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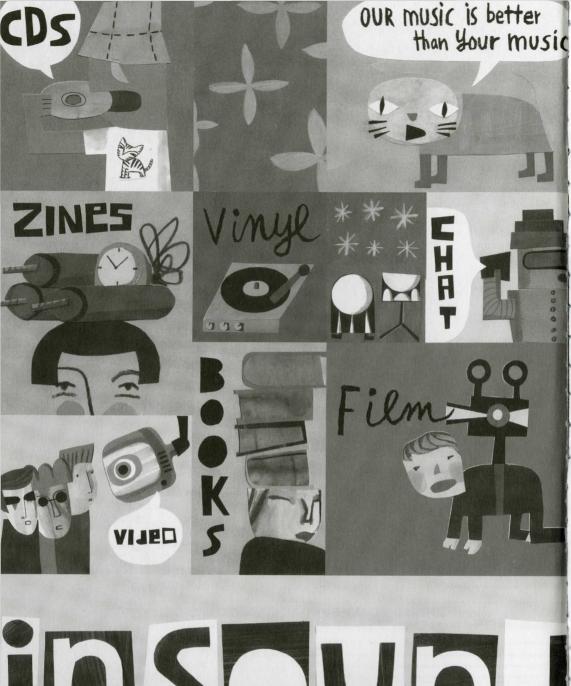


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-Laris Kreslins

#### LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

in this space i have no time/patience/energy to offer any clever/witty introduction/observations, what follows is a list of thank yous (t) and apologies (a).

enjoy.-Laris

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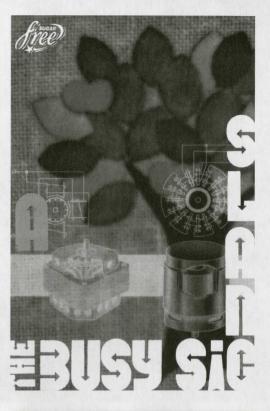
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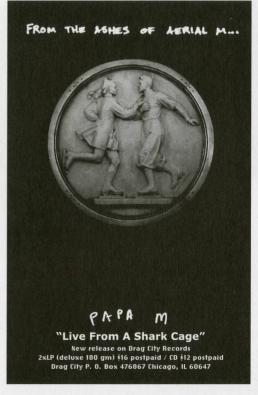
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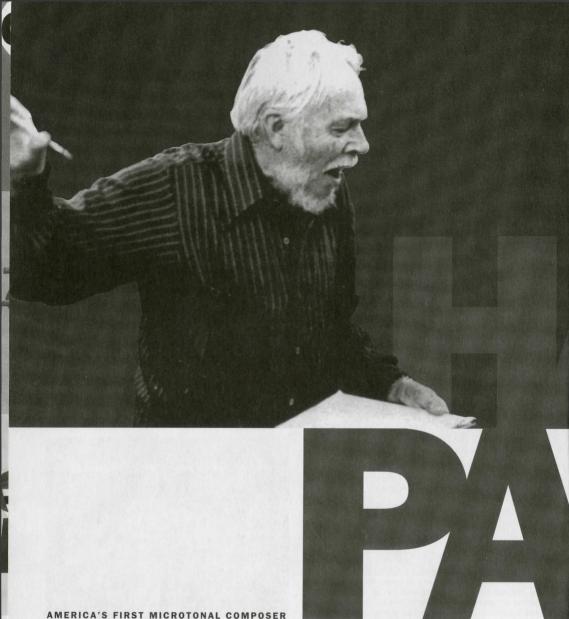
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AMERICA'S FIRST MICROTONAL COMPOSER BY MARC WOLF DRAWINGS BY HOPE "It was as if one had drunk the music instead of accepting it through the ears... The affinity of his music with water, with the poetry of space, with fusion appealed to me" -Anais Nin referring to the music of

#### **PART 1: A THUMBNAIL HISTORY**

The early part of this century marked the beginnings of a vast cultural upheaval.

Advances in archaeological science and scholarly research into antiquity gave us a newfound respect for the wisdom of the Ancients and extended our perspective of history by thousands of years. At the same time, the influence of the natural sciences on all aspects of life was profound, especially in its reestablishment as a factor in the creative arts. Furthermore, non-western cultures would continue to have an ever-increasing influence on all aspects of the western art tradition.



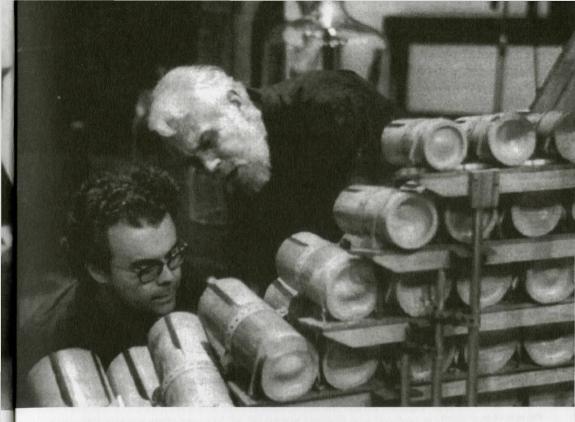
The cultural impact of this complex new awareness was widespread. Ancient and near-eastern teachings were at the core of the Spiritualists & Theosophists, which included Blavatsky, Steiner, & Gurdjieff. Movements in the visual arts with Van Gogh, Klee and Picasso; in architecture with Frank Lloyd Wright; and in theatre with Antonin Artaud were all profoundly affected by non-western cultures. At the same time humanity looked to science as a means of explaining the world. Light and vibration were revealed as having the same underlying physics, and new art forms such as Film and Photography were developed.

While many arts were enjoying a rebirth, assimilating newfound resources as inspiration, Art-Music was floundering in a centuries old system that was cracking at the foundation, the essence of which was only superficially affected by such developments.

The "crisis of tonality" at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries was primarily a crisis of materials. Composers such as Mahler and Wagner had exhausted the rhetorical abilities that the 12 building blocks of tonality would provide. Atonality and 12-tone technique were a means of recycling a new language out of the remnants of a diatonic system. Because of the impossibility for exotic and liberating influences to have any effect on *sound* (the instruments and tuning are still the same) composers used a high degree of abstraction isomorphic manipulation of these arbitrary materials to convey *rhetorically* a new kind of music. (The best examples of this are Cage and Xenakis.)

It would seem then that to find a new *sound* one would first have to abandon the use of the ubiquitous intonational system of Equal Temperament.

Equal Temperament, since its conception on the "fatal day in Halberstadt [Germany, February 23, 1361]" when the "7 white 5 black" keyboard layout was invented by an organ builder named Nicholas Faber, had by the early 20th century become an accepted fact of musical existence. The musical education system in Europe, and its American cousin, had degenerated into an organ for its indoctrination. It is easy now to see how a creative individual living in such times could have been exasperated with the lack of resources that this musical "system" made available. Only a handful of courageous and furiously uncompromising artists found the energy and means to transcend this system, and Harry Partch was one of the first.



Partch was born in Oakland, California on June 24th, 1901, the son of Christian missionaries who spent much time in China, and who had assimilated enough of the culture they sought to convert that they could speak fluent Mandarin. Partch grew up in isolated areas of the American Southwest, hearing local Mexican tunes, Yacqui Indian music, music from cylinder records and his mother singing Chinese Iullabies.

His mother fostered the children's music education, encouraging them to play various mail order musical instruments; Harry took up the violin, piano and mandolin. The family moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1913, and Partch spent his High School days studying piano and playing in silent movie theaters, graduating in 1919. Partch's early development surely affected his ideas about music, and it is clear that he had intuitively sensed the limitations of Equal Temperament even at a young age:

"Before I was twenty, I had tentatively rejected both the intonational system of Modern Europe and it's concert system, although I did not realize either the ultimate scope or the consequences of that rejection."<sup>2</sup>

It wasn't until 1923 when Partch discovered Hermann Helmholtz's seminal treatise on physiological acoustics "On the Sensations of Tone", that he began to take seriously his radical ideas.

"Helmholtz's book... provided Partch with what was, at the time, the most cogent and persuasive answer to the question that most obsessed him: "whether there was any logical reason for 12 tones in an octave... I was always dissatisfied with the explanation of musical phenomena given in school and by music teachers." Helmholz was "the key for which I had been searching..."

Helmholtz provided a foundation for Partch's radical ideas in that he effectively bridged the chasm between the natural science of physiological acoustics and music theory, which had not been affiliated since Pythagoras' discovery that proportional string lengths in small number ratios produce intervals. This "law", – the relationship of musical intervals to the rational proportions of a vibrating string – is the starting point for all of Partch's innovations in music theory."

Partch's official break with the European tradition occurred in New Orleans in 1930 where he burned 14 years worth of his compositions in a pot bellied stove. Among them a string quartet, nearly 50 songs, and sketches for a piano concerto.

His first instrument to use just intonation was a viola with a cello fingerboard attached which he called the Adapted Viola. The fingerboard was marked with tiny brads at the appropriate ratios and provided a means of realizing his new theories on Just Intonation. Partch's work at this time was mostly compositions for voice accompanied by the new invention, among them the *17 Lyrics of Li Po*, settings of Biblical Verses, and Shakespeare.

In June of 1934, Partch received a grant for a research trip to England, where he visited the poet W.B. Yeats to discuss his idea of setting Yeats' *King Oedipus* using his new musical system, and to commission the construction of a reed organ with forty-three notes to the octave. During Partch's meeting with Yeats, Partch played his setting of "By the Rivers of Babylon". The flood of comment that Yeats offered at the end epitomized the "total comprehension" for which Partch had been searching for so long. Yeats told Partch that "a play done entirely in this way, with this wonderful instrument, and with this type of music, might really be sensational."

When he returned, America was in the Great Depression. The years from 1935 to 1943 were subsequently referred to as Partch's "Hobo Period." During this time he wandered the American Midwest, and his Journal "Bitter Music" is an account of the first 8 months of this period. Despite his transience and lack of means, he was able to continue composing and building instruments, among which was his first Kithara, an instrument inspired by a painting on a Greek Vase in the British Museum. The Kithara would become a staple instrument in the works ahead, and a symbol of Partch's philosophical ties to the ancient world.

Partch moved to New York in the fall of 1942 and in 1944 had several works played at the League of Composers concert at Carnegie Chamber Music Hall. Among these were *Barstow, U.S. Highball, San Francisco*, and *Y.D. Fantasy,* which was performed by Henry Brant. The concert was widely reviewed and the response positive.

From 1944 until 1947 Partch worked out of the University of Wisconsin, presenting lectures and concerts, and finishing the manuscript of *Genesis of Music*. Partch was forced to leave Madison in 1947 because of lack of support from the school's music department, and their refusal to accept him on its staff. "This would be the familiar pattern of Partch's relations with academic institutions throughout his life: despite the enthusiastic applause from audiences and strong support from faculty and students throughout the university, music departments generally remained hostile and unsupportive, and there was always a shortage of space for his growing ensemble of instruments." Partch, like other composers of his generation, suffered prejudices against contemporary and experimental music. Most American universities were steeped in the traditions and repertoire of Europe, a fact that led to his prolific output of writings, consisting of polemics against such orthodoxy, as well as writings on his own music. (Unfortunately, this prejudice is still strong: recently *Newband* – the ensemble who currently use Partch's instruments and perform his works – were dismissed from their 5 year tenure at Purchase College in Purchase, NY)

In the spring of 1951, Partch moved to Oakland, California to prepare for the Mills College production of *King Oedipus*. The work was widely acclaimed in national reviews and press coverage. But even such critical acclaim didn't make life any easier for Partch.

He was forced to leave Mills, and after relocating to Sausalito, set up Gate 5 records. Having his own label would allow him the freedom to record and market his work without being at the mercy of record industry bureaucracy, or of academic institutions for his income. The income he received, along with grants and help from friends and colleagues, allowed him to pursue creative work.

By 1955, Partch had completed another major stage work, *The Bewitched*, which was performed in March of 1957 at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. It was to receive national reviews, but Partch was dissatisfied with the choreography of Alwin Nikolais, and vowed never to relinquish control of any creative aspect of his work again.

In 1957, Partch began working with the filmmaker Madeline Tourtelot, collaborating on the film Windsong, for which Partch wrote one of his best compositions, later renamed Daphne on the Dunes.

Their collaboration was to yield several more art films: *Music Studio* (1958), *U.S. Highball* (1958) and *Rotate the Body in all its Planes* (1961). (These films are now available on video).

Returning to the University of Illinois in 1959, Partch staged another version of *The Bewitched*, this time with choreography by Joyce Trisler. He was to remain at the school for nearly 3 years, though his affiliation was with departments other than music; The Department of Speech and Theater, and the Activities Board of the Student Union. Thanks to this support, he was able to stage two more major theater works: *Revelation in the Courthouse Park* and *Water! Water!*.

Moving next to Petaluma, California, Partch set up another studio where he began work on *And on the Seventh Day Petals Fell in Petaluma*. But this was also short-lived. He was forced again to move, and this time he chose southern California, where he would spend the last 10 years of his life, living in or setting up studios in Van Nuys, Venice, San Diego, Solana Beach, Los Angeles, and Encintas. His last theater work, *Delusion of the Fury*, was performed at UCLA in January of 1969.

By the mid 60's, Partch was beginning to get the recognition he deserved. He belatedly received grants and awards from the Pasadena Art Museum (1965), the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1966) and the San Francisco Art Institute (1966) along with the first commercially released recordings of his music.

Partch's final composition was *The Dreamer that Remains*, written for the film produced by Betty Freeman, a patron and promoter of Partch's work from 1964, and who had established the Harry Partch Foundation.

Harry Partch died in San Diego on September 3, 1974 of a heart attack. In accordance with his wishes, Danlee Mitchell had Partch's body cremated and his ashes scattered over the Pacific. Mitchell was to be the inheritor of all of Partch's belongings, including the scores, instruments, and writings.

In 1989, Mitchell loaned the instruments to Dean Drummond and his ensemble *Newband*. After *Newband's* excellent performance of *The Wayward* at the Bang on a Can Festival in New York in 1991, Mitchell made the loan permanent. Because of this there has been an increase in performances of Partch's work, notably the 1997 production of *Oedipus* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In addition, *Newband* has encouraged and commissioned composers young and old to write for the instruments, creating a whole new repertoire in Partch's microtonal system. These developments mark a new chapter in the history of America's first microtonal composer, one that will surely extend well into the next millennium.

#### **PART 2: GENESIS OF A THEORY**

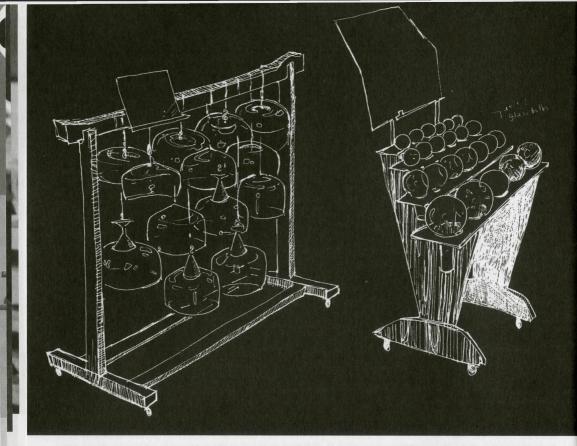
(The history of temperaments is long and complex. Anyone interested should consult the sources listed for a more complete explanation.)

