

# John Sinclair

## Interview



with Michael Erlewine

# John Sinclair

## A Spiritual Biography

Interview by  
Michael Erlewine

### INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a mostly readable document for those who are interested in in this series on Ann Arbor in the 1960s. This is an interview, very informal, almost a stream of consciousness. It is what it is. Enjoy!

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John Sinclair

Interview by Michael Erlewine (sound recording).

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## INTERVIEW WITH JOHN SINCLAIR

[John Sinclair is an iconic figure, a poet, writer, and political activist. At least this is what Wikipedia says about Sinclair. And John is all that, yet IMO this ignores more than it embraces. For me, personally, what John Sinclair has to say about modern music, in particular the evolution of rock n' roll, and how he learned to appreciate blues and jazz is so much more important. And in particular, John's personal take on racism and how he came to understand racism should be clarifying to any American.

Black music makes up the roots of modern American music, especially rock n' roll. Without it we'd all still be dancing jigs. To read how Sinclair, who was raised in Davison, a small town outside of Flint, Michigan, a mostly White and segregated community, discovered Black music and subsequently Black people and finally racism itself, is eye-opening.

John's command of the English language cuts to the quick in pithy imprinting insights that cannot be denied. His sensitivity to nuance is such that it results in direct talk, so that we cannot avoid the obvious racism that is still very much ingrained in much of America, is liberating, IMO. This is an interview I did with Sinclair some years ago during one of his visits to our center. I know you will enjoy it. I have learned from it.]

**Michael:** Okay, you ready to rock?

**John Sinclair:** I'm ready to rock.

**Michael:** You don't mind in what order I do stuff?

**John Sinclair:** I don't mind.

**Michael:** Cool. Let's talk about the Grande Ballroom, Michigan's answer to the West Coast and places like the Avalon Ballroom

and the Fillmore West.

**John Sinclair:** I don't mind [sings do, do do.]

Hi, I'm John Sinclair, I'm here to talk about the Grande Ballroom.

**Michael:** Well, let's. How did you get involved with it and what was your function? What did you do for them?

**John Sinclair:** Well...I was an unpaid unofficial publicist for the Grande Ballroom. When Russ Gibb started the Grande Ballroom in the fall of 1966, it was a very interesting time as you probably recall. There had been these people who were like us, that we were part of... post-beatnik jazz-loving people, artists, people into poetry, people who got high as a way of life, smoked a lot of weed, and also started taking peyote and mescaline and LSD.

We had the Artist Workshop in Detroit, at 1252 West Forest and, out of there, I went to the house of correction on a marijuana charge and spent five months and 16 days in the Detroit House of Correction in 1966, emerging on August 5th.

I always get a kick out of that, because my daughter Sunny who is here with me [visiting the Erlewine family], was born exactly nine months later on May 4th. She has that six months in her. So, when I came home... remember in the 60's so many things happened so fast, so many cataclysmic changes in the way things were. At least, it seemed liked it to me. When I think back on it now, more would happen in six months than now happens in six years, or maybe we were just engaged with it. But I was gone for six months and that was when the hippies started to emerge.

I read about them when I was in the house of correction, I read

about them in, "Life Magazine." Ha...also I had found an influential experience reading "Life Magazine" that summer, when I was in correction, and I read about Jerry Rubin appearing before the House on Un-American Activities Committee with a revolutionary war costume on. And that had a big impact on me, because I thought it showed for the first time that you could really respond to the idiocy of the government with a sense of humor [laughs]. I thought that was great. But also, these hippies, you started to read about.

## THE BEATS

**Michael:** And where were you at with all this?

**John Sinclair:** I was in prison.

**Michael:** No, but...were you a hippie at that point?

**John Sinclair:** No, I wouldn't call... Well, we called and thought of ourselves as beatniks, even though the real... We were followers of the beatniks. We wanted to be like the beatniks. We wanted to be beatniks. I know I did.

I wrote poetry and I was into jazz and I wrote about jazz and, you know, I studied the works of other great beatnik authors and all the great be-bop musicians, and I was involved with the new wave in jazz - Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Sun Ra, Pharaoh Sanders, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman. So that's where I was at mentally. Physically that summer, I was in prison. When I came out a lot of things were different, in that there were these young kids, obviously influenced by the Beatles. They had long hair, but they were also smoking marijuana, and they were taking acid. But they had no intellectual...

You know, the difference between our group [Sinclair and

Erlewine are the same age] and the ones that came after was, to a large part, having an intellectual heritage. The Hippies were like the television generation, you know what I'm saying? The first generation of kids that grew up watching television instead of imagining things. Because that was our generation. Our great thing was, and the one before it, we imagined a lot [laughs] and then made it happen, stuff that hadn't happened before you imagined it. But once they got it on television, they started this ugly process of fixing their modes of thought, so that they were primarily influenced by what they've seen on television. Anyway, that was just an aside.

**John Sinclair:** The Grande Ballroom. [laughs] Well I said all that to say that in August of 1966...Okay, when I got out, that would be exactly two months before the opening of the Grande Ballroom, right? October 6th, am I correct in thinking it was October 6th?

**John Sinclair:** You know October 6, 1966 was also the day that they made LSD illegal.

**Michael:** I didn't know that. The Grande opened on October 7, 1966, a Friday night. I was there.

## LSD AND PSCYEDELICS

**John Sinclair:** Up until that time you could take LSD with impunity.

**Michael:** And I did.

**John Sinclair:** Yes. [laughs].



**Michael:** I don't know about impunity.

**John Sinclair:** Hooray. Legal impunity; we may have colored in the face of the universe, but we didn't have to worry about the law.

**Michael:** Right, I certainly colored in the face of the universe.

**John Sinclair:** Right, me too, many times and thankfully I might add. So, I have been a parent of this kind of post-beatnik artistic activity. I was the organizer of not only the events, but also the living spaces and performance spaces and eventually, well, in magazines, and little books we printed. And I was the driving force of organizing this stuff, and making it happen. And now there was this interesting thing in the air that didn't have any of the intellectual properties that had been so important, but it was more about bigger more intangible spiritualism, I don't know just how all those things connect with taking LSD, and not having any pre-conceived... You know, one of the things we had to do was blast a lot of pre-conceptions out of our minds. I know I did, in order to get to the things that I was trying to learn from that experience.

**Michael:** And when did you first take LSD, so I can time that?

**John Sinclair:** Well, I took peyote in October of 1963. That was my first psychedelic experience. It was August, mid-August of 1965, when I took LSD for the first time -- sugar cube.

**Michael:** Me too. I had peyote in the late 1950s while in high school and first took LSD in May of 1964 during the year I spent out in Berkeley, California, some original Sandoz in a sugar cube. And for you, was it a good...I mean a big trip?

**John Sinclair:** It was tremendous... They were sugar cubes from

San Francisco that someone had brought through on their way to New York.

**Michael:** How did it change your way of looking at life?

**John Sinclair:** Wow. Then I took it many times after that, I mean several times. I don't know, I can't remember how many [laughs].

**Michael:** How did it affect you?

**John Sinclair:** You know, it would just sharpen things... See, when I had peyote, it all opened up. I mean I gained a different outlook on things. A sense of love for all humanity, a sense of oneness with the universe, a sense of humility in the face of the universe, realizing that one was just a little tiny organism in this vast sea of atmosphere. Those things were primary, well the feeling of love, love for one's... just love for being alive.

Acceptance was the other great thing I always felt that I learned from psychedelic experiences, to accept what's happening as what's happening and not impose your idea structure on it and also, you know, to realize that what has happened can't be changed, it can only be acknowledged. And the only thing you can change is what might happen next. You can change that by doing something different.

I felt that all around me people were hung up because they had an upside-down vision of that. They spent all their time trying to change what had happened in the past, but they looked at the future as if it was futile, that there wasn't anything they could do about it. And that never made sense to me, but on peyote and on acid I kind of understood. Just the acceptance issue was so big, because our culture was so non-accepting. My mother and father, I mean, they had the ideas of the way things should be

and that's the way that they looked at everything.

## RAISED CATHOLIC

**Michael:** What religion were you raised in, if any?

**John Sinclair:** Well, my mother was agnostic, and my father was agnostic, but it was a Roman Catholic upbringing.

**Michael:** You got some of that? Me too.

**John Sinclair:** So, he felt it was his duty to bring his children up in the church. We didn't go to parochial school or anything.

**Michael:** Did you go to mass on Sundays?

**John Sinclair:** Mass and Sunday school, what did they call it? "Catechism."

**Michael:** Same here, for me it was Catholic school, Sunday Mass, catechism, and I was an altar boy and learned to recite church Latin. What year did you manage not to go to mass anymore, roughly how old were you?

## ALBION COLLEGE

**John Sinclair:** Well, I had this wonderful epiphany right after my 18th birthday. I was at Albion College, my first semester. It was a beautiful fall day, in mid-October. I will never forget this moment, as long as I live. It was a great liberating experience of my young life. I was walking across the campus thinking and I'm thinking about it, as all good Catholic youth do, it was the

weekend. Should I go to confession on Saturday and go to communion on Sunday?

Well, I'm already planning to have too much fun on Saturday night that it makes it worthless to go to confession, because you would never it make it with the state of grace until the next morning. So, I'm having these kind of teenage thoughts, and all of a sudden it was like the sky opened up and I realized that this was all just some weird trip that some humans had made up and that God didn't have anything to do with this stuff.

It was something some humans had dreamed up, and they were pretty sick humans, the more that you thought about it. They were twisted, and they made up this really ugly construct and then somehow, they ended up imposing it on centuries of people [laughs].

And this occurred to me that it was all horseshit. Man, it was then that the cloud lifted, you know. It was like, it just opened the door to, well, what I consider authentic religious experience [laughs] in the years since, which I had a lot. God...that was my first one. I have liberating forces, like epiphanies. One was that at the end of my first term in graduate school at Wayne State University and I got my grades. I was taking a full course load, four classes, and I got three A's and a B+, and I got the B+ because I missed the class five times instead of three.

