

H . P . L O V E C R A F T

a n i n t e r v i e w w i t h G E O R G E E D W A R D S

"I'd like to start by saying that all the memories and incidents recalled here are of course the product of a twenty-five year mental filtering process [laughs], but I'll do the best I can.

"I guess Lovecraft began when I met a fellow in Chicago called George Badonsky, who had been a promo-man with Atlantic and Atco records on the East Coast and who had recently relocated to the Mid-West. He was looking around for some music business opportunities, and became partners with Bill Traut who was a musician, a music business attorney and a producer in the Chicago music milieu. Together they formed a company called Dunwich Productions, and also had a management company for a lot of the young, up and coming Chicago area bands - the Shadows of Knight, the American Breed and many other groups as well.

"Anyway, I met George and we became friends. I was playing clubs around the Chicago area as a solo artist doing folk and blues material, and George took an interest in my music. We made a series of demo recordings of my original tunes which were really more like experiments for me trying to find a recorded sound than complete pieces of material. But, we recorded some of these things and released them locally to mixed reviews... [laughs]. We weren't exactly received with open arms, let's just say that!

"Meanwhile I still had my other career as a club performer which was going along nicely, but I was really interested in making records and George, having formed this partnership with Bill Traut, as I said was beginning to produce some local musicians and I was one of the people they took an interest in. So, I began my somewhat spotted recording career - I'd already done quite a lot of recording of my folk and blues material and had worked as an accompanist for several other people prior to that; but this was all new to me, my first solo recording venture.

"Through that I got introduced to a number of studio musicians and began to formulate some ideas about my musical identity and how I wanted to present and record myself, and started working with Bill and George towards creating that concept. We released two singles I think, one of them was a cover of Lennon & McCartney's 'Norwegian Wood', then came a tune that Bill and George found which they really thought had serious potential. I had my doubts but we went in anyway and recorded 'Any Way That You Want Me'. After listening to the finished tape I felt that it was lacking something, that it needed something extra, and decided that what it needed was a harmony vocal part.

"I had begun working by this time in a vocal trio, sort of a lounge/bar group doing jazz standards and contemporary pop music, and through this had come into contact with David Michaels who was one of the other singers. We really enjoyed singing together so when I started hearing this other vocal part for (it was a higher part than was in my range to sing) I immediately thought of David. I called him up and he graciously came down to the studio and added his vocal harmony. That was the first H.P. Lovecraft record. It just fell into place really, it wasn't planned in the sense that it wasn't intended to be an H.P. Lovecraft record as such; it was intended to be a George Edwards record, but it became the first H.P. Lovecraft record even though the only members of H.P. Lovecraft on it were David and myself.

"By the time all this transpired David and I felt that we were ready to move on from the group that we had been performing in, and we began to look around to see who was out there in the way of players. We began held some auditions, using a club that was closed during the daytime, and after going through the usual audition insanity we came across Tony Cavallari who was a very different sort of guitar player - he really had an identity all of his own which we really enjoyed about him, and he became our first 'victim' so to speak! We began writing and working out some musical ideas together and then oh, perhaps a month or so later we were introduced to a sixteen year old drummer named Michael Tegza. He was an *incredible* drummer. I can't say enough about Michael's playing, he just took our ideas and brought them to a whole other level musically in terms of his energy and his contribution to our rhythmic thinking.

"We began rehearsing and writing with that core line-up, realising of course that we needed a bass player. We started looking around for one. The first bass player was a fellow named Tom Skidmore who joined us briefly, he rehearsed with the band for a while but it quickly became clear to everyone that this would be a temporary situation. Tom played the first couple of gigs with the band, but it just wasn't working. In the meantime, one of the bands George and Bill had been producing was the Shadows of Knight. I had been involved in some of the recording sessions so I knew the guys in the band. It became known to us that Jerry McGeorge was probably going to be leaving, so we asked him if he would be interested in playing with Lovecraft. He immediately said yes, he was real excited about it. We had by this time been working weekends occasionally in the Chicago area clubs and were just starting to formulate an identity in terms of doing all our original material. This was unique, because at that time almost all the bands around were cover groups, playing other peoples' music. David and I were still working in this club group that I mentioned earlier, so we'd get off that job at about 1:30 in the morning and go over to our rehearsal room which was on an upper floor of an office building in downtown Chicago. We'd get on the elevator and go up there in the middle of the night, at like two in the morning, and start rehearsing very loud Lovecraft material. And of course the police would regularly come up and shut us down! It was very hectic working until the early hours and then rehearsing until five or six every morning - a very strange schedule.

We must have looked pretty suspicious, coming in and out of this deserted office building in the middle of downtown Chicago at all hours of the night.

