

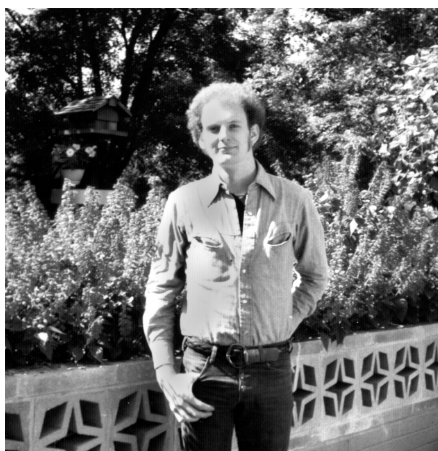
AD: “There was this old guy who lived (at The Plaza) from before Allen and David got the (building) and he worked in the steel mills. He was from West Virginia, he lived by himself, he didn’t have any relatives (except for) a sister in West Virginia he would go down and visit every once in awhile. He was a total loner, and he lived there in The Plaza amongst all this weird shit. He was part of it too. Everybody liked him, he kept to himself. All these people there...there were kids going to college that really didn’t belong with what was happening there but they were part of it.

“In the summertime everybody would just hang out, play basketball, or drink, goof around. Leo Ryan would put speakers in the open windows, and he’d be playing Waylon Jennings or something, and everybody would have a good time, you know? So there was this whole social network, and there was this network of musicians and artists and it was just like a very unique wonderful thing. Like it was meant to be...all these people getting together, some of them fighting, some of them getting along, and it was always part of the music (too).”

MH: “When I came back from Sweden in the fall of 1974, just about everyone had migrated to The Plaza. Peter and Bensick were the major creators at The Plaza, the ones with the fire. Peter lived on one end of the building and Bensick lived on the other end. You had to go through the basement apartment to get from one side to the other. The Plaza (could be) a dangerous place. Some girl living in a ground floor apartment got broken into and raped. On the corner...was the Sterling Hotel, a really down and dirty joint.”<sup>27</sup>

AR: “I was once told by a tenant that I ought to carry a gun. He said: ‘It’s not you, man, it’s the times.’ He was wrong, we are the times, and everything we do falls down on one side or the other, you have to choose. We can’t get away with blaming the other guy for the choices we make.”<sup>28</sup>

Bensick made some brief public outings in December 1974, playing a gig with Laughner, Dennis, and Hronek at Case Western Reserve University on the 7<sup>th</sup> and supplying saxophone for Laughner’s Rocket From The Tombs at the infamous First Extermination Music Night at the Viking Saloon on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. He also contributed “electronics” for electric eels at the Second Extermination Night<sup>29</sup> on January 19, 1975, also held at the Viking Saloon.



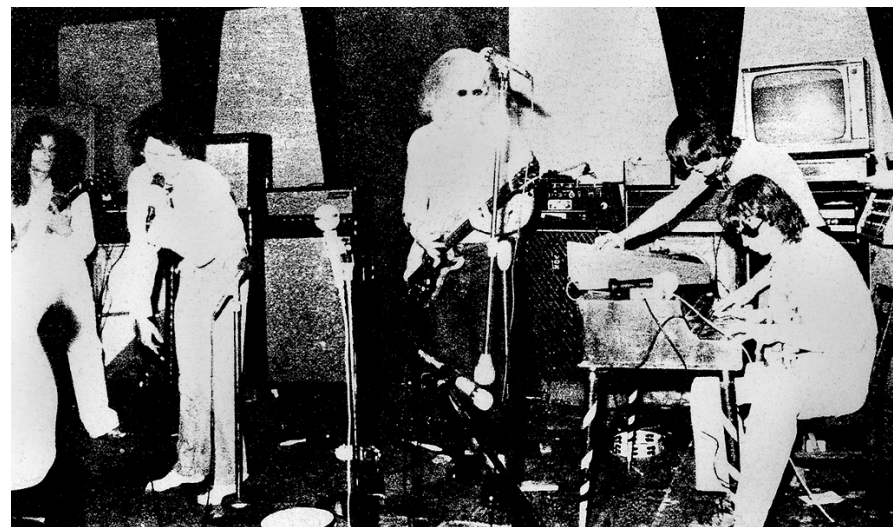
Michael Hronek.

