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A THEATREGRAPHICS PUBLICATION

NEW ALBUM AND TAPES 'HAMBURGER CONCERTO'

FOCUS

HAMBURGER CONCERTO



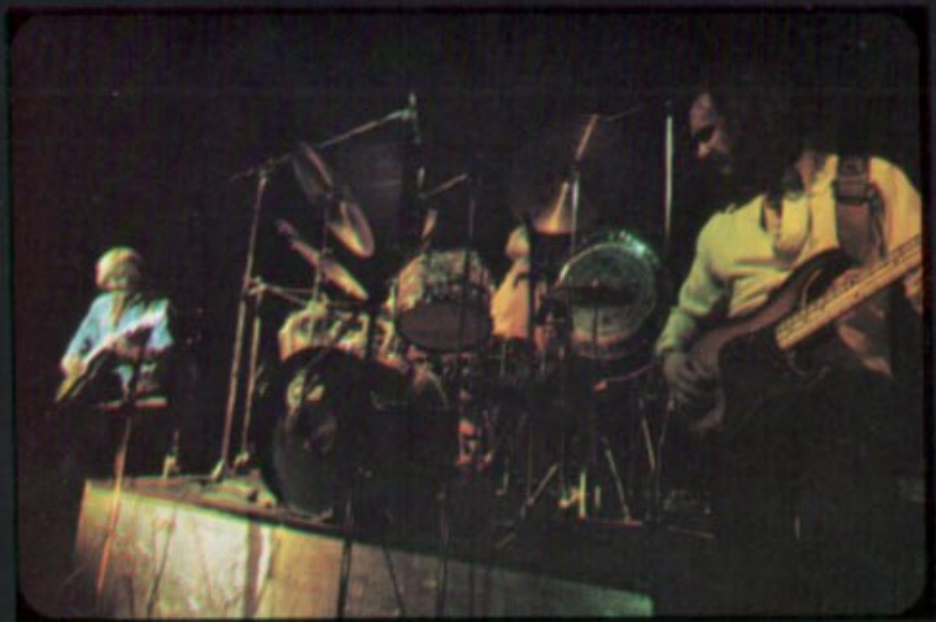
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Thursdays



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FOCUS

THIJS VAN LEER Organ, flute, vocals
JAN AKKERMAN Guitars and lute
BURT REITER Bass guitar and vocals
COLIN ALLEN Drums

with

BLUE

Hugh Nicholson — guitar, keyboards
Ian McMillan — bass guitar
Timmy Donald — drums
Bob Smith — guitar

In accordance with the requirements of the Greater London Council and the Watch Committees of the various towns and cities of the tour, the following conditions must be observed:—

1. The public may leave at the end of the performance by all exit and entrance doors and such doors must at that time be open.
2. All gangways, corridors, staircases and external passageways intended for exit shall be kept entirely free from obstruction whether permanent or temporary.
3. Persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any of the other gangways or any unseated space in the Auditorium, unless standing in such space has been specially allowed by the G.L.C. or the Watch Committee, as applicable. If standing be permitted in the gangways at the sides and the rear of the seating it shall be limited to the numbers indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.
4. The safety curtain must be lowered and raised once immediately before the commencement of each performance, so as to ensure it being in proper working order.

The Management reserve the right to change the programme without notice and are not held responsible for the non-appearance of any artist. The Management reserve the right to refuse admittance.

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231 Oxford Street, 13 Oxford Circus Ave.,
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FOCUS

When Focus first broke upon the international scene in 1972 rock had been largely dominated by British and American bands. Although Holland had long been one of the few European countries to produce a thriving local rock scene, nobody ever really expected that a band would emerge which could successfully compete with the most powerful names of the day, and introduce a unique, original brand of progressive rock, into the bargain.

But Focus did more than bargain for a place in the sun. They swept to immediate popularity, particularly in England, where the artistry of Jan Akkerman and Thijs Van Leer in particular, was welcomed with open arms by fans who didn't care where they came from, as long as they played their richly melodic music.

It wasn't long before Focus became voted Brightest Hope in the Melody Maker Pop Poll of '72 and the following year, Jan Akkerman was the top guitarist. Then in came their conquest of America, where albums like "Moving Waves," and "Focus III" and their hit singles "Sylvia" and "Hocus Pocus," hit the chart.

