

was to do a multi-media presentation. Remember I was a sculpture major so they still got pissed at me!”

Assisted by Dennis on string bass, Krauss on drums, Schneider on congas, and Ravenstine on lights, Hy Maya gave a free-form art and sound performance that saw Bensick playing multiple instruments including synthesizer, guitar, and flute as well as hammering on a giant metal sculpture of female anatomy he had created. (Albert Dennis: “We turned off all the lights in the art room and the students had to listen as part of their class.”) The surviving tape of the performance displays heavy elements of free jazz, krautrock, and general cacophony over the course of an hour. It lived up to the promise Bensick delivered in his introduction that what the audience was about to hear would “try to take them places that top 40 radio doesn’t”¹¹.

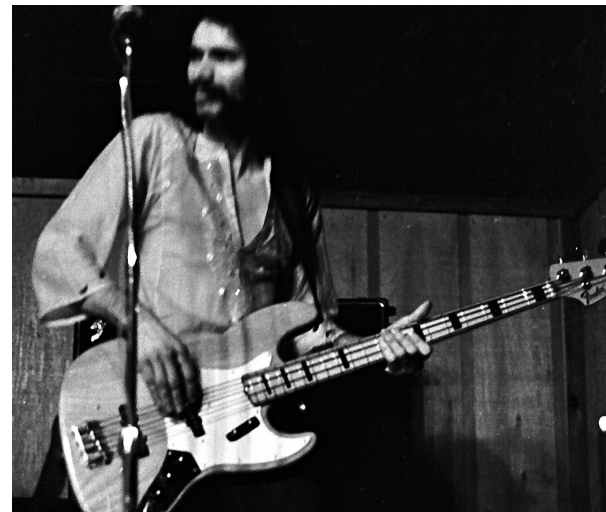
Hy Maya’s next show was on July 28, 1972 at a club called The Cellar in Bensick, Dennis, and Krauss’ old stomping grounds of Sandusky. Joining Bensick (again playing multiple instruments in addition to handling vocals), Dennis, and Krauss were Bob Friedhofer on piano and on lights, artist David Bloomquist, another old Sandusky friend of Bensick’s who was also a student in the art department at CSU. The nearly two hour performance—recorded for posterity by Ravenstine—was

¹¹ According to Bensick, the event also caused a minor scandal within the CSU Art Department as such solo shows were never meant to be such wild, raucous affairs.

¹² The track “Ship of Fools (Dissolving The Contradiction)”, in which Bensick recites some sadder verses over a particularly mournful but deeply effective backing, was said by Krauss to have been heavily inspired by the 1967 album *The Zodiac—Cosmic Sounds* (Elektra). The piece is also somewhat evocative of the morbid “Ebony Eyes”, a John D. Loudermilk-penned tune which was a 1961 hit for The Everly Brothers.

¹³ Ironically, Bowie’s American breakout performance and start of his first U.S.A. Ziggy Stardust tour was at the Cleveland Music Hall on September 22, 1972.

¹⁴ It is generally believed that Roxy Music’s first ever show in the U.S.A. took place at Ohio University in Athens supporting Jethro Tull on December 7, 1972. http://www.vivaroxymusic.com/tours_1.php



Cynthia Black (left) and Albert Dennis (right) in *Cinderella Backstreet* live at the Viking Saloon, Cleveland, April 1973 (COURTESY OF RICK KALISTER, PHOTOGRAPHER UNIDENTIFIED)

an almost 180 degree shift from the CSU show, taking more of an art-rock approach that was still improvisational in nature but contained within more traditional rock structures. Friedhofer’s subversively dark and haunting piano work gives some John Cale-like coloring to the proceedings which range from proto-industrial drones and near-fusion jams to gothic pop and musical poetry¹² prefiguring what groups such as And Also The Trees would do a decade later. With this performance, Hy Maya were once again standing on totally original ground, though it is debatable how many in the audience that night actually realized this.

Bensick, Dennis, Krauss, and Ravenstine soon entered Motion Picture Sound Studios in Cleveland to work on an album that went unreleased at the time. With Gary Hedden engineering, Hy Maya did a vast cross-section of its musical abilities and fantasies, producing pieces that touched on the avant-garde, jazz, and even exotica at times, all the while remaining experimental and at certain points challenging. How such an album would have been received had it actually been released is debatable; locally, the clubs were ruled by more conventional groups such as Dragonwyck, East Wind, Labrynth, and Sweetleaf whose

repertoires were dominated by covers. The *Billboard* charts in the summer of 1972 were grooving to the likes of Gilbert O’Sullivan, Looking Glass [“Brandy (You’re A Fine Girl)”], and Neil Diamond while hard rock radio was tuned to Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, and Grand Funk Railroad. Though performers such as David Bowie¹³ and King Crimson were beginning to rise in popularity and The Moody Blues and Emerson Lake & Palmer continued to sell out concert halls in the U.S.A., Hy Maya’s cosmic, improvisational approach probably would have sat better with fans of Raheem Roland Kirk than, say, Chicago.

Locally, WMMS-FM was taking a more progressive approach to programming, and one was as likely to hear Ry Cooder and Lou Reed on that station as much as you would Kevin Ayers and Frank Zappa, but, again, as Bensick had stated so boldly at the CSU performance, Hy Maya was attempting to take audiences places their radios would not. By that account, though, there was no place in the 1972 mainstream for a group such as Hy Maya. Roxy Music – with envelope-pushing synth player Brian Eno still in the ranks, who added elements of chance and chaos to the group (not unlike the role Ravenstine would play a few years

later in Pere Ubu) – released their groundbreaking self-titled debut album that summer but had yet to break into the U.S.A. WMMS DJ Kid Leo, however, would soon be pushing them hard on the air.¹⁴

Prior to this, 1968 was a watershed year for electronic music. Several acts that featured electronics prominently in their music and set-up had albums released nationally. Groups such as The United States of America (signed to Columbia) and Fifty Foot Hose (who released their sole album on Limelight – a subsidiary of Mercury) tended to work within the context of more traditional rock structures while the two-man Silver Apples – whose debut came out on Kapp – tended to be little further out there with their electronics and drums approach. The duo of Paul Beaver & Bernie Krause provided the music for the landmark release *The Nonesuch Guide To Electronic Music* that year, followed by *Ragnarök* released on Limelight in 1969. Other examples include *An Electric Storm* (Polydor/1969) by White Noise, *Zero Time* by Tonto’s Expanding Headband (released in 1971 on jazz flautist Herbie Mann’s Embryo imprint which was distributed by Atlantic-Cotillion), and *Ceremony* (A&M/1969), by the U.K. band Spooky Tooth (then fea-