

**9 ORIGINAL STORIES**

**ALL ORIGINAL AUTHORS**

**LOW HUG**  
presents

**AS SEEN IN BITCH!!**

# **ZINE MACHINE**



**Religion and Football  
Is Rock Dead?**

**"Very Special" Episodes  
Laughing at Lovedolls**

**CD Bonus Tracks - Worth It?**



**Love Letters to C-SPAN**

**Live Music Experiences**

**Running Out of Oxygen (Network)**

**The Pleasures of Lo-Fi**



**A SMATTERING OF TASTY ARTICLES FROM  
LOW HUG ISSUES #1 TO #4**



# ZINE MACHINE

## A LOW HUG SAMPLER

**"As seen in *Bitch*, *Bust*, *Alternative Press Review*,  
*Throwrug*, and many other fine publications!"**

Hello and a great big thank you for picking up ZINE MACHINE – A sampler featuring the best of the first four issues of LOW HUG fanzine!

LOW HUG hit the scene in August 1998, after eight years of procrastination on the part of yours truly, the editrix. It is currently published twice a year. LOW HUG strives to be a delightful melange of cultural criticism, media analysis, sometimes cranky rants, and thought-provoking essays on a wide range of topics. In the past four issues, we've covered everything from vintage stereo equipment to tribute bands, love dolls, Woodstock 99, Liz Phair, thighs, C-SPAN, jazz, "Law & Order," the laughable "Felicity," and the current state of rock and roll music.

Presented here for your reading pleasure is a smattering of articles from the first four issues of LOW HUG. Here's a little bit of info on each selection...

Starting things off is Tim Woessner's "Drop Kick Me Jesus, Through the Goal Posts of Life," from Issue #3. This was one of LOW HUG's most well received articles, garnering critical raves from both readers and reviewers.

Also from Issue #3, is the roundtable discussion "Is Rock Dead?" where S.C. Bailey, Steve Bojanowski, Jack Persico, Dan Taylor, and myself argue about the current state of the rock genre. There are some thought provoking ideas tossed about here.

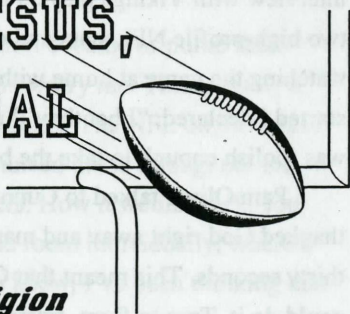
Next up is a "Very Special Article" by Darren Gilmore, exploring the genesis of that staple of all television "sweeps" periods, the Very Special Sitcom Episode. These are the sitcom episodes that cover "serious" topics" such as birth control, drugs, divorce, alcoholism, teen violence, or whatever social ill is currently plaguing the Kids in America today. This was from Issue #2, and generated a lot of mail where people fessed up to their favorite "very special episodes."

We got a little "blue" in Issue #2 as well, with "Snug, Gripping Anus!" marveling at advertising for "love dolls" that claim to be as real as any woman.

*Continued on inside back cover!*

# DROP KICK ME JESUS, THROUGH THE GOAL POSTS OF LIFE

***or, "Take it outside, Godboy!":  
Professional Football finds Religion***



*By Tim Woessner*

The weather is warm, the sun is shining brightly, and songbirds perch in the young maple tree in my front yard. Once again, summer is here, and with it NFL training camp. I'm a football fan (and a Green Bay Packer fan in particular), and to me summer means just a few more months until the season starts. Lately, though, I'm troubled by a trend I've noticed in my beloved sport. I can handle many of the recent changes in football—the outrageous salaries that may one day bankrupt the entire league, the utter lack of loyalty to team or community among players and coaches, drug use, poor sportsmanship, greedy fatcat owners who move their teams from city to city in search of ever richer stadium deals, players who throw their girlfriends down flights of stairs. What I can't handle is all this Jesus-talk. It's startling how often Christ comes up when players talk to the media. In the past, it wasn't unheard of for players to mention God ("Well, you know, Brent, I wanna thank the Man Upstairs for giving me this opportunity"), but lately these occurrences have become far more frequent and specifically religious ("Well, Jim, I'd just like to give all praise to the Lord Jesus Christ Almighty. After my knee injury, I prayed, 'Father God, I give my life to you and I pray to be reborn in you.' And God brought me here to Tampa Bay."). I have nothing against God or Jesus or Christians. I'm sure Christ was a lovely man. However, if, in fact, Christ was the son of God, was crucified and buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, I suspect he's only a casual football fan. Yet many pro players are convinced that The Lord is helping them win games.

A recent example: after a Minnesota Vikings playoff victory over the Arizona Cardinals this past January, Fox TV's Pam Oliver conducted a post-game



interview with Vikings players Randall Cunningham and Cris Carter. These are two high-profile NFL stars and even higher-profile born-again Christians. I was watching the game at home with some friends, and just before the interview started I declared, "I bet they'll mention The Lord at least five times." Nobody was foolish enough to take the bet.

Pam Oliver talked to Cunningham first and he didn't disappoint: he thanked God right away and managed two mentions of His Name in less than thirty seconds. This meant that Carter needed three mentions, but I was sure he could do it. True to form, Carter immediately thanked God for the Vikings victory. But then things took an unexpected turn. Oliver wasn't feeding Carter any good God-talkin' questions like, "What does this victory mean to you?" or "What was going through your mind as you scored that touchdown?" Instead, she was asking specific questions about the game: "In the second half, you guys didn't throw as many long passes and you stuck to the short stuff; why the change?" I was getting nervous, and I think Carter was too; I could see it in his eyes. I could almost read his mind, "Damn, how am I supposed to talk about Jesus with questions like these?" It was looking bleak for me and my bet, and for the Lord too. But then, just at the end of the interview segment, before Pam sent it "back up to Pat and John," Carter blurted out, "Glory be to God!" I think that should count for two. I think anybody would back me up there.

We don't hear much of this talk in other areas of public discourse. When the CFO of MCI Telecom discusses the Dow with Lou Dobbs on *Moneyline*, he doesn't say, "Well, you know, Lou, I'd just really like to give all praise to my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He's kept earnings high and inflation low for several years, and because of that, our projections for the fourth quarter look strong. Praise Jesus!" When movie stars appear on the *Tonight Show* to promote their films, they don't say "You know, Jay, working on this movie was really fun. But I'll tell ya, what's really fun is my relationship with the Lord Jesus."

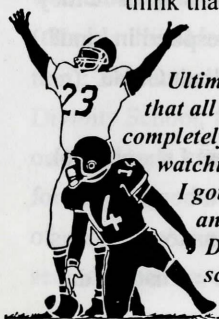
It used to be that there were one or two Jesus-talkers in pro football. Fans have always known that former Green Bay Packer Reggie White, for example, was at any moment likely to launch into a sermon. But now it's become fashionable. Deion Sanders is now a born-again Christian. DEION SANDERS, for Chrissakes! What clearer evidence could there be to illustrate just how hollow and insincere this trend is? He used to hang with M.C. "We've got to pray just



to make it today” Hammer!

Like most fans, I don’t mind players who snort cocaine or pump themselves full of steroids; it’s these Jesus-addicts who worry me. This is really a much greater problem for the league than illegal drugs. The NFL ought to test for it. During training camp and at a few unannounced times throughout the season, NFL officials should randomly test players. How it would work, you see, is that the players would be called into a little room individually, where a physician from the NFL would say to them “You know, I’ve been thinking that I should develop a personal relationship with God.” The Jesus-talkers won’t be able to resist starting a long, tiresome monologue about their “walk with the Lord.” Other players might even inform on the Jesus-talkers: “Oh yeah? You should talk to Reggie.” A first offense would result in a one-post-game-interview suspension and mandatory counseling. After second offense players would be forbidden from talking to mainstream media for an entire season (though they’d be free to make guest appearances on *Touched By An Angel*).

This sort of talk should be discouraged because it’s selfish, self-righteous, and self-centered. The point of any religion is that it’s deity-centered; religious activity should point to the deity. What I see is players pointing to themselves. It’s every bit as self-serving as when pompous Hollywood gasbags use the Oscars to trumpet their hip political views. This also threatens one of the real values of sport: perhaps more than any other area of American life, sport (and team sports in particular) has been a trailblazer in the area of equality and fairness. What makes sport so appealing and dramatic is that people from wildly divergent backgrounds put all their personal differences and beliefs aside and they work together toward a common goal. It doesn’t matter what racial or socioeconomic group you belong to (okay, it does matter some, but just stay with me here), what counts is your talent and your dedication. That’s corny, but I think that’s the appeal of sports for a lot of people. This God-talk only



*Ultimately, what disturbs me most is that all this Jesus-talking is just completely inappropriate. I mean, I'm watching a football game, man! I got cheese curds and corn chips and beer here, for Chrissakes. Do I have to listen to religious screeds from former Phy. Ed. majors?*

points out differences and creates division. How offensive, for example, for a non-religious player to hear his teammate credit God for a victory. These obnoxiously religious players co-opt

***So here's what we do: realign the NFL along religious lines. I propose four conferences: The Islamic League, The Christian Coalition, The Agnostic Association, and the Jewish/Miscellaneous Conference.***

their teammates' hard work and offer it as a self-serving sacrifice to God. And how offensive for religious people with real problems, who pray for guidance or help; how must they feel when they hear millionaires thank God for a playoff berth?

Ultimately, what disturbs me most is that all this Jesus-talking is just completely inappropriate. I mean, I'm watching a football game, man! I got cheese curds and corn chips and beer here, for Chrissakes. Do I have to listen to religious screeds from former Phy. Ed. majors? If I wanted to hear a lot of God-talk I would have gone to church on Sunday morning instead of watching pre-game coverage on TV.

My first reaction to all this religious blather was mere annoyance ("For cryin' out loud, can't these guys stop talking about Jesus for five minutes!"), followed by deep revulsion. But lately, I've come to enjoy it. For one thing it makes TV sports people very, very uncomfortable, and that's just fine with me—watching blow-dried TV boneheads squirm is one of the few joys left for us non-televised Americans. I suppose I should feel some sympathy for the sportscasters, particularly those who do live post-game interviews—people like Jim Gray or Pam Oliver—and stand there awkwardly with pained expressions on their faces while some player thanks The Lord Jesus Christ for his two interceptions. The job of the on-the-field sports correspondent is thankless enough, and most of the people who do this work are paying their dues, hoping one day to make it to the broadcast booth where they can sit in comfort, play with the TeleStrator, and avoid tedious, humiliating tasks like interviewing players' grandparents in the stands. How is one of these reporters supposed to respond when a player starts talking about his Personal Lord and Savior? What're they supposed to say? Do these players really want TV people to respond in kind? "You said it, Reggie, God truly does live within each of us. Great Game, Reggie, and praise His Name! Pat and John, back up to you."