Focus are intense, creative and highly intelligent men, with a background of study and varied interests in European classical music, Old English music (especially that featuring the lute), as well as art and languages. When they first came to England, Jan in particular was on his guard, determined not to be dragged down into the rock machine. But success has mellowed them, and with



the creation of this album, are probably happier and more satisfied than they have been throughout their career.

There have been past traumas and upheavals within the ranks. There was a succession of bass players, before Burt Reiter, and most recently Pieree Van Der Linden, their drummer, quit, to be replaced by England's Colin Allen, who first came to prominence with Zoot Money's Big Roll Band, and later Stone The Crows.

Now they are settled and Colin's influence in steadying the rhythm section can be clearly heard in these exciting performances. During the final mixes under the supervision of producer Mike Vernon, at London's Olympic Studios, Colin and Thijs took time out to chat both about the musical content of the LP and the story of the band.

Thijs, the gifted organist, pianist, singer, flute player and yodeller is in fact the founder member of Focus. Even his speaking voice is musical, and off stage he is quiet, almost to the point of shyness.

Born in Amsterdam in 1948 he was educated at Hilversum Grammar School and Amsterdam University. He was awarded a degree for flute playing at Geneva Conservatoire, and took orchestral and arranging tuition from Dutch composer Rogier Van Otterloo. His organ master was the conductor and classical organist Anthon Van Der Horst.

"I used to play a lot of Old Music at home when I was young, then I began to play jazz and wanted to forget about it," said Thijs. "We

all used to play at home together, and I suppose I wanted to reject what I was brought up on. But then I thought the combination of jazz and classical music could be used in rock, which is the most free from of expression.

"I've always played music, from my third year onwards. But I did a lot of other things as well. My whole family played music and we did other forms of expression, painting and modelling and plays. But we weren't special y'know? We were good amateurs. My father has a degree as a flute player, but he is not a flautist. He's a businessman, and he wanted to keep his enthusiasm for music by not being in music. My mother was a singer, and my brother plays bassoon. My other brother is a piano and flute player.

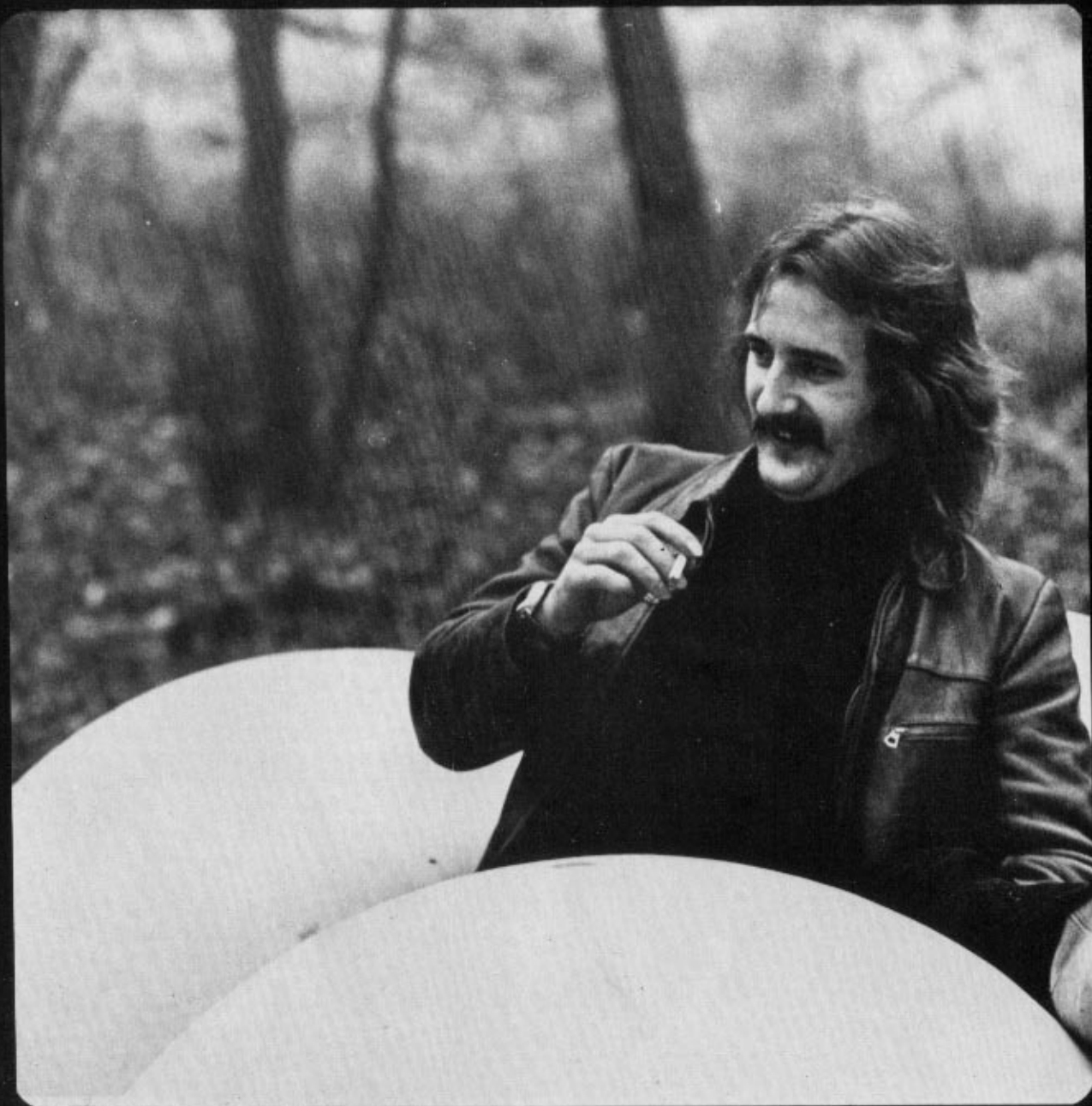
"It was mainly classical, then jazz came in. Miles Davis — especially Miles. And the Jazz Messengers. I started on piano when I was three and flute when I was 13. Then at school I discovered the beauty of song, the joy of singing. But I only liked classical music and jazz. I had an academic education and studied Greek and Latin at school, so I didn't have the courage to go to music school. I didn't feel good enough. So I decided to study the history of art, at university. This, I thought, was a combination of intellect and culture.