I had never cared about schoolwork up to this time and I thought, I was pretty proud of myself, a full ride. But, my mother, who was a schoolteacher, would be happy with me finally applying myself after 13 years of school and four years as an undergraduate, I finally had found that I liked this shit. You know, getting A's and stuff. I had resisted her up until then.

So, I stopped at a payphone, on like Cass and Warren, and I

called my mother in Davison, and I said, "Mom, I just got my grades and man I got three A's and a B+" and she said, "Well, why did you get the B+?" And all of a sudden, I realized that I would never be able to please my mother [laughs]. That whatever I did in life, it would never be enough to make her say, "Good job son," you know, so I just stopped worrying about that.

It was like being free of religion and family and those two things kind of opened the door for me to do other things, but I had already had peyote by then. I just felt that peyote and psychedelics in general... just heard from my mind all these horrid suppositions and cultural imprints that had been made by these people who, basically in my view, were kind of twisted, stunted, emotional dwarves, you know, but also their intellect wasn't that well developed either -- the kind of people that run our country now.

## BECOMING A RADICAL

**Michael:** I've got another question for you, while we're back there, I think that something that would really be good is for you to describe a little about that you were raised in a very small town. What I need to know is that, when you were a little kid and stuff, how did you become so radical?

I mean where did all that come from? Where and when did you begin to have an alternative view of community? You're an alternative community leader and that means something outside of... an alternative. Where did that come in? When you were a kid, you were probably just in whatever situation you were in.

**John Sinclair:** When I was a kid, you know, I played. I grew up in a little bitty town, Davison, Michigan. [near Flint, Michigan]

## IT'S THE MUSIC ON THE RADIO

**Michael:** So where did the difference come in, in the whole life?

**John Sinclair:** Well, because of blues, rhythm and blues and the radio, that was what changed my life.

**Michael:** Please do talk about that.

**John Sinclair:** I'm a little kid in a little country town. I was kind of fascinated by the process of pop music when I was nine, ten... Well, I was a radio enthusiast from when I was a little kid, sooner. You know we came up in that last generation before television took over. Well, I was a radio guy.

**Michael:** What did you listen to? What were some of the programs?

**John Sinclair:** Well, when I was seven my dad got me, built me a radio. And I would come home from school and listen to the after-school programs, like Sky King and I forget the name of the program but it starred Gene Autry and Pat Buttram, Red Ryder. The Lone Ranger also. And this would all be after school.

**Michael:** Ovaltine Time. Also, all I had was radio for many years, because they had not invented TV, and we lived way out in the country with no neighbor kids. It was radio or nothing.

**John Sinclair:** They'd drag you out to eat dinner and then I'd go back into my room and then the mystery show's would come on, the "Fat Man," East Steps on the Scales, "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell me," "The Shadow," which was my favorite of all of these, The "Green Hornet."

**Michael:** That's cool, no, so let's talk...

**John Sinclair:** There were those and then there were the ones that the adults listened to also, like the "Great Gildersleeve," and "Jack Benny Show" on Sunday night was like the pinnacle of the week culturally in our household.

**Michael:** How about "Amos n' Andy", did you...?

**John Sinclair:** Well, I loved Amos n' Andy. I love Amos n' Andy to this day. I think Amos n' Andy were [laughs] just incredible. "Our Miss Brooks," but I mean if I sat and talked...I mean, I don't think about these things ever, so these are just popping up from 50 years [laughs], 55 years ago. I was just fascinated with that stuff.

**Michael:**

As you must know, both Amos and Andy were white folks, at least on radio. So how did the rhythm and blues... how did the Black music arise?

## WHEN TV ARRIVED

**John Sinclair:** Well, what happened was the television came in, and so the dramatic life of American entertainment, which lowered to television, and the radio became a medium for music. Changed its nature completely. All of the dramas, the soap operas, the serials -- all that stuff, all the basic spine of television programming, such as it is a jellyfish spine, that as all converted radio programs, quiz shows, serials, soap operas, the weekly programs, comedies, all of that was on radio when I was a little kid and it was fascinating, because you invented all the pictures to go with it in your mind. You created the visual track, you know.

It gave you a big part to play in the entertainment process, because you'd be listening to this stuff, and you'd be a kid and your imagination would be running wild [laughs]. Oh, I loved that. Because when television came in, it just didn't interest me. I was about...I was 11, when we got our first television set. I was 10 going on 11, in 1952.

I'd watch the stuff and it was just too boring, because some people that didn't have an imagination as vivid as mine had fixed the imagery. Like when you saw Superman, it was so lame compared to hearing it on the radio. On the radio, when you pictured Superman, it just wasn't as good as what you had in your head, you know, so I just couldn't watch TV too much. But on the radio... Oh, the one thing I liked on TV, I was kind of fascinated, even at that age, even before the age of 10 by the, some of the conventional structures of pop-culture like the "Top 10."

Like I used to listen every Saturday morning on the radio to see what the top 10 records would be and then they had "Your Hit Parade." Remember that horrible show? But we used to watch it.

In my family, that was a pretty high cultural event, because people were singing songs. Most families didn't have music. I listen to music 24 hours a day, basically, at my house. But in my parents' house, they just didn't have music. Music wasn't important to them. But I did okay. There was a phonograph, one of those big 78 consoles. We didn't really have any records, but records just stressed the shit out of me. I liked the top 10, so I used to watch "Your Hit Parade" and it would be these horrible re-enactments of pop tunes by Patti Page, Guy Mitchell, and all these characters.

But I was too young to... I mean that music kind of was Snookie



Lanson shot at eight or nine year old kids. I mean that's about the intellectual level of it. "How much is that Doggie in the Window?" I remember seeing them sing that on Your Hit Parade, Jerry McKenzie and Snookie Lanson [laughs]. Oh, that was some sick shit. So, I'm looking for things that would make life bearable as a kid, curious kid... comic books. I was a voracious reader, as I still am.

## "I WANTED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT NEGROES"

Well, I tuned into a Black radio station in Flint, Frantic Ernie D was the star of the disc jockeys and he was a spectacular personality, who rhymed everything he said and played the greatest records. I mean these records were so great, far beyond anything I had ever heard on white-oriented popular radio, you know to hear the Clovers sing, "One Mint-Julep." It was just like walking into a world that you had never imagined [laughs].

You know that just all of a sudden, bam, these people who had beautiful voices, singing these kinds of salacious lyrics but in a very smooth and charming way [laughs]. God, I wanted more [laughs] and that's characterized my life ever since. I just want more and more of that.

So, I didn't know, I didn't have any idea what kind of people... To me, it was using exotic sounds in a 10 year-old kids ears in a radio in a country town. I used to think that records came from God. Man, I used to think that records came from sweetest [laughs].... I don't know, you know, you didn't have any idea what the distribution of these things were. It was magic. You turned on the radio, you heard this station you used to hear, it wasn't the same.

You wanted to hear something, you tuned it a little bit, Bam! One early morning, when I was walking, you hear this shit man, or Ray Charles, you know, "Jumping in the Morning," "I got a Woman," Big Joe Turner... that put my mind on fire.

**John Sinclair:** And then when I started finding out that these were songs that were created by Negroes, that inflamed my imagination and curiosity and I wanted to know more about Negroes.

There weren't any around that I knew about, not where I lived. When you'd go to Flint, it was like...well you know society in the 50's, was pretty much segregated, wherever you went, as it is today, but even more so then. So, you didn't have Brown Vs. the Board of Education until a couple more years after that, 1954. So it was like a different world, but it was one that piqued my interest, and I kept wanting to know more about it, and eventually was completely immersed in it, much to my happiness [laughs].

Oh boy, God, it was so fun with me. You know, we had that wonderful, I don't know what your relationship to popular music was, because you come from a more intellectual household, but I had the pleasure of having the first records by Chuck Berry and Little Richard, Bo Diddley when they came out it was like... "Maybelline" by Chuck Berry came out, it was like the most beautiful gift from God. It was this record, and it was the most perfect record you had ever heard. It had everything.

We used to go to the Dairy Bar, where we hung out at, was a nickel a play, six for a quarter. And you'd put a quarter in the jukebox and play Maybelline six times and they would already be putting another quarter in, and you hit it, so you didn't want to hear anything else that week. It was just so bomb, you know.

Every week, like, five of the best records of all time would be released, some weeks it would be more. But when you look at the charts, like if you look in those books where they show week by week, they made so many amazing records. And they'd just come out and that was your environment, that was what they played on the radio.

They were popular, really good records, and then they took over some of the major airwaves when they started calling it rock and roll. That was quite an incredible phenomenon. I mean you don't hear anything remotely as exciting as Little Richard or Chuck Berry on today's radio, and you hardly hear anything you could even stand to listen to for three minutes.

For me, it's not swinging, it's not emotional, it doesn't... Little Richard, man [laughs], he was on the radio, then songs like "Long Tall Sally." That was on the radio then, "Rip It Up" and Ready Teddy," you know, just one right after another. That was an exciting life, wasn't it? Yeah.

## COUNTER-CULTURE

**Michael:** How did that turn into something that was counter-culture, alternative? I want to try to find your roots...

**John Sinclair:** I don't know, but I mean when I started thinking about my... Well, the first thing is... see, to me, it was a new experience to be engaged in something that was art. You know what I mean? It would have been a perfect American community [laughs], where there was no art, you know [laughs]. Everything was on the up and up. They have one bar in the hotel, you know, it was like a clean white place. It was greening. It was like the American dream. So, I got that to the max. [laughs]

By the time I was 18, I never wanted to have anything to do with that part of life ever again, because it was just so ugly in all of its whiteness, really. The more you learned, the more you realized how ugly this thing was. The more you read, the more things you heard, the more you exposed the idea of people that didn't; they weren't allowed to share in this vision, you know? Wouldn't matter what they did, they would never be able to live in Davison, Michigan. They just wouldn't let them, colored people, no way. They didn't want that there.

