

Sweet Potato

October-Issue 9/Vol.1

The Musicpaper



Home Grown

I was a little early for our appointment when I knocked on the door of Ken LaRoche's apartment in Ogunquit, Maine. There wasn't any response to my knock, so I gently pushed open the door and took a couple of steps into the living room. It was littered with dozens of instruments; flutes and lutes, guitars and sitars, maribas and kalimbas, bells and shells. No electric guitars, no amps, no drum kits. It was going to be an enlightening afternoon.

Ken LaRoche is one-half of the group Do'a. That is "Do'a," not D.O.A., not DO'A, not "doa" by the "windah," but Do'a. The word Do'a is an Arabic-Persian word that signifies the call to prayer and meditation. As one might imagine, the group Do'a is primarily an acoustic ensemble bent on "creating a synthesis of sound, using all different musics

from around the world and blending them."

The other half of Do'a is Randy Armstrong. Both musicians are multi-instrumentalists and well-schooled in several fields of music. Randy and Ken are members of the Ba'hai faith. They do not proselytize with their music, but their personal convictions have a profound effect upon it. Their feeling that all the world is one country provides a basis for combining elements of Indian, Irish, folk, classical, jazz, and rock music into their performances.

"Music strikes a ringing chord with peoples of all backgrounds," Ken told me. "I love all honest forms of music. I love music that is performed honestly and well, and sometimes not so well. . . What we're trying to do is stress the positive aspects and qualities music can have. Music is a very

able to relate to it in one way or another. They like to work with concepts in their music, and a lot of their music is improvised. Randy plays many string instruments but is partial to the acoustic guitar. Ken favors flutes, flutes of all kinds; wooden, ceramic, ancient, modern, even handmade.

"There are so many incredible musicians around these days. What impresses me most about music is a group consciousness, and that's what we're striving for. The power is in uniting, sharing. In practice we don't achieve a quarter of the power and beauty we get when we're in front of an audience and they take an active part. There are times when the energy level is in tune, and we do things we never even conceived before."

The words are Randy's, ex-country-rocker, with our outfit called Annie Oakley and did some session work for RCA for a while. Like Ken, he has been around and is comfortable discussing all forms of music. He cites Chick Corea, Ralph Towner, and Gary Burton as some of his favorite musicians.

Currently, Do'a is an intensive 6-8 week creative period with plenty of practice and rehearsals and few gigs. One of their top priorities is getting an album

together in the near future. What will be on it? Nearly anything, it may have a version of "Scarborough Fair" on it, a Jobim bossa-nova, or a traditional medieval folk tune. Whatever will be on it will be very mellow, very well done, and very pleasing to the ears. "Perfection is the key element to our music, whether we're playing to ten people or a thousand." Who could ask for anything more?

Randy and Ken firmly believe in the adage that music is the language of the soul. They have been warmed by Indian and Iranian people who have approached them after concerts to tell them, "I can really feel the energy of our culture in your music." The greatest complement they feel they have received is a total silence from an audience of over 100 at the end of a piece, a silence that lasted many seconds. They have received kudos from Arlo Guthrie and Paul Winter, and played before colleges, and on television and radio.

Do'a is exotic and quality musicianship by a couple of talented, dedicated, and serious musicians.

Dean Johnson