Just as Pythagoras was to provide a starting point for Partch's theories, Pythagoras, ironically, must also be credited with generating the idea that led ultimately to Equal Temperament: the cycle of 5ths.

Dividing a string into 3 parts – a number that held critical significance for Pythagoras in its representation of the tetractys, (the pyramid of dots; an equilateral triangle with 10 equally spaced dots inside, which according to Theon of Smyrna revealed to the initiate the mystery of universal nature), – Pythagoras generated the interval of a perfect 5th. By continuing the process, generating a fifth above the 5th, he was able to construct the heptatonic scale. But this process did not yield a cycle. The generating of ascending perfect 5ths produces a never-ending spiral in that the 12th 5th is close in pitch to the 1st, but is sharp by 23.5 cents. This remainder is known as the Pythagorean Comma. Pythagoras didn't accept this irrational spiral, and adjusted all of the 5ths flat by 23.5/12 cents so that they would fit into 1 octave, and yield his divine circle. His actions are manifest of changes that occurred to the human psyche around 600 BC, referred to by the composer Dane Rudhyar as "The Great Mutation": the gradual replacement of Mysticism with Rationalism.

Partch's innovations came through the rejection of the Pythagorean idea of ascending 5ths, instead basing his scale instead on a fundamental law of acoustics, the Overtone Series.

Equal temperament (the intonation system that most western music is based on) was a later development of Pythagoreanism, and is a system of intonation which ultimately resulted from the development



of fixed pitch keyboard instruments in the mid 14th century. Europe's musicians were determined to have keyboards because of the ease in which they could produce major chords as never before, a sound that the people of Europe loved. But it was soon realized that the freedom of intonation they were so used to in the voice would be a tremendous task to apply to keyboards.

"Theorists and builders wanted to apply the Just Intonation of the Ptolemaic Sequence [the modern diatonic major scale in Just Intonation], but they were prevented from doing so by the limitations of (1) comprehension; (2) the mechanics of instrument construction (3) the hand; and (4) the familiar notation."

In other words the technology and education at the time would not allow for such a complex system to be realized, and it was because of this that the compromise of Equal temperament was adopted.

#### **BRIEF EXPLANATIONS OF TEMPERAMENTS**

When two pitches of differing frequency are sounded together or in succession there is a relationship between them, and it is this relationship that the ear senses and is known as an *interval* in Western music theory. In physical terms, the two notes are related by a comparison of their wavelengths, and the resulting combination represented by their ratio.

"By plucking a string of a given tension and then while plucking it while it is stopped at the exact midpoint, we produce the interval two parts to one part, or one vibration to two vibrations, the ratio 2/1."

Since the ear hears two simultaneous tones in a small ratio as sounding consonant, Just Intonation uses pure intervals and refers to pitches not by note name but by ratios, all relating to an arbitrary 1/1 ratio, analogous to the open string referred to above. In Equal Temperament, the pitches become more important than the intervals as the demands of harmony and modulation necessitate that pitch identities are fixed throughout the 12 diatonic keys. If we attempt to tune the intervals Just in one key, they will not sound Just in a remote key, in other words, a Just 'E' in the key of 'C' would be different than a Just 'E' in the key of 'C#'. The compromise is made so that the 'E' is equally in (or out) of tune in both



keys. This compromise was brought about to necessitate the advancement of musical composition, around the time of Bach, enabling composers more freedom to modulate and use all 12 keys equally, and to use more complex harmonies.

Today, Equal Temperament's uniformity makes it the perfect tool for creating music in a commodity based culture/economy. Although we have the technology to make viable complex systems of temperament, these possibilities have only been explored on the fringe. Equal Temperament possibly represents a convenience demanded of today's global economy. But the widespread domination of equal temperament as an unfortunate by-product of imperialism has impoverished world music culture. The following quote from a letter sent to Partch, which he published in his book Genesis of a Music, illustrates this:

"To go back from Equal Temperament on keyed instruments is to scrap the music of two centuries. We may have entered on an evil course-it has ruined singing for instance-but we shall have to go on with it... The Indians are up against it too: they have imported the harmonium, the issue of which is inevitably European harmony, though they don't know it. A 25-note harmonium has been invented for them but they won't use it-too difficult-they are settling down complacently on a 12 note scale, and contenting themselves with the dozen or so ragas it will play, and scrapping the many scores of them they used to sing... it's all very sad." -A.H. Fox-Strangways 5

#### PARTCH'S ANSWER TO EQUAL TEMPERAMENT

Harry Partch's theory was a lifelong endeavor and work in progress. His book Genesis of a Music was written as an explanation of his theory and is too extensive to discuss here. What follows are Partch's summaries of "The Four Concepts".

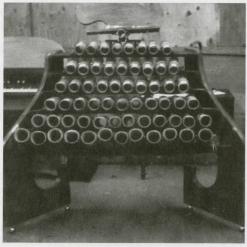
- "1. The scale of musical intervals begins with absolute consonance (1 to 1), and gradually progresses into an infinitude of dissonance, the consonance of the intervals decreasing as the odd numbers of their ratios increase." [This is a property of the natural overtone series.] POSTULATE: Every ratio of a monophonic system is at least a dual identity.
- 2. Over-number tonality, or Otonality ("major") is an immutable faculty of the human ear.



bass marimba



cloud chamber bowls



the boos

3.Under number Tonality, or Utonality ("minor"), is the immutable faculty of ratios, which in turn represent an immutable faculty of the human ear.

4. In terms of consonance man's use of musical materials has followed the scale of musical intervals expressed as Concept One; from the earliest times it has progressed from the unison in the direction of the great infinitude of dissonance." <sup>9</sup>

With these 4 concepts, Partch established that major and minor tonalities could be explained as natural products of the overtone series, and consequently developed the 43 tone scale in which all of his works are written. Partch's new system of tonality required him to abandon almost all currently used musical instruments, and to create an array of instruments that are no less magnificent than the works written for them.

#### **PART 3: THE INSTRUMENTS**

(The following are descriptions of some of Harry Partch's instruments. For a more detailed and complete survey, see Partch's book *Genesis of a Music*. All quotes that follow are from chapter 12 & 13 of *Genesis of a Music*).

#### Chromelodeon I

The Chromelodeon is used in most of Partch's works. It is an old Harmonium that has had all of its reeds removed and retuned to Partch's original 43-degree monophonic system. The keyboard is only changed in the fact that the keys are painted and the ratios representing their pitch is indicated on the key.

"A very valuable adjunct of nearly all harmoniums are the knee swells. In U.S. Highball, the pulsing, rhythmic use of the right swell helps materially in pushing that freight train to Chicago."

#### **Kithara**

Partch's Kitharas are some of his most beautiful instruments. It is played either with the flesh of the hand or a special ring pick that Partch devised for the purpose. At the sides are sets of strings with movable glass Pyrex rods that act as movable bridges for glissandi or to access any higher tonality desired. These are used prominently in the majority of Partch's works.

#### **Surrogate Kithara**

was created to ease the burden of the Kithara part in the work Castor and Pollux, the part being broken up between the two instruments. It is smaller and can be played sitting down. This position allows for more complex use of the rod and for bending techniques similar to a Koto to be incorporated. It was used in the Dances, The Bewitched, Daphne on the Dunes among others.

#### The Harmonic Canon

is relatively simple in its conception, a rectangular box with 44 strings attached at one end to pegs. and the other to guitar tuners. The strings rest on various movable bridges, allow for great variety in the tuning. It can be played with mallets, picks either plucking individual strings, or strumming glissandos, or with fingers. The original Harmonic canon had 2 sets of 44 strings and a 14" Pyrex rod under the bottom set for further controlling intonation. "The harmonic canon idea (harmonic law) is that of a glorified multiple monochord, and once the design and placement of bridges and the tuning of strings is decided, at least half of the creative concept is established. And this half may be just as imaginative as the writing of actual notes."

#### The Quadrangularis Reversum

is a later development of Partch's Diamond Marimba, an instrument that illustrated his theory in its design. "This instrument is the theoretical Tonality Diamond brought to practical tonal life." The diamond has at its lower point the 1/1 ratio, and extends to the right with Tonalities, and to the left with Utonalities. (the overtone series, Otonality, and its inverse Utonality).

#### The Bass Marimba

consists of 11 vertical-grain, Sitka-spruce blocks, the longest 53" and the shortest 27". The resonators are the lower ends of organ pipes with plungers at the closed ends to allow adjustments in the volume of air. Four kinds of mallets are used, as well as the tips of fingers. Occasionally large sheepskin-covered mallets are played directly over the resonators for maximum resonance. Because of the height of the resonators required for good low-end response, the player must stand on a riser to play.

#### The Marimba Eroica

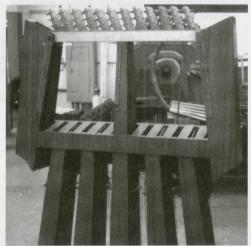
This is one of Partch's most interesting instruments. a 4 note marimba which produces very low tones. Each note is roughly the size of an upright piano, the resonators being large empty plywood boxes and the block a long redwood timber suspended on foam. The mallets are very large and weigh about 4 pounds each.

#### The Boos (Bamboo Marimba)

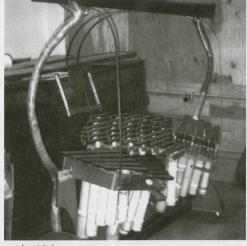
are constructed usually of bamboo with tuned tongues, though the one currently used is made from PVC tubing, and is less prone to tuning fluctuations from the material. The cylinders are laid out in 6 rows, in descending order of size from the bottom to top and mallets are usually used. Boos give "dry sounds, sharp in character and short in duration."



chromolodeon



kithara



quadrangularis reversum

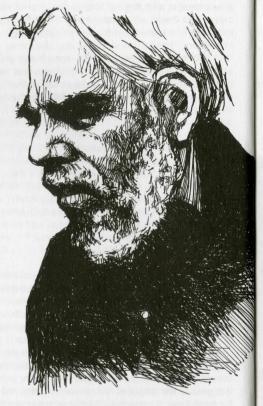
#### The Cloud Chamber Bowls

are fourteen sections of 12 gallon Pyrex carboys, suspended from a redwood frame in seven vertical lines by rope and s hooks. The original carboys used were found at the Radiation Laboratory glass shop at the University of California, Berkeley in 1950. "I discovered that a very beautiful but complex sound could be produced if the center of a section was suspended by one hand, so that the edge was free, while the other hand struck with fingertips on the edge. As long as my experiments went on, I undoubtedly deprived various faculty wives of many punch and fish bowls."

#### The Mazda Marimba

is a delicate and soft instrument that is composed of various sized lightbulbs mounted in a frame and resting on foam. "The delightful sounds of the instrument resemble, more than anything else, the bubbling of a coffee percolator."

Throughout his life, Harry Partch was faced with resistance to his revolutionary and controversial ideas. His theories, writings, instruments, music and life can be seen as one unified act of transcendence, subversion and defiance. His struggle was nothing less than the millennia old fight against the expropriation of man through the development of autonomous technology and the destruction of nature. Partch ruled the technology required to complete his creative vision, a vital art, which never compromised its core of primitive sexual impulse, subversive to all systems of indoctrination and those that seek to regiment or commodify the creative spirit.



#### NOTES

**1.**Genesis p. 373 **2.** Biography p. 41 **3.** Ibid p. 48 **4.** Ibid p. 49 **5.** Bitter Music p.xx **6.** Genesis p. 375 **7.** Ibid p. 398 **8.** Ibid p. 392 **9.** Ibid p. 87-94

#### DISCOGRAPHY

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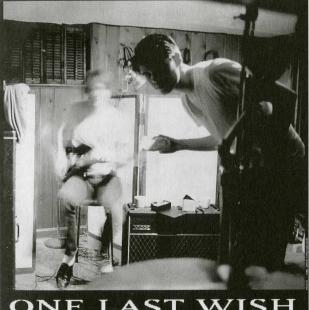
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BY JESSICA V. CHIL

Miles Kurosky, front man for San Francisco's Beulah, is a charmer. I was first won over two summers ago. Coming up Route 95, packed into a car too tiny to hold 5 smarmy restless passengers, someone put a tape of Beulah's first release into the deck. True, the earnest DIY pop aesthetic of *The Handsome Western States* may not have been unique. It was, however, unfamiliarly perfect. "The album of the summer!" someone declared. We rewound. We sung along. We were content, in transit.

It is Beulah's sophomore effort - When Your Heartstrings Break - that's been touted as "the album of the summer" this time around. Kurosky, once quoted as deeming his own band the No. 1 pop outfit in the world, seems non-plussed by the praise. Coloring slightly over the infamy of his cocksure premierrock-band-in-the-world quote he concedes, "I'm told I shouldn't be saying [things like] that anymore. I've said it once, put it out there, and now it's for everyone else to decide."

The second album does not warrant modesty. As one of the newer additions to the famed Elefant 6 collective, Beulah reveals an orchestrated, craftier version of its former self in *Heartstrings*. Hailed for maintaining catchy vocal hooks and clever lyrics while

feeding off a battery of instruments, Beulah have achieved a fuller sound. "It's mid-fi," Kurosky quips. And, as the taste for "sixties pop" persuades a growing number of pop fans to seek out vocal harmonies, keyboard, and allusions to the Beatles and Byrds, Beulah too have fallen prey to the pigeonholing.

"People are falling into a couple of camps. People love that first record and have some sort of attachment to it. And this new one, some people haven't. [They] like this thing or that thing... Hopefully they'll all fall into a third come the next album," Kurosky diplomatically notes. Critics have pointed to Elefant 6 as the source of Beulah's "vamped up" sound. The horns, the harmonies, and most prominently Rob Schneider's (of Apples In Stereo fame) lent vocals have aroused suspicion from fans and critics alike of Beulah as the simple extension of Elefant 6. Kurosky, however, like any sensible pop musician, seems disinterested in drawing comparisons or discussing trends.

"I just want to make great records... as great as I think the records I think are great. That's all I want to do. The fact is, we might not ever make what's considered a classic record, as great as we think like the Beatles, or the Velvets, or Love, but we're trying to.

We might be killing ourselves but we're trying."

And what of the dilemma that plagues any great record? What is the band's vision? Who is the audience and what are the end goals? Beulah is not one of those bands where the mention of an end-goal is a faux pas. Lyrically, as well as in the press, Kurosky has mentioned rock stardom more than once.

"Yeah, here comes the good part. I want to be rich and famous," Kurosky cracks. Becoming serious, he pauses for a minute. "I hope I have a couple more records in me. Longevity is important, sure. I'll just keeping making records 'til well... it's like The Who said, "I hope I die before I get old. I just hope I stop before I start making bad records. That's pretty much the motto to live by, isn't it?"

It is the sort of whole-hearted response we'd hope to hear from the front man of a group that juggles pop genuinity with bookish ingenuity ("Matter vs. Space," the third song on *Heartstrings* creatively narrates the history of California). Beulah's drive is not fueled by the desire for stardom or even the more sinister version of fame, the obscure sort costumed as sincerity. It is, after all, about music and ultimately, sound.