Since this phenomenon looks like it's here to stay, I guess I should look for a silver lining—and I think I've found one. This could be a boost to the NFL, which has been slipping in the TV ratings and losing fans to ridiculous sports like snowboarding, in-line skating, and soccer. So here's what we do:



realign the NFL along religious lines. I propose four conferences: The Islamic League, The Christian Coalition, The Agnostic Association, and the Jewish/Miscellaneous Conference. Each conference would be made up of teams representing different denominations or religious factions. Thus, the Boston Catholics, the Miami Jews (Reform), the Atlanta Baptists, and the St. Louis Methodists. Large cities like New York and Los Angeles could support more than one team: the New York Jews (Orthodox), the New York Episcopalians; the LA Muslims, the LA Baptists. And of course, the Madison Wisconsin Atheists, and the Berkeley New Agers.


What are the benefits of organizing the league this way? Well, as any true sports fan knows, bitter rivalry is often the basis for some really fine play. The oldest rivalry (and one of the most bitter) in professional football is the one between the Chicago Bears and the Green Bay Packers; they've played 159 times since 1921, and games between the two teams have included fantastic individual performances, tons of sports drama, and lots of late hitting. But this rivalry is peanuts compared to a game between, say, the Cleveland Shi'ites and the New York Jews (Orthodox). This league has hatred built in!




A league divided along religious lines presents ample opportunities for excitement, whether it's watching a close game or participating a bloody religious riot in the stands. For the fanatic—and that word takes on a whole new meaning in this league—the new NFL (can we call it the “Born Again” NFL?) offers limitless possibilities for sports drama. Now it's not just civic pride and merchandising profits on the line, but an entire worldview. How can we know which of the world religions is really the “right” one? We'll find out in the Superbowl.

Of course, this new arrangement would present some problems, but a few changes in the rules would smooth them over. The NFL's current officials would be replaced by Ph.D. candidates in Comparative Religions programs (this has the added benefit of employing an otherwise idle sector of the population); TV football analysts would be replaced by theologians from the Harvard Divinity School; to accommodate Jewish players, no more late-season games on Saturdays; games involving Islamic teams would be interrupted periodically for prayer (great time for TV time-outs!). On the other hand, maybe this kind of league isn't feasible. Jews and Muslims are, to say the least, underrepresented in pro football. I guess I'll just have to live with the league we've got.

# Is Rock Dead?

## A Call and Response

With contributions by: S. C. Bailey  Steve Bojanowski

 A. j. Michel  Jack Persico  Dan Taylor

*The impetus for this collaborative article was a heated e-mail discussion between several of the contributors about the topic at hand. At that time, rap albums were outselling rock albums, the music charts were dominated by teeny-pop and no-talent boy bands. Rock, as a genre, seemed to be ailing. In order to present a coherent roundtable about this topic, each of the writers was given the chance to respond to the question: Is Rock Dead? What follows are five very different answers, each approaching the question from a unique angle. Enjoy.*



### Rock is Dead, Part IV By S.C. Bailey

Rock is dead! Where have I heard that before? It seems that rock musicians, rock fans, and rock critics must suffer through a new “rock is dead” panic every decade or so. Thus, rather than answering the question “is rock dead,” I’d rather point to three previous “deaths” and try to explain why the revival of this silly myth seems to be a generational ritual. Then again, I like debating the question as much as anyone, so I’m not excluding myself from blame for this compulsive repetition.

*Panic #1*—Late 50’s/Early 60s. Elvis is drafted, Chuck Berry goes to jail, and “American Pie” is baked (you know, the plane crash). But is rock (literally) dead? Well, only if Gary U.S. Bonds, Girl Groups, Ben E. King, late doo-wop, early Motown, Dion, and surf music don’t count.

*Panic #2*—Mid-Late 70s, pre-Punk. Emerson, Lake, and Palmer, Yes, and other dinosaurs rule rock and compete with bad “soft rock” for dominance. But what about Mott the Hoople, Neil Young’s greatest (and weirdest) albums, Springsteen, and most of all Parliament/Funkadelic, who produced some of the greatest rock moments of the era—check out “Who Says a Funk Band Can’t Play Rock,” “Get Off Your Ass and Jam,” and “Cosmic Slop (Live),” all from 75-78.

*Panic #3*—Early 80s. Punk starts to wither, synth dance-pop rules, and “classic rock” drones on (e.g., Journey). Limeys with big hair and top buttons buttoned make wimpy music and aging hippies make boring music. But what about L.A. hardcore, early Minneapolis mania (both Husker/Replacements and Prince/Time), and most of



all, the "Kings of Rock," Run-DMC, who produce the best hard rock singles of the era—"Rock Box," "Can You Rock it Like This," and of course "King of Rock."

Notice anything here? It seems that the old "death of rock" argument makes a lot more sense if one overlooks the r&b-soul-funk-rap musical continuum, which is certainly as "rock" as any thread within the American musical tapestry. If Prince and Funkadelic and Run-DMC and the Shirelles aren't "rock and roll," then we'd probably be better off if rock was dead. I think a lot of today's rock panic is better described as hip-hop-hysteria. If rap is touching a chord with rebellious dissatisfied youth and a bunch of old fart rockers say "that's not music," they are just replaying the Perry Como fans in the 50s shaking their heads at those JDs listening to Frankie Lymon—who was probably tougher than any Gangsta rapper, anyway. And hey, even if rock—in the narrowest sense—ends up a connoisseur musical genre (like jazz today), so what? I like jazz but I don't worry about why it's not on MTV. If rap becomes "rock" and "rock" becomes "jazz," that's just cultural evolution. So I guess we should head the words of Pete Townshend: "look again (and again and again and again) rock is dead. . . Long Live Rock!"



## **What's left . . . ?** By Steve Bojanowski

To paraphrase the Late Great Frank Zappa: rock isn't dead, it just smells bad.

I don't really believe rock will ever really die. But I do believe its days as "king of the hill" are numbered. I doubt rock will be the pre-eminent popular music much past 2000. Could Woodstock '99 have been rock's "blaze of glory" (pardon the pun)?

I believe this mostly because I doubt the kids growing up now will give a shit about it. They have no allegiance to the past. We listened to the Stones and Zeppelin because we wanted to be cool like our older brothers and sisters. This isn't so for the current generation. They may dig some of the fashions of the '70s, but how many of them actually appreciate the music of that era? Today's teenagers have as much (if not more) loyalty to hip-hop and pop music. Teens aren't gonna air guitar in their bedrooms if they're not listening to music that has a guitar in it.

Match this attitude with the technology available today. If kids want to make music, they can buy a guitar and an amp and spend the time and effort learning how to play. Or for about the same money they can get a drum machine and a sampler and be tuning out grooves as soon as they get home. Instead of saving up for that Les Paul, their eyes may be on a set of turntables and a P.A. As more people who press buttons rather than play instruments make music, who will be forming garage bands?

In recent years rock's greatest strength has been its flexibility. Today's brightest artists are those that inject hip-hop's influence. By mixing with other genres of music, rock has stayed fresh. But there are few forms of music left to exploit. As Ozzy has said, "There are only so many chords and it's all been done before."

But the core problem is this: rock is supposed to be the music of rebellion. What's left to rebel against?

Even into this decade, death metal and hardcore could still make an elder wince. But where can it go from there? How atonal can rock get before it ceases to be music? This isn't like the 1950's. Today's parents grew up with hard rock. They may have even been the first generation of punkers. They may not like a band like Korn, but they can understand the appeal. So where is a nihilistic teenager gonna turn to really piss off his folks?

I'm not saying that all is lost, though. Like jazz, rock will be the choice of elitists: those who demand their 4/4 beats be played by a real drummer. Maybe rock is going through a mid-life crisis. It is pushing fifty, after all. It just can't exert itself like it used to. There are newer and younger players on the field. It should probably get out of the way before it gets hurt.

*Steve looks forward to being an old, eccentric rock aficionado that the young people look at with a slight air of confusion.*



## Exploratory Surgery By A.j. Michel

Rock isn't dead. It's just on life support. Oh, rock should recover – it always has – but this time it might take a while. Maybe a few more years until the 60 million teenyboppers grow up and out of their sugary pop music phase. One of the Backstreet Boys is sure to be caught with a hooker or overdose on drugs or announce that they're bigger than Jesus, and that will be the beginning of the end for the current sorry state of popular music. During this long recovery period, serious music fans' time might be spent more productively exploring other genres of music rather than sitting at rock's bedside, reminiscing about the good old days.

What to do during this incredibly extended fallow period for rock and roll music? Here's a suggested four step plan.

Step 1: Turn off the MTV and VH1. None of the music networks every show anything particularly "new." MTV is cluttered with T&A fests like "Beach MTV," and "Real World" and "Road Rules" marathons. When they do show a video, it's from a tightly controlled roster that changes very slowly. VH1 is really scraping the bottom of the barrel for their "Behind the Music" series – Quiet Riot? Weird Al? You're not going to find anything new, or be educated about anything old by mindlessly watching



these networks.

Step 2: Try to find something interesting on your local radio dial. The object is to find a station where you don't recognize any of the songs for an hour straight. This is not be as easy as it sounds, since 99.9% of radio is corporate controlled crap. If your spin around the dial fails, head to the Internet, get yourself RealAudio, and sample other radio stations from around the globe. Play with Mp3 and other on-line formats.

Step 3: Go to your local library and pick up a general introductory guide to a genre of music you know nothing about. Some suggestions: *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, *The Penguin Guide to Jazz on Compact Disc*, *The Virgin Encyclopedia of R&B and Soul*, *The NPR Classical Music Companion*, *Stairway to Hell: The 500 Best Heavy Metal Albums in the Universe*, and *Modern Twang*.

Step 4: Read these books, borrow a few CDs from the library, or pick up a few well chosen collections, and educate yourself about music you've never listened to before. Bluegrass, opera, classical, Sousa marches, Zydeco, death metal, folk music from Sweden, free jazz, honky-tonk, gospel, reggae, chamber music, scores from porn films ... the possibilities are endless. I would have never discovered 60s Stax/Volt soul, old time country, and twangy/insurgent/alt.country if I hadn't become disgusted with the state of rock music about five years ago. I've bought only a handful of new "rock" albums since '94 — otherwise it's all been reissues and stuff from other genres.