You know it's just that perfect [laughs] embodiment of this culture, this idea. And as soon as you learned there was something different, then you wanted something different. I guess you'd had to have gone to World War II to really, really desire that, you know. I'm not sure how they got that way, but I know it was repulsive to me. It wasn't any fun, and anything that you wanted to do that might be fun, you weren't to do any of that. I mean that's where I developed my earliest rebellious tendencies.

**Michael:** Well, that's what I'm after, what I am trying to understand. I mean I had rebellious...I had all the same thoughts, no... I don't think I had the richness of the music, I mean I had things like "Sally Go Round the Roses" and "Earth Angel." We danced to that.

**John Sinclair:** We had our folk music in our town...art music, art-folk music.

**Michael:** You know Josh White, yeah, folk-blues.

**John Sinclair:** Ah, Josh White wasn't a cotton-picker, but he was a guy who put on an act about...but you know.

**Michael:** Well, that was what my parents had, those type of blues

records.

**John Sinclair:** Right, right.

**Michael:** Not "Sally Go Round the Roses, but "Josh White," "Art Tatum," Duke Ellington, that kind of stuff.

**John Sinclair:** High art in my view.

## "IT'S THE RACIAL THING"

**Michael:** Well relative... Just to find all those through a whole different process. But what I'm trying to understand. I never got political to the degree you did... I'm trying to understand the roots of your political rebellion, which I'm beginning to understand. This is helpful to me, I don't know, it's important for readers to know this stuff...

**John Sinclair:** Well, it's all in the racial thing, you know?

**Michael:** I think that's right.

**John Sinclair:** See when I found out about Negroes, then when I found out that they were into this great music, and I hadn't heard jazz yet. This was just like the lowest form of black popular music, you know R&B.

**Michael:** But not blues, you hadn't....

**John Sinclair:** Well, I knew blues, I knew blues on these black stations. Blues never penetrated the white station, few blues records that really charted big on the pop charts in all that time, but on Ernie Gum he would play Muddy Waters. He was dealing up seven people in Flint.

**Michael:** You're not talking about just rhythm and blues, you're talking about straight blues. I mean there's a big difference between Little Richard and like...

**John Sinclair:** Not that much to me, I mean the emotional content is way up there [laughs].

**Michael:** But the form is different.

**John Sinclair:** The form is different. The form's different between "Wynonie Harris" Mystery Blues and Muddy Waters, but it doesn't make...I mean Wynonie Harris was equally exciting to me. Amos Milburn, Charles Brown, Willie Jordan...you know I was in on the tail end of all those guys when I was 12-13 years old.

**Michael:** But you're still in this little town?

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, I was in my little rec-room in the basement like this.

**Michael:** Were you buying these things or getting them?

## BUYING RECORDS

**John Sinclair:** Well, when the 45's started, I was listening to them on the radio and I would get my father... Now it's good to sort this out. I was 14 when I got my 45 player for my 14th birthday in 1955. I got a 45 player that I could plug into my little radio that my dad fixed a jack in the back of the radio. It was a big mystery that they could continue at such nominal expense. And my dad built that, you know. And my dad built this fucking radio

from a kit man and I had my own radio, AM radio, but I had my own radio and he built me a little shelf for it over my bed.

**Michael:** But weren't those 45 players beautiful then?

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, the little compact one. Cost probably, I don't know what they cost, \$25, I don't know. My dad bought a stand-alone 45 RCA and he drilled a hole in the back of the little radio for a jack and he hooked it up. So you put the jack in there and you turned your dial all the way to the end where there wasn't any station and then you could play your records. But I was already 15. I mean I was already 14 when I got the 45 player. Okay, my first 45?

**John Sinclair:** Did it ever tell you the first record I bought?

**Michael:** No, I want to know what it was.

**John Sinclair:** First 45 I bought the day I turned 14, "Hard Hearted Woman," by Big Walter Horton on States 154.

**Michael:** You couldn't do any better than that. One of the greatest recordings I have ever heard.

**John Sinclair:** [laughs] You know what I'm saying, one of the best records ever made.

**Michael:** Totally. I just heard it the other day. Big Walter is in 1<sup>st</sup> Position on the harp, something he did not do all that much.

**John Sinclair:** Well, they finally put it in on CD, Dellmark.

**Michael:** Really?

**John Sinclair:** Yeah. I didn't think I'd ever hear that record again.

And I got it for 25 cents, it was a cutout. So I think that came out in 1954 I think.

**Michael:** But had you heard Big Walter before you got that, or you just happened to get it? Because...

**John Sinclair:** No, no, no, I'm real but, I knew who the artists were by the time I started buying 45's.

**Michael:** Even Big Walter? Because he's a little bit of an oddity.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** ... Even now.

**John Sinclair:** Well, yeah, but I mean States Records would play it on black radio stations. States, Chess, Aladdin, Specialty, Atlantic, you know.

**John Sinclair:** If you went on one of those labels, you had an equal chance to get played as anybody.

**Michael:** Right, but that record didn't go too far out of Chicago.

**John Sinclair:** No, but it was just Chicago to Flint. Well, it didn't do any good in Flint, because somebody had bought a few from the distributor, but they couldn't sell them, so they were selling them for a quarter.

**Michael:** Instead of?

**John Sinclair:** .89 cents or whatever they were.

**Michael:** Wow. What are some of the next ones you can remember? I mean that's a killer one to have first, It is one of my



all-time favorites, some of the best harp playing ever recorded.

**John Sinclair:** I'll never forget that. Well I mean it was there, it was there in the thing, you know.

**Michael:** But did you know it for...?

**John Sinclair:** My dad wasn't going to go in and spend a bunch of money on a bunch of records, but he said you can get a couple of records.

**Michael:** But did you know that song or did you know Big Walter by name? If you remember... perhaps you don't remember.

**John Sinclair:** I might have heard it on the radio. I just...I knew I wanted it. I knew what good records were by the time I was 14. I used to get my records...see in my time they didn't have a record shop.

**Michael:** Really?

**John Sinclair:** No, the only records you could get in Davison were Tops, you remember Tops?

**Michael:** Vaguely.

**John Sinclair:** Okay, Tops were dime store records. And they would be like your Hit Parade, there were some inauthentic of a popular tune.

**Michael:** Oh, I know what you mean, right. I had too many of those myself, hits rerecorded by not the original artist, until they were not worth listening to. I really know and that is what inspired me to create the All-Music Guide, when CDs were coming over

from vinyl and, to use Little Richard as an example. CDs were coming of claiming "Original Hits by Little Richard," when yes he was singing the original hits, but it was 30 years later and he could hardly sing. I was worried that people would buy these and think they had heard the best of Little Richard, when they had not. That's how AMG, the All-Music Guide was born.

**John Sinclair:** Some...not even a cover, the top studio orchestra would record the shrimp boats are coming and on the B side would be Jambalaya, you know or whatever, I can't, I don't know if that's accurate, but... they'd have two, there would be a two-sided riff for .79 cents.

**Michael:** Right, I had them.

**John Sinclair:** Well in my town, you go to the drugstore and they had Tops, you know. I think I probably started on those. Because I knew the tunes that were popular, but then I remember realizing that these were inauthentic [laughs]. They were stealing my money. This wasn't the record that I wanted. So I was pretty sophisticated for a real young person on the record thing.

When I used to send away, see before, or after right around the same time, when I was 11 or 12, and at night you'd be listening to a station they'd be playing rhythm and blues and you just be fucking wiggling, you know, just having a ball and then all of sudden the show would go off and it would be hillbilly like, when

Ernie D went off, hillbilly music came on with what was probably after the third shift widows on WBBC in Flint, Michigan and all of sudden instead of Joe Turner and Ray Charles it was Faron Young and Webb Pierce ... I remember these songs because I would be too young and I would be drifting off to sleep, so I

would be too tired to reach up and turn off the radio. So your show would go off.

**Michael:** But those were great songs. I like old country a lot and enjoy current country as well.

**John Sinclair:** Well, I like them now, but I mean at the time I didn't have any, I used to hear Jazz O's was another show that I used to listen I think when Ernie changed stations and then a jazz show came on after him. That was a strictly black oriented.

I used to hear this guy, he was a famous disc jockey, and he moved to Detroit later, named Jim Rockwell, and he'd say this is Rockwell and these are records.

**Michael:** Okay, I appreciate hearing your history with popular music, now I'm also curious about where did the poetry and philosophy come in?

**John Sinclair:** Oh, later.

**Michael:** And how did that happen? I'm just trying to understand how it all unfolded. So now you had the music which I think was...

**John Sinclair:** Well music was the thing, you know, I mean everything came from that.

**Michael:** Okay.

**John Sinclair:** See when I got turned on...I was going to say I used to send away...I found WLAC in Nashville, Tennessee. Did you ever hear that one when you were a kid?

**Michael:** I don't think so.

**John Sinclair:** A 50,000-watt station. I'd talk to people all over the mid-west and the south; there were 50,000 clear channel watts out of Nashville. Every night from 9 o'clock until 1 o'clock, they had this succession of rhythm and blues programs sponsored by mail order record retailers. Randy's Record Shop in Gallatin, Tennessee and only Gallatin, Tennessee and they were hosted by Gene Nobles and later by Bill Haus Allen. And each of them...and then they had Jumpin' John R would come on for Ernie's Record Mart, 179 Third Avenue in Nashville, Tennessee. And then Herman Grizzard would come on for Buckley's Record Mart. And each had the same format.

They would number the tunes they played that night. See there were, it was a programming strategy directed at rural Negroes who had a record player, but nowhere to buy records, because all these little towns were just like my little town was in the north, they didn't have a record shop. I mean you would have had to go to Jackson or Clarksdale or Mississippi to get a record, you know? So, this show, this station catered to them by having the show sponsored by mail-order record shops and then they were also tailored to the illiterate.

