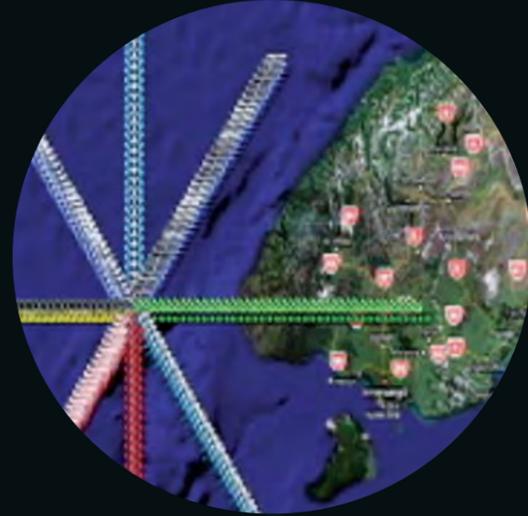
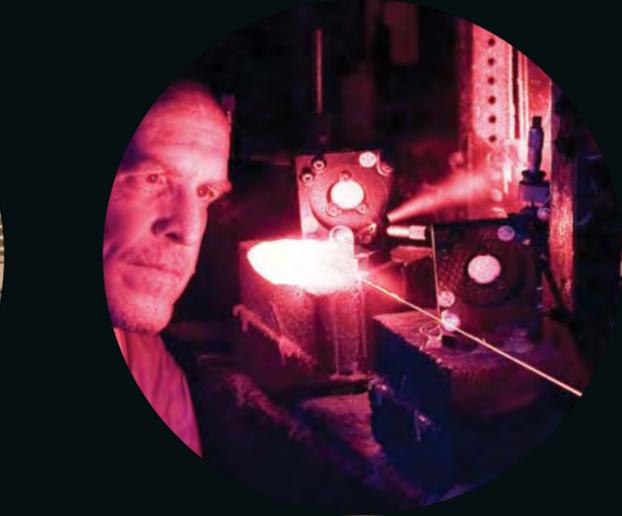
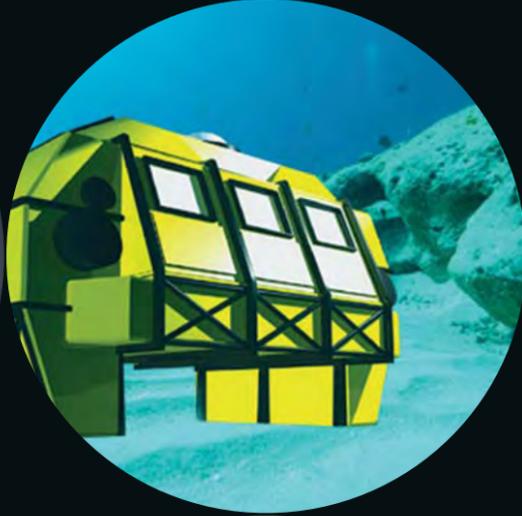


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Taken at the last-ever gig by the Jam in Brighton, 1982, this lovely snap shows one of the Woodford mods happily bearing the results of being hit in the face with a hammer. Photo by Tony Matthews.

VOLUME 17 NUMBER 8

Cover photo by John Michaels

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EMA

EMA hails from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, a factoid she has a hard time keeping to herself. Next time you talk to her, keep track of how often she says “Mount Rushmore,” “Sturgis,” or “Lieutenant Governor Dennis Daugaard.” We get it: All they do in South Dakota is drink and listen to Danzig. It’s great. We all get it. EMA is currently the most beloved substitute teacher in all of West Oakland. Her work in Gowns (and new band AWE) makes her inclusion in this issue a tad hypocritical on our part—for as much shit as she talks on touring, she still seems to do enough of it. Must be all that ethanol in the Midwest’s beer supply.

See KEEPING IT BLEAK, page 32



Photo by Noelle Burke

NEIL BURKE

Neil Burke was raised in Newton, New Jersey, and graduated from Newton High, where he was once suspended for calling a teacher “horse dick.” Over the course of his adult life, Neil has worked as a cabbie, cartographer, garbage man, and nightclub doorman. He’s not too proud to admit that he was once arrested at a Wendy’s in northern Ohio. Perhaps you know of Neil as a guy who cofounded Men’s Recovery Project in 1994. But are you also aware of his first-class artwork and screen-printing services, available through monoroid.com? “Paint me to be a hero that someone would want to send money to,” explains Burke, 41.

See A READER & WRITER’S GUIDE TO READING WRITING ABOUT MUSIC, page 86



Photo by Noelle Burke

JOHN MICHAELS

John Michaels was raised in Newton, NJ, and attended Newton High, where vice principle Kenneth Hart once referred to him as “an asshole and a ying yang” for clapping in approval to a Neil Young lyric about “getting high” during a teen arts festival. He lived in SF for the ’89 quake, NYC for 9/11, and NOLA during Katrina, so if you see him in your town, relax (when has lightning struck four times?). Perhaps you know of John as the guy who saved Men’s Recovery Project in 2000. But were you also aware of his stunning photography, viewable at johnmichaelsphotography.com? “I had several run-ins with Kenneth Hart,” Michaels reports. “Anything you can come up with to disparage that fucker would be great.”

See MUSICIANS, page 94



TARA TAVI

A native Marylander, Tara Tavi moved to Southern California in the early 80s. She’s also lived in Paris, sat next to Linda Hamilton and Gina Schock on two separate flights, and worked as Pizza Girl on a Da Lench Mob video shoot (in which Ice Cube warned an associate to “watch out” because “that chick’s into voodoo”). In 1998, Tara traveled China for ten months on a research grant, covering the umpteen thousand square miles between Beijing, Tibet, the Afghanistan border, and Inner Mongolia. She plays hammer dulcimer the way Venus Williams hits backhand. Her paintings, sculptures, and altered books are all on display at taratavi.com. Oh yeah, she’s also been a kindergarten teacher for 14 years. When’s the last time you did *anything* for 14 years? Thought so.

See KEEPING IT BLEAK, page 32



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RICK FROBERG

Because of this theme's issue, it's not really our place to mention the half-dozen offensively awesome bands Rick has played guitar and/or sang for. It is our place to mention his talent as both a freehand and a vector graphics illustrator. The problem here is that it is very hard to discuss the latter without discussing the former. In particular, the galling, maddening, brain-twisting *unfairness* of it all. Here's a tip, Rick: The phrase is "Do one thing, and do it well." NOT "Do several things, and do them so exceptionally that it makes everyone else feel chintzy". It's like if Neil Armstrong became the singer of Devo, cured AIDS, and married Rosario Dawson. It simply isn't fair.

See ALL MUSIC IS SHIT TO GOD, page 114



DESTROYER THE CAT

There was a Destroyer in 1980s Albany, New York, so it seemed like a funny idea to pass the mantle to this little guy when he showed up two years ago. Big mistake. There's nothing funny about this trembling fatty, for whom a chair leg scraping the floor might as well be the Archangel Gabriel trumpeting the earth's explosion. Christ, what a weenis. But fair's fair. Destroyer was also on deck (lap) for at least 5,000 words of this issue. Also, he's got twice as many toes as a normal cat. Just last week an eighth toe was discovered in his many folds of pad fat, and it's a disgusting little chicken-wing mutation that looks like the remains of a subsumed Siamese twin. I guess that explains some of the shame.

See THIS ENTIRE ISSUE



Photo courtesy of NASA

SATELLITE #400,634

Much of the work on this issue required hours-long, filibuster-laden telephone discussions between the guest editor and the editor in chief. For these bicoastal conferences, we relied on good old S-4-Hundo, as we lovingly came to call him. Originally commissioned by the Soviets during the Cuban Missile Crisis, this tough little hunk of hardware still travels the heavens today. He's a little the worse for wear, sure, but that only makes him cuter, like the beat-up, Slim Pickens-voiced robot BOB in Disney's *The Black Hole* (1979). How could you not love that guy? And did S-4-Hundo sometimes have a circuit fart and patch an obscure spy-channel transmission into our fevered talk of comma placements and moral obligations? Sure. But that just added character. Besides, who hasn't wanted to hear the Russian Woodpecker firsthand? We always did, and now we can confirm that it's still out there. Perhaps that explains the Slavic-looking gentlemen in ill-fitting Hugo Boss suits who have recently been lurking outside our homes. Who's to say?

See, again, THIS ENTIRE ISSUE



ALEX SEARS

Alex, one of the new interns around our office, loves classical music. In sixth grade, she pasted pictures of Mozart photocopied from her mom's *World Book* collection onto the inside of her Trapper Keeper. Then she'd sneak peeks at him during pre-algebra. In high school she traveled to South Carolina as her academic decathlon's classical-music expert, scoring a resounding win after answering "OPERA BUFFA" to a question she no longer remembers. Tchaikovsky makes her want to rip her fingernails out almost as much as Debussy makes her want to have a dance party. She thinks Brooklyn Rider's newest Debussy tribute album is just sublime. Her biggest regret is not having taken voice lessons, but she makes up for it by recording operatic renditions of Candlebox songs and posting them on YouTube. Anyway, she was a huge help with this month's music reviews. Thanks, Alex. Sorry that we took all of your carefully thought-out, intelligently written opinions, turned off our brains, and rewrote them as idiots.

See REVIEWS, page 110



Here's some advice for anyone pondering guest-editing the Anti-Music Issue of a magazine in the future: Don't tell anyone else what you're doing. It'll just complicate things. Here's how it will work. You'll say, "Hey, I'm guest-editing an Anti-Music Issue!" And the person you're talking with say, "'Anti-Music'? What does that mean?" And you will suddenly discover that your theme is a remarkably hard thing to communicate.

If you persist in explaining, you'll encounter another, even less comfortable phenomenon: the Breakthrough. The person you're talking to will suddenly "get it." Their eyes will glaze over and they'll look past your shoulder and they will deliver an impassioned monologue. This may involve: bit rates, blogs, compact-disc prices, compact-disc manufacturing, covers, cronyism, dilettantes, foppish haircuts, poseurs, public fickleness, oblivious youth, overcompression, neo-jam bands, political posturing, rap jerks, reunions, thwarted reunions, too little file sharing, too much file sharing, and/or Vampire Weekend. The only consensus will be that—like the education system and those fat cats in DC—"something" is drastically wrong. But no two people will have the same definition of what that something is.

That's the bad news. The good news is you'll have this issue of *Vice* to guide you. And, of course, if you're guest-editing an Anti-Music Issue of some magazine in the not-so-near future, you'll have bigger things to worry about (nano-assassins, Tube Foot, global famine). At which point this issue will still be something nice to read in the bomb shelter.

Either way, enjoy!

Sam MCP

Sam McPheeters ran a record label for 12 years and was in touring bands for 15 years. He lives in California and still grudgingly listens to Slayer.



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Nap(ster) Attack!

Burning Down the Internet's Original Library of Alexandria

INTERVIEWS BY ELLIS JONES

Napster 1.0 was one of the best things that ever happened to the internet. It wasn't just a file-sharing site where college kids stole Snoop Dogg songs. It was more a massive bazaar where anyone could access practically every kind of music ever created. Within months after its launch in the summer of 1999, millions of people around the world were downloading rare artifacts that couldn't be found elsewhere. Even ethnomusicologists were scouring the site for long-lost recordings. For many fans and researchers, Napster was the only portal to releases from legendary labels such as Folkways and Melodiya. And it wasn't just accessible, it was fast as hell.

Of course, record-company executives and high-profile artists were collectively shitting their pants. They saw Napster as the greatest of evils because it was a potential pocket-drainer. They acted on that fear and, ultimately, were the catalyst for the demise of Napster.

But before the downfall there were other artists and individuals who occupied a middle ground. They agreed that Napster encouraged piracy, but they set out to open up a discussion about the future of the music industry and new technologies, and what it all meant to our generation. Ten years later, long after the smoke has cleared, we caught up with a couple of these instigators—John Fix, creator of the notorious Napster cuckoo eggs, and Tyler Stewart, drummer for the, um, Barenaked Ladies.

Vice: Ten years ago you and your brother Michael nested cuckoo eggs—Trojan-style downloads—into Napster. These were nonsense tracks that had the same titles as popular songs, and people would unwittingly download them. You gained notoriety and were featured on CNN and in the *New York Times*, but neither of you was an artist or working in the music industry. Why did you take it upon yourselves to sabotage Napster?

John Fix: When Napster first came out I downloaded it straightaway, but my brother wasn't as enthusiastic. He had a wife, Stephanie, who was trying to make a living as a musician. Napster raised concerns with them that artists weren't being paid through the distribution of their songs. She was like, "Hey, just as I hit my stride, is the whole music industry falling apart?"

Did you share the same sentiments as your brother and his wife? That Napster wasn't just peer-to-peer sharing of music but worldwide piracy?

Well, I was sort of torn. I agreed that there had to be a way to compensate the artists, but the technology was moving so fast at the time that I also realized it was eventually going to catch up.

One of my problems with Napster was that you would find eight different versions of a song and the quality was all over the place—some weren't even the right song at all! People were downloading so many files at once that they never took the time to listen to it all. So I suggested that this could be a way to seed Napster with the music that Stephanie was making. We would take one of her songs and rename it something we thought would have a lot of appeal on Napster, like Bruce Springsteen's "American Skin (41 Shots)."



But on your website you called what you were doing "hactivism." Was there an aspect of doing this purely based on the appeal of hacking a popular program?

Definitely. I had gone to MIT for a couple of years, so I had the background. And in terms of hacking—not stealing credit cards, but just as a harmless prank—it was so easy. You could take any song, rename it whatever you wanted to, and that would be how Napster shared it.

So what were you trying to accomplish?

There wasn't a good business plan for it. More than anything else I'd say my reason for doing this was the hacking value of it, because it was funny. I think Michael's motives were all over the place. He wanted to stop Napster on the one hand, but on the other he wanted to promote his wife's music. So at some point we had a backlash of people saying, "Well, you really don't care about hacking Napster, you're just doing this to promote Stephanie." That's when we started taking legitimate songs, filling the middle section with noise, like a looped cuckoo sound, and then putting the rest of the song back on the end. That changed everything. That's when the *New York Times* contacted us, asking for an interview. As all of this was happening, we realized we needed a website to explain our intentions.

Your website is like something out of *The Matrix*...

That was a default theme and it looked binary, so we just threw it out there.

Were you getting any hate mail?

Of course. We got emails from people who were pissed off and then some from people who thought it was amusing.

Your website also clearly points out that you weren't trying to help the music industry.

We were trying to figure out how to get the money to the artists, and the record companies just seemed to be the bloated middlemen. A couple years after all of this happened there were a number of companies who took our idea, made it into a business model, and sold their services to the record companies. We were ticked off about it.

So in making the cuckoo eggs, you inevitably aided in the record companies' success. Pretty ironic.

Right. But if they're still polluting files, that just challenges hackers out there to create better versions of file sharing. If the record company has to spend all of this money to put these bogus files out there, then they're wasting their own money too.

In retrospect, how do you feel about it?

Well, back then we were just throwing a little more noise into the mix, and at some point we just let it peter out. But, you know, I'd still do it again and this time probably better. I don't think I was trying to bring down Napster as much as I was trying to point out the flaws. By planting the cuckoo eggs I was hoping people would realize that, yeah, once in a while you need to go through the thousands of files on your hard



drive. People weren't doing that. And I think that's the hacker mentality in me, where you realize that the average user doesn't understand the ramifications of what they're doing. If you make it too easy for them, then you're going to have problems. Secondly, I thought doing something like this would get people talking about it and thinking, "Hey, how am I compensating the artist?" I wouldn't have had anybody arrested or sued for file sharing, but I always thought it was a huge can of worms that was opened up with Napster. The technology was moving so quickly that I thought that throwing this monkey wrench into the mix would just slow it down and make everyone stop and fix the problem. And it was pretty easy to fix eventually.

And now, for the first and last time ever, *Vice* talks with a member of the Barenaked Ladies, who actually seem like really nice guys.

Vice: Around 2000 your band released a series of Trojan-style downloads. Instead of users getting what they thought would be your latest single, they were actually downloading an advertisement for your upcoming album *Maroon*. Why?

Tyler Stewart: Well, back in 2000 we were signed to a major label, Reprise Records, and it was their idea.

Really?

Completely. At the time we didn't really know too much about peer sharing. And, quite frankly, we didn't know it was going to be the future of the music business. Obviously, neither did the record companies, and they were caught with their pants down. Those days—2000 and the late 90s—were kind of the height of the record business. We were really smack-dab in the middle of that game. After slogging it out together on the live circuit for ten years, we were gradually building and building. Then we arrived, finally, with millions of records right as Napster came along. Obviously the record label saw this as a threat.

And many artists did as well. Of course Lars Ulrich from Metallica was the most memorable for his ongoing hissy fit and court battle with Napster. Dr. Dre and others soon followed. But you guys weren't necessarily trying to aid in the utter annihilation of Napster? No. I think that they were pissed off because they didn't get the bigger picture either. The hindsight that I think most artists have now is that the record companies were in a battle to sell the last CD. They didn't care about the artists. Now the CD is an outdated format. Why didn't the major labels see this coming? They have to figure out a way to monetize peer-to-peer sharing.

iTunes is a good example of how they're starting to get a handle on that. So when Reprise approached you with the idea for the Trojan downloads, did they give you the chance to make it your own?

Yes. We wanted to approach it as a gag. It was our way of gently reminding people, "Hey, this is illegal," without walking into a courtroom with an armload of legal documents like Lars did. When Napster first started, most users didn't realize that it was actually



theft. Collectors and lovers of music would open up Napster and suddenly every piece of music was available to you from your home. You didn't have to go to a boutique shop and have some snobby record-store clerk look down their nose at you. You were right there. I think the beauty and convenience of a thing like Napster was the true revelation.

But were you afraid of pissing off your fans? Or was that why your band approached it with such lighthearted banter?

We were skeptical about the idea, so approaching it from a humorous position was our way of combating that. If you're a fan of Barenaked Ladies, particularly in those days, you always expected something humorous or a little bit off the beaten track. Our fans tended to respond really well to it, actually. Fans of your band are going to buy your stuff anyway, or they're going to find it however they need to find it. I don't think we alienated our fans at all.

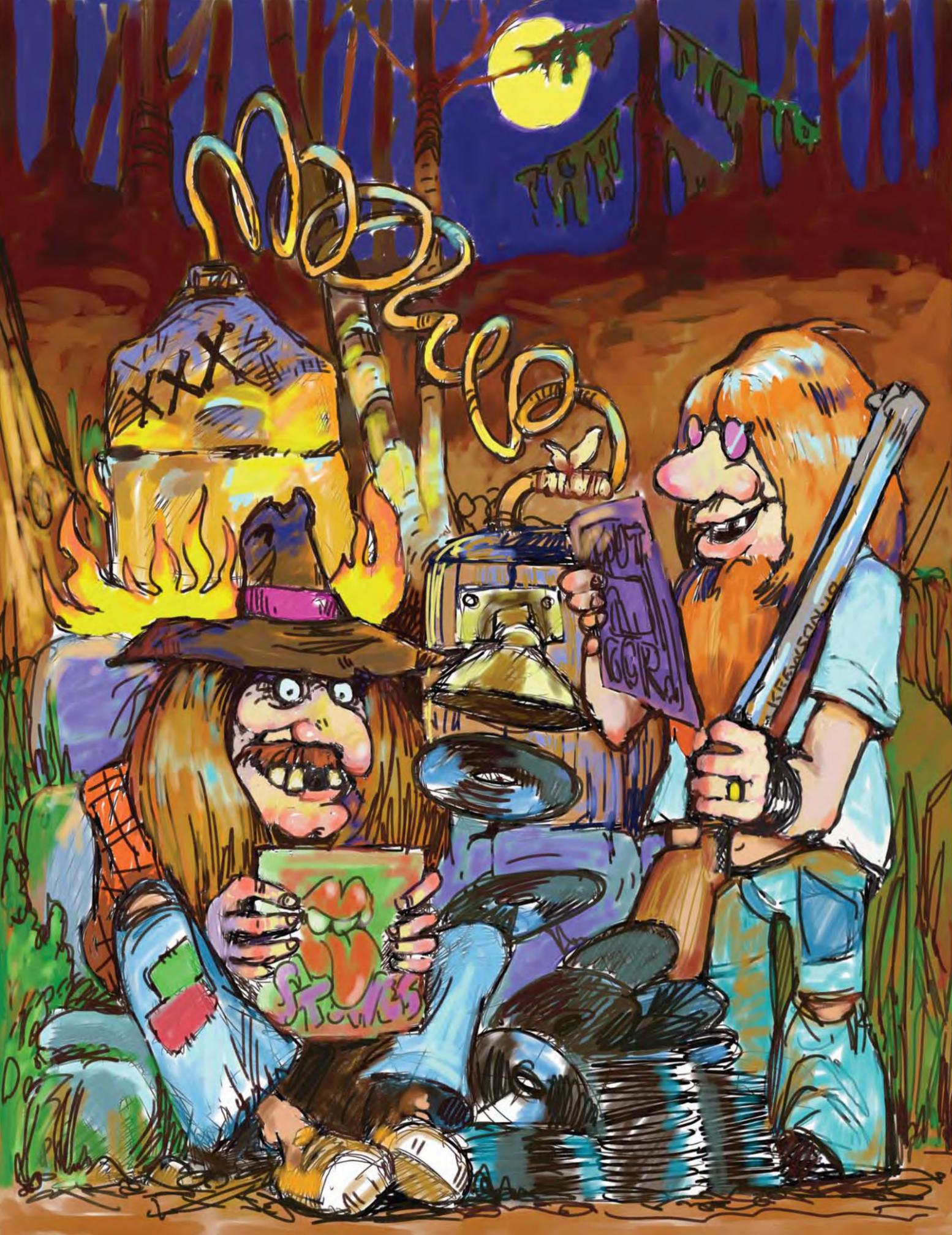
Looking back, would you have approached the situation differently?

No. For us, it was all part of the promotional machine. It's the same as going in and playing at a radio station for free or doing interviews. I think we really didn't realize it would be part of a larger sociological shift in the whole way people view business and listen to music. Today, the record business is dying, and I don't really care about that. That's a controversial thing for a lot of artists. I don't think they give a rat's ass if the president of the record company doesn't have a job anymore. People will buy music if they're passionate. They will spend money on it. You have to find a way to keep your fans interested. And I think facilitated things like Napster are the answer. Essentially, the record labels had their heads in the sand.

They were just too scared to accept it.

Well, they were the ones who had the most to lose. And they lost it. I think we can pretty much declare the battle over. One of the good things about it is that the people who are left in the music business—you know, the skeleton staff of labels and the youngsters who are passionate—they're the ones with ideas. It has to be a business full of forward thinkers, of boutique-type people who know how to survive with innovative ideas and new approaches because the old way is dead. For years and years, artists suffered because they got ripped the fuck off by labels.

So Napster was this generation's "Fuck you" to the record business. Whether artists realized it or not at the time, it was a helpful thing. I can understand why artists would see it as a threat. But ultimately it started to break down that entire system that had been exploiting the majority of artists. You must look at it like that. There needs to be a new way, and there will be a new way. That's the way I see it. And the guys who started Napster and the tech geeks who came up with peer-to-peer sharing, they are the future. So we have to figure out, as artists, a new way to utilize that to our best advantage without trying to destroy it. ■



Bootlegging Inc.

The Golden Age of Music Piracy

INTERVIEW BY MILES RAYMER
ILLUSTRATION BY JIM KREWSON

In 1969, two young hippies named Ken Douglas and Dub Taylor heard some unreleased Dylan material on one of the edgier LA radio stations. The station had acquired a copy of the illicit *The Basement Tapes*, which were, at that time, circulating around the underground. Being Dylan superfans, Douglas and Taylor decided that they wanted their own copies of the tapes. But also being somewhat crafty and ambitious, they decided that they wanted the tapes pressed to vinyl for clearer sound, longer life span, and heftier physical presence. So they pressed up a bunch. They kept their own copies of the initial run of 100 and put the other 96 out for sale at a hippie-friendly LA record store to cover their costs. The record sold out almost immediately despite the fact that it had only a plain white sleeve and labels recycled from leftover jobs at the pressing plant. So Douglas and Taylor pressed more, as did other people who had caught on to the idea. *Great White Wonder*, as the untitled, unofficial Dylan record came to be known, had accidentally given birth to the bootleg-record industry.

At their best, bootleg labels were a weird amalgamation of fan club, DIY project, and guerrilla capitalist endeavor. They were run by people who were genuinely obsessed with the artists, whose shows they taped and whose tape libraries they raided. But the bootleggers also possessed a hustler's mentality when it came to business and ducking the law. Clinton Heylin's definitive *Bootleg: The Secret History of the Other Recording Industry* reads like that Johnny Depp movie *Blow* remade as a vehicle for total music geeks, with characters named things like the Rubber Dubber and John Wizardo coming up with a constant series of ideas to evade the authorities and supply the people with all the Who live albums and unreleased Beatles sessions they desired.

Douglas and Taylor went on to start the Trademark of Quality label, which released an amazing string of records including the very first live concert bootleg, the Rolling Stones' *Live'r Than You'll Ever Be*. The label split up and reunited and split up again before Douglas decided to get out of the game in the mid-70s to move to New Zealand and become a writer. Recently he's been blogging about his experiences in the bootleg business, which is how I found him.

Vice: You grew up in California, right?

Ken Douglas: Yeah.

Tell me how you got involved in the record business to begin with. You came from a more legit side of things, right?

I was born into it. My dad owned Saturn Records, which, at the time, was the largest buyer of phonographic records west of the Mississippi. At least that's what somebody told me.

So you just sort of fell into that as the family business? Yeah.

How did you distribute your first bootlegs?

Dub had a friend who had deserted from the army just as he was to be shipped out to Vietnam, and then he sold them for us. However, he made a mistake. He went to the very first place to sell them, a place called Vogue Records on Hollywood Boulevard, and the guy who owned the store, a guy named Bill Bowers, bought them all. So we figured out that maybe we had a hit on our hands.

And you guys immediately started repressing it?

Well, yeah. We pressed another 300 copies and sold them, and then another couple 300.

You knew pretty much right away that this was potentially something that could make you some money?

No. Because, see, we were kids. I think I was like 20 or 21? And Dub was the same age, maybe a year younger. We thought what we were doing was, like, against the law. We thought we'd get in a lot of trouble and the stores knew us, so we had someone else go around to the stores. Meanwhile, the guys who made the big money, guys who started a bootleg label after ours, they had lawyers. They found out that it wasn't against the law because it had never been done before. And so they made a living off these things.

It seems like at the time there was a combination of a lot of artists like Dylan, the Beatles, and the Stones that people were really, really obsessive over, and also these kinds of laws that were open enough that you could feasibly get away with something like bootlegging.

Yeah. But we didn't know that at the time. I'm trying to remember what it was like when I was 21 years old. We initially didn't do it for the money. We initially did it so that we could have copies of the records, and then the Stones came and Dub wanted to record them. So we bought a Uher tape recorder and a Sennheiser mic. We didn't

I always knew it was stealing. I never thought for a second that we had the right to give the music away for free to the people.

make a gang of money on the Dylan boot *Great White Wonder*. But we did a gang of money on the Stones' *Live'r Than You'll Ever Be*.

Was that when things started taking off for you?

I don't know. I don't know what taking off is. Taking off compared to what? I mean, it was good for us. We did OK because, remember, we were still kids. So you know, the records were taking off. We weren't making millions of dollars or even tens of thousands of dollars. But we were doing OK. We were making rent. We weren't buying property or anything.

I saw something in one of your blog posts about how Dub was living pretty large...

OK, yeah. I'm older now and I know what large really is. So we thought we were living large. We had new cars. I had a motorcycle. But I still worked. I never quit my job for years. I worked at Saturn and I worked as a social worker all the time I was doing bootlegs. I was working right up until, I don't know, '75 or '76. I don't want you to get confused. I don't want you to think we made a million dollars.

I didn't think you made a million dollars, but it seemed you were living all right for some younger dudes.

Yeah. We were able to go to Europe a couple times. We were doing all right.

You've said earlier that you guys didn't get into it for the money, that it was a labor of love.

Well, for Dub it was a labor of love. For Andrew, who came later, it was a labor of love. I don't think it was a labor of love for some of the other bootleggers like Rubber Dubber or Norty and Ben. I think they were doing it for the money. Although Scott seemed to really like music so maybe I shouldn't include him in there. He was a Rubber Dubber guy. And then eventually for me it was not a labor of love, it was about money.

Do you remember what point it was that it became a money thing for you?

Yeah, in '72 and '73. But I always knew, unlike most of the other people who were doing it, and I've written this in a couple blogs, I always knew it was stealing. I never thought for a second that we had the right to give the music away for free to the people.

On the other hand, there's sort of an outlaw aura to the whole bootlegging thing. It's not letting the companies, or even the musicians themselves, determine what gets released. It's like if the fans want a live record or if the fans want Dylan's *The Basement Tapes*, bootleggers are sort of liberating the music for the fans. Is that over-romanticizing the situation, or was there an element of that?

You're spot-on as far as Dub and a lot of the other people are concerned. You're spot-on. Dub was really into Bob Dylan.

You mentioned you were working at Saturn while you were still doing some of the bootlegging. How was it having that double life, working both sides of the industry, like the legit and the underground, at the same time?

Well, in the beginning it was really strange because, for example, they kept saying they were trying to catch us, but our Capitol

salesman knew who we were and what we were doing and he never said anything. A good percentage of the customers who came in who owned record stores knew who we were and didn't say anything. I guess you would call them the cool ones—the ones who had the \$2.99-record stores. At the time, records were going for like \$4.98 and there was a lot of, like—I don't want to say hippies, but young people—hippies, I guess—who had record stores and sold records for \$2.99. They sold our kind of records. They knew who Dub and I were and they never told. More and more people knew and they never told. It wasn't like we were really leading double lives.

Do you feel like you were able to take some of the skills and knowledge and contacts that you had from the straight business that you were doing and apply it to bootlegs?

No.

It didn't feed into it?

No. After the second record, after *Live'r*, we just walked into recording studios. When we did *Stealin'* [their second Dylan boot], we just walked into a recording studio and the guy put it on and he was crying, "This is Bob Dylan!" Everybody, all the producers and everybody in the studio, just stopped and came in and listened to the record we had mastered, you know? And everybody thought it was really cool. Everybody in there knew that we didn't work for Bob Dylan.

It seems like there was, in terms of pressing, a sort of hit-or-miss element in terms of figuring out how and where you could get records pressed.

Not really. It was pretty easy. In those days, people who owned record distributorships said, if the guy doesn't steal more from me than he makes me, I can't afford to fire him. I don't want to say everybody was a crook—but just about everybody was a crook. We would just walk into a pressing plant and say this is what we have, and they would make it and we would pay them—in cash.

That seems like an incredibly gutsy thing to do.

Well, the first pressing plant we approached was a place called Wadell's. They pressed Verve and Disney stuff. We had a friend go in to meet them because we were just frightened kids. Our guy who talked to them wasn't involved in the record business at all. He figured, what did he have to lose. So he went in there and he said that they made the mold, put it on, listened to it, and—this was the Stones live record—they pressed it right alongside *Let It Bleed*. They would have to have been not very bright to not know that it was the Rolling Stones on our record. That's when we figured we could be doing this ourselves.

Wow. You guys were going in and pressing stuff right—totally legit. *Live'r* was literally pressed right next to *Let It Bleed*. But the only plants we didn't use, obviously, were Capitol and Columbia.

Were there a lot of independent pressing plants back then?

There were. Are there any now? We used Wadell, Jack Brown, Louis, Korelich—we used one on Hollywood Boulevard whose name I can't remember right now.

I know there was some time where there were some authorities interested in your operation, right?

Yeah. There was a guy named Pete somebody-or-other, whose name I can't remember. He was a process server who worked for Columbia Records, and he was after us. The first thing Columbia did is that they issued a statement to *Billboard* magazine saying that it wasn't Bob Dylan, it was someone who sounded like Bob Dylan. Well, obviously no one believed that. They said that about a bunch of people. Then they hired this Pete guy to get on our trail and find us, so that they could sue us. And he did actually serve me, but he served me a

subpoena with Dub's name on it. It wasn't valid. Other than that, in those days, we were just, like, really careful.

Really?

Well—that's a lie. We were not really careful. Some of us weren't really careful. Dub went and gave an interview to *Rolling Stone* magazine.

That was either brave or stupid.

We were kids. We didn't know better. I think it was with Greil Marcus—but he gave Dub's name as Vladimir.

That's a really deep cover. Just giving a different name.

Well, yeah, because the next month they got his real name and we figured that that would be a problem if there were process servers looking for Dub. So I told Ben Goldman, who owned a store called Ben's Records and who was Norty Beckman, our biggest competition's, brother-in-law, that Dub and his girlfriend still lived in Vancouver and had just opened a gas station there. Lo and behold, there it was next month in *Rolling Stone*: Dub Taylor moved to Vancouver and opened a gas station, and that was the only guy I told.

That's pretty sneaky. You guys were total hippies at the time?

Yeah, we were. We were actually like, "Fuck the man!"

It's pretty common knowledge that the major-label record industry has always been really corrupt and kind of devious.

Well, I know lots of stories where they screwed over artists. I'm not going to go into those, but I have lots of stories. I never really liked the labels. I thought they were all just crooks. But then again, that meant that we were crooks.

Yeah. But at least you guys were kind of up-front about being crooks. The difference is they wore suits and had short hair and we had really long hair and wore Levi's and cowboy boots.

The labels weren't above taking hints from the bootleg industry.

The Stones never would have released *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out* if it weren't for *Live'r*. [The Who's] *Live at Leeds* looks just like a bootleg. Look at Bob Dylan. Are you familiar with the *The Bootleg Series*? My dad sent me copies of the first volume, and he checked off all the ones he thought they copied from us.

There are also things like B-sides and rarities collections, and even box sets, that started off as bootleg formats and have been adopted by the legit labels. It seems, in the end, bootleggers helped the record industry as much as they hurt it.

Scott Johnson, a Rubber Dubber guy, once told me that he had a friend who worked at Warner Bros. who said that he considered Rubber Dubber an unpaid advertising arm of Elektra/Atlantic.

What about artist reactions to your bootlegs?

Neil Young said something derogatory about a bootleg we did of his stuff, and so we stopped making it. We figured, fuck him. He doesn't get to get bootlegged by us.

You guys had some balls on you.

Keith Richards was going into stores in Berkeley to buy up the bootlegs, and a lot of bootlegs were signed by Mick Jagger. I've got a photograph of a signed Mick Jagger *Live'r*. So, a lot of the artists seemed to like it. They realized they'd make a lot of money on concerts, and bootlegs are not costing them very much, and it's good publicity.

Were there any times when things got really dicey or scary?

My dad had financed a good percentage of black record stores in Los Angeles. Since I knew pretty much everybody who owned those stores, and I knew what was selling, we got the idea that we would just pick the No. 1 and No. 2 single, which I think were "The Onion Song" by Marvin Gaye and something else, and put them back to back. Then we would hire a guy, because Dub and I didn't want to go around to the black stores, because they knew

Neil Young said something derogatory about a bootleg we did of his stuff, so we stopped making it. We figured, fuck him.

us, and we didn't want them to know it was us. So we hired a guy to go to those stores to sell these records. We figured we'd make a bunch of money really fast because it only cost 15 or 16 cents to press these things up. So we pressed up 300 and had someone run them to all the stores. No one would buy any. They all knew it was a bad thing. And then these gangster guys, they figured out immediately who did it and they came to my dad's house within three or four days. My dad was having dinner when these gangsters came in. They hit him in the stomach with an ax handle when he tried to protest, and they told him they wanted his son and they wanted him now. My dad set up an appointment and we were going to have a meeting and they wanted all the money we made—but we didn't make any 'cause none of those black stores bought these records, because they were smart. And in those days, black people didn't have the same rights as white people did, and they didn't have the same recourse with the law. So they had to take matters into their own hands. And that's exactly what they did. They told my dad they wanted all of the stampers, all of the records, and all of the money we made. Dub and I figured we should throw in a thousand bucks so they'd think we made something and were giving it to them.

