

Bummer in the summer

Arthur Lee takes his final trip



Arthur Lee (above) – the founder, guiding light and principal singer and songwriter of the late psychedelic-era band, Love, died on August 3 2006 after a brief battle with acute myeloid leukaemia at the Methodist University Hospital in his native city of Memphis, Tennessee, in the USA. Lee's erratic and sometimes-brilliant career peaked in 1968 with the international release of Love's third and best album, *Forever Changes*, which remains one of the most celebrated cult albums of the rock era. Michael Waddacor pays tribute to a talented, but troubled troubadour of the great West Coast psychedelic era.

One of the great visionaries and artists of the West Coast psychedelic era has taken his final trip at the age of 61. Singer, songwriter and guitarist Arthur Lee passed away in August 2006 after battling leukaemia.

Despite his erratic career and what appear to be the many personal demons he carried in his later years, many of us will continue to cherish the memory of Arthur Lee as the inspirational visionary and talented leader of the earlier incarnations of his Los Angeles-based band, Love. Above all, many of us will continue to eulogise Lee's finest hour – the album that changed how many of us felt about rock music: *Forever Changes*. Most rock critics and die-hard fans advocate Love's *Forever Changes* as being a true desert-island album – one of the great albums featured in our personal Top 200 lists.

One is tempted to draw parallels between Lee and two other key figures of the psychedelic era: the late Syd Barrett of Pink Floyd (see edition one of *Strange Brew*TM) and Roky Erikson of The Thirteenth Floor Elevators. All three were seen as leading lights of the comparatively short-lived psychedelic era between 1965 and 1969, and all three are best remembered for a short period of creative and influential highs. All three, too, had their demons – and were regarded to have been acid casualties in some form.

Interestingly, Lee inspired and influenced many of his contemporaries, with Barrett and Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant and Jimmy Page being among his many fans.

An enigmatic artist

Arthur Lee is remembered as a strange, eccentric, aloof and complex loner, according to many of his music-industry peers and journalists. He walked and dressed like the Master of Cool; he could be jolly, relaxed and generous; he could be difficult, unpredictable, hard-headed, secretive and enigmatic;

he drank a lot of alcohol, consumed a lot of drugs and did not nurture conventional material aspirations and tastes. Lee claims he had an adventurous love affair with drugs, mostly marijuana and LSD, and once asserted proudly to have taken LSD every day possible until some time in 1972 or 1973.

He adored The Byrds, The Beatles, James Brown, Jimi Hendrix and The Doors, among other influential artists of his time. On the earlier Love albums, Lee wrote and recorded some of the finest and most original lyrics of his time, yet he could talk the nonsensical ramblings of an inarticulate stoner. He could be a charming interviewee, but, mostly, is remembered as a hostile and unspecific interview subject.

In some respects, Lee reminds one of a few other darker, more aloof and enigmatic West Coast rock musicians who seemed to avoid the limelight and follow their own muse. Here, Neil Young, Brian Wilson and Captain Beefheart (Don Van Vliet) spring to mind. Former Love bandmate, Bryan Maclean, believed Lee was mildly agoraphobic and deeply troubled by childhood issues, which were never publicised or discussed openly.

When Love travelled from Los Angeles (LA) to perform in San Francisco at the height of their glory days, Lee was prone to hole himself up in his hotel room when the band was not performing, while Maclean and the rest of the band would be out exploring San Francisco's hip scene. His excessive drug-taking is said to have been part of his determination to keep himself isolated from the humdrum world of everyday people – and the weight of the world (a theme explored further on in conjunction with the review of *Forever Changes* album on page five).

Back in LA, the early Love shared a mansion on Lookout Mountain. Nicknamed "The Castle", this homestead once belonged to Béla Lugosi, the Hungarian-born American actor best remembered for starring in the lead role of the 1931 film, *Dracula*. Despite being a spacious home, Lee made a point of living in the attic room, which was accessible by ladder.

The earlier years

Arthur Lee was born Arthur Taylor Porter on March 7 1945 at Memphis, Tennessee in the USA and later referred to himself as the "first so-called black hippie". An only child, he moved to LA at the age of five with his schoolteacher mother. His father once was referred to as a "struggling trumpeter". After settling in LA's Crenshaw-Adams district, Arthur's mother married another man, Clinton Lee, from whom Arthur acquired his surname. The young Arthur Lee was a loner and an introvert, and not academically inclined.