"It's about fidelity. I want things to be hi-fi. I don't mean hi-fi in the sense of slick production, right? I don't know the Webster's dictionary definition but fidelity, in my mind means true... like the truest replication of sounds. Whatever we record, I want it to be true to how it sounds... warm... it's hard to explain." For once, the lascivious Kurosky hesitates, "Pure, I don't want to make low-fi records anymore. It's limiting. I've already done it, and I don't want to continue doing it... You have to continue to progress, to make different records, don't you think? So we've already made a low-fi record, we've made a mid-fi record, now it's time to make a hi-fi record and keep trying different things. I think the band would be dismissed easily by people if you continue to make the same records over and over." He pauses and adds, "I'd dismiss us myself."

It must be this desire for progress in sound that necessitates a list of 18 instrumentalists

in the liner note of *Heartstrings*. When asked about the musicians, Kurosky states, "We're not that good as musicians. Enthusiasm is more important that proficiency in a way. I want everyone to be proficient but I don't think anything we do is that difficult for anyone, really. Anyone decent enough at any instrument could be in this band. Again, I'm more concerned with how people approach music as far as their enthusiasm and inventiveness." For a band often times dismissed for resurrecting sixties-pop, the main man in Beulah is actually focusing on progress.

"The third album is already done. We just have to record it," Kurosky confides later. "I can sing it to you right now. The whole thing," he adds, returning to sanguine charisma. What, I wonder, will be on the third, Beulah record? Drum n' bass? A full symphony?

"Maybe," he says cryptically. "It's not impossible."



Several weeks later, I am listening to a tape of the new Beulah record, on the train en route to Philadelphia. As the train races past Elizabeth, Harrison and Trenton, I think perhaps Beulah have struck at the perfect time. Beulah are intent on evolving their sound. Maybe it is the earnest desire to move forward, as well as stake those landmark records into pop's shrinking ground that charms us.

It could be our hypersensitivity to all things transient. Or, simply, a blithe love of melodic hooks and good pop. It is irrelevant in the end. I rewind, content, in transit.

# What have these old fools been up to for the past 18 years anyway?



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# U.S. MAPLE DRIPPING AND SOURING ON A STAGE NEAR YOU

DRITTING AND COCKING ON A CTAGE NEAR 100

BY SUZANNE CLARKE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC BRUNS

Describing US Maple's sound is not as imple task. In fact, the utmost authority on the band's sound - the band - refuses to offer any suggestions. "I only know the things that I like and the things that I pretend to be. I can't describe this band to anybody," said vocal front man Al Johnson. "You say that question and honestly I just go, 'Uh, you know, we're just a rock band.' It is a cop-out, but it's the truth." Both Dan Koretzky, owner of the Drag City label, and producer/musician Jim O'Rourke evaded the question. Koretzky said he describes US Maple "with tour dates." O'Rourke's response, albeit less sarcastic, didn't really get to the heart of the matter: "Hmmm, that's tough," wrote O' Rourke via e-mail. "I do think they are the first significant advance in 'rock language' in many, many years."

In a recent issue of *The Wire*, Sasha Frere-Jones wrote, "US Maple create music that actually sounds like post-rock."

"Whatever they have to say to get us an article in *The Wire* they can say because for two years they were chewing the cud on whether to even write about this band or not," said US Maple's front man Al Johnson.

Comparing US Maple to another band is like trying to hurl a 500 pound cinderblock at a poodle yapping a foot in front of you. If you could only lift it, you wouldn't miss. But you just can't. Yet music critics, record labels and friends want what might be undeliverable. US Maple presents a new sound, one that exists only because the band members exist. "Their overall effect is that of some sort of existentialist question, and I don't mean that in any pompous way," wrote O' Rourke. "For me their music is honest, challenging in the best way and cathartic in a most articulated way."

#### THE SYRUP RECIPE

The band's distinct charm can be broken up into three unwholesome ingredients: the guitar styles of Todd Rittman and Mark Shippy, the vocal characters of Al Johnson, and the growing unpredictability of drummer Pat Samson's beats.

Rittman and Shippy eschew effects pedals and other deviations from what might be considered "manual" guitar playing.
Rittman has dressed up his guitar to provide bass accents, while Shippy trips, swirls, and slides on trebly ground, often sounding like a Defense Department electronic gizmo gone berserk.

**Shippy:** Todd has the bass strings on the guitar, he's got the stereo output that goes into the bass and guitar amps. There's no effects. It's just that we feel it's better to do it manually instead of messing around. **Johnson:** It's all standard tuning except for maybe one song. He may turn down a string, but...

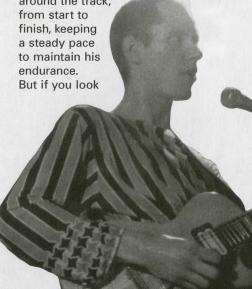
**Shippy:** Yeah, Todd may tune differently than me every now and then, but it's pretty much standard and there's no effects. We're not cluttered with all these effects.

**Johnson:** There's none really on any records.

Johnson has been crafting his vocal delivery since he and Shippy played together in the band Shorty. Back in the day, Johnson sounded more like AC/DC's Bon Scott. "Shorty wasn't as good as US Maple and it was more complacent and more obvious," said Johnson. Since then, he has struggled to animate various characters within himself. Johnson insists those characters are not inspired by the mental patients he cared for while working nights at a halfway house in Chicago with other members of the Skin Graft label.

"Honestly it's about getting up in front of a bunch of people and like the old rock bands, being the lead singer and the lead guy and not really having a real way of singing and not having the energy and the schtick and the chops and all that," he explained. Johnson does not so much sing as mutate real words with muffled, almost drunken exclamations.

Drummer Pat Samson is the witty one, the honest engine, the whippersnapper. And he's got the beats down and up. Samson has a dual personality in the studio, that of the bandleader and the smart-ass kid in the back row marching out of step. Picture yourself in a blimp looking down on a racetrack: this thoroughbred from afar appears to be running laps around the track,



[listen!] real close, a keen eye will detect that he's actually skipping, crawling, zig-zagging, cartwheeling, and sprinting. Equally a Janus on stage, Samson occasionally looks over his shoulder and hollers off into the distance, possibly yelling obscenities at Johnson.

#### No. 3, THE BLACK ALBUM

With the release of their third album, *Talker*, US Maple is attracting larger and wider audiences at their live performances, selling more records than ever before, and inching towards their definition of success: failure.

The band owes much of their recent attention to the crew at Drag City. "It's a perfect match, not just because they're selling records, but because they're six or seven people who are passionate about their jobs and do their jobs well." Which leads to the second reason US Maple is doing so well. "Out of all the bands on Skin Graft, nobody toured like this band, nobody worked as hard as this band, nobody was stuck in the middle of Virginia like this band," said Johnson. "That had a lot to do with why we had left Skin Graft-- because we needed support to back up our actions."

Johnson: It's like when you're touring as much as we are, you need...

Samson: ...somebody behind the scenes to really kick ass.

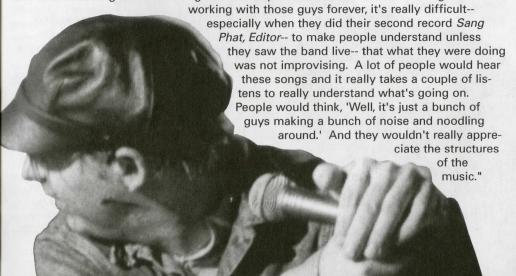
**Johnson:** You need somebody out there answering phones and you need somebody to make it successful.

**Samson:** It's made a huge difference. Drag City has like a huge team of people working for them. And it's just made touring and press and everything a lot easier. And Mark [Mark Fischer, owner of Skin Graft Records] only has him and maybe one or two other guys. It makes it really hard for a band to have a successful bout.

**Johnson:** We're out playing six months a year, if you don't have somebody back at the label you're gonna end up beating each other up and hating each other and just devolving. We want to make sure that doesn't happen.

C'mon guys. Would US Maple be where they are today if it weren't for Mark Fischer, who signs on bands that other labels will having nothing to do with? Possibly. But a lot of bands that start out on Skin Graft do so because, like US Maple, they are not easily aligned with music on other labels, independents included.

"Most of the bands that we work with here, most of the bands that we-- I mean they're all a little bananas," said Mark. "And I can't imagine any other label outside of us or Drag City that could handle a band like US Maple because I think that they require a lot of work and a lot of talking to. After doing two US Maple records over here and a single and



Johnson: I think this band potentially can appeal to the scummy heavy metal kid and it can also appeal to the cardigan wearing Knitting Factory crowd as well. There's a lot of things happening a lot of times at once. I think there are a lot of things going on there, I don't think it's exclusive, I don't think it's for "these kinds" of people. I see these kinds of people building over time. over time, over time just because we're touring. I've always thought there was something there for a wide audience and it's just getting it to them. And I think that Drag City enables us to get our shit to them. I mean, think about it. We were at Skin Graft for how many years? Three years? Four years? Right?

Samson: Three and a half.

**Johnson:** Okay that's two albums, a few singles, a lot of touring, right? We move to Drag City and two months after the records out we've sold twice as many records...

**Samson:** ...as all other records combined. **Johnson:** Exactly. And I don't want to put a focus on the records or the money because it's not about that.

Samson: [with sarcasm] It's definitely NOT about the money.

**Johnson:** Right. [pointing to Rittman] Look at that tank-top for crying out loud!

**Rittman:** Hey, I paid for this out of my own pocket.

Johnson: It's just about the band being at a certain place in our lives whereby we're doing what we should be doing, we have a label that is doing what

they

should be doing and if all those elements are working together, we're going to be out there for people. They are going to be able to find the record and they are going to be able to read about the band. It all makes sense to me.

#### **FALLING AND FAILING**

Yet underlying all this talk of success, failure rumbles in a sort of theatrical plight on stage, as a form of motivation and expression. "I really want it to be this struggle that people can actually see, where I come out and it's this bout that begins and then you kind of see me slipping and slipping and slipping and sweating and sweating and sweating and sweating back and fighting back and fighting back and at the end it's always a loss, but it's a good loss," said Johnson.

US Maple will gladly discuss the subject of where they are coming from, where they are headed and what it is they are trying to achieve, although they will argue about it.

"I mean the ideas are in place from the first record until now," said Johnson. For Samson, it's just a matter of slicing and dicing. "It's becoming harder and

harder to write songs.

Every record, it's becoming just more and more painfully difficult to write these songs."

Johnson chimes in, "As it should be."

Samson: And because you're boiling down, you're ist getting to the essence of these ideas. You know, whatever our overall ideas are, you're just getting down to the what, or at least that's what we're hoping. I mean it's the direction that I'm hoping that we're going in. So it's gonna get to the point where we can no longer write. It's gonna just get harder and harder

as we go, but...

**Rittman:** That's true. I've always felt that we've been our own best competition all along. And it's always been really hard to write songs. In hindsight, you'd say that the first record, the structures are a lot more easily understood than the new one, but because to us we've had the whole history of our entire repertoire.

**Shippy:** The analogy of like the first record, we were starting out. We built this thing up and then we tore it down with the second one. And then the third one, we're kind of building things up again.

Johnson: Well, it's very practical right. We start as a band, you have a blank slate, we create something out of nothing. Okav. that's the first record. And then, you build relationships and you write songs and you tour and then you've got the second record, which is a conglomeration of all these things. All this work, all this stuff. And then, you think, only after that second record you can really start getting outside of it, macroing out and changing it and making decisions. I mean, you can say what you want about the first record, it's this and the second record is that. But regardless, personally I think Talker rocks more than any of the records because, Pat's right, we have come to the essence. The essence is us and we've started early. Rittman: Well, we're always trying to get back to that blank slate when we're writing music.

Shippy: I mean it's reconstructed.
Johnson: [interrupting Shippy] There you
go, Captain Beefheart, go ahead...
Shippy: I'm talking in a literal sense, Al, I
mean you can say what you want. But
what I'm saying is, in a literal sense, we
don't usually express our direction in
words too well. We don't say, 'well, we're
gonna do this,' and lay it out.

#### IT'S JUST ROCK!

But some fans argue that with each new album, because of all the trimming and chopping, the band is falling out of the rock realm. "I'm not sure if that's really even true," responded Rittman. "Personally, I feel that the music is so internalized that to me it's basically like any pop music I know of, the rules of how our music works. So it's not even really a consideration, it's not a

forethought to me. It is what it is. I think it does rock. And if we're getting more rock or getting less rock that's not an issue." Johnson affirmed, "I think we all feel that we're a rock band mostly more than anything. And because we feel that way, you're either rocking or you're not. I think people instantly know that and I think we instantly know that."

These guys are acutely aware of their place in the current rock scene. "Consider where we come from and how old we are. We're all in our thirties. Who's under thirty in this band? Anybody?" asked Johnson.
Rittman responded, "Not anymore."
"Oh shit, interview over!" yelled Johnson as he pretended to walk out of the room. "We all come from this era of hard rock bands. We all grew up going to see Judas Priest and Journey and Pink Floyd. This is where we're from, right, and so we feel we're doing the same thing, but we're not doing it ten years ago."

#### TRIGGER RUT

US Maple also managed to latch onto a Pavement tour, which increased their already present audience of baseball cap wearing guys. According to Johnson, they got the gig after "Steve Malkmus was turned on to us by Dave Berman, who's from Silver Jews. From that point, they just asked us. It started out being two shows, a couple of shows, then it was four shows, then it was a whole tour. And that's how that came about." Touring with Pavement was an experience. Numerous people in the crowd booed their performance and, at times, even begged them to stop playing. "If they had tomatoes, they would have thrown them," said Mark Fischer. According to Johnson, the band was only heckled in a couple of cities on that tour. But Samson set the record straight, "We get heckled in every city by somebody."

**Johnson:** ...but there's 2000 of them. **Samson:** Yeah, there's 2000 Pavementheads.

**Johnson:** But it's not as bad as people like to make it out to be.

**Samson:** It seemed to get better and better as we went along.

Shippy: Every night the audience was very

polarized. Sometimes the people who were against us were more vocal, sometimes it was the other way around. More often than not it was just a perfect mix of that. Occasionally, the audience was yelling at each other.

**Johnson:** And we would play shows-- I remember shows that we would play, like in San Francisco, where we'd be playing three nights in a row and you would see the same people in the first two rows hating you the first two nights and then loving us on the third night. And it's nice to see that transformation.

**Samson:** Plus, that whole situation, that polarized audience, really adds to our set. Once we kind of got used to what was going on, which was maybe after two or three shows, it's part of the theatrics to be yelled at and you take your inspiration from those moments.

Johnson: I mean, we've been getting yelled at for years.

#### **IMPROVISATION**

The ehaotic drama US Maple brings to their live performance lends clarity to Johnson's indecipherable lyrics and credence to the band's claim that they're not improvising on their albums. This is not to suggest that by attending a US Maple show you'll be able to figure it all out. "Some people, like at the Pavement shows, decide per song. 'I love this song, I'm going to scream now. I hate this song, you suck.' So there's all these variables happening and because of that situation, this has been happening since day one, because of this, we've gone inward," said Johnson. "And that's why you're seeing dialogue and that's why you're seeing this narrative that's happening between the band." Yet, watching the band communicate in an insulated fashion gives the appearance that there is improvisation on stage.

**Shippy:** The music is all perfectly organized before we play any shows. **Johnson:** Yeah, but she's discussing about our directions on stage. **Samson:** No. We're doing the same thing we do on the record.

