

The book of Joe Boyd



Left: Boyd (in shades) at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, with Geoff and Maria Muldaur in right foreground.

Below: Joe Boyd today

With folk music enjoying a new day in the sun, **Joe Boyd**, maven of seventies folk rock, has in the last half-decade returned to music, curating star lined tours from his one-time Witchseason stable of musicians, as well as penning a definitive memoir of the times, *White Bicycles*

A few pages short of the close of Joe Boyd's *White Bicycles*, Boyd returns to a favoured theme; psychedelics. Richard Alpert, the Harvard psychology prof who turned a few of the brightest and the best of his early sixties' student cohort onto hallucinogens before being expelled from the East Coast's ivory tower, reappears after a brief walk-on part at the beginning of the book. In a couple of sentences, Boyd recalls what happened to Alpert after the Harvard removal. Heading to India, he met a hitch-hiking student, 'who seemed calmer than anyone he'd ever met' and took up the suggestion to track down the apparent cause of this, a moss eating guru living the life of the spiritual aesthete in a Himalayan cave. When the meeting happens, the guru apparently recited Alpert's complete stock of dreams since crossing paths with the student. After looking at Alpert's pillbox, and immediately picking out 'twelve tabs of Owsley acid,' from the rest of the drugs, the foothill guru continued to talk about the spiritual world for the next eight hours, 'as if nothing had happened.' Alpert never touched drugs again, and

before too long changed his name to Baba Ram Dass, embarking on a new career path, that of New Age spiritual master.

It is a casual by-the-way type stunner that typifies Boyd's marvellous raconteur style memoir of the period, and the book is dotted with many other anecdotal incidents and accidents, though few others quite so magically real; vivid reminders of why the sixties were such a different decade for many in the West, as well as attempting to explain their allure now that the whole period is into its fifty year decade.

White Bicycles was published in 2006 with much celebratory gush because one of London's music world's own movers and shakers was telling his tale and was doing so with literary style and deadpan verve. Yet, that was only a part of the story. While the book is very much an insider's account of a journey through some of the period's hippest and most exotic musical flora and fauna, its author has one eye on addressing the small peer group of music industry fraternity to whom these stories are of most immediate import. Boyd's recounting also immerse the reader in the social, cultural and transformational phenomena of the period, in a way neither the majority of music focused books, nor academic or popular accounts seem able to do. With the story of this young American's life and times, one gets ample clues into why the sixties developed into such a culture of anomaly. Boyd himself is emphatic