It was here in LA that Arthur Lee developed his passionate interests in a wide variety of musical genres, including blues, R&B, soul, folk and rock. At LA's Dorsey High School (also the high school of the

late keyboardist, Billy Preston, a friend of The Beatles), Lee befriended John Echols. In 1963, they formed the first of several Lee-led bands, Arthur Lee and the LAGs, a Booker T and the MGs-styled instrumental band featuring Lee on organ, future Love stalwart, John Echols, on guitar, Allan Talbert on saxophone and Roland Davis on drums. The LAGs recorded and released a single, *The Ninth Wave*.

Arthur Lee met and first recorded with Jimi Hendrix in 1965. The two later discussed forming a band with Steve Winwood.

Around this time, before forming Love, Lee earned some mild reputé as a budding songwriter with surfing-inspired songs like *White Caps* and *Ski Surfin' Sanctuary*. One of his earlier songs, *My Diary*, recorded by the American R&B singer, Rosa Lee Brooks, featured Jimi Hendrix on guitar. Some rock historians think this may have been Hendrix's first studio recording. At the time, 1965, Hendrix was part of the Isley Brothers' backing group. Lee and Hendrix became friends and towards the end of the 1960s, when Lee was in London, he and the great guitarist talked seriously about forming a group, Band Aid, with singer and multi-instrumentalist, Steve Winwood (ex-Traffic and Blind Faith), and the great African percussionist, Remi Kabaka (ex-Ginger Baker's Air Force).

Information on Lee's pre-Love career is scant, but, according to the Wikipedia online encyclopaedia, Lee also wrote *I've Been Tryin'* for Little Ray and recorded his song, *Luci Baines*, with his new band, The American Four. He also wrote an album song for Ronnie and the Pomona Casuals, which featured Lee on lead vocals.

The genesis of Love

After The LAGs and The American Four, Lee formed The Grass Roots in 1965, which became Love. The first incarnation comprised Bryan Maclean (guitars and vocals – and a former roadie for The Byrds), John Echols (lead guitar – and another Memphis native), Ken Forssi (bass – formerly with The Surfariis) and Don Conkra (drums). Conkra was ousted before long and replaced with the Swiss-born drummer, Alban "Snoopy" Pfisterer. The band was soon obliged to change their name from The Grass Roots on hearing that another American band had this name: the pop group signed to Dunhill Records and best remembered for its classic 1967 hit, *Let's Live for Today*.

Love made their live debut at LA's Brave New World diner in the northern-hemisphere spring of 1965. Here, the band started building a small cult following with their idiosyncratic sound that drew some of its inspiration from the jangly folk-rock sound, as typified by The Byrds, fused with some mischievous garage-band punk attitude, as well as the mid-1960s

sounds of The British Invasion groups and the soul and R&B tones of Atlantic-Motown-Stax soulsters like James Brown. By now, Lee and, to a lesser extent, Maclean had amassed enough original songs to consider the possibility of recording their first Love album.

The fledgling West Coast folk label owned by Jac Holzman, Elektra Records, signed Love in 1965 as its first rock act and recording sessions began for the band's eponymous debut album. Produced by Jac Holzman and Mark Abramson, *Love* would become one of the watershed albums of 1966, along with The Beatles' *Revolver*, The Rolling Stones' *Aftermath*, The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde*, The Byrds' *Fifth Dimension*, The Thirteenth Floor Elevators' *The Psychedelic Sounds of ...*, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention's *Freak Out*, The Kinks' *Face to Face* and The Yardbirds' eponymous album.

The *Love* standout tracks included Lee's quirky, drug-tinged *Signed DC*, as well as a dark, brooding rendition of the Burt Bacharach-Hal David song, *My Little Red Book*, which is said to have offended Bacharach. The album also featured a rendition of the much-covered Billy Roberts song, *Hey Joe*. *Love* went on to sell about 150,000 copies, mostly in the USA. In 1966, Love also enjoyed a residency at Bido Lito in Hollywood, among other rock venues in the greater LA area, including the legendary Whiskey-a-Go-Go, which also had been a musical home to the likes of The Byrds and The Doors.

After the release of *Love* in September 1966, Lee moved drummer Pfisterer to keyboards and introduced a new drummer, Michael Stuart. He also hired Tjay Cantrelli to play flute and saxophone. This line-up entered the studio in 1966 and recorded the band's promising second album, *Da Capo*, which was released in February 1967. The highlight tracks included the band's biggest hit, *7 and 7 Is*, as well as *Orange Skies*, *She Comes in Colours*, *The Castle* and *Stephanie Knows Who*, the last of which was later covered by the English Midlands band, The Move. The album's second side featured a bold experiment for the period – a 20-minute song, *Revelation*, an adventurous, but only partially conceived piece of music.