Rittman: The composition is still the same.

Johnson: Yeah, but it happens differently every night...

**Rittman:** Of course, but, I would say that it's as much of an improvisation as dialogue is. I mean, we're all familiar with the English language and on stage, we're all familiar with the language that are our songs. And it's easy to manipulate them and alter them on a moment to moment basis.

**Shippy:** The order of the parts never changes, but the parts might be, there might be a little more tension here or there.

**Samson:** So all the yelling that you hear on stage, it's either theatrics or it's honest to goodness like Al yelling at me because he's really mad...

**Johnson:** If you do a show like we do and it's not a song-stop-song format and it's a story that lasts about forty minutes, unless you play here tonight and it lasts about fifteen minutes, but if that happens where like you're doing this thing, it's almost like we have the ability to sort of control the time and space of every night and we do. But we have to do it on the spot and we have to do it by communicating with each other and it has to be outbound because we're all playing and we're all performing. That's what's happening.

**Rittman:** Another factor to that whole thing is we're always aware of the space that we're playing in every night. That's different. Yeah, we're very conscious of just the shape of the room, where people are standing and that affects how we interact with the audience and how we can move around. Ultimately, it ends up affecting how our songs go. We're aware of that enough to where we're in control.

**Johnson:** There's conversation on stage about it, for sure. Because a lot of times we'll get to a certain place where we need to get our heads together about it and there's a lot of conversation on stage about where to go and how to get back to it. And these guys will take something and stretch it so far further than they did two nights ago and now we have to vocalize what we have to get back, what we have to get back to the song because it's about songs and it's not about parts.

**Rittman:** We put a lot of thought into every aspect of everything we do from recording to performing.

The band does little pre-show planning because they have been playing together long enough that everything unfolds on it's own. "Most of the shows that we've played and still to this day, you know, it's a battle. It's still a battle and it has been a battle for a long time. So every night it's this thing where we come out and do it and we begin at 12:15 and by 1am... I can see from my perspective whether we've sort of won or lost or have befuddled everybody," said Johnson. "And every night it ends up being this kind of war. I don't think we're an aggressive band, I don't think it's about being aggressive, that's easy."

#### TALKING STUDIO

Recording Talker, the band embarked on a new adventure. They left Chicago, shacked up with Michael Gira [Swans, Circus Mort, Body Lovers], and then flew to London for mastering. Their past two albums, Sang Phat, Editor [1995] and Long Hair in Three Stages [1997], were produced at home with Jim O' Rourke. "Working with Jim, for the first time - we were Jim's first rock band that he's ever recorded - knowing that he had recorded, knowing that he liked the band was a nice thing. But the first thing was almost an experiment," said Johnson. "He gives input, he's an intelligent guy and he knows how to record bands. He's really great with miking techniques, but we could say anything and he would almost be okay with everything. And the same sort of modus operandi happened on the second record."

"It was more an engineering job," wrote O' Rourke. "I wouldn't say I 'produced.' It was their thing. We would talk a lot, about how I saw/heard it as a listener, and this seemed to be a good way to get discussions going as to what they wanted. It was my job to get as close as possible to what they wanted."

But US Maple was itching for a new sound with their third album. Gira and Jon Spencer chased the band down a flight of

stairs after a US Maple gig in New York City. It was at this moment that Gira expressed interest in recording the band's next album.

Johnson: We felt that Michael Gira was coming from a different area. An area that we wanted to maybe explore. Which is this idea of, like, I think with his bands like the Bodylovers or the Swans, there's real intimacy and there's this whole idea of song and intense and there's a depthness to his records. And those things we wanted and we also wanted to do it with somebody we didn't really know so well. And we wanted to do it out of town. It was nice to record in Brooklyn for a couple of weeks, to go somewhere. And we lived at the studio for a couple of weeks to do it with him. And it was great working because he was very passionate about the band. He had a lot of ideas about the band and it was a nice tug of war, which is what should happen. It's somebody who wants to produce your record. It shouldn't just be, 'I'm gonna record a practice, these songs you're writing.' It should be his concerns versus our concerns and then we try and get to the songs and then we try and work them out. I mean it happened actually quite nicely. There were no problems. Maybe he lost his shit a couple times, but so did we. Shippy: He called us Chicago-purists now and then, but, I don't think that -- he knows that we were willing to deal with his input. Johnson: But the thing with Michael is that he wanted to, you know he was very familiar with the songs because we had sent them to him early, early on. His idea was to build them up with like harpsichords and all kinds of instruments, build and build and build and build. When in fact, we had done just the opposite, which is strip and strip and strip and strip... And so when we got together, that was always the natural tension between us, which is, 'Oh you don't want to add all these elements, well, hey it's your record. If that's what you want to do.' Shippy: He still had a good feeling about what we were doing.

**Johnson:** No, no, no. It's not a bad thing. It's just, you know, if you listen to the

there's some synth parts that he played...

Shippy: It's subtle...

**Johnson:** It's subtle, you know, it's minimal. He has a really strong work ethic. He was always having us get up at like 11 or 12 o' clock and working until 2 or 3 in the morning every night. And then we'd go out and drink until 4 or 5.

**Shippy:** But it was great too, like if we'd done like five takes say on a song and we were just like, 'Okay, one of those has got to be good,' he might say, 'well there's something good about this one, there's something good about this one, do it again.' He was listening to it the whole time, too, and listening to every little detail. He was really paying attention. **Johnson:** It's nice to have somebody on the outside to say that. Like 'that was good, but you just played it better before and it'd be best if I do it again.' And that's the idea, that's what producers do. They don't do much more, you know.

And for the most part, everybody in the band is happy with how the album turned out. "I mean, we flew to Abbey Road, we flew to London to master it," Johnson said. "And to master it to copper plate, which is like what, say what a lot of the old bands did like Queen and Led Zeppelin, and then have it pressed on really heavy vinyl, so that if you have the vinyl you can sort of hear and feel real, sort of like an analog recording. We did all of this stuff, we did it with Michael to get the depth, we went to Abbey Road to get this, we did all these steps so that in the end it would be in the best possible format that we chose initially."

#### **FACTORY WORK**

Currently, the band does most of its songwriting in a large locker room with big wash basins and showers located in a steel wire factory. "It's very cheap," said Johnson. "We practice on average at least three times a week, unless we're playing all the time, which is what we've been doing for maybe a year and a half or two years." According to Samson, they work all day. "Every last one of us works all day at a job. And then we practice for like an hour or two or three hours in the evening."

**Johnson:** Unless, you know, if we're in a writing mode then we'll practice four or five, sometimes all of the week. I mean, depending on what we're doing. We've been playing quite a bit, quite regularly, for the last year and a half. So when we get together and practice now, it is to run through the set because we've been at home resting for a few days.... After this we're going to play more Pavement dates, we're gonna go to Europe for four weeks. Then we are going to stop playing and we're going to write. And we're not going to play for months.

Samson: Right, until Sonic Youth asks us to...

**Johnson:** I can tell you we write so many songs, we throw so much away, so much away. So if there's nine songs on an album after 8 months it's because we've thrown away fifteen songs.

**Shippy:** So it might be more of a process of elimination initially.

**Johnson:** For me it's, you know there are elements of humor in the band, which I think is different from being silly or funny. You know because silly or funny lasts about a second, and humor can last a very long time. There's nice things about it. We're very serious about this.

**Shippy:** The feeling and idea of direction is there, it's just saying, 'well, this or that' and just plain plotting it out on a chart. We're trying to all add our own inputs.

**Johnson:** On a common note, we're very serious about there being songs and it being at least listened to or taken seriously, so I think when we feel like we're crossing that line of it being like silly or it's just so much satire that it doesn't really register on people, it only

registers as being silly and a one off and a pie in the face.

**Shippy:** That's a definite constant for our direction as far as what we're actually doing, technically.

#### IN THE END...

A little verbal prodding and repetitive questioning forced Johnson to lay down his guns and offer a sketch of the band. "I think if you go see a band like the Make-up or Jon Spencer or certain bands, I think you can expect a couple of things and you know if you like those things, you can go. And I think that it's hard to kind of get a hold of us and I still think that. And if that's not true, tell me, but it is," said Johnson. "And I think there are sexual elements to the band and I think it's ugly and I think it's that these guys can play really quite well and I think it's outta control and it's in control, it's all these things. And so I understand fully why it's hard to write about the band, talk about the band, describe the band, attend our shows. I understand that. Because all those things are true. I can't describe the band to anybody else. It's true. There's no shtick in this band."

The unsettling solo instrumental intro on *Talker* is devilishly reminiscent of the zither piece at the start of Carol Reed's *The Third Man*. And US Maple – like Orson Welles' character Harry Lime – projects upon itself a tragic end of epic proportions.

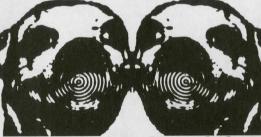
**Shippy:** I think that's somewhat deliberate. Well, the concept of failure in itself is kind of abstract. You could be succeeding at failing. **Johnson:** I certainly hope I am.

The zither-like guitar line evokes an awk-wardly calm and sweltering island atmosphere for Johnson's war lingo. At the end of the film, Lime's best friend shoots him in the underground sewers of Vienna. Care to take a guess at which band member is aiming for Johnson?



BY MICHAEL ROHLY AND CATHY FITZHUGH

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William Winant is one of the best and busiest avant-garde percussionists working today. He has tapped on tablas, struck gongs of all sizes, rapped on flowerpots, stroked water drums, rattled baker's pans, played kanjira harps, pulled clock coils, knocked tortoise shells, and struck many a jalatarong in the name of rhythm. He teaches contemporary music for percussion and percussion ensembles at UC Santa Cruz, UC Berkeley, and is an artist in residence at Mills College, where he has a studio, teaches, and performs. He's played with, among others, James Tenney, Chris Brown, John Zorn, Sonic Youth, Anthony Braxton, Mr. Bungle, Kronos Quartet, Steve Reich, Yo Yo Ma, Oingo Boingo, and Lou Harrison.





#### Q: When did you first start listening to contemporary classical music?

A: In high school. There was a gang of people and we were listening to all kinds of people. I think I first started listening to avant-garde jazz and free jazz and from there branched out into listening to Stravinsky and Terry Riley and people like that, second, third year in high school.

#### Q: Were you reading any music theory at that point?

A: In high school I was taking some beginning harmony and music lessons and playing drums. I was improvising with some friends and playing in some blues bands.

#### Q: Were you at Cal-Arts for dance?

A: No, I started doing dance in high-school. I took modern dance as a way to avoid gym. They were so horny to have boys in the class that they didn't make us wear gym clothes or shorts, we could just go in and wear street clothes. We didn't have to take showers or anything like that. Got to lift girls...I did that for two years.

#### Q: What took you to Cal-Arts?



A: I had a really good friend named Michael Byron and he was going to Cal-Arts. He said I should go there. I first went to City College because I had terrible grades in high school, so I was relegated to that for a while, but Cal-Arts didn't require good grades if you did a good audition so what I did was I worked for a year on auditioning to get in.

#### Q: What was Cal-Arts like at that point?

A: It was dedicated to contemporary music. The focus was on avant-garde music, and at the same time they were interested in world music. The school was just starting: Walt Disney died, and one of his dreams, which he put in his will, was to have an arts school where all of the arts would be taught in one building. It took a long time to get it going, but eventually it came together as a combination of the LA Conservatory and some art institute or something. They combined, and the general idea was to have the most interesting artists from around the country come there to teach in a loose environment. They hired a guy called Mel Powel who came to Cal-Arts from Yale, I think, and Mel Powel used to play in the Benny Goodman Quartet, and he used to be in those old Danny Kaye movies, and he was a really famous piano player, and later on in life he stopped playing iazz and became interested in the Schönberg twelve-tone school of music and became very famous as a composer in that style. He was one of the people in charge of putting together the music department, and he brought in the best and most wigged-out people from all over the country to teach various instruments or composition, so it was a very forward-looking school and that's why it was so interesting. It was very open-ended with a lot of weird people. I was there seriously for a year and a half, and then I started playing with The Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo and doing that more and playing truant at Cal-Arts until I dropped out, so I was probably there for two years.

#### Q: Who or what has taught you the most about music?

A: I learned most of what I know through colleagues or friends that I was working with at the time. When I was young I had a group of friends that I hung out with and we learned together. Later on it would be James Tenney, Lou Harrison, Michael Byron, David Rosenboom, John Zorn, people like that who I end up working with and collaborating with.

## Q: What do you think people should know about contemporary music that they might not know now?

A: The music is much more abstract and layered. It's always been willing to take chances with experimenting and has always been able to take the chance that it might work or, not work. That's what I like about it. There's so much going on in some of these pieces that they can't be listened to once. That's what makes it fun is that you can find different things each time you listen.

#### Q: Fun is sometimes not associated with contemporary music.

A: Some composers are very funny that you wouldn't necessarily think about as funny...maybe Shostakovich. Frederick Rzwesai was saying that he thought that that guy was the funniest composer around. Milton Babbitt is a big musical theatre buff and a big baseball fan. You just don't know. James Tenney was involved with the Fluxus movement, which was laughing at everything, almost coming out of Dada and Marcel DuChamp. John Cage did a lot of things with a lot of irony, and he was laughing all the way to the bank sometimes. I think there's a lot of humour in this kind of music, but you have to listen to it. Certain pieces of Cage's are very humorous, like "The Aria for Solo Voice" or "Credo in U.S." where he's using radios or old records, and those pieces are humorous and you can hear people laughing. Now there are a lot of composers that throw in weird things that might seem funny. It's a cliche that all the music is super-serious. think when people think of contemporary music they're thinking of a specific style, this sort of pointillistic, serialistic twelve-tone kind of music, but there's a wider range out there, with pieces that are tongue-incheek and composers testing limits. The stereotype is humourlessness, which in itself is funny. There is a movie Lipstick, Margaux Hemingway's first movie. That movie was about a serial rapist who was an avant-garde contemporary music composer. I think he was an electronic composer who studied with a master composer called Sean Page, and he wrote this really weird music that no-one liked. They actually brought this music into the courtroom, made the jury listen to it and it was obvious that it was this horrible noise: obviously this guy was deranged to compose music like that. It was pretty interesting, and at the end Margaux Hemingway shaves his balls off.

#### Q: What role does a percussionist usually fill in new music?

A: In Western classical music for a long time percussion was reserved for fanfares and explosive

moments, but later on with people like Debussy and Stravinsky they started to use percussion more for exotic qualities or colouring, creating a more interesting orchestration by adding all these sounds; I thin that's how composers are using percussion now, for colour and expressiveness and an exotic sound. Percussion also opens things up for a lot of composers. They can compose for things that don't necessarily have to do with pitch. Other elements come in: noise, colour, and other avenues of sound.

#### Q: Have you ever had any "eureka" moments figuring out music?

A: I had moments, but it was more seeing music that inspired me and made me decide "that's what I want to do" or inspired me to go home and practice for eight or ten hours a day.

#### Q: How often does that happen now?

A: Less. Every once in a while I see something that is totally inspiring, but back then I would say seeing Sun Ra for the first time was one of those moments, or going to see Anthony Braxton playing with Chick Corea at the Lighthouse was one, or seeing or hearing a Terry Riley piece or seeing Cecil Taylor for the first time.