"But that was very dry, and later I went to join a cabaret troupe who had built their own theatre on one of the canals in Amsterdam, and that's where I learnt how to behave on stage."

"I was mainly the singer and did not play so much piano as they already had a pianist. I played a little background flute and I felt fine! This was when I was 19. After that I decided to go to the Conservatory of Music to study composition and flute. But didn't like the lessons. I had flute lessons from my father and was used to his approach — the first thing to learn is how to get a beautiful one and technique comes second. But at the Conservatory it was the other way round. I formed a trio and left the music school very early. I had finished all the theory but I couldn't face studying for another three years just to perfect a solo flute sound.

"Then I formed my own trio and bought a Hammond organ which I still have. I was very impressed by Traffic which decided me to play rock. Their music was poetic and had space. They had an awareness of greater things. I only liked Hammond because of Steve Winwood and the way he played it. He made me decide to play rock, and Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys, through the whole conception of his music.

"After a year we called the trio Focus and we did a lot of jingles for TV to keep ourselves alive. We backed a lot of singers and made records in 1969. In the beginning of '70 Jan joined and it became a quartet. We played in the backing band for the Dutch version of 'Hair' as the nucleus of a nine-piece orchestra — and we wanted to flee from that as soon as possible! It was nice to have a place to play regularly though, and in the





afternoons, we could work on our own stuff.

"It was really something for us to go to England for the first record. London — phew! You can't imagine how that was to us to go to London and make a record. We were the first Dutch group to make an album in London. This was with Martin Dresden on bass and Hans Cleuver on drums who were with the first trio."

"Then Jan wanted to play again with Pierre Van Der Linden who had been with him in Brainbox. This was a most difficult decision, because they were old friends. And Jan and I were not great friends at that time. But together we could have a great musical adventure, and I had to say 'yes' to his project of joining up with Pierre again. Cyril Havermans was on bass, then Burt replaced him in 1971."

The combination of Jan and Thijs proved to be one of the most creative and significant teamings in rock, because then the two will-powers, backgrounds and techniques could spark off each other and lay the basis for a new sound.

At times wryly humorous, stark and angular or singularly beautiful, their music has many facets, while maintaining the desire to improve and explore. There is no doubt they sometimes have to sublimate some of their personal ideas for the good of Focus, and this has caused problems in the past. But these can now be overcome with the release of solo albums by Jan and Thijs.