What was that meeting like?

It was in the back of my dad's house. Myself and my two brothers, we cut little holes in the wall and we had guns pointed out at these guys when they came in. We were just dumb, scared kids.

Looking back on your bootlegging experience, what's your overall feeling now about what you did?

Well, I moved to New Zealand and I wrote a book called *Ragged Man*. It's a horror story, and in it, this monster guy kills all these bootleggers. That's how I got it out of my system. I just spent six months killing them all. And when the book came out, it didn't mean anything to anybody because people who read horror stories don't care about bootleggers. I reissued it a while back.

It's sort of a shame, at least in my opinion, that there's not the same kind of bootlegging now as you were doing back then. New bootlegs tend to be exchanged on the internet, but there's something about the feel of having the tactile sensation of bootlegged vinyl in your hands. I mean, the fact that you know you shouldn't have it makes it that much cooler.

Yeah, but the guys who wanted to give away the music for free won. One taper goes to every single Dylan show anywhere in the world—so he's got to have a lot of cash—and he does a really good job and he puts them online for free. How can you compete with that? Now you can just get whatever you want for free.

Unreleased material and live shows come out online all the time now. With that, on top of file sharing and how the record labels adopted so many formats from you guys, it seems like your quest has been legitimized by history.

You know, I never thought about it like that, but yes! Because, you know, when I see how poorly the record companies are doing, I sort of smile. ■



Downloading Some Bullshit

An Interview With the President of the RIAA

INTERVIEW BY ROCCO CASTORO
PHOTOS BY BRAYDEN OLSON AND COURTESY OF THE RIAA
SPECIAL THANKS TO BEETHOVEN PIANOS

Many, many people believe that the Recording Industry Association of America is a giant hairy tumor on the neck of the music business. Many people further feel that this disgusting malignancy has slowly spread its cancerous wrath across the public domain in recent years. Over the past decade, the RIAA has sued the following individuals for allegedly using illegal means to download music: a 66-year-old grandmother from Boston who was accused of nabbing thousands of rap songs even though her computer wasn't capable of running the software she was supposedly using, a 12-year-old honors student in NYC who lived with her family in public housing, a 79-year-old man who did not own a computer or know how to use one and was charged with sharing more than 700 tracks from bands like Linkin Park and Creed, an 83-year-old *dead* great-grandmother, and a homeless man living in a shelter. There have been many other unlikely defendants, but those are some of our favorites.

The RIAA's early history, however, contradicts its current reputation. In 1952, the organization was founded with the primary mission of setting an equalization-curve standard for gramophone records. Prior to the RIAA's formation, each record company used its own equalization. Many labels used different frequencies for playback, resulting in records that would only work on certain players. The RIAA fixed all of that and effectively increased record sales by unifying the recording process. It was a great thing.

In 1958, the RIAA did musicians another appreciable service by establishing a certification-and-rewards program that kept track of how many copies of an album were sold. This process evolved into today's silver, gold, platinum, and diamond designations, which are awarded to albums that sell anywhere from 100,000 to 10 million copies. It has helped popularize classic, timeless records that every generation should hear and spawned numerous other systems that allow artists to track their sales.

It wasn't until about a decade ago that music technology, the very thing the RIAA was created to standardize, became too powerful for them to control. Two landmark court cases—*A&M Records, Inc. v. Napster, Inc.* and *MGM Studios, Inc. v. Grokster, Ltd.*—sparked a series of events that changed the music industry forever. The Grokster trial reached the Supreme Court, where 28 of the world's largest entertainment entities (unified by the RIAA and its motion-picture-industry counterpart, the MPAA) tried to end the file-sharing debate forever. In the end, the courts ruled that Grokster and its contemporaries could be sued for illegal file trading that took place on their networks, but this left the RIAA holding a flaming bag of dog shit. Forcing peer-to-peer software companies to police their own user base simply wasn't going to happen, so they began an aggressive prosecution spree that resulted in possibly the worst self-inflicted public-relations disaster in the US up until a few months back, when BP single-handedly (OK, maybe with a little help from the government) turned the Gulf of Mexico into the world's largest mud-wrestling pit.

Cary Sherman is the president of the RIAA's board of directors and has worked there for 13 years. He went to Harvard Law School,

plays the piano, and, most important, claims to be a true music lover. Due to the RIAA's less-than-popular method of protecting their coffers (i.e., lots of lawsuits), Mr. Sherman is often seen as the face man for an oppressive totalitarian behemoth that can potentially throw you in the slammer and/or fine you into a horrid existence for illegally downloading shining examples of popular culture like "California Gurls" by Katy Perry featuring Snoop Dogg (#1 on the Billboard Hot 100 at press time). Thankfully, however, the lawsuits are not happening anymore.

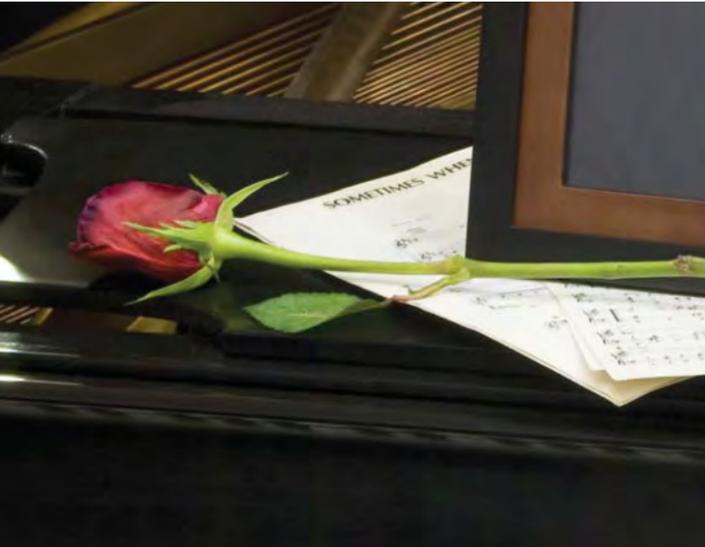
In late 2008, the RIAA switched tactics (some might say as a result of public pressure). Instead of pursuing individuals who illegally download music, they charged internet service providers with the responsibility of monitoring and warning their customers about pirating music and other content via a three-strikes-and-you're-out system. Less than a month after the RIAA claimed to have implemented the new arrangement, several prominent ISPs balked and said they would follow their own internal policies for monitoring. It's no wonder that the RIAA seems to have been keeping a low profile as of late, so it was a very pleasant surprise when Mr. Sherman agreed to this interview. He even answered all of my questions without hesitation, which I have to admit was extremely unexpected. Is he a horrible monster who wants to sue teenagers for downloading albums with explicit lyrics that their parents won't let them buy in stores? Nah. Is he simply a functionary who is far out of touch with the way music (especially the independent variety) is listened to, recommended, distributed, and created in the 21st century? Or is he just doing his job, acting on what he truly believes is right for musicians? We'll let you make the call.

Vice: Let's begin with something semi-current that I can't quite wrap my head around: HR 848, the Performance Rights Act that was introduced in February 2009 and is still before Congress. I understand that its goal is to eliminate the disparity between royalty payments across formats, but does FM radio really pay less for broadcasting music than the internet and satellite varieties? That seems backward.

Cary Sherman: It aims to get terrestrial radio stations to pay royalties. Right now they have an exemption. We get paid royalties by satellite, cable news services, and webcasters. We even get paid when radio stations simulcast on the web, but we don't get paid when they simply broadcast over the air. Since they're the most well-established business, it's certainly an anomaly that all the start-ups are paying while the big gorilla pays nothing at all.

What I found really interesting about the bill was that people like Jesse Jackson were in opposition to it, claiming that it would hurt minority radio stations. What do you think about that?

That was a very clever tactic used by the broadcasters to basically say that this was a minority-radio issue. It sort of went away when the NAACP started calling this the Civil Rights for Musicians Act. They thought that slavery had been outlawed, but somehow musicians still had to work without pay when it came to radio. If they're big enough and have enough revenues to pay the full scale of royalties, they ought to pay like anybody else.



“My job is to worry about the big picture—if the industry is moving in the direction of satisfying the consumer demand for music.”

The alternative to all of this radio nonsense is consumer media devices and storage. It's ironic because while I'm sure that the iPod and iTunes have made the RIAA lots of money, they are also the preferred method to listen to pirated music. Would you say these inventions have made your life easier or more difficult?

It's certainly made it more interesting, but what has always been so amazing about this job is that you never know how the marketplace is going to evolve and throw new, unanticipated angles into the issues. It's the terabyte storage devices that I really have to worry about. At the same time as these developments in mass storage technology, the marketplace is shifting to streaming and cloud computing. Everybody wants to have access wherever and whenever they want on whatever device they happen to be using.

I assume you have an iPod.

Many.

What's your preferred method for listening to music?

At home I have a Sonos system, which has been phenomenal because I have all my music on one device that I can play in each room of the house or every room of the house at the same time. Whatever you're in the mood for, it's there, and that's even before you're on Pandora or an internet station. When I travel I tend to take an iPod with me but I also listen to music on my iPhone, which has phenomenal fidelity. You put on a pair of Bose noise-canceling headphones and it's a great way to travel.

Do you recall the first moment you heard about peer-to-peer software or saw one of these programs in action? Did your heart sink?

I can't say I remember the specific moment. The truth is that you have to put this in context: This was 1999, and I was meeting with digital music startups on a regular basis. Companies were coming in from all around just to introduce themselves and tell us the solutions they had for the music industry in terms of dealing with piracy, new business models, new technologies that were going to make it really wonderful to listen to music, interoperability, and DRMs.

DRM meaning “digital rights management.”

We had a lot of DRM stuff. When Napster came along, it was just one more interesting thing. I remember I created a subfolder—I didn't even bother with a complete folder—for emails regarding Napster because I just thought it deserved a subfolder. It was only afterward that I realized how this thing was going to grow. It just wasn't as obvious because there were so many things going on, and then everything suddenly became Napster.

How does the RIAA calculate potential profit loss from illegal downloads?

We don't.

You don't at all?

We never do. The problem with doing that is we have no ability to measure what's going on with the internet; we have to rely on third parties. It's very difficult to do it under any circumstances. We don't have the expertise—we don't surf the web ourselves for that kind of stuff. The other thing is that it's very difficult to calculate the displacing effect of illegal downloading.

Oh, I would imagine.

We basically decided early on that everybody knew that illegal downloading was having an extraordinarily negative impact on the industry, on the ability of musicians to sell their products and therefore make money from their recordings as opposed to touring, etc. We'd let third parties speak to the scope of the damage, but it didn't matter whether they were debating if it was \$5 billion or \$20 billion. Either way, it was going to be a massive number and we had to deal with it. We haven't really gotten hung up on trying to quantify the impact.

Do you think the court cases may have brought even more attention to file-sharing software and widened its user base? Is that a crazy notion? No, it's not crazy, and we think about that all the time. When something new comes along that could be an issue, we often think about whether we're going to give them more attention than the marketplace would. With Napster it was not even close—the speed with which it grew and the viral nature of its influence—we didn't need to sue them in order to give them prominence. They were making it all on their own, so that was never an issue.

It was the first of its kind, but things have evolved. Does the decentralized nature of something like BitTorrent worry you?

Well, it's different, but no less susceptible to tracking people. The motion-picture studios are mainly dealing with BitTorrent. Just like we do, they are able to identify infringements online relatively easily in a very public kind of way and arrange for notices to be sent.

Some might say that the difference is that a site like OiNK [a legendary BitTorrent site shut down in 2007 by the UK's equivalent of the RIAA] was a much better source for music than iTunes or similar services. Many so-called illegal BitTorrent music-trading sites contain things that will never, ever be available for sale to the casual listener. They primarily cater to completists who previously had to spend years hunting for obscure records. Of course, you've got a bunch of people downloading the album of the minute too, but the development of MP3s and peer-to-peer software has perpetually increased the amount of people who listen to music and how much time they spend listening to it. Do you think there will ever be a “legal” program where a user can download every single bootleg from a band of their choosing? I know a lot of people who would pay for that.

I don't know how much you know about the industry, but it's very complicated. It's got a lot of different rights-holders. You have songwriters and publishers, who have a completely different set of rights than the record company and the artists, and everyone would have to agree on a new business model. It took some time to get to the point we're at now, where 8 million tracks are available individually for download in extraordinarily high quality and in a variety of bitrates and so on. People really can get almost anything they want legally. Are there going to be exceptions like bootlegs and so forth? Yeah, but my job is to worry about the big picture—if the industry is moving in the direction of satisfying the consumer demand for music. There's

no question that the demand for music is bigger than it ever has been before. I just looked at some data the other day, and in the US something like 43 percent of our revenues are digital. Forty-three percent!

A few years ago the RIAA switched tactics. Instead of high-profile prosecutions of people who pirated music, you decided to put the onus on the ISPs. How successful was that transition?

The time had come to shift over to a strategy that would be more effective. The lawsuits were obviously controversial in the media, but the reality was that most people had no idea that what they were doing was illegal at the time of those lawsuits. We did all sorts of surveys. We tried PR firms. We did everything to look at how to begin to change the culture of using illegal P2P. We realized that 1) none of the messages resonated, and 2) most people had no idea that what they were doing was illegal, let alone thought it was wrong. That completely flipped overnight when we started the lawsuits. It made an enormous impression and we were constantly generating dinner conversations about what you may or may not do with your computer. We think it would be very good if there were more such conversations about all the other things that can be done inappropriately with a computer. So we think it had a tremendous impact by very clearly searing in the minds of the public that maybe getting all of this stuff for free isn't legal after all.

But mainstream public opinion quickly shifted against the record labels and high-profile artists themselves, correct? You had people like Lars Ulrich acting like he wouldn't be able to afford Zildjians anymore.

After a while, people began to think that the individuals being sued were X and the free music was Y. We needed to move to a strategy that would have greater breadth and that would give people an opportunity to be educated and warned, one where there would be consequences only if they persisted in their illegal behavior. And for that we needed to enlist the ISPs who had previously looked at themselves like, “Hey, we're just pipes. We have nothing to do with the conflict exploding. That's your problem.” Then peer-to-peer began to occupy a tremendous percentage of their bandwidth, interfering with their own customers' ability to get reliable internet service. One big downloader could interfere with email for all the suburban moms in the same neighborhood. We've been in talks with ISPs for a while, trying to develop a program that everybody's comfortable with—one that is very fair and balanced and that is clearly educational. The ISPs are sending notices to their subscribers telling them that what they're doing is illegal, that they're not anonymous when they do it, and that they run a risk when they do it. That has been very successful in terms of expanding the reach of the program, and we hope that it will continue to produce a cultural shift in attitudes of illegal file sharing.



Would it be fair to say that the RIAA's actions of the past ten years resulted in a PR nightmare of truly immense proportions?

When we went into this thing, we knew that it was not going to be popular. We were looking for it to be dramatic. We didn't want to seem vindictive. We wanted to look reasonable. We also wanted to be strong and determined to protect the property rights of creators. As unpopular as that was going to be, we were prepared to take it on.

I've heard that people working for the RIAA have received death threats. Is that true?

We were astounded at the entitlement that people felt to get their music for free. People really were crazy in terms of “You want to interfere with my ability to get whatever I want on the internet? If it's on the internet, it's free. You have no right to be interfering.” And yeah, there were death threats. There were cyber-attacks and so on, but the truth is all of that is in the distant past. Now the internet has become a little more civilized. I think that people gradually became more aware that maybe there is no such thing as a free lunch. People really do want artists to get paid; they're just hoping someone else will pay them. It wasn't just music anymore that was being affected—newspapers were beginning to go out of business, movies studios were suffering from sales of DVDs, books were getting pirated. Suddenly it wasn't just this one industry that didn't know how to adjust. It was a sea change in terms of distribution for creative industries, and everyone wanted to survive it.

OK, I have just a few short, more personal questions I wanted to ask. I've read that you are a musician yourself. Is that true?

Yes, amateur. I play piano.

When you were younger did you ever have dreams of becoming a professional musician?

Yeah, but I realized quickly that I would be a bar mitzvah performer—that was the highest level that I could reasonably expect to aspire to. I figured I better become a lawyer.

I bet your parents were happy about that. Who are some of your favorite musicians and bands?

I have a pretty wide variety of tastes because I have a big iPod. I like Howie Day, Jack Johnson, Melissa Manchester, U2. I just heard Billy Joel the other night and remembered how much I love him and Elton John. I was also listening to Owl City; you're not going to be able to pigeonhole me with anything.

One final question: Do you currently or have you ever received free music while an employee of the RIAA?

I used to get free CDs, but no longer. I buy all my music now. I do. ■

Keeping It Bleak

Modern Touring in America

BY EMA

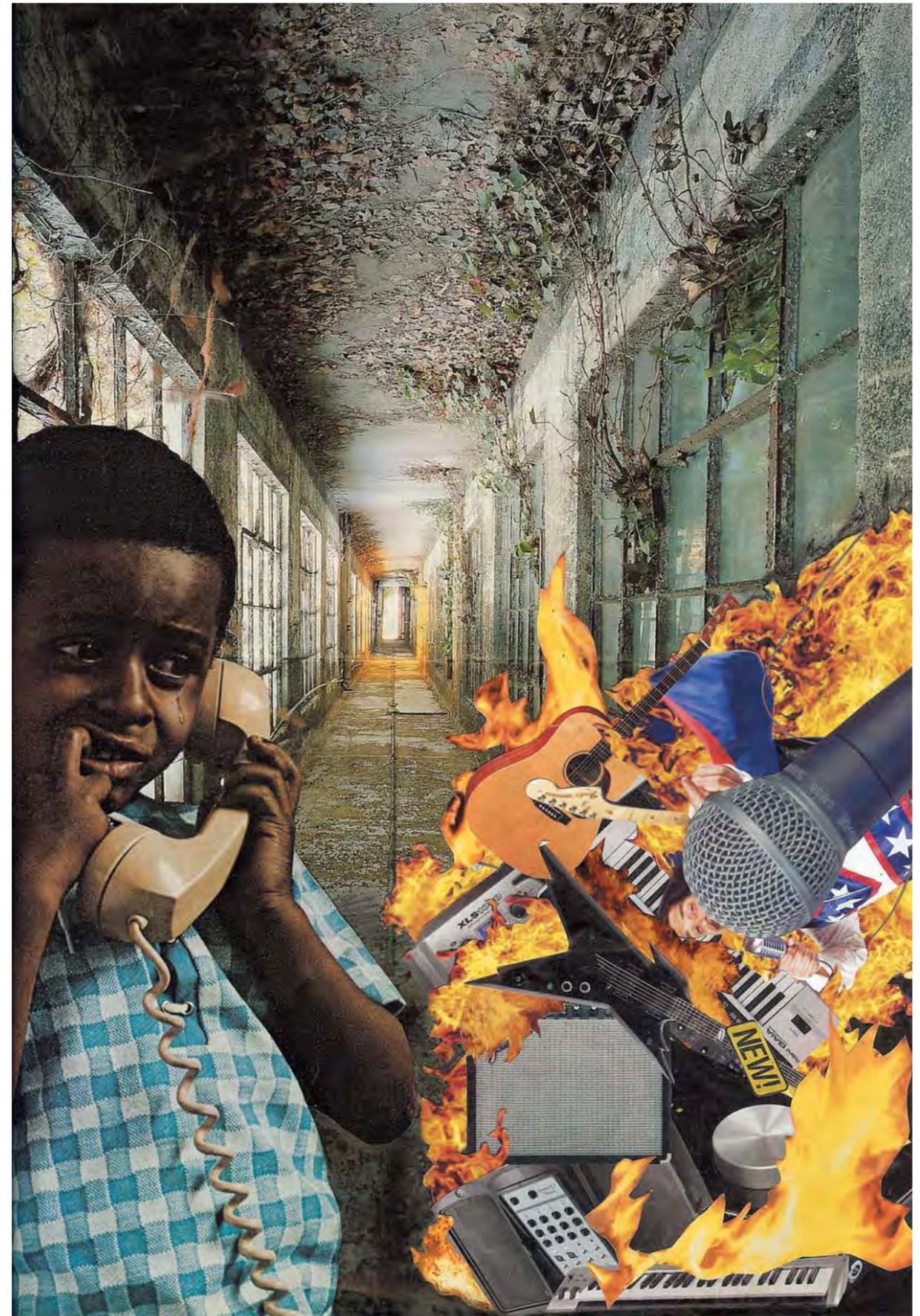
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TARA TAVI

There are certain types of tours where you barely make it off the floor. And if you do, the couch is a sweet, sweet blessing. In the fall of 2009, Elijah Forrest left Los Angeles with two other solo musicians in a 1989 Ford van that had been abandoned in a friend's yard. Two hours out of town, they were overheating on the freeway in stopped traffic behind a Greyhound bus that was on fire. By the time they started moving again, the bus had burned to ashes and they had missed the first show of their tour. Their second show was scheduled to take place in a biodiesel van at an outdoor asphalt-covered park in San Francisco known as Toxic Beach. The cops busted it up before they even got a chance to play. Also, they had brought their dog along on the tour, a female Chihuahua named Joaquin, and sometime during that day a man had smashed her in the face with a cane, leaving her bleeding and traumatized. What a way to start a tour: van troubles, cops, and then someone hits your fucking dog.

Elijah plays heavily reverbed guitar sets under the name Terrors. My former band, Gowns, played with him at the Toxic Beach show, and I ran into him again in Baltimore, on the last show of a tour. Apparently, those first few days set the tone perfectly for what was to come on the rest of their trip. The van overheated and broke down in Wyoming. A stranger had punched a friend of theirs in the head outside a show after calling her a "noise bitch." One of the other musicians had gotten food poisoning after eating dumpstered pizza, and they were all almost arrested in Iowa City for drinking in public. On top of all of that, somewhere along the line Elijah had broken up with his girlfriend, who was also on the tour, playing under the name Pussy Control.

While the above may read as a jaw-dropping litany of shit-luck incidents, the overall tally is pretty typical for a modern tour of the noise/performance/atonal/not-pop/not-rock variety. Broken-down van, bleeding money, missing shows, not getting paid, and eating trash... It's hard to tell whether these conditions are the result of poverty, poor planning, or some sort of post-Black Flag nihilist extremism. It's also possible that this lifestyle is somehow an integral part of the art form itself, as if the only way to get up every day and play an authentic harsh noise set is if you slept on a spare radiator the night before. But maybe the sad truth is that some form of tour-travel tragedy is now inescapable, no matter how well you save and plan, that touring in 2010 is such a shit-fuck gamble that the worst can happen to anyone at any level, and the odds are good that it will.

While these touring conditions seem to be the antithesis of most American kids' dreams of rock stardom, others appear to thrive on it. To me, no one has typified this ideal more than the Scum Crew, which were a group of artists and musicians who played noise and lived filthily in various pockets across the country. Elijah describes them as "a bunch of boys and a few ladies who played music and got





“When you are feeling strong from some kind of deprivation, it translates into your performance and you go into the whole situation with a lot of confidence.”

wasted together between Southern California and Oakland for a few years starting in 2005 or so. Membership was informal and hinged on speaking a coded lexicon of unrequited sexual depravity and acronyms. Bad jokes and worse nicknames.”

I first became friends with the LA faction a few years ago when I played a show in Seattle with Scum Crew members Deep Jew and Gator Surprise. I could tell right away that they were a motley crew. They had their own way of dress, sort of a cross between Green River and *Mad Max*, and their own vocabulary, in which the word “bleak” figured prominently. This was the band’s first transnational tour, and bassist Jeff Witscher describes it as “a self-inflicted disaster” with “plenty of laughter and goofing off.”

At the end of the tour, Kyle Parker (aka Gator Surprise aka Infinite Body) made a documentary out of the travel footage and titled it *Destiny Is Stupid*. There is a trailer for it on YouTube featuring the upbeat Del Amitri hit “Roll to Me” as a soundtrack to ferocious Scum Crew live shows and cutely boyish antics (swinging on a merry-go-round, completely destroying a PA, etc.) while all-caps text fills the screen with the alternating words “FUN” and “BLEAK.” “BLEAK” apparently wins, however, as at the end of the video the words change to: “KILL ME NOW,” “JUST FUCKING KILL ME,” and, finally, “I’M SICK OF THIS SHIT.” The line between irony and honesty is hard to read here, but when asked whether he would change his touring conditions if he could, Witscher replied that “there is no changing of anything” and that it would be like “trying to control your dreaming or a television show, and that is not an option.”

The conditions of Scum Crew tours, while extreme, are not uncommon. After hearing innumerable horror stories of bands running out of gas and/or having the van catch on fire, I began to wonder whether perhaps the show wasn’t the show and the band wasn’t the band. The experience seemed immersive, and the whole thing was less like a rock tour and more like a monthlong performance-art project on self-deprivation. Some would argue that the love of music might be motivation enough to keep going, to sleep on floors and brave cold and hostility. But let’s face it, most of these artists are less into music and more into sound and performance, and their sets are often five to ten minutes on a bill of six or seven other acts. Besides, can it really be all about the music if your gear is as likely to break onstage as not? As Witscher explains, “Nobody was really concerned about anything regarding the shows. Never any concern given seriously to the conditions of a show or a drive or financial matters or mechanical failures.” And as for the lifestyle: “When you are feeling strong from some kind of deprivation, it translates into your performance and you go into the whole situation with a lot of confidence. You’ve managed to legitimize your situation in that you’re living without regard, so you can perform without regard.”

But what about the good ol’ mom-and-pop question: *Well, how does it pay?* I’ve heard more than one midlevel indie musician say that touring constantly is better than painting houses, which is what they would be doing if they were at home. Well, sure, I buy that. But is it better than being a doctor? Better than owning a



The truth is, being a “rock star” was only a viable job for about 30 years. Now it’s basically like being a spirit photographer or a phonograph repairman.

couch? How about a house? For most of us, just being able to cover rent on a shit-hole apartment in a bad neighborhood is a financial triumph.

The truth is, being a “rock star” was only a viable job for about 30 years, from the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show* (1964) up to Kurt Cobain’s suicide (1994). Now it’s basically like being a spirit photographer or a phonograph repairman. If you’re in it for the money, then get out now. If you’re in it for the fame, I can only hope it comes to you in Winehouse/Lohan proportions.

Despite the extremity of the lifestyle, both Elijah and Witscher are committed to touring. Witscher considers it an “eternal phenomenon” that will “never run dry,” and Elijah concludes, “My willingness to put up with things that make others cringe is a byproduct of my worldview and maybe a sign of ill mental health from where the cringers stand.” Indeed, it may seem as though some of their experiences could serve as cautionary tales for more successful musicians who are pounding the same pavement. But what if it’s the reverse? What if the Scum Crew logic permeates every rung up the ladder, and the Deprivations of Bleakness have been secretly encoded in the lives of nearly every touring performer in every modern subculture? In this scenario, the Scum Crew aren’t the most masochistic mobile musicians in operation. They are merely the most honest.





THE TIERS OF TOURING AND NETWORK TV

When hearing that the touring lifestyle involves travel, art, and brokenness, our friends with real jobs ask, “But how can you put a price on creativity? On artistic freedom?” Indeed, it’s a question we all must ask ourselves every time we get paid \$50 after driving eight hours to play in front of 20 people. And granted, it’s hard to determine the artistic value of a groundbreaking yet difficult new sound versus the latest rehashed pop hit. In fact, I’ve found that people are much more comfortable intuitively decoding the hierarchy of success of network-TV stars. So for the sake of analogy, here is a breakdown of the musical pay scale and its televised media counterparts.

TIER I: Artists for the sake of art, making no money—more likely to actually lose money. These musicians not only don’t have health insurance, but each prolonged tour spent sleeping on floors, eating fast food, and drinking cheap beer probably takes years off their lives. Their closest television equivalent would be a completely fascinating documentary, mostly likely taking place in a country without electricity or running water, that gets shown on the Sundance Channel once late at night.

TIER II: The weird, cool indie bands working low-paying jobs that allow them to go on low-paying tours. It’s possible they live with their parents (no shame here! Apparently even Kim Deal and J Mascis still do this), and if not they give up or sublet their apartments while on the road. They may or may not have health insurance, depending on how supportive their bar/coffee shop/food co-op day job is. TV equivalent: Adult Swim shorts. We love that shit, but does it really pay the bills?

TIER III: Shitty bar bands that somehow have an inexplicable national following. Due to my purposeful ignorance of the genre, I researched this by picking a band at random out of Nickelback’s Top 20 MySpace friends. With the befuddling name On Tracy Lane (is that porno or geography?), their bio pretty much says it all: “After being based in 3 cities, 3 EPs, 4 music videos, opening for national acts, their music licensed to several TV shows, close to 2.5 million plays and views on MySpace and closing in on 200,000 friends, featured in *Radio & Records* trade magazine, recently touring in Greenland to play for the US troops, etc... On Tracy Lane has finally arrived.” WTF? We have troops in Greenland?!? TV equivalent: sad reality-TV stars.

TIER IV: Doing good for now. Bands with two-page spreads in magazines, playing a midsize tent at Coachella. Probably making enough to cover their rent while they’re gone and not have to work a day job when they get back. However, it’s hard to say how long that will last and whether they will be able to make the transition from this band into another successful venture. TV equivalent: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Lots of people love *Buffy*, but six Teen Choice awards do not a 401(k) make.

TIER V: Temporary rock star. Your weirdo college band that debuts at #1 on the Billboard charts. This is a dream come true, but probably fleeting. How long before the current Ibiza-meets-Margaritaville revival gets deleted from Urban Outfitters’ playlists? Most episodes of *Behind the Music* don’t end with early retirement and kids’ tuitions paid. TV equivalent: *Lost*.

TIER VI: Permanent rock star. These are Vegas odds. And, tellingly, most of the artists in this category started in the 60s or 70s. In fact, none of the artists holding the top-grossing tours of all time have even had a #1 single in this millennium besides Madonna, whose 2000 song “Music” reached the top after being leaked on the internet. The fact that the Rolling Stones hold four of the ten highest-grossing tours on record speaks to the fact that the megarich musician as a lifetime gig was a baby-boomer phenomenon. TV equivalent: *Dynasty*. ■

The Vice Guide to Not Being in a Band

BY SAM McPHEETERS

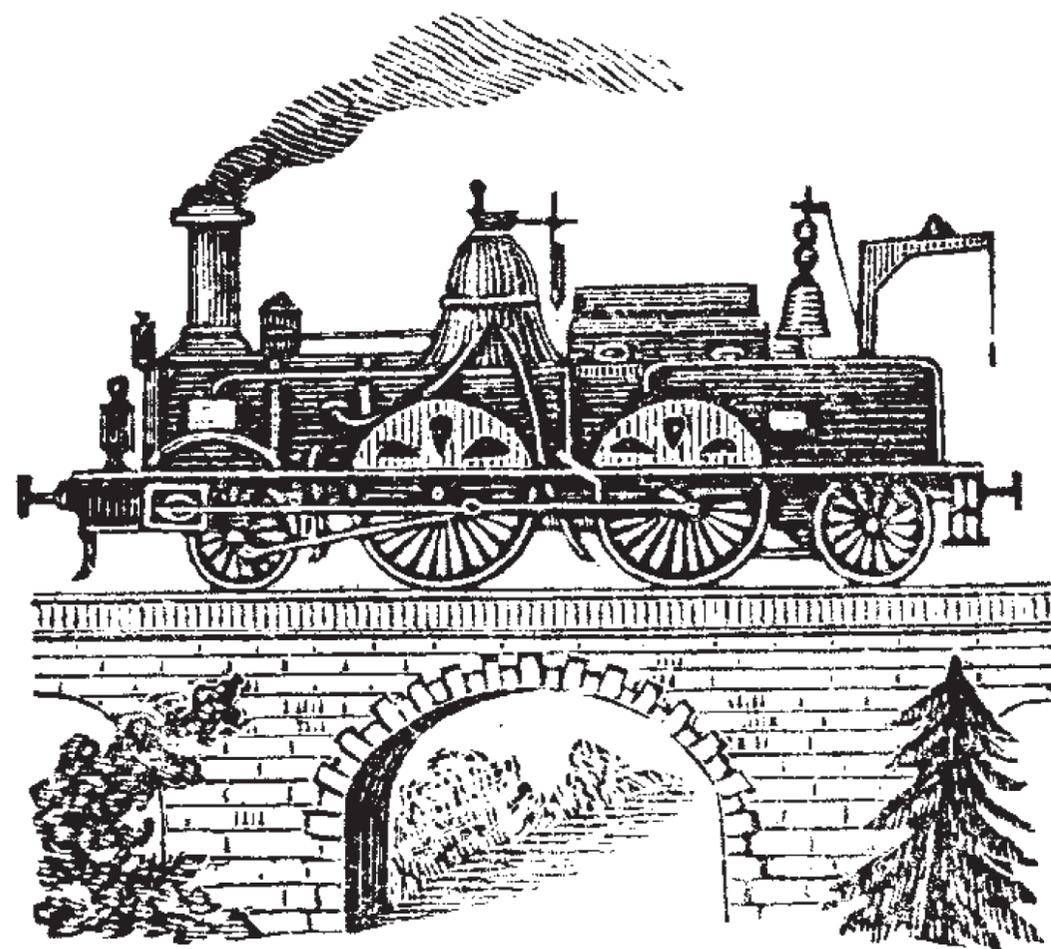
It's been nearly three decades since the Big Boys commanded, "Now go start your own band!" For the most part, everyone has complied. There are more bands now than ever before, clogging nightclubs, burning millions of unwanted CDs, straining the nation's broadband infrastructure. "Being in a band" has become the default activity for several generations of

adventure-seeking youth, occupying the space previously held by "joining the military" and "having a career."

It's an obvious lifestyle choice. For the last several generations, bands have served as the surest route to adventure, the modern equivalent of riding down the Mississippi on a raft, the easiest way to see the world. And being in a band is a great way to see the world. But

only if your idea of the world is stages and highways and public restrooms.

Live music isn't the only game in town, of course. Life offers plenty of adventure-positive alternatives to being in a band. And while some thrills (ziplines, the Arctic) remain out of reach for most people, there are lots more requiring no commitment, expertise, or investment. Here are 20.



1. GO ON A RIDE-ALONG WITH YOUR LOCAL POLICE

Little-known fact: Any American citizen can petition their local police department and request a ride-along. This means that you will literally be riding along in a patrol car, in a real American city, witnessing real, actual crimes. It's like *Law and Order*, only without the boring *Order* part. And it's in 3-D. And actually occurring in real, physical reality. Plus, you have to sign a waiver!

PROS: Completely free adventure, just for you, just because you were smart enough to read this article.

CONS: There is a remote chance that some shit will go down.

HOW: Contact your local police station. Start with the community-affairs bureau, if they have one. Programs vary greatly from city to city.

2. HIKE THE GRAND CANYON

No big deal here. It's just that Mother Earth spent the past two billion years grinding and twisting the Colorado plateau into the most breathtaking natural wonder any human being has ever laid eyes on. No biggie. There are bigger canyons elsewhere (Mars).

PROS: Grandeur, exercise, enchantment, bragging rights, risk in tourist-friendly doses, possible public sex under the vastness of a quite-visible Milky Way.

CONS: You might emerge from this experience a better, more well-rounded person?

HOW: Bright Angel Campground (928-638-7875) costs \$5 per person per night, plus a \$10 permit. See the URL at the bottom of this article for full info, including how to arrange mule rides.