Sure, every once in a while, rock will cough up something absolutely wonderful (Hole's *Celebrity Skin*, for example), but there's still a long recovery ahead, if at all. Instead of declaring rock a lost cause, discover something new (or old) you might just enjoy. It's far more interesting and productive to learn something new than to pointlessly bitch and moan about the current state of rock music.



## **Down, But Not Out** By Jack Persico

Hello, my fair-weather friends! Yes, it is I... Rock and Roll. Rumors of my death have been greatly exaggerated. I may be pushing 50, but I'm alive and well.

OK, maybe I've been caught sleeping on the job lately. For instance, I somehow let Sammy Hagar release another album. My apologies. And I really can't justify irritatingly bland stuff like Third Eye Blind, except to say it'll make whatever comes next such a welcome relief. Remember when I did this in the 1980s? Tortured you with all those hair-metal bands, then wiped the slate clean and gave you Nirvana? It'll happen again soon. To everything there is a season, as I once said.

My critics tell me that country music outsells me and hip-hop is gaining fast. I'm no longer relevant, they say. True, country is winning converts from the Baby Boom-

ers who used to be my loyal disciples (those cowards), and rap appeals to both whites and blacks these days. But I'm still the Great American Dream to millions of kids who play air guitar in front of their bedroom mirrors, so I've got plenty of torch bearers that will keep my name alive well into the 21st century. I'm too ingrained in American culture to be pushed aside by rap. No high school class is gonna pick a Wu Tang song as its prom theme. And country music, as its name suggests, is a regional product that has little appeal east of the Mississippi or north of the Mason-Dixon line.

Today's hard rock bands like Limp Bizkit may have been influenced by hip-hop, but I'm sure they've also got a copy of *Led Zeppelin IV* on the tour bus. Bands like this are a testament to my durability: Every few years, I reappoint myself in the trappings of the latest music trend. In the past 20 years, I've been reinvigorated by everything from hip-hop to ska to techno to world music to big band swing. Can any of my musical siblings boast such an eclectic resume?

Besides, few rap groups have the staying power of rock bands. Why, 30 years after the death of Jimi Hendrix, he's still getting airplay alongside today's newest bands, while rap groups from just a few years ago are ancient history. Has anyone heard from the aptly-named Arrested Development lately? Nope. But even some of my less inspired creations, like Journey, still have careers 20 years after their debut.

Detractors also point to the glut of juvenile pop on today's Billboard charts (Backstreet Boys, Britney Spears) as evidence of my ill health. But that's not my handiwork. Pop is my wicked step-sister. A complete airhead... always was, always will be. Remember the 1970s, when she made stars out of Leif Garrett and the Starland Vocal Band? But I was busy churning out punk, heavy metal, Bruce Springsteen, David Bowie... tons of groundbreaking stuff that will still have an audience long after today's pop sensations fade from memory.

Just because I'm going through a mid-life crisis right now is no reason for you to pick on the guy who put an end to the era of Pat Boone and Doris Day and gave this century one of its most enduring and popular art forms.

Now I want you to apologize or else I'll get started on that Bon Jovi comeback right away.



## Is Rock Dead? Rock is Dead? Dead, is Rock? By Dan Taylor

Debating whether or not rock is dead is sorta like sitting around arguing that the end is near, that the *Flinstones* were simply an animated *Honeymooners*, or that Bailey Quarters was far hotter than Jennifer Marlowe. Strong, academic points can be made for both sides. Unfortunately, every time I turn my head, flip on the radio, drop by a



newsstand or tune in the idiot box, the signs that rock is dead are — like love — all around.

These days, TV shouts the death of rock from the rooftops like the idea is going out of style. It all starts — no surprise here — on cable. Once heralded as the salvation of music, for those of us who can remember when non-video programming on MTV was unique, cable delivers nightly doses of the once proud and mighty turned sad and pathetic. Tune in USA's deplorable *Happy Hour* and you'll see the sons of rock's greatest innovator and genius, Frank Zappa, scream, shout and play karaoke with "celebrity" guests like they're trained monkeys. Sure, it was great to find out that the little girl from *The Wonder Years* is still a piece of ass, but Dweezil's guitar hysterics and Ahmet's unchecked buffoonery leave me longing for the sedate thespian stylings of sister Moon Unit.

But wait, whose grave is rumbling even louder than FZ's? Why, it's none other than post-punk king Kurt Cobain. Hell, if the far-fetched rumors are true and Courtney did have Kurt smoked — or, in better film noir fashion did the deed herself — she did the guy a service! Who didn't think about gnawing on the business end of a shotgun after seeing the former Mrs. Cobain spill out of her dress and come this close to raping poor James Van der Beek on the stage during the recent MTV Movie Awards? That poor guy looked like he'd be far more comfortable in, say, a space suit or plastic bubble.

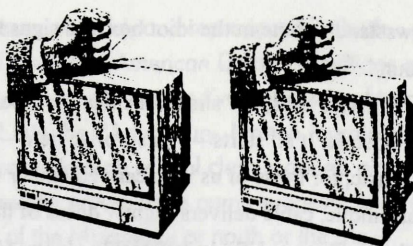
And I haven't even mentioned the commercial for the ubiquitous SUV that bops along to the tune of Pete Shelley and the Buzzcocks whining "What Do I Get?" What's next, Black Flag promoting automated tellers with "Slip It In"?

Stop at any newsstand and you'll be shocked what passes for a rock magazine. Quick — name the last "rock artist" that graced the cover of the long-in-the-tooth *Rolling Stone*. Nicole Kidman? Mike Meyers? Britney Spears? Jennifer Love Hewitt? (Well, she does sell a lot of CDs in Canada...) Jennifer Aniston? Though I think they're deplorable and unlistenable, I'd kill to see Limp Bizkit or (ugh) Kid Rock staring out at me while I'm buying my sea scallops. At least there'd be a hint of rebellion... *Entertainment Weekly* courts more danger!

The clock's telling me that I'm running out of time to offer more arguments. That said, I'll pull out my big gun — it's probably been about a year since I set foot in a club to see a band. This September, I'm spending \$75 to see the reunion of Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band. If that doesn't tell you how bad things are, nothing will.

*Dan Taylor is head honcho at Last Call Productions, publishers of Exploitation Retrospect, The Hungover Gourmet and Cut and Paste, as well as a contributing editor for Carbon 14. He honestly declares that the best concerts he's ever seen include The Dead Kennedys, Bruce Springsteen, Hüsker Dü and Barry Mannilow.*

# A Very SPECIAL



Article . . . . . about the beginnings of that television  
sweeps staple, the Very Special Episode!

By Darren J. Gilmore

Television shows live or die by ratings. Advertisers live or die by sales. Television production companies live or die by advertising dollars on successful shows. It's simple math...higher ratings, higher dollars. So, to get those higher ratings for their show/s, production companies resort to gimmicks which not coincidentally occur during the Sweeps, when advertising rates are set.

There are the Crossover Episodes: *Fonzie* (Henry Winkler) shows up on *Laverne and Shirley* and they in turn see *Happy Days*; Cliff Huxtable (Bill Cosby) visits Denise (Lisa Bonet) on *A Different World*; and even Steve Urkel (Jaleel White) leaves *Family Matters* to visit DJ Tanner (Candace Cameron) on *Full House*. Previously, all have been within the same production company on the same network and usually on the same night following one another. Breaking new ground, however, David E. Kelley (*L.A. Law*, *Picket Fences*) recently one-upped them by crossing his productions between networks—Fox's *Ally McBeal* and ABC's *The Practice*.

There is also the Common Thread, where one event affects several shows. An NBC hurricane hits Florida and producer Susan Harris's (*Soap*) *Golden Girls*, *Empty Nest*, and *Nurses* on a Saturday night. ABC sent some of its crew to visit Las Vegas—*Drew Carey, et. al.* And in a New York 22-minute sitcom, a blackout strikes the Big Apple's *Mad About You* and *Seinfeld*.

The unsung gem of the gimmicks, though, is the Very Special Episode (hereafter referred to as the VSE)—the one where preview commercials tell viewers to "Watch a *Very Special Episode* of \_\_\_\_\_ with your whole



family...Don't miss it." Generally speaking, the VSE is dramatic in tone because it deals with serious subject matter, typically drugs/alcohol, death or potential death, or sex. Television dramas, by their obvious dramatic nature, handle these topics and more on a weekly basis, thereby voiding the "specialness" of the VSE. Sitcoms, on the other hand, seldom trade their canned laugh track for the dramatic, relying on Jack Tripper's pratfall, Sgt. Schultz's know-nothingness, or Balki's ridiculousness for their obvious comedic nature (SITuation COMedy). When the sitcom does do the VSE, it's *extra-special* because it's special for the characters, special to break sitcom conventions, and special for television to address those topics.

Not all sitcoms have the proverbial VSE arrow in their quiver to hit the ratings mark, however. Television uses the VSE to teach its lesson by making the viewer more aware and wiser as the character/s become more aware and wiser. Therefore, the VSE is limited to those shows where both can occur. *The Munsters*, *Married...with Children*, *Barney Miller*, *Soap* (among others) could have VSEs, but the characters never learn. And, although *The Simpsons* is arguably the smartest comedy on TV, few acknowledge it as a sitcom (witness its continued Emmy nominations for "Best Animated Series" and not "Best Comedy") let alone Homer learning to be sensitive about "Homer-sexuals." *F-Troop* isn't eligible for VSEs because it fits neither category; both viewers and characters never learn. Besides, it's excessive "cheeze" factor is well beyond the scope of this article.

Not surprisingly, family-based shows are prime candidates for the VSE. Those darn TV kids have so much to learn about life and growing up! It's a darn good thing they have understanding parents and authority figures to teach them...even though every now and again the kids teach the parents.

Why is it, though, that Blossom (*Blossom*) has something to learn about sex in a VSE and JJ (*Good Times*) doesn't? Or the Taylor boys (*Home Improvement*) have to learn about drugs and drug abuse in a VSE, but the Douglas boys (*My Three Sons*) don't? Timing, as they say, is everything. It is not coincidental that the VSE hit its stride in the 1980s. The television stage was set for it.

