

For Them It's Just Duck Soup

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WHEN YOU go to a Randy Newman or Loudon Wainwright concert, you expect to sit in your seat and laugh.

When you go to a Rod Stewart Concert you expect to leave your seat and boogie.

At a Duck Soup concert, you can leave your seat, boogie and laugh.

Humor in rock and roll has taken many forms, from the burlesque riffs of the Bonzo Dog Band, Ruben and the Jets (Frank Zappa with

greasy pompadour) and Sha Na Na to the sophisticated sad-funny, almost elegaic sound poems of Newman and Wainwright.

But in humor, musicality sometimes has to take a back seat to words. In music, as proved recently by the Rolling Stones' hit single "Tumblin' Dice," which had no intelligible lyric at all, words are sometimes so much ballast used to weight the song.

If Duck Soup, a local quintet which is just starting to penetrate general consciousness, could record their songs in the old George Martin-Beatles manner — with vocals on one stereo track and instrumental so the other — either channel would be well worth listening to completely on its own.

IN APPEARANCES at Grendel's Lair recently, Duck Soup showed the validity of its musical content in coping with a truly awful sound system. With wild waves of sound redoubling off bare walls, making words impossible to hear, the group sounded just great.

Later in the weekend, with a Bose sound system installed and the words now coming through in aural focus, Soup's appeal more than doubled.

Duck Soup has to be considered on two levels, then: music and words. Both are mainly the product of Richard Grossman, a 34-year old patriarch of the local free-jazz movement of the early and middle 60s.

Grossman played piano in jazz bands as early as 1955, when he was a freshman at Central High School. After graduating from Temple in 1959, he went to graduate school in England and took up with some jazz players around town.

"We formed the Philadelphia New Music Quintet in 1964," Grossman recalled recently. "We gave a concert in May, 1965, that must have been the first free-form jazz concert given locally. We played music with no strict time signatures, assigning no roles to the various instruments. It was pretty far-out for the time."

Although Grossman had played piano all his life, his increasing frustration with the limitations of the instrument ("I just couldn't play

between the keys") led him to the electric cello.

Not surprisingly, the commercial market for electric cello wasn't firm enough to support Grossman. He kept ends together by playing straight gigs with wedding and social event bands.

"I started listening to rock and roll when the Beatles first started getting popular," Grossman said.

"Just as free-form jazz players scared traditional jazz musicians, the Beatles scared them too. Jazz men have always had this hipper-than-thou feeling about their audience. But the Beatles' music was accessible, very open, very free."

IN 1969, Grossman took a job sell-

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ing records at the Lamppost in Bryn Mawr. People dropping in and talking about music made him begin to think about, of all things, rock and roll.

"I saw the same thing happening to rock that had happened to jazz," he said. "The players were getting to think they were super-hip compared to the audience. The accessibility was fading."

Then something strange happened to Grossman. After years of writing music, words started to jump into his head. Whole verses of satiric poesy. And music, accessible music, right along with the words.

Duck Soup was born.

"I was with a bunch of people who lived in the neighborhood," Grossman said. "We were playing colleges and bars, just having a good time playing other people's music. But when the songs started to come, we thought, 'What the hell, let's try a real band.'"

Grossman, who had gone back to Keyboard's, picked up singer Jim Pabarue from Dingo, a Haverford College band (an excellent one, too, by the way), and linked him with Jimmy Hayne on guitar, Bill Hayward on bass, Bill Koepnick on drums? All five of the Soupers sing.

The music at first seems scattered. There are improvisational jazz-rock numbers, country and western, hard rock and traditional middle-brow rock.

Grossman says this is not inconsistent.

"The area we've staked out to explore is rock and roll," he explained. "In my mind, rock

and roll at one end fades into folk music and on the other end into experimental jazz, a la Weather Report. Everything between is rock, and that's what we're playing."

THE WORDS to the songs, that other very important half, are satiric, without the sometime poignance of Randy Newman and the flashing brilliance of Loudon Wainwright. But they hit the mark, poking

fun at everything from current high school curricula to worship of the counter-culture, parenthood, motel mattress-rippers and the capital "A" in America.

Duck Soup went up to the Hit Factory in New York last weekend to cut two songs for record company perusal. The group's chances for success at this point seem to be more than just a pile of horse feathers.