RB: “I had my EML and I got an ARP Odyssey and I was pretty obsessed with training and writing, myself. And for kicks I would go and hang out a lot with the Mirrors and the electric eels because I really liked their stuff. But most of the time I was writing.”

Paul Marotta (Mirrors/electric eels): “During fall/winter of '74/'75 both eels and Mirrors practiced in the basement of a rented two-family house on Storer Ave in Cleveland. As I remember it, Davy (McManus, vocalist of the electric eels) thought the eels sound was ‘thin’ during the First Extermination Night. It was his idea to get another noisemaker on the stage for the second show. I think I had met Bob at the suggestion of Scott Krauss. Bob was available. He...was using the ARP Odyssey

sitting on top of my Wurlitzer piano, which otherwise wouldn't have been used during the eels set. The piano can be heard near the end of the audio tape of the Extermination Night while Bob says, ‘You were there. Rome.’”

John D Morton (electric eels): “We eels wanted a synth player to make non-related meaningless dyne and discord. Musique fucking concrète. He just couldn't do it. It was like form kept pulling him back in. We played out with him once . . . I had hopes . . . He was much too East Side Cleveland Institute of Art intellectual. Bob was just too polar opposite to me/us. Aesthetically antithetical. Nothing wrong with Bensick, just not my way.”



the electric eels with Bob Bensick

l to r Paul Marotta, Dave E., John D Morton ? Robert Bensick

AD: “People called him Banana Bob ‘well you know Bob yeah you just gotta put up with all that other stuff that comes with the territory...’ Think about this guy (Bensick) coming up with all this eastern philosophy stuff, and he’s talking about Maya and what that means...you know Buddhism and Hinduism... Think about that being behind his influence on the music. I mean it’s really mind boggling because most people would go ‘Bob, what the FUCK are you talking about? We gonna play music here or what?’ But just that influencing the music...that’s why the music is like it is, I think it’s part of it.”

Bensick was completely focused on what ultimately would become his magnum opus, *French Pictures In London*, ingesting his Plaza surroundings and writing in words and music what he was seeing and hearing every day.

RB: “The truth is *FPIL*...was my coming out as a pop artist and as a songwriter, really the first declaration of trying to do the music in a pop vein because really before that I was doing Hy Maya which was really fun but I also liked the idea of pop songs. *FPIL* came from living at The Plaza. I spent like two years getting *FPIL* ready and then recording it. Every song is a about a real person (at The Plaza). I can walk you through every fucking line.”

<sup>27</sup>In his piece “The Plaza” published in the *Cleveland Edition* on June 30, 1988, Ravenstine discusses the rape – which he states happened to two young women – and the Sterling Hotel as well as the early days of him and Bloomquist owning the building.

<sup>28</sup>Ravenstine, Allen. "The Plaza," *Cleveland Edition*, June 30, 1988, 7.

<sup>29</sup>Though memories of the actual events are somewhat blurred, it would seem that Bensick played with the electric eels at both Extermination Nights. Traditionally it has been stated that Bensick only played at the second, but photos from the first night (December 22, 1974) show Bensick and his ARP Odyssey on stage during the eels set, and the recording of the eels set from the second night (January 19, 1975) clearly include Bensick’s voice and playing. Morton and Marotta have both suggested (in conversations with the author) that this is indeed possible. Bensick’s reflections upon all of this are perhaps the most succinct: “Playing with the eels was like dropping acid...you never knew what was going to happen, but it would always (be) outrageous, entertaining, and fun.”