3. DRIVE A DRIVE-AWAY

Q: When do you get to legally use a stranger's car as your own personal magic carpet? A: When that car is a drive-away. It's an astonishingly simple concept. Someone moves to another state, and the drive-away company contracts you to drive their car to them. You get a free tank of gas and an allotted time frame and number of miles. It's basically legalized carjacking with a happy ending.

PROS: All the good bits of touring in a band with none of the work, drunks, smells, mind games, downtime, or privacy issues.

CONS: You need to be 23 or older and have \$350 for the refundable deposit. Some of the solo night drives might get a little *Twilight Zone-y*.

HOW: See the URL at the bottom of this article for full info.

4. BECOME AN AIR COURIER

This is like #3 but for the planet instead of just one country. Businesses sometimes need packages delivered faster than mere ASAP. Commercial flights can be cheaper than airfreight but require a live human escort for all cargo. Accordingly, the courier company brokers the arrangements and sells the courier (you) a ticket at a huge discount (generally 15 percent). The courier flies to the destination nation, chaperones the goods through customs, relinquishes the goods in the airport, and proceeds to whoop it up in an insanely exotic country not of their own choosing.

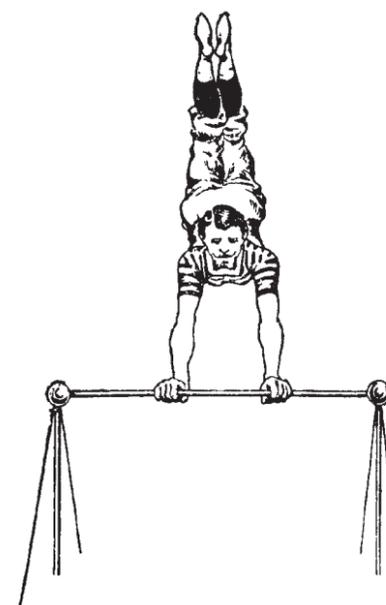
PROS: Spending the day in Kuala Lumpur with no money instead of at home with no money.

CONS: You will need to fly out of a major city, on very short notice, with no checked luggage. And you're not getting paid, so stock up on complimentary airline peanuts.

HOW: See the URL at the bottom of this article. Scammers abound, so do your due diligence.

5. BECOME A GUARDIAN ANGEL

Giuliani Time (and Curtis Sliwa's long stint as a radio personality) didn't really slow down the Guardian Angels. It's the same old international organization of volunteer crime fighters it was in the 80s: red berets, street patrols, citizen's arrests, karate training.



You won't get to do any traveling as a Guardian Angel, but you will see parts of your own city that might as well be a late-night postapocalyptic Syfy original movie.

PROS: This is the closest you will ever get to being a crusading vigilante, let alone a full-fledged superhero.

CONS: You are going to get slapped by a wino.

HOW: www.guardianangels.org

6. BECOME A STORM CHASER

Chasing storms is essentially the rugged cousin of performing live music: long drives, hobby-level expenses, long-shot pay-day opportunities. But you will be seeing far prettier parts of the country than if you were in a band, and honing your hydroplaning chops to boot. Good God, imagine the next time you're at a party and you tell everyone what you do for kicks. I envy you!!!

PROS: Standing ten blocks from an F4 tornado is more exciting than playing with the guy from Animal Collective's side band.

CONS: You may get a large strip of aluminum siding flung through your abdomen.

HOW: No training needed. Please consult the URL at the end of this article.

7. BECOME A FREELANCE PAPAZZO

This is the rich, sexy, creepy older uncle to being a storm chaser. A lot of work goes into celebrity hunting. There's deep competition, high legal and physical risk, and the odds are stacked against individuals selling photos without agent representation. But it is entirely possible for a lone photographer to fetch three-to-six-digit checks for a single picture. You'll just need the right picture. Plus, you'll be getting lots of fresh air and exercise. And digital cameras get smaller and cheaper every month. And you could be the first paparazzo to turn "Say cheese!" into a catchphrase.

PROS: At least you're not in a street gang.

CONS: Technically, this makes you human garbage.

HOW: Read *Paparazzi* by Peter Howe. Search eHow.com for "how to sell paparazzi photos." Spend 20 minutes online researching tabloid contacts. Buy a camera.

8. HUNT TREASURE

Treasure hunting in America is older than America itself. A lot of loot lies under the United States. There's the \$50K buried by Captain Kidd off Long Island, the \$200K hidden by John Dillinger in the Midwest, and a million in gold nuggets interred in a wash-tub, in 1879, somewhere in South Dakota. By some estimates, \$4 billion have been misplaced or concealed in this country alone.

You know where there is zero hidden treasure? *Inside the shitty, shitty bar where your band is playing next Tuesday.*

PROS: Buying your first McMansion with pirate jewels.

CONS: It's going to be a real challenge viewing your new neighbors—lawyers and stockbrokers all—as anything other than colossal suckers.

HOW: Seriously, go to the URL at the end of this article. There are lots of websites, listing lots of treasure hunts. Just pick one. There's enough for everybody.

9. EXPLORE A DESERTED ISLAND

The United States is 3.7 million square miles big. There are a lot of deserted islands here. There's Nomans Land (Massachusetts; unexploded ordnance), Burlington Island (New Jersey; burned-down amusement park), Plum Island (Wisconsin; 250 shipwrecks), and High Island in Lake Michigan (former cult home, buried treasure). Many of these places are illegal to visit, highly accessible, and unguarded. Then there's Robins Island, a 435-acre oasis of primordial wilderness in Peconic Bay, just two hours from Manhattan. The tycoon who owns it (and occasionally uses it for pheasant hunts) will never know you're there. Maybe combine this adventure with #8 or #12. *Circus Island???* Did I just give you that idea for free?

PROS: Catch that Mark Twain reference in the intro? You now have the opportunity to live that.

CONS: Snakes, bears, boars, rats, wolves, tarantulas, the mysterious stick-men left by your campsite every morning.

HOW: Check the URL at the end for a long list of islands.

10. BECOME A PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

Licensing varies wildly from state to state. If you live in Massachusetts, for example, you're going to have to jump through some hoops to make PI. In New York, there's an exam. If you live in Colorado, Idaho, Mississippi, South Dakota, or Wyoming, you can become a private eye simply by announcing that you are a private eye. Either way, it's not all fun and glamour. A normal private investigator traffics in a great deal of human misery. You can correct this situation by keeping your overhead low (hold off on the office with Venetian blinds) and waiting for the right cases to come to you. Here's a quick guideline: Infidelity = NO. Missing emeralds = YES.

PROS: Just picture your business cards.

CONS: Cheating husbands get upset when snooped on.

HOW: See URL below for state-by-state info.

11. GO CAVING

The nice thing about exploring caves is that there is a wide range of difficulties to match every experience level. You can start with dinky limestone caves and slowly work your way up to talus, ice, and lava caves. Equipment is minimal, and mostly optional if you feel you are a badass. This is limitless adventure, available in every state.

PROS: There are no noise bands under the earth's surface.

CONS: Bats, C.H.U.D.s, falls, drowning, albino molemen, stalactite impalement.

HOW: Join the National Speleological Society (\$40/year) through one of its 200 local chapters. www.caves.org

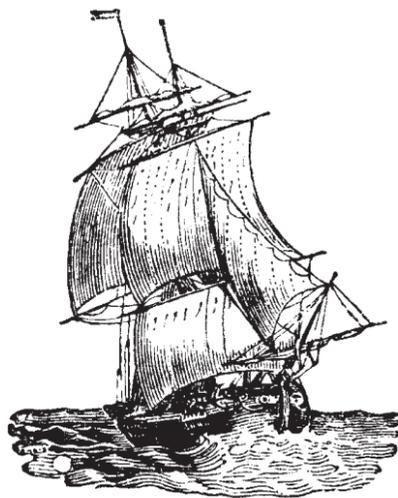
12. START A CIRCUS

This is the gold standard of American adventure, but it's changed a lot in the past few decades. In the old days, you could pack a bindle, flip off your sleeping parents, and run away to join the circus. No more. These days, respectability has taken the edge off the whole endeavor. Ringling Brothers wants a résumé, "clown college" is apparently a real thing, and people use the Shriners as a de facto internship program. It's perilously close to a job. The solution here is to start your own small big top. There are dozens of such micro-circuses in this country, and they all pretty much make their own rules. And with attendance at \$20 a head, it's the financial equivalent of a music fest where yours is the only band playing.

PROS: Travel and thrills without that hostile interlude in the van after your guitarist gets drunk and Godzillas the drum kit onstage.

CONS: Clowns, lions, pies, fire, public humiliation. And circus tours involve many of the hassles and downtime of band tours.

HOW: Consult the URL below for resources.



13. BECOME A PARANORMAL INVESTIGATOR

Being a ghost hunter takes serious grit. Choose this only if the other 19 options bore you. With a bit of documentation and some good (?) luck, you and your ragtag crew of Mystery Machine explorers will be on the road to YouTube glory in no time. But please do have fellow explorers. Don't try this by yourself.

PROS: More adrenaline than #6, #16, #17, and #19. Wide-open marketing possibilities.

CONS: That moment when your inner five-year-old asks, "Why are we in this abandoned abortion clinic at night?"

HOW: FlameCollege.org offers online paranormal-investigator "certification" for \$95, which includes a textbook and EMF meter. Or you can buy an EMF meter on Amazon for \$59. Please get an EMF meter.

14. JOIN A KIBBUTZ

This one involves a few more hurdles and a bit more commitment (although, in theory, you can walk away at any time). You need to be between ages 18 and 32. You'll have to pass several interviews. You'll need to pay for a visa, insurance, medical records, administration fees, and a flight to Israel. It'll cost about \$2,500. Although it's actually a lot less once you factor in free room and board and the monthly \$100 stipend. If you like your living communal, your work assigned, and your privacy scanty, than kibbutzim time may be the adventure-lifestyle choice for you.

PROS: Hey, at least you got to travel.

CONS: This sounds like a fucking nightmare.

HOW: www.kibbutz.org.il/eng

15. JOIN THE MERCHANT MARINES

This involves a bit more commitment than the last one. Five years, to be exact. Technically, the United States Merchant Marine is a civilian auxiliary of the Navy. It's not a uniformed service, however, and basic quality of life has increased dramatically in the past 200 years. There's no killing, no boot camp, no fatigues. If you can pass the physical (including screenings for acne, asthma, and stuttering) and have decent book smarts (1070 SAT/2.5 GPA), you can make good money hauling cargo across the seven seas. But beware: Drop out within five years, and the regular Navy gets you.

PROS: Imagine how good it's going to feel stepping off that gangplank in Singapore and straight into a Tom Waits song.

CONS: Squalls, tedium, the Kraken.

HOW: See the URL below.

16. HOP A FREIGHT TRAIN

How far are you from a train yard at this very moment? That's how far you are from adventure. And although this particular adventure format is confusing and filthy

and surprisingly heavy on rules (see the link below), it's also a great way to get over your phobia of being crushed under massive wheels. Plus, you are going to meet some characters.

PROS: Free travel in its rawest form.

CONS: You will have to enter the middle of the Venn diagram linking the worlds of Normals, Hobos, and Serial Killers.

HOW: Kindly refer to the aforementioned URL.

17. TRACK BIGFOOT

You're too good for Bigfoot? Maybe Bigfoot is too good for you, chief. Seriously—camping under the stars, hiking the pines of the Pacific Northwest, following those elusive, musky footprints: All these things are exponentially more exciting than practices, shows, or tours. And then you get to sell your photos for big bucks? What? (Although the odds are against your having any actual photos to sell, the big money here is in writing and merchandizing, something you'll be eminently poised for as an authentic Big Foot tracker.)

PROS: All you need is a camera, camping gear, and rudimentary survival skills.

CONS: Increased risk of Sasquatch Sexual Rampage.

HOW: Have we mentioned the URL at the end of this article?

18. JOIN A DEMOLITION DERBY

Transform a lifetime of bad decisions and badly managed rage into 12 terrifying minutes of joy. There are lots of regional organizations, lots of arcane rules, lots of options for destruction. And unlike passive-aggressive onstage band-member hissy fits, there is nothing passive about this show of primal infantile id rage.

PROS: You got here just in time. This "sport's" days—like fossil fuels—are numbered. And who knows what kind of dangerous explosions the new nitrogen/Mr. Fusion/Synthetic Biofuel-powered vehicles will make when they ram one another?

CONS: You are going to need a lot of cars (maybe combine this with #3?).

HOW: Check the URL for organizations and contacts.

19. BECOME A FREE-LANCE DAREDEVIL

This is sort of a companion piece to #18. The next logical step after you've demolished your car is to demolish your body. Unfortunately, *Jackass* and YouTube have flooded the market with amateur daredevils. Meaning you have two options: 1) Go legit (stuntman school, meaning: a career, meaning:

Why are you even reading this article?) or 2) Super Amateur. Think up something totally insane that no one has thought of before. Last year, a British cyclist became a web sensation with "bike parkour." I think you can do better.

PROS: The Large Hadron Collider is going to kill us all anyway.

CONS: What's your take on debilitating physical pain? You like it, right?

HOW: There's some stuff at the URL. But really, this one's kind of your job to figure out.

20. BECOME A CARNY

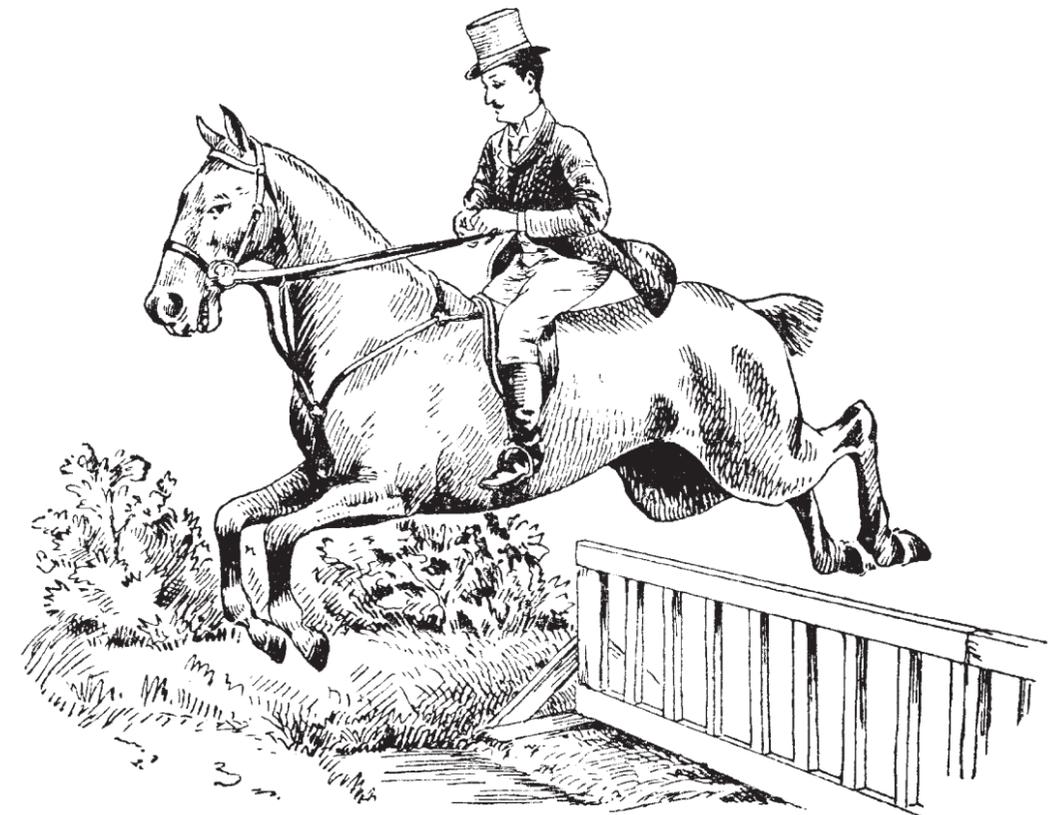
Aw, hell. Why not make it a triple play? After all, Mad Max didn't give up in *Thunderdome*. Even then—broke, carless, beat to hell—he was willing to do whatever he needed to do to make ends meet. You've tried everything else. Why not travel with a carnival for however many years you have left?

PROS: Really? You actually think this is *less* dignified than playing to six drunk Dystopia fans in the basement of the Punkin Patch House in Billips Falls, Iowa?

CONS: You are going to have to have a lot of sex, often in less-than-optimal conditions, and with less-than-optimal partners.

HOW: URL. Do this.

www.viceland.com/TVGTNBIAB ■



CLOSED FRONTIER

Is rock over?

BY SAM McPHEETERS, ILLUSTRATIONS BY LAURA PARK



It's odd to think of the Wild West as something that could be "closed," like a cardboard box or a failed department store. And yet the 1890 US Census did precisely this, with the audacious announcement that the government would no longer tabulate western migration, as the frontier region had ceased to exist. With one stroke of a pen, the entire Wild West—all its buttes and prairies and outlaw towns and poorly lit whorehouses—became simply the West, just one more region of the United States. Throughout the 1890s, academics debated the psychic impact of this closing on a country that no longer had anywhere to go.

Thirteen years later, a 12-minute motion picture called *The Great Train Robbery* ushered in the genre of western films. It's a grubby little movie, crude and surprisingly violent. It was also the first film to use crosscuts, double exposures, and location shooting. For many Americans, *The Great Train Robbery* was the first movie, period. When the leader of the outlaws stared into the camera and fired his gun straight at the viewer, early audiences reacted with panic.

If the arbitrary absurdity of the census ruling didn't kill the Wild West, *The Great Train Robbery* certainly did. Dime novels, minstrel shows, and traveling exhibitions had been repackaging cowboy legends since before the Civil War, but it took the new medium of film to coalesce folklore into genuine mass culture. Within a decade, the "western" was a staple of silent film, and actors like Tom Mix were working out the mechanics of how to be a movie star.

To a startling degree, modern America finds itself in the same position almost exactly 100 years later. Rock 'n' roll is to 21st-century America what the Wild West was to 20th-century America: a closed frontier, ripe for mass mythology. Because our era's perspective begins with a pop culture that's already rife with mythologies, we are particularly blind to the colossal impact that rock music—from Bill Haley to grunge—will have on the century before us.

This century even has a direct analogy to *The Great Train Robbery*. In just five years, *Guitar Hero* has mushroomed into a multibillion-dollar franchise, complete with clones, sequels, and competitions. Idols of classic rock lend their talents to the game's software just as Wyatt

Earp once consulted for John Wayne and filmmaker John Ford. *Guitar Hero*'s medium—virtual direct participation—is still in its infancy, much as the film industry was in 1903. In decades to come, immersive, three-dimensional multiplayer rock gaming will open new emotional channels for future music fans, avenues for self-expression unrelated to songwriting or performing as we know it (and this doesn't include unforeseeable innovations, much as CGI would have been unimaginable to 1903 filmmakers). If you ever felt that shiver of excitement hearing the crowd roar as your virtual representative sauntered onstage, just imagine what that experience will be like with 3-D, high-def eyewear, in full stereo, in a seemingly real concert hall, with no TV screen between you and your adoring audience.

It's not hard to see the game's enchanted-mannequin characters as primitive precursors to the photorealistic gaming that's just a few years away. The game itself offers plenty of sneak peaks into the near future of a music-gaming singularity. In 2008, Metallica fans traded *Guitar Hero* versions of the band's new album *Death Magnetic* in protest against the retail album's alleged overcompression. Last year's controversy over Kurt Cobain's maltreated *Guitar Hero* avatar—a ghost marionette condemned to endless karaoke—surely heralds the many upcoming conflicts involving CGI and celebrity spirits.

Guitar Hero debuted in 2005. By the logic of the *Great Train Robbery* analogy, this would backdate rock 'n' roll's conclusion to the early 1990s (snarkier writers than I might date 1994—the death of Cobain and the birth of Creed—as the year of death for the genre, if not all of popular music). That's a bit of a sloppy endpoint, but not entirely so. Certainly, there haven't been any new mass-marketing labels like "grunge" since grunge.

What can be charted rather precisely is the dearth of new hit makers in this century. Here's *Billboard* magazine's Top Tours of 2000-2009:

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. The Rolling Stones | 14. Aerosmith |
| 2. U2 | 15. Neil Diamond |
| 3. Madonna | 16. Cher |
| 4. Bruce Springsteen | 17. Paul McCartney |
| 5. Elton John | 18. Rod Stewart |
| 6. Celine Dion | 19. Metallica |
| 7. Dave Matthews Band | 20. Rascal Flatts |
| 8. Kenny Chesney | 21. Britney Spears |
| 9. Bon Jovi | 22. Jimmy Buffett |
| 10. Billy Joel | 23. Tina Turner |
| 11. The Police | 24. Toby Keith |
| 12. The Eagles | 25. Trans-Siberian Orchestra |
| 13. Tim McGraw | |

It turns out the whole decade was one giant old-timer-palooza, a series of unending backslap marathons for long-established acts. Less than a quarter of these artists even sprang from the 90s, and only one entry—cornbag country snoozers Rascal Flatts—could be considered a new act (and even then only barely, having first cracked the market six months into 2000).

It's a sign of how fragmented pop music has become that no new genres—let alone bands—were able to capture this nation's heart in the past ten years. Hip-hop, pop punk, emo, and "indie" can each boast some measure of rock's energy, but all have long since forfeited any claim to its innovation (20 years ago, critics compared Jane's Addiction to Led Zeppelin with a straight face; no band draws such comparisons this century). Exciting new music still thrives in the subgenres, but modern musicians draw increasing amounts of inspiration from tradition, not originality. The sexagenarian Rolling Stones do serial victory laps around the world, just as an aging Buffalo Bill toured America and Europe in the 1880s and 90s, performing rope and horse tricks alongside Annie Oakley and Sitting Bull. Even the most deranged, depraved, shocking performers of 2010 have to maneuver around the precedent set by all the deranged, depraved, shocking performers of the recent past. Just as in 1890, there's nowhere left to go.

By the late 1980s, the music business was ruled by six companies (since narrowed to four), and major-label consolidation served as an easy stand-in for an entire industry's sins: homogenization, backdoor censorship, creeping blandness. But a far more sinister situation hid beneath the consolidation of majors: the explosion of minors. As recording and manufacturing prices dropped through the 1990s, the world faced an onslaught of artistic output unprecedented in human history.

A May 2001 issue of *Billboard* spelled out this predicament with hard data culled from the previous year's SoundScan. At the turn of the century, independent labels were responsible for 71 percent of all albums released—more than 200,000 titles. Even with the smallest of pressings (1,000 per), this meant the creation of more than 200 million new physical objects in just that one year and for just that one category. But only 17 percent of the cash from album sales actually went back to these independent labels. And the average sale for indie labels was only 635 units per title. The article concluded:

I'm sure distributors would like to believe that they are in the sales business, but, if truth be told, they are in the shipping and receiving business, and the essence of their game is sending large numbers of unwanted CDs back and forth from one shipping dock to another.

In any other sphere of human activity—meaning, one not pegged to people's artistic yearnings—such behavior has a name: economic bubble.

Album sales have plummeted 60 percent since then. In just 20 years, compact discs have transformed from luxuries into clutter (think about how many you've purchased this year, versus how many you've had to toss in the trash), and the vibe of doom has crept steadily up the industry food chain. In 2010, major labels lurch toward any teen star or award show that can provide even a modest monthly sales bump. Although the economies of minor and major labels are vastly different, both are increasingly looking like unsustainable business models sprinkled with the occasional lucky exception.

The production glut begat a band glut. The days of ubiquitous pop stars are gone. In their place is a blur of ever-fragmenting subgenres, propelled into and out of public favor by DSL ADD. In the past decade, audiences have championed and dismissed blog house, dance-punk, chillwave, crunk, electroclash, freak folk, glitch, grime, mash-ups, neo-lo-fi, and many, many stabs at straightforward rock revivals. Every year, more and more bands compete for dwindling club space. Indie/underground acts of the 2010s are choking on the success of indie/underground bands of the 1980s and 1990s.

Nowhere is this buyer's market more on display than at showcase festivals. While still plenty of fun for audiences and industry reps, the festivals have evolved into something else for bands: a blast of artistic humiliation disguised as careerist opportunity disguised as a





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holiday from regular touring life. With more and more competition every year, bands have a longer and longer shot at getting signed and a longer and longer shot at having that signing mean anything. At South by Southwest, dozens of bands have to play vacant clubs at 11 AM. There are just too many groups, too many singer-songwriters, too many dreamers.

Last October, the *Village Voice*'s "Why Does CMJ Exist, Exactly?" depicted NYC's prestigious CMJ Music Marathon as uninspired and informally rigged, its shows "coronations, not introductions." The article continued:

CMJ may well be for no one in particular at this point, give or take a few Europeans who come over, happy to have a decent amount of otherwise far-away things grouped in one place. (Ditto otherwise non-nightlife prone A&R types, who can knock a bunch of look-sees out at once.) It's an event that persists out of inertia.

There is still one corner of the music industry with plenty of momentum: nostalgia. Cover bands—once a novelty genre spawned by Elvis mimics and Beatlemania—are now an essential part of the nightlife underbrush in every major American city. Through the past 30 years, the Hard Rock Cafe has expanded to a quarter of the nations on earth. Even a global economic meltdown hasn't slowed the mania for memorabilia. Two months into the Great Recession, Christie's auction house held a "Punk/Rock" sale, repackaging hundreds of bits of ephemera as "rare artifacts." There was a photocopied Germs flyer (sold for \$688), a Sex Pistols promo poster (\$6,250), and a signed Debbie Harry photo (\$8,750). Tellingly, the auction spanned the 40 years between Bill Haley and Nirvana, as if the auctioneers were using their prestige to imply finality.

Then there's the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, where, for \$22, you can visit Slash's top hat, displayed with the same gravity as Abe Lincoln's less-snazzy stovepipe in the National Archives. After the Sex Pistols declined induction in 2006, John Lydon famously sent a note dismissing the museum as a "piss stain." If the Hall of Fame doesn't one day reverently frame and display the note, Christie's will probably sell it to someone who will.

The Hall's induction of rappers has caused ripples of dismay among purists. The museum's website asserts, in a brash graffiti font, that "hip-hop is rock and roll." In a lengthy defense of this inclusiveness, the site later asserts that "hip-hop is but the latest iteration of a conversation America has been having with itself for the past 400 years," which is one of several plausible definitions (another is

that hip-hop is part of a much shorter, much louder monologue America has been delivering to the rest of the planet since WWII).

It's a weird question. What are the boundaries of rock 'n' roll? *Guitar Hero* is different from *DJ Hero* in that you need different sets of input controllers. But it's still the same game. Likewise, rap's mythology looks a lot like rock's mythology: beat the odds, reach for the stars, have it all. It's such a durable template that it's hard to think of any popular genre (or subgenre, or sub-sub-subgenre) that falls outside this baby-boomer-constructed mythology. Even the weirdest of electronic bands still operate within the framework of performance-based engagement. If you don't get paid in cash and fame, you get paid in excitement and notoriety. Perform live with a musical instrument invented in the 20th century, and you're almost definitely playing under the vast Big Tent of Rock 'n' Roll.

It is so big and old a tent, in fact, that for many musicians alive today, it's hard to imagine a world that doesn't follow the rules of American rock mythology. This lack of context has birthed a mutant strain of entitlement. Some of this entitlement is merely technological. For anyone under 30, a world of unlimited home recording, instantaneous global distribution, and infinite storage capacity (as of this writing, \$100 buys you nearly two years of MP3 space) is a birthright, not a luxury.

But there's an even deeper entitlement at play now, insidious in its ubiquity. This is the idea that all music is worthy of recognition. The Future of Music Coalition—the prestigious musicians' rights nonprofit—states in their concise mission statement that they want artists "compensated fairly for their work." In 2010, it is a commonplace notion that "musician" is a career like any other, that—like bakers, bankers, doctors, or farmers—one should be paid for the simple act of making music. A June FOMC study found that musicians lack health insurance at twice the national rate (33 percent to 17 percent). That's a sad statistic, but one with ambiguous significance. You could just as easily point out that men living under bridges lack health insurance at 100 percent the national rate. "If you eliminate intellectual-property royalties," anti-Napster activist Travis Hill proclaimed way back in 2000, "there won't be a reason for musicians to create any work."

That's not really correct either. People made music for several millennia before intellectual-property royalties. The clergy, military, storytellers, and propagandists have all had a long head start on getting



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musicians inspired to compose. For all the musicians out there struggling to decipher their place in 21st-century America, it turns out there is an easily discerned precedent. It's called 19th-century America.

Vaudeville in particular had some eerie parallels with the current small/indie touring band circuit. A huge national network of nightclubs, halls, and theaters existed a century ago, fueled by audiences hungry for entertainment and open to new ideas. Vaudevillians networked, hustled, and endured long stretches of downtime—just like traveling musicians today. Overlook the internal combustion engine, and the two eras of touring look awfully similar.

There was, however, one big difference. Vaudevillians were acutely aware of their own market. If your act bombed, you retooled it. As blackface became less and less politically palatable throughout the United States, blackface acts grew scarce. Even the "nut acts"—freeform, furniture-smashing loonies—aimed for laughs and responded to market forces (i.e., nightclub owners banning them for going bonkers). No vaudevillian dared alienate the audience they depended on for their bread and butter. There were no vaudeville equivalents of performance art or noise bands. Of all the varied wild acts touring the country at this time last century—dancers, magicians, musicians, ventriloquists—there wasn't a single act that demanded the audience meet the artist on the artist's terms. "Expressing oneself" was something for painters and poets, not performers.

The current world of bands and recordings is actually a freakish anomaly in the vast sweep of human history, precariously dependent on a series of interlocking innovations. Without a national power grid (1890s-1930s), the interstate highway system (1950s), or reliable gasoline (1910s-90s), bands would have no way of documenting or promoting their music. The internet has rapidly made itself indispensable to all musicians. And post-hippie-days social freedoms are so universal now, it's easy to forget that it was entirely possible to get arrested for saying "fuck" on a public stage just half a century ago.

Each of these items might seem like trivia from a distant past. In reality, each is a variable. And variables can change. The 2007





If enough people believe something has ended, at what point does it actually end?

Minneapolis bridge collapse gave Americans a taste of infrastructure insecurity. If 2008's market crash had gone slightly differently, a lot more bridges and highways and overpasses would have been left to rot. And a full-scale economic collapse could have subjected musicians (like all other travelers) to the rolling blackouts and highway banditry that lurk not far from the edges of any civilization. Even today, steep gas prices have made cheap touring a thing of the past.

Here's a weird analogy. In 2008, *overthinkingit.com* graphed *Rolling Stone's* 500 Greatest Songs of All Time and then overlaid this data with a second graph plotting US crude-oil-field production. The two little mountains are nearly identical, although *Rolling Stone* dated rock's peak to 1965, and US oil production peaked in 1971. For the most part, the only insight this provides is into the biases of *Rolling Stone* writers. But this is itself instructive, in that *Rolling Stone* is the standard-bearer for the baby boomers, a demographic

with a proven track record of imparting biases to further generations. If enough people believe something has ended, at what point does it actually end? The article includes a grim analysis: "It would seem that, like oil, the supply of great musical ideas is finite."

This comment was probably meant as a gag. And yet a lot of middle-aged people—raised in rock and shocked by its slump—seem to have reached this bizarre conclusion in earnest. It's a recipe for curmudgeonliness. Last November, avant-garde composer Glenn Branca caused a minor stir with a *New York Times* op-ed, "The Score: The End of Music." It's a confusing harangue, grasping and fumbling around a grand assumption of musical finality. "The paradigm shift may not be a shift but a dead stop." For the future, Branca envisioned nothing but Muzak designed to lure consumers.

The op-ed racked up hundreds of nasty online comments in just a few hours. Oddly, many started from the assumption that there is good music and there is bad, and that the bad is in the majority, and that Branca had not done his research by neglecting to seek the good. Being human, the commenters never reached a consensus on exactly which music was good.

Perhaps plummeting record sales aren't just a casualty of file-sharing or the limitations of compact discs. Perhaps the grand, sinking morass of the music industry in 2010 is also an indicator that music isn't quite as important to the generation currently coming of age. Justin Bieber fans are loyal consumers, but they have exponentially more avenues for their prepubescent hopes and dreams than Leif Garrett fans did 30 years ago.

With increasing frequency, popular music in the 21st century—in all its strata and subbasements—resembles a vast pyramid scheme. The first wave of every subgenre reaps the prestige, leaving future generations with greater competition and channels of expression flooded with mediocrity. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, both a beneficiary and an instigator of this pyramid scheme, defends its own existence with a drippy banality: "If rock and roll has a purpose, it is to get people in a position, either intellectually or geographically, to communicate with one another." As business rationales go, it's pretty weak sauce.

Precedent has tremendous weight. The *overthinkingit.com* piece nails it:

Assuming some constraints on the definition of the form, the amount of innovation that can be done within that form is finite. Most of it will come early and fast, then decline after the peak.

There's a reason innovators get the biggest slice of the pie. There's a reason modern cubist painters are not famous. It's a sad phenomenon, and one not restricted just to obscure musicians (just look at the Killers' undisguised ache to fit into the rock pantheon). At its best, music allows listeners to transcend the slime of life. No technological innovations will change that. But more and more, it's going to be old bands and old songs that inspire the masses.

Branca commenter #116 wrote, "Live music remains an irreplaceable human experience." This part is not so certain. The odds seem

Popular music in the early twenty-first-century resembles a vast pyramid scheme.

awfully good that attending a virtual concert—a magic concert with unicorns and singing bulldozers doing backup vocals while you and a naked Jimi Hendrix and a naked Kurt Cobain wail away in utterly realistic surround-sound 3-D—is going to be far more exciting than the reality of concerts today. Rock 'n' roll, it turns out, *will* never die. It won't even age. It'll just evolve into something else, something where fans strut on endless computer-hallucinated stages, celebrating past glories, all of rock's martyrs and lifers frozen in myth. As the *Village Voice's* review of Metallica's *Guitar Hero III* album download pointed out, who has time to listen to an album when you can live it? ■



Fear of Music

Melophobia Is Real!

INTERVIEWS BY MARK ALLEN, ILLUSTRATIONS BY TARA SINN

Do you know someone who says they don't like music? Someone who doesn't own a single CD or an iPod? Are they always turning the radio down? And when pressed on the subject, do they shrug and say they don't really "get" music? Never could quite figure that person out, could you?

Your friend's weird lack of taste could be the result of melophobia (fear of music), a little-understood but very real neuro-physiological condition. People with melophobia have particular physical characteristics that make them unusually sensitive to sudden changes in pitch and tone. Music is, not surprisingly, one of the most concentrated forms of this sort of stimulus. And music is all around us. Scary! Even scarier, perhaps, is musicogenic epilepsy, a very real condition in which music can bring on intense seizures.

We wanted to know more about music being a demonic force of tangible fear and pain, so we talked to a doctor who deals with people who suffer from these conditions, a melophobia patient, and a woman with musicogenic epilepsy. Strap on your noise-canceling earphones and read on...

Dr. Marsha Johnson, audiologist and clinical director at the Oregon Tinnitus & Hyperacusis Clinic, has treated those who suffer from melophobia, and the conditions that lead to this perplexing phobia, for 13 years. We recently spoke with her.

Vice: So, melophobia actually exists.

Dr. Marsha Johnson: Yes, it does. Often it is a condition induced by a negative encounter with music or musical instruments, like a loud concert that produced tinnitus or ear ringing in a person for several weeks. This could be so frightening and disturbing that the person would avoid all concerts from that point forward. Another example is the professional musician who plays near a loud instrument and, over time, develops severe hyperacusis [sound sensitivity] and suffers pain afterward, which intensifies with each exposure. Eventually, the professional stops playing music altogether.

Are tinnitus and hyperacusis the main causes of melophobia?

