

PART IX: 1960s Musiciansⁱ

The Hotel Albert became home to any number of rock musicians in the 1960s. This is the only part of the Albert's history that has been written about to any extent, chronicled in May 1968 an article in *The Eye* magazine by Lillian Roxon, author of *Lillian Roxon's Rock Encyclopedia*. Roxon, a music journalist of the 1960s, has been called the "Mother of Rock." Her article about the Hotel Albert called it the "New York home to rock's greatest." It opens:

It is the best of hotels, it is the worst of hotels; its prices are ridiculously high, its prices are astonishingly low; its corridors are filled to the brim with life, its corridors are perpetual reminders of death; staying there is the wildest, most exhilarating, dizzying, around-the-clock trip of all time; staying there is the most wretched, lonely terrifying, around-the-clock bummer of all eternity.

So much for New York's Hotel Albert, whose distinction is *not* that it has housed some of the most influential rock personalities of our time (after all, so has Holiday Inn), but that it has affected them so deeply (in a way no impersonal Holiday Inn could ever hope to) that American popular music would probably never have been what it is today without it.

Roxon lists dozens of musicians who stayed at the Albert:

...the Paul Butterfield Blues Band got itself together under its roof;... Steve Gillette wrote his Sunshine Company hit there ("Back on the Street Again"), but was able to finish his other songs only after he moved out, which, in itself, is influence of a sort. The Canned Heat jammed with the Cream in one of the Albert's grimy rooms, the Hand People jammed with the Gurus, a score of total unknowns jammed with each other to make history in some future year.

....

Think of any hotel story and then realize that at the Albert, it probably happened to the Butterfield Blues Band or the Mamas and the Papas, the Canned Heat, the Lovin' Spoonful, the Mothers of Invention, Spanky and Our Gang, Salvation, Kaleidoscope, the Clear Light, the Byrds, the Blues Magoos, the Sopwith Camel, Tim Buckley, Muddy Waters, Steve Gillette, Baby Huey and the Baby Sitters, Lothar and the Hand People, to name, as they say, but a few.

And she closes:

It is hard to say *what* it is about the Albert. There is no room service. There is no coffee shop. You know already there is no lobby. The maid service is negligible and the main reason the residents don't care about the ban on visitors is that most of the time they are ashamed to bring people back to their rooms anyway.

Still, go there sometime, say, on a Saturday afternoon about five when the musicians are finally awake and shout and the groupie chicks in their trendy gear are running messages between the floors.

I was wondering what the Albert had and now I know. It's the only hotel in the world that is a twenty-four-hour Be-In. Some of the being isn't always what you want but then, what is? And remember, if you meet Joe Butler's ghost on the stairs, don't be surprised. You expected maybe after all this he should haunt the Caribe Hilton?ⁱⁱ

From a different perspective, Kwei Chu, Brody's chief chef and successor, remembers the "loud music" coming from the basement, but recalls that when representatives from the restaurant went downstairs and asked "the kids" to stop, they always did. According to Chu, the kids slept in the basement, on the roof, in the hallways, or on the street; they had no money.ⁱⁱⁱ

The musicians who stayed at the Albert are listed here in alphabetical order. The descriptions speak for themselves.

Tim Buckley

From Lillian Roxon's article in *Eye*:

Tim Buckley wrote the song "Good-bye and Hello" there and almost half the album of the same name.

....

Most musicians, initially, are attracted by the prices: \$20 a week for a room without bath, \$30 with, is what they start at. Tim Buckley found himself paying \$70 a week by the time he was through – exactly what it cost him per month in California. "Expensive," he said, "but the best place I ever lived."

....

Tim Buckley says he watched the whirling of a snowflake down an airshaft and thought that the movement could be used in orchestration. Has he used it yet? No, but he will one of these days. Has he ever written a song about the Albert? No, but he has written a lot of songs with the Albert about him, surrounding him.

From *Blue melody: Tim Buckley Remembered*:

Tim and I piled our guitars into the rear of a Volkswagen panel truck Herb had rented for us, and drove coast-to-coast to New York with Johnny Sider. Johnny was a first-class drummer. He was also an intelligent, happy go-lucky guy with an extraordinary memory and marvelous sense of humour.

We stayed at the Albert Hotel, in Room 1268, as I recall, but Johnny insisted years later that it was Room 1216. I have a good memory, but because of Johnny's exceptional memory, I'll go with him - 1216. The Albert was a famous - or infamous - home away from home for some of the most popular and influential rock musicians of the era - Frank Zappa and his band, the Mamas & the Papas, the Lovin' Spoonful, the Butterfield Blues Band, Spanky and Our Gang, the Byrds, the Doors, and dozens of others. The graffiti on the seventh floor corridor wall said, "Jim Morrison is sex, but Ray Manzarek is love."

...Louise Dula, drummer and leader of an all-woman rock band called the Bittersweet, remembered meeting Tim.

"I didn't know who Tim Buckley was when I got to the Albert," she wrote to me, "although I had seen his picture on the wall and thought, 'Cute guy.' One day I was waiting for the elevator to come down. When I pushed the button my purse strap got tangled up in my beaded necklace. The necklace broke and the beads scattered all over the floor. I was down on my hands and knees like a fool, trying to catch them. The elevator door opened, and I looked up - to see this beautiful face looking down at me and smiling. From the angle I saw him at, being down on the floor looking up, the elevator light seemed to form a halo around his curly hair. I remember thinking to myself, 'My God, it's an angel!' He bent down and started helping me gather up all my beads, saying funny things about how cute I looked crawling around on the floor.