Network television became consistent in 1948 with a (mostly) full schedule, seven days a week, on four networks—ABC, NBC, CBS and Dumont. With a brand new visual medium at their feet, networks (which had been based in radio) filled the airwaves with proven formats, proven material, and proven stars—*radio* formats, material, and stars. There were variety shows, westerns, serials, news, and game shows, but mostly variety shows. The top 5 rated shows in 1950 were variety shows, including Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows* and topped by Uncle Miltie and *Texaco Star Theater*. Those shows were the easiest to convert to television. Even *I Love Lucy*, which was in the top five from 1951 to 1957, began as a radio show and was initially rejected as a television show. Sitcoms were few and far between with competition from varieties and westerns and the VSE wasn't even a thought, let alone a consideration.

By the 1960s, television had worked through it's initial growing pains. Variety shows had faded from the glory days followed by the majority of westerns while sitcoms finally gained prominence with *The Lucy Show*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, et. al. The television sitcom conventions and clichés of the late 1990s were neither conventional nor cliché in the 1960s. *Bewitched* was original. *Gilligan's Island* was original. Granted they may have been based on other works (i.e., *Robinson Crusoe*), but they were cutting edge television, even though television lags behind reality. The 60s sitcoms reflected an idealized version of the 1950s where controversy was showing a husband and wife sleeping in a bedroom each in a twin bed. Sitcoms were getting closer to the VSE.

With the tremendous social and political and cultural changes of the late 60s (the Civil Rights Movement and Dr. MLK, Vietnam, etc.) television dabbled a bit in the change with *That Girl* and *Julia*, but caught up completely with Socially Conscious sitcoms in the 1970s. Sitcoms were well established by now and creators could experiment with the sitcom formula. By the end of the 1970s, the VSE was very close indeed.

Norman Lear turned the television world upside-down by pushing the racial envelope with *All in the Family*. Archie Bunker and his blatant bigotry appealed across demographics—to those who understood the scathing criticism



of bigotry behind Archie and to those who just believed it outright. It was number one in the ratings for its first full season and for four seasons afterward. Its success gave Norman Lear carte blanche and he spun off other hits *The Jeffersons*, *Maude*, and *Good Times*, all of which furthered racial consciousness.

Larry Gelbart was a staff writer with Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows*. More notable to most, however, is that he took a reasonably successful movie and turned it into an even more successful TV sitcom—*M\*A\*S\*H*. While not a ratings smash in its premiere season (1972-73), it became a top twenty show for the next 10 seasons (dropping out of the top 10 just once) and its finale is still the most watched episode in TV history. It was a social commentary on the ravages of war, specifically Vietnam, veiled in the guise of the Korean War. Nevertheless, in the early seasons, the show was slapstick. Inevitably on a long-running show, however, cast members leave and the show reinvents itself, *M\*A\*S\*H* was no different (Henry gets killed, enter Col. Potter; Trapper goes home, enter BJ; Frank goes loony, enter Charles) except that with its powerhouse ratings, *M\*A\*S\*H* pushed television sitcoms into unexplored territory in the latter half of its run. In one episode, each character falls asleep and has a disturbing dream—Charles is a magician, but tricks don't work in the operating room; Margaret is in a bloodied wedding dress while soldiers march by and take her newlywed husband; Potter plays polo with a hand grenade; and Hawkeye has his arms removed. Not to mention the hour-long interview episode filmed in black and white, or the episode where Charles starts taking amphetamines.

Typical sitcom? Hardly.

In 1970, Mary Tyler Moore stepped out of her Capri pants and into the Minneapolis singles life on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. It, and its spinoffs *Rhoda* and *Phyllis*, were produced by MTM



(meow!) Productions, spearheaded by Mary herself and husband Grant Tinker (soon to be head of NBC Entertainment). Mary Richards didn't need to rely on a husband. She was the idealized single career woman and MTM productions made it acceptable. Go ask *Alice* and take it *One Day at a Time* (developed by Norman Lear, incidentally).

The top-rated sitcoms at the beginning of the 1980s had been on the air for a long time—*M\*A\*S\*H*, *The Jeffersons*, *Alice*, *One Day at a Time*, *Laverne and Shirley*, *Happy Days*, *All in the Family*/*Archie Bunker's Place*—and there are only so many cast changes to be made before a series mercifully ends (personally, *Happy Days* ended when Chuck left... \*sigh\*). And, as is the cyclical nature of television, sitcoms began to fade and dramas took hold. By the 1983-84 season, only three sitcoms were in the top 20—*Kate and Allie*, *AfterMASH*, and *The Jeffersons*. It was the Death of the Sitcom.

Television had been around for over thirty years and the second generation of creators had arrived. Steven Bochco was raised on television and with his success of *Hill St. Blues* he could experiment with television conventions and clichés because they were now really conventions and clichés—witness *Cop Rock*. He furthered high quality ensemble cast dramas. With networks trying to program more and more dramas (the sitcom died, remember?) an unusual thing happened, however, in the 1984-85 season—NBC Thursday night, the beginning of “Must See TV”. The line up was *The Cosby Show*, *Family Ties*, *Cheers*, *Night Court*—all were top 20 shows that season and all top 10 by 1986-87. The reported death of the sitcom had been greatly exaggerated.



But what are networks and production companies to do with everyone geared to do drama and sitcoms are suddenly popular again? The answer: Merge a drama with a situation comedy to get The



Dramady, a show with the half-hour sitcom time format but with character evolution and both dramatic and comic tones. Look, up in the sky! It's a drama! It's a sitcom! It's *Hooperman*! Yes, it's *Hooperman*, supposed savior of television starring John Ritter.

Others followed, including *The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd*, but the most significant part is that the final piece had been laid for the Very Special Episode. Sitcoms could have drama! It was groundbreaking television and the floodgates opened.

One of the first VSEs was *Family Ties*' hour-long episode " 'A' My Name is Alex." Alex Keaton (Michael J. Fox) must cope with the death of his friend and he visits an always-offstage psychiatrist. For the most part (save flashbacks), it is just Fox with a chair on a black stage. Period. Unusual for a sitcom, but the most unusual part was that the last half-hour was commercial free! That's right, no commercials! Now THAT'S ground breaking TV.

Since then, Blossom has had to deal with sex, and the Taylor boys have had to deal with drugs. Rudy Huxtable and Darlene Conner have had their periods. Murphy Brown had to deal with breast cancer and Ellen has come out of the closet. All of those shows, save *Home Improvement*, have come and gone, but the VSE will live on. In a recent (Nov. 1998) episode of *The Wayans Bros.*, Shawn had to help Marlon deal with his drug habit. Those darn TV kids! They have so much to learn about life and growing up! If only they had a Very Special Episode to watch. **LH**

## What's YOUR favorite Very Special Episode?

Is it when Willis tried out pot on *Different Strokes*?

The "Who Concert Tragedy" episode on *WKRP in Cincinnati*?

Alex Keaton losing his virginity on *Family Ties*?

Theo turns out to be dyslexic on *The Cosby Show*?

Let us know your favorite Very Special Episode and why you love it! We'll publish a round up of responses in a future issue of *Low Hug*!

Send your answers to:

A.j. Michel, Station A, PO Box 2574, Champaign, IL 61825-2574

# Snug, Gripping Anus!

Every so often, we receive an envelope of smut in the mail at the *Low Hug* offices. Nothing extreme or illegal, just tacky catalogs and flyers for porno videos, cheap sex toys, love lotions, strap-ons, and so forth. Thanks to Mark Moscato's excellent article in *Generation Latex* #3 (not a porno zine!) about similar solicitations he has received, I finally figured out how I got on these lists. I've purchased comics from Fantagraphics Books, who also publishes an "adult" comix catalog, Eros Comics, which I receive even though I don't remember asking for it. They sold my name to all these porno peddlers. I've been able to get off of some of the lists, but every once a while, I still get a mailing full of photos of cheap looking naked chicks, spread and ready for action. Frankly, these ads make me sort of nauseous, but I don't want to get into a debate over pornography in this essay, as I could fill pages and pages about that topic.

The latest envelope had the words "sexually explicit ad" printed on the front in hot pink ink. Way to be discreet. These mailings usually get pitched right into the trash, after checking to see if they included a "remove me from the mailing list" postcard. This mailing didn't have that information, but the *Low Hug* staff did get a good laugh over the advertisements included inside. Yes, the ads and products were offensive to women (heck, they're offensive to everyone), made women into pieces of meat (well, actually plastic), and were sort of stomach turning... but upon careful inspection, it seems that something actually subversive may be going on at the Asian American Marketing company of Tarzana, CA.

One of the flyers was for "Love Lotus" - the most advanced, life-like doll ever! They don't actually show the doll, but two skanky photos of real women are provided: Angie, spreading it wide for the camera, and Brigitta, who looks a lot

To qualify for this special introductory price, you will be asked to complete the following survey/questionnaire after receipt of your doll.

- Which sexual feature of your love doll provided you with the most enjoyable, explosive orgasm?  
☐ Her suctioning, deep-throat mouth ☐ Her "cherry-tight" vagina ☐ Snug, gripping anus
- Note: Perform the following test before answering the question. Close your eyes, then either touch or have sexual contact with your love doll for any period of time. Then answer the question:  
 How long did it honestly take you to realize that you were not making love to a real, live woman?  
☐ 5 minutes ☐ 10 minutes ☐ Longer than 15 minutes
- How many orgasms did you experience during the 24-hour period after you first received your love doll?  
☐ 2-4 ☐ 3-5 ☐ More than 6
- The doll's snug, gripping anus has undergone radical design changes before this test-marketing. How would you say it compares to a real, live woman?  
☐ Very similar ☐ Incredibly realistic
- Suzi's "cherry-life" TM vagina is a special feature not found in any other love doll on the market. After inserting your penis into this wonderful replica of a real woman's love canal, answer the following question: how long did it take you before you exploded in a thundering climax?  
☐ 20 seconds ☐ 45 seconds ☐ 1-2 minutes
- If you could purchase an additional doll at a reduced price, so you could have group sex with two or more dolls, would you?  
☐ YES ☐ NO



like a man. The ad copy is completely offensive and objectifying, but is also humorous in a pathetic way (as in "think of the pathetic losers who are reading this and are going to order one of these up!").