"We proceeded to do that for, I guess, about two or three months. It was right at the end of that time that Jerry McGeorge joined the group, and about a week later we went into the studio and recorded what I consider to be the *real* first H.P. Lovecraft record, the first album, entitled 'H.P. Lovecraft' on the Philips label. We did it at Universal Recording in Chicago - the engineer was Jerry DeClerk who was a real interesting man to work with. He had come out of a radio background and was very technical but he was very open to our ideas and experimentation. We spent a lot of time learning about the studio with Jerry, who took the trouble to sit down with us and explain what he was doing and how it all worked; this really gave us a great foundation for things we were to do later on.

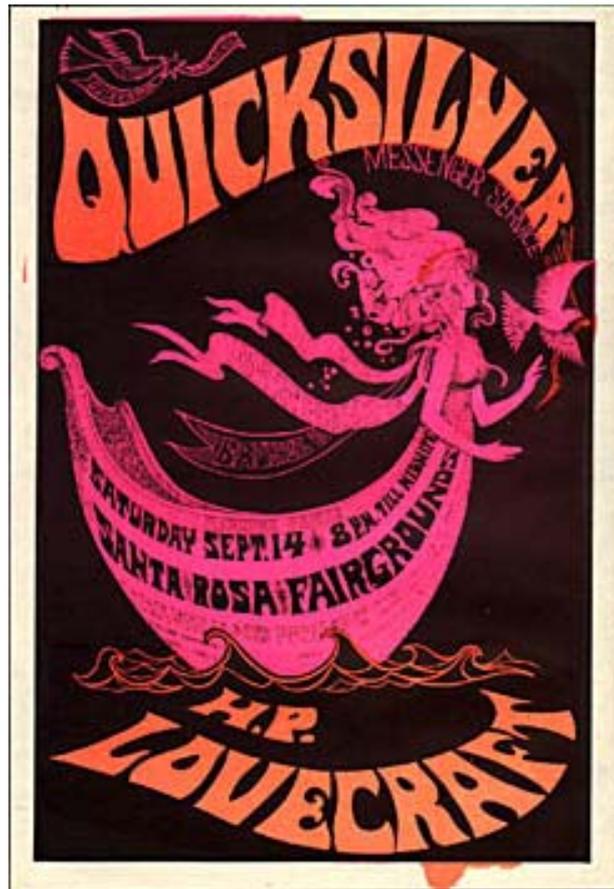


"That first LP was a very low-budget kind of a deal, I think we spent \$5000 recording the album, I may be wrong but it was something like that. So needless to say things happened in a hurry. The studio was primarily used to cut large album projects - the room was huge, big enough for an orchestra and indeed they did many orchestra sessions there, big band sessions, jazz sessions etc; Nancy Wilson recorded there, Frank Sinatra, all sorts of people recorded there. So they were used to a certain type of session, what I would call a typical union session where people would come in, they'd play everything from written music and all according to the clock, on a very tight time schedule. They would record one or two takes, with a minimum of overdubbing, and move onto the next thing. Of course, when we came into the studio we had some different ideas... we really wanted to use the studio as an instrument, to experiment with the sounds that could be achieved by utilising the electronics of the studio. This was different to what the people there were used to. Jerry was a guy though who was willing to sit there while we went through our little rituals and were trying to figure out what we could do using the studio to enhance our music. Badonsky was also very giving in that regard, Bill Traut had some problems with us though because he thought we were wasting a lot of time. To some extent I'm sure he was right! I mean, I'm involved today in music production and I understand how important it is to keep the energy moving, at that time though I was looking at it more like a playground. We would take hours and hours just goofing around with all these fantastic toys. On the other hand, with the first album in particular we had spent so much time in our rehearsal room that we really knew the tunes, we went in there and for the most part just recorded that first album. We did add some horns to a couple of pieces at Bill's suggestion, but for the most part it was a 'live' LP. It was recorded on a 4-track machine so there wasn't a whole lot of room for building tracks... some ping-ponging and interesting stereo effects, a few vocal overdubs, that's all.

"The sessions went very fast. A lot of the material was derived from what I had been playing as a folk artist. 'Wayfaring Stranger' for example was a traditional song that I rearranged for the band, it was a song I had been performing for many years. I had originally heard it on a Bob Gibson album years before - Bob plays it on the banjo, it's a wonderful song. One of my other musical influences was Fred Neil, I performed a lot of Fred's material and admired him greatly. We rearranged and adapted some of Fred's tunes to fit into the Lovecraft 'sound'. Then of course we did some of our own original material: 'White Ship' was written with Tony and David, and 'That's How Much I Love You' - those tunes and most of everything else on that album were written late at night in that office building in Chicago.