In most cases, I would say yes. More specifically, the most likely cause of these conditions are loud sound waves that crash right through the middle-ear system, which includes the tender, thin membrane of the eardrum as well as a very tiny chain of bones that includes movable joints, cartilage, tendons, and muscles, all of which can be strained, sprained, or overextended.

How do these conditions cause the experience of listening to music to be painful for the person?

Along with severe tinnitus—the type that can keep you awake for months and make you totally unable to concentrate—hyperacusis can be painful and provoke headaches or even eye or jaw pain.

So the avoidance of the stimulus leads to the avoidance of sound, which leads to the avoidance of music, and then melophobia sets in. Is melophobia curable?

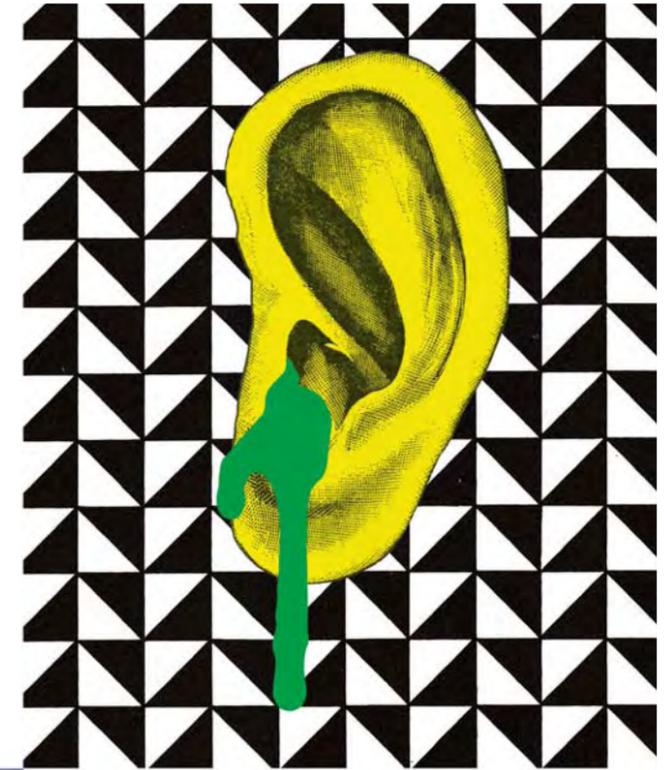
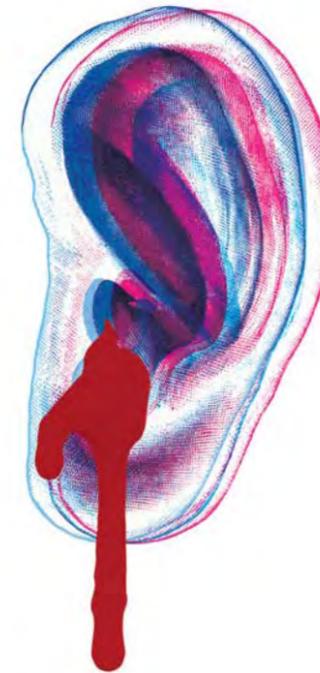
Well, tinnitus has no cure at this time but there are some wonderful management programs for improving the

loudness, intrusion, and negative impact of tinnitus. This includes Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT), which was developed by Dr. Pawel Jastreboff, and Neuromonics Oasis therapy, which was developed by Dr. Paul Davis. These are the two most-used tinnitus treatments in the world at this time. Hyperacusis can be improved, most of the time, with proper desensitization therapy using Jastreboff's TRT principles, and then the person is often able to recover from fear of music or musical events and begin to enjoy this important part of life again.

Please outline for me how we get from tinnitus and hyperacusis to melophobia.

Most people who have had a serious encounter with tinnitus or hyperacusis are quite motivated to avoid whatever seemed to have triggered it. So melophobia is a real concern among this population and, to some extent, quite rational. Those who have damaged the hearing cells in their cochlea are going to have persistent permanent hearing loss, and this can lead to phobias and avoidance beyond a reasonable scope of practice. I had a male patient from Chicago last year who had been a drummer. He quit his band and used earplugs all the time, running away from noisy buses and never accepting party invitations. But he was actually making his own situation worse through overprotection! Melophobia patients must often be counseled and supported to overcome irrational beliefs. One important fact to keep in mind is that many people with tinnitus or hyperacusis do not have significant hearing loss, and perhaps just a very mild case.

I'm currently working with a young woman who is totally housebound in an eastern state due to her severe loss of tolerance for all sounds, including music. She cannot leave her bedroom for more than a few moments. She was enrolled in college and studying singing when she developed a sudden onset of a severe arthritis condition, affecting her joints with swelling and pain. Over time, she could no longer walk due



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to the pain, and she was diagnosed with reflex sympathetic dystrophy. She tried to remain in school but was unable to navigate the campus. Only the fact that her friends carried her everywhere for the last few weeks enabled her to get through her second year. She had to give up her ambition for a musical career. She dropped out of college and is now able to listen to just 15 minutes or so of anything each day, including human voices or music.

This sounds horrible.

She is terrified that she will be exposed to a sudden noise like a radio, which can cause great pain and distress that persists for days. She wears earplugs most of the day and limits her exposure to even softer sounds such as fans or outdoor noises. We have started with reducing earplug use and opening the window across the room for two periods of five minutes per day. Her fear of sound and music is so severe that the psychological beliefs are now even stronger than the physical reactions, so she is also trying some counseling therapy via the telephone for 15 minutes per week. This young woman is unable to visit medical offices and has a severely limited life at this point in time. She is 23 years old.

Are you familiar with the condition known as musicogenic epilepsy? I'm thinking of a woman who was in the news in 2008. Her name was Stacey Gayle, and she was from Queens, New York. She had seizures every time she heard the Sean Paul song “Temperature.” She had to have a brain operation to correct the problem.

Yes, although I'm more familiar with the term “audiogenic seizure disorder,” which falls into the hearing category. It's also known as vestibular hyperacusis. Certain sounds or tones, aka music, can stimulate the central nervous system in a way that provokes a brain seizure. I have seen quite a few of these cases over the years. They are often induced by a closed head injury or an illness. I recall one fellow who was in a rear-end whiplash car accident. A 2,000 Hz pure tone was presented to his left ear in a sound booth, first at zero dB, which is inaudible, and then raised slowly one dB by one dB; he went into a grand mal seizure at about 20 dB—which is a very soft sound. Another such patient, following a similar car accident, suffered complete loss of consciousness when trucks roared by, with their lower-frequency rumbles. She would fall to the ground, senseless. In that case, I suggested the neurologist conduct a resting EEG, and this showed that her brain was normal when resting in a quiet environment. When an audiometer was attached via headphones and a stimulus at 500 Hz, a low pitch, was presented, her brain EEG showed epileptic-type activity.

How common is this stuff?

These cases are rare. Another common diagnostic term for it is Tullio syndrome. Most often, people who suffer from it end up in dizziness or balance clinics.

What is the genre of music that you most often hear complaints about? Like, say, rap music booming out of cars on the street with subwoofers, or Muzak playing in a department store?

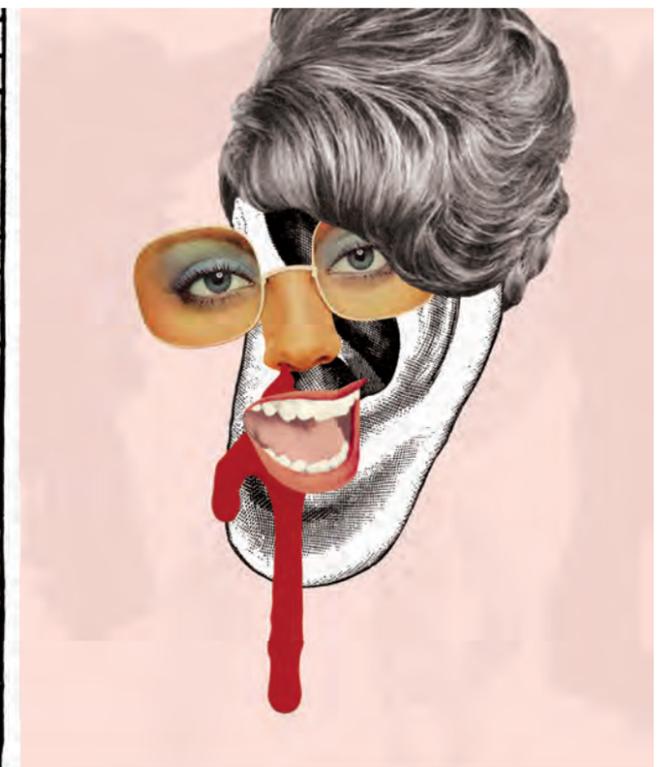
Even normal hearers often are seriously annoyed by the loud, booming rap music coming out of cars driving down their street at night. The lower-frequency energy of those big speakers passes right through solid objects very easily. It rattles our very bones! But the biggest complaint for most music-loving people with melophobia is that they miss their music very much. It is as if a part of their soul has been kidnapped and held hostage.

Are your patients who are musicians mostly rock musicians or nightclub DJs?

Oddly enough, most of my musician patients are in orchestras, philharmonics, or symphony groups—or are piano players. These instruments are often quite loud, and the whole group productions are very loud, and I believe that the practice times needed to acquire great skill on these instruments are longer. Many professionals playing violins, flutes, cellos, and so on begin very early in life, so their exposure time may already have been decades long when they first begin to perform professionally. I believe that among the guitar bands and rockers, however, the belief that they will incur hearing loss and hearing damage is quite well understood and, to some degree, expected. An occupational hazard, you might say.

Could someone be suffering from tinnitus and hyperacusis and not know it?

Yes, and there seems to be deep fear and shame associated with these two conditions, and that can lead to melophobia as well. Often people feel very guilty and stupid for putting themselves into the situation that caused it in the first place. “I knew I should have left the concert, my ears were burning, but I was too embarrassed to ask my date to go, so I foolishly stayed.” The patient is also often afraid that they will be viewed differently at work or in social settings, as everyone else enjoys the New Year's Eve party or the convention, and they cannot. Most often, these individuals will just refuse to attend such events and will quietly fade away, becoming prisoners in their own homes in some cases.



“The use of iPods is going to produce hearing loss at far younger ages than we’ve seen in the past. This is going to be an epidemic of great proportions in our world.”

What are the signs and symptoms?

Insomnia is one of the biggest co-conditions with tinnitus and hyperacusis. Also look for the use of earplugs beyond what seems normal, and people avoiding movies or parties or consistently arriving after things are over, dinner is done, or the musicians are packing their gear away. I can recall patients who would never dream of listening to any radio, stereo, or live music performance and who would go to great lengths to avoid these things. There was even one person who walked his daughter down the aisle in silence at her wedding, then kissed her and exited through the nearest door to observe the rest of the ceremony from afar.

Do you think it’s possible for someone to develop a lifelong fear of music?

Yes, though it’s not just music. It really is the sound and noise of just about everything in the world. Music is simply often the main focus since we like to listen to it loud, and it has higher-pitched tones and variations and is often unpredictable.

There seems to be more and more obtrusive music and noise in public in our everyday lives. Would you say this is bad?

Yes, unequivocally. Our systems were not designed to withstand this onslaught every minute of our lives. We need to adopt the more advanced European standard of an alert-action sound level of 80 decibels, instead of the 85 we have now. In Sweden, I saw kindergartens with a wall of lights working as sound monitors: Green lights came on when voices were quiet and moderate, and yellow ones flashed when the noise increased. At 80 dB, red ones lit up. Visually, the children could see when they were being too noisy in the classroom. They could self-monitor.

What about MP3 players?

The use of things such as iPods, which are forcing sound right down into the ear canal with the newer, tighter ear buds, is going to produce hearing loss and other auditory issues at far younger ages than we’ve seen in the past. This is going to be an epidemic of great proportions in our world. We also must educate ourselves and our children that making music that is too loud is not a well-thought-out activity. Children in bands or orchestras should wear ear protection in the form of musician’s plugs, which come with filters of 9, 15, or 25 decibels. We know there is a relationship between tinnitus, hyperacusis, and noise exposure, so let’s work harder to prevent those cases when we are easily able.

If someone suspects they may have developed melophobia, what would you suggest they do?

Visit the nearest tinnitus and hyperacusis specialist if you believe that your problems are related to these two symptoms. After a full evaluation, you may be referred for cognitive behavioral therapy as part of your rehabilitation.

An MD should also be consulted to rule out any ear disease or problem that would prevent recovery.

John Loudenback is a sound engineer who enjoys all things music- and music-production-related. He designs and builds high-end audio gear: amps, loudspeakers, and the like. He likes spending time with friends, family, and his cat, Ubic. He also enjoys music, from classical to punk (favorites include Bruckner, Shostakovich, Mahler, Richard Strauss, X, Radiohead, Keren Ann, Procol Harum, Roger Waters, and Pink Floyd). Several years ago, John began dealing with melophobia.

Vice: What led to your sensitivity to sound?

John Loudenback: A high-frequency power-line noise was causing a problem with a stereo amplifier my dad and I had bought and were working with. The sound quality was excellent and loud, but we’d find our ears hurting and getting more sensitive every time after we listened to it.

When did you first realize you were avoiding sound?

About nine months after using that amplifier a lot, I developed an extreme sensitivity to sound. I soon learned about Tinnitus Retraining Therapy and also about phonophobia, or the fear of sound. I didn’t accept that I had phonophobia until I got some guidance via email from a hyperacusis specialist in the UK. People generally don’t like the word “phonophobia” because they think it’s psychological. It’s really a neurophysiological problem.

How did this lead to a phobia of music?

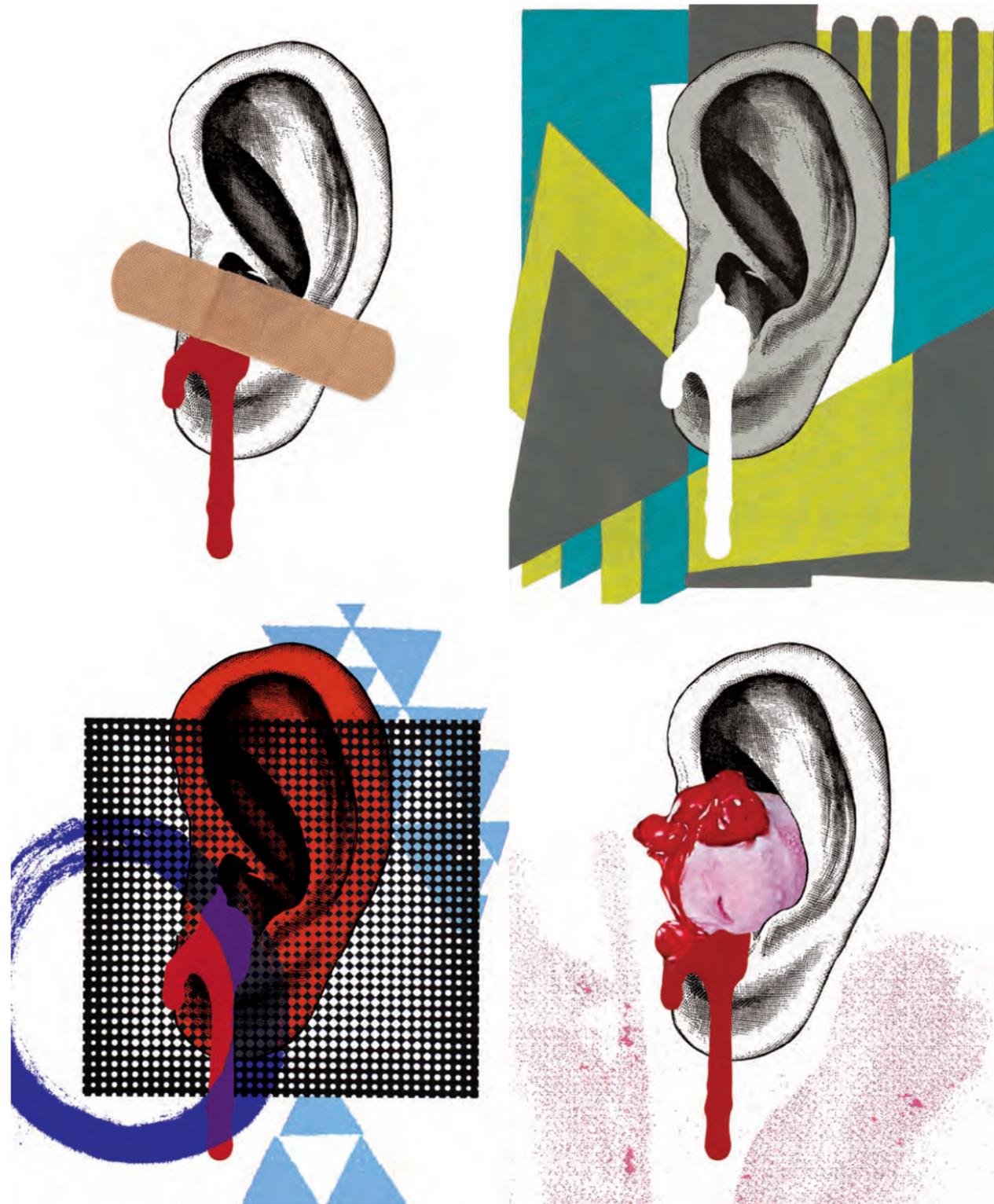
Due to my bad past experiences with music, I eventually developed a strong aversion to it and completely quit listening to it. I kept trying, listening to my car stereo, going to music stores. Inevitably my ears would get irritated or hurt. Loud music became a real problem for me. This condition prevented me from taking part in my audio hobby or activities with friends and family, as I could no longer eat out or go anywhere that had music playing. It was devastating!

Were there any particular types of music that made it worse for you?

Rock music was hardest for me because of the types of processing and studio effects done to these recordings. Cinderella’s “Gypsy Road” was one of the worst offenders for me. The poor quality of the recording made Tom Keifer’s voice sound edgy and bright. Also, classical strings really irritated my condition.

What are some of the things you did to cope in a world that has music everywhere?

Mostly I just avoided those sounds when I could. And when I couldn’t, I wore ear protection. When I started TRT I was



“The bass drums made me feel like I was drowning, reminding me of a brush with death I’d had once during a status epilepticus seizure.”

living in virtual silence, having eventually retreated totally indoors, where I always wore ear protection. Eventually I learned that overuse of ear protection makes ears more sensitive, and that was my real downfall. Complete avoidance of sounds or music that have caused you problems in the past is also not recommended. So I had to very slowly remove my ear protection. My goal was to gradually let my ears adjust to all the sounds and music I had avoided. This also meant facing some unpleasant symptoms, like ringing and headaches, and thinking positive thoughts. Ears need practice with lots of sounds.

And how are you doing today?

I have made excellent progress! I go outside and go shopping, but I’m still limited in terms of how long I can listen to some music.

What advice would you give someone who thinks they might have developed phonophobia or melophobia?

Don’t overuse ear protection or spend long periods in complete silence. Don’t distress over your symptoms or think bad thoughts. But most of all, seek help from a TRT-trained doctor.

Julie Hope is 63 and married, with five children, “many” grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. She has had epilepsy nearly all her life. A retired professional caregiver, she has always loved music, but has dealt for much of her life with music being a “trigger” for her seizures—aka musicogenic epilepsy.

Vice: When did you first experience musicogenic epilepsy?

Julie Hope: That would be on my honeymoon, when we went to a concert. I can’t recall the name of the band, but the music was extremely loud and there were people jumping all over the stage. The band’s notes were going up and down and all over the place, very frantically, like fusion rock. I began shaking. The bass drums made me feel like I was drowning, reminding me of a brush with death I’d had once during a status epilepticus seizure. I began to hallucinate. At one point the only thing that I saw was the musicians shaking on stage like leaves, which reminded me of what I must look like during a generalized tonic-clonic seizure. A wheelchair was brought out to assist me in getting back to my room. That was the most memorable musical moment in my life up to that point, and I learned to stay away from that type of music.

What are some of the things you do to cope in a world that has music everywhere?

If something gets in my way, I have always been bound and determined to overcome it. I have tried turning it around

and thinking positively, listening to the good part of the music and blocking out the bad.

Well, what for you are the good and bad parts of music?

For me, good music would be something like Sarah McLachlan’s “In the Arms of an Angel,” which I love. The notes sound like a slow up-and-down, kind of moving around me. It feels protective, and I feel like nothing can touch me, not even a seizure. Harp music can also be healing for me, as it is so calming and peaceful. If you can imagine how playing it is, eyes closed and just letting your mind, body, and fingers go to work, then nothing can touch you, not even a seizure.

I relate bad music to the sound of a loud thunderclap: silence, and then a loud bang or shriek from an instrument, which leaves me in terror and fear. An example of this would be any kind of a marching song, like those played at an army funeral. The horns, bugles, muffled drums, saxophones, and the feet stomping. To me, this has no real “song” to it, just all these loud sounds. Also, I love Elvis, but there were some songs where he got kind of wild and loud that I couldn’t handle. I can’t recall those Elvis titles because my brain wouldn’t allow me to think long enough when listening to something that I think might cause a seizure.

Do you feel like you’re missing out?

There are some concerts that I would love to go to, but the phobia comes into play. Everyone speaks so much about AC/DC, and I would love to go and check them out, but from what I’ve gathered they would drive me to a seizure for sure. Oh, and Ashley Tisdale! All her music is bad for me. The instruments and noise in the background drown out the song itself. You can’t understand what she’s saying! All those effects and noises numb my brain. If and when I see and hear her stuff on TV, I have to leave the room or change channels because I might have a seizure. The brain is funny, and so different from person to person.

What would you tell someone who thinks that they might have developed melophobia?

First ask yourself if you simply dislike music, which some people do. But if you really love music and something is getting in your way, try and find out what is causing it. Me? I’m stubborn, so I was determined. I eventually discovered most of it was something that happened that I’d blocked out. So you need to find out the root cause of your melophobia and go from there. ■

A list of resources can be found at www.tinnitus-pji.com or the brand-new Tinnitus Practitioners Association, at www.tinnituspractitioners.com.





On the Misuse of Music

BY IAN SVENONIUS, ILLUSTRATION BY NICHOLAS GAZIN

Music in modernity has heretofore been seen not just as an instrument for pleasure but also as a tool for achieving greater social justice (see Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror" or Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land"). Due to these dual and all-encompassing cultural roles, and because of cunning technology that allows its effortless transport, music is now truly ubiquitous in a way that it never has been before in human history.

If the world, at this juncture in time, is characterized by one thing, it is music. Music is being blasted from cars and into ears through earbuds, piped into shopping malls, in public parks, on TV—everywhere. But is this a good thing?

There have been murmurs recently from small, unpopular, and controversial factions that perhaps music's paradigmatic status should be reconsidered and even overturned. The reasons?

1. MUSIC IS BAD FOR YOU

Let's consider the evidence: Elvis died before his time. So did Marc Bolan. And Sid Vicious. Coltrane. Marley. Even Mozart. With half of the Ramones having passed away (Marky, Tommy, and CJ still roam among us, thankfully), most of the New York Dolls and the MC5 deceased, and the Velvets down to a fraction of their once-teeming Underground, the question is being asked: "Is music—like smoking—dangerous to one's health?" And, if so, "shouldn't it be banned from public establishments?"

Such an idea, and the subsequent argument against the proliferation of music, seems quite persuasive. Music has an intoxicating effect on people. Is there any intoxicant that hasn't been proved to have adverse qualities? For all of methamphetamine's amorous inducements, for example, crank leads to bags under the eyes and bad breath. Cocaine is considered a wonderful high, but it results in tedious monologues and poor decision-making. Marijuana was extolled by none other than bathrobed sex guru Hugh Hefner himself, but it ends up inducing grumpiness and underarm odor.

Meanwhile, music apparently leads to DEATH. And not a lush, orgasmic death as with a morphine overdose, but a horrible death like drowning in a swimming pool, choking on vomit, or turning blue while bent around a bedpost or a toilet in a fleabag motel.

Perhaps the effect people get when they feel music is not so much an emotional or aesthetic one, as they might assume, but in fact a simple physiological sensation of sound vibrations crashing into one's body and creeping

into one's ear holes. Maybe the decibels and the pummeling force of music, especially at extreme volumes and when used regularly, are a toxic force. Maybe music is destructive to one's liver or brain or kidneys or heart—or all of the above!

Certainly instrument amplification, especially at stadium levels, is not "natural." Nowhere in nature, except in the case of a volcanic eruption or an earthquake, or perhaps if one were to stand in the middle of a tornado, is anything as loud as a rock band or a sound system at a dance club.

Of course there is the often-cited issue of musicians' lifestyles: that the music is not harmful in and of itself so much as the circumstances of the music industry are. And the "biz," of course, is a junior branch of the alcohol industry, and much of its labor force works at night in bands at bars and in scummy venues, around freaks and scoundrels. All of this, it is claimed by music-industry apologists, leads to alcoholism, drug ingestion, heavy partying, stabbing one's girlfriend, suicide, and so on. It is claimed that these factors—and not noise or music—are the culprits for the astonishing mortality rate among musicians.

But are we really to believe that musicians party harder than factory workers? Or taxi drivers? Or professional ball players? Or members of the armed forces? Or actors? Or drug dealers? Or the president of the United States?

And while musicians' deaths are so commonplace that news of one invokes yawning, these other "normal" hard-partying people don't just fall down dead every day. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that our chief executives party in a way that would make the notoriously degenerate Dee Dee Ramone blush like an amateur, yet the last president of the United States who died before he was 93 years old (except for Nixon, the exception to all rules) was John F. Kennedy, and he had help.

In fact, the average president's globetrotting social calendar and Bohemian Club soirees makes the Grateful Dead's exhausting 40-year tour itinerary seem quite quaint. And yes, Pigpen and Jerry Garcia lie a-mouldering in the grave while Clinton and Bush Sr. traipse through the world's most exclusive brothels, beseeching their inhabitants, through PowerPoint presentations, to embrace "globalism." And so I ask you: Who are the real lightweights?

Other high-profile partiers such as William Burroughs and Boris Yeltsin lived to respectable venerability, as opposed to Mama Cass or Skip Spence, proving conclusively that music is more dangerous to your health than alcohol or drugs.

Music has an intoxicating effect on people. Is there any intoxicant that hasn't been proved to have adverse qualities?

2. PEOPLE DON'T REALLY LIKE MUSIC

For people involved in music, especially disc jockeys, it is increasingly apparent that, counter to modern assumptions, music is not for everyone. In fact, it's actually a niche taste more akin to needlework or kite flying than it is to something like food or sex. It is only in the past 50 years in the first world that the populace has been convinced that music is somehow central to one's identity and a necessary feature of every single interaction and activity.

People are raised to believe that they must enjoy music and that there is something deficient in them if they don't have strongly held beliefs about what they like, why they like it, and what it means. Similar to spirituality in a religious society, liking music is de rigueur, deviance is not tolerated, and deviants are despised and cast out.

Of course, most of those who don't especially care for music don't think of themselves in such a way. They like to hear "Brown Eyed Girl" or whatever Lil Wayne song has been bashing out their brain in heavy rotation for the past six months. But this doesn't betray a latent appreciation of music. This is just a longing for the familiar. Wanting to hear 50 Cent when one is standing in a nightclub means one feels antsy or uncomfortable and wants reassurance that everything will be all right. It has nothing to do with liking music.

The same formula that created a hunger for food from McDonald's is the key to "hit" success for entertainers. Instead of Ray Kroc's mantra regarding "location," however, music is about bandwidth and repetition. If something is played enough times, it will be a hit. Creating the sensation of familiarity and security is far and away the most vital component in a song's chart success.

Music, meanwhile, is a thing for hobbyists who will almost never achieve any "success" of the sort that is respected in our society (wealth, numbers, chart position). Which isn't to say it's not worth pursuing as long as one has realistic goals.

Those hapless individuals who couldn't give a toss about music are a silent, long-suffering majority who must endure iPod commercials, rock concerts, chats about the Beatles among their friends, and the incessant squall of encroaching radios and hi-fis, all of which insinuate that there is something wrong with them for not loving a good tune. They are like Jews or communists who've gone undercover in Nazi Germany, unable to reveal themselves, smiling and nodding with secret resentment at the smug and blithe self-satisfaction of the prevailing music enthusiasts.

3. MUSIC IS TIME CONSUMING

As opposed to other art forms (excepting cinema), music is a time-based medium. Therefore, to enjoy or consume or appreciate music one must devote a considerable amount of time to listening to it. And who has this kind of time now?

We are not children anymore. There are languages to learn, bridges to build, lost arcana, such as cooking and magick, to master, factories to occupy, and DNA strands to dissect.

4. MUSIC IS UNPLEASANT FOR ANIMALS

Do we really suppose that birds, mammals, insect life, and microorganisms want to hear Gary Puckett sing "Young girl, get out of my mind" again? The least we could do for these critters—with which we share the planet—is to turn it down.

5. MUSIC IS MISUSED

A slave to the forces of evil, music is beaten, worked, misused, and serially abused. Once, music was a way for humans to engage with one another.

Music came from a human and was projected as a way to speak to and entertain other humans (or dolphins, if your name was Fred Neil). After the Industrial Revolution, however, when music was pressed onto a less temporal format called "records," humans lost control of it. The record rang out the first stunning prophecy of our total enslavement by robots.

When one hears the shriek of James Brown on a record, it is not a joyful reminder of that man's genius for performance and emoting: It is the ghost of an artist imprisoned by technology, a man who can never rest, whose art is being utilized day and night in multiple locations simultaneously to pound people into absolute submission.

One cannot escape the benighted rhythms of rock 'n' roll no matter how far one strolls, chickens, mashed-potatoes, hully-gullies, and twists away from "where the action is." And if one finally escapes its insidious snare, one has backed oneself into another sound system's death zone to endure its own equally cynical mechanized cacophony.

As for the misuse of music? Every song that is any good was invented through the use of joy. This joy, however, has been inverted through the most despicable black magic imaginable. Music is utilized as a pacifier for potential customers in marketplaces. It's used to hypnotize watchers of advertisements and the programs designed to showcase advertisements. It's used as white noise in elevators, at parties, and in waiting rooms. It's even blasted outside to groove the patrons using the gas pumps at filling stations. While the Christians once hated music and banned it, music is now enforced in the same way as sexual perversion and idiocy are in our society.

Maybe LA punk band the Weirdos were right when they beseeched us to DESTROY ALL MUSIC. Let's start today! ■



photo by andy mueller



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Anarchy and Peace, Litigated

A Brief History of the Idealistic Punk Icons Crass, and Why in 2010 They Are Going to Court Over Some Total Bullshit

INTERVIEWS BY ANDY CAPPER
ARCHIVAL PHOTOS COURTESY OF GEE VAUCHER AND PENNY RIMBAUD
CAPTIONS WITH ASSISTANCE FROM GEE VAUCHER



Pete Wright, Phil Free, and Joy De Vivre enjoy the sun at an outdoor antiwar protest, circa 1980.



If you pick up some crap book about the history of punk rock, chances are there will be about 90 pages dedicated to Joe Strummer's jackets but only two sentences about Crass. This is despite them selling millions of records, singlehandedly creating the DIY punk blueprint, and maintaining their hard-line libertarian and anarchy principles even as they reach their mid-60s today.

A lot of you reading this will be aware of their logo and the fact that they were a punk band, but not a lot of people know their actual story. Because it's so inspirational and so "anti-music" (in the sense that it was a total revolt against the established music industry of the time) we feel that everybody with even a passing interest in punk rock should hear it.

And so we interviewed founding members Penny Rimbaud and Steve Ignorant for a brief history of the group and to procure their ideas surrounding this issue's theme. During the talks between myself and Penny that preceded this interview I discovered that the unthinkable has happened and that Crass, the most anti-authoritarian, anarchy-endorsing free spirits in the history of punk music, are on the verge of going to Crown Court to ask lawyers and judges to intervene in a huge row over some remastered CDs.

Despite our efforts to include all sides of the story here, a couple of former members of Crass declined to participate.

We asked Pete Wright to comment on the issues surrounding the rereleases, but all he would say to us was: "It's best if we kept it in the band at present." Joy De Vivre told us, "While meetings are ongoing, I'm not interested in discussing the reissues with anyone but those involved. Thinking space needed."

Our respect goes to all members of Crass. But for now, let's get this story told.

First, some history...

Vice: Crass—and EXIT, your first group—weren't traditional bands. It was kind of anti-rock-'n'-roll, and anti-music.

Penny Rimbaud: EXIT was profoundly so. That's why I think it's a good place to start. Gee [Vaucher, band member who was responsible for the aesthetics of Crass] and a friend called John Loder were involved and it was entirely anti-music, based around a lot of what was happening in America with free jazz and in Europe with the avant-garde, in the sense that it was anti-form. Up until that time you could say that music had a certain form, in the same way that up until cubism art had a certain sort of representational form. Obviously, there were people outside of that, but...

But not many.

EXIT set out as a guerrilla operation. We used to just turn up at places and play without an invitation. There was certainly no ambition and there was certainly no wish to engage in the commercial world of music. I mean, it's a bit like that emotion I feel when I say: "What are you?" to someone, and they say: "I'm a professional writer."



This is the blue Sherpa van Crass would tour in. The gigs were all fund-raisers, and anything they could scrounge went back to fixing the van, buying food for the audience, and fixing the van again.

“We were all, I thought, artists working together toward some common cause or liberation from the whole world of control through commerce.”

Now by saying that, they’ve just precluded the possibility that they’re a writer. It’s a self-contradiction. You can be a writer or you can be a professional. If you’re a professional all you’re up to is making money, it doesn’t matter how you do it. It’s not entirely negative, but in my view you might as well work at a bank, and you’d get better money than writing articles for *The Guardian*. That was our attitude to music. Obviously we weren’t paid because often we weren’t invited. That extended into happenings and art performances, so there was no line between us as a band and as a theater group, or as a circus, or as just a group of antisocial people sitting around doing nothing. And we did that quite actively for about three or four years and inevitably got involved with people who took it seriously in the sense that they were trying to make something of it; notably Harvey Matusow and the ICES Festival of ’72, which was at the Roundhouse. That brought to Britain the biggest collection of known avant-garde artists ever. I don’t think there’s ever been a festival like it. There were people like John Cage and Charlotte Moorman, and John and Yoko were meant to come but didn’t. Which again is a contradiction, because how can you have big names in the avant-garde? Anyway, after the Roundhouse gig we became thoroughly disillusioned, because it seemed like it was part of a ladder and we found the whole scene quite competitive. We were all, I thought, artists working together toward some common cause, or liberation of mind, liberation of spirit, liberation from the whole world of control through commerce. There’s nothing worse than control by commerce. People are so governed by it. In a way, political ideologies are something you can sort of sneak around. You can deal with that. But you can’t deal with commerce short of

completely turning your back on it. So anyway, that’s how EXIT operated, and it must have been around 1973 when we disbanded, with the Roundhouse experience being one of the major reasons. I didn’t really talk to John Loder again until 1977.

What did you do in that period?

I was at Dial House [the Epping farmhouse where Penny and Gee have lived since the 60s and where Crass all lived together during their time as a band]. Gee had left to go to New York to work on art, and I worked on investigating a case where I believed a dear friend of mine, a person who was involved in the Stonehenge Festival, was essentially killed by the authorities. I was on my own, and I was fucking shit-scared. I started a big drinking spell, and I was writing angry, cathartic material. It was then that Steve Ignorant turned up on my doorstep. He’d been down in Bristol, he’d seen the Clash do some gig, and he wanted to make a band. He knew I’d got a drum kit. He was the brother of someone of the hippie era. He was very young. So we started a band that was just the two of us. **Steve Ignorant:** I met Penny after my brother had bummed a bed for a night at Dial House and ended up staying two weeks. He took me over there to visit one day. That was in 1972 or ’73. So I had known Pen for a long, long time, but it wasn’t until ’77 when I came back from working in Bristol that I started living with Pen and we got the band going.