Here are some choice lines from the ad copy, with a few editorial comments tossed in:

**Built like a "brick shithouse"** - A body to die for, perfect, mouth-watering hourglass figure (*Editorial Comment - Hmmm... not waif thin?*), with full, firm, huge-nippled 38DD breasts, womanly tantalizing hips (*Editorial comment - it's sort of sad that the only place in American society that a woman is allowed to have "tantalizing hips" is on a cheap blow up doll*), incredibly rounded and firm butt (*Ed. Comment - Hmmm.. a round butt. Could the people who actually buy these dolls have a more realistic image of what women actually look like? Minus the huge tits, of course*), long, lovely legs and more!

**"Dream Woman" sexual features** - Space-age, deep, LUBRICATED "Cherry-tight" young vagina with vibrating option; tantalizing "penis-milking" anal opening; huge breasts, firm and large enough for tit-fucking; deep throat "suck expert" mouth for the most maddening blowjobs and oral sex imaginable! (*Ed. Comment - Gee, do you think Angie or Brigitta could vacuum the floors after they're done being used for oral pleasure?*)

What follows this tasteless ad copy is the real kicker, and the reason to believe there must be some truly subversive minds at work at the doll factory. The ad includes a survey that the user is supposed to complete after receiving and using their Love Lotus! Now, no matter how offensive the concept of the Love Lotus is or how gross and anti-woman the ad copy is, this questionnaire turns the tables and makes the male user (and with references to penises in the ad copy, it's pretty darn certain that they are marketing to *only* males) of the doll look absolutely sad, lonely, and downright pathetic. No man who actually stooped and purchased a Love Lotus doll would ever fill this out... and if they did, they deserve an extra free doll for the humiliation suffered and the good laugh they probably provided the mail room workers.

The original version of the survey appears down the edge of page 24, exactly as it appeared in the ad. Although it's highly unlikely, I'd like to think that some writer for the Asian American Marketing Ltd. group had a good laugh while writing this survey. Imagine if they could have written what they really wanted to, slamming customers at will!

It might go something like this...

1. Which sexual feature of your doll provided you with the most enjoyable explosive orgasm?

Her suctioning, deep-throat mouth

- ☐ Her "cherry tight" vagina
- ☐ Sung, gripping anus
- ☐ They all felt the same - like masturbating in a plastic baggie
- ☐ The lifelong companionship I've received from her
- ☐ The snug gripping anus made a great pencil sharpener!

2. How long did it take you to realize that you were not making love to a real, live woman?

- ☐ 5 minutes
- ☐ 10 minutes
- ☐ Longer than 15 minutes
- ☐ Wait, it's not a real live woman?
- ☐ When the doll stopped talking to me

3. How many orgasms did you experience during the 24-hour period after you first received your love doll?

- ☐ 2-4
- ☐ 3-5
- ☐ More than 6
- ☐ I lost count, but now I'm breaking out in a strange rash from the plastic! Help!

4. The doll's snug, gripping anus has undergone radical design changes before this test-marketing. How would you say it compares to a real, live woman?

- ☐ Very similar
- ☐ Incredibly realistic
- ☐ Exactly alike
- ☐ Wait, you're still telling me that it's not a real live woman?
- ☐ Again, when the doll stopped talking to me
- ☐ Ugh, you expect me to go up her ass? Only gay boys do that, and I'm a real man with my real Love Lotus doll, "ruggedly designed for the American male; and built to handle 300 lbs. bodyweight" like it says in the ad!

5. Suzi's "cherry-tite" (TM) vagina is a special feature not found in any other love doll on the market. After inserting your penis into this wonderful replica of a real woman's love canal, answer the following question: How long did it take you before you exploded in a thundering climax?

- ☐ 20 seconds - the longest I've ever lasted!
- ☐ 45 seconds - I never knew it could last this long!
- ☐ 1-2 minutes - Wow, my doll really wore me out!
- ☐ Help! My penis is stuck!

6. If you could purchase an additional doll at a reduced price, so you could have group sex with two or more dolls, would you?

- ☐ Yes, and then I'd take them everywhere I go and introduce them as my lovely sisters.
- ☐ No, even this woman is too real for me to handle.





# HIDE AND SEEK

THE CD HIDDEN BONUS TRACK – A  
NOVEL IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS GONE?

BY STEVE BOJANOWSKI

The inspiration for this piece came from listening to *Without You I'm Nothing*, the latest CD from Placebo (a CD which, by the way, I heartily recommend). As the final track wound down, the reflex that's developed over the course of this decade kicked in: I checked the CD player's counter to see if it would stop.

Sure enough, it didn't. After the last track faded out, the counter kept ticking off. I skipped ahead through the silence until I got to the secret last song, an instrumental.

It's a decent track, probably one of the better ones on the disk. But as I listened, the thought occurred to me: "Why bother hiding it?"

Of course, hidden bonus tracks have become almost a matter of course. My fellow *Low Hug* staffer Mr. Persico informs me that The Clash were the first to have a "bonus track" – their "Train in Vain" being added to *London Calling* only after the record jackets were printed. However, it wasn't until the introduction of compact discs that bonus tracks became widespread.

Record companies began to place extra tracks on CDs (and to a lesser extent, cassettes) in the late 1980s in order to promote these formats in lieu of vinyl records. The available length of CDs made them more conducive to such surprises, however, and they would get the lion's share of the extra tracks.

Then came the first "hidden" tracks. They were songs that simply were not listed on the cover. Of course, the surprise usually came when your CD player first read the disk and listed more tracks than the jacket.

Seems kind of silly now, but this was pretty mind blowing at the time. I can remember a bonus track called "I Don't Want To Be Your Hero" on Ozzy Osbourne's *No Rest For The Wicked* disk freaking everybody out: "DUDE – There's like this extra song! Killer!"

But it wasn't until 1991 and Nirvana's *Nevermind* that the *secret* hidden bonus track came to be. Ever the innovators, the band hit upon the idea of hiding the bonus song (which was later found out to be titled "Endless, Nameless") on the same disk track as one of the other songs. It was one of many notable features of the disc's packaging; i.e. listing only partial lyrics, etc. It came as quite a surprise to listeners who let the CD play out until the end (though in this generation of shorter attention spans, I suppose it's a wonder it got discovered at all...). The song's place in music history has been cemented by an accident. Workers at the CD pressing plant didn't know what the extra information was at the end of the disc, so they cut it off! Thus the first pressing of *Nevermind* (however many thousands that was) got shipped without it. It only added to the album's buzz.

Lucky me, I have one of the discs sans "Endless, Nameless." I wonder — does that make my disc more or less valuable?

After that, it became hip to include a "secret song" on CDs. And lots of bands did it. They still do it. And to the listening public, it's be-

come akin to the prize in the Cracker-jack. It's a nice little surprise that makes us feel like we're getting something more.

But in the last eight years, the secret hidden bonus track has also gotten boring. There's been precious little innovation with the basic idea, though few artists have done some interesting variations:

On Alice in Chains' *Dirt* the "hidden" track

was #9. It had its own track marker, but was skipped in the cover's song listing. It was less than one minute long, and was

mostly ominous guitar noises and sinister vocals courtesy of Slayer's Tom Araya, but it was cool nonetheless.

Both Nine Inch Nails and Marilyn Manson have done the 99-track disc, wherein there are 80 or so tracks between the last listed song and the bonus tracks that consist of a half-second of silence. But it's quite a surprise to see your CD player read 99 tracks that first time! Korn have taken a cue from this strategy and arranged their latest *Follow The Leader* with the silent tracks as numbers 1 through 12. The record company took all the fun out of it by slapping a sticker on the case reading "40 seconds of si-

HERE'S A THOUGHT. PUT THE HIDDEN TRACK BETWEEN TRACKS 5 AND 6 FOR A CHANGE. OR BETTER YET - PUT 20-SECOND SNIPPETS OF IT ON EACH TRACK, AND LET THE INTREPID FANS ASSEMBLE IT THEMSELVES!



lence from Korn. Music starts on track 13." I guess they didn't feel like fielding all the complaints of "defective" CDs. Plus there's the same old hidden track at the end, a goofy cover of Scatterbrain's "Earache My Eye."

One of the best, and most appropriate, uses of the hidden bonus track is on the soundtrack for the *X-Files* movie. It's not a song, but a spoken explanation of "the conspiracy" by *X-Files* brainchild Chris Carter himself. It comes at the last track's time index of 10:13 - after Carter's Ten Thirteen Productions. Pretty cool.

Of course for every good idea in music, there are a dozen or so lame ones; so it goes for the hidden bonus track. Probably the worst offender in the category is *Come On Feel The Lemonheads*. Following the last track there's about 20 minutes of stupid, random guitar noise from Evan Dando, with a so-so 2-minute pop song in the middle. I'd probably like the song more if I didn't have to scan through so much crap just to get to it. As it stands, I hardly find it worth the effort.

But at least the Lemonheads tried something different. Mostly, the game has become "how much nothing can we put between the last listed track and the bonus track?" There was about 10 minutes of silence used on

*Nevermind*. The gap on the Placebo CD has become almost 15. Is this the best we can do? Is a 30-minute gap inevitable?

Here's a thought: put the hidden track between tracks 5 and 6 for a change. Or better yet - put 20-second snippets of it on each track, and let the intrepid fans assemble it themselves!

A friend of mine had another suggestion: put out a CD with blank cover and no info, and have all the tracks be "hidden"! [props to Brian]

Of course, most of these ideas simply make the process of finding and hearing the extra song more and more annoying. And if that's the way things are going, perhaps we don't need them at all.

**LH**

# LOW HUG

## BACK ISSUES

### ISSUE #1 / THE MUSIC ISSUE

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***Speaking Phairly : Growing up with the music of Liz Phair***

Back Issues are \$2 cash each.

A.j. Michel, Station A , PO Box 2574  
Champaign, IL 61825-2574

# To C-SPAN, with love

An appreciation by  
S.C. Bailey



If you have even the most basic of cable services, chances are you have access to C-SPAN and its “companion network” C-SPAN 2. I am writing to alert you of the delights offered by these two channels, a bounty of television treasures you may be missing if you habitually surf right past the C-SPANs or, as a friend has done, “program” them out of your television choices with your remote control. I will admit it, I LOVE C-SPAN (I don’t have a cute little “heart” key or I’d use it here)!! Now you may wonder, what kind of total geek/loser/nerd/sociopath loves a “public service” channel, so I’d thought I’d give you a list of reasons, both light-hearted and substantive, why I love—and you should watch—C-SPAN.