"As soon as we recorded the album we started playing around the Mid-West area. We played on an early Who tour, in a place on the outskirts of Chicago one very hot summer's evening. Soon we started playing the larger venues around the mid-west and became one of *the* bands to see at the time. We had quite a different stage show - we put our drummer up front for one thing, which was almost unheard of in those days. We also wore some pretty outrageous outfits. We would go to costume houses and buy up lots of their old costumes. We had a lot of fun doing this, and were quite surprised later when it became fashionable among other musicians. David and I had been singing harmony together for quite a number of years by that time so we had a real lock on what the other was doing - we were able to capitalise on that and do a lot of improvisational singing which was great, real free, and a lot of people seemed to relate to it.

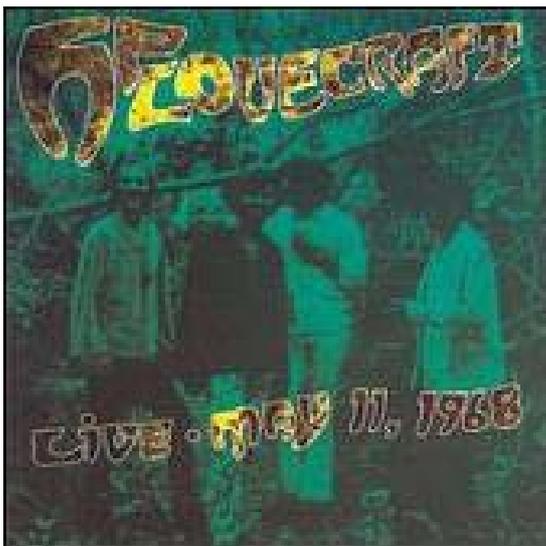
"Around that time George had made contact with Bill Graham in San Francisco. Bill had heard the first album and really liked it, and he wanted to bring the band to play at the Fillmore Auditorium. So we packed up our stuff and drove across the United States, stopping off to play a couple of pick-up gigs on the way. That was how we got to California. It was the beginning of what I think was the best period of H.P. Lovecraft; some of the live performances we played in late '67 and all through '68.



We really felt at home in California. As soon as we arrived in San Francisco we had a really warm reception, we also went down to Los Angeles and played some down there. We felt that the West Coast was the place for us to be, so we relocated to the San Francisco Bay area and began gigging and working there. Our management company and manager remained back East though which made things a bit difficult in terms of continuity. But we struggled on and played a lot on the West Coast, in Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Sacramento - all over California and the whole Western part of the United States, as well as back in the Mid-West from time to time. We also began playing New York frequently. We played at The Scene which was the happening club of the day - it was owned by a fellow named Steve Paul, who also managed Johnny Winter. We'd play there and Hendrix would come down and sit in; it was a good club to go to if you wanted to see whoever was in town. Spanky And Our Gang were around a lot; Odetta; Steve Stills; Jerry Jeff Walker; a lot of good people. Later we played at the Fillmore East - that was an outstanding time.

"Some of my best memories of all the shows that H.P. Lovecraft ever played were the shows with Traffic and Buffalo Springfield. There was a compatibility factor with both of those bands and H.P. Lovecraft, it just worked really well and made for a great show. I felt that they had the same kind of drive and energy that Lovecraft had at its peak.

"We continued to try to do more recording, but it was getting increasingly difficult because we had been on the road almost constantly. We really hadn't had any time to sit down and develop new material, no time to rehearse; we were just too busy trying to catch up on our sleep and make it to the next gig. The record company really wanted more material and we didn't have anything to record so we went back home and took about a week off and tried to write and regroup.



"In the meantime, Jerry McGeorge had left the band. We wanted to be doing a lot more harmony singing, the band had also been pretty dependant on me as a writer as well. It had become obvious that I wasn't prolific enough, wasn't writing enough material to support the band. Jerry was not a very strong singer, and it was clear that something had to change. It became mutually agreeable that Jerry would leave the group. At the same time, we had heard that a friend of ours from Chicago, Jeff Boyan, had become available. Jeff had been singing for a number of years in a group called

Saturday's Children, he was a very good singer/songwriter and a strong bass player. We felt like our prayers had been answered! We had actually fantasised from time to

time about Jeff being in the band. So, when he became available we asked him to join, and he came straight out.

