

In case you can't tell, I had a great time talking to the Retina Circus, and I advise anybody to catch their show sometime. They do all right.

Taylor, Cochrane Juniors of Year



Loni Cochrane and Eric Taylor have been selected Juniors of the Year by the Masonic Lodge.

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