

A TIME FOR RAINBOWS

By Anastasia Pantisios

The story of the band Rainbow is the story of a man named Buddy Maver, and a bunch of guys named Billy, Norman, Gregory, Chester, Jay, Kevin and Tom who want exactly what he wants.

Buddy told me one night after a gig, "When we got together, we sat down and talked about what we wanted Rainbow to be.



Charade - some wanted to and some didn't

We all want the same thing; we'd rather be together than do anything else." And when I proposed the idea of the interview and he asked if I wanted to talk to him or the whole band, he added "Well, it doesn't matter. We all feel the same way."

I was amazed that night at the agora that the band got an encore after their last set and when I mentioned to someone in the band (I don't remember who; "it doesn't matter," remember?) how surprised I was because I had never heard of a dance band in a bar being called back for another number, he remarked "Oh, that happened last week too."

That was when I began my search to discover what it is that Rainbow are doing right, why they are maybe the most popular dance band in Cleveland and what is likely to happen to them as they take the next set up.

The search led me back several years, to Charade. I first met them in the office of the Belkins, who managed them, six energetic guys plus roadie Rusty ("The real musician of the group", according to the Charade bio). To this day, there are a lot of people who will tell you how great Charade was and all the great things they could have been, but the point is, they broke up in late 1970, after signing a recording contract with Epic and having a local hit of some magnitude called "And You Do" in the summer of 1970.

Buddy, described in that same Charade bio as "the spokesman for the group," learned an important lesson from that break-up of the band he had played with for a half dozen years. Some of the band really wanted to make it but some of them had no faith in their goals. Without agreement on what the band would do or be, they eventually disbanded.

And what a shame that was! I count among my dozen or so magic rock and roll moments walking along the balcony of the Allen Theatre while Charade played their opening set to Ten Years After in the summer of

1970, with the delicious harmonies of "And You Do" wafting into my ears. Learning heavily on their vocal excellence, and using their assorted horns with a light touch that stamped them as individuals at the time when everyone was rushing to be horn-ier than Chicago, Charade were one of the better bands to pass through the Cleveland club scene.

For Buddy, after Charade came Mushroom. I remember Mushroom too: together with Chester Florence on bass and the Jeric Brothers on guitar (Bill J. was once with the James Gang), they played one night in the spring of 1971 to maybe two dozen people at the Exit in Kent while hundreds of hot-panted teeny-boppers wriggled to the dance music of Measles at the Dome across the street. Another ex-Charader and Rainbow-to-be, Billy Hanna, was gigging up at the Agora at the same time with Ramu, also short-lived and not widely lamented.

One of Mushroom's bigger moments came that summer with the famous WNCR Birthday Party, the first big Edgewater Park rockfest. "That started out as our idea," Buddy said. "We noticed all the kids who hung out at Squires' Castle and got the idea to play out there. When we went to get permission, we found another band was ahead of us, and then Roger Abramson came into the picture and decided to make it a thing for WNCR, and it got moved to

now Rainbow. "We were into kind of a jazz thing," said Buddy. "It was nice." But, like Mushroom, the band wasn't popular. "We didn't have anything particular in mind, just to sort of get up and play some songs we liked." And Buddy was learning that it wasn't that much fun to play for nobody.

So, he and Billy and Norman and Gregory and Chester got together and formed Rainbow in August of 1972, with an idea in mind: to have a successful band. Jay Mohler, former Charade bassist and now Rainbow's sound engineer, recalls "I was in Florida and Buddy called me up and said "I want to get together a band, play some music, make some money and have a good time." So I quit my job and came back."

Buddy talked about the thinking that led to that point:

"Some people are content to just play in their basement and jam. You have to decide what you're trying to get out of it. You have to understand what facet of the art form-rock music-you are into. If you're into is as purely art form, you have to accept you won't make much money or have many fans. You have to be realistic, if you want to support yourself making music."

So Rainbow set about being realistic in a calculated fashion. They picked exactly the right material to play in the clubs: a couple of "standards" like "Layla" and "Roundabout", a big doze of reliable old Beatles (their popular "Sergeant Pepper" medley), some rabble-rousing boogie and a couple of current dance-band cliches "Long Train Running" and the ever-popular "Smoke on the Water". They developed their appearance and their act into a smooth, sparkling, glamorous entity, full of energy and right moves in the right places. With the help of Hank Lo Conti of the Agora, they put together (and are still working on) a topflight sound system, especially important to Rainbow, as one of their strongest selling points is their vocals: all five sing lead and of course are capable as well of breath-taking harmonies. They are also putting together a light show.