## *Truly deranged callers on the network’s numerous call-in programs*

Due to C-SPAN’s minimal call screening, you never know what you will hear. Once when my favorite C-SPAN pundit (and yes, I have a favorite) Christopher Hitchens, a left-leaning Englishman, was a guest, a caller called in and began rambling about moral decay and so forth and offered a final bit of analysis about how this country was great “until the Beatles came over and ruined everything.” This was 1997, by the way. Hitchens refused to accept blame for the Beatles, but did seem taken aback by the call. More recently, a caller talked at length about the coming apocalypse while a grey-suited magazine correspondent sat stone-faced, seemingly torn between mocking laughter and abject fear. And of course you never know when this classic will occur: “Uh, yes, I would like to talk about inflation. I’m wondering if your guest thinks the Federal Reserve will loosen up HOWARD STERN’S PENIS!!!! (phone slams).” It happens more than you might think. And of course there is the natural alarm that accompanies any call that begins, “I’m retired and I want to know why. . . .,” as there is always a good chance this will turn into a cranky, confused rant.



## ***Brian Lamb's Emotionless Poker-Faced Demeanor and Rigorous Avoidance of Any Opinion***

Lamb, the network's founder and host of many call-in programs strives to avoid any sign of political bias, despite the numerous right-wing cranks who claim he is a tool of the liberal media, as in the case of one caller who accused him of smiling at liberal guests and frowning at conservatives. Lamb apparently takes his lack of commitment into the arena of fashion as well. When a caller told him that his rep-stripped necktie was "a nice tie. . . very preppy," Lamb, not wanting to take sides on this key issue, responded "well, it's...uh... something." Of course there was the episode of *Booknotes* in which Lamb repeatedly asked Martin Gilbert, author of a Churchill biography, to explain what "buggery" was. Interestingly, Lamb recently told a non-C-SPAN interviewer that he hoped that people did not think that he was that boring in real life. On the contrary, Brian, I think your performances are fascinating, even if it is somewhat sadistic to enjoy the ritual of a man remaining emotionless as one caller after another rambles dementedly about what's wrong with the government.

### ***Booknotes***

On a more serious note, this is arguably the most intellectually stimulating hour on television right now. While I certainly don't find every topic scintillating, the interviews tend to render almost any socio-political topic fairly interesting, mostly because they allow the authors a lot of room to discuss their work, how they became interested in the topic, and their own life. This of course can produce such gems as the "buggery" exchange and when 70-something author Forrest McDonald mentioned that he liked to write in the nude on the porch of his rural cabin. However, it can also yield real insights into the writing process which you won't hear elsewhere, except perhaps on the "Book TV" programming that now appears every weekend on C-SPAN 2. Although Brian Lamb has been mocked for his occasionally didactic questions—"who was Abraham Lincoln," etc.—it still beats Oprah's Book Club by a mile.

## **Booknotes**

*Oooo... you can almost hear  
Tomaso Albinoni's Concerto No. 5!*

### *Miscellaneous Political Weirdness*

When not covering the House and Senate, C-SPAN sends its cameras (and sometimes the C-SPAN bus) to cover various political events. You never know what you might see—the extreme-right U.S. Taxpayer's Party Convention (actually coming up in September), the far-left Revolutionary Communist Party (whose slogan is—no kidding—"Mao More then Ever!"), a Nation of Islam conference (find out why the film *Booty Call* is a Zionist conspiracy), or any other wacky gathering.

Of course, some of the best stuff happens right in Washington. A few years ago, former California rep. Robert "B-1 Bob" Dornan and fellow Republican Randall "Duke" Cunningham (I am not making up these nicknames) took advantage of the House's "special orders" provision, which allows them to speak as long as they wish after official business has concluded, to rant at amazing length about that dirty druggy draft-dodging President. Dornan's contribution included the repellent yet not-entirely-implausible description of a young Clinton traveling about the nation "nailing every stewardess he could get his hands on." The "Dornan Show," as I came to know it, was unquestionably the most compelling viewing of the year. And who could forget the Bob Livingston soap opera earlier this year—I actually sat and watched the house proceedings for several hours in fairly rapt attention, something that I have not



*Brian Lamb: C-SPAN founder, chairman, CEO, Washington Journal moderator, Booknotes host, and non-partisan fashion plate.*

done since my pre-adolescent days of televisual hypnosis. Even if politics happen to be lacking drama on a given day, there are always those thrilling games of "hairpiece, comb-over, plugs, or Rogaine?" that you can play with about half the Congressmen. As a follicularly challenged guy, I am offended by all these strategies.

So the next time you go flying past C-SPAN 1 & 2, consider pausing for a second look. You never know what you might see. As Brian Lamb would say, "it's...uh... something."



To help C-SPAN attract more viewers, I have come up with the following jingle which I think might give the network a little more marketing flair. By the way, there is a little dance that goes with it—I call it “the Brian Lamb”—but it is better seen in person.

*(Chorus)*

*It's C-SPAN, It's C-SPAN  
It's you and it's me-Span  
It's us and it's we-Span,  
C-SPAN is really great,  
Why don't you stay up late,  
watching C-SPAN, it's C-SPAN*

*I'm old and retired,  
you're raising my ire,  
my pants are on fire,  
that's why I called today,  
cuz I know Clinton's gay,  
and I'm on C-SPAN, it's C-SPAN*

*(Repeat chorus)*

*It's got all the pundits,  
and all kind of fun-it's  
the place you should run  
if you are feeling blue  
there's C-SPAN one and 2  
yes, that's C-SPAN. . .*

*(Repeat chorus)*

## C-SPAN Web Resources

**www.c-span.org:** The main page for the network, very complete and informative. Includes video and audio, live and archived, a comprehensive program guide, and “Campaign 2000”, which is sure to be a valuable source of information in the upcoming election year.

**www.booknotes.org:** The official *Booknotes* site. Includes complete text transcriptions of all past programs, audio and video archives of selected shows, first chapters of some of the books featured, and schedules of upcoming authors.

**www.booktv.org:** The site for C-SPAN 2's weekend programming, “Book TV.” Includes a comprehensive weekend schedule, as well as user comments about local independent book stores and local book discussion groups.

**www.americanpresidents.org:** A companion site to C-SPAN's ambitious “41 presidents in 41 weeks” project. More in-depth information about each of the 41 presidents than you'll ever need to know.

**www.c-spanstore.com:** 3000 videotapes of past C-SPAN programming! Washington Journal coffee mugs! C-SPAN sweatshirts! Faux “alabaster” Alexis de Tocqueville busts! C-SPAN teddy bears! *Booknotes* latte mugs! All the logo-ed merchandise you need for the complete C-SPAN experience!

**www.citizensforcspan.org:** A volunteer organization that helps local communities retain and restore C-SPAN on their cable lineups. With the expanding universe of cable stations, and only a limited amount of slots on each of the cable lineups, C-SPAN has been squeezed out in some areas of the country.

# "Hello there ladies and gentlemen, are you ready to rock?"

*Tales of live music experiences contributed by fellow zine editors, Low Hug contributors, and friends.*

A few friends & I went to see Melvins/L7 a few years ago at the Vic Theater, Chicago. I sat next to my pal, Rocker Al Kocsak, who at the time resembled a young Joe Walsh. Al went to buy a round of drinks & while in line, the bartender asked something like "Aren't you Joe Walsh?" Rocker Al, who has heard this before, just smiled & shared the story with us when returning to his seat. During the awesome L7 set, Donita Sparks announced something like "Hey Everybody! Just heard Joe Walsh is in the house!!!!" & the crowd went nuts! We convinced Rocker Al to work it. So, he strutted down to the main floor & without having to say a word, the "security" staff let him back stage during the last part of L7's set. Backstage, he was mobbed with hands to shake, autographs to give, and compliments to be heard. Rocker Al started to feel uncomfortable lying (even though he didn't have to say ANYTHING to convince anyone), so he bailed before his cover was blown. Bands & fans might still believe that Joe Walsh was there that night!

— Vera Gavrilovic

Editor/Publisher, Polka Scene 'Zine

Polkascenezine@yahoo.com

Who: Third Stone

When: A cool summer evening in 1994

Where: The Silver Bullet, Urbana, Illinois

My friend Ross once took me across town to the infamous Silver Bullet, a strip club that actually used to feature more bands than boobs. Ross had a strange affinity for running into people he hadn't seen in years, so sure enough, he recognized two guys standing at the bar right when we walked in. One looked like actor Robert Pastorelli of *Murphy Brown* wearing leather. The other looked like a long-haired John Denver wearing leather. Hell, everybody in the joint had long hair and leather! Except me, of course. Anyway, local hard rockers Third Stone (Bryce Johnson, Tom Grassman, David Ward, and Jeff Markland) owned the stage on that particular night. The four of us made our way up front, big-ass aluminum beer cans in hand, just in time to head-bang to Third Stone's powerful cover of Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb," although Bryce kept changing the refrain to "Comfortably Dumb" instead. What a kidder. Either way, it summarized my evening beautifully, even without the long hair and leather.

— JaPan, a.k.a. Jason Pankoke

Editor/Publisher, MicroFilm

japan@pdnt.com.

January 1989, my high school gymnasium, Green Bay, Wisconsin. Green Cheetah, a talentless but very, very loud band of classmates, played right after a basketball game. Our team had just defeated our despised crosstown rival, so I had spirit, yes I did—and I was ready to rock! Green Cheetah took the stage and hurled themselves into a screaming rendition of what was probably "Hell's Bells"; nobody was really sure. I was having a great time, jumping up and down and pumping my fist to the beat when I noticed that a girl I knew was staring at me. She smiled. I liked this girl so, still jumping, I leaned down toward her. "What are you smiling at?" I asked. "Oh nothing," she said. "It's just that you look so stupid jumping up and down like that." It was really hard to resume jumping after that, and when I did, it wasn't fun anymore. I still think of that damn girl sometimes and how she ruined Green Cheetah for me.

— Tim Woessner



WHO: Manitoba's Wild Kingdom

(aka The Dictators)

WHEN: October 21, 1990

WHERE: Bonnie's Roxx in Atco, NJ

October 90 was a great "band month." An alignment of the planets had stocked clubs with tons of superb acts. Having blown my cash on shows and beer (not in that order), I was picking up extra scratch working at a hayride. I ditched my then-girlfriend at first chance and raced back to Jersey. Bonnie's was a hair-metal joint with one big room and a caged-off bar that made it look like something out of MAD MAX. Big-haired chicks and long-haired dudes were groovin' to the Bon Jovi soundalikes that littered the bill. We soon edged our way to the front, only to discover we were the only 10 people left to see MWK—and eight of us were together. Fueled (and bemused) by our passion, Handsome Dick and Co. buzzsawed through what seemed like their entire discography. In a fit of irony, their road manager handed us "backstage passes" which were pointless once the band left the stage and joined us for beers. A decade later I still have that pass. DFFD.