"The next day at the front desk there was an envelope for me. Inside was a really pretty necklace with a note from Tim that said,

'To replace what was broken,
I thought you'd like this small token'

I couldn't believe he would do something that nice for a stranger. He won my heart for life...^{iv}

One night in New York, Tim and I dropped Owsley acid, zipped back to the Albert Hotel (rushing on LSD as the elevator ascended), and spent the night writing "Bussin' Fly," one of Tim's best-loved Happy Sad songs. He strummed and sang. I played guitar. The walls and curtains breathed. Glistening orange velvet lining in open guitar cases undulated like red-orange seawaves. (Elsewhere, Beckett has said this was an old song carried over from earlier days. Not so. A line or two may have been carried over, but the total song was born that night in the Albert.)^v

The Clear Light

From Lillian Roxon's article in *Eye*:

...the sheer pain and loneliness of living seven cramped into two of its small rooms in a strange city welded the Clear Light into the solid group it had never quite been in its airy, carefree, spacious California house....

Cliff de Young says that after the now-infamous night when the Clear Light were fired from the Scene East because the organist told the audience it was cold and unfeeling, each member of the group came back to those two grim rooms at the Albert and wrote, unbeknownst to the others, a song or poem about the coldness of New York. Cliff wrote his, about a city with no eyes, on the fire escape of a hotel that also had no eyes.

If the Albert had been a better place, it might have counteracted something of the trauma of that evening. But it is no place to be when things go wrong. It is another great irony that, apart from the basement, no special concessions have been made to the musicians who have brought it so much life.

Jerry Edmonton

From *Great Rock Drummers of the Sixties*:

Jerry took the Ludwig set to New York in 1965 to record the Sparrow tracks for Columbia, only to have them stolen from the group's station wagon in front of the Albert Hotel in Manhattan.^{vi}

Barry Goldberg and Mike Bloomfield (plus general comment)

From "Goldberg: '60s Survivor Still Rockin' the Blues," *Los Angeles Times*:

In 1965, when [guitarist Mike] Bloomfield, then a member of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, went to play at the Newport Folk Festival, he invited Goldberg along. It was there that Goldberg met Bob Dylan, beginning an association that would last through the years....

After Newport, Goldberg went to New York, where he and half the musicians in the city lived at the famed Albert Hotel. "It was such an incredible time," Goldberg said. "There was this whole musical renaissance happening. I remember going into the Cafe au Go Go when Hendrix was in this group called Jimmy James & the Blue Flames. Even then, everybody knew how amazing he was."^{vii}

From "World's Greatest Rock Organist," *Los Angeles Times*:

Next, Goldberg had a gig at the Cafe Au GoGo backing John Hammond with a young guitarist named Jimmy Jones on guitar. The guitarist later changed his name to Jimi Hendrix. "Then Michael came up and said, 'How'd you like to start a perfect band?'" "The perfect band was the Electric Flag and they began recruiting members. One of the first was Buddy Miles, a dynamic drummer and singer whom Goldberg had seen backing singer Wilson Pickett. He and Bloomfield invited him to their room in the Albert Hotel and talked to him about the proposed band. During the conversation he dozed off and

they amused themselves for the rest of the evening by dropping cookies into the open mouth of this huge, slumbering creature.^{viii}

From *Michael Bloomfield: If You Love These Blues*:

Paul was a despot, as far as the money was concerned. And I remember when Paul's despotism as far as the money stopped. We went to Electra one day. We were sitting around the hotel - we always stayed at these rotten hotels, the Albert Hotel and stuff - we were sitting around thinking, and I said, "Paul, y'know, I bet we have some money at Elektra from the Bugter album."^{ix}

Our original thought on the drummer was Billy Mundi from the Mothers of Invention. And then we walked into this theater, and the whole theater was rocking to this massive drum beat. We were just mesmerized. It was Buddy Miles, who was Wilson Pickett's drummer. So after he got off the stage, Michael and I went up to him and starting talking to him. We invited him back to our room at the Albert Hotel for further conversation.

We bought a box of Oreo cookies, and we kept giving Buddy Oreo cookies and telling him about all the beautiful young girls in San Francisco. Our plan was that he could be the star of San Francisco and have anything he wanted - which is basically what happened. And Buddy said, "Okay, count me in." He left Pickett, and Pickett was pissed off. We heard that he was looking for us for a long time, for stealing his drummer.^x

Mike [Bloomfield] and I were in New York, at the Albert Hotel. We were doing sessions with Mitch Ryder. And Mike said to me, "Will you help me get a band together? I want an American music band - everything in American music from Stax to Phil Spector to Motown." And, of course, blues. He wanted to cover the whole spectrum of American music. I thought it was a great concept.^{xi}

From Lillian Roxon's article in *Eye*:

Mike Bloomfield thinks it's an excellent hotel, the friendliest and nicest in town. "I don't stay there anymore because it's too dirty," he says, but he is ready, at the drop of a hat, to recommend it as an absolutely essential part of the experience of living.

Gary Higgins

From “The Meter; The Legend of Red Hash,” *Chicago Reader*

Gary Higgins’s first and only LP came out in 1973 – and by then he was already in prison.....