"It's funny, but the H.P. Lovecraft history is such that usually the bass player joins the band about a week before the record gets made. It happened with Jerry on the first album, and it happened with Jeff on the second. He actually joined us on the road if I'm not mistaken. I don't think there was even a rehearsal period, he just came straight out and joined us. Fortunately he knew most of the material so he became a part of the band immediately. It was great! He brought some good material to the band and a strong voice. The band had achieved a certain status by then, especially on the West Coast. We had become *very* interesting and unpredictable, a very improvisational group live, we weren't structured at all - we would just find a theme and expand on it, explore it as long as it felt good. So, we were having a lot of fun in the previous two years though we'd spent almost all of our time on the road, and it became clear that we were in need of new material for a record.

"By that time we were experiencing what's come to be known as 'artistic differences' [laughs]. We tried to take some time off to write and record new tunes, but it turned out that it was just impossible because there were so many gigs that had been booked months in advance. We decided that we should at least try to put a record together - we'd been doing so much improvisational stuff live, we felt that we should be able to go into the studio and make a record from nothing. And that's what we did! We rented a small studio in Los Angeles, moved into a motel down there, and began work on what was to become the H.P. Lovecraft II album.

"At this time we were introduced to an amazing British engineer, Chris Huston. He went on to work with many other successful people - Led Zeppelin and George Benson for example. He introduced us to some studio techniques that he was exploring at that point and we proceeded to start working with him. He was the perfect engineer to be working with us on this very conceptual album - an experimental album rather, in the sense that there was little written in advance, we just went in and started improvising themes. And then in our own very free-form way we evolved lyrics to fit in with those themes. The only real songs as such were 'It's About Time' and 'Spin Spin Spin'; both of those songs were written by a good friend from Chicago, Terry Collier, and adapted for Lovecraft. 'Keeper Of The Keys' had been written previously as well - the rest of the material on the album was improvisational. Ken Nordine became a part of that record too. We were on the road again, on our way to New York to play at the Fillmore East and we stopped by at Chicago to do a little overdubbing and mixing... the record company had become *very* insistent that we get this record out! I forget how it happened, but Ken, creator of the legendary word jazz albums, came down and spent an afternoon with us. He improvised 'Nothing's Boy' and a couple of other things, and it just seemed to fit in with the theme of what we were doing...

"People have asked from time to time about the name of the group, so I guess I should explain that. H.P. Lovecraft was, as you're probably aware, an author. He wrote a number of books - a very interesting fellow. Prior to the forming of the band H.P. Lovecraft, I was not aware of his work, had never read any of his stuff. The name came up one evening when I was at George Badonsky's apartment. He and his wife had this little Yorkshire Terrier named Yuggoth - I found the name interesting and asked George where he'd ever come up with a name like Yuggoth for his dog and he said, "Oh, it's from an H.P. Lovecraft story". That was it - I immediately looked at him and said "H.P. Lovecraft! What a great name!" (after all, this was the 60s!) He suggested that I should read some of his books so I borrowed one and took it home, it was a collection of short stories. One of them was 'At The Mountains Of Madness' which I loved and thought this just had to be it, we've got to name our band H.P. Lovecraft - it was just too perfect! As it turned out, it was perfect because Bill Traut, George's partner, had known for many years a man named August Derleth who was somehow involved in the H.P. Lovecraft estate. Bill called him and asked if we could use the name for the band, August Derleth agreed and H.P. Lovecraft the band was born.

"We became Lovecraft fanatics, read everything we could get our hands on. Bill Traut had been a Lovecraft fan for many years and had a complete collection of his books which he was kind enough to allow us access to as a lending library, so we just borrowed book after book. I read everything and loved it. They were great.



"Going back to the second album... we finished mixing it in New York and really felt that although there were some wonderful moments, we simply hadn't had the time to make the record that we'd wanted to - it was a great learning experience, but it wasn't at all the record we'd wanted to make. When I look back on it now I can see that the band was totally unprepared for the experience and more or less got rushed into doing something just to get product out. It wasn't the right move to make and I don't think the album did very well at all. It had some good artwork though - I really like the artwork on that record!

"Well, shortly after that we regrouped in California and realised that we were burnt out. We had just been together too long, we had been on the road too long. In those days, being on the road meant driving around in a van from coast to coast many times, hardly stopping except for gas and food. It takes a tremendous toll on a group of people who are confined to that lifestyle. The band began to deteriorate, we started bickering and just going through everything that people under those conditions go through. We knew we needed a break. It was sort of odd the way it happened... one thing led to another, the band just fell apart and never did come back together.

"It was a real hard time for a lot of us. I think we had felt burned, really bad about the way everything was happening with our business. By that time Bill Traut and

George Badonsky had dissolved their partnership and as part of that dissolution the property was divided up, and we were one of the properties. We ended up with George and as George was located in Chicago and we were in California, we were totally isolated and out of contact with the way our business was being conducted. Things started happening in a way that was very uncomfortable and questionable. Hard times had set in.