What made you two friends?

I think what attracted me not only to Pen but to the actual place was that for the first time ever I was spoken to like an adult. My opinion, no matter how naive it was, was always taken on board. Penny and his older friends were always talking in words with 20 syllables, but they talked to me like an equal. I was always really into writing, since school,

and when I got there I started writing properly—not poetry, but prose. And they always really encouraged that. Whatever I did, they said: “Go for it.” Penny wasn’t your typical hippie. There were no headbands or John Lennon glasses or afghans. He had long hair, but I wouldn’t have called them hippies. They were more like dropouts. Well, not even dropouts—just very clever, healthy, good-looking people.

How did you hear about Dial House?

I think it was probably a network from Pen and Gee’s art college days, by word of mouth. The thing that always amazed me about it was that there weren’t drugged or drunken people in the corners—that never happened. It was a very well-structured, well-run place. You didn’t feel that you were there to muck around, so you respected it.

How long was it until you started making music?

That would have been around 1973, about three or four years.

What influenced you?

Well, I had been to see the Clash at Bristol, and I decided then and there that I would pack in my job, which I did.

What was your job at the time?

I was putting plaster of Paris on broken arms and legs at Bristol Royal Infirmary. I jacked that in and went back to Dagenham, where I come from. I thought vaguely that I would get some of my West Ham football mates to pick up guitars, but in the time I had been away they had all got steady jobs, got married, and weren’t into punk. And I was at a loss, so I decided to visit the people at Dial House. Pen was living on his own there and was typing out *Reality Asylum*—not the song, but the booklet. I said I was thinking of starting a band, and he said that he’d play

drums. I think at that time he was gigging with a band that sounded like tin cans falling downstairs. We just hit it off from there.

What was the first lineup? Was it just you and Steve?

Penny Rimbaud: No, we sort of got everyone in the band that’s known as the band, except it was a different lead guitarist: a guy called Steve Herman rather than Phil Free, who joined about six months in or something, because Herman went off to Nicaragua. He eventually died there in 1992 or something or other.

Steve Ignorant: Steve Herman looked nothing like a punk at all. He was a bald, middle-aged hippie, but it was punk so anything went. Then Andy Palmer turned up and he didn’t have a guitar and couldn’t play anything, but he nicked one and came over, so he was in. Then Pete Wright showed up and said that he was fed up of playing in the folkie band he was in. I think it was called Friends of Wensleydale or something like that. I’m not sure what they were singing about, probably trolls and Tolkien, things like that.

And so the final lineup was you two, Pete Wright, Gee, Andy Palmer, Phil Free, Joy De Vivre, and Eve Libertine.

Penny Rimbaud: Correct. I got in touch with John Loder and said, “How about us doing a demo?” and he said, “Well, I’ll get an eight-track,” and he did, so that’s how we started.

He was able to get the eight-track partly because when we were EXIT we’d bought quite a lot of really good gear. We used to use massive speakers, like when we did the Roundhouse gig. I think there was probably something in the region of a dozen or sixteen cube speakers. So we’d actually had quite a lot of gear for EXIT, which John inherited basically because no one cared a fuck where anything was. But I was actually a bit miffed, because he’d sold the fucking lot and bought two bloody great Tannoy speakers with the money. It’s something I never did anything about, but it pissed me off because we’d lost all our fucking equipment so that John could set up his studio. But I mean that was how it was in those days, we weren’t using it, so he did. So he got an eight-track, we did the demo, and I think we paid him by Gee giving him a picture, which was quite a common way of trading. Then a label called Small Wonder got interested, so we did our first recording with them and they paid John. So then that was the first proper recording he’d done on an eight-track. It was still just John in his garage, basically.

And that record was *The Feeding of the 5,000*, which was meant to include a song on it called “Reality Asylum.” That caused some trouble, right?

Yes. It was deemed blasphemous by the director of public prosecutions, so we were

being investigated on that. We had Scotland Yard come round the house.

Yeah, the night that Scotland Yard came to Dial House. How was that?

It was all right, really. They were people who would normally be raiding nasty porn shops in Soho and coming up against some pretty grim characters, I would’ve thought. And so they turned up at the back door here and we offered them tea. Haha. I just don’t think they knew what the fucking hell they were doing here. They don’t know this, but we recorded their visit. We lost the tape, unfortunately, but it was really funny. We left them to it while we waited for our solicitor to turn up to act on our behalf. Anyway, it was great because they were out there and they were going, “Corrrrr! ‘Ave you seen this book? Look at this! Fackin’ Beethoven and Brahms?” Like, they just could not believe the record collection we had. God knows what they must’ve expected because this place is so beautiful, and they appreciated that, and at the end they did say, “Well, I really don’t understand why we’re here,” and they did actually drop the case with severe warnings that we’d better watch it in the future. It was a piece of criminal blasphemy, so-called, but it didn’t become criminal blasphemy by law.



Gee Vaucher, Joy De Vivre, and Eve Libertine at a motorway service café circa 1982.

“We had no ambition or interest or desire to become a band. And certainly no ambitions to become a known band.”

And didn't the label refuse to release it?
Yes! No one would fucking press it, and no one would print the cover. So we found a private guy who printed the first covers for us, with the lyrics. And we also found a pressing plant that specialized in classical music to do the vinyl. We also promised the people who bought *Feeding* on vinyl that we would supply them with tape recordings of the removed track if they sent us a cassette, and every day for a while we spent up in the fucking top room of the house doing copies to send to people. I don't know how many we did, but it was an awful lot of work. And then we thought, “This is fucking stupid, let's do it as a single ourselves and see what happens.”

And that was the birth of the DIY punk ethic that people still talk about all the time today. You created an iconic movement.

Yes, but I have to say, Steve and myself were just mucking about, really. We had no ambition or interest or desire to become a band. And certainly no ambitions to become a known band. We just wanted to have some fun, and that really was what we were doing. I mean, the fact that our lyrics might have been sort of political or aggressive was simply because both of us were a bit political and aggressive, and nothing more than that. And when people joined up with the group, they would have been fully aware that there was no ambition to make this into anything. There was no interest whatsoever in any kind of engagement with musical convention.

What didn't you like about musical convention? I imagine the business side of it wouldn't really appeal to an avowed anarchist.

Not really the business of it, more the sort of artistic control. That's much more important. I mean, the business side of it can look after itself. What's more the problem is the form of self-imposed censorship that commerce inevitably brings into any enterprise. That's one of the reasons why I've never ever accepted any kind of commission. People have asked me to write things, and I've said, “Yeah, I'll do it, but at the end of it you can give me the money if you like it, but I'm not fucking writing it with your bloody checkbook at the bottom of it.” So it was more than a refusal to engage in conventional business, because there's no such thing as



Steve Ignorant in a contemplative mood at Dial House.

unconventional business. All money requires banks, all banks require arms dealers, and all arms dealers require war. You can't get out of that circle.

There was also the point that the music press, who are very much controlled by advertising, i.e., commerce, and by the whole music business's interests, were very interested indeed in the band when we first started becoming public and very interested indeed in *Feeding* when it first came out. When they realized we weren't actually prepared to compromise, we weren't actually prepared to buy into their requirements—in other words, to fit their package—they very quickly dumped us. Well, not only dumped us but became quite vicious toward us, which is what our history of bad press was and remains. I mean, buy a book about punk and you'll have a very hard job finding us in there.

Didn't EMI try to sign you guys for loads of money?

Steve Ignorant: Yeah, a guy called Tony Gordon. He was the manager of Boy George. I think the Cockney Rejects got involved with him too, and they got a really bad deal out of it. It was a load of rubbish, really, some idiot sitting behind a big desk with a cigar. It was so naff you wouldn't believe it, like something straight off the TV.

I can admit my little Dagenham urchin ears pricked up for about 30 seconds, but then I thought, "No, I don't want to do that."

And so you self-released *Stations of the Cross* on Crass Records.

Penny Rimbaud: We talked to John Loder and said, "This is all a gamble, we don't know how or what might happen, but do you want to be the ninth member of the band?" Which he did. We also borrowed something like £12,000 off another band called the Poison Girls. I think they'd just sold their old house or something like that. Anyway, they loaned us that, and we actually made it back in a week, so we paid them back, and then we started making lots and lots and lots of money. We'd priced the album still at half the price of any other album, and it was a double album, to cover the costs of 5,000 copies, which we knew we would sell, or we felt we would sell because of the sales of *Feeding*. Anyway, it sold 20,000 in the first two weeks or something like that. Huge amount. So we suddenly had all this money.

How much did you sell the record for?

I think it was three quid, probably, which was for a double album. I think what we did was consistently half the price of every other band's records. But that was easy because our lifestyle was half the cost of other

bands'. I remember some of the other bands would say, "Well, it's all right for you, you're not paying big rent, you live together so your food bills aren't very much," and that's sort of true. We were taking advantage of the fact that we were living for next to nothing and we hadn't got expensive drug or alcohol problems. So we were passing that advantage onto the purchaser. It was at least a generous or honest act on our behalf. And so it grew. Crass Records became a sort of formal thing with John as our recording engineer and managing the whole financial side of things for us because none of us were capable of doing that or interested in doing that. He also remained the ninth member of the band until about 1989, or five years after the band folded. I think I'm right in saying that his first expansion out of Crass Records was when I realized he wasn't really getting a fair deal for someone who was doing the amount of work he was doing. It's a fucking big job, not the engineering side of it, that alone was a hard job, but actually trying to financially manage a bunch of people who were willing to throw fucking thousands of quid all over the place for a laugh was difficult.

Where did you throw it?

A lot of it went into things like the CND or Greenpeace, which now have become

"We always all had the idea that '84 was the mythical, Orwellian thing. And I think it largely folded because I was becoming interested in something broader than punk."

regarded as sort of respectable organizations but in those days were struggling to exist. So really there were thousands and thousands that went that way. And the other thing was the expansion of the label. Like: "OK, so we've made bins of money, what do we do with it? We tell the band from down the road they can come in and do a single," which we did do with great grace and great honesty. But anyway, I realized that John really wasn't getting a fair deal out of it, so I suggested to John, "How about we set up another label called Corpus Christi and I'll help you manage it in the sense that I'll go on doing the sort of A&R side of stuff, like if I hear of a band or if you hear of one you tell me?" I think that it was in 1984 or around that time that he formalized it into being Southern Records. In other words, he created an umbrella.

But it wasn't until '89 that he came to me and said, "How about us effectively collapsing Crass Records as a company and incorporating it into Southern, under the umbrella, so that you get all the benefits of Southern?" From that point on he started working from a percentage—an incredibly low one, it has to be said. If Southern were getting 12 or 15 percent, I think that was about all they were taking.

What was the motivation to set such low percentages?

I think it was mutual respect. He knew I didn't make anything from it, and I think he would have felt that it was probably reasonable if... I mean, he was also making money on the studio side and on the distribution side and on the manufacturing side. John was controlling everything at that point.

What was the reason the band folded?

We always all had the idea that '84 was the mythical, Orwellian thing. And I think it largely folded because I was becoming



Penny Rimbaud and Steve Ignorant mid-set, 1980.

interested in something broader than punk. Our interests were going out, and really it was after we'd done that last gig in Aberdare which was so disillusioning and so sad, which was the fucking result of Thatcher's vicious Britain. And I think all of us felt that jumping up and down on a stage saying "No more war!" was a joke in light of the poverty and desperation we saw that night.

What happened?

It was a benefit gig for the sacked miners in Aberdare. We went down in the van as we usually did, loaded with bins of food because people were literally starving in those villages. It was inevitably raining, which it always does in those valleys, and it was just so sad, the sense of destruction and the sense of despair. There were lots of men who didn't know what they were doing anymore. Lots of men who just didn't know what had happened. It was horrible. And the gig was great and everyone enjoyed it, but it was still just so sad. It was the next morning that Andy came through and said, "I'm leaving the band, Pen," and I didn't react because I thought, "Fine, I completely understand." So he sort of initiated what I think would've inevitably happened anyway. It was 1984 and we had said we were going to end then, which is what the countdown was all about in our catalog numbers. We'd said everything that was to be said in that context, fucking hell. The fact that it's still just as pertinent today is indication that nothing's changed. You can't say more than what we've said, really, except possibly offering a few answers. But you know, I'm still looking for them. And they're certainly not ones that will be found in the context of punk rock. I think within the context of punk rock we did everything we possibly could.

Steve Ignorant: We'd been doing it since 1977. It had been all those years, nonstop. We lived at Dial House, the doors were always open, and who we were onstage wasn't any different from who we were in life. It wasn't like we could come off tour and have a week's holiday. We were doing it all ourselves and running the other label, Corpus Christi. Pen was always in the studio; I was doing vocals with Conflict or something like that and writing songs for other people. And it wasn't like a nine-to-five job. It went on and on forever. When Margaret Thatcher came in, it all went up a notch. It was endless. Looking at horrible images, living in a horrible time, dealing with things like the Falklands War, the miners' strikes, unemployment. It was a horrible time. There was violence at gigs; I was wearing black clothes all the time. I got fed up. If I went out for a drink there was an unspoken responsibility I always felt that if I went and got drunk I couldn't show it. If I fell over in the gutter it wasn't just me falling over in the gutter, it was Crass. So there was this responsibility to not fuck it up.

A lot of "punk" was being proud of falling in the gutter. People would pretend to do it even if they weren't drunk. What made Crass different?

Well, we thought that the message was important enough to make people come and listen and buy the records. We couldn't shit all over that by being idiots in the pub afterward.

So it was anti everything that rock 'n' roll stood for.

Yeah. I never got all that. I have been around people who should know better. I mean, throwing a TV out the window, nothing new. I have seen people throw food around, and that really annoys me. I mean, someone has taken the time to cook the stuff. I have seen people onstage giving it all



Sound check at unknown venue, circa 1980. From left to right: Andy Palmer, Steve Ignorant, Pete Wright, sound engineer known only as "Dave," Penny Rimbaud, and Vi Subversa.



Andy "NA" Palmer and Steve Ignorant on tour in 1981.

large about "nonviolence," and the next minute they are in the street fighting with someone who comes from Manchester because they are from down south. Complete and utter bullshit. I have never been into that rock 'n' roll image. Yeah, you get a bit of adulation; fair enough, I can deal with that. But the limousines and paparazzi and all that? You can stick it! Stick it as far as it can go. Bullshit! I have seen musicians who have so many people around them telling them they are great that in the end the idiots actually think they are and that they can tell people what to do.

Did that ever happen to anyone in Crass?

No. But it happened to a couple of close friends of mine. So, in that sense, for us it was never about being a part of a rock 'n' roll band, though sometimes I did want some of the things associated with it. I wanted the blonde girls and the free drinks, which I never got. The only people I spoke to at gigs were spotty blokes in anoraks asking me about anarchy.

Haha. But that's what you signed up for. Do you regret that?

I suppose sometimes it's a little thing, I don't know. It would have been fun for it to happen

now and again. Regret it? Not really, we did what we did. As you said, that's what I signed up for. It was a commitment; and my own fault, really.

And now you've decided to perform Crass songs again live, right?

Well, some people asked me to think about playing at a punk weekender so I did, and I thought, "Well, Conflict are playing and the usual lot, you know, UK Subs and the like." I thought, "I know what I can do; *Feeding* lasts for 30 minutes or so. I will get a band together and just do that. Not announce it, just do it from start to finish and then walk off and blow

"I was a 35-year-old man when a 17-year-old boy turned up and wanted to form a band, and the band that he and I formed together denied him everything he should've had."

because it was a commercial venue which, from Penny Rimbaud who has been performing at the Vortex Jazz Club in Stoke Newington that costs £10 to get into, £12 for a bottle of wine, £4 for a bottle of beer... I mean, which one is the commercial venue? The one I was doing was something like six bands a day for £15-odd for two days. What Penny said really did my confidence in. But I just thought: "Bollocks to it, I'm gonna do it anyway, and if it ends up in court he'll look like a twat."

About two weeks before the gig Pen called me and said, "Actually, you have my blessing." It was a huge relief. He didn't come to the gig, but I understand that. It's not his scene.

Penny Rimbaud: With Steve's gigs I was quite cross at first. I thought, "Nah this is ridiculous. I'm not going to let him do my songs."

What made you change your mind?

It was actually Eve Libertine who said, "You'd let anyone else do it, so why don't you let Steve?" And that was true. Anyone else could play them but not Steve, and that seemed really unfair. So I rang him up and said, "Look, I'm really sorry, Steve. Do what you like, but I can't support it, and if I am asked I'm going to be critical. Good luck with it. Have fun." He was really gracious about that, and that's how it always has been with Steve, in all fairness. He thinks I'm mad and thinks the stuff I do is completely off-the-wall, totally incomprehensible, and I think his stuff is a bit puerile and fun-loving, but great. I also blame myself. I was a 35-year-old man when a 17-year-old boy turned up and wanted to form a band, and the band that he and I formed together denied him everything he should've had. He should've been fucking the groupies, snorting coke, and having a laugh. He never had a laugh; he never had a fucking adolescence. It was denied him by our hard line. I realize that now, I didn't realize it at the time. I thought we were having fun, but Jesus what fun it was. I mean, I suppose I could get more fun out of it because my fun has always been more cerebral and intellectual, so for me some of the conflict that we created with the state and that sort of stuff was fun. But Steve wanted to be having proper fun, and I can completely understand that now. And also I can't actually believe that he is so underappreciated. I think the guy was brilliant, among the best of the punk voices.

What did Penny say?

He had a pop at me. I told him I was going to do it and he said he didn't want me to use any of the material, but by that time it was too late to pull out. I asked why not and he said it was

Well, I'm glad you two are good now. Let's go back to Crass ending and what happened then...

After Crass ended we left it to John, in 1984. We did spend quite a bit of time over the next few years putting stuff into new formats, remastering stuff in new formats. Initially cassettes were the first new format we moved into, and then into CDs.

What did you think of that demand to push it to CD?

I couldn't bear digital sound, having worked in studios for so many years by then. Gee felt the same because obviously you're bringing 12-inch formats down into four-inch formats. Gee wasn't able to exercise or display her artistic integrity fully. At that time, what we thought we were doing was just moving one format into another, so there wasn't a great deal of thought of how you could improve things by doing that in the process. I think both Gee and myself felt we were doing the best we could of a pretty bad job. I was actually fonder of cassettes because they sounded better. However crappy they were, they certainly sounded better than the first CDs did.

As Crass broke up and the records continued to sell, the logo became a commodity, didn't it? People would bootleg it. How do you feel about that?

I feel that it proves the strength of the design in the first place. For all the pastiches and the other bands trying to do something a little bit the same, no one ever came up with a logo that powerful. Which is why I think Naomi Klein commented on it. We were the first example of logo-ing. We were, you know. It was a phenomenal piece of design. Dave King, who made it, is a fucking genius. It was all the way back when he was at art school with Gee and myself. I mean, he was fucking totally brilliant in that domain. People have lost any idea of what design is, really, particularly in the digital era. It took him months and months to design that. It wasn't actually designed for Crass, it was designed for the *Reality Asylum* book. It was the front piece for that. And it represented the death or destruction of the state, the family, and the church. I have been to places all over the world and the logo has popped up somewhere. It's sort of rather nice. Some people might even bother to inquire into what it means and get involved in what it did mean



Gee Vaucher and bovine pal at Dial House farm.

and what it might still mean. That's fine. The commoditization I don't like and never have liked is when those big New York fashion houses rip off a load of Gee's artwork and make a collage with it and sell dresses off it. I didn't actually mind when Wal-Mart bootlegged it. I'd rather people buy Crass t-shirts in Wal-Mart than Coca-Cola ones because I'd prefer for them to be going around with something that means something on them. I'm ambivalent about it. Wal-Mart I haven't got any time for, but on the other hand, you know, great! Get it out there!

There were Crass shirts in Wal-Mart?

I think there were, yeah. It was the same as the Crass t-shirt on David Beckham's chest. I don't suppose he knew what it meant either but great, good. That doesn't actually upset me at all. Like... it would upset me deeply if Mick Jagger was to decide to rip off a Crass song because I've got no respect for him or for the reasons he might want to do it.

And now you've remastered all the albums and Gee's done new artwork and Southern is going to release it, but that's all caused a bit of a hullabaloo, right?

Yes, well, in the remastering I've been doing of the Crass material, I've incorporated stuff which is otherwise only available as bootleg. And why is this stuff only available otherwise in bootleg? It's because we never bothered to do it ourselves. We're to blame, not the bootleggers. So what we've done now is to sort of reclaim that, give really good sound to it, as good as we can, and then put it out so that if people want our version of it they can buy it. The bootlegs will probably still be there.

I discussed the plan to remaster everything with John in the year that he was ill. I was visiting him once a week or so. We talked a lot, obviously, about the future and that. We fantasized about going in to remaster the entire catalog, remaster a lot of my own

works like *Acts of Love*, do new material, but I have to say that most of the time I knew it was a fantasy because it was quite obvious he wasn't going to survive.

When he died, Southern had a lot of trouble coping with it all and during that time I spent a lot of time worrying about what the fuck was going to happen to our material because with John there'd never been any formalities, nothing had ever been signed, who owned what, what owned who. There was nothing to go by. What I was really worried about was the receivers being called in. I thought, "Well, if Southern goes down, they're going to go in and all the fucking stuff's going to get nicked. I want to know what's ours so we can have it." I sort of made halfhearted attempts, but really the place was such a fucking mess that I thought, "OK, I'll back off and let them sort whatever they need to sort out, and then we'll go from there." That coincided with trying to stop the house being taken over by a lot of property investors, so I got very embroiled in a big legal battle.

Who has the house now?

We do.

You nearly didn't?

Yeah, you know, several times over. During the era of the band, we could have sat down and said, "Look, we don't own this house. Why don't we buy it?" We could easily have done it, but it never even occurred to us. Every time we got any money we were like, "Oh, we've got a grand! Let's go ask those people down the road if they want to put out a fanzine!"

It was the same when we did fucking gigs, actually, which I'm not so pleased about. Like we'd go and do a gig, pick out a place somewhere, hand all the money over to people in need or charities or whatever, and then realize we hadn't left enough money to buy

"We'd go and do a gig, hand all the money over to people in need or charities, and then realize we hadn't left enough money to buy supper."

supper that evening. We were that stupid, seriously. We didn't look after ourselves. If we had looked after ourselves, the house would've been ours and Gee and I wouldn't be living in what's close to poverty most of the time. We'd have looked after it, but we didn't, and that's because we weren't interested and we're still not interested, so I'm not complaining, it's just that's a fact.

How was the task of digging out all the old material and remastering it?

I didn't actually come to sort out what was truly ours until a friend turned up, and then we spent fucking ages going through all of the tapes, documenting them and finding out what was there. It was a huge warehouse full of fucking tapes.

Our last album, which was never popular with anyone but myself, which was *Ten Notes on a Summer's Day*, had been digitalized before but it sounded awful. So I took the opportunity to remaster it. That's when I realized how brilliant the new remastering potential is. It sounded like I had always wanted it to sound. I was actually able to hear bits that I thought had gone forever.

You remastered off the original tapes?

We went back to the pre-mastered tapes and remastered them in digital format.

You've done it all now, then. You've done new artwork and bonus tracks and put all the original artwork in there too.

We digitalized everything we'd ever recorded. The first one I did after *Ten Notes* was *Feeding*, and bloody hell, I got excited. I discussed with Southern about just remastering the whole fucking lot, which they were enthusiastic about because they'd heard the results. Then we talked about doing the same with the artwork. The digital packs were crappy, they were plastic, they looked old-fashioned, and they looked grubby. They hadn't been done with an enormous amount

of interest by Gee. She'd done as good a job as she could, but she wasn't actually that involved because it was such an unprofitable—creatively, that is—thing to be doing. So when there's a possibility of new digipaks in all cards and booklets, it became very exciting, and Gee started redesigning.

Did you remix any of it?

No, no, to remix the material would have been to completely change it. When you remaster it, you can't change it. You can only make the sound better or worse, but it's still exactly what you did. You're not affecting the material.

What was the thinking of including new artwork and old photos of the band?

Our thinking was firstly that there were a lot of people getting into the band who didn't know of our background, didn't know of any history, and didn't know what was going on socially at the time. So I decided to take on the job of writing an essay for each release. We thought for the first time it'd be good to include photos, because people don't have a chance to go to our gigs so they don't know what the fuck we look like, and we'd got some great pics of the band so we included them. Gee adapted some of the original Crass artwork and then added new images where she felt they were appropriate. I somewhat

tastelessly wanted to release it as *The Crassical Collection* and I wanted it to have that feel of classical music because I thought: "We are classical now, we're not actually just another fucking bunch of kids pissing around with a DIY mimeograph machine, we're doing this plush, we're doing this smart." You have to have a particular arty sense of something or other to want to look at that old Crass stuff. It's got its charm, but it's charm only... it's got no relevance. I want stuff to look slick, I want people to go: "Fucking hell, this is crazy good design." Gee can do that, and she did, keeping the elements, but adding a thwacking great big new element in the same way. It feels like what she did with the artwork was exactly what I did with the sound. We were able to take something that looked like it was out of a fucking museum and make it sound modern. Something like *Yes Sir, I Will* sounds like it could've been recorded next year, it's so fierce.

When you played it for me in your study/shed it sounded really brilliant. So, this is all fine and dandy, but the rerelease project has caused a huge shitstorm that could end up in Crown Court, right?

Well, yes. The bassist, Pete Wright, is vehemently opposed to the rereleases and I think he's also convincing Joy De Vivre and Phil Free to be as well. It's a nightmare.

Why do you think Pete is so opposed to the rereleases?

When the band broke up and we no longer had that common ground, it increasingly became obvious that there were distinct differences between the various members. That didn't rest well, and so certain conflicts started developing in the house. Notably I would say between those who didn't see the folding of the band as a collapse of security, the individuals who were secure in their own being and quite happily got on with whatever it was they might be doing or not doing, whereas another part of the band was worried, like: "Where's the future now? Our security has suddenly been taken from beneath our feet." I think that was the root of the conflict, but it became expressed in lifestyle arguments. I created this house as a center for anything anyone wanted to do with it, in a way. It wasn't for me to define, it wasn't for me to judge, it wasn't... I'd found the house, I was quite happy to finance it, and everyone could do what they wanted within certain parameters.

I've since been accused of standing back when I should've helped a situation. So the objection that Peter's making, by his own admittance, is that I would not give support to his criticisms, some of which were probably just, but in large number were bloody infantile or impractical.



Crass pictured postshow in Glasgow, circa 1980. Note the police officer at the right-hand side of the stage. Many fans had broken chairs at the venue during the show, but when the police turned up there was nothing much to report.



Penny Rimbaud with his hand in the bush, Dial House, 1983.

Such as?

Well, one infantile one was to not recognize a natural authority. A natural authority is one that produces 65 percent of the material that you're making a living from. Not for their own ends, but for a genuine belief that there's a shared purpose here, which is why I wrote all those Crass songs. I don't take kindly to someone turning around and being critical of that authority when they're not directly benefiting in the way they want to directly benefit,

while at the same time benefiting in all sorts of ways in which they continue to benefit. I don't think that's graceful. I think it was infantile to feel that one could change a situation by stamping your foot and being rude. It's not how to do it. I'm willing to sit and listen if someone is willing to sit and talk, but I'm not willing to be insulted by anyone. I don't think it's very graceful of people not to acknowledge that; to live somewhere for seven years, rent free, for fuck all, to use every little iota of

space which could've been mine in a selfish way, and then to make a big cacophony about it all.

Where does the opposition to the remastered material come from? Is it ideological or aesthetic?

It's got nothing whatsoever to do with the quality of the material. That's been laced into it to give some sort of faux weight. By his own admittance, it's to do with his feelings of what happened in the period after the band broke down, when we no longer had the Elastoplast adhesive tape of the band to keep us in one piece.

What's your communication with him?

Initially, there was communication when he objected. I have to say there's a history of objection with him. He objected to just about every sort of artistic move I've made over the last few years, from the big Queen Elizabeth Hall concert, which he attempted to undermine and actually partially did, quite successfully.

How did that happen?

He hired a professional actress to act as a... what are the people that shout at gigs, what do you call them?

A heckler?

He basically hired a heckler in the same way that in Vienna they used to hire hecklers to come and fuck up people's gigs. And it actually turned into heckle night. He basically gave license for people to heckle throughout the night. It was a deliberate move to undermine the gig.

Did you confront him about it later that night?

I was actually so taken aback by it, I just confronted him by saying, "Great show, very funny." With the rereleases, his main argument is that he hasn't wanted anything changed, because if anything's changed, I think in his words, "we," i.e., those who are trying to change things up, are opening a Pandora's box, and he will tell the "truth" of Crass. The truth of Crass that I've read of his is revisionist to say the least. There's no question that during the period that we lived 15 people in the house with 25 cats there was unbelievable accord. Obviously there were occasional rows about something, but they were very, very rare and we managed somehow. We couldn't have done what we'd done otherwise. However many albums, all of the stuff, it ran like a machine. We did it at the cost of our emotional lives, and we were very good at it.

But when it all ended the emotional baggage wasn't properly dug out from all the dark holes around the house and dealt with by us. We should have deprogrammed, but we didn't. We deprogrammed in our own slow way and within that a lot of bitterness formed.

What's Pete been doing since he left the house?

He created a band called Judas Two and the name, in a way, says it all.

That you and Gee are Judases?

Well, some of his lyrics are direct, stupid attacks on me; "Fools on the Hill" or something like

"I wrote on the Crass Facebook how ironic it is that the intergalactic anarchists of all time, Crass, all dressed in black, can't solve the debate without running to the apron strings of mummy system."

that. Really rather ineffectual and a little bit infantile.

So are you going ahead with the rereleases or not? You said there were lawyers involved and the court involved. It seems crazy that Crass could be going to the Crown Court, which is essentially asking the Queen to intervene in the band. And this is a band that was never really a huge fan of the Queen, to say the least.

Pete has tried to bring an injunction against us, but because his papers have not been in order, because really as far as I can see, I don't know law that well, but certainly...

No contracts were ever signed.

There's no contract, there's no written anything in the history of Crass and Southern, and there never was between any of the bands that Crass recorded. It was done on trust or it was not done at all. And in fairness to John, I think that was a principle he kept on Corpus Christi.

If Pete wants to play the law, in the real sense of the word, it's a very foolish line to take. If I were to play the law on a 65 percent ownership of the songs of Crass, I could be sitting with a swimming pool just close to us, rather than a cat bowl, and he would have to work a little bit harder at whatever part-time jobs he does now. That's the truth of it.

So as of now the nine members get an even split?

Yeah. And nine members have ownership of all of the assets, i.e., all the hardware, like the tapes and all that shit, the ninth member being Southern, representing John Loder's original stake.

I'd really like to hear Pete's side of it.

It'd be great if you could, but I don't suppose you'll get very far.



Crass posters at the Roxy, Covent Garden, London. Crass played two shows here, the second of which resulted in them being banned from the venue, which resulted in the song "Banned From the Roxy," which appears on The Feeding of the 5,000.

And you're meeting with a lawyer?

Yeah, tomorrow.

And Pete's going to be there?

Yeah! Happy days!

When was the last time you saw Pete?

I think it was the week John was dying. He knew he was going to die and I bumped into Pete at the studio, and I said, "Pete, we really need to talk," so we went over to a café and sat down, and it was cordial enough. I said, "Look, John's going to die, we need to sort out our material." He said, "No we don't, it'll be all right." He just wouldn't even hear of it.

What do you think the outcome is going to be?

I hope the outcome is that people accept that legally he really hasn't got a leg to stand on, and he just shuts the fuck up and he continues to accept the royalties, as he's been happy to do throughout all his criticism.

Surely going to court and bringing in lawyers is going against everything that Crass was set up for?

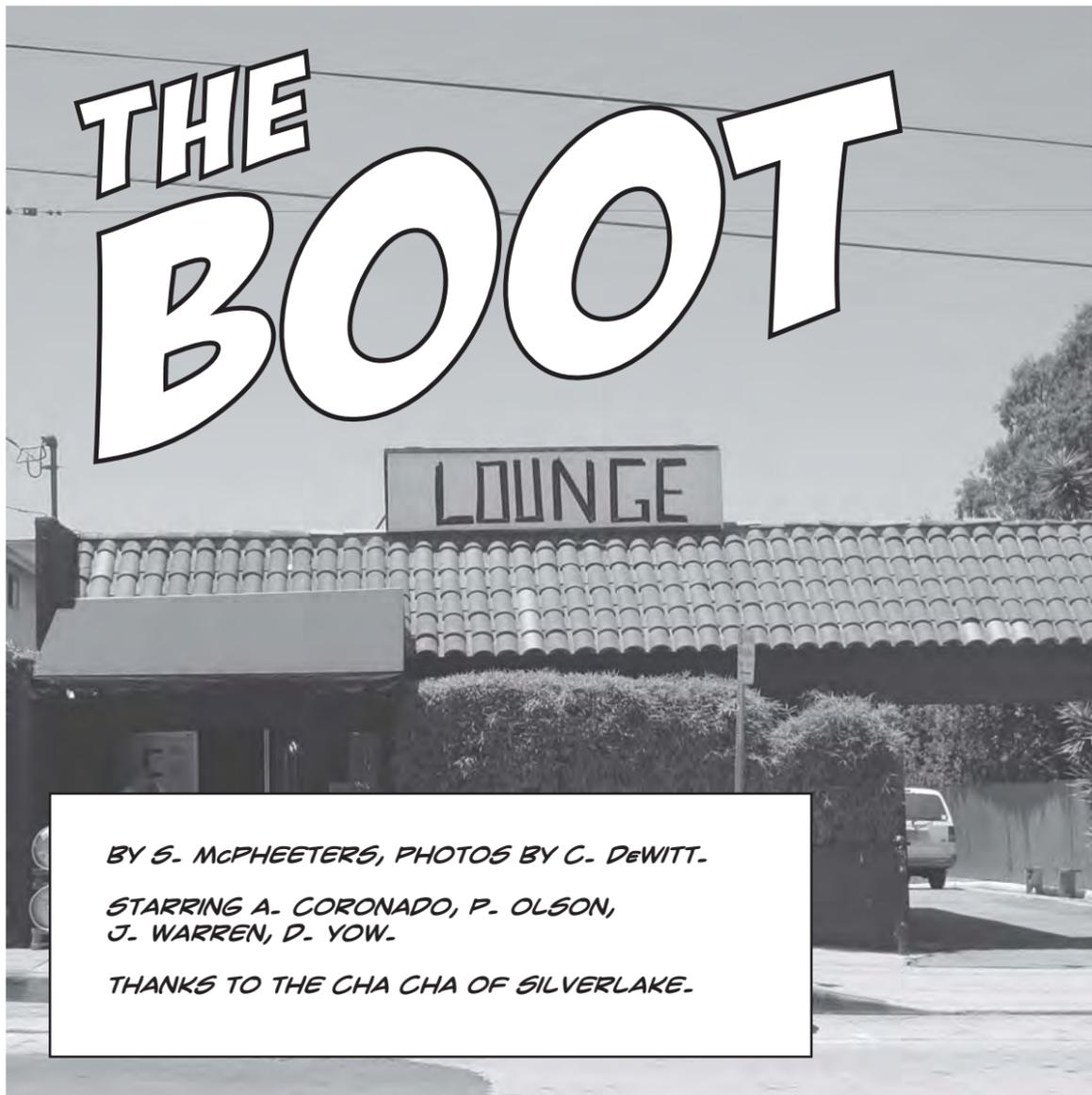
Pete would argue that that's what I'm doing, because in its day we had the principle that if one person didn't like something, we wouldn't do it. But I think after 30 years of a de facto situation, myself doing everything and no one else doing anything, not even bothering to ring up and see if Allison, who runs Southern Records, was all right after John died... I think things like that meant we'd been given de facto rights to do what the fuck we wanted after that length of time. And both of us, Gee and I, were very, very careful indeed. For example, in the essays I wrote for the remastered CDs I made very sure that I gave the picture of the band as the band was when the band existed. I didn't bring into it any of the personal doubts and criticisms I've had since then. I tried to voice it

in the voice of the person I was then, so that I was being honest and fair and I gave everyone a crack. And I know that Gee felt very, very committed to being honest to the band. What I think some of the detractors might say is, "Oh yeah, honest to what band? The band you fucking think it was?"