#### Q: What's inspiring to a percussionist about a Terry Riley piece? Listening to one of those can be...long.

A: I think at the time, "In C" was probably the first piece I heard, it was something different, and I liked the fact that the score was printed on the back of the album cover so that anyone could play the piece. seemed like a new concept; it had a rock-and-roll aesthetic in that it was pulsed and had a beat. A lot o new music at the time was very abstract, without a melody you could hum, or a beat to tap your foot to and Riley's pieces had a constant pulse and simple melodies, so it was a breath of fresh air in some ways.

#### Q: Have attitudes towards contemporary classical music changed?

A: More and more young people are into it, and it's crossed over into jazz and popular music. That's a good thing. This late in the century there aren't as many divisions. There used to be classical music, and film music, and everybody had their own camps and what was outside of what you did was not as good. Over the last fifty years because of mass media and recordings, so much music is available so easily to everyone that people, including artists and composers, are listening to much more diverse kinds of music and are more aware of what's going on because of television and movies and so on. Music is now more of a blend of a lot of things.

#### Q: Do you prefer to read music or improvise it?

A: It depends on who I'm playing with and what the music is. I like doing both. And then how maybe much money I'm being paid. But it depends on who I'm improvising with or whose music I'm reading. A: Both. Most pieces involve a bit of each, if it's good. Steve Reich for a while, was in a rut, and most of probably do more of the reading style because I get paid more to do that, it's how I make a living. I'm probably at my most creative when I'm improvising. I'm not a composer and I'm not interested in composition. I consider myself more of a technician.

#### Q: If crazier musics hadn't been around when you were playing music would you have been A: When I get up in the morning, get a cup of coffee and start listening to records and CD's. And every satisfied playing a regular, limited, style of music?

A: I don't think so. I think as I started getting into music I never just wanted to stay in one area I was all Indian audience, and it was at some high school in Menlo park. interested in rock, and blues, and I was finding myself constantly looking for new kinds of music, exploring all sorts of different sounds and looking for different things to play. I was always attracted to the weirder end of things.

#### Q: There's a form of music called Drum and Bass that has no drums or bass in it. What do you think of that?

devices, can all work well with real percussion. There's no threat there.

#### Q: What are your favourite instruments to play?

A: I just got a brand-new marimba and I really like that. I like all kinds of instruments, there are just so many. I like small drums, I like tambourines...I'm really into tambourines.

#### Q: Who is a jerk?

A: The people who stole Sonic Youth's truck and instruments.

#### O: Who are you itching to play with?

A: Bjork. And, I wouldn't mind working with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company; I really like what they're doing now especially with Jim O'Rourke. That would be a lot of fun. It's a unique experience, it's very loose, they let the musicians pretty much do whatever they want to do. The musicians have a lot of creative input: the dancers do what they do, and the musicians do what they do and then they put it together and see what happens. Even after all the years they've been doing it, it still somehow seems like a very fresh and exciting thing.

#### Q: What makes for a bad performance of a good piece?

A: Not enough rehearsal. For a contemporary notated piece, it's the rehearsal. Good musicians, a good conductor, and lots and lots of rehearsal time.

#### O: What about audiences?

A: You just play the music because you like it. I've flown all across the world to do a concert where there are 10 people in the audience, that's not unusual. And then, when I toured with Steve Reich, even a long time ago, he always got large audiences that drew standing ovations. I've been lucky, it seems like mosty audiences are fairly enthusiastic.

#### Q: What do people need to have within themselves to be able to improvise in an interesting way?

A: Don't go into it with too many preconceptions. Be a good listener and have a technique to work with. Be ready for anything. There's more of a chance of things going wrong in an improvised piece of music. When you're improvising you're really putting yourself out there and taking a chance. If it's not happening, it's really not happening. It's also what is so great about it: when you're improvising you don't know what the outcome is going to be.

#### Q: Does interesting music ever come from boring people?

A: Yeah, probably. But, my favorite kind of music is playing my favorite peoples' music. Knowing the person behind the music is important to me. If the person is a drag, I don't want to play their music.

#### Q: Fast or slow?

his pieces were fast.

#### Q: What's the best way to listen to music?

once in a while, I go to concerts. I just went a saw these South Indian violinists about a month ago, and it was a three and a half hour concert that was inspiring. We were the only Westerners there: it was an

#### Q: What is it about world music that's so crucial?

A: It's well performed and it's got a tradition that reaches back hundreds of years, so when you're hearing it, you're hearing something that's been perfected. Some of these performers have been working on their craft their entire lives, and when you hear it you can feel the kind of work that has gone into it, and it's amazing. People like Debussy were really influenced by Indonesian music. Reich loved and was influ-A: That music is fine. It's not at all a problem for percussionists. Samples and sequencers and electronic enced by Balinese music and West African drumming; they were coincidentally working with similar techniques. Terry Riley was interested in Indian music, Jon Hassel was interested in adapting Indian music for the trumpet. It's natural. Sixty years ago, as a teacher Henry Cowell said that composers should know more than one type of music. Luckily it's become easier and easier to hear international music. You can go into a record store, and there are huge sections of CD's from all around the world.

#### Q: Why drums and not ocarina?

A: It was the easiest thing to learn. I'm a musical idiot, and drums were something you could bang on...they were just there.

#### Q: What are you most proud of?

A: Recently I'm most proud of the new Mr. Bungle record, and the work I've been doing with Sonic Youth. We're doing an avant garde, classical record. We've recorded the work of John Cage, Christian Wolff, Takehisa Kosugi, Yoko Ono, Pauline Oliveros and people like that. Me and Jim O'Rourke and Kosugi helped Sonic Youth put it all together...

#### Q: What records would you have liked to have been a part of?

A: I would have loved to have played on the Beach Boys records. To have been able to play on *Pet Sounds* or the *Smile* sessions would have been a dream come true to me. To work with Brian Wilson...that would have been amazing.

#### Q: What was it like to play with some of the folks you've played with over the years?

A: With Zorn I've done a lot of work: both improvisation and notated music. Some of those pieces (like Elegy and Kristalnacht) are composed on 3x5 index cards and each card has a musical figure, an idea, or an improv sketch. A piece might have a hundred cards and he sequences them out and we record each little piece, one at a time, in the order they will appear on the record. We make it as it goes along with no editing; it's done live in the studio. Everything is used. He knows exactly what he wants. Then there are other pieces that are more straight ahead and notated.

Bungle is a completely different kind of thing. You're learning songs, or with the new record, it's all specific parts that are highly orchestrated. I have to work really hard to get all my parts right. I want to play perfectly well. It's great to be working with these people that are from a completely different generation than me. It's inspiring, they're all such great musicians. It's a honour really, to see how they work.

With Kronos it was interesting to be a part of the rehearsal and getting to see how they tear a piece apart. When you're playing with a quartet and doing chamber music there's no conductor, so you've got to figure out who's going to cue whom. It's all signals. They're thorough and very dedicated. It was exciting because they have created a large following for contemporary music, so it was fun to tour with them because they always had large and interested audiences.

With Braxton and Rosenboom I had a trio which was saxophone, percussion and electronics. We mostly worked with pieces that were semi-composed and semi-improvised.

With Yo Yo Ma I just finished doing a new piece by Lou Harrison. It's quintet that features cello, percussion, violin, and viola. It's 12 movements long and was written as a ballet for the Mark Morris dance group. There are all different types of music with combinations of instruments playing different parts.

#### Q: What's so cool about Kim and Thurston?

A: Kim has really good taste in art: I like her aesthetic. She was the one who turned me on to a lot of avant-garde jazz in high school. She has always had a very wide knowledge of music. I like the two of them because they're very open and loose and yet at the same time, they're very serious and interested in what they are doing. I'd never worked with the whole band before this last project. They're all well-read in what they're doing; they have a wide knowledge of what's out there that extends far beyond the rock and roll world and they bring a lot of those influences into their music. When I listen to their stuff, I can hear LaMonte Young, Steve Reich, and John Cage, as well as the rock influences.

### Q: There is a line in a Kiss song that goes "You watch me beating my drums, and you know what my hands can do."

A: Wow. There was a period in the 70's when I have to admit I was a total new-music snob, and I was just practicing 8 or 9 hours a day and was only listening to avant-garde, from 1975 through 1978 I never heard popular music. A lot of that stuff passed me by. Even Queen for example, and certainly Kiss. Now I'm catching up on it. You rediscover things and how great they were and think "How did I miss that?"

#### Q: Do you really feel like you missed out?

A: I don't feel like I missed out, but you realize a whole era has passed you by because you were so busy doing something else. And certain bands, like now I hear Queen and think "What didn't I get? This is amazing music."



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Henry Cowell

John Cage: First Construction, Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano

Conlon Nancarrow: any of his player piano pieces

Karlheinz Stockhausen: Kontakte, Gruppen, Hymnen

Morton Feldman: Rothko Chapel

Terry Riley: In C

John Zorn: Spillane, The Big Gundown, Naked City

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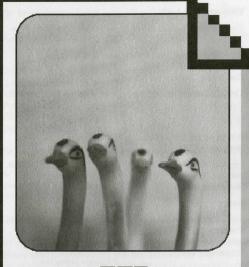
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By Raj Thadani

Art makes waves, waves make art, and the FCC doesn't like it.

While planing a trip to the annual Burning Man festival (which focuses on large-scale art installation) in the Nevada desert, Chris Vecchio was confronted with the problem of transporting his entry, a sculpture, by plane from Philadelphia. His solution to the problem was a creation entitled The Poetron. It's medium was not your typical stone or bronze. The Poetron relied on radio waves. The Poetron is an art installation that was made from a low-powered FM broadcast band radio transmitter, an electronic text-tospeech converter, and a small single-board computer. This combination of gadgetry reads poetry and broadcasts it on the FM band. Those who tune in hear offerings like these:

> Matters of the heart let the reptile brain decide marry based on smell.

Love is just finding someone whose pathologies complement your own.

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SUV asshole driving through spring's warm caress he has the air on.

While he doesn't feel the content of the broadcast is very important, he feels the medium for its delivery is of the utmost importance. To emphasize this point The Poetron is subtitled "The Medium is the Sculpture." He refers to it as "Part installation, part sculpture, part performance." "The Poetron has created a surprising bit of a stir and has raised freedom of speech issues I did not initially recognize" he continues. If Vecchio had been aware of the events to come he might have subtitled it "The Medium is the Controversy."

The Poetron was listed in the Burning Man pre-festival guide and Vecchio received a lot of positive feedback on the concept via email. However, it was underpowered for the actual festival. Given the four-mile radius of the campground and 1000 foot radius of The Poetron, Vecchio did not get much attention from attendees. However, upon returning to Philadelphia, he set it up again in his living room. He told a few friends and neighbors about it but made no other attempt to publicize it. The automated transmitter toiled along in relative anonymity, broadcasting haiku and other poetry to a small area of South Philadelphia until a reporter from the

Philadelphia Inquirer stumbled upon it while driving through the neighborhood. With a little investigation the reporter identified the source of the unusual broadcasts and wrote a story (Mark Davis - "BELLA VISTA'S POET OF THE AIRWAVES CHRIS VECCHIO'S RADIO FORMAT IS ALL HAIKU, ALL DAY. BUT IS IT LEGAL?" 11/03/98) about The Poetron.

As part of his research for the story, Davis contacted the General manager of the Trenton radio station, WWFM, which operates at the same frequency. The general manager, Walt Gradski, said that The Poetron, "a pirate radio station," was illegal. He also filed a complaint with the FCC. Vecchio had anticipated trouble from the FCC but not quite so soon. "I knew that sooner or later there would be publicity and then, inevitably, heat from the FCC." The Gradski call to the FCC sped up the process and created the problem Vecchio had tried to avoid. "I chose my frequency of operation (89.1 MHz) based upon the fact that Philadelphia is not in their area of coverage. On top of this, WWFM operates a repeater in Philadelphia which re-broadcasts their signal at 107.9 so anyone who would want to receive them can do so, loud and clear, at this frequency."



Vecchio telephoned Gradski after the Inquirer article was printed and the FCC complaint was filed. He wanted to explain that he had no desire to interfere with WWFM, that he had even taken steps to insure that he would not interfere with anyone by choosing a frequency that seemed unused in the area. Gradski responded by telling him the reporter had gotten it wrong. He had no problem with The Poetron. Gradski told him that WWFM had been having interference problems with the input to their repeater (which sits on top of Society Hill Towers) but that their engineer had made some measurements, and determining that the interference was from a station in Baltimore, not from Vecchio's transmitter. Vecchio speculates that Gradski was not honest with him. "Five minutes after I hung-up the phone with him I got a call at work from the FCC and the FCC did not know my work number."

Gradski, for his part says that even though the signal is rebroadcast at 107.9 FM the signal travels to the retransmission tower via 89.1 FM. When he was informed by the Inquirer reporter he notified the FCC but he says the reporter misinformed him saying that the

Poetron was reaching a three or four block radius. His finding was that The Poetron's broadcast range was closer to half a block. He felt operation at this level was legal and not a threat to WWFM's retransmission. He also says that he has never had a problem with pirate radio, but that anyone operating outside the specific FCC guidelines should be shut down.

Despite Gradski's diagnosis, the FCC quickly took action to stop The Poetron. "I told the FCC that in my estimation the thing was legal and met the Part 15 unlicensed low power guidelines. They said their preliminary measurements indicated otherwise. I promised to temporarily shut off The Poetron and made an appointment to meet with the FCC guys the following Monday morning saying that I would appreciate their help in assuring that the thing was in compliance. That Sunday night/Monday morning I called them to reschedule the meeting because I was at work until 3AM on Sunday night and had to be back to work early on Monday. They came anyway, ringing my doorbell a half-hour early, and calling my work to find out where I was.

I did not let them in. They called me again at work that afternoon to ask me to turn the thing back on. I said I wouldn't do that until I could ensure compliance. At this point the FCC agent became annoyed and said he had better things to do than provide free testing services for me. The more I think about it, the more I think that this was probably a trick and that it was good I didn't meet with them. I had intended the meeting to be evidence of a good faith effort on my part to comply with regulations. However, from what I hear about the FCC, they don't give a fuck about good faith. They probably just wanted a chance to assess my equipment and gather evidence for possible future legal action. This was a very low power installation that existed only over a few block area and generated no complaints, only messages of support, from people in the community (the 3 blocks surrounding my house). It's amazing to me that while supposedly acting as custodians of the public airwaves, the FCC seems to do nothing but prevent any sort of independent, creative, community-based use of those airwaves."

According to Part 15 of the FCC Rules and Regulations, unlicensed radio broadcasts are permitted at levels that limit coverage to a range of approximately 500 to 1000 feet. Violation of this rule is punishable by up to \$11,000 in civil penalties and criminal penalties of up to \$100,000 and up to one year in prison for a first time offense. The ambiguity of the rules and the severity of the penalties have made most low power radio broadcasters hesitant to tangle with the FCC. As a result Vecchio has not attempted to restart his broadcasts.

Vecchio is now working for a small engineering firm (he holds a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from Drexel University) in suburban Philadelphia. He is also continuing his artistic pursuits as a member of the Nexus Foundation for Today's Art. The first solo exhibition of his work was held this past April at Nexus. There are plans to include the Poetron in an upcoming show this fall at a prominent Old City art gallery. Stay tuned, the controversy may continue.



