

Local group makes good: the wild Rainbow Canyon

By Anastasia Pantsios

The five musicians of Rainbow Canyon don't look like the sweet, sexy little post-teen-agers often found in rock 'n' roll bands. Neither do they have the funky, brass-tacks appearance of the Allman Brothers-Grateful Dead school of bands.

In fact, they look quite lunatic. They have wild, dark, frizzy hair and wear unbelievably sleazy, colorful "costumes," that more than occasionally look like Halloween leftovers.

They reel around the stage in a sort of well-controlled anarchy. When organ player Norman Cotone steps out in front to sing "Mr. Dream," it's as if a bizarre, writhing madman has taken over the stage. He staggers, jumps and jerks like a spastic.

Rainbow Canyon members aren't cute, but they have the power of rock 'n' roll in them. At a time when most musicians who have been around as long as they have would have retired to sedate lounge bands, these Cleveland-based performers are out presenting some of the most energetic rock music this area has been privileged to hear.

The group's drummer and leader Buddy Maver said: "To excite people, you



Rainbow Canyon

have to be exciting. To be exciting, you have to be excited and it has to be genuine — a feeling of "WOW! I'm up here playing rock 'n' roll."

There are lots of closet musicians around who want to make tapes in their basements and hope that some record company person will recognize the pristine, unspoiled beauty of their creations, uncompromised by the grind of playing clubs every night. That is not Rainbow Canyon, and that's why it's good.

Buddy expressed it as a question: "Would you rather be in a band that could pack a place and have people dig it, or would you rather play in a place where no one came and no one dug the music except a couple of people who thought they were hip?"

All the members of Rain-

bow Canyon know what it's like to be in that latter sort of group. Maver and guitarist Billy Hanna did come to success once before with Charade, which had a hit "And You Do" in the summer of 1971.

That band disbanded shortly after that due to personal problems. Hanna went on to Ramu and Buddy formed Mushroom which also included Rainbow's bass player, Chester Florence. Guitarist Greg Grandillo was playing in Fully Assembled and then in Pig Iron, as was Cotone, and later Maver and Florence.

In the summer of 1972, Hanna, Maver, Florence, Cotone and Grandillo sat down and mapped out plans for Rainbow. They followed those plans and arrived at where they are now: one of the more popular bands in

Ohio and the surrounding area, with one of the best live rock shows this area has seen, one album out and another in the works.

That first album, "Rollin in the Rockies," released this spring, has some nice music on it, but the band's verve is not fully conveyed on vinyl. Live, their sound is much thicker and the music more richly developed.

Of course, the record is unable to get across how well the group can relate directly to an audience. At least, the group's exquisite five-part harmonies are adequately shown even if the fire and intensity of its instrumental work is not.

They feel that, based on what they learned from

making their first album and their musical development since they made it, they will be more able to present themselves accurately. They have three songs written, arranged and ready for performing including a tough, propulsive rocker called "Blue Jean Dream Machine," that is much harder than anything on the last album. Three other songs are written but not worked out and three more are in fragments. They plan to be recording late this summer.

Because the group's strength lies in live performing, national recognition for them would seem to depend upon live exposure elsewhere. As to when this will happen, Maver says simply "We're ready."

The Rainbow Canyon five are hard at work on their next album. Indeed they are. Their sets are fast-paced, high-energy arrangements of songs from the last album, a couple of new things and some of the best of the bar standards on which they built their following. These include Derek and the Dominoes' "Layla," Yes's "Roundabout" and Lee Michaels'

Rock beat

"Would You Be Happy." These the group expands with some impressive solo work and close with a medley of 50s rock classics turned into one huge 70s boogie rave-up. This last comes complete with a little get-it-on speech by Billy Hanna containing every cliché of the genre: "If it feels good, do it . . . put your hands together . . ." delivered with uncommon conviction.

It's conviction that makes Rainbow Canyon work more than its instrumental tightness, its full harmonies or the strength of its rhythm section, the all-important "bottom" that makes rock 'n' roll what it is. The group reaches its audiences because, honestly, there is nothing Rainbow Canyon would rather be doing than playing for the people — and it shows.