You didn't have to remember a lot of this shit; you didn't have to know how to write, if you wanted a certain record. You would have a postcard. You'd get somebody to address it, John R., WLAC. Nashville [laughs] and on the back it would say number three and the date that you heard it and like two weeks later, a 78 would arrive C.O.D., having the tune you were waiting to hear in the privacy of your home whenever you had too [laughs].

It was a really remarkable thing when you think about it. And then they would have these packages. The Blue Star, Blue Special, six records, 12 big sides for the low price of \$2.79 plus packing, mailing and C.O.D. " Send no money, just your name and address to Blue Star, care of me, John R., WLAC,

Nashville, Tennessee" [laughs]. These are the formative things in my intellectual life really.

**John Sinclair:** Such as it was, you know, but I mean to me it was everything, getting those records [laughs].

**Michael:** Okay. So where were we? You might like to say something about what it was like for a guy that came from a little tiny town and then maybe went to Albion College

## CONFINEMENT

**Michael:** But similar, it's actually better, not much. What was it like to be put in a prison cell. I'd really like to know, and not just the tough stuff, don't be brave about it. I am more interested in like... I mean I would be terrified of being confined.

**John Sinclair:** Well, they confined me, yeah.

**Michael:** Yeah, but tell me what was it like?

**John Sinclair:** I mean I was terrified of the authorities.

**Michael:** How did they treat you?

**John Sinclair:** The way they treat everybody else in prison, you know, like a dog [laughs]. I mean I didn't have any...well I had special treatment in that I was always kept in the maximum-security condition.

**Michael:** Why?

**John Sinclair:** Well, because I was an organizer.

**Michael:** Oh. So, they knew that?

**John Sinclair:** Well, that's why I was in there [laughs]. I wasn't there for no two joints, you know? That was just what they could use. Well, you know I mean at first, well the first time I did six months in the house of correction in Detroit.

**Michael:** Was that like in a cell or in a group thing?

**John Sinclair:** That was a camp type...I lived in a barracks with a 100 men, something like that; you had your own bed.

**Michael:** Did you labor or stuff?

**John Sinclair:** Well, I worked as a clerk. See when I was in the house of correction, it was in 1966 and I was already notorious among people into the arts. I guess from marijuana too.

## ENGLISH SKILLS

**Michael:** Where did you get your English skills and stuff? where did you get skilled with the language?

**John Sinclair:** Well, my mother was a schooled English teacher [laughs]. I got my training early, wouldn't you [laughs]? Then I went to college. I was supposed to go into a law program and I decided... I had a teacher at Albion, named John Hart, who was an intellectual, stood out like a sore-thumb on that campus [laughs]. He imbued me with a passion for literature. I had always been a voracious reader, but I was never exposed to literature, you know what I'm saying? When I was a kid, I read every landmark historical treatment in the Davison Library. I've read every western that they had, every Zane Grey book, every western.

We had a little library in this little town. I read 3 books a day. [laughs] I still read three or four books a week. I mean I just read all the time; that's what I do for kicks. Then after westerns, I got to murder mysteries and I read everything by Agatha Christie, everything by Earle Stanley Gardner, Sherlock Holmes, all that kind of stuff. So, I was into all these things but I didn't know about Ernest Hemingway or F. Scott Fitzgerald or anything like that until I went to college and then I got to the writing class or English class with John Hart and somehow he fed me with the zeal of the person interested into literature and I changed my major to English literature and I went on and studied English literature and graduated with a degree from the University of Michigan Flint College.

**Michael:** Oh, so you did graduate?

**John Sinclair:** In English literature. Then I went to graduate school at Wayne State in literature, because that was my real passion. But at least I learned how to write, I learned how to write in undergraduate school, writing papers and then I would write papers for other people [laughs], for \$5. That would be my beer money. So, I learned at an early age to write anything about anything, which I can still do [laughs]. Then I learned how to write from writing papers on Thomas Fielding. I don't know just in English classes they had the most obscure shit and I got that passion for complete-ism, you know reading every...I guess I already had that [laughs]. But that's how I got into it. And then of course my semester in college I got tuned onto the idea of the Beatniks.

**Michael:** Yeah, let's talk about that. I did the same.

## TURNUED ON TO JAZZ

**John Sinclair:** I got turned on to jazz.

**Michael:** This was what year?

**John Sinclair:** 1959. I always say I had the good fortune to enter the jazz world after the greatest record of all time was released, "Kind of Blue." When I joined the Columbia record club for the first of many times. I got "Kind of Blue." [laughs] So that was just a fortunate accident of time, you know history. But, at Albion... my parents sent me to Albion because it was a good college and I tried to give up...to repudiate the teenage rock and roll greaser lifestyle that I found so much solace in during my high school years and I tried to get with the college thing, you know short hair and khaki pants, Albion sweatshirt, and the whole nine yards.

But one day a guy I knew was doing a radio program on the campus, what do you they call that? Closed-Carrier, the radio station at Albion. That meant it was broadcast into the dormitories, like cable. It wasn't an open broadcast into the air. It was broadcast on these carrier lines. But anyway, they got to have their show at seven in the morning, one day. And he couldn't handle it. So, he got me to do his show.

Well, see, the other thing when I was a teenager, my real ambition in life, my personal private emotional ambition was to be a disc jockey [laughs]. Because all my heroes were disc jockeys, you know. So, I used to do record hops when I was in high school. I billed myself as "Frantic John," Flint's youngest deejay.

**Michael:** But also, with black music?

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, playing R & B, yeah. Well, see rock and roll



was nothing but rhythm and blues with a different marketing concept. But the records, the great records were all by black people. And I also subscribed to a small number of white artists like Buddy Holly and the Crickets, Bill Haley and the Comets, Sun Records Artist Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, Johnny Cash.

## DANCING

Even, Johnny Cash was about as far to the right as I went toward a folk type of thing. Billy Riley and his little green men doing flying saucer rock and roll, Warren Smith doing the Ubangi Stomp. I had all the Sun records; I just thought they were the shit. So, I mixed those in, you know, Dale Hawkins, Suzie Q, Cross Ties [laughs], but yeah I would entertain the kids seeing I could do it. I wasn't doing it for money, I was doing it to get my nuts off, so you could hire me for like \$20, whereas you'd have to pay a guy who was a disc jockey on a radio station a \$100 maybe, or \$50 to do a record hop. I'd do it for \$20 or a case of beer, you know [laughs]. So, I was a fanatic dancer when I was a teenager, that was the other half of the records, and it wasn't just listening to them but also dancing to them. And I was a very accomplished dancer in the jitterbug, post- jitterbug school. I don't know what they call what we used to do. But I was a fanatical dancer and I went to dances, six nights a week.

**Michael:** What style of dancing?

**John Sinclair:** The bop, you know, dance like colored people. I used to go to the...See the high points of life were when I was a kid was to go to the Black show revues at the IMA Auditorium. I went there to every show that came to Flint from 1955-1960. Allen Fried's, "Big Beat Show of 1958, headlined by Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis". A show so bad that the 18 acts opened

with Screaming Jay Hawkins coming out of the coffin and went on from there [laughs].

Oh man, so I saw all my idols perform and danced to them. With the colored people, and I was, like I'm not trying to swell my head, but I was such a good dancer I could clear the floor at a Negro dance. And the pinnacle of life when I was a teenager was to go to one of these big R&B reviews at the IMA Auditorium and dance with colored girls. To me this was like the ultimate...like winning the simple award for the athletically minded, you know. I think that's at the IMA Auditorium with 3000 black people there and make everyone stop and watch.

**Michael:** Really?

**John Sinclair:** That was spectacular. I mean it's hard to imagine, even now, but when I was a kid...when I ran into a guy at the Music Menu two nights ago named Pete Woodman, you ever know him?

**Michael:** No.

**John Sinclair:** He's a drummer with from the Saginaw area.

**Michael:** I don't think I know him.

**John Sinclair:** He's got a hair lip and he's only got half his fingers. I've been knowing him...I met him in 1959 at the Music Box in Houghton Lake [laughs]. But I mean, going to dances, these records and then going to dances.

So, these records, you know, not only would they be my works of art, but also you danced to them, and other kids like you danced to them and then there was like the elite of kids who knew about the records and danced to them and that would

maybe be a grand total of 30 white kids in Flint, Michigan. Of course, we all knew each other because we all went to the dances and we all dressed a certain way, like Negroes, you know. We had pointed toe shoes, we were sharp, and we wore sunglasses at night you know and all this crazy shit in the 50's man [laughs]. Oh boy that was something, you'd get a case of beer and you'd go to the dance and you'd get loaded and you'd dance and try to take some girl out in the car, you know the whole nine yards, big fun, or go to some kids house. See I was the guy when you had a party at the house, I would come in with a case of beer [laughs] and I would take a position by the turntable and then I would bogart the turntable for the whole night. I would just sit there in the chair and drink my beers and play the tunes ...and commander the record player.

**Michael:** You were a deejay.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, yeah [laughs]. So, when I went to college and I had a chance to do this deejay show, man it was like my life ambition was being realized. Even despite my surroundings, I'd take my old box of 45's down there, and "School Days" by Chuck Berry was my opening theme song "Up in the morning and out to school" at seven A.M.

Then I would play an hour of Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker [laughs], The Flamingoes, you know et cetera, et cetera, Big Jay Turner, Ruth Brown and then I would go back and try and get with the college thing. Well, I did this for a few times and one afternoon they came a knock on my door in the dormitory, in the freshman dormitory. And I'm in there with my roommate who was a Canadian football player and hockey player and this other Canadian guy, total squares. And this knock on the door and I open it and it's the campus beatnik. We only had one, and this guy wore sandals, rode a bike, you know, brought a colored girl to the prom. He was out there. His name was Rodney

Coates. And he says...[laughs], well they called me Tuffy when I went to Albion College, because in Flint, in our circles of the hip young white people that had rhythm and blues records and went to dances, we wore this kind of pants called Tuffies of the old west, do you remember those?