— Dan Taylor

[www.dantenet.com](http://www.dantenet.com)

[Dante@dantenet.com](mailto:Dante@dantenet.com)

Who: Mindless Self Indulgence

When: Late 1999

Where: CBGBs, NYC

Singer whips out his weenie on stage, pees in a cup, and he and the guitarist take turns drinking it. The audience is pretty grossed out. Lots of the audience starts drifting back from the stage as the band has a reputation for spewing liquids onto the audience and entering the audience for various antics. They do spew a spray onto the front row of people - some actually look "into" it. They finish it all. I'm pretty grossed out. Then Jimmy Urine, the singer, lovingly asks "So, who wants to make out with me now" - and wouldn't you know it, about 3 girls and one guy suck face with him. Oh so lovely!!!

— Brian Klimek

Who: The Replacements

When: April 1989

Where: Tower Theater, Upper Darby, PA

These are actually pre- and post-concert experiences. Before the show, a few of us were at the Waterford Inn across the street, sucking back some beers, oblivious to the time. We had planned on skipping the opening act, but hadn't planned on missing the first twenty minutes of the Replacements. Oh, shit! We run in to the Tower, kick out the people in our seats, and enjoy the rest of the show. Paul Westerberg's monitor blows out, so he hops down into the crowd to sing "Cruella DeVille." Afterwards, the band goes to Brownie's Pub. I've never been so happy to be a girl because I don't think the doorman would have let me in otherwise, since I was only 18 at the time. Band is completely drunk, Paul and Tommy jump in on the house band during "L.A. Woman." The rest of the night was a fast paced blur, and some of it wound up in a script I wrote for class years later, including a late night trip back to Jersey to deposit a slightly inebriated friend who was in no shape to drive, and an even later night stop at the Golden Eagle Diner somewhere in the wilds of Jersey.

— anita j.

I have a lot of tidbits ... but nothing too bizarre. Running into good friend and intermittent adult Nicky at Lollapalooza '93 among how many thousands of people? ... Seeing the Dead Milkmen opening for the Replacements in '87/88 at the Tower with Gena, and watching the Milkmen run up and down the aisle while the Replacements played (the 'Mats were so drunk, that was a better show) ... condemning JFK stadium in Fall '89 after the Grateful Dead played (I was there), forcing the Rolling Stones to reschedule their Philly stop, allowing me to see them before leaving the country for six months ... that same Rolling Stones show at the Vet, being so drunk that Chuck carried me out of the bar (before the show), I tripped and allowed someone to pour beer on the abrasion to "disinfect" it, and missing the opening act -- Living Colour, damn! -- and the first few Stones songs; Joe lost his ticket while urinating against a tree (or was I watering and he was just watching out for gawkers?) ... running into Black Train Jack at the King of Prussia Mall in summer '91, then driving to Reading to see them that night ... That's about it.

— Susan Talbutt

Who: Lollapalooza  
When: July 15, 1995  
Where: Chicago, IL

Normally, you'd never see me at Lollapalooza, but with The Coctails playing the second stage, Kim and I wouldn't miss it! It was a blistering 103° that day. I knew it was going to be an interesting day when I got my foot caught on the seat belt getting out of the car and fell on my knees in the gravel parking lot. So my first stop was at the first aid station! The film tent was extremely popular, full of people grateful for a brief respite from the relentless sun. I spent about \$20 on bottled water, but I was afraid to eat anything. Fear of food poisoning and public restrooms killed my appetite. The Coctails finally went on, though it was difficult to dance without wanting to puke. Yo La Tengo followed, but we left before they finished and returned to the mainstage. Back in the shade, we saw Sinéad O'Connor, Beck and Cypress Hill. We decided to leave when the storm clouds rolled in, and as we pulled out of the parking lot, it started raining. We rolled down the windows and let the water blow in. I was exhausted but happy, cruising down the expressway in the rain with my closest friends.

Kathy Moseley  
SemiBold  
semibold@aol.com

What is not a blank is a blur.

It was 1979, the LA Forum and my once druggie now born-again cousin and his leather pants-wearing friend invited my tailgating younger sister and me to a Kinks concert. Leaving the suburbs in the Camero is the last thing my sister, who shall remain nameless, remembers. She drank so much that she threw up projectile-like onto the guy in front of us and then vanished for the rest of the concert. She missed the evening's pinnacle, "Lola" and its accompanying torched Bics, but recalls hearing the song from the infirmary. As the evening progressed my fears of the worst took over, but the guys kept telling me "Don't worry! We'll find her in the parking lot!" Yeah, chopped in a million pieces; Ted Bundy was still loose. As the cars pulled out, one by one, and spaces opened up, my little sister was nowhere to be found. Finally, as the last Trans Am emptied the parking lot, she emerged from behind its exhaust. Seeing her, I slammed my purse onto the cement and exhaled words new to my sister's virgin ears.

After that we really didn't go to too many big concerts again.

— Grace Giorgio



Who: Eric Clapton  
When: Around 1990  
Where: Spectrum, Philadelphia

Sometime around 1990, when I was still under the disillusionment that 1) I was straight and 2) Simon T. was an acceptable excuse for a boyfriend, I attended an Eric Clapton concert. I did not attend this concert because I had even the remotest interest in one of drug rehab's poster children, but because of the aforementioned high school boy. He decided tickets to a concert he wanted to see would be the perfect gift for me. I had never been to a concert and was still as naive as only an 18-year-old should be.

I was living outside of Philadelphia and for reasons that are a tad unclear a decade later we took the train to the Spectrum. He was gleefully entranced by the music and able to ignore everyone around us. The drugged out rockers that the 70's had somehow conveniently forgot in south Philly repulsed me. Towards the end of the night a woman I seen earlier in a short black mini-skirt and teased, yet crumpled, big bleached blond hair vomited warm beer down my back. That sensation ranks quite high on my list "most disgusting life experiences." I decided it was time to go and dragged him downstairs to the bathrooms where I demanded his t-shirt.

This is where it starts to get funny. For me at least. He gave me his t-shirt, leaving him with just a pair of white OP corduroy shorts. He was proud to admit he had had them since he was 14. Of course he had also grown a foot since then and they were far too short on him. It was July, so the temperature wasn't a problem. The fact that he looked like he was wearing a pair of undies on the Philadelphia mass transit system is another story. I figured the stares his pale, scrawny, 6-foot frame was enduring was suitable punishment for his "altruistic" gift of taking me to the concert. It would be almost 5 years before I tried to go to my second concert. I haven't tried a third.

*Davida Gypsy Breier  
Publisher/Editor*

*Leeking Inc, The Glovebox Chronicles, Xerox Debt*

Who: Jane's Addiction  
When: November, 1990  
Where: The Tower Theater, Upper Darby, PA

Jane's were touring: the buzz was high. My friends Brian and Millie had come from out of town for the show.

I'm not sure exactly what pissed off the band. Could've been the small army of rent-a-guards patrolling the aisles. Could've been that you couldn't hear the band over your own voice (so much for the "Jane Says" sing-along). Could've been the stifled crowd – confined to their seats by the guards and not singing so they could hear the music.

Whatever it was, the band played 8 songs and left. 3,000 disbelieving, unsatisfied goth-kids spill out onto 69<sup>th</sup> and Ludlow with nothing else to do. Someone shouts, "TIP THE TOUR BUS!" The cops freak.

A county-wide assistance call goes out. Within minutes, squad cars are pouring in from all directions, filling the intersection: you could've traversed the two blocks to the El station without touching the ground. The riot gear came out and they marched the crowd away.

I'd never been in a near-riot before. It almost made the night worthwhile.

Home later that week for Thanksgiving, Mom overheard me eagerly relating the tale to Jack, the entertainment editor of the college newspaper I wrote for.

She could've killed me.

— Steve Bojanowski

# Gasping for Breath: The Oxygen Network

This atrocity of a "woman's network" may be explored at length in a later issue of *Low Hug*, if I can stand to watch it for a significant period of time without tossing something heavy at the television.

The Oxygen Network is the creation of Oprah Winfrey, and was designed from the very beginning to blend together television programming and the Internet. Their Web site ([www.oxygen.com](http://www.oxygen.com)) was up and running months before the network hit the air, and there is a permanent black bar on the bottom of the Oxygen Network screen – sort of like where sports scores are shown on ESPN – that constantly displays the Web site address of the product or service that is being discussed. Even during commercials, the advertisers' URL is displayed. According to their slogan, both the network and Internet venture were "created by women, for women." Now, granted, I have noticed in the credits of the television and Internet programming that it is mostly women running the business. However, I'm not so sure of their product.

The main "empowering" message behind the Oxygen Network is to CONSUME. CONSUME lots. For example, twice every weekend they feature a four hour show called *shEcommerce*, which

shows women all the fun stuff they can buy on the Internet. This show is basically a four hour tutorial about how to use your credit card safely online. It is truly horrible. Instead of teaching women more ways to shop, spend money, and participate in rampant consumerism, why not show them how to do something productive with their computers? Need some suggestions? Demonstrate how to take a machine apart and put in a new hard drive or sound card. Explain the differences between operating systems such as Linux, Unix, Windows, DOS, and which works best in a particular situation. Or, if these are too weighty topics to tackle, how about an informative show about selecting and purchasing the best computer for your needs? Or, a show spotlighting the other things to do with the Internet besides shop: look for a job, take distance education classes, or do consumer research. Why not teach women something they can really use to further their careers instead of showing them how to spend more money?

It's not only on the *shEcommerce* that Oxygen pushes the message of CONSUME. Most of the day is taken up by free-form programming called *Pure Oxygen*, where a forced politically correct

A Critique by A.j. Michel



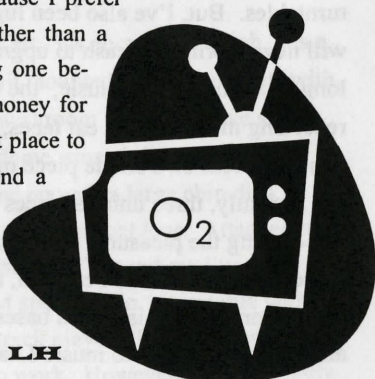
balanced group of hosts (there's core cast of a chubby chick, an African-American, an Asian-American, a Latina, and a few others) talk about shopping, shopping on the Internet, dating, men, money, and exploring hard hitting topics such as (I am not making this up) the hosts' past lives with a psychic. So CONSUME products, CONSUME men, CONSUME spiritualism. CONSUME it all.

