

The electric kool-aid acid tests by tom wolfe

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For people today Ken Kesey's magical journey on the Further Bus and the stories of his band of mischievous Merry Pranksters are major cultural and social turning points during the late 1960's psychedelic era. Hollywood adapts these stories to film over and over again; the latest example being the new release "Across the Universe" where a group of college age kids during the 1960's take a trip across the country on the "Beyond Bus," an obvious representation of the Further Bus.

The Merry Pranksters were not just crazed tripped out drug fiends; contrary to some popular belief. These kids were honors students, enrolled in high level academics. The book by Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests*, sets the stage in Kesey's Perry Lane abode where he meets some of the first Merry Pranksters. Ken had come to Parry Lane not with the intent of going on a decade(s) long LSD journey, but with the intent on furthering his academics after receiving a Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship to enroll in creative writing at Stanford. He was already an accomplished student and writer before ever smoking his first joint. Neil Cassidy, Carolyn Adams, Wavy Gravy, Paul Krassner...these weren't your run of the mill, hedonistic drug abusing kids, these were gifted and talented writers and scholars who went on to contribute amazing works and efforts in their later years. They saw revolutionary social change in the enlightenment they experienced with LSD. They went out into world intent on sparking a movement; a movement which was very successful.

Tom Wolfe was a conservative man, and did not partake in the acid tests himself. This put him on the outside of the psychedelic mindset and though

he writes with a colorful and involved style. He put himself as the narrator right in the middle of what was happening even though he did not actually ride the bus or experience what those people did. Regardless, his re-creation of the famous stories is legend and has earned him a most respectable title as a founder and pioneer of “ new journalism.” I believe that Wolfe had a heartfelt connection, as many of us do, with Kesey and the Merry Pranksters and through his research and many first person accounts he was able to understand enough of their state-of-mind to portray himself as a medium between their world and what he describes as “ the outside world.”

There is an interview about the book *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* with Ken Kesey and Jerry Garcia of *The Grateful Dead* by Tom Snyder in which they state that they believe they started a revolution which is still happening today. Tom Wolfe captured that revolution and gave it to the world in a safe paperback vessel through which we could all hop on the bus and go for a trip. I think it is evident through the generations of amazing music, writing, and art that has been inspired by Ken Kesey and his LSD induced revelations that he made one of the biggest contributions to American culture we've seen today. Without the parading of the Merry Pranksters and the scattering of LSD we may have never discovered the undeniable connection between music and psychedelic drugs that many artists have exemplified. *The Grateful Dead*, *The Beatles*, *Janice Joplin*, *The Mamas and the Papas*...I could go on but the point is that all of these musicians and more have made mention of psychedelic drug use and how it contributed to their ability to create art.

Indeed Ken Kesey and his band of Merry Pranksters will be remembered

forever as the revolutionaries and philosophers that they were and indeed Tom Wolfe captured their story in a timeless masterpiece.

References

Tom Wolfe. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. New York: Bantam Books, 1968
You Tube. Added 4/11/2007. Interview with Ken Kesey and Jerry Garcia by Tom Snyder. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_ICMpJzxBM)