

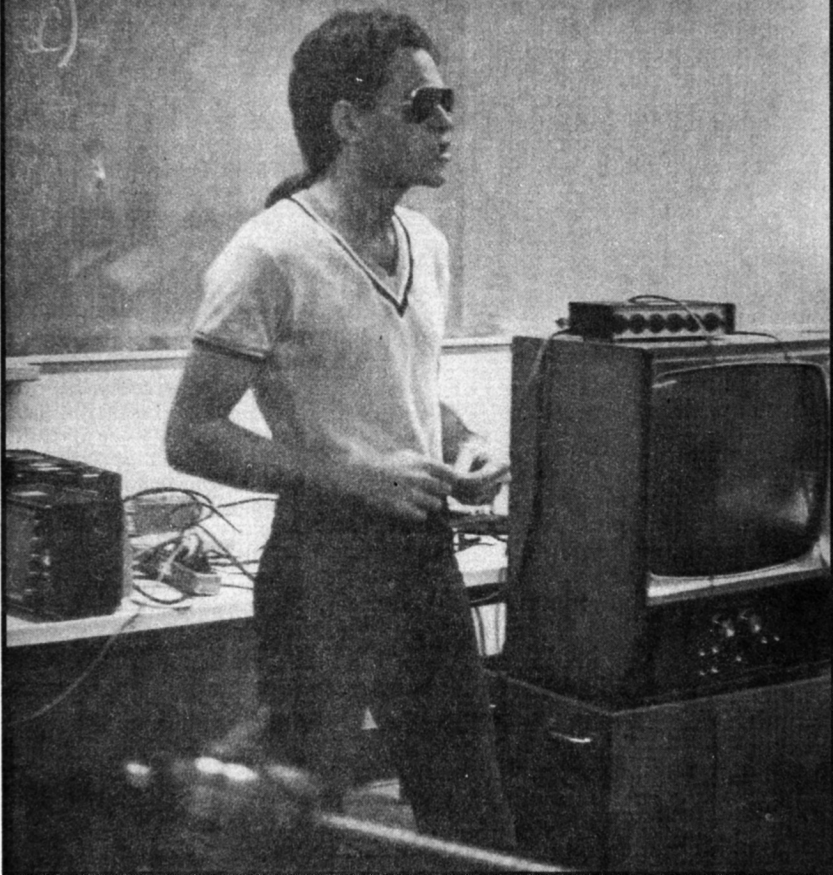


NOISE

ROCK AROUND BOSTON



STEVE NELSON



pre-J. Geils group, The Hallucinations, for house band status. Nelson was busy with his managerial duties at the Tea Party so he had the opportunity, but not the time to photograph the Velvet. Nelson later managed the Woodrose Ballroom in western Mass. When the Velvets played there, they crashed at his house. Nelson, being of high principles in a scene where it was often a lost concept, was concerned that shooting the Velvets in their leisure time would be intrusive. (He related an amusing anecdote about how he tried to get a paparazzi-style shot of Surrealist master Salvador Dali. Much to Nelson's chagrin, Dali did a Houdini-style vanishing act).

Nelson was very pleased with the photographs he took when The Byrds and The Flying Burrito Brothers join forces for an impromptu Rolling Thunder Revue-type jam when the bands shared the same bill at the Boston Tea Party in 1969. Jon Landau printed one of Nelson's historic shots in *Rolling Stone*, but regrettably the rest of the shots are lost as Landau never returned the negatives. As we talked, the coffee house troubadour played The Byrds "Hickory Wind." The synchronicity of the song and Nelson telling his story was so mind-blowing that Nelson accuses me of planting the singer. I pled innocence, although I admit the young man provided the perfect soundtrack for our conversation. It was a perfect rock 'n' roll moment that I'll cherish forever.

When I told Nelson that he photographed not only the first rock 'n' roll group that I ever saw live, The J. Geils band (as well as members of some of my all time favorites The Modern Lovers, The Sidewinders, and Billy Briggs of Barry & The Remains fame), Nelson retorted, "Boston was and still is a hot-bed for great rock 'n' roll." Nelson has spirited shots of Jonathan Richman's legendary Modern Lovers as well as the lesser known but still seminal Sidewinders, a band that launched the careers of, among others, hard rocking Billy Squier as well as Andy Paley, who went on to acclaim with The Paley Brothers, as a record producer, and a collaborator of The Beach Boys' Brian Wilson.

My favorite photo of Nelson's is of garage rock keyboard hero, Billy Briggs. It's a shot of Briggs with a luminescent blonde. Both look as jubilant as The Remains' music sounds. The setting is a garden at the beginning of spring; buds sprout in the background. Nelson's photograph of Briggs and his glowing companion is so heartwarming that it brings to mind a smiling "American Gothic." Nelson wittily titled it "Remains Of The Day."

Nelson's photographs chronicle a time when there was a cultural revolution catching fire. The Boston Tea Party was the Hub's equivalent of NYC's Electric Circus. WBCN mated from classical music to rock 'n' roll. The *Phoenix* was born and reported the happenings. Nelson's photographs capture the spirit and energy of those times.

STEVE NELSON: PHOTOGRAPHING THE ROCK 'N' ROLL REVOLUTION

by Nancy Neon

Steve Nelson will be exhibiting his cinematic photographs in a show called *The Square: Stills from the Scene, Harvard Square and Cambridge, 1967-1973*. The opening reception is on 6/19 from 5 to 7 PM, and the photographs will be on display until 7/18. The exhibit will take place at the New England School of Art & Design at Suffolk University, 75 Arlington St., 2nd Floor, Boston.

Nelson's gig as Boston Tea Party manager in 1967-68 gave him access to many cool subjects. Moreover, his friendships with area musicians give his photographs a rare warmth. Nelson's closeness to his subjects is what makes his photographs so compelling. His pictures pair the intimacy of family snapshots with the aesthetically pleasing composition of fine art photography. When I asked Nelson what photographers he admires, he mentioned Andy Warhol, Man Ray, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and Edward Weston. Nelson calls Cartier-Bresson "a pioneer of 35mm

street photography, who captured fleeting moments with elegance and style while portraying the essence of daily life in France." Nelson added that he admires Weston for his "mastery of formal composition" and for the manner in which he "produced exquisite photos of nudes and other subjects using natural light."

Nelson relates, "In my photos, I tried to capture the essence of daily life in the Square but with a sense of composition and style." Whereas Cartier-Bresson was a master of street photography and Weston was a master of formal composition, Nelson combines the strengths of both. One added element to Nelson's style is its cinematic aspect, revealing the strong influence of film upon his work. A second added element is color. Although Cartier-Bresson and Weston shot in black and white, Nelson feels that "color was essential to the best portrayal of the Square."

When asked which subjects he regretted not capturing, Nelson related without hesitation "The Velvet Underground." The Velvets played the Boston Tea Party so often that they practically vied with Peter Wolf's