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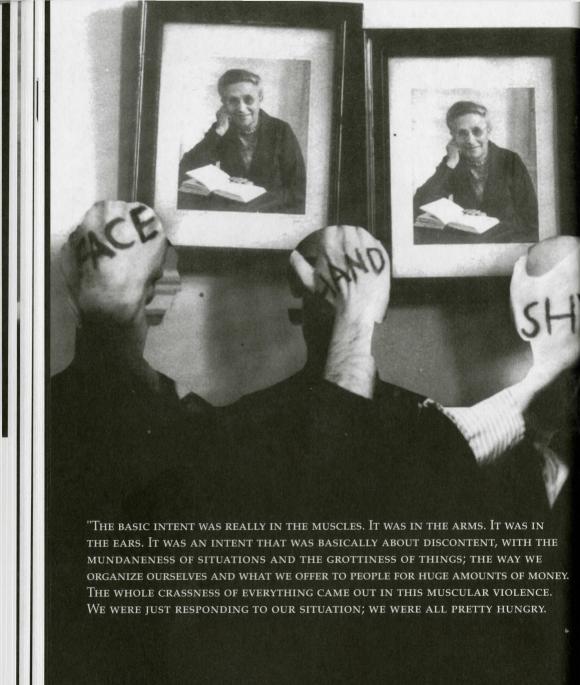
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by brent burton

# THIS HEAT

This Heat formed in London in 1976 and quickly distinguished itself as one of the most unique-sounding bands of the punk era. The trio of Charles Bullen (guitar, clarinet, viola, vocals and tapes), Charles Hayward (drums, keyboards, guitar, vocals and tapes) and Gareth Williams (keyboards, guitar, bass, vocals and tapes) seamlessly melded dub reggae techniques, punk rock aggression, and prescient experimentation into a sound that was both remarkably diverse and aesthetically unified. Propelled by muscular drumming, atmospheric tape loops, and textured guitar work, the group sonicly paved the way for everyone from post-punkers like Public Image Ltd. (circa Second Edition) to current avant rock bands like Tortoise.

In March 1999, I spoke with Charles Hayward about the origins and history of This Heat, as well as the music he has made in the band's aftermath.

"I started playing piano in about '56 and then research. So someone approached Bill and me t drums in about '61 or '62. Then there was a school band [Quiet Sun] that started in about 1968, which was with Phil Manzanera and Bill MacCormick. That went through to about the beginning of 1972. Then Bill joined Matching Mole and Phil joined Roxy Music. The reunion was a very brief thing--a rehearsal period of maybe two or three afternoons. That produced the album Mainstream."

After Quiet Sun folded in 1972, Hayward served a short stint drumming for Gong." [It was a] very brief period: about 8 weeks, 10 weeks at the most. There was a period when they had an endless stream of drummers and most of them aren't on record at all, including me. Some of them would reappear twice -- Laurie Allan for instance. Pip Pyle was one. There was me. There was somebody else -- maybe the drummer from Caravan for a brief period. Camembert Electrique was out, and they'd already toured in Britain with Kevin Ayers, because I saw them.

Soon after leaving Gong, Hayward met Charles From the start, This Heat was influenced Bullen and the duo began playing improvised music as Dolphin Logic, a project they described as "a living room duet."

"I think I left Gong in August or early September of '72, and I met Charles Bullen either in late September or by early November of '72. Bullen was playing a Fender Telecaster, but he was preparing it. He was weaving crocodile clips or chopsticks in and out of the actual guitar strings. I was playing drums and also a bit of melodica. There were points where we hit very slow meditative places, and then it would slowly become this big, dense jungle of sound. We were like chamber music in a strange sort of way. I was also in a more sort of jazz-rock sort of thing, never played any gigs at all, but rehearsed a lot. Charles Bullen was in soul bands that played in pubs. I was also in Amazing

The trio of Hayward, Bullen and Williams initially came together as a result of Hayward's bid to capitalize on the success of Mainstream.

"I'd been in Quiet Sun, made the record, and the "The basic intent was really in the muscles. It was record sold reasonably well for that sort of music. Bill MacCormick and I were both at loose ends: Matching Mole had finished, and I was moving

particular one. Phil Manzanera, meanwhile, was in Roxy Music and doing very nicely, thank you, in that sort of world. Dave Jarrett, the keyboard player was back at Oxford doing his mathematical see if we wanted to reform Quiet Sun or make a Quiet Sun II. We'd get Phil Manzanera in for the first two or three gigs, but those gigs would be very high profile--you know, the Victoria Theatre. So Bill and I looked at each other and thought, well there's nothing else better to do at the moment, let's try and do that. We tried all these different guitarists and settled on Charles Bullen. We tried to get a lead singer or somebody who was like an additional percussionist or something, and Charles and I suggested Gareth, who was living in Cambridge. We met up with him before he actually became a player, He had this absolutely gorgeous record collection. He came down to London for an audition, and Bill and Gareth really hated each other. It eventually ended up with Bill leaving and Gareth staying, and the whole thing becoming something completely different. It became clear that Charles and I should be working with Gareth, so we started rehearsing in January of '76, and by February the 13th we were doing our first gig."

by diverse sounds from around the globe.

"We were actually listening to huge amounts of dub reggae and we were copping all the studio techniques. I mean '24 Track Loop' wouldn't have happened without dub reggae. We were also lis tening to gamelan and also music from New Guinea -- flute music. We were listening to Harry Partch and bits and pieces of John Cage, although we had problems with Cage, insofar as he seemed to have abandoned intent. We were applying those techniques, but we were still maintaining a certain sense of control. We listened to people sometimes because we didn't like them. We could argue with that music. What else did we listen to? Liberation music from Africa, because there was a lot of armed struggle going on in Africa at the time There was the struggle with the Portugese that was just north of South Africa. They had a lot of fantastic guitar music. Also Sun Ra.

The intensity of This Heat's work was largel indebted to extra-musical concerns.

in the arms. It was in the ears. It was an intent that was basically about discontent, with the mundane ness of situations and the grottiness of things; th through all these groups without settling on any way we organize ourselves and what we offer to

people for huge amounts of money. The whole crassness of everything came out in this muscular violence. We were just responding to our situation; we were all pretty hungry. We tried not to have a particular dogma about what we would and wouldn't do. What we wanted to say was more than just one particular attitude musically, so I think that's quite a contemporary way of being."

While they admired the technique and dedication of local avant-gardists like Derek Bailey, Evan Parker and John Stevens, This Heat ultimately found a greater kinship with the populist energy and connectivity of the emerging British punk scene. Comparing the earliest This Heat recordings with Quiet Sun's polite jazz/prog fusion reveals just how drastically punk altered Hayward's musical direction.

"We were just a little bit older than a lot of the people who were doing [punk]. We were 25 and some of them were 16, 17, and 18. But there was a sort of energy about not selling everything to the music industry, and about making what technology you had at your disposal, and what techniques you had at your disposal serve what you wanted to do. There was a certain anti-authoritarian stance that was immediately attractive to all of us. Some of the punk bands were more exploratory than their records ever seemed to be. They were often quite like interesting, sonic experiences. I'm particularly thinking of the very early Alternative TV, Mark Perry's group. I saw a couple of things that they did which were out of control, but in the most fantastic way! We aspired to something other than the dilettante, free-jazz scene as we saw it at that time. We wanted to look at some of the problems about why that music was communicating to so few people. We felt that there was a desire to communicate, which was happening in punk, that was more relevant. It was interesting that Johnny Rotten was at a This Heat gig and said, 'oh great band, but it's a pity they're sitting down,' because at the time, Charles Bullen was sitting down. That completely changed our attitude and made us think differently about what we were doing. We tried to become more physical in our reality on stage."

As evidenced by their 1977 Peel sessions (compiled on Made Available), This Heat quickly became a powerful live presence.

"We had a set that was one, big, long arc. Sometimes it would literally be a solid one-hour and ten-minutes-worth of music. There were other points when we needed to talk to the audience, because we were trying to make ourselves quite

clear in terms of what our messages were about. When we were coming up for a series of gigs, we would rehearse the set three times a day from beginning to end, as if it was just one long thing. It was very important to us that we had this very strong live thing, and although I love, dearly, the records, and those are the things that are left for people to actually listen to. The gig was actually the thing."

This Heat's brilliant, self-titled, debut album featured live practice and studio recordings from February 1976 through September 1978. It was released on David Cunningham's Piano label in September 1979.

"The people who wanted to move the punk scene along, to not let it lose its energy and become stylized, a lot of them came to the This Heat gigs, and amongst them were the journalists who wanted that to happen. They were clamoring to get the right to do the review. So it was quite well received, but I'm only talking about three music magazines.'

This Heat masterfully unified the band's "multiple systems" into a remarkably cohesive whole, which spanned from "outrageous tape edits" and ambient collective improvisation, to dub-influenced studio wizardry and mathematical guitar-drum interplay.

#### "Horizontal Hold"

"We originally started doing that when we were still rehearsing at my mom and dad's place. I was obsessed with the simplicity of the rhythm. I just kept banging away on it for about three days of rehearsal. We collected a load of different textures on tape, all centered around these events around the rhythm. We started orchestrating some of them and manipulating some of them, so that the first bar being played would be the second bar; that was the first thing that you heard. So it twisted the whole melody around. This is the earliest of the grid things. Some of This Heat's pieces were like rhythmic grids that we'd overlap and move one part of the grid against another. That was very interesting, because it was also one of the first things that we worked on with Gareth as an instrumentalist. For instance, we would discuss about rhythms always being in pairs and he would say, 'well, why?' There's this seven-bar thing in the middle of 'Horizontal Hold:, there's a quiet seven bars with a bell, and this was in direct response to Gareth's question. On Deceit, on the end of 'Cenotaph,' there's a verse that changes on the beginning of the eighth bar. In other words, the main texture of it is only seven bars long and that was a reapplication of the same idea.

"Not Waving"

"I heard this phrase: not waving but drowning. After I wrote the song, people told me that it was a Stevie Smith poem. I took that phrase and tried to turn it into something I could use because I'd been reading a lot of Joseph Conrad. So I started to fixate on the idea of water as an analogy and a way of conveying a lot of political ideas. So I started trying to tune in to these different ways of looking at water. That's the first of those songs where I did that."

"Water"

"That was from an improvisation in the studio, and Gareth took away a rough mix and played it on his machine at half-speed. Then he got another rough mix -- a different one -- and he played that on another machine at half-speed and he said, 'that sounds like a good idea.' He brought that back into the studio and reconstructed that. It was improvisation, but we cut out bits. The breath, we stuck right at the end of a note; that was a constructed moment. It's through the clarinet. Those two events were slightly further apart; we made them into one moment. We were manipulating improvisation, but then we also played it at half-speed and we also played it against itself, so we had it in almost semi-random delays. Then when the big tidal wave of sound towards the end came in, it just became quite obvious to us that it was called 'Water."

"Twilight Furniture"

"It was a song I'd had around for awhile, but Gareth had this little eight-note guitar sequence and he played it, and I worked out this drum part. It just came about quite quickly. I think it took something like four or five days. And then we recorded it on the same day as one of my oldest friend's funeral. I had this decision to either go to his funeral and cancel the studio, or do something intensely for my friend. I said to the others, 'it's either we get the whole track done in a day from recording right through to the mix, or I've got to go Gigs in Belgium, Scandinavia, Germany, Holland to this funeral and cancel.' So they said, 'okay, we'll get this done in a day,' and we did. It had a lot of intent about it and it was a way of us giving it a purpose and a shape."

"Rainforest"

"We did our first gig three weeks after we started; that's 'Rainforest' on the first album. We recorded ourselves quite obsessively. We just needed to have tape on all the time. Sometimes, because of poverty, we would make decisions about what tapes to wipe. But very soon we made a friend with somebody who worked in a tape-copying studio. This friend of ours would save all those things that were

slowly built up a collection of all the off-cuts from reel-to-reel, which would often be long, 20-minute stretches, and he'd put them together for us as reels. Throughout the history of This Heat, we had this endless supply of tape."

"Fall of Saigon"

"I was around a mate's house, and we were watching the television. Saigon was falling, and there was that amazing bit of footage of people clamoring onto the last helicopter on the roof of the embassy. It was all in silhouette, and there was a TV aerial involved, and I just remembered it being a really strong image. Then after that comes the local news, and there was some heavy-top article about a murder or plans to stop a motorway being built. Then, two or three articles down, there was this stupid story about a cat called Soda! He liked to drink whiskey, or something. That seemed quite a contrast to me: the Saigon thing happening and then there's this inane thing about this cat. Those two ideas, they just stuck there. Then I went home and wrote the song. I'd spent the summer alone in my parent's house -- this was in '75. I think I spent the whole time with three or four cassette machines just putting one idea down on one cassette machine, and then playing it very loud across onto the next one. So it was like totally primitive multi-tracking. This was five months after I'd made the Quiet Sun record in a quality studio. But I was really enjoying pushing myself to use this completely nonexistant technology to its nth degree and as imaginatively as possible. Every so often, I'd just go down to the living room, where this beautiful old piano is, and I'd knock out something on that, or I'd go to where the drum kit was and I'd do something on that. S I had this hour-and-a-half tape of things that I' just done over the summer. One of them was this early version of 'The Fall of Saigon.'"

and France followed the completion of This Heat Yet even before the first record hit the streets, This Heat began work on their next project, a 12" El titled Health & Efficiency, which was released or Piano/Rough Trade in September 1980.

"When we recorded Health & Efficiency, we also recorded the basic tracks for 'Paper Hats' and 'A New Kind of Water,' and the first section 'Makeshift Swahili.' We knew we were going t record Health & Efficiency and it wasn't part of this project we had in mind called *Deceit*. We recorded that in Cold Storage. We got a mobile recording studio to come and park itself outside the drive for two days. I was actually very happy with that way of working, because we still had the 24-track tape and we went and mixed it somewhere else Basically, it's live and then we overlapped some

going to be jettisoned and give them to us. He pre-recorded tape on top of that. We used to do photo-shoots with my wife, Leslie, next door [to Cold Storage] in this large gallery space, and I think one day we actually recorded the photo shoot. We wanted to actually photograph us making sound. We took it seriously, but we knew that it had to have a visual quality for it to be a photograph. So, it was this weird thing where we tried to do two things at once. It became quite playful and theatrical. I think that all the bottles rolling and the bits of melodica and all that stuff were from that weird photo shoot come recording session."

> Deceit was released in October 1981, and featured a more structured, less improvisational approach than the first record. The band's politics and terse, contrapuntal vocals were thrust firmly into the foreground on Deceit, pushing the music to new levels of intensity. The result is an unsung classic, which predicted much of the precision minimalism of American post-punk.

'Sleep"/"Shrinkwrap"

'Almost all the lyrics are taken from British TV commercials. They're all from frozen foods or about washing powders, or things like that. The melody is an old melody I had knocking about. We tried to do that track and 'Shrinkwrap' in parallel. 'Shrinkwrap' is the first track on side two. So, we used the same rhythm track and we recorded the vocals on one thing at one tempo, and we recorded the vocals for the other one sped up into another tempo. Then we tried to make it so that we could let little bits of 'Shrinkwrap' come forward inside 'Sleep,' and bits of 'Sleep' come forward inside 'Shrinkwrap.' So that was quite a bit of weird, heavy, brain-screwing work to get these two things to be in parallel, but at different tempos."