They profess to be satisfied with this new album, but when one realised the technique at their command, their



range of influences from Bella Bartok to the Beach Boys and street musicians of Holland, and appreciates their endless search for fulfilment, one can safely expect still better things to come.

Colin Allen the ebullient English drummer, and Thijs the Dutch multi-instrumentalist sat drinking coffee in the overpowering silence of an empty recording studio. When a door opened, the roar of "Hamburger Concerto" could be heard emitting from the playback speakers in the control room, where Mike Vernon pored over the desk, operating the banks of sliders.

Colin had only recently joined the band and was thoroughly enjoying the experience. Although Jan and the others occasionally talked among themselves in Dutch, language was no real barrier and certainly on a musical level it was as if Colin had always been with them. He had joined at a day's notice when Pierre Van Der Linden left because of his disagreement with Focus' future musical policy.

"The first thing I noticed in this band," said Colin, "was that nothing is taboo. In 'Hamburger Concerto' there are elements of comedy. Just listen when Thijs' voice takes the male and female roles of operative singers. It's so funny man! It's going to make people think — what are they up to? Then immediately after that there is a swirling organ solo. It surprises me that so much of what the band does makes people think: 'They must be really serious about that' But it's lighthearted man. It's a laugh. When I first joined we did a tour of America,



and I hadn't played for four months beforehand. So I was goofing occasionally. But Jan would turn round and laugh, and that's the way they are."

Focus do have a sense of humour, but they take immense care in assembling their ideas and composition. And they are not afraid to go to the most unlikely sources for inspiration.

Said Thijs: "One afternoon in London, Jan and I went to a lute music shop and Jan found some work by an old Belgian composer from Antwerp. The next day Jan played it in the studio on his lute and I played the recorder along the same notes and lines. It came out beautifully."

"Then there's a boogie called 'Harem Scarem,' a thing I wrote in Belgium, where I have just moved to live. It's the first piece I have written there — just a piece of fast rock. And then there is 'La Cathedrale De Strasbourg' which is a piece of nostalgia for past holidays in caravans and tents, near Strasbourg Cathedral which had a very special sound to its bells. The piece is a kind of impressionistic thing with French lyrics. That's all my material. And from Jan comes a number called 'Birth' and that starts in primitive fashion. The whole thing is designed to shock — with a very heavy beat.

"There are a lot of influences in the 'Hamburger Concerto', Spanish and a little Chinese and Gregorian. We try to produce a completely international music. We like Chinese music, we listen to it and buy the records.

We are not Chinese of course, but why not involve it? As a matter of fact, we listen to rock music the least. In fact 'Harem Scarem' is a kind of parody on boogie, y'know? It's like 'Hocus Pocus' was meant to be fun.

"Hamburger Concerto has Dutch lyrics and the quintessence of the story is — how could Herod do what he did whilst in the light of Jesus. In other words, how could evil exist! It's based on a very old Dutch Christmas song, but the main theme is Jan's.

"We really consider this album is our first proper work. We're all glad and pleased with it. It has strength and purpose. On past albums there just wasn't enough time, and of course that was our own fault. We'd say, 'hey this sounds nice.' And we just didn't think of making more sound layers."

"Our music has realism, and magic too. Harmonically, it's not very new what we do. We have no pretensions about being new in that way. But to dramatise musically, that is our forte, and perhaps that's where the magic comes in." Says Colin Allen: "The music is so much a group concept. Thijs and Jan don't obviously dominate each other by saying:

"okay, I'm gonna play a solo here." They care so much about whether the group works. So many people have a misconception about Jan. He can play four notes in eight bars like nobody else in the world can play. He can play so 'empty' sometimes. They know about his technique but don't appreciate his feeling."