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Ironically, *Love's* 1967 *Forever Changes* masterpiece was recorded while the band was disintegrating and barely communicating with one another.
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The great turning point

Pfisterer and Cantrelli left the band in 1967 before writing and recording sessions commenced for *Love's* defining masterpiece, *Forever Changes*. Explored in more detail on page five, *Forever Changes* was produced by Arthur Lee with Bruce Botnick at LA's

Sunset Sound Recorders studios over seven scattered, but intense recording sessions during June, August and September 1967. This would prove to be *Love's* masterpiece – and the one for which they will be best remembered for decades to come.

Despite the critical acclaim that greeted *Forever Changes* on both sides of the Atlantic, Lee decided that his band could not cut it any more, so Echols, Maclean and company were dismissed and a new line-up formed. Their sacking, sadly, signalled the first death knell for the spirit of *Love* – and subsequent incarnations of the band would not even come close to emulating the songs and the sounds that shaped *Forever Changes*.

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After *Forever Changes*, Lee's songwriting and vision lacked creative edge.
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The low road

The new *Love* featured Jay Donellan (guitar), Frank Fayad (bass) and George Suranovitch (drums). These musicians were joined by a handful of session musicians, including English drummer, Drachen Theaker, formerly with The Crazy World of Arthur Brown, and guitarist Gary Rowles. This line-up recorded two albums in 1969: the tolerably good *Four Sail* (Elektra; released in November 1969) and the erratic and disappointing double album, *Out Here* (Blue Thumb; released in May 1970).

Infamous for their dogged attachment to LA, *Love* – with Donellan replaced by Rowles – ventured to the United Kingdom for a short tour. While in England, Lee collaborated with his friend, Jimi Hendrix, and recorded an album. For contractual reasons, the album was not released, but one of its songs, *The Everlasting First*, was used on the sixth *Love* album, 1971's disappointingly flat outing, *False Start* (Blue Thumb; released in January 1971). This song, one of the more spiritually hued ones of the Lee oeuvre, bemoaned the loss of Jesus Christ and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Lee then disbanded *Love* and entered the studio in LA to record a lacklustre solo album, *Vindicator*, which was released in August 1972 under the moniker of Arthur Lee and Band Aid (A&M Records). By this stage, wider interest in Lee as a songwriter, bandleader and spokesperson had waned considerably and he would have to wait until the 1990s before there was any resurgence of interest in his art.

In 1973, Lee signed with a new West Coast label, Buffalo Records, created by Paul Rothchild, a key member of the early Elektra family in LA. Lee recorded another solo album, but it was not released due to Buffalo Records being beset by financial problems. After the Buffalo saga, Lee returned in 1974 with a fresh incarnation of *Love* comprising John Sterling and Melvan Whittington (guitars),

Sherwood Akuna / Robert Rozelle (bass) and Joe Blocker (drums). Augmented with session guitarists Buzzy Feiten and Harvey Mandel, this incarnation of Love recorded in 1974 another disappointing album, the soul/R&B-styled *Reel to Real* (RSO Records; released in January 1975). The band, in a revised form, toured the UK and then disbanded.

Lee, Maclean and a few musicians gathered in 1978 to tour and record a live album, *Love Live*, which was released either in 1981 or 1982 by Rhino Records. By now, however, Lee had become a shadow of his former self due mostly to the setbacks of alcoholism and drug abuse, which sapped his diminishing writing and performing talents.

Little information seems to be easily accessible on Lee's 1980s, but, according to Wikipedia, Lee once said: "I was gone for a decade. I went back to my old neighbourhood to take care of my father, who was dying of cancer. I was tired of signing autographs. I was tired of being bullshitted out of my money ... I just got tired."

A brief, ineloquent and unfinished Lee autobiography surfaced in 1982.

In 1981, he released a self-titled solo album on the then up-and-coming British alternative-rock label, Beggars Banquet. Aside from Lee originals, *Arthur Lee* featured covers of Jimmy Cliff's *Many Rivers to Cross* and The Bobette's *Mr Lee*. A year later, archive material was culled to produce another exploitive Love compilation album, *Studio/Live* (MCA).

Around this time, Lee devoted some time to writing his memoirs, or biography, with the help of a typist, Chris Boyle. At least one copy of Lee's brief, unfinished biography, dated 1982, fell into the hands of a journalist. Extracts from this manuscript were recently published by *Classic Rock* (October 2006) in the UK, but carry little weight and provide little insight or interest.