Red Hash is still Higgins’s only release, and his career as a professional musician was essentially over even before it came out – he was serving time in a maximum-security prison on drug charges. A native of rural Sharon, Connecticut, he formed his first band, Random Concept, in 1963. Three years later the group – which included singer Simeon Coxe, who’d go on to form the legendary Silver Apples – moved to New York City and took up residence at the Hotel Albert, alongside lodgers like Tiny Tim, the Lovin’ Spoonful, and the Blues Magoos. Random Concept got work, but their schedule was grueling – they often played six sets a night – and they were unused to the demands and excesses of the big city. “We were kinda homesick,” says Higgins. “So we decided to go back to our roots and regroup. It probably wasn’t the best business decision, but it’s where all our heads were at.”^{xii}

Howlin’ Wolf

From *Moanin’ at Midnight: The Life and Times of Howlin’ Wolf*:

Wolf was walking toward New York City’s hippie hotspot in late 1966, the Cafe’ A-Go-Go [sic], when Jerry Rappaport, sixteen years old, introduced himself. Wolf asked if he was heading into the club to hear him play, and Rappaport said he couldn’t afford a ticket. Wolf told him to follow him in. The teenager spent hours backstage with the Wolf and his band, and they invited him back to the Albert Hotel in Greenwich Village, where they and other bluesmen usually stayed. Rappaport hung out with them whenever they played New York City after that. He also became close to Muddy Waters and his band, but he came to consider himself Wolf’s de facto valet. When Wolf was in town, the teenage would head to the hotel in the morning and get Wolf a bottle of rye. “I saw that man drink rye all day long but I never saw him get drunk,” Rappaport said. They’d listen to one of Wolf’s favorite groups, the Clara Ward Singers, on Wolf’s portable Victrola, and Wolf would play guitar and talk music for hours. “He’d sit there with his nylon stocking on his head and a True cigarette hanging out of his lip and play acoustic blues all day long. One of the first things he asked me to do was to find him a copy of the Robert Johnson record ‘Kind of the Delta Blues Singers.’

...Today Rappaport is a highly regarded record producer. When he won a Grammy Award in 2004 for co-producing Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues: A Musical Journey, one of the first people he thanked in his acceptance speech was the Wolf.^{xiii}

Lovin’ Spoonful (and general)

From Lillian Roxon’s article in *Eye*:

Joe Butler of the Spoonful, who loves it and is shamelessly sentimental about it, stayed there long after he could well afford to stay elsewhere. Its very squalor played a big role in his life and that of the other three in the group. “It inspired us because it made us frightened of poverty,” he said.

Those were the days when the hurricane eye of the rock scene had not yet started its subtle shift away from London back to the United States and when not being English was the kiss of death to young musicians.

Two of those kissed-by-death musicians, young, penniless, unable to find work that paid anything like real money around the Village, had taken a dank eight-by-ten room at the Albert mainly to store their instruments. It had the single bed in it which, when divided into springs and a mattress, provided a place to sleep for two.

Every day at midday the two others in his group would arrive and the four would play in that small room until late into the night.

....

At this stage, thankfully, because there are so many versions and no one is really interested anymore in the “real” one, legend takes over. And there is not a teenybopper anywhere in America, or possibly the world (is there?), who does not know that the four were the then still-unknown Lovin’ Spoonful, that the noise of their rehearsals drove the neighbors to complain, that Miss Feldman bounded up to investigate, that the boys told her without rehearsals they would not be able to find work and money to settle the already overdue rent, and that, after some discussion, it was agreed the four could practice anywhere – the basement even – so long as they did not disturb the neighbors.

For the benefit of the very few who don’t know, the basement became a rehearsal room, the Lovin’ Spoonful a top group as a result of the long hours spent there, and America, thanks to the Spoonful and others they inspired, once more a potent force in the field of popular music.

Joe Butler walked around, regarding it all with a sweet tenderness. “They were very good to us here,” he said....

Obituary, December 16, 2002:

Now, it was the early 1960s and Doherty and Mr. Yanovsky were hanging out in the basement of New York's Albert Hotel singing their songs. Doherty said the place was a dump but it was a dump where dreams came true.

"I remember Zalman came in one day and sang Do You Believe in Magic and I thought it was nice. I didn't see him again until the song was a hit," he said with a laugh.

Doherty said there was no way he could have known that The Lovin' Spoonful's first single would hit No. 9 on the Hot 100. He just thought it was a catchy little song.

"You can't tell if something is going to be a hit, but you can tell if something is a good song," he said.

"Do You Believe in Magic" was just one of the hit tunes created in the hotel in the city's lower east side.

"Here we were, in a hotel, in a basement with the ceiling caving in and what was coming out of there was gold. They were mining for gold down there," Doherty said.^{xiv}

As recounted in Lillian Roxon's *Rock Encyclopedia*:

There had been an attempt to change all this but they had failed. And the Spoonful, with all their talent, weren't that good, weren't clicking or jelling. The story goes – and it's such a legend now that everyone has forgotten what's true – that they were at the Night Owl and terrible, and that Joe Marra, the owner, told them to go away and practice. Zally and Joe had a room at the Albert Hotel then, mainly to store equipment. When they rehearsed there, there were complaints. So Miss Feldman, the assistant manager, suggested the basement. And that was it. The group made it. The basement became a shrine; and no musician feels he's a musician unless he's stayed at the Albert and rehearsed among the pools of water and the cockroaches. The Albert became the hotel and the Spoonful became the group that eventually turned the hurricane eye of rock away from Liverpool and London to New York and Los Angeles (and later San Francisco).^{xv}

As recounted in *Turn! Turn! Turn!: The '60s Folk-Rock Revolution* by Richie Unterberger:

"1963 was the year that the Halifax Three broke up, the Journeymen broke up, the Big Three broke up, everybody broke up," says Doherty. "It seemed that everybody came off the road after the Kennedy assassination, and folk music was sort of over. Zal and I wound up playing as two-thirds of a surf trio, just instrumental stuff. By the time we got back to New York, Cass had broken up with the Big Three (a group that had also included two folk-rockers in the making, Tim Rose and James Hendricks). Everybody was sort of bivouacked at the Albert Hotel" – famous for harboring on-the-way-up and down-and-out musicians throughout the 1960s.^{xvi}

It would not be until well into 1965 that Sebastian and Yanovsky's group, the Lovin' Spoonful, would begin to release records. Before that, they'd have to do their rock 'n' roll apprenticeship in rehearsals in the dank Albert Hotel basement, as well as gigs in Village clubs.^{xvii}

"When we were looking for the rhythm section," says Erik Jacobsen, who was heavily involved with the group as its producer-in-waiting, "Joe Butler was playing drums in the Sellouts, who were managed by Herbie Cohen [also manager of the Modern Folk Quartet, Judy Hensek, and Fred Neil). We had a drummer that we jammed [with], and he was good, but we were I guess [going through] the same kind of thing as when they got Ringo in the Beatles. You know, 'we need a guy, a little more energy, a little more extroverted, a little more appealing, who could sing as well.' Because we wanted to do harmony. So they went over to see Joe, and I think they were not that hot on him, generally speaking. Zally and Joe almost never got along."

