

Date: Sun, 9 Jul 2000 08:18:14 -0400 (EDT)
From: Sarah Smiley <smiley@shore.net>
To: beret-group@world.std.com
Subject: Re: Estate of Rodney
In-Reply-To: <41424776@prancer.Dartmouth.EDU>
Sender: beret-group-approval@world.std.com
Precedence: list
Reply-To: beret-group@world.std.com

On 6 Jul 2000, Larry Polansky wrote:

> --- You wrote:
> Is it not a little strange that despite Rodney's death sometime in the
> 60's, his work is only being discovered now? Is it possible that he is
> alive but composing under another name?
> --- end of quote ---
> There have been a lot of rumors about this, yes, and we're not really
in a position to
> say either yes or no. All we can say is that if he IS alive no one
has heard about him, although there
> are any number of composers and artists who have seemingly been
influenced enough by his ideas to
> actually, in fact, or perhaps, rather, to be candid, be him.

hmmm, he sounds many faceted. truly a person of many and diverse talents.
That we all should be so lucky to made up of many people! But another
question. You have spoken of who he has influenced..what has influenced
Rodney? What touched him (or perhaps fell on him) at an early age?

-ss

Date: 10 Jul 2000 10:03:52 EDT
From: Larry Polansky
Subject: Re: Estate of Rodney
To: beret-group@world.std.com
Bcc: Larry Polansky

--- You wrote:

hmmm, he sounds many faceted. truly a person of many and diverse talents. That we all should be so lucky to made up of many people! But another question. You have spoken of who he has influenced..what has influenced Rodney? What touched him (or perhaps fell on him) at an early age?

-ss

--- end of quote ---

Rodney seems to have had four parallel, abiding streams of influence:

- 1) automotive (I suppose, motorcycles is more specific)
- 2) high voltages
- 3) hermetic religious movements (sevi, bruno, gnosticism, some more violent forms of taoism, etc.)
- 4) the early electric guitar

Somehow, these all came together in a kind of strange confluence in his work. It seems to me that a lot of the things he is currently being credited with pioneering (open form scores, tuning, live electronics, improvisation, use of popular styles, extended instrumentation, etc.) are more a result of his extra-musical influences than his musical ones (which are, frankly, hard to pin down, except for the recurring, almost bitter and somehow strangely knowledgeable set of references to beatle-dom). That is, other than being a guitarist, he seems to have had no musical education (or any education at all) to speak of. As a front end tram repairman (this is now well documented by a group of young british musicologists working in the Liverpool records), he was not particularly qualified in any field except motor repair.

Tom Erbe's suggestion that he was something of a conspiracy theorist (see tom's reconstruction of HumB.) is intriguing, especially the organized crime connection. It's probably the case (for example, read the interviews, they're clearly evidence of some form of highly paranoid dementia). In one interview (in a zine called "The Liverpool Worker Bee") he refers to the "great Jewish-Trotsky-Lennon [Lenin?] - Shirelles axis", and it seems clear that he was equally scared of many things, including early sixties female vocal groups (he seems to have had a kind of fetish even about the Boswell Sisters, whose song "That Sentimental Gentleman from Georgia" shows up as snippets

in a lot of pieces).

So... it's hard to tell. But it's funny, at one time he was asked (a pirate radio show where the tape still exists in fragments). He says "My only influences, truly, musically, are probably the singing of Iron Head and Clear Rock, and I hope to join them one day. But I see that more as a "con-fluence", or a "re-fluence" (if you will), or an "ex-fluence", or even a "de-fluence"... please excuse me I'm feeling a little sick now"

hope that helps

lp

Date: 14 Jul 2000 09:58:04 EDT
From: Larry Polansky
Subject: Re: Estate of Rodney
To: beret-group@world.std.com
Bcc: Larry Polansky

--- You wrote:

I suppose that would explain a few things. What do you think is Rodney's most important and seminal work?

--- end of quote ---

Near the end of his life, we think, Rodney became a devotee, and perhaps one of the progenitors of a quasi-spiritual practice called (Fah) Win Gum, whose provenance is somewhat unclear. It dealt with "palmar energy" -- energy confluences that emanate from certain hand positions that seem to be related to what have become thought of as "power chord" positions. In Win Gum (see Brennan, Roderick; FROM THE DARKEST CORNERS: The Fah Gum Phenomenon; Galaxy Press International, Provo, Utah, 1973). Win Gum believers wrote incessantly about palmar energy curing, among other things, brain tumors. They only ate food with "low frequency" energy. As a practitioner of Win Gum, Rodney spent at least two hours a day concentrating on his palms in what might be confused for meditation, but it was seemingly all done while under the tram front end (his job).

The "Quasi-Paraludes" (pieces for electric guitar) seem to be a direct expression of this belief, in almost a religious, devotional way (like, for example, Carl Orff's music, or Farwell's), and I guess one would have to say that those guitar works are germinal,.

lp