One of the few times where Oxygen is not trying to get women to spend money, it's encouraging them to act ridiculous on the show *Pajama Party*, which is "girl powered" in the worst kind of Spice Girls way. This show features about 25 women sitting in their pajamas, laughing, giggling, eating bad food, dancing on cue, and summoning up the B.O.D. Dancers – the "Boys On Demand Dancers" – to come out and dance shirtless for them. This is what passes as feminist television? *Pajama Party* is just a bad example of the "do-me feminism" invented by *Esquire* magazine in the early 1990s. Even worse, it's forced and carefully planned "do-me feminism." The description of the show on the Oxygen Web site reads like a well-crafted marketing plan for "spontaneous" female fun:

"Sharp, funny, and frank, this talk/variety show subverts the classic sleep-over ingredients – taboo topics, mind-bending trends, and far-out music – into grown up friskiness with the help of celebrities in their pajamas."

It's as if the women at Oxygen tried to bring a copy of *Bust* (the very smart zine of the third-wave feminist movement) to life on this show, but with disastrous results. *Bust* is funny, smart, intelligent, insightful, and an excellent example of third wave feminism. *Pajama Party* is just an atrocity. It pains me to think that my feminist peers before me suffered so much and worked so hard so a bunch of giggly women can say "shocking" things about their vaginas (Tee-hee, we said a dirty word!) and try to tempt men with plates of glazed doughnuts on cable television.

As far as I can tell, nothing on the Oxygen Network, except perhaps for the shows about personal finance (and then only maybe), addresses any of the serious issues that women in the United States face today. And forget about issues that women of the world face – they're not wired for the Internet, so they don't count. But maybe I'm missing something. Maybe I'm too serious and stodgy because I prefer to get my feminism from *Ms.*, *Bitch*, and *Bust* rather than a glorified shopping network. Maybe I'm the boring one because I think that fact that women still earn less money for equal work is a bigger problem than finding the best place to buy Prada handbags online. Maybe I need to spend a week curled up with the Oxygen Network and Oxygen Web site and only then I'll find enlightenment. But more likely I'll have tossed both the television and computer in the dumpster.



LH

# Enjoying the pleasures of Lo-Fi

*by A.j. Michel*

Every month or so, the Audio Advisor - "The catalog for audiophiles and everyone who loves fine music" - shows up at the offices of Low Hug. It's always amazing to see the wide variety of high end stereo equipment available. Besides \$1000 single CD players (belt driven for better sound), \$500 a pair speakers, and recordable and re-writeable CD players (around \$600), there's a bevy of high priced equipment you never new you needed that will enhance your listening "experience," like power conditioners to assure that equipment always receives the exact same level of power at all times, least the CD player slow down by .00001 second (cost: from \$400 to \$1500). To assist you in precise speaker placement, there's "Loudspeaker and Listener Placement" software available for the low price of \$495. Because, as they say in the catalog copy, "Speaker placement is CRUCIAL to good sound!"

One can only hope that people who are purchasing high end equipment from these catalogs and expensive stereo stores haven't made the hefty investment so they can listen to Celine Dion CDs with perfect clarity.

Although I appreciate quality construction, and I can understand spending a lot of money if the stereo equipment is going to be used heavily, for example, DJ turntables. But, I've also been lugging the same stereo around for ten years and will never spring the cash to upgrade the cassette player/radio in my vehicle. As long as I can hear the music, the lyrics aren't garbled, and it doesn't destroy the recording medium (e.g. eat tapes, scratch vinyl), I can't justify spending more than a month's rent on a single piece of stereo equipment.

Recently, three unique pieces of equipment came my way, and I have been discovering the pleasures of lo-fi audio reproduction. The design of each of these pieces of equipment is beautiful, and they have been more useful to me than any power conditioner, isolation bases, or polarity testers could be because they have allowed me to listen to music I had purchased over the years, but could not hear.

Let's explain...



**Lo-Fi Item #2:** The Electrohome Model 880U Serial D stereo.

Made in Canada by Electrohome Limited, Kitchener, Ontario.

Year of manufacture 1968 or 1969.

**Found:** Bequeathed to me by Dan Taylor, of [www.dantenet.com](http://www.dantenet.com), and an old WKDU 91.7FM (Drexel University, Philadelphia) colleague.

About a year ago, I visited Dan while he was living in Pittsburgh. While admiring all the cool thrifted objects they had in their apartment, one stood out for me: the space age shaped, very 1960s, "mushroom stereo" tucked in a corner of the living room. I didn't ask him about it then, but I always wondered where he and his sig.ot. Khaki found it. Many months later, when I managed to get back to Pittsburgh again, I happened to be there the week Dan and Khaki were moving back to the other side of the state. I joked that I'd take any cool junk they were going to leave behind, and Dan floored me by offering me the mushroom object d'art I had so coveted! After many thanks, I squeezed it in the rental car with me, two friends, and four cases of Yuengling (the beer that made Pottsville, PA famous), and drove the 'shroom stereo back to the Midwest where it now sits in the corner of the living room.

While writing this article, I e-mailed Dan asking him how he had come across this work of audio art in the first place. He replied:

*"The mushroom stereo came our way via a vintage store in the 'Burgh called Estate Treasures, and I think we paid about \$20 for it. I'd usually never had paid that kind of money for something, especially at a consignment/vintage shop, but it spoke to me and we had to have it. One cramped ride in the car home later and it was ours. We never even got that much use out of it, but it was great for parties and was a real conversation piece. I'm glad you could give it a good home."*

The Electrohome Model 880U is truly a work of art. It's about 3 feet high, has a pedestal base with the large, squarish main stereo unit mounted on it, topped off with a smoke colored plastic dome, hence the moniker "mushroom stereo." Steve and I been trying to think of alternate uses for the plastic dome, since it isn't actually attached to the main unit by hinges. So far, we've come up with a large chip dish, a birdbath, a diaphragm for Mrs. Godzilla, or a huge tinted contact lens. Attached to the stereo are two, small, boxy 8 ohm speakers for "superior" sound quality.

The stereo console itself features an AM/FM/FM stereo radio, a turntable with 16/33/45/78 speeds and a record changer, and an 8-track player. The radio works fine, but unfortunately, we couldn't get the 8-track to work. However, it's very handy

to have a turntable with 78 speed around the house, since 78s at most junk shops are sold for very very cheap. At the latest public radio station "Vintage Vinyl" sale, we picked up old Ink Spots and Frank Sinatra platters and an actual Glenn Miller "album" - four 78s, each in their own sleeve, bound into a hardbound album. Granted, the mushroom stereo isn't the cutting edge of hi-fidelity, and the 78s do sound thin and scratchy, but it's the ability to play them and discover long forgotten music that's the real thrill. Right now, I'm listening to a song from a 50 year old record, pressed on a long obsolete medium.

I don't know how much actual playing time the mushroom stereo is going to get, but it is a great object for the corner of the living room, and now I can actually buy 78s if the musician or song looks interesting. And, it is getting a lot of attention from anyone who comes over: "Ohmygawd, where did you get THAT?"

Postscript to the Electrohome story!

Out of curiosity, I took to the Internet to see if I could find anything about the Electrohome company. They are still in business, but now produce very high end video projection equipment for businesses and convention centers. I filled out their e-mail form, asked them about the mushroom stereo and threw in the model number. A few weeks later, I received this letter in the mail:

*Thank you for your inquiry about the Electrohome Bubble Stereo, Model #880U.*

*In the 1960s, the company's President, C.A. Pollock urged designers to look ahead 10 years to 1975 for design inspiration. Keith McQuarrie, sparked by Star Trek, responded with a spaceship 'bubble' design. His group was responsible for metal appliances such as stove hood ventilators, bug lanterns and so on, so it was surprising to have them come up with a competing design to the electronics group. Nevertheless, it was given the go ahead and it gained instant recognition and great popularity.*

*The first year of production of a few hundred units followed in year two by over 15,000 and even higher numbers in subsequent years, with many supplied to the USA where they were well accepted.*

*The Model 880 was a later version, produced in 1968 and 1969 and had deluxe features such as better quality speakers and an 8-track stereo tape recorder.*

*I hope you continue to enjoy your new (old) stereo, it should give you many more years of good service.*



Are those pesky "hidden tracks" tacked at the end of compact discs really worth the hassle anymore? Steve Bojanowski pursued this question in "Hide and Seek," from Issue #3.

You'll be dancing the "Brian Lamb" after you finish "To C-SPAN, With Love," by S.C. Bailey. This ode to political punditry, Congressional hearings, Senate sessions, and embarrassing call-in moments will have you running to your TV set to tune in to C-SPAN and C-SPAN 2! This is also from Issue #3.

In Issue #4, we printed the hellish story of a day at Woodstock 99, reported by Karl Nyce. Although this article was too long to include in this sampler, we have included the accompanying article, "Hello there, Ladies and Gentlemen, are you ready to rock?", a collection of live music moments from contributors, friends, and other zine editors. Thanks to Vera Gavrilovic (*Polka Scene Zine*), Jason Pankoke (*Microfilm*), Tim Woessner, Dan Taylor ([www.dantenet.com](http://www.dantenet.com)), Brian Klimek, Susan Talbutt, Kathy Moseley (*SemiBold*), Grace Giorgio, Davida Gypsy Breier (*Leeking Inc*, *The Glovebox Chronicles*, *Xerox Debt*), and Steve Bojanowski for their stories.

A new "woman's network" or a new "woman's shopping outlet"? The Oxygen Network left me "Gasping for Breath" in Issue #4. Is teaching women how to shop over the Internet really empowering?

Completing this sampler is an excerpt from Issue #1, "Enjoying the Pleasures of Lo-Fi," a discussion of the glories of vintage stereo equipment. The article been trimmed a bit for space considerations, highlighting only one of the three pieces originally discussed.

Enjoy this exploration of the zine that is LOW HUG. More details about individual issues can be found on the back cover.

Thanks for reading, and a great big LOW HUG to everyone!

— A.j. Michel

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A project from **LOW HUG PRODUCTIONS**

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