The first comeback

In the earlier 1990s, he spent some time touring with younger bands, including Baby Lemonade, The High Llamas and Shack, as part of an effort to stage a comeback and restore at least some of his lost popularity. Baby Lemonade with Lee toured the USA promoting the Love tribute album, *We're All Normal and We Want Our Freedom*, in 1994.

In the earlier 1990s, Lee was also diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Towards the end of 1996, he was arrested and sentenced to 12 years in prison for the illegal possession of a firearm and threatening to shoot a neighbour. He was sentenced on California's three-strikes-and-you're-out ruling, having been arrested and charged for two previous felonies.

While incarcerated in California, Lee wrote periodically to Elektra Records' Jac Holzman, asking for lists of things. Some of these, including a guitar, were for Lee's direct benefit, while other items were deemed goods to be used for trading on the inside. Sadly, while in prison, two members from the definitive Love line-up died: Bryan Maclean and Ken Forssi.

He served almost six years and, after his release in December 2001, made a triumphant comeback in 2002 and 2003, touring the USA, Europe and Australia with a new incarnation of Love, playing to both older and new fans. Most of his tours focused on playing *Forever Changes*, track by track, to highly appreciative audiences.

These sessions led to the releases in 2003 of the Love with Arthur Lee album, *Love: The Forever Changes Concert* (Snapper). He also released a single in 2003, *Girl on Fire* with *Midnight Sun*, on Distortion Records.

Arthurian sojourn

Arthur Lee and Love played at Glastonbury in the UK in the summer of 2003 and returned to the legendary Arthurian town a year later, this time to play in a smaller part of the Glastonbury arena (the Acoustic Bands Tent). He went on to play some other key British dates during the first half of the Noughties, including London gigs at Shepherd's Bush and The Royal Festival Hall. For a while, he was accompanied by John Echols from the glory days of Love.

In 2004, he received a Living Legend Award at the 2004 NME Awards. His more cheerful face again appeared in British and American rock magazines and, for a short while, fans hoped Arthur might just surprise us by having one final crack at rock glory by cutting another superlative album. Sadly, we shall have to live with *Forever Changes* as our primary reminder of Arthur Lee's once glorious talents.

After his release from prison in December 2001, Lee revived interest in Love's earlier music, notably *Forever Changes*.

Arthur Lee was diagnosed with leukaemia in February 2006 and benefit concerts were organised for him in June, but, within two months – despite aggressive treatment, including chemotherapy and a bone-marrow transplant – he moved on to higher ground. He is survived by his wife of three decades, Diane, and some of the finest rock songs written and released between 1966 and 1972. ■

Forever Changes

Inside the weird, kaleidoscopic mind of a fringe visionary



Release date: November 1967 (USA) and February 1968 (UK)

Label: Elektra Records (EKS-74013)

Recording studio: Sunset Sound Recorders, Hollywood, CA, USA

Producers: Arthur Lee with (engineer) Bruce Botnick

Cover art: Bob Pepper

The musicians: Arthur Lee (vocals and guitar), Bryan Maclean (vocals and guitar), John Echols (guitar), Ken Forssi (bass) and Michael Stuart (drums) with session musicians including Hal Blaine (drums), Bud Brisbois, Roy Caton and Ollie Mitchell (trumpets), Carol Kaye (bass), Richard Leith (trombone) and Billy Strange (guitar) with David Angel as arranger and an eight-piece string section.

The songs: *Alone Again Or* (Bryan Maclean), *A House is Not a Motel*, *Andmoregain*, *The Daily Planet*, *Old Man* (Maclean), *The Red Telephone*, *Maybe the People Would be the Times or between Clark and Hilldale*, *Live and Let Live*, *The Good Humor Man He Sees Everything Like This*, *Bummer in the Summer* and *You Set the Scene* (standard 1967 edition) **plus**

seven bonus tracks for the deluxe edition of 2001: *Hummingbirds* (demo), *Wonder People (I Do Wonder)* (outtake), *Alone Again Or* (alternate mix), *You Set the Scene* (alternate mix), *Your Mind and We Belong Together* and *Laughing Stock*. All songs written by Arthur Lee unless otherwise denoted in brackets.

Background: Most of *Forever Changes* was written in the hilltop home of Lee and Love, The Castle, high up on Lookout Mountain, far enough away from the humdrum of downtown Los Angeles. Here, at The Castle, Lee was a prolific writer – and wrote a significant percentage of what he once claimed was an oeuvre extending beyond 1,000 songs. Fellow guitarist and singer, the late Bryan Maclean, wrote two beautiful songs for the album, *Alone Again Or* and *Old Man*.