CHRIS WELCH, Melody Maker 1974



FOCUS

IN AND OUT OF
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MOVING WAVES



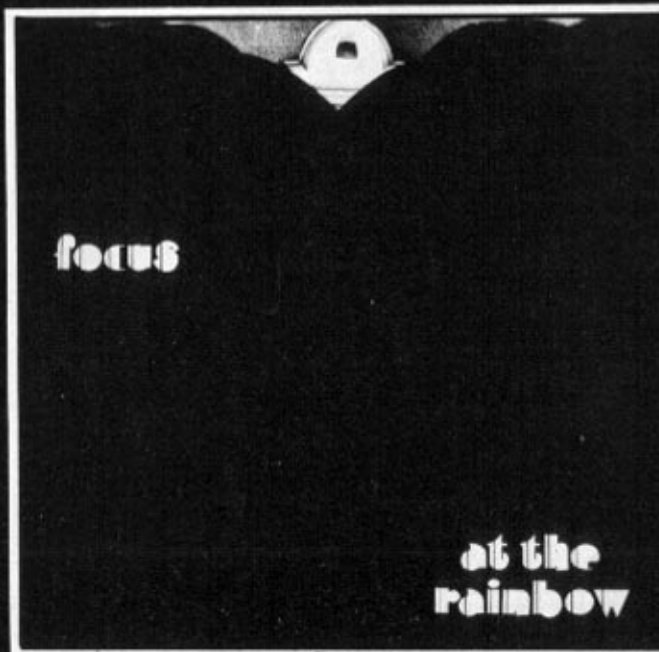
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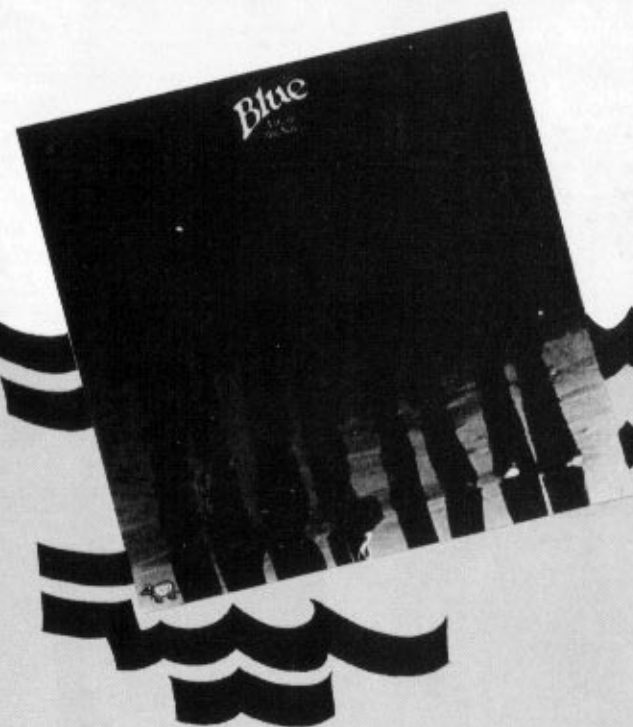
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BLUE

Hughie Nicholson (guitar, keyboards), Ian MacMillan (bass guitar) and Timmy Donald (drums) were all working around Glasgow with the same aspirations and chances as a million and one other provincial hopefuls in the middle sixties.

Timmy was born in Bristol in 1946 but had lived in Glasgow since the age of two. He was the first to go when, as a member of White Trash, he impressed George Harrison and Apple released "Road To Nowhere". The follow-up single was a chart

success, "Golden Slumbers", taken from the Beatles "Abbey Road" album but subsequently the group folded. The "B" side of "Road To Nowhere" was written by Hughie Nicholson, born in Glasgow in 1949. He had worked with The Poets in Scotland, as had bass player Ian MacMillan, born in Paisley in 1947, who also subsequently joined White Trash

When Hughie made the scene, however, it was in a big way. He joined Marmalade and during his year's stay with the group wrote three of their biggest hits, "Cousin Norman", "Radancer" and "Back On The Road", before rejoining Timmy and Ian in White Trash, now renamed Cody. Dissatisfied with Cody's policy the three formed BLUE, signed to RSO and recorded their first album, "BLUE" which was released, to critical acclaim, in July, 1973. Particularly enthusiastic was D.J. John Peel who featured the album extensively and who wrote "An excellent debut from an excellent group with an excellent album."

For a short time the group was joined by Jimmy McCulloch but eventually settled on guitarist Bob "Smiggy" Smith as their fourth member. Smiggy, born 30th March 1946, started playing guitar, influenced by Buddy Holly and Eddie Cochran, when seventeen years old. He joined The Pathfinders in Glasgow when he was twenty-one and has also worked with Cliff Bennett and Writing On The Wall. During the past eighteen months, Smiggy has been working and recording in Canada, but has now settled with fellow Scots, Hughie, Ian

and Timmy as an integral member of BLUE.