But Butler soon convinced them both how badly he wanted to be in the group, and - quite literally - just how much rock 'n' roll blood he was willing to spill for his chance. Continues Jacobsen, "We had Joe come over to the Albert Hotel, set up in the upstairs ballroom for the rehearsal, and he came in. They were playing some kind of hard-hitting tune. He broke the drumstick, right toward the end of the song. He was playing on a cracked cymbal, a big cymbal with all the little holes and metal rivets for them, which are very sharp on the top. He started hitting it with his hand, keeping beat, and the final chorus, his rivets were just slicing into his hand. Blood started to fly. The guys were like, 'Whoa-oa? Stop, stop!' He had proved his mettle big-time by continuing under such painful circumstances. I guess they decided, 'This guy's okay.' "

Taking its name from lyrics in a song by bluesman Mississippi John Hurt (whom Sebastian had worked with in the Village), the Lovin' Spoonful spent much of early 1965 playing at the Night owl Cafe. The Night Owl, a narrow room of about 75 by 20 feet with a stage so small that Butler had to play on the floor, was the Spoonful's equivalent to the Byrds' residency at Ciro's, giving the musicians time to refine their sound and develop material as they lobbied labels for a recording contract. When they weren't at the Night owl, they were rehearsing at the Albert Hotel, where they lived in a single room that also included all their instruments, dodging the rent by having their friend Denny Doherty sweet-talk the female bookkeeper.^{xviii}

Since fending off the Spoonful's bill collection at the Albert hotel, Denny Doherty had decamped to the Virgin Islands with John and Michelle Phillips.^{xix}

From *Echoes Of The Sixties* by Marti Smiley Childs, Jeff March:

The four members of the Spoonful, along with Cass Elliot and Denny Doherty, all roomed that icy winter at the rickety Albert Hotel, where they rehearsed in the basement. "We lived on tuna fish and ice cream...."^{xx}

John Sebastian recently confirmed that “Do You Believe in Magic” was indeed composed at the Hotel Albert.^{xxi}

The Mamas & The Papas

As remembered by Michelle Phillips:

Michelle PHILLIPS remembers 1963 as a year of bone-chill and profound homesickness. The Long Beach native, then 19, had married John Phillips in late 1962 and the two had shuttled off to New York to seek fame with their folk group, the New Frontiersmen. “We were staying at the Albert Hotel, near Washington Square. It was a fleabag. I had never seen snow before, I had never been to the East Coast. I was miserable.”

One blustery day, the couple were strolling by the marble spires of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. “I wanted to go in just to see what it looked like, but John wouldn’t go with me,” Michelle recalled. “He had been sent off to a parochial school when he was 7 and, well, he just had very strong negative feelings about the church. So I went in alone.”

That random moment took on new meaning a few weeks later. It was the middle of the night when John, guitar in hand, woke his wife up.

“He undoubtedly had taken a few bennies. I wanted to go back to sleep, but he said I would thank him someday if I got up and worked on it with him.” A few years later, with the Phillipses singing as half of the Mamas & the Papas, that late-night sketch of a song became the evocative pop masterpiece “California Dreamin’.”

All the leaves are brown
And the sky is gray
I’ve been for a walk
On a winter’s day
I’d be safe and warm
If I was in L.A.
California dreamin’
On such a winter’s day . . .

“He had the lyrics for those first eight bars that night,” said Michelle Phillips, the only surviving member of the Mamas & the Papas. “I added the next few lines about the church. He hated it. Just hated it. But he didn’t have anything better.” That portion of the song – “Stopped in to church / I passed along the way / Well, I got down on my knees / And I began to pray” – has an interesting history. Not everyone hears the same lyrics, and that includes the people who sang it.

“We were on the road after the song was a hit and I was doing a sound check with Cass [Elliot], and I sang the lyric. She looked at me and said, ‘Wait, what did you say? I thought the lyric was ‘I pretend to pray.’ That’s how she had been singing it all along!”^{xxii}

Michelle Phillips recently confirmed that *California Dreamin'* was indeed written at the Hotel Albert. She also recalls that she cooked her first meal for John Phillips at the hotel.^{xxiii}

As recalled by Denny Doherty:

As Doherty tells it, it goes like this: Cass loved Denny who loved Michelle who loved (mostly) John.

It was Cass who first met Denny in New York's Hotel Albert and saw the musical future after hearing The Beatles. And it was John who was the musical genius who never truly cottoned to Cass.

Still, the four worked musically, bringing a lyrical lilt to folk - until their feuds exploded and they broke up.^{xxiv}

Moby Grape (and general)

As recounted in *Roadwork: Rock & Roll Turned Inside Out* by Tom Wright, Susan Van Hecke, in which an entire chapter is devoted to the Hotel Albert:

Chapter Sixteen: The Albert

New York City's Albert Hotel was a secret. Muddy Waters could tell you about it. Bob Dylan could tell you about it. The Moby Grape could make a mini-series on it. It was at University Place and 11th, pretty big, just a short walk from Washington Square Park, about thirty blocks from classy hotels and about ten blocks from the really shitty ones. The Albert was about fifty years past her prime; at one time posh, when I got there it was rundown and cheap. It had roughly twenty floors and didn't really look that bad from the outside, all granite and stone. It was the seedy characters wandering the sidewalk that gave it away.