When the final Love recording sessions were completed to Lee's satisfaction, arranger David Angel was brought into Sunset Sound Recorders to add the final flourishes, using an eight-piece string section featuring violins, a cello and other classical strings. The final tracks, according to late bassist, Ken Forssi, were mixed in one, intensive, 17-hour session.

Almost 40 years on, Love's perennial psychedelic album from late 1967, *Forever Changes*, remains a subtle, offbeat, enchanting and seductive album – one of the finest albums ever written and recorded since the birth of rock 'n roll.

Going back to the heady, lysergic-tinged days of the later 1960s and early 1970s, *Forever Changes* was – and will always be – a landmark album in the same vein as The Beatles' *Revolver*, Bob Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited*, The Jimi Hendrix Experience's *Electric Ladyland* and Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks*. For many rock critics and enthusiasts, *Forever Changes* is an essential album – an indispensable part of any definitive Top 200 rock-album collection.

What makes this album so remarkable is knowing that the band was disintegrating and enduring strained relations after the success of the two previous albums and the day-to-day grind of living together and playing so many sweaty gigs in LA, as well as San Francisco. Here, one is reminded, 10 years later, of the best post-Peter Green album made by Fleetwood Mac. Amid crumbling relationships, emotional upheaval and financial uncertainty, they went on to record and release the irresistibly great *Rumours* (1977).

Awkward beginnings

In finalising material for recording *Forever Changes* in mid-1967, Lee originally envisaged himself and Maclean each recording their own songs and then using session musicians to complete the backing tracks. Hence, The Wrecking Crew being recruited to record the backing tracks for two songs during the first recording session in June 1967 under the

production guidance of Neil Young, then with Buffalo Springfield.

Lee later admitted in interviews that money earned from the first two Love albums' royalties had spoilt the band and satiated their hunger to make any more great music. The first session with The Wrecking Crew (Hal Blaine, Carol Kaye and Billy Strange) had provided the wakeup call Love needed to rekindle their passion before proficient session musicians hijacked their talents and royalties.

Forever Changes remains one of the most unusual and original albums of its time and today it remains a seminal work, reaching out to touch and influence a new generation of songwriters and bands. While it is starting to age, *Forever Changes* has dated remarkably well compared with some of the other definitive rock albums of 1967. In some respects, one tends to cringe when listening to the likes of Pink Floyd's *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, Traffic's *Mr Fantasy* or The Rolling Stones' *On Their Satanic Majesties Request* today.

Last great Love album

Recorded in intermittent bursts at Los Angeles' Sunset Sound Recorders studios over seven intensive sessions in June, August and September 1967 under the direction of Arthur Lee, as the principal writer (nine of the 11 final mastered tracks), *Forever Changes* is the type of rare, beautifully written and performed album most rock bands can only dream of making, but never quite finding the muse and the subject matter, the environment and the blend of enthusiasm, talent and dedication to cut such a precious aural jewel.

Forever Changes is a kaleidoscopic work of multiple moods and images and enchantingly subtle contrasts.

Sadly, Love's much-admired third album would be their last great work – and the one for which they will be most eulogised as the history of rock continues to unfold.

Forever Changes is a light, soft, meandering sonic adventure into an unsettling, twilight world of bittersweet and often paradoxical and vexing musings and meditations of a largely enigmatic type. It is a deft, heart-felt and sometimes bizarre fusion of folk and rock with subtle psychedelic highlights, flamenco guitars, simple, yet urgent, drumming and the sweet strains of strings augmented by occasional Mariachi-style trumpet flourishes.

At once, *Forever Changes* is cohesive and fluid, yet also eclectic and unsettling. It is a kaleidoscopic work of multiple moods and images and enchantingly subtle contrasts.

At the height of hippie naïveté and indulgence, Lee appeared, at the age of 22, to be sensing some impending doom, including his own premature death.

Lee was wholly in control of his songwriting talents – and it shows in the fluid and wonderful melodies he wrote and arrangements he directed. To add to his creative high, the remaining four members of Love were brought back in line after months of indolence and disenchantment to reawaken their innermost passion – and play with inspired fervour as if they already knew this would be their final album as Lee, Echols, Forssi, Maclean and Stuart.

This is significant because Lee was acutely aware that Love had to build its credibility around songwriting and the fine delivery on compelling song ideas because none of the individual members was an instrumental star in the sense of guitarist Jimi Hendrix, Nice keyboardist, Keith Emerson, Cream bassist, Jack Bruce, or Who drummer, Keith Moon.