**John Sinclair:** So, I never heard of them. I don't know how they got to Flint, Michigan, but to us if you wore Levi's, you were a farmer, if you wore Wrangler's you were a farmer.

**Michael:** Okay, let's hear some more.

**John Sinclair:** Well, I was talking about Tuffies.

**Michael:** Yeah, let's see if we can get to the Grande.

**John Sinclair:** [laughs].

**Michael:** Because I need to know...

**John Sinclair:** It's a long trip, you know.

**Michael:** I know, you know...I think this is good interesting stuff.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** And whoever makes your book should read through this.

**John Sinclair:** Oh, well, it will be me [laughs].

**Michael:** Yeah, all right. I'll end up being able to give you transcripts.

**John Sinclair:** Whoa, now you're talking.

**Michael:** Which is like enormously helpful.

**John Sinclair:** No shit.

**Michael:** Yeah, this has to be transcribed.

**John Sinclair:** Oh, very good.

## AND HERE COMES JAZZ

**Michael:** I understand how you got activated and how...but you're still in Albion, I mean, that's not very...activist. That's not wild and radical.

**John Sinclair:** Not in the least bit.

**Michael:** How did you get to Detroit?

**John Sinclair:** Well, first, I was at Albion and this guy knocked on my door and he's like, "You Tuffy Sinclair?" And I said, "Yes I am." He look's at me and I'm trying to look like a college boy, and he said, "Are you the Toughie Sinclair that was on the radio this morning?" I said, "Yes, I was." He said, "Well, where did you get those records?" I said, "Well, they're my records." He said, "They are?" I said, "Yeah, c'mon in."

So, these other guys are looking at each other like man what's this weirdo doing here and so they split. So, me and Rodney Coates sat there for about three hours, through dinner and everything playing 45's. Well it turned out he grew up on this. So, we're listening to show and you know all this shit. And at one point he looks at me and he says, "Are you for jazz man?"

And I said, "No, I really never heard it." He grabbed me by the arm, I'll never forget this, he grabbed me by the arm, and he marched me up to the second floor into the sophomore part of his dorm, and he sat me down and he said, "Now I'm going to play you some music that I'm sure you're going to like it, but you know, but it might take a minute." [laughs] And he puts on this record of Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins and Jackie McLean, called, "Gig." And then about in three seconds I was totally with it. I said, "Wow, wow this is the shit."

Then he says, "Yeah, yeah, I knew you'd like this." [laughs] And so then we sat in his room and he played me records by Charlie Parker, you know Miles Davis and all this stuff. So that was when I got into jazz. And then I immediately thought that this music from my teenage years was lame, it was like a lower order and I graduated to a higher level. And I just got embroiled in it, obsessed with jazz. Used to go to...they had a record shop there, that had a pretty good, you know, for a little town it had a pretty good selection. And they had... Remember when they had the booths? You could go in the booths and listen to the records. And I used to take like 10 albums in there and I'll play one and I'd read the backs of the other nine, you know?

And then I would...you'd hear somebody, like had a Miles Davis...like Miles Davis. See I'd hear all the Miles Davis records, but then Sonny Rollins was on there. So, then you'd hear all the Sonny Rollins records, all the Jackie McLean records, then Coltrane, than I became with obsessed with Coltrane [laughs].

## BOB MARSHALL'S BOOKS

And remember Beatnik poetry, "Howl," "Gasoline."

**Michael:** What year was this?

**John Sinclair:** 1959 going into 1960. And in those days, you couldn't get those books anywhere but from Bob Marshall's Books in Ann Arbor, Michigan. So, I'd write away to Bob Marshall's and ask. You'd hear about them. You know it was like archaeology really because this stuff wasn't in Life.

**Michael:** No, we could talk about this. I mean Bob Marshals Books was where I hung out in Ann Arbor. I just spent all my time there. I read all this...where I read the "The Subterraneans," all of Keroauc's books, huge slippery books from Evergreen Press.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, well I used to send for them from Albion and ask them to send me some. Grove Press, City Lights Press, New Directions. Those were the main ones.

**Michael:** I read all that stuff. I went out to San Francisco and met Ferlinghetti at City Lights Books.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah. Well and then it was just like with the jazz records. There was enough information encoded in the book... pocket poets and see the rights by Allen Ginsberg and on the back, it would have the other books that were on and so we had to have all of those, see [laughs]? And we just followed the threads, you know, until we had found the stuff we were looking for and that would in turn, open up other things. So that's where I got my intellectual curiosity from that kind of thing.

**Michael:** So, there's where you and I are together, totally, because I totally went the same exact route.

**John Sinclair:** Yep.

## ANN ARBOR COFFEE HOUSES

**Michael:** But I got it from the people in Ann Arbor, the beatniks in Ann Arbor, so to speak, and the Promethean Coffee Shop where you could go and hang your head down, smoke cigarettes, and look serious. Right? They didn't even have espresso back then, just coffee, Café Wein, Viennese.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah. I remember when I went back to Flint from college and I found they had a coffee house that they opened in front, a beatnik house called "Plato's Pad." My ex-wife used to work in one of them on Wayne Campus called "Cup of Socrates."

**Michael:** I know the Cup of Socrates, yeah.

**John Sinclair:** Tim Fairlane was in there. Well, those were all people from the "Cup of Socrates" that after I came to Detroit, I merged with them, and I became a leader of that group in the sense that I organized shit that wasn't happening otherwise.

**Michael:** But at this point there was not really a political edge to it?

## POLITICS

**John Sinclair:** No, my whole political thing came through really finding out more about Negroes. The Civil Rights movement had started in December of 1955 with Rosa Parks. So, the Civil Rights Movement and the emergence of Martin Luther King and all that stuff was all taking part during the same period. At some point I hooked it all together that this music was coming from these same people that were in the Civil Rights Movement. So, I was an advocate of that.



**Michael:** Me too.

**John Sinclair:** After two years at Albion, in which I was in a fraternity; I was the rush chairman of my fraternity.

**Michael:** That's really hard to picture, you a fraternity fellow.

**John Sinclair:** Well, it was, Sigma Nu. They sent me there. I was there. It was where it was happening, and I was trying to get with what was happening. So, I was trying really hard, but at the same time I started to listen to jazz and was trying to write poetry and then I found eventually... Well, Allen Ginsberg was a real idol. But I also found my real mentors in poetry through Charles Olson, Mary Brock and Robert Creeley, Amiri Baraka always opened me up and I learned he was LeRoi Jones then and he opened up another possibility, because he wrote about jazz and he wrote the book, "Blues People."

**Michael:** And he was political.

**John Sinclair:** Well yes, that's some... from that. Castro took office in that period -- my first semester in college. He had a beard. Ginsberg and these guys were telling you he was the greatest, so I thought he was the greatest. When he wrote a book that was the most influential of all which was covered, "Black Muslims in America," by C. Eric Lincoln. It was about Elijah Muhammad. I read about this, I read his book. I was just floored because everything he said about white people I knew to be true and even more so. You know what I mean?

Muhammad's idea of separating from the white people. Hear him talk about what the different things white people did. I thought he doesn't know the half of it [laughs]. Just from my experiences with white persons, you know. And so, I became an

advocate of black people in America. I just thought that what was being done to them was the most vicious cruel shit that I ever heard of. I didn't want to have anything to do with the people that were doing that. This is kind of where I started with yelling from the Caucasian sphere [laughs].

As completely as I could, we were still interacting, but mentally put them in line with these other people. So, when I was in Flint...oh, when I went to Albion, okay.

At the end of my second year, which is 1961 in the spring, there's the push to integrate fraternities. I had a meeting in that fraternity house where I lived. At this meeting they carefully laid out the stratagem to rise by the national office of the Legion of Honor as they called themselves. Which was sort of: any chapter was forced by the university where I was based to accept black people into their fraternity.

They could then apply to withdraw from the national. So, the national fraternity wouldn't have its honored sullied by these people of color. And after the meeting the guys all ran through the fraternity house signing, "They will never be a Nigger Sigma Nu." And I started kind of mentally packing right at that time. [laughs]

That was our getting married or something and then in June we were out, and I just decided I wasn't going back. I didn't care what they did. I wasn't going back with these people, which I thought they were alright people. They were my friends and fraternity brothers. And then all of a sudden, they're just these vicious racists, you know? And we found this more and more about white people where they were friends, but were as bad as Bull Connor [laughs], in their attitude. There wasn't any difference among white people. There were very few white people who want to right this.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**John Sinclair:** You know. Other than that, all those were phonies. [laughs] But other than that, white people pretty much united against the Negro and so this just turned me off completely to the whole concept of white people and white America. Man, this is really awful. So, I imagine that's why...you know a lot of my interest was spurred by jazz records that I listened to, like "Freedom Now" by Max Roach and Coleman Hawkins. Sonny Rollins did the "Freedom Suite," and was always talking about this stuff. And these were people who were my favorite artists you know. So, all of these things and the Castro ascendancy... Kennedy became President at that time and things seemed to open up a little bit more, politically. I mean it wasn't Eisenhower... Eisenhower was in the closet, you know.

**Michael:** At this time... I was in Ann Arbor, and Ann Arbor was halfway...

**John Sinclair:** Halfway cool.

**Michael:** ...about, you know, racism.

**John Sinclair:** Well, I often talked to our friend Charlie Thomas.

**Michael:** I mean Charlie and I were friends.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, we were...but I mean he was so direct in his criticism [laughs].

**Michael:** Yeah, but in Ann Arbor there were all races.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** Because of the university.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** I was raised with all kinds of races around me.

**John Sinclair:** Indian people, yeah...

**Michael:** So, I never thought of it like that.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah. Well everywhere I had been, that was the way it was.

**Michael:** Well, I think that fact is one big difference between us.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** That I understand...that helps me go through the realization of it. No, I never got the full realization, because I was already comfortable with all kinds of people of different colors and races on campus...