Bob Dylan used to practice there, but when I lived there in 1968, after I'd road-managed The Who's first headlining U.S. tour, it was folk rock singer Tim Hardin in the basement. But mostly it was Moby Grape, the psychedelic rockers from California. They'd play nonstop from ten at night 'til eight in the morning. I'd fall asleep on the tenth floor and could hear them through my pillow. They were so good you couldn't sleep, though their god-awful records belied this. They would take a riff and just keep playing and varying it from within, stretching it, expanding it. By the time they got to the recording studio, though, they'd have been up for so many days that they forgot what was good about the song. At the Albert, nobody cared what their records sounded like, because at night, if you got real quiet at your place and lay down, you could hear them in the basement. And nine times out of ten it'd be great, and sometimes it would be the greatest music you'd ever heard. Seriously.

Moby Grape eventually got the ol heave-ho from the basement. One morning around 4 AM, as the all-night rehearsal jam in the bowels of the building was still going strong -

and sounding great - the Pakistani desk clerk showed up, stopping one of the Grape's hour-long song jams in mid-flight. Incensed, Skip Spence, the Grape's frontman, yanked off his guitar and chased the tiny refugee gripping a flashlight back up the dark wooden staircase to the lobby. On the way, Spence slowed down long enough to smash the glass on a firebox that held an extinguisher and an ax.

Unlike Moon, Spence chose the axe, ripping it from its mooring with his right hand, which was now bleeding profusely, and continued the chase. Just as he reached the lobby, the crazed, stoned longhair clutching a shiny axe dripping with blood ran right into a neighborhood beat cop who'd happened by as the terrified desk clerk fled the building. Spence left in handcuffs after a gaggle of squad cars screeched to a halt in the front of the Albert, the cops expecting a pile of dead bodies. I never heard or saw Moby Grape again.

Since the Albert was in the gray area, it was hard to book. No wandering family of tourists would ever just stroll by, and it was too expensive for bums and people who were actually broke for real. So the management let rooms to selected renegades - certain musicians, hookers (if they were beautiful and discreet), drug salesmen, artists, gangsters. It was a long process to get in. I moved in with Geoff, the Blues Magoos drummer. It'd taken a month of cajoling, but we finally got the "presidential suite": three bedrooms, a sitting room, kitchen, two bathrooms, a banquet room, plus a living room with a fireplace for \$700 a month. We moved in and repainted everything, had the whole place recarpeted.

The Who were off touring the U.K. yet again. For the time being, I was stuck in New York, getting some work as a fashion and rock photographer. At the Albert, I built a massive darkroom in the master bedroom and bathroom, and put in a fifteen-foot stainless steel sink that'd come out of a restaurant resale place. I wood-paneled the other bathroom with used oak flooring until it looked like an uptown outhouse right in the middle of Manhattan. The big living room with the fireplace became my photo studio. I fogged the huge windows with white spray paint, so from ten in the morning 'til early afternoon I had natural studio light - that soft, Paris skylight feel.

Since the Blues Magoos were booked for a bunch of college dates in New England, I didn't feel comfortable leaving all my stuff alone at the Albert. Geoff said he knew a session drummer who'd stay in the fixed-up suite for sixty bucks and a case of beer. Problem solved.

I returned to New York to find my apartment broken into, furniture ripped up, radios, record players, and telephone all gone. Twenty guitars were smashed, and what hadn't been destroyed had been stolen. Everything I owned was gone.^{xxv}

From *Unknown Legends Of Rock 'N' Roll: Psychedelic Unknowns, Mad Geniuses, Punk* by Richie Unterberger:

It seems that Spence [in 1968], after a gig at New York's Fillmore East, went off with a woman - sometimes described as a witch of sorts - who fed him some particularly potent

acid. Spence flipped out, and took a fire axe to the Albert hotel in search of Moby Grape drummer Don Stevenson (whom he thought was possessed by Satan), breaking down the door to the room Stevenson shared with Grape guitarist Jerry Miller. Finding it empty, he went into the studio, where producer David Rubinson disarmed him. The incident culminated in Spence being committed to New York's notorious mental institution, Bellevue Hospital, for six months.^{xxvi}

Mothers Of Invention

From *Necessity Is: The Early Years Of Frank Zappa & The Mothers Of Invention*, by Billy James:

Although drug usage by the Mothers members was minimal at best, indulgence in sexual promiscuity was another matter altogether. The sixties as well as being notorious for its mind altering chemicals, was also a period of sexual liberation and experimentation. And it was the whole language and subculture of being in a band - groupies, getting the crabs, the clap, etc. - that became the subtext to many of Zappa's songs. So rather than singing about getting high, the Mothers more often than not sung about getting laid - the more lurid and lewd the suggestiveness the better.....