Avoiding psychedelic clichés

Whereas other greater bands of the time were starting to trade on their instrumental prowess, as did The Nice, Cream, Traffic, Procol Harum, Jefferson Airplane and The Yardbirds, Lee and company kept their music to the sincere basics of deft writing, subtle arrangements and understated performances. There are no prolonged guitar solos, no distinctive drum breaks and no gut-tugging bass riffs on *Forever Changes*. In fact, there is barely any electric guitar as Lee and Maclean adhere mostly to simple acoustic guitar rhythms with subtle flourishes. Electric guitar and keyboard motifs were pared to subdued essentials.

Going further, Lee and company had the intuitive good sense to dispense with most of the more obvious and florid aural tricks of the day. To *Forever Changes'* credit, the album is devoid of indulgent mellotron atmospherics, dope-humour concrete sounds and hysterical screeches, backward tapes, fairytale-like reciting, goofy stoner platitudes, multitracked vocal harmonies, excessive reverb and exotic instruments such as the sitar, tabla, koto or dulcimer.

At the height of hippie naïveté and indulgence, Lee appeared to be sensing some impending doom and, at the time, was convinced he was about to die and that this would be his swansong at the age of 22. Even today, 39 years later, *Forever Changes* is a paradoxical and dichotomous work of art – a rare album that sounds like the final, happy-sad acid-fest before Mother Earth succumbs to the final pangs of a post-nuclear fallout.

By far the dominant spirit on the album, with his commanding voice and lucidly enunciated lyrics,

Arthur Lee is at once cheerful, witty, adorable, carefree and optimistic, and yet also sardonic, aloof, concerned and dejected. We sense his belief in, or quest for, something higher or greater than himself as a mere mortal – a superficial willingness to love and embrace people, and dance on sunbeams or something else of poetic significance. Yet, we also sense, more keenly, a wounded loner, a strange, disenchanted visionary, pining and pondering from an elevated platform on the fringes of the counterculture, wondering if anything at all makes sense or has meaning in his deeply private and personal world.

Lee's arcane realms

Even more compelling today are the album's lyrics, which tended to be overshadowed in the past by the majestic music. Listening to Lee afresh today, one cannot help knowing he was a prophet in the biblical sense of the word. Listening to many of his lines, and some of his subtle wordplay, one travels back in time and pictures Lee aloft in The Castle, using solitude, lysergic acid and a peculiar open-mindedness to teleport himself to another dimension of transcendental imagery and symbols. It seems as if Lee had penetrated an arcane world accessed by a rare cluster of shaman, metaphysical poets, existential philosophers, and hermetic mystics and prophets.

I do not think Lee deliberated over his role of being a contrarian, or any sort of anti-counterculturalist. Nor do I believe he was smug and manipulative enough to indulge in inscrutable thoughts and image for the sake of a dark hipness. Nor do I believe he pretended to be a brilliant polemicist. He merely had the gift, time and freedom to travel to hitherto untraversed realms – and to return to terra firma with his visions and insights encoded in concise stream-of-consciousness lyrics set against beautifully pared melodies with unorthodox and enchanting structures.

This is an interesting aspect of *Forever Changes*: the melodies are keen, fluid and instantly recognisable as love at their best. But try to hum or whistle a *Forever Changes* tune after playing the album, and you will appreciate the subtle cleverness of the song structures and arrangements.

Lee's lyrics shape-shift from one verse and one song to the next in delicate and intelligent forms, portraying an inspired artist who is at once saddened, sarcastic, sardonic, surreal, solemn, sanctified, suppressed and so much more in a world where he feels genuinely eccentric, if not misplaced and even downright paranoid. We sense not only his disgust for the Flower Power generation, as well as The System, but also his outrage over the entire human malaise, past and present.

There are moments when listening to Lee's singing and lyrics when one conjures images of some of history's darkest and most challenging poets, philosophers and thinkers. One senses Lee trying to cut through what the Hindus call *maya*, the concrete

realms of worldly illusion, hoping to catch glimpses of transcendental truths and pearls of divine wisdom. There is an interesting nexus between Lee and the so-called counterculturalists of the 1960s. If the beats, hippies and their ilk were calling for the demise of war, excess capitalism, political tyranny, environmental degradation and other severe systemic maladies, then Lee was among a considerably smaller cluster of epicentric visionaries and messiahs who were emphasising the flaws and fancies of the counterculturalists – and therefore the pitfalls along the supposed high road to the neotopian dream of the Beat Generation.

Perhaps, too, in the sense of the doctrinaire libertarian and syncretic prophet, Lee was concerned that the Beat Revolution would merely supersede one bland, imperfect form of systemic uniformity and collective human consciousness with yet another at the expense of sovereign individualism with our hallowed individual rights to responsible freedom of choice within a system of minimal state intervention and moderate law and order. Lee, we sense, foresaw the inherent destructiveness of the hippie ideals and had the courage to be vociferous, even if much of his prophecy was seemingly indecipherable, or even downright disquieting, on a superficial listening.