**John Sinclair:** Right.

**Michael:** Although the black people in Ann Arbor were not like the foreign students, those from India and those people at the university.

**John Sinclair:** Right.

**Michael:** The foreign folks were educated...

**John Sinclair:** They had their little....

**Michael:** The Blacks in Ann Arbor had their own element. They had their own little neighborhood and they had their own little business section, Ann Street, which was gentrified decades ago now, and lost.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** Which I ended up playing music in, Like Clint's Club on Ann Street for a year and a half, right?

**John Sinclair:** Well, I know. I saw one of the first people at Albion.

**Michael:** Right.

**John Sinclair:** There was a little black ghetto there, people that worked for Albion...

**Michael:** And our band was integrated sometimes from pretty early on.

**John Sinclair:** Ah.

**Michael:** We had a black drummer for a while.

**John Sinclair:** Now who was that?

**Michael:** That was...Shorty. I can't remember his last name. I think it was McGaugh or something like that.

**John Sinclair:** Shorty [laughs].

**Michael:** Do you remember Shorty and his brother?

**John Sinclair:** No [laughs].

**Michael:** Shorty on drums and his brother was the bass player....

**John Sinclair:** Oh wow.

**Michael:** I can't remember his last name, but I think he's a car upholsterer now in Ypsilanti, and I'd love to see him again.

**John Sinclair:** Oh wow.

**Michael:** Because he was cool.

**John Sinclair:** Shorty.

**Michael:** Shorty. But what was his last name? It was like a Scottish name.

**John Sinclair:** Right, right.

**Michael:** McGaugh, or something, anyway, my brother would know. I can't remember. Anyway, so I'm just...I'm sorry to talk too much, I just...

**John Sinclair:** Oh no that's fine.

**Michael:** Realizing that I didn't have the same vision and I know that you lived in Detroit.

**John Sinclair:** Right.

**Michael:** Ann Arbor was like cushy, right? What I hated as a high school student were the pinheads, the college students. And then I hung out with them, eventually.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** And so, I didn't like intellectuals. I didn't like academics.

**John Sinclair:** I like...right, right.

**Michael:** Because I was a townie.

**John Sinclair:** Right.

**Michael:** We used to beat them up. I mean not me personally... but Ann Arbor high school roughnecks would.

**John Sinclair:** Right.

**Michael:** As a rule.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, I remember the town and gown controversies.

**Michael:** Anyway, keep going, I just...

**John Sinclair:** Well, I fell in with some black guys in Albion and I would go over to their place and they had one of those huge record players that... They lived in little bitty place and they had one of those huge record players that took up like half the room. We would drink wine and listen to jazz records all weekend, you know?

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, see the first blues I ever heard were Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf.

**Michael:** Yeah, I don't think I heard much Muddy Waters, early on.

**John Sinclair:** On Chess '78's, you know.

Oh, I was going to say, going back to when I was a kid, one thing I wanted to put in there was it was racist to send away for records to these...to Randy's Record Shop or Ernie's Record Mart. And I would hear this on the radio and I would send away for the Blue Star Blues Special.

**Michael:** Right.

**John Sinclair:** You get six 78's. \$2.79. Yeah, plus packing, mailing and C.O.D. You'd send for these. I remember I hated my mother for years because my package of records would come and she would refuse to pay the C.O.D. because it would be like \$3.50.

I would come home everyday from school waiting for my box of records, you know? [laughs] This lifeline from outside, and finally my mother, "Oh, some package come but I sent it back." Oh, no [laughs]. Sometimes when we'd get through, I had to give her the money from my little earnings.

**John Sinclair:** Man, I can still... the feeling of unpacking the box with the six 78's in it, that came from like another planet, you know? "Sincerely" by the "Moonglows" ... that blue and white Chess label, you know?

**Michael:** I imagined you liked doo-wop probably as much as I did.

**John Sinclair:** Oh yeah...

**Michael:** I still hear it and go into raptures, right?

**John Sinclair:** Ah yeah, that doo-wop is what my heart's composed to that [laughs].



**John Sinclair:** What I used to do was on Fridays when I got my little \$2 allowance for the week, I'd give my Dad a list of like ten records and he worked at Buick. Buick was in the middle of the north-end ghetto in Flint, and Ernie's record rack number one at 943 E. Street, near Industrial, was just up the street from the Buick Headquarters where my Dad worked. So, on Friday, on his lunch hour, he would go to Ernie's Record Mart, Ernie's Record Rack, and he would pick me up two records out of the list of ten that I gave him. And he did that, I don't know for how long, but I mean that was my...before I could get to be 13 and start hitchhiking, we used to hitchhike into Flint every Saturday, hitch around to the different record shops and steal 45's [laughs]. And hitchhike back to Davison, because you could hitchhike everywhere then as you recall.

**Michael:** Yeah, I know. Hitchhiked to NYC some 10 times.

**John Sinclair:** That was a great thing to stand out there and next thing you were in downtown Flint [laughs]. Like teleportation [laughs].

**Michael:** Right.

**John Sinclair:** I just wanted to get those three things when I was a kid.

**Michael:** That's great, yeah, I know.

**John Sinclair:** Man, records are like holy objects [laughs]. You can never have too many.

**Michael:** I don't know about that. My CD collection is now part of Michigan State University in East Lansing, some 800,000 CDs. That's a lot of music.

**John Sinclair:** And you wanted to have everyone that you liked, you know?

**John Sinclair:** Who's on Vee Jay, you had to have it. Where was the Spaniels? Wade Flemings, Jerry Butler, Jimmy Reed, Billy Boy Arnold, , Ben Eldorado, you had to have them [laughs].

**Michael:** Yeah, I'd like to have them.

**John Sinclair:** Well, that's when they were on Brunswick.

## GRANDE BALLROOM

**Michael:** You really did a lot for that scene according to Russ Gibb. Russ went on for five minutes which I will transcribe and send to you at some point. So how did you...he made it sound like you really made the intellectual aesthetic decisions and booked the bands.

**John Sinclair:** I schooled him, yeah. I didn't book the bands.

**Michael:** Well, how did you get involved with it?

**John Sinclair:** See when he started, I didn't know anything about rock and roll bands.

**John Sinclair:** I saw the MC5 at the Grande Ballroom opening night, and I just thought they were the shit.

**Michael:** So, you weren't booking them then?

**John Sinclair:** No. I was becoming friends with Rob Tyner and Rob Tyner's best friend was Gary Grimshaw and so Rob Tyner had the band and Grimshaw did the posters. I remember a poster before the Grande opened that Grimshaw did.

**Michael:** No, Grimshaw didn't do that one. Because I just talked to him and with Russ and that was from an earlier time, the poster with a trumpet on it.

**John Sinclair:** Well, I don't think it was published

**John Sinclair:** But I remember seeing this in his apartment.

**Michael:** But it's not a Grande poster from 1966. It was from an earlier time.

**John Sinclair:** I don't think it was a Grande poster.

**John Sinclair:** Well, you asked him about that trumpet thing?

**Michael:** I did, and he (Grimshaw) doesn't remember it, but what he said is that he made that seagull poster in one night. I pulled a "Seagull" poster out of my basement some years ago. I must have been there. [laughs]

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** And so, he couldn't have made anything before because they hadn't asked for anything.

**John Sinclair:** No, but he had a rock and roll type poster. It was blue. I can see it. I can't see the image but I can see the color.

**Michael:** I believe it.

**John Sinclair:** It was on his wall he didn't have...I just thought man, you know, wow [laughs]. I was blown away. I always thought it was the greatest thing, that somebody was doing that there, and it was him.

**John Sinclair:** You know another thought I had about that last night? That could have been from the old Grande Ballroom.

**Michael:** That was my point. It was.

**John Sinclair:** That could have been the opening for their fall season.

**Michael:** From back in 1960 or 1955?

**John Sinclair:** That's what I'm saying.

**Michael:** No, what Russ told me is that he found a stack of them when he took over the building and he put one up on the wall because it was fun, but then he contradicts himself in another interview that someone else did.

**John Sinclair:** Oh.

**Michael:** If it was a Grande thing then it worth a lot of money.

**John Sinclair:** Oh right.

**Michael:** Otherwise, it's worth nothing, other than as an oddity.

**John Sinclair:** Right.

**Michael:** I'm just trying to figure it out.

**John Sinclair:** Right, see you're trying to authenticate this is a valuable item.

**Michael:** Well, you can't blame him.

**John Sinclair:** No, you can't, but...I wouldn't be surprised if it didn't go back to an earlier incarnation. That's like art from the early 50's isn't it?

**Michael:** Well, their response to that is, "Well, it was a standard stock image, over which they overprinted a date."

**John Sinclair:** Well, it could have been the opening of the fall season. Wouldn't it be summertime, everybody would go to the Walled Lake Casino and places like that and then they would start in the fall, and they danced...

**Michael:** Yeah, the years it could have been was 1960, or 1955, those are the dates, September...

**John Sinclair:** September 17 you said.

**Michael:** Friday, September, whatever it was. Either that or the other thing is that Russ had a pre-mature opening, but why wouldn't he have had a band? Unless he was just going to open the place and he didn't even announce a band. Didn't happen.

**John Sinclair:** I can't see that.

**Michael:** I can't see that either.

**John Sinclair:** I know they did announce a date. I'm almost positive.

**Michael:** You tell me that the seagull poster, you didn't have any

influence on it.

**John Sinclair:** No.

**Michael:** You didn't know Gary then?

**John Sinclair:** No.

**Michael:** What...how long after...it must have been pretty soon after?

**John Sinclair:** I met him right around then.

**Michael:** Okay.

**John Sinclair:** Like I say, I got out of the house of correction August 5th. August 6th they had a big party, coming home party at the Artist Party Workshop on John Lodge and Warren and the MC5 played there, but they didn't play until three o' clock in the morning and I had already turned in and there was the legendary time where my wife went down and told them to un-plug; it was too loud.