Don Preston recalls one of his encounters. "While we were staying at the Albert hotel, I was in my hotel room; a room trying to look respectable but failing with its worn carpet and old cigarette-burned furniture. I had just taken a shower and was drying myself when there was a knock on my door. 'Fuck it,' I said and went over and opened the door wide only to behold a totally beautiful girl standing there wearing a light turtleneck sweater and a very short mini skirt. She looked me up and down and said, 'Well, aren't you going to invite me in?' She came in and I wrapped the towel around myself. She then introduced herself to me and we proceeded to make passionate love for several hours. She told me she was an interior decorator, but had been a Vogue fashion model during her teens. We lived together for six months. She was a beautiful soul that I regret separating from."^{xxvii}

Jim Morrison

From *Jim Morrison: Life, Death, Legend*, by Stephen Davis:

Between sets [1967], an unusually attentive Andy Warhol was whispering to Jim and cajoling in his passive-aggressive manner, still trying to get Jim to get naked on camera. Warhol lackey Eric Emerson found girls to spend the night with Jim at the Albert Hotel, on Tenth Street and Fifth Avenue.^{xxviii}

Jonathan Richman

From the *Eugene Weekly*, Eugene Ore:

Jonathan Richman is a rock and roll god. Maybe he's not on the level of say, an Iggy Pop or a Lou Reed (one of Richman's early influences). But he definitely sits nicely with the likes of Tom Verlaine, Bob Mould and even a less volatile Mark E. Smith. And although Richman has tailored a highly acclaimed solo career, his fame blossomed from one fateful record from 1976, *The Modern Lovers*.

According to a self-penned 1983 press biography, Richman's impetus for starting his own band came when he first heard the music of *The Velvet Underground*. The story continues that when Richman was 18, he left home for New York to hang with the Velvets. After a brief, transient affair on the couch of the band's manager, Steve Sesnick, Richman relocated to the notorious Hotel Albert, where he first hashed out some early versions of *Modern Lovers* classics such as "Roadrunner" and "Pablo Picasso." Jaded with his lack of success at getting anything solid going musically, Richman returned to Boston, where he connected with his old friend John Felice, who was 15 at the time, and *The Modern Lovers* name was coined. Soon after, Richman and Felice picked up drummer David Robinson and keyboard player Jerry Harrison.^{xxix}

From a transcript of an NPR interview by Liane Hansen with Richman:

HANSEN: As a songwriter, Jonathan Richman takes the experiences of his own life and distills them into lyrics that are both direct and full of childlike wonder. On "I, Jonathan," his new CD on Rounder, he sings a romantic ode to twilight in Boston, songs about love, parties and a tribute to the prime minstrels of 1960s Bohemia.

HANSEN: Jonathan Richman doesn't like to explain his songs, and he's known to clam up during an interview. But bring the conversation around to his favorite 1960s rock group – there's no stopping him; because deep down, Jonathan Richman loves to tell a good story.

RICHMAN: See, I was 18 years old and I'd just moved to New York. I wanted to be near the rock group, *The Velvet Underground*, and I wanted to be that – near that whole New York scene. I – I'd – had already been auditioning at local coffee houses and they weren't interested – maybe because, like, I couldn't play or sing or anything. That might have had something to do with it.

So I moved into the cockroach-infested Hotel Albert where rents were cheap and it was rich in musical heritage. *The Lovin' Spoonful* at one time practiced in their basement, *Lothar and the Hand People* practiced in their basement – so I practiced in their basement. And I wanted an audience, see, because – some people don't like attention. I'm not one of them. Me and attention, we get along pretty good.

So I just went up to the roof and there was a bunch of people walking down eight stories below so I did 30 minutes' worth of material for them. Well, they started gathering and I was real excited because I was thinking 'all right!' And I felt like a big rock star then, you see, because people were starting to crowd the sidewalks. When I knew that my

spectacle had gone somewhat awry is when I saw the presence of law enforcement officers down in the street, and the manager of my hotel.

I could see her down there, pointing at me and shaking her head no. (Laughing) This was not a good sign. So I figured I'd better wrap it up. So I did one more number for the throngs, you know, and I figured that my little spectacle should end, so I went down back to my room. And I knew that something was brewing. I knew that I wasn't just going to get off the hook. Like, in other words, I knew there was going to be trouble with the hotel management for my little spectacle. So I didn't want to wait around for them to get me, so I went right down to the manager's office and figured I would discuss it with them.

She said, 'You! You! Out of here!' And I said, 'But, but – but wait,' and she said, 'You! Who do you think you are? Donovan? You think you're the Strolling Minstrel and you think...' She – like, she was beside herself, you know. And I said, 'But wait a minute, Loretta. I didn't do it on purpose. I just...'

What! People thought you were going to jump! I said, 'Was I that bad?' I said, 'Look, I won't do it again. I didn't know it was, like, that big a mistake. I thought they liked it.' And because I was only 18 and probably all pathetic and everything, she let me stay, and that was the story of my spectacle at the top of the Hotel Albert in the fall of 1969.^{xxx}

John Sebastian

Letter from Sebastian to the *Acoustic Guitar*:

Thanks for the article on David Grisman and me ["Keepin' Satisfied"]. But don't get me in trouble with the Van Heusens. I wasn't "good friends with [Van Heusen's] daughter." I was friends with the daughter of a Coca Cola ad executive who threw parties that Mr. Van Heusen and Mr. Cahn attended, and they would always end up playing at these parties. This all happened in Halesite, Long Island, near where we lived in Huntington. There ya go. And, while I've got you, I wonder if any of your readers has ever spotted a 1961-ish Gibson J-45, obviously refinished with mahogany stain and lacquer. It's pictured on page 76 of Douglas R Gilbert's book, *Forever Young: Photographs of Bob Dylan*. It was stolen in front of the Albert Hotel in '65, and it's on all the early Lovin' Spoonful hits. I guess we all have at least one that got away-and that's mine.^{xxxi}

JOHN SEBASTIAN
Woodstock, New York

Otis Smith

From his 2008 obituary:

All Night Worker Otis Smith passes gently into the good night

Smith went on to pair up with Lloyd Baskins, forming the All Night Workers, which found national success with its 1965 recording “Don’t Put All Your Eggs In One Basket,” a tune that was paired with “Why Don’t You Smile?,” co-written by friends Reed and John Cale. However, the band’s popular single couldn’t stop it from splitting up in 1968, by which point Smith had moved to New York City’s Albert Hotel, a somewhat famed hangout for a variety of musicians at the time. After achieving limited success in that circuit, Smith was recruited to play percussion with Bob Dylan’s band in Los Angeles in 1979. Because Dylan was experimenting with a variety of bands, Smith wasn’t selected to be a permanent part of Dylan’s lineup.^{xxxii}

Spanky and Our Gang

From Lillian Roxon’s article in *Eye*:

Those people arguing with the desk clerk who won’t let them go up are not on their way to see a fashion buyer from Idaho. They were invited to dinner up there by Spanky. In the end, in desperation, Spanky and her guests sit in the nonlobby on that hard little bench eating the artichoke hearts she has considerately brought down from her room with her.