The radical libertine

In many respects, Arthur Lee was not just an adroit wordsmith and melody writer and a compelling voice with a cool, black-dude image. He, too, was a radical individualist, a free spirit and a raging prophet, despite his outward flaws. It is for such reasons, I believe, that *Forever Changes* had endured as a classic cult album without ever achieving mega-commercial success. The songs are brilliant, the lyrics marvellous and the production superlative – and certainly could hold the light to those of the vast majority of Love's contemporary bands.

I am certain simple commercial statistics will prove a point. The average group sales of the first three albums of other West Coast luminaries, among them The Byrds, The Doors, Jefferson Airplane and The Grateful Dead, must have greatly exceeded the average sales of Love's first three albums. Love lost out not only because Lee was a homebound body who detested touring, but also because his messages, at a subliminal level, at least, were too disconcerting for many of the rock enthusiasts of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

One also senses that Lee could have been a closet mystic, ensconced in more ways than one in his lonely attic room in The Castle up on LA's Lookout Mountain. In a spiritual or transpersonal sense, one catches a glimpse of Lee pondering over the haplessness and tedium of the human malaise as we come back, time and again, on the wheel of birth and death, to pay karmic debts. He senses the potential to reach the other side, another more illuminated and emancipated dimension where ignorance, pain and incarceration are not even concepts or ideas. Yet, he feels futile in his solitary human condition, knowing he lacks the skills, knowledge and power to

walk freely upon the illuminated path of emancipation.

This may be one of the reasons, deep inside, why Arthur Lee shunned crowds, avoided the media and, to some exceptional degree, kept himself alone, aloof and addicted to alcohol and drugs. He was not, in a conventional sense, a misanthrope, or a psychotic crazy, or an amoral punk, or misguided rock 'n roll fool. Instead, I believe, Arthur Lee was an inspired and visionary artist ahead of his time in ways similar to the great Dutch expressionist, Vincent van Gogh. Take a leap back in time and play *Forever Changes*, repeatedly, listening to one remarkable Lee verse after another.

Genius defies market opportunities

Perhaps someone who knew him better than most should have the final thoughts on the man. In the liner notes to the expanded edition of *Forever Changes* (2001), Jac Holzman (Elektra Records' founder and guiding light, who supervised the original album recording sessions) reflected:

"Arthur was, and perhaps still is, one of the smartest, most intelligent and finest musicians I have ever met in my entire career of making records. As large as his talent, however, was his penchant for isolation and not doing what was necessary to bring his music to the audience. His isolation cost him his career. Which was a shame, because he was one of the few geniuses I have met – in all of rock 'n rolldom."

Other views on *Forever Changes*

"The continuing deep affection for this gem is no fluke. Its universal appeal to rock critics earns its position even though total sales have yet to exceed a million. The enigmatic Arthur Lee created the perfect hippie album, with joyous acoustic melodies, strings and occasional biting guitars," **Colin Larkin** from his book, *All-Time Top 1,000 Albums* (Virgin, 2000).

"... full of bizarre juxtapositions, perceptual tricks, multiple-viewpoint lyrics, lightning fast, almost schizoid changes of mood and topic, the personal fusing with the universal. ... Its greatness lies in its very equipoise between light and dark: heaven and hell enacted over 45 minutes," **Jon Savage**.

"*Forever Changes* is a light classic from the late psychedelic era. ... the music has an exotic frothiness and the string settings are among the most gorgeous in rock history," **Dave Marsh** in the second edition of *The Rolling Stone Album Guide* (Random House, 1983).

"This album saw the fullest exposition of Lee's warped vision of the world in a literate, poetic, philosophical body of lyrics. Musically, too, *Forever Changes* was decidedly ambitious. Driven by a light,

but powerful rhythm, the sweet orchestrations contrasted sharply with Lee's stark lyrics and John Echols' savage guitar solos," **Mick Houghton**, from *The Rock Primer*, edited by John Collis (Penguin, 1980).

"*Forever Changes* may be 36-years-old at the time of this writing, but its hermetic fusion of the personal and the political feels more relevant than ever. It speaks to the present in ways that, say, a Jefferson Airplane record never could, whatever the parallels between the late '60s and our contemporary morass. For unlike most rock musicians of his time, Arthur Lee was one member of the '60s counterculture who didn't buy flower-power wholesale, who intuitively understood that letting the sunshine in wouldn't instantly vaporize the world's (or his own) dark stuff. For him, the glittering surface of the Age of Aquarius obscured an undertow of impending doom," **Andrew Hultkrans**, from his pocketbook, *Forever Changes* (Continuum, 2003).

