

Cream Churn It on in Scorching Finale—Made Rock a CULTure

By ED OCHS

NEW YORK — When Eric Clapton, Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce played their farewell to New York Saturday (2), at what is now affectionately called "The Cream Concert," they left behind them 21,000 Cream buffs, platinum and gold records and a music scene changed by their presence. And though they played at what seemed like their own funeral, the Cream disbands with two Atco LP's and three new rock groups due in the near future.

When the trio reached the stage at 11:15—after the Terry Reid trio and Buddy Miles Express braved "We want Cream!" cries—they struck swiftly to the heart of "I'm So Glad," "Crossroads" and "Toad," Baker's 15-minute drum solo. "White Room" and "Sunshine of Your Love," the group's best-selling single disks, mesmerized the Madison Square Garden gathering, with Bruce's bass work and clean, clear vocals, Clapton's mercurial guitar flights and Baker's Afro-Asian drum runs that danced around and about the beat like natives around a fire. The ascension of Cream, from the underground to above ground pop supremacy, has won them the distinction of being a trend within a trend, a Goliath-like figure that has changed the face of an entire rock form.

Like a flash fire, the British blues group flared to instant success and, after three mighty albums, snuffed itself out with an overdose of the same genius that initially generated Cream to glory—the genius of conflict. It was a conflict of personalities, overcome only by the knowledge that excellence could be magnified threefold by linking together, that limited the life-span of Cream from birth. Later, it was controlled conflict that gave their music a profound, almost frightening wail of intensity: Clapton pitting his punishing quick riffs against Baker's dogging beat, or Bruce matching mad dashes on his mouth-harp in "Traintime" against Baker's sustained clackety-clack drumming of a train on tracks; Clapton squeezes a squealing voice from his guitar strings, Baker joins heartbeat and pulse in a duet, Bruce batters his bass like a solo instrument.

At every concert, on every recorded band of music they fought for the solo advantage, to hoard the acclaim. But in the end, it was always Cream, the group, that won the applause and gold records, like a small crowd of perfect people that together created a larger musical utopia. The struggle within Cream of musician against musician produced "Fresh Cream," "Disraeli Gears"

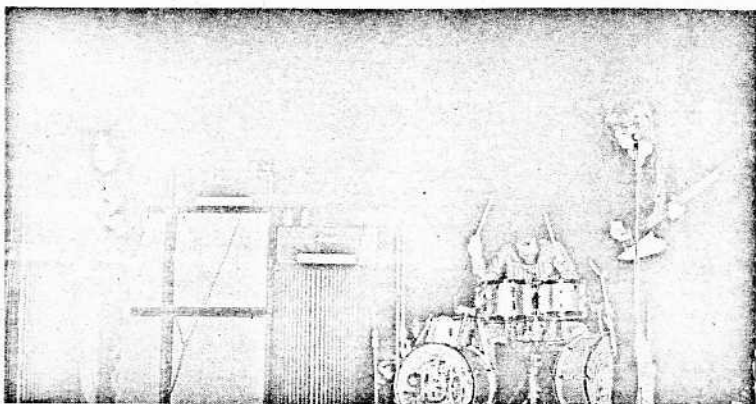
and "Wheels of Fire," three in-chic distortion expressed in muchic/distortion expressed in music.

Danceable, yet durable, their music is the finest definition through example of the hipster's "head" music, that half-intellectual and completely intoxicating stream of vibrations, shocks and sensual sounds. It is this same internal conflict that, at the end of a 15-city U. S. tour, brought the Cream to Madison Square Garden, where the trio played until long after midnight and passed from the scene with a final psychedelic flourish.

Visibly moved by the intensity of the Cream's ecstasy-rock, the entire music market has simultaneously stepped backward into Presley's bluesy blue suede shoes, ahead into the wizardry of computer-rock, and perhaps

even deeper into serious symphonic psychedelics. Their virtuosity, both as a group and as solo artists, has at last created a rock with culture, good enough in composition and execution to evoke nervous scorn from the jazz ranks. Thanks to Cream, the blending together of the old guard with the avant-garde has moved pop music past the pabulum stage into a middle age of thoughtful improvisation and technical sophistication, where, if the trend continues, "rock" may give way to just plain "music."

It is a final tribute to Cream that, in an age when rock groups are pushed into early retirement by fickle trends, Cream has quit willfully and at the peak of success. Yet it is sad that this group, who earned a gold album before ever releasing a single, has to retire at all.



THE CREAM, the British blues group whose best-selling Atco album pushed them to rock supremacy, play for 21,000 fans at Madison Square Garden Nov. 2 on the last leg of their U. S. farewell tour. Cream, from left to right, Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker and Eric Clapton, were also awarded a platinum record for over \$2 million in sales of their double LP, "Wheels of Fire." Gross for the date was \$104,000, of which \$50,000 was Cream's cut.