They evolved step by step. When I heard the band in

January, I was not exactly blown away, despite their obvious tightness and professionalism. At that time, their act was less well-formed. No one wore lame suits yet. But they had their goal

in mind and were working it out.

By July, there were so many people at the Agora on Sunday night that it was downright uncomfortable, and there were those encores. I found myself willingly involved in what the band was doing, no matter WHAT they were doing. When they swung into "Smoke on the Water", I didn't even catch myself thinking "Oh no, not THAT again." They jump into it with too much joy for that. There are things a band has to do, and Rainbow does them, but without the feeling of martyrdom frequently encountered among young musicians, who sniffle that bar owners and audiences won't allow them the creativity to do all original material after being together for two weeks. Though experienced and well-seasoned, Rainbow's musicians lack condescension, which undoubtedly has a lot to do with their acceptance in the clubs and the loyalty of their followers. You could say they have compromised; you could also say they have made concessions necessary for them to be in a position to do what they want to. On one side of the coin, Billy Hanna delivers that whole stale boogie rap ("get your hands together, leme hear ya say

yeah..."), with a terrifically bouyant off-handedness that is almost amusing, but on the other side, he can send out a long, involved guitar solo that caused the girl sitting next to me that night at the Agora to remark loudly to her boyfriend "He sounds just like Phil Keaggy!" Keaggy, as we ALL know, is maybe the 2nd or 3rd best guitarist to come from these parts.

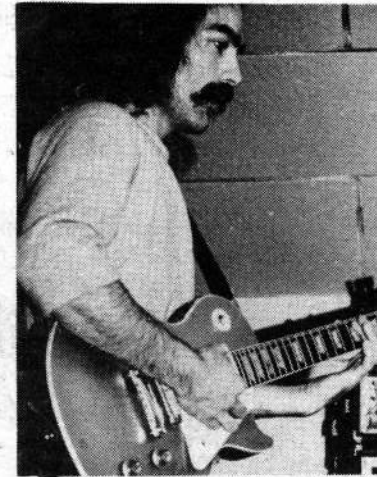
All that Smoke-on-the-water and boogie was vital to the successful completion of step one: becoming a popular dance band. What Rainbow are being that facade will be vital to step two: recording and upwards to (hopefully) national fame.

Norman said, "We know we had the deal with Capitol, but we didn't know it was final, until Mike Belkin got up to announce us (at the Mott the Hoople concert in Massillon in July, where Rainbow opened the show) and he said "Capitol recording artists"...that was the first we know!"

Chester said, regarding the difficulties in getting there, "They are all looking for the new Raspberries. The Raspberries were the most successful of any new group last year, so all the record companies look at new groups in those terms. It's especially hard for a band coming from Cleveland.

On October 1st, Rainbow heads for Colorado for 2 weeks to record their album, to be produced by the James Gang's Jim Fox. They have 9 or 10 songs, Chester told me, but hope to have about 20. "We'd

like to record them all, and let them chose the best. It's hard for you to do that yourself because you tend to think everything you write is great." Suggesting that the boogie image is largely a tool, Chester said, "I think the album will be softer than people expect." Drawing from a background broader that is often apparent in their dynamic stage show, (and broader than that of most other dance bands playing in the same vein) they should be able to create a strong and articulate album.



Billy in Ramu - short-lived

This broad background plus the unity of purpose and the self-propulsion to accomplish that purpose are what set Rainbow apart. The group did not even have a manager to push them this far: Buddy handled all the group's business affairs until such a time as they were ready to record. "We signed with Belkin (in July) because they have the contacts to get us national exposure. As long as we were just doing local bookings, we could handle that ourselves." I discovered while doing research recently on band management that most bands have a manager party to encourage and energize them. Rainbow were unusual in that they were entirely self-motivated, and several of the managers I talked to spoke of Buddy with admiration, ("one of the finest people I've ever met", "he's amazing"). Self-propelled, they are less likely to lose momentum while on their way up. Not needing to be fed energy, they are in a position to feed energy to others. Like Carol, a girl I'd seen at several of Rainbow's gigs. She told me how she and some others had been following the group for a few months and were looking forward to putting together an official fan club, once the band had an album under their belts.

In the end, what makes the difference when a band tries to step beyond the local club circuit, is what's underneath the cover versions, whether faithful or original, of "Free" and "Them Changes" and "Moonage Daydream". And it seems eminently clear that the various backgrounds of Rainbow's members and their strong self-direction makes them one of the more likely candidates to help put Cleveland on the music map.

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Chester at WNCR birthday party - "originally our idea"

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Mushroom - nobody wanted to hear

Edgewater because of the space and parking and by that time it was out of our hands. We were just another band that played." Pig Iron followed for Buddy and included much of what is

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