"A psychedelic masterpiece with neither lengthy jams nor studio wizardry; folk-rock with scant hint of protest or sweet harmonies: *Forever Changes* is an enigma wrapped in a web of contradictions – which hasn't harmed its impeccable cult credentials one bit," from the third edition of **The Mojo Collection: The Ultimate Music Companion**, edited by Jim Irvin and Colin McLearn (Canongate, 2003).

"On *Forever Changes*, Lee wrote and sang some of the most luscious melodies this side of the vintage Bee Gees – check out *Andmoregain* – butted against apocalyptic visions of what lay beyond the Summer of Love, as on *The Red Telephone* with its prophetic lyrics ...," from **Rolling Stone** Online, 2006 (www.rollingstone.com) (Washburn).

"Nothing on *Forever Changes* is what it seems and, if Lee's acid wisdom is compelling, it is also frightening, the negative image of vulnerable psyche driven insane by too much pain," **Matt Cibula** and **Jesse Fahnstock** from the online magazine, *Ink Blot*.

Forever Changes ratings

12 out of 1,000 in the third edition of Colin Larkin's *All-Time Top 1,000 Albums* (Virgin, 2000). The album was ranked 32 in the first edition of 1994 and 40 in the second edition of 1998.

10/10 by Martin Strong in the sixth edition of *The Great Rock Discography* (Canongate, 2002).

★★★★½ (standard 11-track version) and ★★★★★ (18-track deluxe edition) by Paul Evans in the fourth edition of *The Rolling Stone Album Guide* (Fireside, 2004).

★★★★★ by Dave Marsh in the second edition of *The Rolling Stone Album Guide* (1983).

The Love and Arthur Lee discography

Love: *Love* (Elektra; 1966) ★★
Love: *Da Capo* (Elektra, 1967) ★★
Love: *Forever Changes* (Elektra, 1967) ★★
Love: *Four Sail* (Elektra, 1969) ★
Love: *Love Revisited* (Elektra, 1970) [C] ★★
Love: *Out Here* (Blue Thumb/EMI Harvest, 1970)
Love: *False Start* (Blue Thumb/EMI Harvest, 1971)
Arthur Lee and Band Aid: *Vindicator* (A&M, 1972)
Love: *Love Masters* (Elektra, 1973) [C] ★★
Love: *Reel to Real* (RSO, 1975)
Love: *The Best of Love* (Rhino, 1980) [C] ★★
Love: *Love Live* (Rhino, 1981/1982?)
Arthur Lee: *Arthur Lee* (Beggars Banquet, 1981)
Love: *Golden Archive* (Rhino, 1982) [C]
Love: *Studio/Live* (MCA, 1982) [C]
Love: *Out There* (Big Beat, 1988) [C]
Arthur Lee and Love: *Arthur Lee and Love* (New Rose, 1992)
Love: *Comes in Colours* (Raven, 1993) [C] ★★
Love: *Love Story, 1966-1972* (Rhino, 1995) [C] ★★
Love: *Forever Changes* (expanded and remastered) (Rhino, 2001) ★★
Love: *The Best of Love* (label unknown, 2003) [C]
Love with Arthur Lee: *Love: The Forever Changes Concert* (Snapper, 2003) ★★

[C] denotes **compilation** album

Arthur Lee's unreleased 1973 album for Buffalo Records, *Black Beauty*, is said to have been available in bootleg form.

Forever Changes artwork

Illustrator Bob Pepper painted the main artwork for the front cover of *Forever Changes* in watercolours in a psychedelized rendering of the five Love members' faces in a mock resemblance to the presidential faces carved in one of the granite faces of Mount Rushmore in the USA. Some people believe it was inspired by the shape of the African continent.

The back-cover photograph of the band was taken at Lee's LA home by Ronnie Haran.

Love and Lee trivia

- Lee went bald prematurely and had a fetish for wearing wigs.
- Neil Young, originally, was commissioned to produce the *Forever Changes* sessions, but quit after the first recording session in June 1967.
- The band, some suggested, should have been called Hate – and not Love – because Lee and company were irreverent towards the love-and-peace cause.
- Lee was a devoted vegetarian.
- At the height of hippiedom, when sandals, moccasins and Chelsea boots were in vogue, Lee had a penchant for wearing army boots – one laced and the other unlaced.

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For David E, and Irene and Bruce P ... with gratitude