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From Los Angeles, CA
JAMES HARMAN BAND
Wed.-Sat., Oct. 7-10

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THE ZOO BAR 136 No. 14th

Hair discrimination returns; It's 1967 at the barber's

I go to a party. It's pseudo-yuppies — hairdressers, actually, and lots of them — but there's enough free alcohol of the hard, expensive variety that I stay. The music isn't bad so I don't mind being completely ignored. And there is a nice terraced condo backyard, two levels and a balcony, a fireplace, private stuff to get into, magazines about hairstyles that actually seem to have political slants. There are the conservative magazines that still advocate the uniform haircut. "Used to be you could go into any 'barber' in the nation and say, 'gimme a haircut' an' he'd know what you meant," that sort of thing.

Then there were the Rolling Stone/Spin kind of hair magazines: tinting, mousse, moving escalators up hair-spray-hard blocks of hair, hair terrariums with little bonsai trees growing out of them...

In between were those crafty moderates, trying to live in both worlds. In Lincoln, moderation was survival. One of them told me that in a rare moment of communication.

Thanks to the friends I came with, though, communication became more frequent.

"So what do you think of my hair?" One of my friends asks.

"Oh, not bad, a little trim, a little layering..." More drunken shop-talk as they massage my friend's scalp.

"And mine, what about mine?" Another of my more gregarious friends goes in for a lock-groping of his own.

"Nice hair," the hairdresser purrs and runs her tongue through the small gap between her two front teeth, completely around her dentifrice, down her throat, into her sinus cavity, out one ear, down the hall, into her bedroom, around one of the latches on her dresser drawers and into the little silver disc that contains her birth control pills. "Really sexy."

"What about Charles?" Another friend graciously lands me in the lap of this situation.

There is that moment of silence

where all the images and photographs I've ever seen of car accidents, grain augur accidents and burn victims flash through my head.

"Who?" The hairdresser totters. That farmer's left arm and leg were ripped clean off...

"Charles here..." Nice manly slap on the shoulder for identification's sake. Thanks, friend.

It swerved out of control on the ice, taking out several yards of guardrail and plummeting into the valley many miles below...

pay for my Samsonian ignorance I get this.

It's not the only instance, of course. When I was little my father turned my sister's photographs to the wall because she went off and joined the hippies "to look like an Indian," as Dad put it. Hair was a big deal back then. "Get a haircut!" was a really significant thing to say to someone. It put you on one side or the other in political arguments. It gave away your economic class within a few thousand dollars and it often made known what geographical area of this great land you were from. Now hair has more to do with consumerism. Hair sells albums. A mohawk will put you on one side of the record store and a good short fraternity cut will put you on the other. It distributes the consumer dollar.

To my amazement, hair-bashing has returned. I'm not sure if politics has much to do with it. I walk down the street and some guy turns to his wife and says, "Is that a girl or a boy, Martha?"

Have they really hidden-out behind their Yosemite salt shakers and quilt toaster covers since 1973, waiting until it was safe to come out and say stupid things again?

Fraternity boys yell out their windows: "Get a haircut!" These are young people. Are they from Mars? Who sent them? Is the Vietnam War over yet? Let's get our boys home.

So why don't I get it cut off? Why don't I go to some reasonable old coot with palsey who believes saying "I want a haircut" is enough, and have him wittle out some roughly human hair formation from this thick mess of straw?

The hippies had two reasons, and although I don't want to be saddled with their mass neuroses, I share those reasons with them: In the course of a day I rarely think about my hair until all the barber shops are closed and, as Bob Weir of The Grateful Dead said so aptly in 1969, "I don't have the bucks."

Charles Lieurance



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