**Michael:** And I've heard that story. And the Grande, what was in it for you? At some point you were managing them?

**John Sinclair:** That was the year later?

**Michael:** A year...you probably didn't have much to do with the first thing, or did you?

**John Sinclair:** I wrote about it. I publicized it.

**Michael:** Okay so you...

**John Sinclair:** I wrote about it in my column. I thought it was really great that they were doing this, and I went every week.

**Michael:** But you weren't interfacing with Russ the first few times.

**John Sinclair:** I met Russ when he came down to the Artist Workshop when we were writing Jerry Jounkins. And the MC5 auditioned for Russ at the Workshop. This would be August, or very early September 1966.

**Michael:** So, you came out of.... whatever detention and then somewhere between that and the opening of the Grande you met Russ?

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** But Russ wasn't seeking advice from you, or was he? Sounds like he says he was. He didn't know what hippies were much.

**John Sinclair:** No, he didn't. Well see...

**Michael:** But you didn't either, you weren't a hippie either but you were a beatnik as I was... trying to be.

## THE FIFTH ESTATE

**John Sinclair:** Well, what they had there... I was like the beacon, you know?

**Michael:** Okay.

**John Sinclair:** Because I wrote about it and I...the Artist

Workshop was the only thing hip happening in Detroit at that time.

**Michael:** How long had you been writing? When does that...?

**John Sinclair:** Oh, I say writing...

**Michael:** Were you writing when you were in detention?

**John Sinclair:** Sure.

**Michael:** And they were publishing it on the outside?

**John Sinclair:** I started writing for the Fifth Estate by the first, second issue. That would have been 1965 in the fall.

**Michael:** Oh really?

**John Sinclair:** Yeah. Because Harvey O' Shinski had the same experience that Russ had a year later. Harvey went to Los Angeles for the summer. He was a junior in high school, you know Harvey?

**Michael:** No.

**John Sinclair:** And his father Stan O' Shinski, the guy who invented the microchip?

**Michael:** Really.

**John Sinclair:** [laughs] Harvey worked here. Harvey was a nerdy kid, you know? Harvey O' Shinski,. He was kind of a nerdy kid and he went to California for the summer and he hung out at the Fifth Estate Coffee House and the Los Angeles Free Press had just started. Incidentally Art Conklin, the publisher and



founder of the Los Angeles Free Press came to one of my gigs in Los Angeles not too long ago.

**Michael:** Oh really?

**John Sinclair:** And just made my whole fucking night [laughs]. Anyway, Harvey saw this underground paper in the Fifth Estate Club. He also went back to high school for his last year and he decided he wanted to start an underground paper. That would be the Artist Workshop and our mimeograph machine. We created this school of arts publications on mimeograph machine.

**Michael:** Right, right.

**John Sinclair:** Poetry magazine, an avant-garde jazz machine. This would be a 150 page mimeographed magazine with a pictorial cover. We were like in the forefront of the mimeograph revolution, basically spearheaded by Ed Sanders.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**John Sinclair:** So, we mimeographed all this shit as part of our mission. Well, all of a sudden here is this little tabloid paper, the ugliest piece of shit you've ever seen. Harvey and his younger brother and sister, I think, made it in the basement in northwest Detroit, or Oak Park or wherever they lived [laughs]. I never forget seeing that, because it was the first thing outside of our efforts to turn up that was like...what was happening, you know? Even though it was ugly, and it wasn't really happening, the idea that some kids had made this happen was really a big thing, so Leni and I went and talked to them and she kind of became the art director and I was the arts columnists and we kind of told them what was happening and what to cover, because they were high school kids.

So, I started with them with the second issue and I had this little column called "The Coat Puller." And it was like a column, classic bullet-column, you know? Odds and ends of what was happening. So, this was my influence on things, because I wrote about what everybody was doing, and it was the only place...and I had aggrandized the stuff, you know what I mean, anybody who was trying to paint or have a jazz, I aggrandized.

**Michael:** So, I guess if there would have been a false opening...a pre-mature opening to the Grande, you probably would have written about that?

**John Sinclair:** That's what I'm saying, it's probably in my column...it seems to me, almost certain that he announced another opening date in September, but then for some reason either having to do with permits or the physical preparation of the space or whatever it prevented them from opening then until this October date. God, I remember all that shit so good [laughs]. You know when the Grande opened there was the MC5, and I forget who was the other perhaps "The Chosen Few" or something.

**Michael:** Could have been.

**John Sinclair:** I didn't know anything about rock and roll bands because they were...we were beatniks. It was about jazz bands, you know?

**Michael:** Some of us...we didn't think of ourselves as a rock and roll band...

**John Sinclair:** No, you were a blues band.

**Michael:** Yeah, the blues were our love and intention

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** Yeah, I mean that's what we liked.

**John Sinclair:** There was no question in my mind that the Prime Movers were a blues band.

**Michael:** Right. And that was...

**John Sinclair:** They were like Paul Butterfield.

**Michael:** Oh, the Butterfield band were our idols.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** Those were...

**John Sinclair:** I loved Paul Butterfield.

**Michael:** Yeah, me too, seeing them live changed our life.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah [laughs].

**Michael:** They were a mixed band.

**John Sinclair:** Yep.

**Michael:** Yeah, I mean Sam Lay, Jerome Arnold.

**John Sinclair:** Jerome.

**Michael:** Right.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, they were so great. Where did they play, the "Living End."

**Michael:** Yeah, so did we. Yeah, they played at the Living End, the Chessmate. J

**John Sinclair:** Chessmate.

**Michael:** I used to go down and see them...

**John Sinclair:** You were in the blues reviews went to the Chessmate.

**Michael:** Well Jimmy Cotton lived in my house for six weeks with his whole band.

**John Sinclair:** Wow.

**Michael:** And he played at the Chessmate, and every night we drove from Ann Arbor...

**John Sinclair:** Wow.

**Michael:** And it was during a time when he...he never could get quite enough confidence in himself.

**Michael:** Yeah. We would sit there with our heart in our mouth praying that Cotton would have a good set.

**John Sinclair:** Wow.

**Michael:** And he couldn't quite make it, right?

**John Sinclair:** Oh wow.

Michael Erlewine. He wanted to be a "Bobby Bland," but he was James Cotton, which we loved, just as he was.

**John Sinclair:** Well, I've hung out with him a couple times. I don't know him all that well.

**Michael:** We were with him and the whole group, Luther Tucker on guitar...

**John Sinclair:** Wow.

**Michael:** And what it was is that he could not get his thing, his mojo going for that gig.

**John Sinclair:** Wow.

**Michael:** Not one hundred percent.

**John Sinclair:** Wow, Cotton.

**Michael:** He would rise to it and we would rise with him and then he'd fall back and we'd all be crestfallen and we all be going back to Ann Arbor, so anyway I don't want to...

**John Sinclair:** Wow.

**Michael:** Interesting.

**John Sinclair:** Wow.

**Michael:** So we would go there and drink booze...drink whiskey with John Lee Hooker in the back and come to see Cotton and he'd go in the little side room there and drink whiskey...

**John Sinclair:** Wow.

**Michael:** And I'd go back and sit with Hooker, so...and he was

cool.

**Michael:** I'm sure, but not this one...these were Cotton's gigs, but John Lee would come to see him, right? I mean to hang out and talk to him, friendly.

**John Sinclair:** Steve Booker.

**Michael:** Oh yeah, I know...but it wasn't, I don't remember...

**John Sinclair:** He used to play at the Chessmate, he would play like between sets, he would do drum solos.

**Michael:** Yeah, not this time.

**John Sinclair:** [laughs].

**Michael:** Well Cotton walked out in the audience and sang "Turn on your love light" just like Bobby Bland. It was kind of...it wouldn't always get turned on.

**John Sinclair:** Right, right.

**Michael:** It was heartbreaking, because we loved Cotton and for all the stuff he already did and could do.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** Because we loved him; He's such a nice man and a great player.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, but the crowd wouldn't know how to respond to somebody like that.

**Michael:** He'd always end up being like an imitation of Bobby

Bland, right? He was not Bobby "Blue" Bland.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** He wasn't used to being a front man and he didn't know how to do it so that he was satisfied. The crowd was happy with whatever he wanted to do. He was having a problem with it. All of us who performed know this, not being happy with our performance.

**John Sinclair:** Wow.

**Michael:** He had a heart of gold, so, it was cool. Anyway.

**Michael:** Okay, so we're...so in the Grande, I mean...so you slowly, so somehow you got to a leader of the hippies.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** Without really being the hippie and...

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, I was there.

**Michael:** Because you were a little older.

**John Sinclair:** I had to tell them when I got into there that I called myself a rock and roll beatnik. That was before hippies.

**Michael:** I never called myself a hippie, but I...

**John Sinclair:** But see they called me the king of the hippies.

**Michael:** Well, they never called me that, but I could control hippies, right? Because I knew...like you said, I knew all the

intellectual under-garment that they didn't possess.

**John Sinclair:** Right, right.

**Michael:** You said it well, that's what I'm saying.

**John Sinclair:** No, that was where I was giving about these hippie folks. They didn't have any intellectual...they read comic books and watched television.

**Michael:** Well, they had to come through, you know, they hadn't worshipped at the Beatnik altar of learnership.

**John Sinclair:** No. So, we would always try to turn them on to these things, we're always trying to turn them on to our little poetry books and our little art activities.

**Michael:** The other thing is that you, even though Russ remembers all kinds of stuff you don't remember, were you that influential on him.

**John Sinclair:** Well not at the outset except that...obviously the people who read my writings in, were the target audience along with the young kids from the suburbs who were circling into rock and roll. But see, that was different from rock and roll because rock and roll was going toward matching suits and haircuts, at that time.

**Michael:** I remember.

**John Sinclair:** And the Grande wasn't about that, it was about rock and roll beatniks really, kids with long hair who got high.

**Michael:** It's like what Jeep Holland, our band manager for a short time, wanted us to wear us to wear Beatle jackets.