"We were all pretty disillusioned. We were a group of idealists and we just weren't ready for a lot of the hardcore realities that came our way. It was the end. After that most of the band went back to the Mid-West. I stayed in California for a while and tried to put a group together but just couldn't find the sound I was looking for. I was pretty burned out from the road, I'd been out there a little too long and under the wrong conditions, so I took some time away. I got offered a job in the Mid-West which I took, working for an agency promoting bands and working with various touring groups; I produced a number of shows and realised that this was not for me. Music was what I was about and the business side of music, while it was briefly interesting, just didn't offer what I needed. So I left that and began thinking about forming another band - which turned out to take about a year.

"With encouragement from Bill Graham and Bill Traut I started negotiating a deal with Warner Brothers Records. It was agreed that this band would be called simply 'Lovecraft' and that we would record on Reprise Records, which was a Warner Brothers subsidiary, and that we would be managed by Bill Graham's management company which was called, believe it or not, 'Shady Management'. Bill Traut and I went to Los Angeles and met with Mo Ostin, then president of Warner Brothers, and agreed to make a record for them. I came back to Chicago thinking that David Michaels would be a part of this. We had spoken about it and he had expressed interest. But when we finally made the deal and got back to Chicago I realised that David was not really ready for that - he had begun working on his PHD in music and just didn't feel like he was ready for what was required to gear up for recording and the subsequent tour that would follow. The group therefore consisted of myself and Michael Tegza as the only original Lovecraft members. We took on at very short notice Jim Vincent, who was a well-known studio session guitarist in Chicago and another fellow who I had never even met called Mike Bean who was, and still is, a bass player and singer - he's now with a group named The Call. Mike had an almost uncanny resemblance to David Michaels not only in his singing but in his appearance - very, very similar, you could almost take one for the other. This was kind of strange, almost as if David Michaels had been cloned!

"So Mike joined the group as the bass player, Jim joined on lead guitar, I was playing rhythm guitar and doing most of the writing and singing (and Michael Tegza was on drums) - we were still in need of a keyboard player. Jim had known Marty Grebb for some time - Marty had been in The Buckingham's in Chicago and had relocated to Los Angeles, so Marty came up to San Francisco and joined the band and we began working on the material for what was to become the first Lovecraft album, 'Valley Of

The Moon'. We realised very quickly that we had bitten off more than we could chew, in the sense that we really didn't know each other. We came together more or less as a group of people that were interested in music but really didn't have much more in common. We began living together communally, ten or twelve of us in this large Spanish-styled mansion in northern California and we discovered that our difference in lifestyles was really beginning to interfere with the making of the music. There were people in the group who liked to do their work in the mornings, and people who liked to sleep until 3 or 4 in the afternoon and work all night. It became a very destructive situation. Warner Brothers meanwhile were waiting for news of what was happening on the recording of their record - and in truth, not a lot *was* happening. So after a lot of wheel spinning and substance abuse, bad feelings had started to arise and it quickly got to the point where I realised that I'd pretty much had it. I packed up my stuff and left the group.

"They went on to record the album - the record company didn't believe in the group and didn't promote it, and I think it sold about ten copies. And of course the group disintegrated and went their separate ways. It's an all-too familiar story. There just wasn't any focus with that band unfortunately, it was just a group of people who couldn't find a way to get past the bullshit and come together musically.

"As to what people have been doing since Lovecraft, I'm a little sketchy on that. I'm involved in music production, still composing and producing music, working a lot in radio and T.V. I still see David Michaels from time to time. He lives in the San Francisco Bay area and is active composing and living his life. We sang together on a commercial a couple of months back, which was fun. Tony Cavallari I lost track of about four years ago. I saw him at a party but we just lost touch. I've tried to reach him a couple of times but I've been unsuccessful so, I don't know what's happened to Tony. Michael Tegza when I last heard was still playing, and I've completely lost track of Jerry McGeorge and Geoff Brian [Boyan].

"When I was thirty-five, I discovered that I had been adopted as a child. I also discovered that my original name was Charles Ethan Kenning, thus Ethan Kenning. I have no idea why Jeff changed his name from Boyan to Brian. But, we're all still around - we're just not as visible!

"I'm flattered that there's still interest in this music. It was an incredible time, a very magical time, and one which I will certainly never forget."

By: Ethan Kenning. Produced and directed by Phil McMullen.

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Special thanks to Jeff Jarema of Tutman Records for lining this one up for us, and of course to Ethan Kenning himself for his time, understanding and patience.