The group are much in demand in Britain for live gigs and radio, have appeared on B.B.C. T.V.'s "Old Grey Whistle Test" and were voted second in Sounds' 'Top New Artist Band Section' poll. They recently completed their first coast to coast U.S. tour and returned to San Francisco at the end of January to record their second album, this time using Neil Young's producer, Elliot Mazer. Their new album, "Life In The Navy" is scheduled for release on R.S.O. Records on 1st June.





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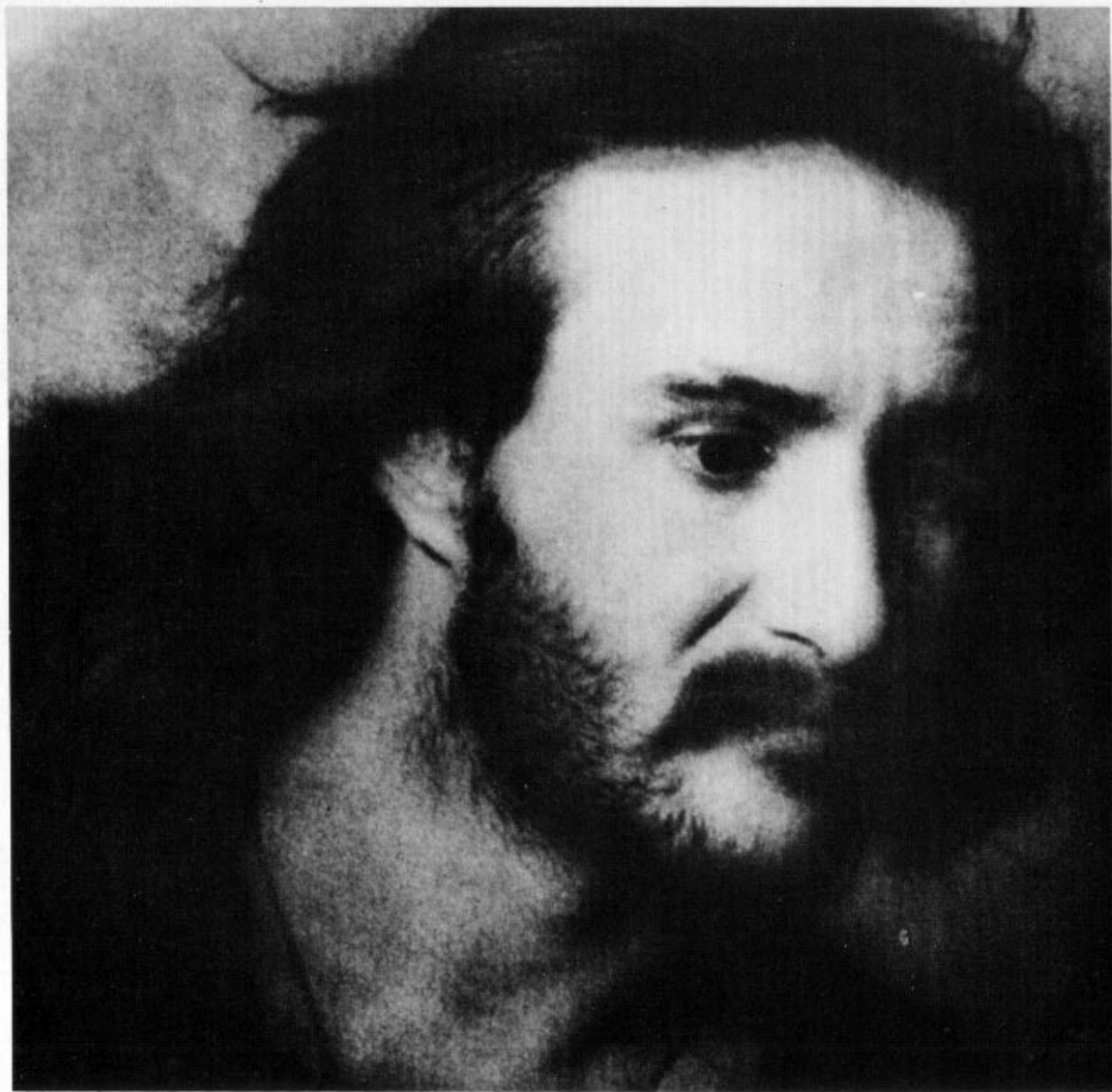


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