**Michael:** Oh, see we already knew Jeep, because he had already managed us as a band and gave up, because we wouldn't be managed...

**John Sinclair:** You too I caught a classic.

**Michael:** We wouldn't play anything but the stuff we liked.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah. He couldn't see any future in that even with Butterfield, no?

**Michael:** No, I'll tell you one other quick story, there was a time when Motown, a subsidiary of Motown courted our band and drove us around in a limousine, wanted us to be a white band playing black music, they would set things like...

**John Sinclair:** Kind of like Rare Earth does.

**Michael:** Right, for example, so they actually set up a lunch with myself and my brother Dan and the Everly Brothers. We had lunch with the Everly Brothers. We were geeked.

**John Sinclair:** Wow.

**Michael:** We had lunch together, sitting at a table for four.

**John Sinclair:** Wow.

**Michael:** But I was so stupid, or stubborn, I refused to play anything but the blues that I loved and they had songs for us to play, because we would have been a white band playing the songs that they wanted. Kind of...

**John Sinclair:** Right, never be writing them of course, be a Motown...

**Michael:** And then we would be a white band that could play a bluesy sound.

**John Sinclair:** Right.

**Michael:** But we refused to do it and then they spit us out pretty quickly. We would have had a lot of opportunity. I didn't care.

**John Sinclair:** You know where I was at the same time that they signed the Underdogs?

**Michael:** I don't know, I don't remember.

**John Sinclair:** Because the MC5 had a pal named Peter Prim, and he was the bass player in the Underdogs.

**Michael:** I remember the Underdogs.

**John Sinclair:** And I remember this guy would come around here and talk about what Motown was doing with them and everything. To me Motown was another planet, you know?

**Michael:** Yeah, no it just didn't appeal to us because we didn't want to be told what to do.

**John Sinclair:** Of course not [laughs].

**Michael:** So anyway, let's go on. I have a little bit of history there of our own, so...

**John Sinclair:** But I mean, we were a part of the Grande from the minute it opened.

**Michael:** Well, that's the way Russ presents it. I want to send you...you won't believe what he says. I couldn't believe it.

**John Sinclair:** Oh, I believe it, because it's mostly true, but it wasn't when he opened, he got his ideas to open it from San Francisco.

**Michael:** Totally.

**John Sinclair:** And he came back and he said, man this guy Bill Graham is making money hand over fist [laughs], and this is a good thing, and kids need...you know he had, the altruism and also it was profitable.

**Michael:** Right. And he made a lot of money from it.

**John Sinclair:** I'm sure of it.

**Michael:** He told me on tape, he made a bundle of money.

**John Sinclair:** Because I'm sure Gabe was ripping him off as well as everybody else. That was just his way. Yeah, what they got, like their first year, was all local bands. And he gradually grew and grew but, in the fall of...in the late summer of 1967 that's when the Grateful Dead came in on their first tour.

**Michael:** Right.

**John Sinclair:** And they played there and then we took them up to Ann Arbor to play them at the Free Concert.

**Michael:** I remember, and we played on stage with them in West Park at one point.

**John Sinclair:** Did you play on that?

**Michael:** Prime Movers did. We jammed for a set or so.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, well that was...

**Michael:** What was the first time they....?

**John Sinclair:** You brought them there from Detroit.

**Michael:** But very informal.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** We just played out in the bandshell...

**John Sinclair:** Lee said, "Or friends in Ann Arbor have these free concerts at West Park on Sunday, do you want to go up and play? You got Sunday off?" And they said, "Sure." And so...

**Michael:** They weren't any big deal then.

**John Sinclair:** No, they weren't. That was as big as they got then, you know?

**Michael:** I don't remember.

**John Sinclair:** Their first album came out on their first tour and they said we're having these concerts, because we were going up there...

**Michael:** We all played together if I remember.

**John Sinclair:** I wouldn't be surprised.

**Michael:** You were there because I remember you being there.

**John Sinclair:** I was there, we brought them. I was hanging out with their manager, Rock Scully, that's what got me into this management. Because I said this guy is crazier and more a dope fiend than I am, but his bands on Warner Brothers records and on a national tour. I guess I could do this, and this is when I started doing for the MC5.

**Michael:** When was that, roughly?

**John Sinclair:** Well, they came in August of 1967, I imagine by September I had...you know we didn't sit down and say I'm going to be your manager or anything, I just started...I just decided to take responsibility.

**Michael:** Did you ever remember...did you ever make much money from that?

**John Sinclair:** I never made any money.

**Michael:** Really, how is that?

**John Sinclair:** Then or now. We were a commune. All I ever wanted until I was 40 years old was a place to sleep and a ride and something to eat and some weed. That's all I ever wanted. I got all my records for nothing, I wanted my record collection and I got all those for nothing. It didn't cost anything, thousands of records. I just hustled them, you know, disc-jockeying, whatever them, but...I never wanted anything, so I didn't...I wasn't about money [laughs]. It wasn't about money in the slightest...I mean the money was to rent a house where you could put 15 people in it, you know?

**Michael:** When did you move to Ann Arbor again, tell me that?

**John Sinclair:** May of 1968.

**Michael:** And talk a bit about that, what drove you to that, and why you did it, what came up and came into your life that you moved to Ann Arbor?

**John Sinclair:** Well, we were in Detroit, we had a commune, we had not only a commune, but we had a system of communes around the Wayne State area. See the thing about our communes is they were always single economic units.

**Michael:** Meaning, what is that?

**John Sinclair:** No one had any personal money. They were kind of cults.

**Michael:** Who managed the money?

**John Sinclair:** I did and my brother.

**Michael:** David?

**John Sinclair:** Yeah.

**Michael:** And how did it work out?

**John Sinclair:** Well, it was just always an incredible fucking hustle. But everybody had a place to stay and something to eat and a ride if you had a gig, you know? And then we would hustle things, and we learned how...I don't know, we...we had publications we'd hustle all of it, we'd steal the paper, we'd go to somebody's office, my wife worked for Otto Feinstein at Wayne State and she had a key to his office and we'd go in there at midnight with a box of stolen mimeograph paper and we would

print it all night on the mimeograph and then we'd take it back to the Artist Workshop and go to bed and get up in the afternoon, get everybody in, roll some joints and collate the magazines and staple them together. Somebody's book of poems, you know, everyone was a hustle, we didn't have any money, nobody ever had any money. The MC5 worked for a \$125 a night.

**Michael:** We were the same way.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah. Now \$125 would have got them about 15 people, that's not very much money [laughs].

**Michael:** Well, I think we used to play at Clint's Club, our whole band for like \$35 a night. That was it.

**John Sinclair:** But I mean the top of the line was \$125 at the Grande, that's what we got every week at the Grande, \$125 and they had, unlike your band, they had this heavy metal habit.

**Michael:** Yeah, right.

**John Sinclair:** We had to have more equipment. The drummer used to go through a lot of Drumsticks per month.

**Michael:** Wow.

**John Sinclair:** I mean they just had to have more. They wanted... Jimi Hendrix came through with his Sun Amps, and the next week I had to figure out how to get a complete set of Sun Amps for two guitars and a bass, you know?

**Michael:** Yeah.

**John Sinclair:** Then we installed like 60 inch Electro-Voice speakers and we pretty much had to go into more stuff for the band.

**Michael:** That's the way you grow business.

**John Sinclair:** That's what we did.

**Michael:** Yeah, know it well.

**John Sinclair:** And we had all these fanatical hippies who just wanted to get high and do something worthwhile and have some laughs, so we'd just assign them to different things. These people do their light show, these people would have another show. See in the building we had the light show, that was Grimshaw, Leni, and someone. And others, they did the lightshow they got \$25 a night [laughs]. Grimshaw did the poster, he got, maybe \$25.

**Michael:** The most he ever got was \$75.

**John Sinclair:** Oh, that would be that big show at Cobo or something, he didn't get no \$75 at the Grande.

**Michael:** Well, that's what he said.

**John Sinclair:** At the Grande?

**Michael:** I'd have to ask him again, I think so.

**John Sinclair:** Well, that wasn't...at the outset it was like \$25 or \$50. It wasn't shit. Whatever you could make doing what we did wasn't anything and it wasn't...you'd put it all together in an aggregate and your rent was \$50 a month for the whole house.



**Michael:** But you weren't in it for the money.

**John Sinclair:** No, and the electricity was \$20 a month and the phone was \$25 a month, and we had several of these houses. But to get that money together was always over your head. It was always hard; you never had enough. I mean we were accustomed from the very beginning to the idea that our work was worthless in America [laughs] you know? Nobody wanted to pay for it. Unless you got a hit record. If you got a hit record you could generate a lot of cash, but somebody would probably steal most of it.

**Michael:** I know.

**John Sinclair:** The managers, the record companies, the agents, you know? Well so what, we're still going to do this. That is kind of where we came from.

**Michael:** Well, a good friend of mine is Audrey who was like your secretary.

**John Sinclair:** Audrey Simons.

**Michael:** Oh yeah.

**John Sinclair:** We didn't have secretaries.

**Michael:** Well, that's what she called herself.

**John Sinclair:** She took care of things, I don't know, Audrey, I love her.

**Michael:** Well, she and I dated for a while, yet we didn't get on too well; we're still good friends.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah, good people man.

**Michael:** Now one...

**John Sinclair:** I remember she went to California with us when we went out and she finally gave me some pussy, I was so happy, I wanted it for so long and so bad [laughs]. I'll never forget that, in a motel on University Avenue in Berkeley.

**Michael:** I know that place.

**John Sinclair:** Yeah [laughs]. Audrey finally broke down under my ministrations. She was a tough character, then she was Dr. Simons daughter that ran away, you know? We took her in. See that's the kind of people, the people that ran away from home we took them in.

**Michael:** Well, that's true.

**John Sinclair:** Give them something to do. They were looking for something to do. Some strung beads you know? Some made roach clips out of spoon handles and...

END