"Triumph"

"It's based on somebody going up a footpath, but knowing that there's some old lady looking through the curtains at them. And the idea that that person is looking, but is not seen and has control, has more power than the person who is being seen. There's a battle of the wills going on now between

> these eyes. It's about a very mundane power struggle turning into something much more megalomaniacal

later."

"S.P.Q.R."

"When the Roman army went out to war, the standard-bearer would hold an image of two children suckling at the breast of a wolf -- that was Romulus and Remus, these two abandoned children who became the founders of Rome -and underneath it would

be the letters S.P.Q.R., which means the senate and the people of Rome. Because it was at the front of the military, it was on behalf of the people of Rome, and then this carnage would take place. It was the most efficient form of organized carnage, and to facilitate this organized carnage, they made straight roads. Then, to do the quartermastering for all this, they had to know their math. There was this fantastic piece of photography of an autobahn in 1942 being used by the invading German army, then the same piece of autobahn in 1965, chockablock with holiday-makers, going in the opposite direction to the way the army was marching. There's a luxury system, a leisure industry, using a system which was basically there for the military in the first place. Teflon and all that kitchenware was initially used for military purposes. Everything we have, all these advances, they got their resonance, their source material, in military ideas, and then later on they become our CD players."

"Makeshift Swahili"

"First of all, there's a version we tried to record for the Deceit album. Then there's a version that we had already recorded, which cost a huge amount of money, and was quite a produced thing done around the time of the first album. So there's this guite, lush bit just before we cut into the mono cassette. We'd already spent a month and a half sending sounds up to the toilet via the speakers and all this sort of really crazy stuff. There was that already finished and mixed, but from a year or two beforehand. And then there was this mono cassette of an extremely impassioned, crazed version from a gig just outside of Brussels. Even though it's pretty badly recorded, that was probably the closest photograph to what we were like live.'

"A New Kind of Water"

"I had a piano tune that Charles Bullen really liked. We were improvising a lot in our rehearsal space, and we'd put the tape machine on. One of the things was around the opening bit, and then [Bullen] went into that strumming guitar thing and he started singing this tune of mine. That tune had been around for two years. So that was an indication of the way we used to work;

things were thrown into the central pool and shared, and sometimes they would just go into someone else's memory system. By then it was a very organic way of working. Everything was possible. It was fantastic! Then we worked more and more on the bass and drum part to make it so that Bullen could stay on the one guitar thing, and yet we could still make it do lots of difDavid Cunningham had got us all to work on an advertising campaign for the first This Heat album, which was in the form of little flags, little mottos. Gareth came up with a whole load of things; 'blue and vellow like smoke and cornflakes.' Another of Gareth's ones for that was 'A New Kind of Water,' which we thought was just insanely funny; this idea that something so elemental being sold to you again as something different. So that was one we stored away as an idea from a completely independent, almost pisstake, project 18 months beforehand. Basically, Bullen and I wrote the lyrics for that bit between us and then we had the opening sequence, but it just needed to have something about it that made it less 'we know what's happening' and more, 'God, I don't know what's happening.' The lyrics and the bass and the drums on the second section -- the bit that really charges along -were two parallel problems, and they seemed to be at the front of everyone's brains for about six weeks. It was really quite dense work."

Shortly after Deceit's release in 1981, Gareth Williams guit This Heat and moved to India to study traditional dance.

"He left pretty much as it was released. He'd gone once, but he didn't actually go back to study yet. He went and stayed in Germany for a while. I think he was studying for about two years, but he's also studied since then, back in London, at the School of Oriental and African Studies. As far as I can make out, he's accepted as quite an authority of certain aspects of Indian culture."

In the wake of Williams' departure, Hayward and Bullen recruited Trevor Goronwy (bass), Ian Hill (keyboards) and Stephen Rickard (live sound) to join This Heat for a 1982 tour of Holland, Germany, Czechoslovakia and Switzerland.

"A whole load of material became impossible, but by then, a certain degree of ideology had already set in. I was prepared to go along this road, where we changed, and we tried something else, but I didn't actually turn my back on the things that we'd done before. Whereas Bullen, to a certain extent, was starting to go through a period where he was going to disavow the earlier This Heat stuff. We should have carried on the Deceit lyrics thing and taken it to further heights. We didn't. We sort of found we had a tour and we had a couple of mates who could play, so we got them in very quickly. The wind had been taken out of our sails, completely, by Gareth leaving."

This Heat played their final show in the summer of 1982. By December of 1982, Hayward began

ferent things. We started working on lyrics, and recording with Goronwy and Rickard as Camberwell Now.

> "It's a long time before we actually played live. It's something like a year and a half, because we had to encourage Steve Rickard, who used to be the and then we'd spend quite a bit of time, just the Tzadik CD Funny Valentine. three of us, sitting around considering what notes could be the ones that would work on Steve's Thanks to London-based These records, all of This by then was a multi-track studio, and we'd spend pact disc. two afternoons building up two sounds. It was an extremely slow and laborious process. Then having these sounds and knowing that they were the ones for this particular song, we would then go in and rehearse them and find out exactly what the rhythm accompaniment to that was."

Camberwell Now released three recordings on RecRec: Meridian ep (1983), The Ghost Trade Ir (1986), and Greenfingers ep (1987). At their best, Camberwell Now combined the political insight and urgent physicality of This Heat into powerful anthems to the heroism of daily existence.

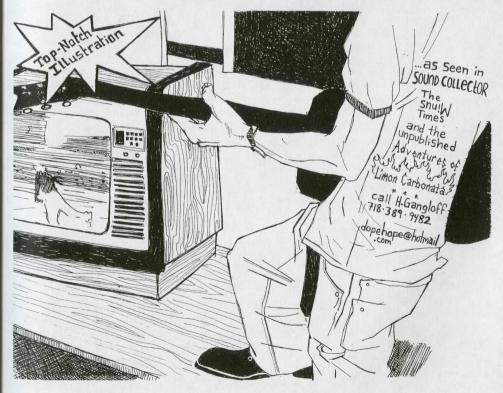
"The political started to melt down into everything. For instance, when I used to go to Rough Trade, to the office, I started going along on the Tube. It would be parallel to the Westway, which was this road that became a freeway a little bit further along, and someone had somehow or other, painted on this concrete along the side of this freeway this raised up road. I don't know how they did it but they'd written 'Eat Work Sleep Eat Work Sleep Eat Work Sleep Eat Work Sleep' all the way along this freeway. People on the Tube, their experience would be going to and from work and looking out and seeing this incredible feat, where somebody had written these three words over and over again. That seemed to me to be quite a political thing; this idea of eating, working, sleeping. On Deceit there was a lot of the use of the word 'they.' There was some use of the word 'you' and then I tried to make

it more about 'we.' Later on, when I started doing records completely on my own, I started allowing 'I' to come through. So it's been a question of bringing it back to what I actually can feel that I have the authority to actually talk about."

sound engineer, to become a musician. To do that, Of all of the ex-members of This Heat, Hayward he had to invent this instrument. The instrument remains the most musically active (although Bullen was four stereo-cassette machines (therefore two checks in every now and again as Circadian signals each). We would then feed each of these Rhythms). After Camberwell Now, Hayward eight separate signals through little Morse code released a string of solo albums on Sub Rosa: keys, very simple, little, contact switches. The tapes Survive the Gesture (1987), Skew Whiff (1989), Switch would be running all time, but you'd only hear on War (1991) and My Secret Alphabet (1993). He them when you actually contacted the switches. So also released three separate volumes titled Live In we had a very simple Mellotron, or we had a sam- Japan (Locus Solus), which document a week of pler that didn't constantly go back to the zero point 1996 concerts featuring collaborations with guieach time you made it come into play. Therefore we tarist Keiji Haino, turntablist Yoshihide Otomo, had to have a very simple network of notes that drummer Tatsuya Yoshida and tenor saxophonist would work harmonically, because we couldn't Peter Brotzmann. Most recently, Hayward joined have all 12 notes and then lots of octaves. So I'd Massacre -- Fred Frith and Bill Laswell's legendary usually come in with the basis of a song, or Trevor improvisational rock trio -- for a January 1998 would have a chord shape and I'd write the words recording session which produced the excellent

machine. Then we'd go into Cold Storage, which Heat's official releases are now available on com-





NOAH WALL IS

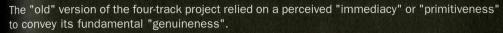
# **JUKEBOXER**

BY AARON MULLAN DRAWINGS BY HOPE

There was an attempt to have a band. There was one live show. But it was a four track project turned band turned four track project, completed in an unemployed summer spent in Queens Behind most of the songs could still be heard the ghost or the remains of a few chords on an acoustic guitar, but something else was going on. Moog lines were plentiful and multiple; the drum kit disappeared with the band. The percussion was done with a tambourine, household objects, or on a cheap keyboard. Vocals almost invariably went through some guitar pedal. The result was *The Ground Round*, a display of pop song craftsmanship the likes of which is rarely to be seen. Two years later, Noah is completing a second album, *Jukeboxer Learns the Alphabet* 

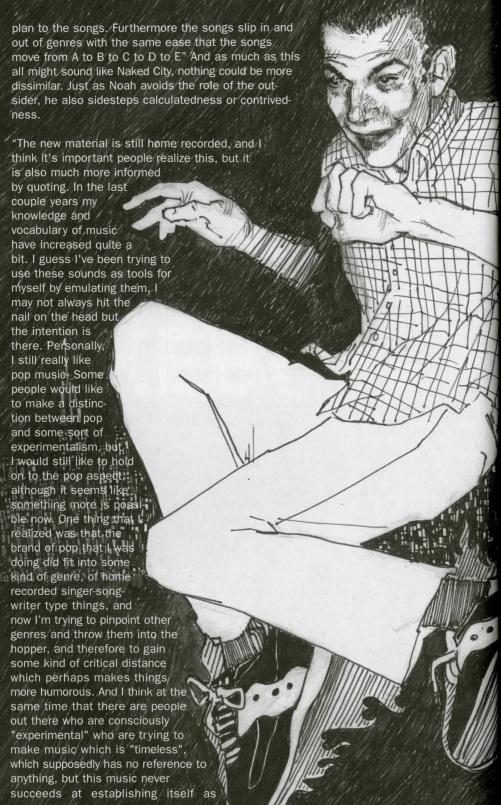
"The first Jukeboxer album was the product of me familiarizing myself with the cassette four-track. There was a long period before/during this familiarization that I felt was surrounded by hordes of indie rockers who were also 'four-trackin' and I always thought it was cool. I had played guitar and written songs but never really recorded them. For the most part, the first tape was a collection of songs that I had to figure out how to record in a cool way. I had very limited resources and I think that this made me try and do a lot with a little. I basically had a digital keyboard that I was borrowing, and I had just gotten the minimoog, there were guitars some percussion. There's always more instruments, mostly gadgets. More pedals, more toys and percussion instruments, toy pianos. I usually try and find the right instrument for a certain track. I don't just pick up the toy piano and do a song for the toy piano."

Noah's virtuosity with the 4-track could be compared to the guitar virtuosity of Andy Gill of the Gang of Four. There is an element of the self-taught, of the iconoclastic, and at the same time there is an eloquence of extended technique that makes you realize the guy knows what he's doing. It's a very different take on four-track recording than the one we are accustomed to



"Looking back on this period, I'm glad it happened but I don't think I'd want to do it again. It was never really about 'personal expression' and it always made me uncomfortable when Lou Barlow-A would ask Lou Barlow-B to come in his room for a private screening of his newest sentiment. I confess to being Lou Barlow-C for a while, I'd really get mired down in that bedroom and end up covered in wires wondering what time it was... The material is all home-recorded but I've tried especially with the new album to get away from the lo-fi sound usually associated with this local. I feel like people maybe associate lo-fi with some sort of integrity or earnestness that is a result of the artist's reluctance to 'sell out'. Even though I'm still doing home recording stuff, I'm trying to reference these things which are very different from the typical home recording; things which are regarded maybe as more commercial. That romantic idea of the artist as isolated persists in the veneration (and commercialization) of these outsider types doing home recording where it's like "He didn't leave his house for three years? This is great!". But what I think is interesting about these outsiders like the Shaggs or Joe Meek or Bruce Haak is that it's very commercial at the same time that it's very weird."

At a time when the critical power of lo-fi seems to have waned to its lowest, the Jukeboxer material seems to be asserting a different aspect of the four-track. The new material in specific is comprised of almost endless overdubs, which in part occur as Noah's instrument collecting intensifies, and in part are facilitated by a digital four-track. The arrangements are another striking aspect. There are plenty of catchy lines and complimentary parts, but the songs never seem to repeat themselves. Noah has enlisted a woman (Amy Jones) to share vocals with him, but even in the tracks with vocals, there is nothing like a verse-chorus-verse



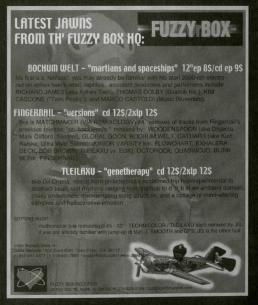
generic itself. Of course I like some of this music, which is kind of ironic, but beyond iust irony I think there can be a certain ambiguity in liking this music. For both experimental and pop music you can hopefully be critical of the genre and simultaneously rec- lary exists between the way one learns the ognize that you are implicated in the thing you are criticizing. I mean, it's not like I'm going to swear off the acoustic guitar because it's too tied up in this romantic four-track myth, I want that to be at my disposal too. I don't want to completely shun anything. Because it's the placement of the different elements in relation to each other that's important. It's more like choreography."

Ground Round and Jukeboxer Learns the Alphabet. Unlike the first, the new one is a concept album. Often the lyrics and song Everything has become much more geared to titles on the first album were arbitrary; funny word pairings such as "Frozen Dog", the title of an instrumental. But other old songs have a certain narrative theme such as "Cross- And as the recording seems to have neared a Country Blood Drive", about driving crosscountry collecting blood from people all over, getting their input. The new material channels these techniques into the theme of the alphabet. Song titles and lyrical content are determined by a specific aspect of the alphabet. For instance, a song about playing hangman or a mean schoolteacher, narratives and characters already familiar and accessible. And while the lyrical content and vocal styles may be accessible, the music oscillates between a friendly and often tongue-in-cheek familiarity, darker minimal sections, and occasional noise bursts. Noah has no samplers, MIDI tonebanks, (or even MIDI period); it is his revolving door of instrumentation which moves the tracks forward. And a setback like the fiery demise of the Wurlitzer only provides an opportunity to work in a Farfisa. This all adds up to a self-propelled and constant reconfiguration of letters and instruments which never ceases to be unsettling or silly.

"It's a concept album, but not on the grand scale. It's about someone learning the alphabet, which is a very puny concept. It's some-

having no reference to genre, because it is thing pretty much everyone has achieved or will achieve, as opposed to something insurmountable, or a fairytale or something. It's very mundane, overly derivative, as opposed to albums which tell someone's life story, like S.F. Sorrow or Tommy. But I think that a corolalphabet and the way that various genres of music appear on the record. You learn the alphabet by associating a letter with an already known concept; A is for Apple. And in that same way we associate twangy guitar with Western, feedback with improvisation. With the new material I feel like I've become more involved in perhaps isolating certain elements of a song and then changing how they relate to other aspects of the song. As Almost two years have passed between The the concept of the album has become clearer I have gone back and edited tracks that I may have considered finished a few months earlier. the album as a whole and how each track will play a part in this.'