(Listen, by then Spanky had a record in the top 10, but with a nice lack of snobbishness, the Albert doesn’t play favorites with its freaks.)...

Spanky liked the Albert because there were parties every night, and because it was within walking distance of the Bitter End where she was singing, so she saved on cab fares. But, of course, it was another thing when all these teenybopper magazine kids came up there to interview her after “Sunday” made it on the charts, and found her using saucepan lids for ashtrays because this is one commodity, in addition to others, the management does not provide.

“You should have seen their faces. They weren’t ready for the Albert, those kids.” She chuckles at the memory.

Don Stevenson

From a review in *Billboard*, 1998:

Later in the chapter, Unterberger writes that Barrett’s U.S. drug abuse counterpart was Moby Grape guitarist Skip Spence. After a gig at New York’s Fillmore East, the author notes, Spence flipped out on LSD, carried a fire ax to the Albert Hotel in search of drummer Don Stevenson (who he thought was possessed by Satan), and was then committed to Bellevue Hospital. Unfortunately, he’s continued to suffer serious mental illnesses.^{xxxiii}

Carly Simon and Joni Mitchell

From *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, And Carly Simon – And The Journey ...*, by Sheila Weller:

Manhattan was both a magical and a daunting place for a Pentels-and-guitar-case-toting young woman to enter, alone, in the spring of 1967. Downtown had its own ecosystem. The folk scene on MacDougal, to which Joni immediately introduced herself, was centered on the Night Owl (where James Taylor and Danny Kortchmar's Flying Machine had been the house band until James went to London and Danny to Laurel Canyon) and the Cafe Au Go Go (where the Blues Project - "the Jewish Beatles," from Queens and Long Island - held forth), with all the musicians piling into the Dugout around the corner after sets. English rock stars stayed at the Albert Hotel on Fourth Avenue [sic], while beatnik expatriates thrust back on the city holed up at the Chelsea on Twenty-third Street.^{xxxiv}

...Joni, James, and Carly flew back to the States in November and lived together at New York's funky Albert Hotel and the glitzy Plaza Hotel...^{xxxv}

James Taylor

From *Billboard*, 1998:

Then I dropped out of school. I had some emotional difficulties. It actually was probably typical adolescent stuff, but the people around me put me into a mental hospital called McLean for nine months. That was my exit from the family agenda, as I perceived it. I did get a high school diploma, but it was from the school at McLean, the Arlington School. I never went to college; it's funny that my father was such an academician and none of his children-not one of us-went to college. When I split from McLean, I went to Boston and then to New York to hook up with Kootch, who was in a band called the King Bees. I lived on Columbus and 84th, and then my friend since my teens, the bassist Zack Wiesner, he and I lived in the Albert Hotel on University Place and 11th Street in Greenwich Village, on a floor that was burned out except for two rooms.

We lived at the Albert for three months, rehearsed in the basement of the Albert, and we all became a house band at the Night Owl Cafe for eight to nine months as the Flying Machine. That was really the only job we had. We tried to get a manager for a while, but I don't think he was that interested in us; he just did it as a favor to the people who were producing our record.

[Question: What was the origin of the awful "James Taylor And The Original Flying Machine" LP that was released in 1971 after the success of "Sweet Baby James"?)

It was the doing of Chip Taylor.... He and a partner came down and hear us, and they signed us to a contract.^{xxxvi}

From *Fire and rain: the James Taylor story* by Ian Halperin:

Taylor rented a room on Columbus Avenue and Eighty-Fourth Street in Manhattan and joined his longtime musical buddy Danny "Kootch" Korchmar, who had been living in the Village playing guitar in a band called the King Bees. After a couple of the band's members had a huge fallout, the King Bees broke up. Kootch decided to form a new band, and he wanted James to be the frontman. Taylor got very excited at the prospect of singing lead vocals; the two spent hours huddling in a cafe working out the logistics and details. Kootch was so happy Taylor had joined him that he even proposed to name the group after him.

"Let's call it Stringbean [one of Taylor's nicknames] or the James Taylor Group," Kootch said, as Taylor listened attentively. "We'll get some local gigs and start recording our music. Then if things go well we'll buy a van and hit the road."

Kootch and Taylor finally settled on calling the band the Flying Machine. They recruited Vineyard alumni Joel O'Brien on drums and Zach Wiesner on bass. Taylor and Wiesner moved in together to a tiny room with little sunlight at the dilapidated Albert Hotel on University Place and Eleventh Street. This was one of the seedier hotels in the Village,

frequented regularly by junkies and prostitutes. A fire a year earlier had charred a good part of it, but its owners refused to close the hotel and rented rooms on the floors that were not gutted.

One of the prostitutes who hung out at the Albert called herself Flo. Between tricks, she used to bum cigarettes from Taylor. Flo was a teenage runaway from Buffalo who came to New York wanting to be a model but wound up turning tricks after failing to find work and falling into the Village's drug subculture. She was stabbed to death in 1973 by a former boyfriend.

