



# LOU REED IS SCARY

It was very definitely Richard's, the spiritual center of the over-18 rock 'n roll night club scene in Atlanta.

In most clubs, the management puts a group (any group) up on stage to provide some kind of background sound for the real action in the audience (rock Muzak?). But at Richard's, they do it in style. They obtain "name artists" to produce the sound vital for rock 'n roll nightclub scenes. After the audience is sufficiently drunk off of each other (their collective presences), the booze, and the pills, the management unleashes the act.

For four nights (Dec. 26-28), Richard's did just that with Lou Reed, one of the few remaining life (death?) forces in rock music. Being one of the few performers who can go four nights without appearing to notice a crowd and being a person of many disguises, he destroyed any glittery images which might have been conjured up in the crowd's minds. There just was no glitter. And Lou Reed looked anything but transsexual. If that's what people came to see and be a part of, then they must

have been shocked by what they saw.

They saw four nights of lights-turned-low, urban rock 'n roll, kind of mean and not too pretty. Dressed in a car mechanic's black T-shirt, work pants, complete with a shaved head, Lou Reed looked more like G.I. Joe than a phantom kind of rock. He tried to look moronic and mean (as mean as a short skinny New Yorker can look, anyway). But behind it all, he seemed to be marked "Fragile" as if any moment all of his sinister detachment might be directed against his own body in a fit of self-flagellation, a la Iggy Pop.

Certain members of the audience absorbed the mood and worked themselves into angry frenzies (maybe it was just the tight-packed closeness of too many people working off steam.) Before Reed's second set on one night, an especially drunk soul in the front took it upon himself to be Lou's personal bodyguard and protector, as if anyone would want to try anything funny (Lord knows there had been enough opportunities up to that point.) "If anyone messes with Lou, I'll kill them," he walked around mumbling. It was like seeing someone playing the

part of the bad guy in *Dragnet*. I'm not saying he would not have carried out his threat (rock 'n roll death what fun!) but five minutes later the same fellow was seen sprawled under his table, helplessly combatting his own drunkenness. It's too bad he missed his friend's performance.

Reed's back-up band was tightly professional, a typical travelling outfit, like wind-up dolls. They must have needed the money as much as Reed needed them (very symbiotic relationship.) We all have to make our money somehow.

Reed stood out from the band, even though he acted like he was just a part of the whole sound. He was beautifully chaotic and sloppy, at times forgetting lines and making up others. For brief seconds, the band would flash spontaneously, and Lou would urge them on, but mostly he would sit absently on the edge of the stage or wander off completely to get a drink or just stare into space. Who needs professionalism when you've got eccentricity?

He has never claimed the "misunderstood genius" label that others have given him over the years. Misunderstood geniuses are a real pain.

"Me, I'm in a rock 'n roll band," go the words to his "Sweet Jane," a song he wrote during the latter days of the Velvet Underground (his old group) and performed every night during his visit here. It's simple four-chord city rock 'n roll ("the beat of the street", and that is his specialty.

Although one person in the city is about as articulate as any other, Reed's bits of brilliance come in being able to communicate simply things that never get fully said (except to far flung sociologists or people who already know.) "Heroin," "Waiting for My Man," and "White Light, White Heat," all old Velvet songs, got the 70's treatment at Richard's, loud flashily played guitars complete with slide riffs. In the old days, the beauty of these songs was in the churning simplicity, like musical pulse beats. With his new band, Reed should not have played old songs.

Decadence was fun in the old days. Lou's neo-Decadence is scary. His newest album, *Berlin*, of which he played large segments, is a tale of sadism and suicide which is hauntingly real. There's really no human in it to relieve the despair. That was his blood which he wiped on his face Saturday night. He had inadvertently cut his hand on the lights, but he worked the resulting blood into his act.

He comes on all mean and evil, but I've heard tell that he's just an aging rocker, a heavy drinker, and he's unsure of himself, like his bodyguard under a table in the audience and like most of the rest of us.

He's probably used to marathon playing schedules. He'll go on to the next city and play. To think that Atlanta was any different would be silly. But what does he do when he finally gets back home? I guess you're not supposed to ask those kind of questions.

Well, I guess it wasn't New York City at Richard's. Like I was telling you, it was Atlanta. . .

—alan bisbort