People seem to think now that Crass was always sort of this "up the front there and everyone pogo." It's just not true. More often than not, they'd be fucking walking out. They hated *Yes Sir*. No one wanted to stay in the bloody room when we played that, so it's a complete myth that we were a successful rock 'n' roll band, really. It was only in retrospect that that happened.

Steve Ignorant: The whole situation with Pete objecting to the rereleases after all these years of not being involved and not even listening to the remasters properly, I think it's stupid. I wrote on the Crass Facebook how ironic it is that the intergalactic anarchists of all time, Crass, all dressed in black, can't solve the debate without running to the apron strings of mummy system. It's totally fucking ridiculous. **Penny Rimbaud:** To my mind, the dispute has its root in ideological differences that existed between the individual members of the band. In my understanding, Pete was fundamentally a socialist, and socialists like wagging their fingers at anyone except themselves.

He claims to be an anarchist. Well, I claim to be an anarchist, but I'm fundamentally a libertarian and a fierce individualist. I think that does fit into an arena of anarchistic thought. I certainly draw a line at all this stupid anarchistic organization of industry and that sort of stuff, because I'm just not interested. If people want to do that, then I'm not going to criticize them. But frankly, it's not my thing. My thing is rising with the angels and flying in the sky. ■



BY S. MCPHEETERS, PHOTOS BY C. DEWITT.
 STARRING A. CORONADO, P. OLSON,
 J. WARREN, D. YOW.
 THANKS TO THE CHA CHA OF SILVERLAKE.



WELL, FOR ONE THING, YOU DRINK TOO MUCH.
 BUT I'VE BEEN IN AA SINCE 1994!
 5,961 DAYS SOBER!



THAT WAS A METAPHOR. JESUS, GET OVER YOURSELF.
 SEE? YOU'RE VERY DIFFICULT TO COMMUNICATE WITH.
 TELL HIM ABOUT THE SONG.



OK. I DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE TO SAY THIS. "FALLOPIAN DUDE" IS ABOUT YOU, MAN. YOUR TOTAL LACK OF PROFESSIONALISM.
 I CAN'T EVEN LOOK AT YOU WHILE WE'RE PLAYING IT.
 WAIT. I WROTE THAT SONG.



THIS IS MY LIFE, BRO! HOW DO YOU NOT GET THAT!?!
 IS THIS BECAUSE OF THAT BATHROOM INCIDENT?



HEY GUYS! WE SHOULD ALL HANG OUT LIKE THIS MORE OFTEN!
 SIT DOWN. WE NEED TO TALK.
 HUH? WHA? WHAT'S UP? WHAT'S GOING ON?



IT JUST ISN'T WORKING OUT. YOU BEING IN THE BAND.
 THIS IS A DECISION THE ENTIRE BAND REACHED.
 I'M GETTING THE BOOT?! WHY?!?



MOVE ON MAN. WE HAVE.
 ANCIENT HISTORY. OLD NEWS.
 BUT WE'RE ON TOUR.
 IN NEW ZEALAND.



AND LOOK! WE GOT YOU THIS NOVELTY FART WHISTLE AS A GOING-AWAY PRESENT!
 ALSO, I THINK YOUR CHAIR IS BROKEN.
 PLOP!
 -FIN-



Despite what the hair-gel industry wants you to believe, making yourself attractive to the opposite sex is a simple matter of playing up your secondary sex characteristics. For women this means keeping the body hair trim, the hair long, and wearing something that draws attention to your round parts. For men, going completely bald the day you turn 30, never shaving anywhere ever, and losing your temper over something inconsequential roughly once a month. See? Simple.



With everybody dressing like they're in a Martha's Vineyard dinner production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* all of a sudden, it's nice to see someone holding down the greasy, working side of the boat. (Aft.)



What, exactly, is more DO than the guy-strolling-causally-to-blow-up-a-major-sewage-treatment-facility look? Just mentally Photoshop a Milan catwalk over that oily little stream in the background and you've got an inkling of how 2018's going to look.



Two of the most common mistakes people make with beards are clipping down the neck like the dad from *Family Ties* and giving a shit about any other aspect of your appearance whatsoever.



Now that Claire's sells razor necklaces and motherfucking Polo puts skulls and crossbones on little girls' tennis skirts, punks need a new accoutrement to remind the world that we're a wild pack of rabid animals who can't be tamed by society. The werewolves have already laid dibs on tails, so I guess that leaves us with this.

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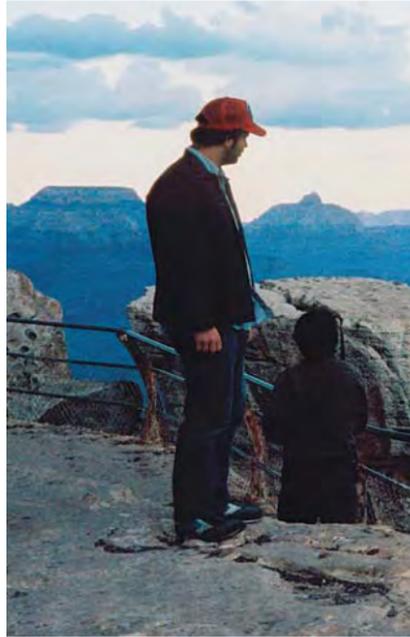
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DON'Ts



Babysitting money is some pretty good scratch, but hanging around playgrounds dressed like an aging Serbian war criminal might not be the best way to find new clients.



Can we please cool it with the fucking baseball hat and sports jacket? It's 2010 already. We should be taking our cues from William Gibson and Gary Numan, not some movie where Billy Crystal's scared of being an adult.



Taking a book to the shitter is a nice, discrete way to warn bystanders of the unholy terror you're about to unleash, but carrying a coat hanger to perform a third-trimester abortion on your bowels is so far past TMI it's basically a Whitehouse lyric.



The wistful, "emotional toll of the road" parking-lot photo-op works a lot better when you're a trio of moody, flat-stomached 20-somethings in B&W and also not burning an eyehole in the neighboring porno shop.



Remember that movie where Leonardo DiCaprio creepy-crawled into people's dreams? This is kind of like that, but instead of explosions and stuff, there's just a couple of skunks living in the woods.

THE GRANDFATHER OF ECSTASY GIVES US A MASSIVE DOSE OF *MDM-YAY*.

HAMILTON'S PHARMACOPEIA

AIRING IN AUGUST ON

VBSN



Getting your posse to the perfect equilibrium of straight man versus goofball versus ravenous, slobbering food-ape with visible stink lines is one of the trickiest balancing acts in friendship. Why do you think the Three Stooges went through so many Curlys?



Few women will admit how primally attracted they are to Bluto (either one) because a) it's weird, and b) doing so would open the floodgates on a slob revival that would threaten the very basis of the sex-for-basic-decency exchange.



It doesn't matter which button you push, just push *something* before the sexual tension causes a power failure.



The very next sentence out of your mouth will determine whether you are dragged screaming into the blue van or the white van.



Haha, drunk.



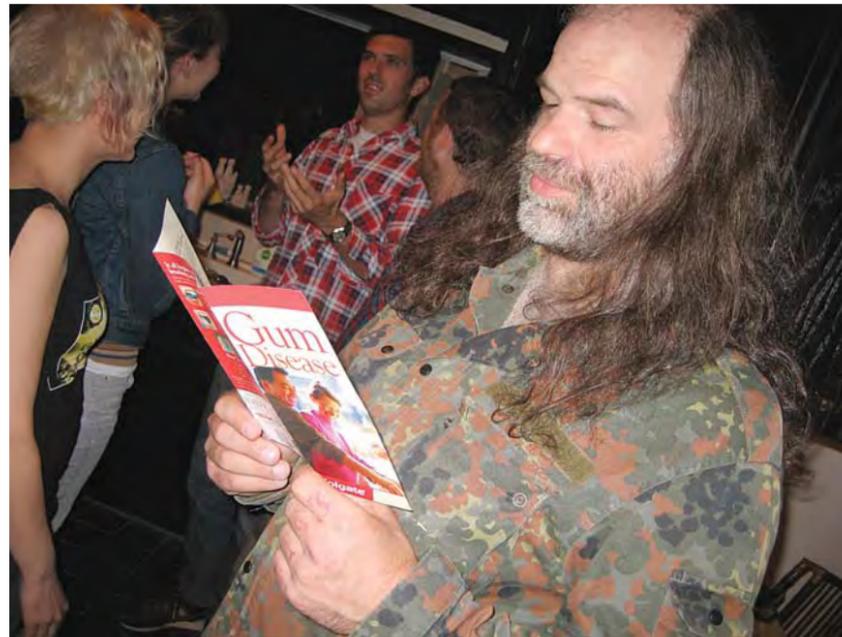


While most of us have dedicated half our brainspace to juggling a religion's worth of ethical dietary restrictions with the conversion rate of two-thirds of a banana to hours on the elliptical, it's easy to forget that there's an entire segment of our population still struggling with "Try not to eat an entire bowl of mayonnaise."

Isn't this what caused a whole big keruffle in *Alien*?



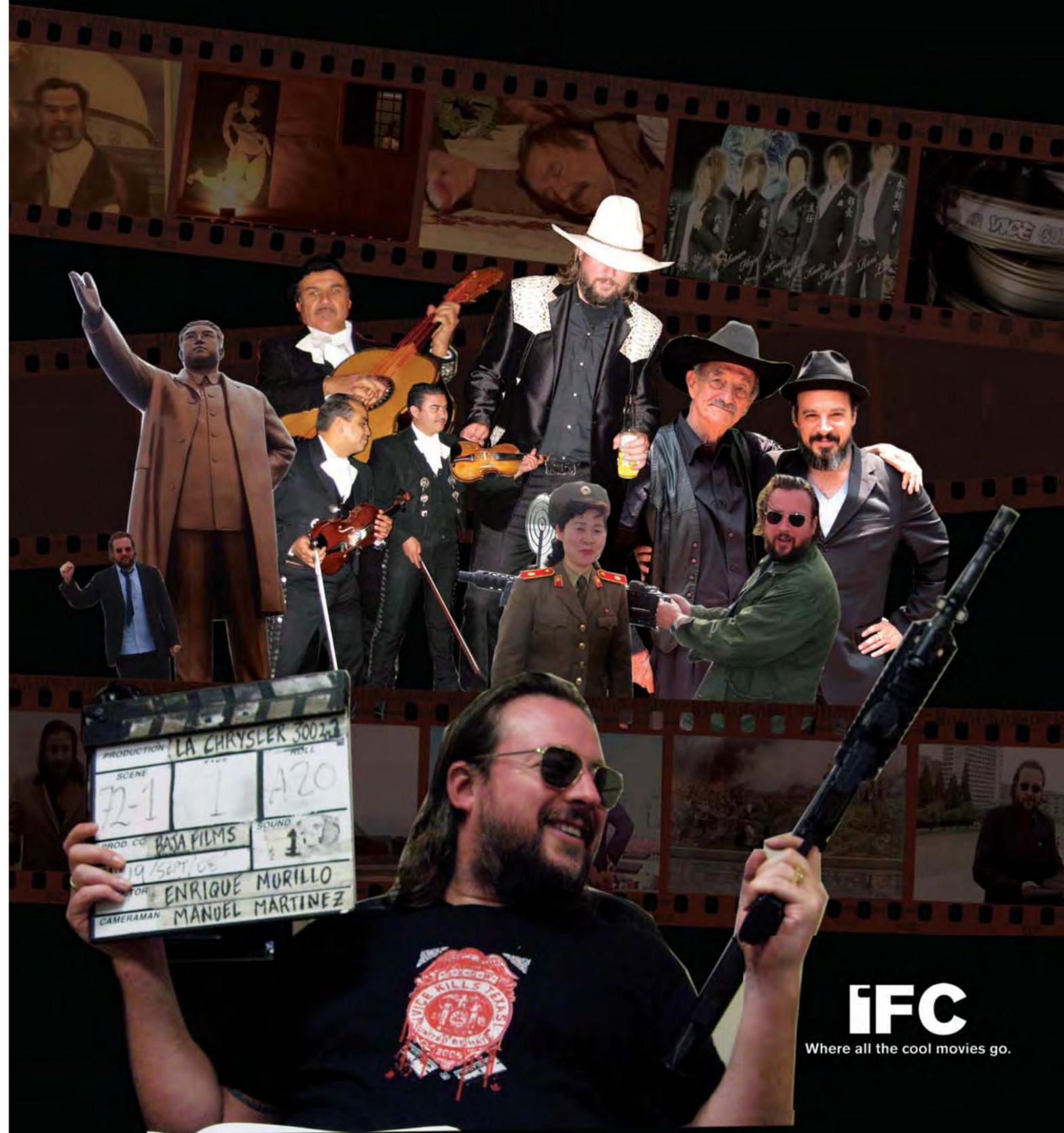
Nothing shows scorn for the lone performer like standing front and center, at a 45-degree angle, thrusting your hands into your pockets, and staring out toward the Milky Way. Normally this'd be a strict DON'T, but since it's the Anti-Music Issue, we'll just call it a DOON'T and split the difference.



I'm getting really sick of shape-shifting pixies infiltrating human parties, assuming the frumpiest form possible, and basically challenging anyone to strike up a conversation. Who needs this Diogenes/Willy Wonka integrity-test bullcrap?

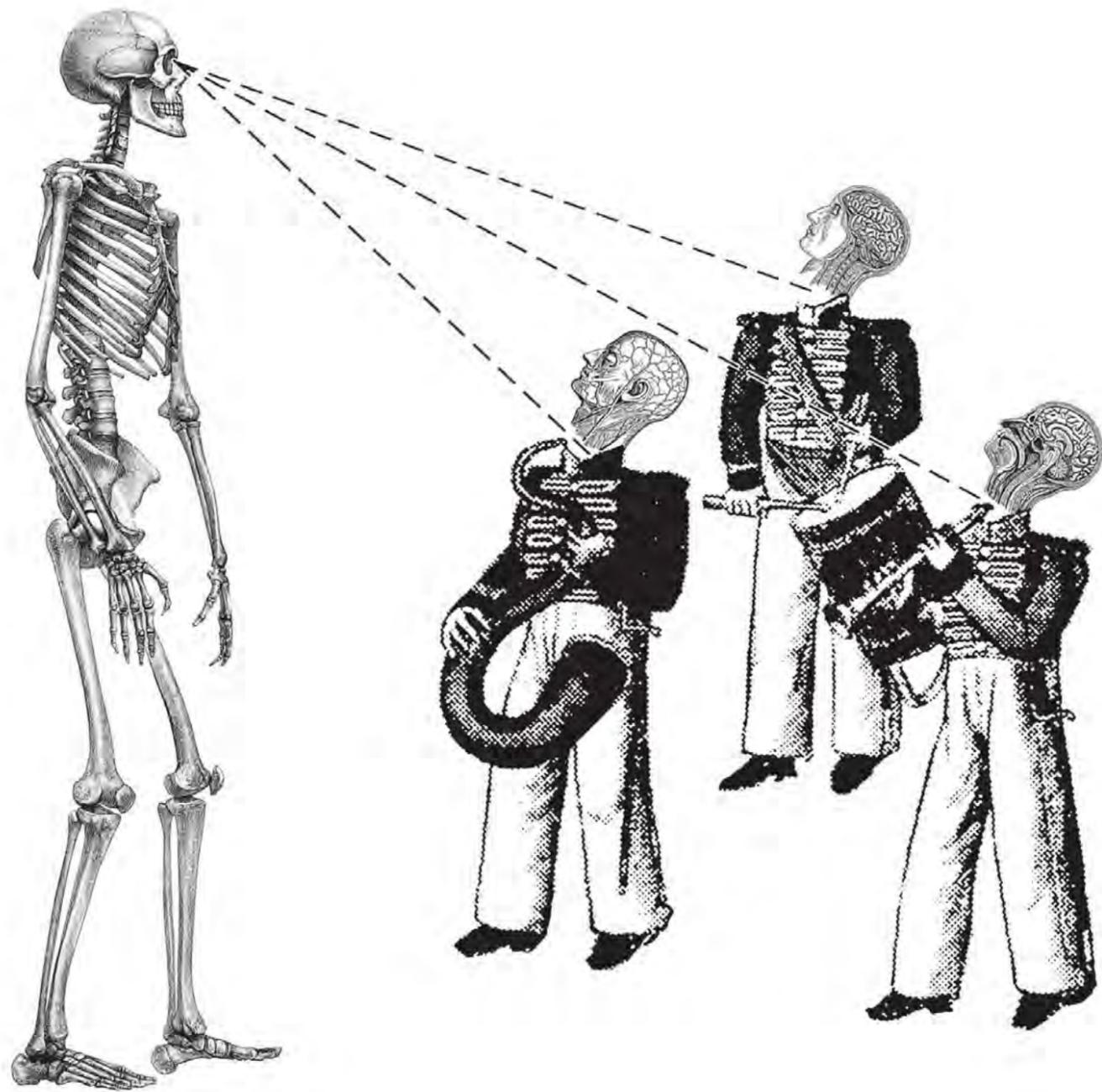
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A Reader & Writer's Guide to Reading Writing About Music

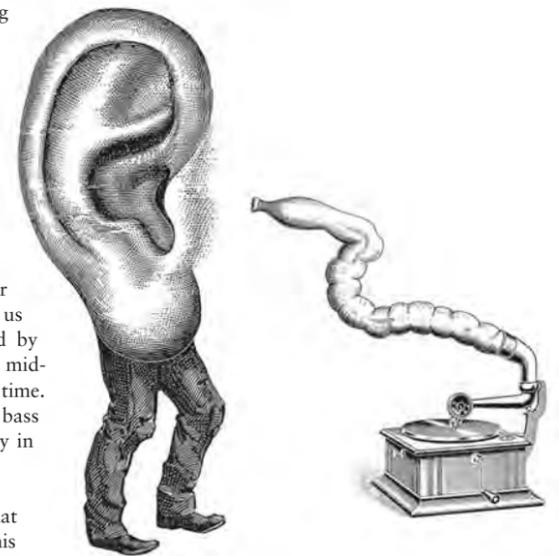
ILLUSTRATIONS BY NEIL BURKE

Words hard. Writing about music can be almost as hard as reading about music. This handy little glossary should help you around both chores of modern living. Either way, it's all about the music. Let's be clear on that.

ACCOMPLISHED (“The Boston-based power-punkers in the Boot Doods have accomplished more with their sophomore effort than most bands do in ten records.”) This is a superb word to use when you’re writing up a devil-may-care gang of 20-something male models with awesome haircuts who have played two Warped Tours in a row and who were totally not pampered by their moms, who stroked their little heads every night until they were 18, telling them what unique, creative snowflakes they were. Too often nowadays, a word like “accomplished” is belittled by using it in the wrong context. How much longer can we sit by while “accomplished” gets bandied about in things like the eulogy of a 96-year-old woman who was raised in the projects, organized a successful tin drive during WWII, cleaned up her community, celebrated her diamond wedding anniversary, and raised nine healthy kids who all graduated from college. Accomplished? Really? And, oh yeah, her third-eldest granddaughter runs the air-filtration system on the fucking International Space Station. OK, but “accomplished”? It just seems a teensy bit too much there.

BUT I DIGRESS (“Back in Cleveland in the 70s, we used to burn copies of the original Shit Stain 7-inch just to keep warm in our squat. Now they’re going for \$400 on eBay. Times sure have changed. But I digress...”) Don’t be afraid to use digressions to hit the reader with all of the self-aggrandizing parenthetical asides that you can fart out. Want to work in the important fact that you saw the Clash when you were 14, even though the piece is about the new Justin Bieber single? Go ahead and digress. Feel a burning desire to let all of us know that you’ve got a complete collection of pristine Guided by Voices tour t-shirts wrapped in plastic in your closet, right in the middle of yet another article on the decline of CD sales? It’s digression time. Is it essential to this interview with Tom Petty’s first band’s second bass player that you reveal that your Doritos paunch grows every day in inverse proportion to your threadbare dignity? Digress that shit.

CUM (“Darkhound’s rock-cum-metal is a cocktail that never sours.”) Who cares if nobody ever, ever uses this word this way in spoken English in real life, ever, for as long as any of us has lived? Why would that make it off-limits to the average music critic? Isn’t it, in fact, our duty to keep alive the Latin tradition of “cum” meaning “with” or “akin to” rather than just “the alkaline fluid expelled from the penis during ejaculation [slang]”? Aren’t we, as writers, the flame-carriers of language, the people tasked with the burden of deciding what words get used when? We are. We really are.



DICTUM (“The dictum laid down by bands like Bitch Goddess has been unmistakable: If you want to rock like we do, you’re gonna have to take the ride.”) So what if nobody has ever heard of this word, much less uses it in daily conversation? It’s also from Latin, which immediately packs some oomph, and if you use it you’ll look real smart. A dictum, just for your future reference, is when a spurious fact that was established by the music-writing brontosaurus morphs into gospel through endless repetition. Today, it’s often applied with a knowing wink, as if the writer knew about it when he was still gurgling in his bassinet. Write “dictum” with a world-weary, “no duh” sort of a tone, and you’ll appear millennia wiser than your three years of eagerly excreting record reviews for blogs actually allow you to be.

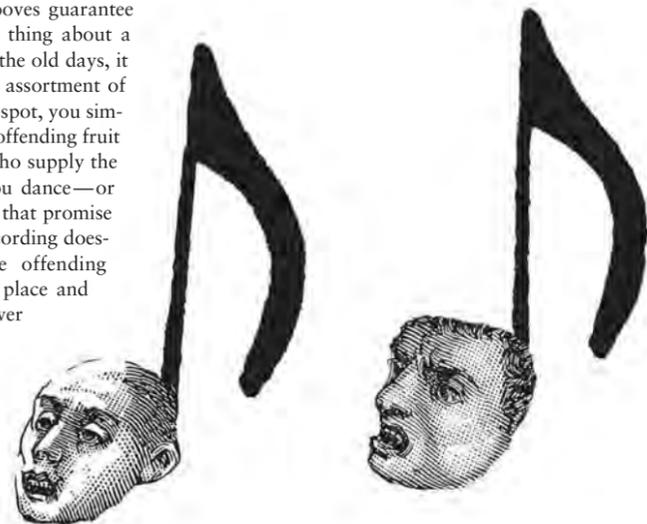
EXPLODE (“With their flagrant flouting of cohesiveness and focus, Hatcher Wound explode the conventions of songcraft in 2010.”) Writing about music can be, as they would say on *Deadwood*, a pussified enterprise. Compensate for your atrophied machismo by cramming in as many action-packed, James Cameron verbs as you can. “Rip,” “shred,” “kill,” “demolish,” “bludgeon,” “lay waste to,” “decimate,” “nuke,” “face-fuck”... all of these can be applied to the sound that four guys with musical instruments make. Even the oft-used “blow away” will do in a pinch, though it’s not quite as apocalyptic as we’d like.

FRENETIC (“Blargh Karkle’s frenetic skronk alludes to the Euro free-jazz masters while still maintaining a very post-laptop nowness.”) Have you been sent a digital download from a label whose good side you want to stay on? Does the music therein sound like a herd of pregnant buffalo being launched into a wind turbine? OK, fine. But if you tell the truth, will said label cut off your review-links supply and your guest-list spots at every show they put on from now on in perpetuity, leaving you a handless and legless pariah in the cockfight pit of your peers? Easy solution: Call it “frenetic,” the backhanded equivocation of music crit-dom.

GUARANTEE (“Flaccid Erection’s contagious grooves guarantee you’ll be dancing around your stereo.”) The nice thing about a guarantee is that it is ironclad. Oak, if you will. In the old days, it was the greengrocer who supplied the guarantee for his fine assortment of apples and loganberries. If you got home and bit into a mealy spot, you simply strolled back down to the penny store and exchanged the offending fruit with no questions asked. These days, it’s the music writers who supply the surety. If a writer guarantees that a recording will make you dance—or sing along, or cry, or stomp your roommates to death—then that promise is blissfully backed with a deeper, moral guarantee. If said recording doesn’t live up to the review’s promises, simply email the offending publication, and they’ll have the writer pop round to your place and refund your money (magazine cover or album retail, whichever is greater) with no questions asked.

HEARTFELT (“With their heartfelt paeans to the Rust Belt, Thunder Bros. keep the spirit of degraded liberty alive in this land of the ‘free.’”) This is the default phrase to apply to anybody who sounds like they’re straining to take a shit while belting out lyrics about economically depressed average Americans. If it’s even vaguely Springsteenish, it’s automatically heartfelt. There is also a provable algebraic equation regarding the ratio between words crammed into a talk-sung story-song and heartfeltitude. The more syllables about the salt of the earth and the wayward wanderers of the US of A you can fit into one line, the more felt is your heart.

INTROSPECTION (“Semisonic share hard-won wisdom and clear-eyed introspection on this hard-rocking yet surprisingly mature comeback.”) Musicians are often so busy studying the objective world—collecting samples in the field, analyzing tables of data, measuring twice and cutting once—that they forget to look within themselves and check out their own feelings. That is why



Musicians should not have to work, because they are special, gifted people who should be free to feel their feelings all day and night.

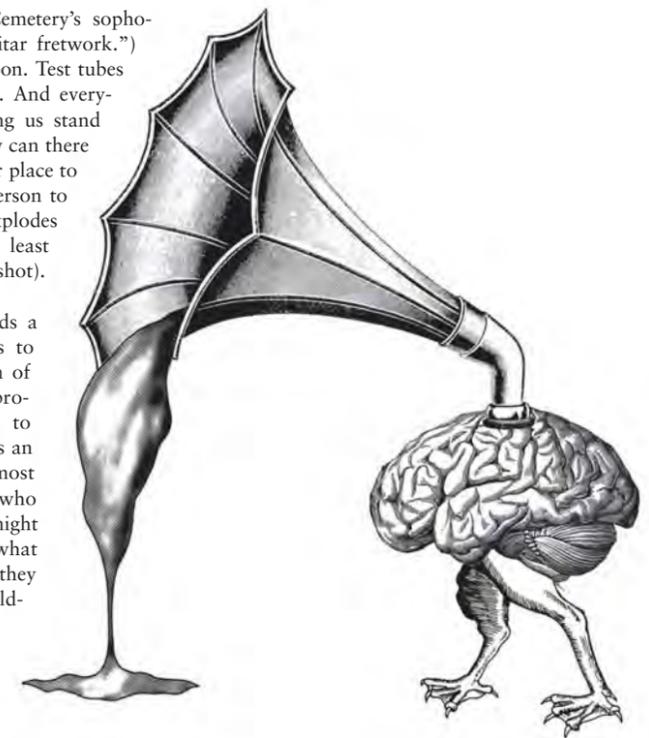
it is such a treat when an album comes along that shares an artist’s personal hurt. It is only on those rare occasions when musicians are able to steal a few moments away from their demanding research schedules to meditate on the agonies of selfhood that they come up with their best material, their “Wherever You Will Go,” their “You Oughta Know,” their “Creep,” their “Meat Hook Sodomy.” Musicians should not have to work, because they are special, gifted people who should be free to feel their feelings all day and night.

JAW-DROPPINGLY TECHNICAL (“Jewish Cemetery’s sophomore effort offers jaw-droppingly technical guitar fretwork.”) We live in amazing times. Men walk on the moon. Test tubes grow babies. Computers can do just about anything. And everywhere you look, guitarists and drummers are making us stand around like shell-shocked bystanders on V-J Day. How can there be such talent in this world? There just is. It’s not your place to question. Just make sure to keep a hankie on your person to dab away the drool as yet another wild ax slinger explodes your mind with their fretwork/skinsmith skills. At least you’ll be in good company (i.e., anyone else within earshot).

KTHE KIDS (“Asspants’ latest gives the kids a whole summer’s worth of hooky choruses to sing at the beach.”) A mythical population of righteous consumers perpetually untainted by compromise about whom it all is who though they fail to understand what shit used to be like have nevertheless an inalienable right to attend all-ages concerts in the most dangerous part of town given by middle-aged junkies who slept in a van in a hotel parking lot by the airport the night before so they could give the kids a musical lesson in what shit used to be like before selling them \$25 t-shirts they silk-screened in the drummer’s bathroom. Because childhood is, like, so beautiful!

LIKE (“The Churlish Boors like taking their like of likable licks to loftier levels, like a like-minded...” etc.) “Like” is like GPS for the eyeballs of our mind. If these unassuming road markers didn’t exist for adrift word travelers, we quite simply wouldn’t know where we are. Remember that weird old road sign in *M*A*S*H* that showed how many thousands of miles it was to Seoul and Los Angeles? That’s like “like.” You can use this simple, versatile word to quote lyrics, offer comparisons, or just to let us know that a particular song is akin to getting your foreskin or areola caught in a bank-vault door. Ouch!

MEEETS (“Rolling Stones meets Beach Boys,” “Melvins meets Aquabats,” etc.) Musicians meet all the time but seldom jam. They may score drugs together, tell self-aggrandizing lies together, or wish for health insurance together, but these interactions don’t sound like much even with Auto-Tune and MPC beats. Some encounters between bands even end in brutal stompings, all the more brutal because no one has health insurance. Imagine your two favorite bands. They meet: One guitarist tells the other how much money he is saving toward the purchase of health insurance by renting



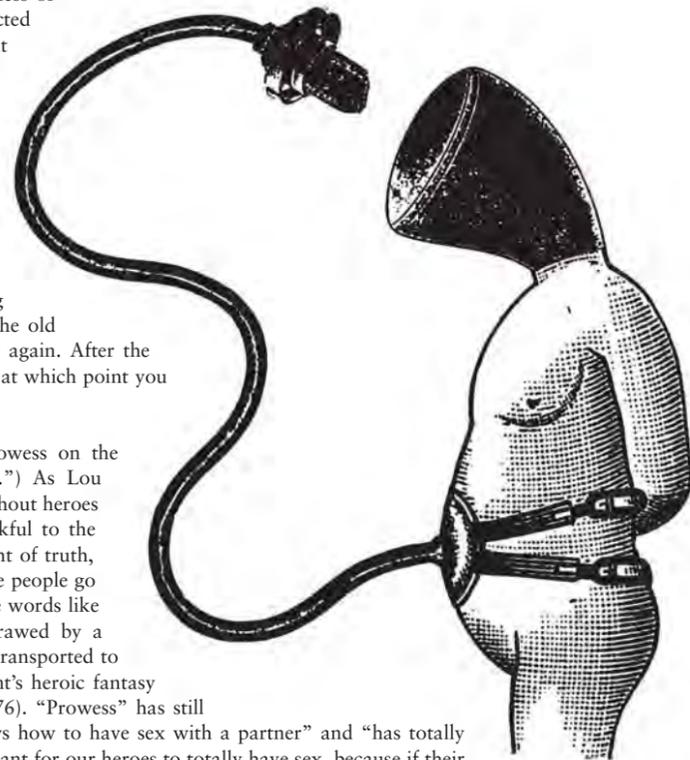
a houseboat in a polluted swamp. “I’m paying for your fancy houseboat, you thievin’ cocksucker,” says the second guitarist, “you stole my lick on ‘Love Vacation.’” Words, then blows, are exchanged, satisfaction demanded, and pretty soon the deck furniture is covered with one of your favorite guitarists’ brain, bone, and facial matter, and guess what? Nobody gets health insurance. And the two bands never would have met if they hadn’t been your two favorite bands, but now one of their guitarists is dead, just because you wanted them to meet. Who did you think you were, God?

NEW SCHOOL (“The BBWs’ clarion call of a debut firmly cements their place in the new school of folksy R&B.”) Imagine the first day of class at a progressive college where grades don’t matter, coloring outside the lines is encouraged, and the professors go by their first names, like Carl and Linda. This, young musicians, is the new school, and the writers of music criticism have the right to matriculate you anytime they think you’re ready. Acceptance into the new school is like a torch being passed on to the next generation, a valedictory moment for any band or singer-songwriter worth their cap and gown. Oh, and average enrollment time in the new school is, as of 2010, less than 36 hours. Enjoy it while it lasts!

OLD SCHOOL (“The old school realness of Third Base and the RBIs’ blues-inflected boogie still gives any young buck out there a run for his money.”) This is where you graduate to once you’re done with the new school. It’s a venerable academy of oaken reading tables, dusty chalkboards, and well-groomed rugby grounds, none of which are ever used because the members of the old school spend most of their time fretting about whether their position in the old school is secure. Music writers have the ability to revoke old school membership, without warning, pending arbitrary irrelevance. And once you’ve been in the old school, you’re never getting into the new school again. After the new school, there’s nowhere to go but no school, at which point you may as well be dead.

PROWESS (“Gary Cherone’s sheer prowess on the guitar will leave doubters slack-jawed.”) As Lou Reed wrote and Kiss sang, “A world without heroes is like a world without sun.” We must be thankful to the heroes, who make the crops grow, spread the light of truth, and keep us warm. When there are no heroes, the people go hungry and shiver with fear and cold. Writers use words like “prowess” and “wizardry” when they are overawed by a musician or producer’s technical ability and feel transported to the realm of Arthurian legend, as in Robert Plant’s heroic fantasy sequence from *The Song Remains the Same* (1976). “Prowess” has still more heroic connotations, such as “totally knows how to have sex with a partner” and “has totally enjoyed sex with numerous partners.” It is important for our heroes to totally have sex, because if their magic race dies out, there will be no more light.

QUIRKY (“This quirky new-wave debut ought to make Square Pegs kings of their art school.”) A polite word for saying that something sucks; a devastating insult disguised as a tolerant wink. Synonyms: “Nazi,” “cancer,” “9/11.” The word has a long history of association with gun violence. In the antebellum South, use of the word “quirky” was the third most common cause of duels, and a California law on the books since Gold Rush days calls the word “a most grievous insult” and “the reason for all Man’s present sorrow.” In modern times, the word is socially acceptable, though a staggering 93 percent of musicians whose music is called “quirky” attempt suicide. This word has killed more musicians than heroin, amphetamines, and alcohol combined.



In the modern world, music is just one more ruthless capitalist enterprise where competing entities try to destroy one another.

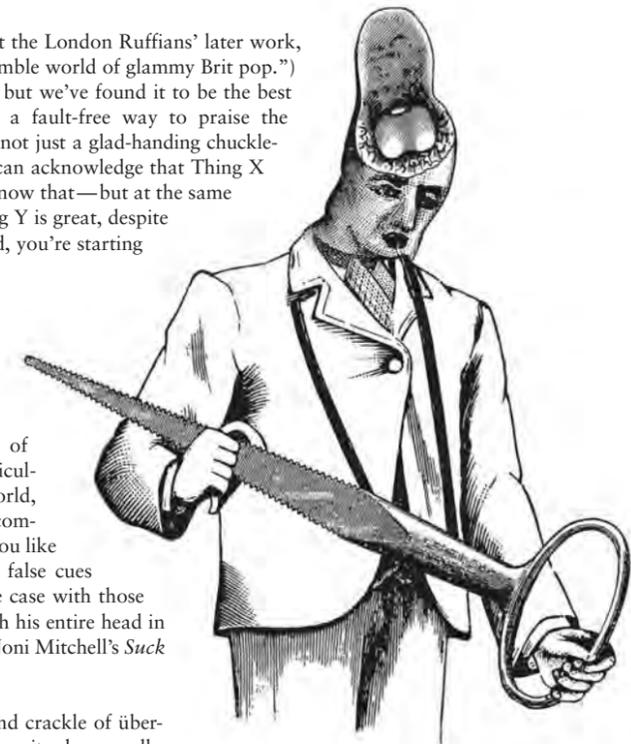
RETURNS TO (“Caged Heat return to their roots—the mean streets of broken bottles and broken hearts—with their new release *Krishna Tree Holiday*.) A band “return to” when they’re on the road to recovery after an ill-advised attempt at copping a musical trend that has nothing to do with them. Did your gutter-punk combo’s earnest go at a trip-hop remix album flop harder than a Tompkins crusty into a park bench? Just chock your next album full of I-IV-V rock ditties with blast beats and oi sing-alongs, and voilà, you have officially returned... to the exact same place you were two years ago. Looks like Mom left your room just how it used to be. She even washed the sheets and cranked the air conditioning.