“There were lots of weird people constantly hanging out at the Albert,” said Bradlee Dixon, who once worked late shifts at the Albert. “We had an eclectic mix of clients, from hookers to Mafia types to artists. It was wild and we just pretended not to notice what was really going down in the hotel. I vaguely remember Mr. Taylor, but after he became famous I recognized him when I saw him on TV. He was always polite, and I remember that he dressed like a hippie. I also remember him because Flo was a regular client of ours and I saw them on a couple of occasions smoking outside of the hotel. I always remained good friends with Flo and we used to go out occasionally for drinks. When she died, I thought to myself that the only time she seemed happy was when she hung out with artist types like Mr. Taylor. I remember that she thought he was a really nice kid and she admired him immensely.”

At Kootch's insistence, the Flying Machine rehearsed relentlessly in the basement of the Albert. The music was distorted because they didn't have a proper sound system; still, after only a few weeks the band began to play in a polished fashion. The combination of talent, circumstance, and American dream inspired Taylor and his band mates to get gigs in the Village. They developed a repertoire of folk-rock songs, took their lumps, and then looked for patrons, managers, and record companies to support and promote them. They were ready for their first gig.^{xxxvii}

ⁱ The following list is based on various sources, some more reliable than others. Lillian Roxon seems to be a reliable source. Some of the memories of musicians quoted in obituaries or newspaper articles written long after the fact might be incorrect.

ⁱⁱ Lillian Roxon, "Hotel Albert," *The Eye*, May 1968 pp. 32 ff.

ⁱⁱⁱ Chu interview, *op. cit.*

^{iv} Lee Underwood, *Blue melody: Tim Buckley Remembered*, p.36.

^v Underwood, p.92.

^{vi} Bob Cianci, *Great Rock Drummers of the Sixties*, p.74.

^{vii} Stuart Goldman, "Goldberg: '60s Survivor Still Rockin' the Blues," *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1984, p.OC-D1.

^{viii} Pete Johnson, "World's Greatest Rock Organist," *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1968, p.F18.

^{ix} Jan Mark Wolkin, Bill Keenom, *Michael Bloomfield: If You Love These Blues*, p.114.

^x Wolkin and Keenom, p.140.

^{xi} Wolkin and Keenom, p. 139.

^{xii} "The Meter; The Legend of Red Hash," *Chicago Reader*, September 30, 2005, vol. 35, issue 1, p.5.

^{xiii} James Segrest, Mark Hoffman, *Moanin' at Midnight: The Life and Times of Howlin' Wolf*, p.237-8.

^{xiv} *Kingston Whig - Standard*, Kingston Ontario, December 16, 2002, p.1. Similar accounts in *Expositor*, Brantford, Ontario, December 17, 2002, p. B12; *Times-Transcript*, Moncton, N.B., December 17, 2002; *The Daily Observer* (Pembroke), Pembroke Ontario, December 16, 2002, p.4.

^{xv} Lillian Roxon, *Lillian Roxon's Rock Encyclopedia* (Grossett & Dunlap), p.306. The story is repeated in Robert Milliken, *Lillian Roxon: Mother of Rock*, pp. 288-289.

^{xvi} Richie Unterberger, *Turn! Turn! Turn!: The '60s Folk-Rock Revolution*, p.72.

^{xvii} Unterberger, p.75.

^{xviii} Unterberger, p.124.

^{xix} Unterberger, p.175.

^{xx} Marti Smiley Childs, Jeff March, *Echoes of the Sixties*, p.202.

^{xxi} Email of April 27th, 2011, forwarded to Arlene Goldman, President of the Board of the current cooperative.

^{xxii} "California Dreamin'," *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 2008, p.2.

^{xxiii} Communicated via email, April 21st, 2011, forwarded to Arlene Goldman, President of the Board of the current cooperative.

^{xxiv} "Dream A Little Dream," review of production at the Village Theater, *New York Post*, April 24, 2003, p.45.

^{xxv} Tom Wright, Susan VanHecke, *Roadwork: Rock & Roll Turned Inside Out*, pp.111-115.

^{xxvi} Richie Unterberger, *Unknown Legends Of Rock 'N' Roll: Psychedelic Unknowns, Mad Geniuses, Punk*, p. 151.

^{xxvii} Billy James, *Necessity Is: The Early Years Of Frank Zappa & The Mothers Of Invention*, pp.56-58.

^{xxviii} *Jim Morrison: Life, Death, Legend*, by Stephen Davis, p.167.

^{xxix} "Modern Rock's Modern Lover: Richman's Still A Rock God," *Eugene Weekly*, Eugene Ore, Vol. 25, issue 49, December 7, 2006, p.33.

^{xxx} "Weekend All Things Considered," National Public Radio, Washington, D.C., December 13, 1992, pg.1; Liane Hansen, host.

^{xxxii} Letter from John Sebastian to the *Acoustic Guitar*, San Anselmo, August 2008, vol. 19, issue 2; p.14.

^{xxxiii} Obituary, *Syracuse New Times*, September 24 - October 1, 2008, Iss. 1956, p.14.

^{xxxiiii} Review in *Billboard*, August 15, 1998, vol. 110, issue 33, p.18: "Unknown Legends Of Rock 'N' Roll: Psychedelic Unknowns, Mad Geniuses, Punk Pioneers, Lo-Fi Mavericks & More" by Jeffrey L Perlah.

^{xxxiv} Sheila Weller, *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, And Carly Simon--And The Journey ...*, p.231.

^{xxxv} Weller, p.351.

^{xxxvi} *Billboard*, December 5, 1998, vol. 110, issue 49, p.16.

^{xxxvii} Ian Halperin, *Fire and Rain: The James Taylor Story*, pp.46-47.