SAY WHAT YOU WILL (“Say what you will about the London Ruffians’ later work, but their early EPs stand proud in the rough-and-tumble world of glammy Brit pop.”) Say what you will about saying say what you will, but we’ve found it to be the best pre-engineered escape hatch in all of music writing. It’s a fault-free way to praise the unpraisable. It’s also a great method of proving that you’re not just a glad-handing chucklehead who loves everything that comes down the pike. You can acknowledge that Thing X is bad, and that you know Thing X is bad—of course you know that—but at the same time you are a discerning enough listener to know that Thing Y is great, despite or even because of the badness of Thing X. Confused? Good, you’re starting to get it.

TAKING CUES FROM (“Taking cues from the Beach Boys and the Jonas Brothers, Fucking Hostile drizzle lush harmonies all over their gorgeous pop confections.”) Stealing from; robbing; plagiarizing. Bands do not helpfully give one another cues, as if they were all volunteering in a regional production of *Godspell* to benefit a hospital for refugees or sharing multicultural vegan recipes for a wiki cookbook. In the modern world, music is just one more ruthless capitalist enterprise where competing entities try to destroy one another. When a musician you like makes an album you think is bad, it’s usually just full of false cues intended to annihilate the rivals who take them, as was the case with those much-emulated albums tastemaker Lloyd Cole recorded with his entire head in his buttock, not to mention David Gray’s *Party Naked* and Joni Mitchell’s *Suck My Cock*.

UBER (“Every track boasts the signature bump and crackle of über-producer Gordon Lung.”) By lunchtime, the music writer has usually exhausted all English words that can be used for emphasis and has to start borrowing superlatives from other languages. Superlatives are crucial to the trade. Popular music is not a field for the ordinary jerk who takes a modest pride in the tradition, delivering workmanlike performances on Grandpa’s old banjo, passing along ancient ballads to schoolchildren at weekend picnics outside the public library. It is a field where blond Germanic supermen deploy the newest, freshest, latest sonic weaponry in battles over the destiny of the universe. The music of mere human people has long since been dumped in the bargain bin.

VERY (“Things get very, very loud on Wampum’s no-holds-barred, pedal-to-the-metal sophomore release.”) The next time you see “very” overused in a feature or review, remember that professional music writers are paid by the word. Try to picture those “very”s through the



Music writers blaze the trail for the rest of humanity as they attempt to navigate the rocky mountain passes of song.

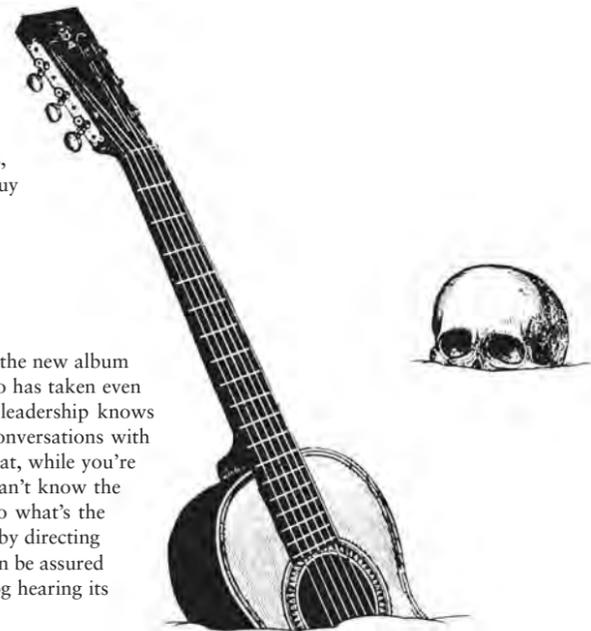
author's eyes. Where you might only see an almost meaningless adverb, the writer sees a montage of all the things this useful little word has paid for over the years: shirt buttons, glue, pushpins, typewriter ribbons, irregular socks, day-old baked goods, single insulin syringes, pork rinds, discount bottles of fortified wine, expired cans of egg salad, old newspapers for fuel, live bait, used cigarettes.

WORKING CLASS ("The Poughkeepsie Champions are real-deal bards of the woes and triumphs of the American working class.") See letter K. When those little guys grow up, they become the working class. And they're just as worthy of our protection, adoration, and anthems as the kids were when they were still wearing short pants and playing stickball in the street. See also letter H. Heartfelt is what these big galoots are. In fact, the working-class folk are the only real human beings alive in the world today. The rest of us are just a bunch of robots, shamelessly consuming high-priced foreign garbage in our glass-walled mansions while all the while life—real life—is happening in the taverns, mills, and bingo halls of Eddie Lunchpail. Buddy, we'd like to buy you a beer.

X FUCK X Seriously. Ignore this letter.

YOU ("You owe it to yourself to buy, borrow, or steal the new album by rapper of the year Lil Smurf Hat.") Everybody who has taken even the most basic Toastmasters course on speaking and leadership knows that the way to a person's heart is to constantly pepper your conversations with them with their own first name. Why? Because it shows them that, while you're talking to them, they are the hottest thing going. But a writer can't know the first name of every one of his readers. That's just ridiculous. So what's the next best thing? "You." Everyone is a you to everyone else. And by directing laser-beam prose straight to the proverbial you, a music writer can be assured that his reader's ears will prick up like those of a little terrier dog hearing its master's can opener crack into a fresh helping of Alpo.

ZENO OF CITIUM ("Zeno of Citium, Greek founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, would surely have approved of the funeral dirges found on the new Crockpot album.") Music writers blaze the trail for the rest of humanity as they attempt to navigate the rocky mountain passes of song. It's a big responsibility, and a reviewer or a critic must be a virtuous and good person—a leader—to meet the challenge. That's probably why we find so many references to Zeno of Citium in every kind of music writing. He is to this noble occupation what Saint Christopher is to travelers: a patron who holds aloft a lantern to light the way for those who in turn hold a bunch of smaller lanterns to light the way for the (metaphorically) blind music fan, who then decides which stuff to buy based on the dual way-lighting of Zeno and the writers. Get it? Some say that the devotion of music writers to Zeno of Citium borders on cultish. Some say it's dangerous, that a Stoic suffers from tunnel vision. But we say that music writers, by adhering to the beliefs of Zeno of Citium, are simply fulfilling their nature as logical men of logic. And logic, as all music writers know, begets logic. ■



NATCH
DRAWN BY JOHNNY RYAN WORDS BY SHEP SHANKS

THE ONLINE ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIONARY DEFINES THE WORD "NATCH" AS A "COLLOQUIAL SHORTENING OF NATURALLY, FIRST RECORDED [IN] 1945."

JOURNALIST H.L. MENCKEN LATER NOTED A "RAGE FOR ABBREVIATIONS" IN THE MID-1940s, INCLUDING WIDE-SPREAD ACCEPTANCE OF THIS JAZZY NEW SLANG WORD.

INSTEAD OF FADING INTO OBSCURITY, "NATCH" ENDURED AMONG BABY BOOMERS AS A SIGNIFIER OF POSTWAR HIPNESS.

TODAY, A SELECT FEW CAN STILL USE "NATCH" WITH IMPUNITY. STAN LEE IS ONE OF THESE PEOPLE.

AFTER LESTER BANGS POPULARIZED THE FREE-WHEELING MUSIC JOURNALISM OF THE 1970s, "NATCH" WAS CHAMPIONED BY A GENERATION OF SHITTY BANGS-RIPOFF MUSIC WRITERS.

HE'S AWESOME AND CAN DO WHATEVER HE WANTS!

INTERESTING, THE WORD APPEARS ONLY ONCE IN BANG'S OWN PSYCHOTIC REACTIONS & CARBURETOR DUNG.

THESE DAYS, USE OF "NATCH" REMAINS ONE OF THE QUICKEST AND EASIEST WAYS TO SPOT A LOUSY MUSIC WRITER.

IF YOU READ THE WORD "NATCH" IN A PIECE OF MUSIC JOURNALISM, DON'T PANIC.

BUT IF YOU READ THE WORD IN MORE THAN ONE PIECE BY THE SAME WRITER, YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO ACT, USE THE COUPON BELOW.

...WITH THEIR MOFO RHYTHM SECTION IN TOW, NATCH...

IT MAY HAVE BEEN FOISTED ON THE WRITER BY A LOUSY EDITOR.

DEAR _____, I NOTICED YOU USED THE WORD "NATCH" IN THE _____ ISSUE OF _____. THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME YOU HAVE MADE THIS MISTAKE. ACCORDINGLY, YOU ARE HEREBY SUSPENDED FROM WRITING FOR A PERIOD OF:

6 WEEKS USE THIS TIME TO HONE YOUR CRAFT.

1 YEAR WORK ON ANY "PLAN B" LIFE OPTIONS.

INDEFINITELY WE'LL CONTACT YOU.

FOR ALL TIME INCLUDING YOUR HEIRS & CLONES. IT'S OVER.

YOURS, *A Concerned Party*



Musicians

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JOHN MICHAELS

Behind the scenes of reality TV, there is a person called a story producer. Their job is to stand over an editor's shoulder and craft countless hours of quotidian bullshit into compelling drama, transforming lumpen schmos, curveballed into uniquely bizarre situations, into unwitting heroes and villains. What I've done here with these people is no different. They're all, obviously, so much more than can be gleaned in a five-minute interaction or described in 200 words, and for all I know, they are nothing like these one-dimensional caricatures I've pasted on them. With my first subject, Shannon, our cover girl, I'll try to offer the purest unfiltered recounting I can. I took few notes, but the exchange was so strange, awkward, and ultimately sad that I can scarcely forget it. I'm a shithead. I'm a fucking moron who should not have been trusted with a tongue. I'll tell you why.

Shannon, 29

I started on the north side, where Santa Monica casually deteriorates into Venice, and I had walked as far south as the paddle-tennis courts, interviewing and photographing the many musicians I encountered along the way, when I decided I'd gone far enough and headed back to my bike for the long ride home. I was fucking burnt and weary of the constant jostle of the two-mile-long mob scene. My mind was going pleasantly blank when, just beyond the basketball courts, the crowd to my left randomly thinned as I happened to turn my head in that direction, and I was stunned into immobility by a strange and arresting presence. Shannon, in full kingly regalia, was using a cast-concrete park bench as a keyboard stand. She was hitting the keyboard with one or two fingers of each hand in a simultaneous, arrhythmic staccato, a crazed, atonal "Chopsticks." She was brilliant. A brazen, glorious "Fuck you!" to the swarming normals who surrounded her, gossiping like flies on the snaking turd that is Venice Beach. I grabbed my camera and took a few shots. She stared back at me, unflinching and defiant, and a maniacal, toothsome grin spread across her face.

There was a partly crushed shoe box at the foot of the bench, and it was hard to tell whether it was hers or just part of the trash

that was strewn about. I walked up to her and picked up the box. "Is this for tips?" I asked. She seemed ambivalent for a sec, then nodded. "I'm going to put it up here so people know to put money in it." I placed it on the bench, wadded up a dollar bill, and put it in the box. That's when I uttered the stupidest, unkindest words. All in a rush, I said, "I'm doing an article for a magazine and I'd like to talk to you. It's the Anti-Music Issue, and this is perfect, because this is so anti-music already." It was then that I realized just how horribly I had misread the situation. Her voice was deeper and thicker than I expected and her face slackened. I noticed the pair of prescription glasses under her costume shades. "Why is it anti-music?" she asked, sounding dully petulant. She wasn't the cleverly ironic misanthrope I had projected. She had been playing her heart out, and I had just totally hurt her feelings. Quickly attempting to diminish the insult, I added, "You know, it's like performance art." A flash of hot shame spread over me then, during which I have no memory of what actually transpired. The only note I scribbled down during this interlude was the phrase "just playing music." I have no idea what it means or what it refers to. I got my head together and fell back onto the standard script.

After getting her name and age, I asked her how long she'd been playing music. She said, "Most of my life. No one ever encouraged it. People would say I'm crazy. They say it's not realistic. They say you have a mental illness."

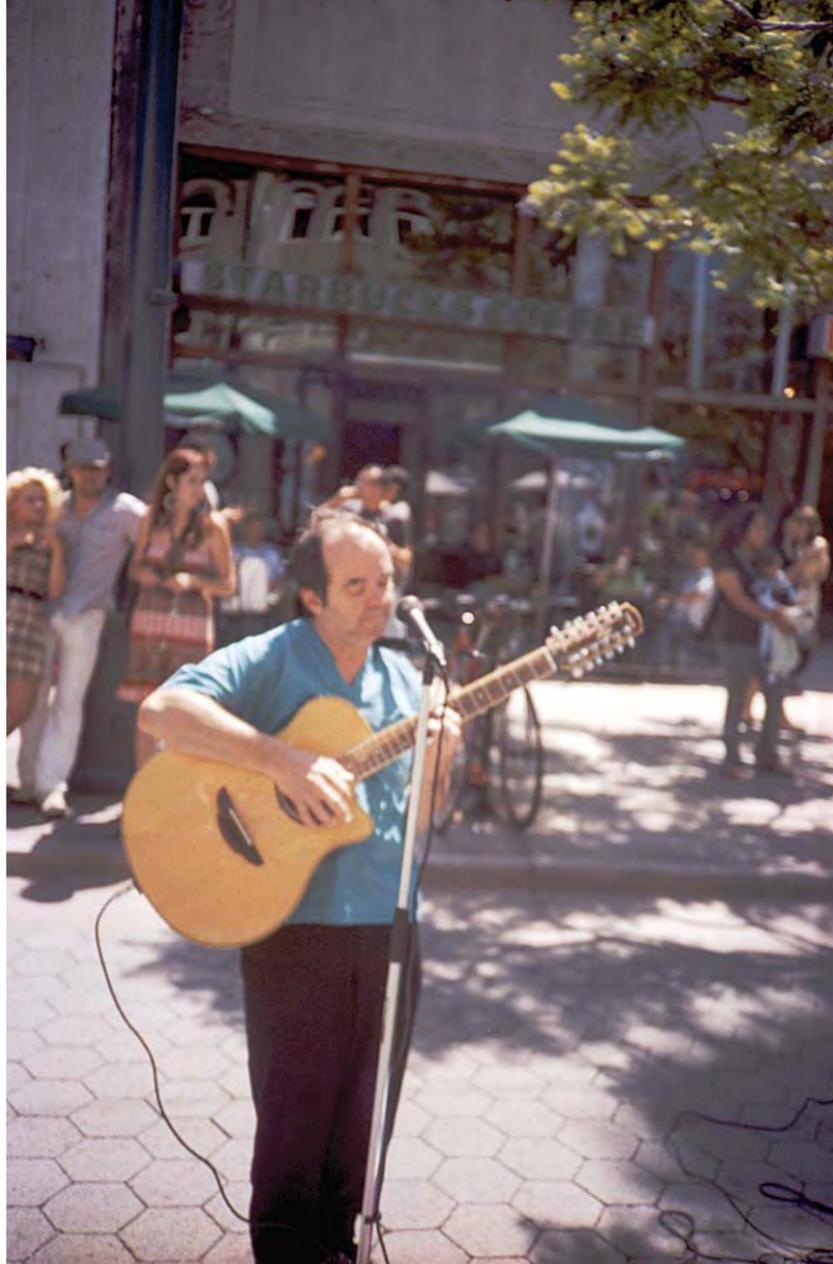
"Do you have a favorite story about music or what music has done for you?"

"Not yet." Then she said, "I'd like to be a Michael Jackson impersonator for real."

"Is there a least favorite thing about music that you can think of?"

"I don't like when people say I'm crazy, or that it's not realistic, or they say you have a mental illness."

I thanked her for her time and I wished her good luck. I might have shaken her hand. I stepped back, took a few more pictures (what an asshole!), and then continued on my way. I was shaken by our interaction and I felt a little queasy. Of course, it could be that the joke was on me and I had fallen victim to some Andy Kaufman-esque mind-fuck performance piece. Or possibly I had just witnessed a tragically unique human being teetering on the yawning precipice of societal indifference. Likely it's some unconsidered third option. Whichever it is, satiric genius, gloomy naïf, result of irrepressible creative urges, or double-dog dare, this woman has earned a hug, a round of applause, and to be more than a mere flicker across the brainpan of some burned-out hipster.



Winston, 41

Winston wasn't having a very good day. He'd somehow had the unfortunate luck of drawing the attention of Officer Carl, one of several community service officers roaming the Third Street Promenade, and certainly the most enthusiastic. He had been fingering through Winston's business for a good 40 minutes. Sweet, gentle, and unassuming, Winston just sort of half-smiled through it all, emanating an aura of monkish patience. It had all started just a few songs into his set. Officer Carl marched on the scene, squatted in front of Winston's speaker, and probed it with his decibel meter. He didn't like what he saw. Not one bit. He stopped Winston mid-song and showed him the readout on the meter. Officer Carl pulled him aside to quietly

discuss what he'd found. They conversed genteelly for several minutes and then Officer Carl pulled out his ticket pad and politely issued Winston a summons.

You'd think that would have been that. A stiff "Thank you for fucking me," a subtle nod of the head, and Officer Carl would be on his way. But that insufferably well-mannered transaction was just the beginning. As harshers of mellows go, Officer Carl exhibited an uncommon persistence. He was a stickler's stickler. Winston returned to the mic and started a song. Something awesome, no doubt. That was another thing about Winston, he had the best song list I'd heard a busker bust out with in I don't know how long. He could play XTC, follow it up with Rush, then maybe

some Elvis Costello, or the Clash, or Lou Reed, Led Zeppelin, Neil Young, the Ramones, Pink Floyd, the Smiths, Jethro Tull, Talking Heads, and on and on, all with just his voice and his 12-string guitar. He could basically play the entire soundtrack of my teenage years. But it didn't really matter what he played, because half a verse in, Officer Carl once again bent over the speaker and gave it yet another dutiful probing and, sure enough, something just wasn't quite right. He called a halt to the music. He had another talk with Winston, who started touching cables and fiddling with the knobs of his mixing board. This scene repeated itself, over and over.

At some point, Officer Carl was joined by a colleague, and they stood off to the side in conference as Winston tried to determine, yet again, which magic combination of knob positions would finally appease this man. I walked up to the officers and introduced myself. That's when I first learned Officer Carl's name. His colleague was Officer Titus. Officer Carl was clearly the point man, the one most deft at engaging with citizens. Officer Titus looked at me like I'd shit my diaper. We got into a little chitchat. Officer Carl told me that the book of rules and regulations for permissible conduct on the promenade was "this big," as he shaped his hand so it looked like he was holding a Quarter Pounder With Cheese. He then proceeded to tell me the several rules that I was in violation of, with my cameras and my questions, but put me at ease with a magnanimous wave of his hand. They wouldn't be pressing the issue. One bit of arcana they filled me in on was that on every even hour, every street performer on the promenade had to change locations, keeping in mind a certain minimum distance. Get that? Every two hours, these people have to pack up all their stuff, push it down the street, counting the paces, and set it all up again.

Winston, for just a guy singing and playing guitar, had an inordinate amount of crap to drag around. I did sound for a living for years, and I couldn't, at a glance, figure out what the fuck he had all that shit for. And on top of all that, literally, he had a huge banner set up, advertising Kiva.org. That was the next remarkable thing about Winston. He wasn't out here shucking and jiving to get his daily bread. Maybe he'd get a little gas money to help cover the cost of driving a van from the Cleveland National Forest deep in Orange County all the way up to Santa Monica. But the only reason he made the trip was because it was a ready-made venue to spread awareness for Kiva. With all these people shamelessly flaunting their disposable incomes, maybe some of them will pull their heads out of the trough long enough to throw a bone to some third-world seamstress trying to make it on her own. But of course Winston also loves the music. He loves it when someone recognizes some obscure song he's playing, especially the younger people. It gives him hope. Officer Carl eventually wearied of the game and let Winston play his music. It was eight minutes to 4.



"Cowboy," 42

Dennis "Cowboy" Morgan said the worst blow music had dealt him was the breakup of his band, Content Life. When I got home that night, I googled "content life band," and the first link that I followed named two players, neither one of them Cowboy, and then briefly described the rest of the band as "two guys that looked like they were homeless. One was wearing chains around his ankles [*sic*] that jingled when he stomped, and the other had a tambourine." The next link reduced the lineup to three and finally named Dennis, our Cowboy, as the tambourine player, and it identified him as someone who had lost his home during Katrina.

From 15 feet away, Cowboy had the strange mix of charm and menace of a carny. But when you started talking with him, he had a certain Matthew McConaughey-ishness that, though nauseatingly saccharine in a rom-com, was disarming when actualized and up close. He gave knowing nods to passersby and called women "Sugar." He explained that though he had been on the streets for the past five years, it was by choice, because he loves the music. This was a sentiment I'd heard before and would hear again, but before I'd heard Cowboy play a single note on the guitar that had initially drawn me to him, it had been reclaimed by Winston, its rightful owner. And now I know

the life he had given it all up for was that of a tambourine player. I don't want to diminish the role of the tambourine in music, or the transformative power of music in general, or the sense of purpose and belonging that being in a band can bring, but it seemed to me that more might be at play in this story than the tambourine.

I may be projecting here (in fact, I probably am), but I was also living in New Orleans when Katrina hit, and it radically altered the course I thought my life was meant to take and left me deeply mistrustful of permanence itself. I've been rootless ever since, and after meandering for a couple years, I also "chose" to attempt a career that promised a total lack of security and stability and would guarantee that rootlessness well into the future. I know others from that disaster who've made similar "choices," and I'm sure there are many more. How many, like Cowboy, find themselves on the very edges of society, basically filling the same niche that Vietnam vets did in the 70s and 80s, bruised and skittish, adrift in a culture that derides meaning and looks down with suspicion on the weak and vulnerable. And what a crowded niche this is becoming. Then again, I might just be having a midlife crisis, and Cowboy might just really like the tambourine.

I wasn't sure of the tone this piece would take, and I made some preemptive apologies for any sense of mockery the editors might impose on my article. In response he solemnly intoned, "I predict if they mock, they will fail." A still hush surrounded us then, like in a loud nightclub scene in a movie where they cut to a tight shot, and two characters are speaking in urgent whispers somehow audible though they are standing a couple feet from each other and the crush of extras that surrounds them still throbs and gyrates to the now dampened, though presumably still deafening, incidental soundtrack. As the noise and confusion of the promenade seemed to drop away, he warned, "Touch not the anointed one." When he saw me start to scribble that down, he laughed and grinned sheepishly, as if to acknowledge that it might sound more than a little crazy, a wry dollop of carny bullshit, transparent in the light of day. He said it again, this time with a smile, and I said, "That's great. I love it," and I smiled, too.



Darius Maxey, 11

Darius Maxey's road-to-Damascus moment occurred at his grandmother's knee. A singer in her local church choir, she would have Darius help her to practice her songs for Sunday. One day as they sang together, offering praises to Jesus and proclaiming their wretchedness before the eyes of God (I assume), his grandmother first lowered her voice and then dropped out completely. Her grandson kept going, taking the lead, and on that day, young Darius, six years old and presumed first grader, disappeared, and Darius Maxey, gospel-singing wunderkind and pre-teen street performer, was born.

"At the same time," Darius told me recently, "I've got my acting career going on. I really didn't expect music to be so important in my life." He sounded world-weary, as if he were confiding

to me in some smoky afterhours lounge over two fingers, neat, and not sitting on a curb of the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica, chaperoned by his mother, Dedra.

The disenchanted tone may have been a result of the encounter I had just witnessed, which he said was the worst experience with music he's had yet. "That lady is rude, rude, rude. I repeat: rude!" The lady in question, pictured above right, is another street performer, and Darius had been engaged in a turf war with her for at least an hour. Set up within spitting distance of each other, they played over one another until Darius, perhaps outgunned, had had enough and, after conferring with his mother, made an announcement. "I'm sorry," he said to the two or three people it could be construed



were watching him (which is not to disparage Darius' talent—he's quite the singer). "I'm always a respectful performer, but we're getting treated with a lot of disrespect here." Then he shut it down.

I never got the presumed nemesis's side of the story, and so I'll follow Darius's example and respectfully decline to make assumptions. She wasn't a bad performer, and I'm sure her songs of love lost, wisdom gained, and shout-outs to the universal sense of wonder at the grandness of life's deep mysteries will touch many a pubescent heart someday, but in the meantime, she was rolling her eyes in dismissal at an 11-year-old. And not just any 11-year-old, but one whose mother believes in him so much she bought him some kind of karaoke machine and a cool pair of shades, helped him make a sign, and drove him to Santa Monica on her day off. And there were no other Dariuses on the promenade that day. On the other hand, there were at least four blandly attractive, 20-something, long-brown-haired, singer-songwriter chicks visible over a three-block stretch. I found the same distribution of this type at the other locations that I checked out, except for Venice Beach. Apparently they avoid Venice. But give it time. If some future reporter makes another survey of the musical marginalia in 20 years or so, it's likely to be all bedraggled brunettes, one after the other, competing with barkers (hawking low-cost, no-fuss heroin prescriptions) for the limited attentions of jaded tourists.



Mark Anthony, 55

My friend told me she knew of a local department store that had a guy playing piano in the women's underwear section, so I went there and soon met resident ivory tickler Mark Anthony. He came off as knowing and lightly jaded, like he'd discovered that life was as pleasantly pointless as a Sandra Bullock movie on a turbulent transoceanic flight. I told him what I was up to and he was almost conspiratorial in his openness to it. When I was concerned that store security might have a problem with me taking pictures, he said he'd say it was for him. He was like that kind-of-cool, kind-of-weird neighbor you had in your 20s who you'd only exchanged pleasantries with when you happened by him in the hall, until you ran into him at a bar on St. Patty's Day and he told you how, back in the day, he had been the lead singer in some band with Gianni, back when Gianni was more new wave than New Age.

I photographed Mark a couple times, but they were both hit-and-run sessions and I hadn't gotten a chance to interview him. He did give me his card, though, and the day before my deadline, I decided that I wanted to find out more about him. So I gave him a call. Guess who he used to be in a band with?

Chameleon was a hot-shit act out of Minneapolis in the late 70s and early 80s. Their sound was a restive mix of Tommy Tutone, Styx, and Vangelis. Besides Gianni (who was already showing signs of megalomania and whose gassy excursions, it seems to me, were the only things keeping them from Top 40 recognition), they also boasted drummer Charlie Adams in their lineup. He's the guy who started the whole spinning-upside-down drum-kit thing that Tommy Lee would later steal. Mark's vocals had a nervous, propulsive energy in keeping with the air of Icarusian cocaine-fueled comedown the

wound-licking boomers were going through at the time. But the band had some bad luck with the labels and then Gianni wanted to take things in a different direction.

It's been cruise ships and department stores since then, but Mark doesn't come off as bitter in any way. Of the many people I talked to, Mark could perhaps make the biggest claim to past glory. He used to be roommates with Nicolette Larson, for Christ's sake. That he's only a tad sardonic today is a testament to his good nature.

Mark, who's also an actor, got a call regarding his name from the Screen Actors Guild some years back. The representative said that there was this hot Latin kid coming up who was looking to break big across all media. He wanted to know whether Mark was willing to relinquish his name. I don't know how superstar Marc Anthony spelled his name before he got into SAG, but I know how he doesn't spell it now.



J.B. Willit, 54

“That’s ‘w-i-l-l-i-t,’ as in I ‘will it’ to be.” James Bartholomew “J.B.” Willit was just back from Warsaw. He’d spent five years in Eastern Europe, and now he was playing around the States, hoping to get up enough money to bring his wife over from Lithuania. Poker-faced, his default stance was defiance, and from behind his deep black sunglasses I could feel him eyeing me with suspicion. I got the feeling that a wide swath of humanity would fit under the heading of “The Man” to him. And maybe with good reason.

Like a Hallmark card to silver linings, in a gravelly mumble J.B. told me a story that contained both his lowest point and his fondest musical memory. J.B.’s anti-folk style, his barking, punk-inflected blues, belies his hippie past. He’d been familiar with the Rainbow Family, a lanky and loose group of eco-anarcho-gypsies, sometimes numbering in the tens of thousands, who live in state and national parks for up to a

few weeks at a stretch, stupefying locals and vacationers and digging low-impact shitters. I had encountered this Family myself while hitchhiking and hopping trains as a teen and, for a few months, probably counted myself among their numbers. In fact, J.B. and I knew some of the same people from this way back when. But, as he had written off the Rainbows decades earlier as sellouts, I sensed that did nothing to dissuade him from being suspicious of me. One night, in 1989, J.B. had just left Irvine Meadows, down in Orange County, where he’d been attending some Dead shows. He was walking down the PCH, holding, when the cops pulled over to check him out. Taken in under the purview of the draconian drug laws of a different era, he was sent up the coast, to San Luis Obispo, to a place with such a weird, time-capsule name, it sounds like it was pulled from the pages of *Papillon*.

The California Men’s Colony has an illustrious roster of alumni. Timothy Leary was there, and Suge Knight. Manson-family members Charles “Tex” Watson and Bobby Beausoleil each served long stretches. Also S&L scandal alum Charles Keating Jr., famed street baller Demetrius “Hook” Mitchell, and Christian Brando. But it was inmate #E4678, whose time at the Colony intersected J.B.’s own, that gave this otherwise pointless stint away meaning. Ike Turner had demons, to be sure. Let’s call him a complicated man. And before those demons eventually killed him, they bought him a stopover at the CMC. There’s no denying that he was a musician of genre-defining caliber, and three or four days a week, for five months, hard, J.B. Willit, stoner, tripper, Deadhead, jammed with Ike Turner on the steps of the library of the California Men’s Colony, and he’s unlikely been the same since. It almost seems worth it.

Harry Perry, 59

This is Harry Perry. He’s been playing guitar on roller skates in Venice since 1974. He’s from Detroit, where he had his first band at 13. He lived with the MC5, hung out with the likes of Ted Nugent, and was managed for a time by Punch Andrews, Bob Seger’s longtime manager. His first record was a cover of Seger’s “Heavy Music,” released on the legendary record label Hideout. Harry himself is a legend, and you can find out all sorts of tidbits about him online, or just look for him at the beach. But even legends have to pay the bills.

When I came upon Harry, he was hawking t-shirts to a couple of tourists. When I told him what I was up to, he gave me a CD. But as we talked, he seemed clearly distracted. Suddenly he looked past me, his eyes searching, and he barked out a name. A nondescript white guy materialized from out of the crowd, pulling a duffel bag on a collapsible luggage cart. Harry said, “Give me ten shirts and a bunch of CDs.” The guy bent to the bag, handed Harry the shit he’d asked for, and then just as quickly dissolved back into the crowd. He was like a Mossad agent. After watching him dematerialize, having left no retrievable impression in my mind, I turned back to Harry, who had somehow already squirreled away the fresh batch of merch somewhere on his person. This was precision machinery. Harry Perry is an industry.



Roger Hinz, 40

He turned to me as if saying yes had never been wrong, and he mugged for a bit, strumming out a series of chords with a flourish. He was kind of antsy, like maybe he’d just burned one with the crusties over there with the cat on a leash. He’d take a few steps back, then a few toward me in a loose, easy swagger, the constant movement radiating from deep within his pelvis. You got the feeling he’s been fucking divorcees since he was 17. He was like a stoned Camaro. He worried the neck of the guitar with impatient caresses, the occasional nervous strum.

After taking his picture, I asked him how long he’s been playing.

“All my life,” he replied.

“Thirty years?”

“Forty,” he intoned.

“What’s your favorite memory?”

“Just last night” (which even my friend’s 12-year-old kid, who was with me, thought was hilarious), “I was up in Beverly Hills, and Stefanie Powers came up to me.” I was too slow in summoning a look of recognition. “The lady from *Hart to Hart*.”

I nodded my head. “How’d she look?”

“She still looked great.”

“Who was the guy...?”

“Robert Wagner.”

“Yeah. What’s your worst memory?”

“Aw, none, man. My music’s too positive.”

This guy was more Lyle Waggoner than Robert Wagner. Later, I found lots of exciting surprises at summerlandcd.com. Apparently someone plays the “flamingo” guitar.



Al, 50

This is the same vaguely disappointed expression that Al had on his face for the entire four minutes and 27 seconds during which we spoke. I even said, at one point, “That’s some expression you’ve got there, Al.” And he said, “Yup.” It’s not like he was unfriendly at all. One time he almost did this kind-of-laugh thing that played ever so subtly across his face. And when we were talking, the expression took on a quality that was less peeved and more like maybe someone had quietly let out a stinker, but we

didn’t know each other well enough to acknowledge it.

Al’s been a musician since he was a child. Growing up, there was a piano in his house that nobody touched until one day he started messing with it, and music got hold of him. He also plays the trumpet, though on the day I met him, he’d been playing guitar in a four-piece funk outfit. He has an easy way about him when he plays. Music is second nature to him, and he said it kept him out of trouble when he was a younger man. It almost seemed as if he

looked up to music itself as some kind of benevolent guiding force, like an older sibling who’d already made all the mistakes so he didn’t have to. This is why he has no patience for fools who can’t get their shit together to play.

“They go to jail, get stuck in the motel. Anything but the music. But I’ll do anything for the music.” Still, I can sort of see how he might have trouble keeping his people in line. I mean, what’s he going to do if you fuck up, give you this face? You’re totally over it already.



David Waller, 62

David Waller has a pedigree. At least he thinks it’s a possibility that he’s a distant relative of Fats Waller. His grandmother and his aunts had pictures of Fats all over the place, and it was their love and admiration of the man that prompted David to pursue music in the first place. He started with the baritone horn. His best friend growing up in the ghettos of Detroit was Marvin Marshall, whose mother had a beauty shop that happened to be halfway between the two Motown houses, and it was where their stable of stars would go to get their hair done. David and Marvin would hang out there in the afternoon, soaking in the cool. By then, David had moved on to the bass guitar, and he said all the young players had to learn that session style, the Motown Sound, note for note. “I hate to say it, but note for fucking note.” Eventually, he hooked up with the right people and was granted entrée into that world

of propitious splendor, Hitsville, USA, where he mixed with the likes of Marvin Gaye, Gladys Knight, and the Jackson 5. In 14 years, he played with everyone on the Motown roster except for Stevie Wonder and the Supremes.

Yet despite his great success, David has a certain ambivalence regarding the capricious finger of good fortune. “If you’re not sharp, intellectual, not in the right clique, you don’t make it. I lucked out. I know ten or 15 guys who never got out of the garage, or some nightclub in Detroit. I went through ten passports.” The pinnacle of his success came when he was playing with the Temptations and they were invited to perform for the Queen of England at Royal Albert Hall. “And I was watching her in that far box,” he said and pointed his finger up toward the rooftops across the promenade, pausing to acknowledge that imaginary monarch. He dropped his

hand and looked at me. “We fucked them up,” he said. And even in recognizing that that is all now long in the past, he spread his hands as if to encompass the small plot of beachfront he and his friends had claimed for the day to jam and maybe make a little cash, and he said, “I feel truly blessed.”

I should maybe mention that when I looked some of this stuff up, I couldn’t find anything to confirm what David had told me. Maybe it’s a deficiency of my search heuristics, or my own time constraints, or laziness on the part of some Motown chroniclers. Motown was notorious for relegating session players to faceless obscurity, as did most hit factories of the day. But the way the memories played across his face as he relived them, I can’t help but believe every word this sweet man told me. And as Fats Waller himself would say, “One never knows, do one?”



Marla Garvin, 55

Marla Garvin was born in Davenport, Iowa. She took up the violin in school in the second grade, but being one of eight children, her family couldn't afford to get her one of her own, and so she switched to voice. In her early 20s, she was the lead singer of a heavy-metal cover band called Lillian Storm, but she longed to break out of the cultural isolation of the Midwest, and she wanted to do her own songs. She headed to New York in '84 to pursue her dream of being a solo singer, but she couldn't get any traction, and she didn't stay long. When she got back to Davenport, she was semifamous and they interviewed her on a local radio station simply because she had survived New York City.

She gave the dream another shot a couple years later, this time in Atlanta. She reinvented herself as a performance artist, performing what she called "heavy-metal a-cappella slash rock-'n'-roll poetry." She lived in the dressing room of a club called the Metroplex, where she says she met lots of "alterna-

stars." But that didn't work out the way she had hoped, either, and she split after a year.

Whatever she was doing in the 90s, by the fall of 2001 it had left her restless, and she headed out to California. On her very first night in Venice, she met Sonny, a homeless, larger-than-life musician. The first thing Marla told me about herself is that she is "the illegitimate widow by proxy of King Sonny Zorro, 1942 to 2003." To some, Sonny was like a later-era, West Coast version of Moondog, the blind, giant jazz musician who stalked New York City in a Viking outfit for 30 years in the middle of the past century, jamming with the likes of Steve Reich and Philip Glass. In a mirrored, Left Coast incarnation, Sonny, it's said, wrote "Purple Haze" in a cafe as a dedication to Jimi Hendrix, transcribed it on to a napkin at Janis Joplin's urging, and then passed it on to her to give to Jimi. It seems like Sonny was an interesting guy, and I might have enjoyed talking to him. But I didn't, because he's dead.

Marla Garvin is vibrant and engaging, though she seems gripped by sadness and self-doubt, and seven years on still relegates herself to the safety of the negative space defined by another's absence. Maybe she's just working it out. After years of homelessness, in her mind a fair exchange for the music, she's finally in a \$20-a-night room of her own. A few years ago, perched on a concrete retaining wall, she was singing Doors songs with Guitar Eddy when some drunk pushed her and she fell headfirst to the pavement seven feet below. She says it made her a stutterer and so now she can't sing. (She never stuttered once when we were talking.) So now she's playing guitar, and she's hoping to have an album out by Christmas. Entitled *Venice, Anyone?!*, it will contain some of the music she's written over the past decade. Let's hope it sounds like half-smoked cigarettes and warm, beer-y melancholy and doesn't feature that hippie drum circle that's always setting up down there.



Los!, 48

Los! is a veteran of the Sunset Strip hair-band scene. He came to Hollywood in '86 and moved in with a little-known group of guys who went by the name Guns N' Roses.

Soon, he was watching as his friends broke big all around him. He was proud to be in the brotherhood of music, and he still is. "I can approach anyone. I can approach stars. The best and the worst. David Lee Roth. Nikki Sixx. Slash was my best friend." The stench of success was heavy in the air, and he was itchy for a taste, but it wasn't meant to be. Not yet, at least.

He's been playing guitar since he was 11. "My mom said as soon as I heard Kiss I was fucked." But it just might have been in his genes. When he was 20, the woman who raised him tearfully informed him that he was adopted. He found his birth mother in the Bay Area. She had been a guitar player in the café scene of San Francisco in the 50s. Her peak was when "she achieved total silence." Apparently, for the finger-snapping

beatnik set, total silence was the hepcat equivalent of leaping to your feet and shouting, "Bravo, bravo!" She awed them into giving her four and a half minutes of this awkward, disconcerting praise.

And apparently John Denver tuned her guitars. The nose for near greatness was in his blood.

For 14 years, Los! and his girlfriend had a band called Mama Fights Back. Though he was the main songwriter and diligent with his copyrighting, they were songs that the two of them brought to life together and, in a bit of morosely romantic logic, his girlfriend felt that they should get married to ensure that she could keep using the songs in case he died. Her father disagreed. Burned by marriage himself, he felt that was the quickest way to end their relationship. So they got married. Two months later, her father died and left her several properties worth millions. Two weeks after that, she wanted a divorce. She took the money and

she took the songs. But the worst was what she did to his dog. "He was my best friend for 12 and a half years." She took the dog with her when she left, only to inform him a short while later that she had him put down. When he asked why, she said his breed only had a life expectancy of 12 to 15 years, so it was time, as if he was in the dog version of *Logan's Run*.

But Los! still has hope. Jesus Christ, he's got a fucking ton of it. He said his new band, Vampire Toothfairies, looks like it's going to break. "But it took this long. I'm the only one that lightning didn't hit. This time it's my turn." It makes me wonder, though, what that even means. What constitutes making it in the music business to a 48-year-old hard rocker? At a time when success is measured less in chicks banged than in downloads and page hits, by what metric will he gauge his? When will he know he's arrived?

They say you won't know you're trapped in a black hole until it's too late. Cruising through uncharted space, you'd slip by the event horizon, completely uneventfully as it turns out, and there'd be nothing left to do but to drift inexorably toward the only possible destination left to you: oblivion. And yet you'd be none the wiser until gravity started pulling you into spaghetti. Dreams are like that. Not your nightly REM sleep dreams, but your I'm-one-in-a-million dreams. Those grand, American dreams. Maybe it starts with Gene Simmons spitting up red dye No. 4 and corn syrup, and then it's nurtured by a charismatic homeless guy telling you that you're somebody. But despite the fact that you're rationalizing against ever-diminishing returns, like a desperate actor shitting in the bushes 'cause he's hoping to get the lead in Shakespeare in the Park, you never realize you've made an all-in bet until that unquenchable, outsize longing for greatness has been finally whittled down to an essential nugget of need, that someone, someday, will tell you that it wasn't all just a waste of time.

I met Marla and Los! one after the other. They were both so warm and welcoming, and desperate for a sympathetic ear, and though they probably have nothing in common other than circumstance, they've become linked in my mind. If the universe is infinite and so an infinite number of Earths are scattered across the cosmos, each an expression of some small facet of discrete possibility, then on one of these Earths, Los! and Marla have found each other and they spend their nights together in a \$20-a-night room making beautiful music without care or silly dreams. And they breathe marshmallows, talk in a language that's like squeaky door hinges, and have long, spindly arms like spider monkeys. ■

KARA-NOT-OK

A Moment of Silence for the Karaoke Bar Employee

INTERVIEWS BY BRIONY WRIGHT, PHOTOS BY NATALIE NIKITOVIC

Karaoke rooms are like pressure cookers for bad behavior. Evidently, something about being locked in a confined space with a bunch of overpriced alcohol and a machine that amplifies your warbling brings out the worst in people. I know this because over the past six or so years I've been a frequent offender. I've snuck cheap booze into private rooms, lit up joints and cigarettes (and put them out on the carpet), snorted lines off the song list, smoked DMT

under the table, danced on the furniture with my shoes on, written on the walls, mistreated the electronic equipment, and stolen anything that wasn't screwed down. I've done all of these things with an inexplicable feeling of entitlement, rarely sparing a thought for the employees and managers who've silently cleaned up my friend's vomit before replacing the microphones, tambourines, posters, and vases that I've taken home. The rancid cherry on top of this curdled sundae for our

accommodating hosts must involve having to endure hundreds of retarded renditions of terrible songs each and every weekend.

In short, thanks to drunken assholes such as myself, working in a karaoke joint must be one of the worst jobs on the planet. We asked some of the people behind our favorite establishments here in Melbourne, Australia, about how they deal with their lot and found out whether the job has made them hate music, and people, forever.



HELEN, SHANGHAI CLUB

Vice: Hi Helen. How long have you been working here?

Helen: I started this place in 1989, just over 20 years ago, and it was the very first karaoke bar in Melbourne. I've been working here full time since then. I'm part of the

furniture. We had our 20th birthday last year and it was pretty crazy.

Wow, that's a long time. You must really be sick of the sound of people singing.

Not really, actually. I can't sing myself, so I can't judge. And all the rooms are sound-proofed, so it's OK. As long as people are having fun, that's what counts.

That's so gracious of you. What kind of people tend to make up your customer base?

We get all sorts, but there are always lots of hen's nights. They come in and generally bring along their own male stripper. The rooms are all enclosed so we let them do whatever they like in there, really.

What do people tend to sing?

For the first ten years we had mostly Asian people—a lot of them were Cantonese and Mandarin—but now we have a mixture of Australian, Japanese, and Korean. It's much more varied, so our song list reflects that. I think that Aussies have really got into karaoke in the last few years, which is

interesting. There are quite a lot of good singers. They get some alcohol in their bodies and they are all singing and dancing.

You must have seen a lot of crazy stuff working here for 20 years.

Yes, a lot of crazy.

Has the smoking ban affected your business?

Karaoke was really affected by the anti-smoking laws. People liked to be able to smoke and drink while they sang, and they used to be able to. When people weren't allowed to smoke anymore, numbers dropped off a bit. You do get karaoke bars that let people smoke illegally, but they risk losing their license.

So it sounds like you actually enjoy doing this. What's one annoying aspect of your job?

It's pretty annoying when people steal the microphones, but they usually return them the next day because they feel guilty.

What do you listen to when you go home at night?

Nothing! I turn everything off and make it peaceful. I don't need music after my day.



MATT, CHI LOUNGE

Vice: How long has Chi Lounge been operating?

Matt: It's coming up on two years now. It used to be called CC's, and that was also a karaoke bar. But I have a feeling that they had illegal gambling going on upstairs. Not anymore, though.

Not on your watch. What do you think encouraged the surge of interest in karaoke among Westerners?

As far as I know, karaoke is only about ten years old. I imagine it's so popular because we have such a large Asian demographic in Australia. They originally introduced it to us.

Is there a difference in how each culture approaches karaoke?

Yeah, absolutely. It's really interesting. The

Asian guys will order a couple of bottles of booze, get some mixers and food, and then lock themselves in the room for the entire night. Westerners will just go to the bar and order as they go along. I think it has to do with Asians being more conscious of getting value for money and keeping track of what they're spending. I've often seen them play drinking games before they start singing too. The problem is that we can't monitor how drunk they're getting because they don't leave their rooms.

Right.

Other times you'll have four guys who'll buy a bottle or two and then lock themselves in a room and sing to each other. It can get quite strange.

Do you think people tend to get more drunk doing karaoke than they would at a regular bar?

Not necessarily, but everyone comes ready to get their drink on, and karaoke is definitely better with some liquid confidence.

How bad can the singing get?

People don't really sing to sound good. It's not really about that. But I try to spend as little time as possible around the rooms. I think you develop a wall. You need to.

How do you deal with people dancing on the furniture?

It's inevitable. As long as we get the room back pretty much how I gave it to them, they can do what they like.

Are there particular songs or artists that always pop up?

That first Britney song, "Oops!... I Did It Again," and a lot of AC/DC too.

And you've seen some real degradation here, right?

Of course. We've had a lot of people vomiting in the rooms and a couple of instances where guys have passed out and wet themselves, which is just awkward because the bouncers have to carry them outside. We've also seen a couple of orgies. We don't hide the security cameras in the rooms, but people seem oblivious to them.

Do you have to put a stop that kind of thing?

Well, yeah, ideally before it gets messy. We've had a fair share of fights, and sometimes the rooms are left in a hideous mess. A few weeks ago some people came in on a Thursday night looking to spend a couple of hundred dollars, but after breaking the TV their bill was \$1,900. That's an expensive night of singing.

That must really hurt.

Just before Christmas something like six karaoke joints were raided and closed down due to the serving of alcohol to the underaged and smoking and the like. Most places have systems set up whereby the lights come on and a siren goes off so people have a bit of warning.

Has doing this made you like music less?

Not really. It tends to be all pop songs here and I don't listen to that in my own time. Right now I'm listening to Broken Bells, Otis Rush, and Z-Trip.



JAMES, MELBOURNE KARAOKE LOUNGE

Vice: How long have you been here, James?
James: I've been running this place for one year. Your place is a bit different in that it's one main room where strangers and friends sing in front of everybody. How many people can you fit in here on a busy night?
 About 200. We have a buffet and a bar and karaoke.

It must turn into quite the party.
 Well, not really. Maybe I need to try to sell the business more, because it's hard to run these days. It's really quiet here. I don't think I'm a very good running person.

You're not even full up on a Saturday night?
 No way. I have found out the hard way that I'm not so good at this. I even tried to make it into a restaurant, but nothing works.

Well, that's a shame. Would you ever try to run a karaoke place again somewhere different?
 No. Maybe I'm too old. I get pain in my eyes if I work late nights. I asked my doctor and he said that it's because I should be going to sleep earlier.

What kind of music do you listen to yourself?
 Michael Jackson's pop. He was so nice a person.



NORIKO, KARAOKE WORLD

Vice: What do you do at Karaoke World?
Noriko: I'm the daytime manager here.

Do people actually sing during the day?
 Yes, they do. Often people who are practicing for a talent show like *Australian Idol* will come during the day. But there obviously are not as many here as in the nighttime.

Have you ever worked the night shift?
 Yes, I've been here for five years so I've seen it all. Karaoke World has been open for 12 years.

How would you rate most of the people who come to sing there?
 You'd be surprised—they're not too bad.

What do people tend to sing most?
 There's always lots of ABBA, Lady Gaga, and Bon Jovi. At night it's all the fun songs whereas during the day it's generally ballads.

What kind of music do you like to listen to yourself?

I like 90s music—the stuff I grew up listening to in Indonesia. The karaoke bars are much better there than here, to be honest.

Why is that?
 I guess it's because everything is so cheap and affordable that they can really go crazy decking the places out. For instance, in Indonesia you generally have your own toilet in the room. There's a lot more luxury over there. In Asian countries, people don't go to bars and pubs as much as here. We all just go to karaoke.

And do people tend to sing better than they do here? Do they have better voices?
 Not so much.



JACK, K-BOX

Vice: Are you the manager at K-Box?
Jack: Yes.

What shifts do you work?
 I work night and day shifts. We're booked up on the weekends, so I'm always busy.

Why do you think people do karaoke?
 To let off steam. It's a modern-day piano bar.

What kind of songs do you find to be the most popular?
 Probably rock songs, which can make the whole room electrified. Songs where everyone can shout into the microphone, you know?

Like Guns N' Roses?
 Yeah, exactly, like that type of thing.

Do you sing karaoke yourself?
 Yes, I do.

Do you have a good voice?
 I'd say I do, but the thing with karaoke is

that it's irrelevant whether you have a good voice. I think there's a misconception that you need to sing well, but that's not the point. It's about having fun. I like seeing people enjoy themselves, so that makes up for how bad it can sound sometimes.

What's the weirdest thing you've seen in your time working here?
 One time there was a Japanese couple here, and I walked in on them having hanky-panky inside the room. That kind of thing happens a lot in Japan because it's cheaper than a love hotel. They hire a karaoke room instead for sexy times.

Do you have cameras in the rooms?
 We are required by law to have cameras in the rooms.

What's your least favorite type of music?
 I like everything. ■

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Saturday August 21st
 ReggaeFest Wrap-Up Party with Leo C, DJ Gummy & The Two Towers

Saturday August 28th
 Young Ones with Steam Engine DJs on at 12:30

Saturday September 4th
 Homebreakin Records Release Party with Neighbour, Cal Bass & DJ Pump

Thursday September 9th
 Hai Karate with Toddla T

Saturday September 18th
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Saturday September 18th
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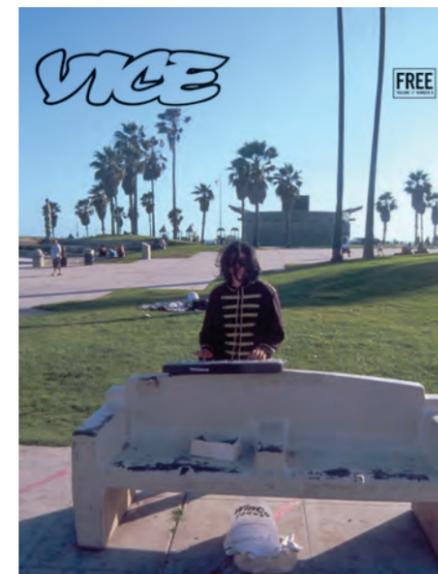
EVERY WEDNESDAY

EVERY THURSDAY

EVERY WEDNESDAY

THURSDAYS & FRIDAYS: NO COVER BEFORE 10PM
WEDNESDAYS: NO COVER BEFORE 11 FOR GIRLS
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For years we told people not to subscribe to *Vice* because it doesn't really make us any money and, unlike most other publications (which are corrupt organs of lies and filth), we don't use our subscriber numbers to try and squeeze an extra buck out of advertisers. Plus, the whole managing the list and mailing thing is a huge pain in the ass to deal with.

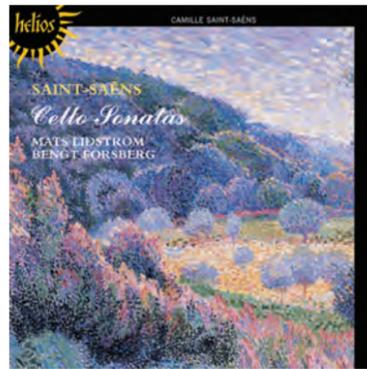
This is all still the case, but after untold years of emails and letters from people whining about how they can't get their hands on an actual physical copy of the magazine because some asshole keeps grabbing 20 copies at a time and then selling them on eBay, we are throwing our hands up and saying, "FINE!"

So if you want to get *Vice* in the mail every month, it's \$30 for 1 year (11 issues) or \$42 for 1 year including the behemoth Photo Issue in July. Send check or money order (payable to VICE Magazine Publishing Inc.) to:

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**BEST COVER OF THE MONTH:
CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS
PERFORMED BY MATS LIDSTRÖM
AND BENGT FORSBERG**



**CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS
PERFORMED BY MATS
LIDSTRÖM AND BENGT
FORSBERG**
Cello Sonatas
Hyperion Reissue

☹️ Saint-Saëns is back with a bang in every sense of the word. In this erotic expedition through three decades of composing, taboos shatter and personal boundaries get slathered in KY and splooge. Halfway into Sonata No. 2 in F Major, piano and cello basically hold an all-orifice orgy in a public parking lot. At one point husky Swedish pianist Bengt Forsberg even makes an appearance as a pizza delivery boy with a big surprise. Back in the day, Saint-Saëns’s contemporaries called his work dull. Now his contemporaries are all like, “Uh...” and Saint-Saëns is all like, “What’s up, bitch?”

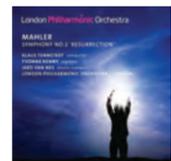
FRED SCONE



**ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK
PERFORMED BY THE EMERSON
STRING QUARTET**
Old World-New World
Deutsche Grammophon

☹️ Is your idea of a good time listening to adapted Ukrainian folk ballads slowed to an andante-tempo tortoise fart? Then have I got a record for you. Violist Paul Neubauer runs Dvořák’s 10th and 11th Quartets through the Snooze Machine, sprinkling in several hundred pounds of allegro scherzando sleepy-dust along the way. You can actually hear one of the Emerson brothers snoring during the third allegro. Dvořák apparently wrote this quintet after a long, hot summer of vacationing in 1893 Iowa. And here I was thinking that state was only good for producing cow methane and Tom Arnold. Yawn.

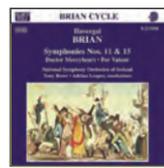
SHEPPARD SHANKS



**GUSTAV MAHLER
PERFORMED BY THE LONDON
PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**
Symphony No. 2, “Resurrection”
London Philharmonic Orchestra

☹️ The late Klaus Tennstedt conducts the equally late Gustav Mahler, making this the *Life After Death* of 19th-century Austro-Germanic late Romantics. Or at least the *Tupac: Resurrection* of early-20th-century modernists. Lotsa high-low tam-tams, sassy woodwinds, and sinister use of C Minor. Not terrible, but not really my thing. Which I guess is bad news for Klaus and Gus, because now they both get that little puking-guy graphic.

EVA BLATTERHOSEN



**HAVERGAL BRIAN
PERFORMED BY TONY ROWE,
ADRIAN LEAPER**
Symphonies 11 and 13
Ireland RTÉ National Symphony

☹️ Ever see a fat kid jiggling down the sidewalk in a WHY BE NORMAL shirt and feel an overwhelming urge to pity-hug? Same deal here. Composer Havergal Brian cuts loose with a very-late-career “Comedy Overture.” There are pippy flute motifs, and a silly salute to Strauss’s *Don Quixote*. Symphony No. 11 undercuts its own adagio with some zany sleigh bells. Ease up, Patch Adams—my funny bone can only take so much.

JANITT KLAMSTON



**RICHARD STRAUSS
Ein Heldenleben (A Hero’s Life)**
**ANTON WEBERN
Im Sommerwind**
**PERFORMED BY THE CHICAGO
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**
Chicago Symphony Orchestra

☹️ Don’t be turned off by first impressions. It’d be easy to take one look at these eight tracks, with their “hero” leitmotif, and think, “What is all this bratwurst Wagner-*Beowulf* bullshit?” But give it a serious spin. There’s a whole little world of intensities—*pauses* as well as crescendos—just waiting for the patient listener. I’m going to be totally honest here. Back when Richard Strauss thumbed his nose at tradition and set out with a bundle and a nickel in search of tone poems, I was one of those who predicted his career had flown the coop. Well, the egg is running down my face now. Our little man’s all grown up.

SHEPPARD SHANKS



**SONDRA RADVANOVSKY
PERFORMED WITH
CONSTANTINE ORBELIAN
CONDUCTING THE
PHILHARMONIA OF RUSSIA**
Verdi Arias
Delos

☹️ Maybe you’re a little burned out on Italian opera composers of the 19th century. Hey, who isn’t? Well, put on your dancing shoes my friend, because Sondra Radvanovsky just came to town. This lady doesn’t merely breath new life into the stale arias of yesteryear—she can act figure eights around any A-list Hollywood starlet in the biz. Just listen to her heartbreak, as Aida the Ethiopian Slave, in *O patria mia* (from act 3 of *Aida*). If you ever need to whip up some tears for a job interview or jury duty, just pop this bad boy into your iPod.

JANITT KLAMSTON



TIMOTHY ANDRES
Shy and Mighty
Nonesuch

☹️ Timothy Andres can tickle the fuck out of the ivories, but here he feels a little too love-struck by a certain virtuoso 19th-century French-Polish composer. Check out track 2, “The Night Jaunt.” Chopin nocturne much? Then there’s “The Tunnel,” intended as “an interstitial movement which leads nowhere.” Hmm. “Nowhere.” Is that some new slang for “so far up Chopin’s dickhole that you might as well be a UTI?”

SHEPPARD SHANKS



STING
Symphonicities
Deutsche Grammophon

☹️ “Sir! Where do you want the prisoners?”
☹️ “Those Al-Qaeda shitstains? Guantánamo’s too good for ‘em!”

“Sir?”
“We gotta show these maggotqueefs we mean business!”
“Sir?”

“Are you aware that Sting has rehashed his hits with a 45-piece orchestra? That he rerecorded ‘Englishman in New York’? That he added *a fucking harp* to ‘Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic’? Can you imagine how destructive this recording would be on the human psyche!?”
“But... Geneva... sir...”

“Don’t cry to me about the Geneva Conventions! We’re fighting a war! Get iTunes on the horn! That is a direct order!”

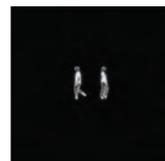
“Sir! Yes sir!”
FRED SCONE



**VIVALDI
PERFORMED BY SERGIO
AZZOLINI AND L'AURA SOAVE**
CREMONA
Concerti per fagotto I
Naivè

☹️ Vivaldi’s love of bassoons is a little weird. Sure, the instrument has a tremendous range of expression, especially for the kind of contrapuntal rhythms performed here. But there are times on this recording (especially in the C Major concertos) where it feels like something else is going on. Like if one day you visited Vivaldi’s apartment and discovered some bassoon-shaped nipple hasps or jelly dongs, would you honestly be that surprised?

PETUNIA PROT



MAX RICHTER
Infra
FatCat Records

☹️ I get what Richter is trying to do here. I respect the symbiosis of electronic innovation and traditional classicism. There are some moving cinematic moments in this, his fifth LP, and some very intriguing combinations of strings (sharp violins, belligerent cello) and mechanical ambience (electronic, sampled, commissioned bits from London’s Royal Ballet). Although *Infra* breaks no major new ground, there are many memorable little interludes and artificially induced

soundscapes. What I’m not so into are the parts that make me feel like I’ve just smoked a pack of PCP blunts and stepped into City Hall wearing nothing but tube socks and a ski mask.

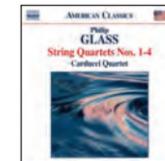
JANITT KLAMSTON



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Music of America: Charles Ives
Sony Masterworks

☹️ What is this sellout bullshit? Charles Ives on *Sony*? Isn’t this the same guy who composed that “Fuck Sony” sonata a few years ago? What’s next? Prokofiev doing Pepsi commercials? Pablo Casals hawking Cool Ranch Doritos? It’s like something out of a Bill Hicks bit. Ives just couldn’t *wait* to suck that corporate cock. Unbelievable.

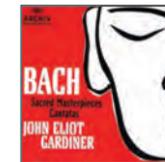
BALLS LARSON



**PHILIP GLASS
PERFORMED BY THE
CARDUCCI QUARTET**
String Quartets 1-4
Naxos

☹️ I’m still not totally sold on the idea that the best way to fight the scourge of Schoenberg-style 12-tone serialism is to write 600 insufferable minimalist art compositions. It’s like trying to fight World War II by painting everyone’s doorknob blue.

PAL PETERSON



**J.S. BACH
CONDUCTED BY
JOHN ELIOT GARDINER**
Sacred Masterpieces – Cantatas
Deutsche Grammophon

☹️ Jesus, this thing is a fucking brick. Twenty-two CDs? Four hundred sixty-three songs? There’s an entire year’s worth of religious holidays and feasts in this collection, including every major Bach choral piece known to man. It’s like buying a pallet of Lemon Pledge at Costco. Do you really need so much?

SHEPPARD SHANKS



**BENJAMIN BRITTEN
PERFORMED BY GERALD FINLEY
AND JULIUS DRAKE**
Songs and Proverbs of William Blake
Hyperion

☹️ What do you get when you cross Gerald Finley’s baritone with William Blake’s mind? A really spooky record is what. You can play this at your next Halloween party for some nervous yuks. But keep in mind that a whackadoo serial killer is probably listening to the exact same song in a basement dungeon somewhere while jerking off and crying.

FRED SCONE



**JONAS KAUFMANN AND
CLAUDIO ABBADO
PERFORMED WITH THE MAHLER
CHAMBER ORCHESTRA**
*Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven,
Wagner*
Decca

☹️ This is really Kaufmann’s show. He’s got great vocal scope, being a *lirico spinto*, a rare lyrical tenor who can cut through all

All Music Is Shit to God

BY ANTHONY BERRYMAN, ILLUSTRATIONS BY RICK FROBERG

Music is so embedded in all aspects of culture today that one rarely pauses to question the validity of the form itself. But is music even a legitimate form of art? Is it even possible to discuss without using a single adjective? (An interesting parlor game, as Roland Barthes pointed out.) The difference between being and becoming is static—“being” implying a state that simply is, in a relatively fixed state of permanence, whereas “becoming” implies a thing that evolves over time. Music, thought of this way, has a multiplicity of natures; it might be thought of in the general, or one might try to understand music within the seemingly incomprehensible system of connections that it makes throughout culture today. And are there lines to be drawn so we may finally say *this* is art whereas *that* is not? How is it possible to discuss the nature of music when the very form seems to fragment itself at so rapid a pace?

I'm sure that most of you have wondered: Where did the great minds of history stand on the subject? What did the philosophers, the intellectuals, the composers themselves have to say on the subject of music?

One of the earliest-known polemics against music comes from Plato, who saw music as a plebeian mode of entertainment, one that was beneath truly cultivated people. As he writes in *Protagoras*: “Second-rate and commonplace people, being too uneducated to entertain themselves as they drink by using their own voices and conversational resources, put up the price of female musicians, paying them well for the hire of an extraneous voice—that of the pipe—and find their entertainment in its warblings. But where the drinkers are men of worth and culture, you will find no girls piping or dancing or harping. They are quite capable of enjoying their own company without such frivolous nonsense, using their own voices in sober discussion and each taking his turn to speak or listen—even if the drinking is really heavy.”

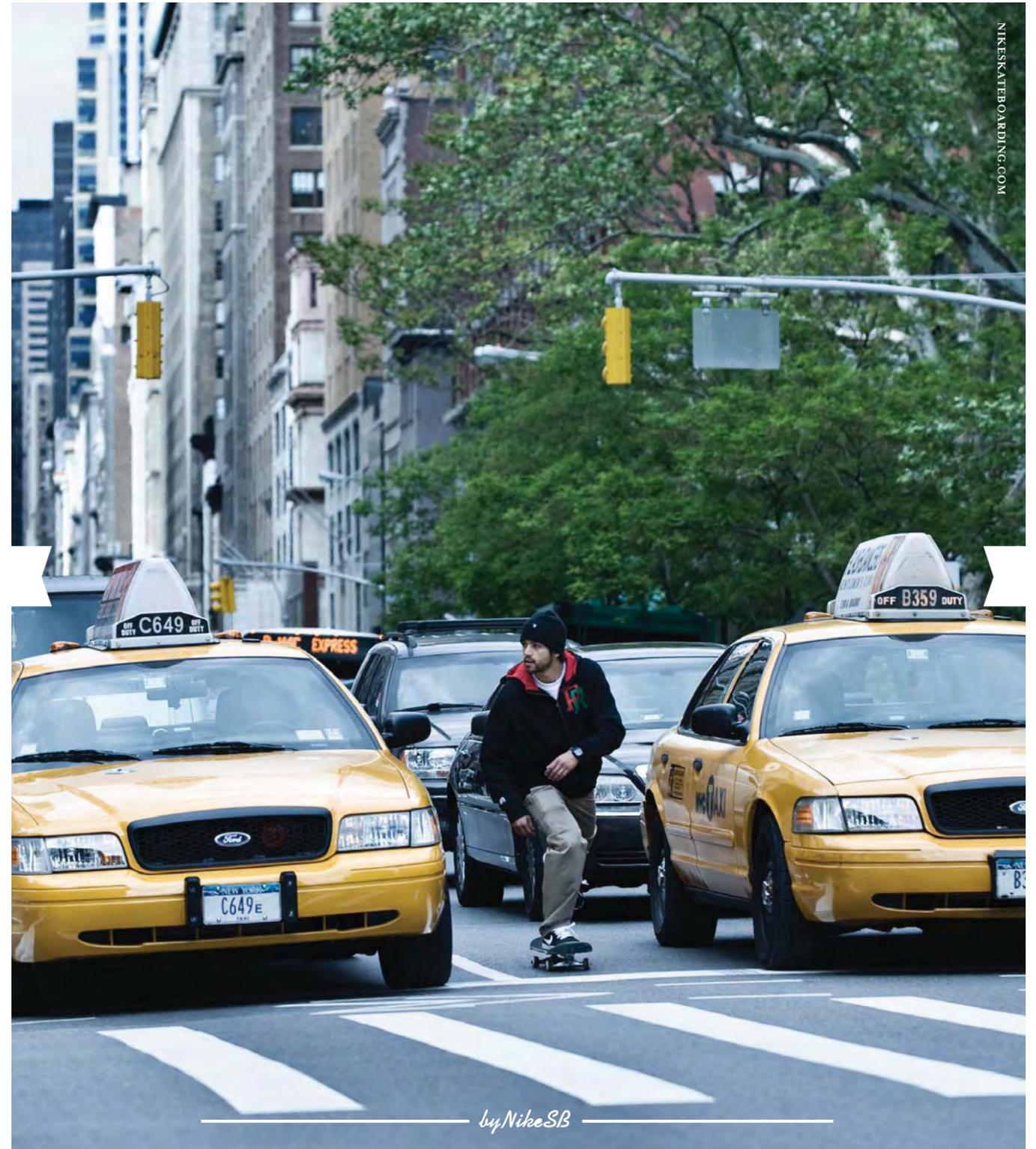
Immanuel Kant's stance on music may seem rather elusive at first, but on further review we find in his *Critique of Judgment* that he thought much the same as Plato with the respect to music's place in the hierarchy of art. In fact, there is scant mention of music at all in his *Critique*, though when present music is usually discussed in a comparison between the fine arts and the “arts” of entertaining—likening music to telling jokes or knowing how to decorate a table. His biographers have noted his significant bias against music, one writing that Kant considered it to be “incapable of expressing any idea, only sentiments”—the death knell for any attempt at producing a work of art. For his part, Hegel wrote much more on the subject than did Kant, and far more favorably so. He did, however, take into account the detachment prevalent in music whereby inward feeling and subjectivity may be usurped by formal development. In this sense, music moves further away from art into mere artistry. Here, music loses its soul and

becomes little more than “skill and virtuosity in compilation.” At this point, music ceases to engage us in any meaningful fashion, though it may still trick the mind into following it through abstract understanding alone.

Surprisingly, one of the most fervent haters of music was Sigmund Freud, though he lived in Vienna during a time of great musical creativity (and was a peer of Gustav Mahler, no less). Interestingly, Freud suffered from terrible migraines, having at least six separate attacks—three of which occurred in Vienna's Park Hotel, where there was almost certainly live music present. More than one scholar has suggested the possibility that Freud suffered as well from musicogenic epilepsy—seizures caused by specific musical pieces or instruments. At the minimum, this resulted in a profound dislike of music for much of his life, as his official biographer, Ernest Jones, recalled: “Freud's aversion to music was one of his well-known characteristics. One well remembers the pained expression on his face on entering a restaurant or beer garden where there was a band and how quickly his hands would go over his ears to drown the sound.”

While Michel Foucault never railed against music in quite the same fashion as Plato, he did concern himself with the multiplicity of links between contemporary music and culture and addressed this with a good friend, the composer Pierre Boulez. Boulez offers a fascinating response to Foucault on the topic of the plurality of musical forms that we see today: “Will talking about music in the plural... solve the problem? It seems, on the contrary, that this will merely conjure it away—as do certain devotees of an advanced liberal society. All those musics are good, all those musics are nice [*sic*]. Ah! Pluralism! There's nothing like it for curing incomprehension. Love, each one of you in your corner, and each will love the others. Be liberal, be generous towards the taste of others, and they will be generous to yours. Everything is good, nothing is bad, there aren't any values, but everyone is happy. This discourse, as liberating as it may wish to be, reinforces, on the contrary, the ghettos, comforts one's clear conscience for being in a ghetto, especially if from time to time one tours the ghettos of others.” Certainly in the early stages of the 21st century, this “touring of ghettos” is occurring in a far more accelerated fashion than at any other time in the history of music—hence a new mashing together of musical forms and genres seemingly every week. Music in this sense becomes a capturing mechanism with a twofold function, one that more often than not stifles the individual both in his relation to it and in his relation to the producers and critics of culture as a whole—passing off an impoverished music to an all-too-willing impoverished public.

I am reminded here of an aphorism in Kierkegaard's *Diapsalmata*. “A fire broke out backstage in a theater. The clown came out to warn the public; they thought it was a joke and applauded. He repeated it; the acclaim was even greater. I think that's just how the world will come to an end: to general applause from wits who believe it's a joke.” ■



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