> type of completion, the album has also begun to materialize in a form none other than that of a live band...



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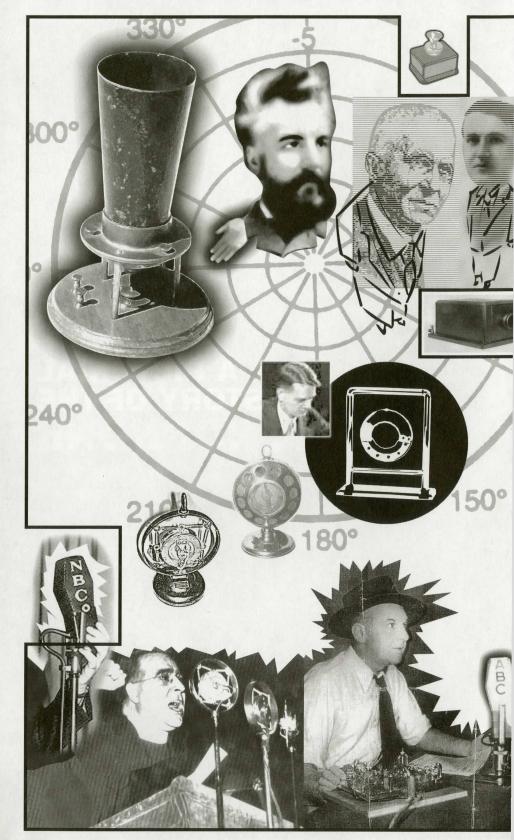
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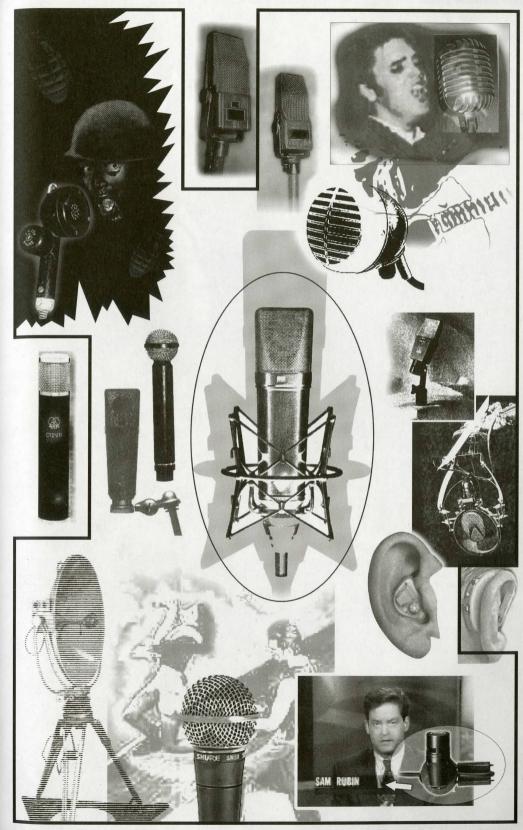
# REAGUER IN TONGUES

# A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE MICROPHONE

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SOUND COLLECTOR FOUR 57

soundcreator

# DAVIDS. WARE

On occasion to meet tenor saxophonist David S. Ware in Manhattan he suggested we meet in front of the Village Vanguard, one of the city's oldest and famous jazz clubs, on a cold, rainy Sunday afternoon in January 1999. The Ware Quartet with pianist and bassist William Parker and new-addition drummer Guillermo E. Brown (who replaced Susie Ibarra, who replaced Whit Dickey, who replaced Marc Edwards) are one of the most consistently phenomenal free-jazz bands of all time. The Ware Quartet has, however, ruled the 1990s, recording 11 albums for five labels and not leaving much to doubt. After jumping from the indies to sign with Columbia for his most recent album, Go See the World, Ware is turning more heads than ever before.

#### It's sort of ironic meeting here at the Village Vanguard. Have you ever played there before?

DSW: Yeah, I played there - actually I played there twice. First time was I think it was 1972 - opposite Sonny Rollins one night. That was when we were living in Boston and he invited us down to do that. The next time was in 1976 with Cecil Taylor for a week. I haven't been in there since then.

# Why do you think it is that clubs like this don't want bands like yours?

DSW: My experience about that situation is that it's basically a prejudice against the music, man. It's not economics - that's bullshit. It's not that we can't pack the place. You know what I'm saying -getting good crowds - it's not that. They don't like the music - that's the bottom line. They don't give a damn if the club is packed. They don't like the music. It's a threat to them on some level. That's my experience about that. The bottom line is prejudice. That's what you get. Not being welcomed into New York's jazz clubs forces you in alternative venues here.

## Do you think it hurts your ability to tour jazz clubs nationwide?

DSW: There really is no jazz circuit in America. When I was with Cecil Taylor, we played a few college concerts, and we played San Francisco the Keystone Corner at that time. I'm going back twenty-some years now. At that time you could have a club date for a week at a time. A lot of those places are no more or they don't do a week, or if they do, we're not welcome in that particular venue. We just came off the road, those weren't clubs; we played colleges, churches, things like that, a couple of theaters. You have to create your own circuit.

As far as breaking through recordings-wise, you now have a record on Sony, how has that experience been for you?

DSW: It's definitely a good thing. I think they are supporting us the best they can in our situation. They supported us on our first tour in America. It's beautiful man: There's a Sony in every country in the world, or just about. The gigs seem to be coming a little bit easier now. But, of course, we had a momentum with that. Columbia has just added a little bit of umph. We're going to be opening for Sonic Youth next month. That could be a whole 'nother door to open.

# How do you feel about that? You've grown up with jazz, but have you ever listened to rock music or been a fan of any rock bands?

DSW: The closest I been to that, man, was in the 1950s and '60s listening to Motown, listening to rhythm and blues. How do I feel about it? Basically, for the past five years, people have been saying that young kids from this alternative field have been checking us out, but it really hasn't gotten real until now. We haven't played any of those types of venues, but one club in North Carolina. Those venues really haven't opened up to us. This is the first situation like that. Maybe now all that talk of alternative audience can click in.

# When you talk about a jazz fans, those people are more interested in Wynton Marsalis and Joshua Redman. I think your music correlates more to bands like Sonic Youth.

DSW: You're absoultely right. We are a lot closer to that than the people you mentioned. I can see that aura around [Sonic youth] is much closer to us.

# What do you think it is that makes your music different from the music of Marsalis or Redman?

DSW: I am an intuitive musician. What I mean by that is whatever I understand about music I got it from an intuitive level. I'm not an intellectual musician. I'm not of that school. I'm not interested in recreating. I'm not interested in recreating someone's sound. I'm interested in open-ended music. Music of expression of the spirit, of the self, and also of the times - a reflection of the times, but not to the point where it's stifled.

#### You talk like you are a continuation.

DSW: I would like to think so. I'm building upon the cats I listened to - myriads of cats that I listened to in the 1960s when I was coming up and listening heavy and being influenced. I would like to think I'm continuing the line of all those cats.

# Do you think the musicians then had more opportunities to play clubs like the Village Vanguard?

DSW: Jazz clubs have always come and gone. They're there for a while and then they're gone and then something else pops up. There may have been more clubs to deal with in the 60s. Now my focus - I don't want to play no more clubs - I eventually want to get this music in the concert halls. Jazz festivals, theaters, concert halls; forget the clubs. Forget these smoke-filled rooms.

# Do you think jazz is put in that position becaue that's the history of it? Do you think jazz will get the same respect as Euro-centric music?

DSW: I think that it can be if, and it's a big damn if, the musicians deal more intelligently. Our approach to where, when, and how we work is not very intelligent, by and large. It's too many of us that are not adequate in what we do. I'm talking from the inside. There's too many of us that want to get out there and be leaders too quick when we don't have a concept yet. We're clogging up the system with shit that is not up to par. All of that is going to influence the image, the thing that we call jazz. All of that is knocking us, man. We really need to be smart and pull together. The youngsters coming on the scene, they should ask somebody. If you've gotten something in your mind you want to do, sit down and ask an older person about it, someone that's been out here 20 or 30 years longer than you. Don't come on the scene like you know everything and you've got it all figured out.

#### It's only been in the past 10 years that you've been recognized as a group leader on record, but how long have you been leading your own groups?

DSW: I've been leading my own groups since 1970, in Boston. From the very beginning I've been leading my own bands. In 1971 in Boston, I was in a band, then we came down to New York. Even [when I was] with Andrew [Cyrille] Cecil [Taylor] I had my own bands. I dropped out of sight a couple times, but it was basically, about 10 years ago that it's been steady stream of recordings and performances.

# When and how did you come to the decision to be a leader and not a part of other groups?

DSW: I've never done it any other kind of way. I've always had my own band. I've played with others. About 10 or 12 years ago I made a decision not to make any more commitments to anyone else. My own band has always been my focus. There have been times, when I went with Cecil, in my mind, that was like a dream come true for me to play with him. And so I respected that situation and I focused on that situation; I wasn't interested in working with nobody else. I said 'I'm with this band, I'm putting my commitment with this band

and that's it." I give the music that respect. I'm sorry that it didn't last longer than it did. But it's fine.

For the past decade, except for occasional drummer changes, you've held a consistent band with Matthew Shipp and William Parker. How important is it to have that consistency?

DSW: It's all important. I don't want to work any other way. That's how important it is.

#### Those are the only people you work with, but they in turn work with others. Do you think that brings any more to the band?

DSW: No. I don't think that brings any more to the band. You want to know the truth, I think it takes away from the band. I can't stop them from working with other people. But, If I had my ideal way, I would put them under contract. You play in the David S. Ware Quartet, here's the contract: Sign it, you don't work with anybody else, you work with this band, and you make a certain amount of money per year. That would be the way I would do it.

#### I want to talk about how you create your music. Do you compose, or is it all based on improv?

DSW: It's both, man. As far as the compositions go, I'm trying to intuitively develop the compositions. What I do is practical. I take an empty piece of music paper and I start writing, that's how I come up with compositions. All the compositions you hear on my records, that's how they've come.

# How does your composition differ from your improvisation?

DSW: It's a slightly different process when you're writing, because you have more time to think. What I'm trying to do is to alleviate the thinking part, so that my improvisation on the horn and my writing on the paper can be the exact same process. Now, I've got a hell of a way to go before I can write what I can play. That's what I'm working on, to be able to develop my writing and put it on the level of my playing. I can pick up my horn and I can play almost anything I want to play. To write that is much more difficult to me. The writing lends itself to a different part of your nervous system. You're developing a different flow, a different channel. That what I'm working; just write, not even think about it. It sounds easy it's not easy. When I play, I don't think. It's way beyond thinking at that point.

## You talk about an intuitiveness in your music; where does that come from?

DSW: Comes from within me. Comes from a universal source.

#### How does a musician get that?

DSW: From meditation. I don't know of any more direct way than that. It's about discovery. Inner discovery.

## How did you find that? Has it always been there for you?

DSW: It's been there a long time for me, man. John Coltrane awakened me to the fact that music could be used as a vehicle for transcendence. So spirituality has always run through the music for me. Spirituality is the underlying reality of music. It flows from that and goes back to that. So you find a way to access that, through myriad forms of meditation. With that comes philosophy, your values system.

# What we talked about before, about making a career out of this, would you still use music for meditation, even if it wasn't your career?

DSW: Certainly. That makes no difference about it. I don't have a choice. I can't do it any other way. This is my path.

# Growing up, how did you learn the things technically to make you a musician?

DSW: I studied, man. I studied in school. I took my horn when I was 9 years old. In school, I was in dance band, marching band, concert band, orchestra, regional all-state band, private lessons. All the way I went to college, all the way until I went to music school.

# Do you think there is a way to achieve musical success without that formal training?

DSW: You don't necessarily need the training. You need to know how the language works, how the alphabet works, how the components work. You must be talented and you must be skilled. You can use your talent to direct the skill. Whether you get it from home or from a university, it doesn't matter. You don't just pick up an instrument for a couple of years, like what's going on now. You need to acquire a thorough mastery of your instrument. You don't subject people to you learning how to hold your instrument almost. There's too much of that.

# How much time do you actually spend playing your saxophone?

DSW: Not very much. My practicing would be equivalent to cooking food. When your food's fulled cooked, you put it on simmer, ready to turn it up anytime. That's my practicing, I keep it on simmer. I don't want to let it go down. When a performance is coming, you haven't lost anything,

but at the same time I'm not pushing the envelope in my practicing.

# Ideally, would you be performing as much as possible?

DSW: No, just on occasion. Have a bunch of work, half some time off, have another bunch of work.

# I know you keep a vegetarian diet and you don't smoke or drink. How important is that to your music?

DSW: It's all-important. I'm trying to live the music. I'm not trying to play a high-minded music and live a mediocre life. It keeps you clear and it keeps you healthy. If when you do things right, still factors come your way. I've never been able to understand how cats abuse themselves with cigarettes, and alcohol and drinking and dope. The list is long. If you make it to 60, you're doing damn good; as a jazz musician, you're extraordinary. The musician is the vessel. It's common sense whatever the shape of the vessel is going to tremendous influence on your creativity, on the depth of it, the longevity. Look how many lives were cut short because of some bullshit, really. They try to take comfort in drugs. That's not the shit to take refuge in. That's just ignorance. Even John Coltrane paid the price of that.

## Is there a time in you life when you think you would ever retire from music?

DSW: Probably not. I'm thinking about it. I'm not going to be too quick to say. I'm just going to say I don't know' on that one. I know there is something in me that really loves solitudes and loves to be inactive on the level of searching within oneself, not on the level of being a couch potato. I could see myself leaving the scene to gain something, that I don't think could be gained on the scene and then coming back.

#### Not to change subjects too much, but what do you think makes the Ware Quartet? Do you think it's different than everybody else?

DSW: I haven't heard everyone else. I feel like it's different than everything else. Basically, man, this is a result of my focus for many years. I've put my focus on this for many years and I've never dropped it. Even through the years of cab driving and all of that, I still wanted certain things. And now it's coming, it's manifesting. A lot of cats have come and gone, because they haven't held their focus. Since I was 12 years old, I've been clear about what I wanted.

#### What is it exactly that you want?

DSW: I want John Coltrane's torch. Or Sonny Rollins' torch, however you want to put it. I want that torch. I want their mantle. To put it succinctly, to put it in one sentence: Whoever got the mantle, I want it. If it is Coltrane or if it's Sonny Rollins, whoever it is, I want it. It's not a thing of ego. To get that, you have to earn that. You can't take it, it's not given to you. You have to earn it. I'm willing to earn it. I think I am earning it.

#### Do you think you've earned it already?

DSW: No, I don't think I'm there, but we're well on our way. You see, it's about longevity. It's about stamina. It's about staying in good health. That's the secrets. As long as I'm good health, I can continue with the same intensity. As long as I can do it, I'm going to do it. When I can't do, I can't do it. It all reverts back to good health, being clear, good diet, good water, good thinking, clear thinking, meditation every day.

#### Do you think you can ever reach an ultimate level?

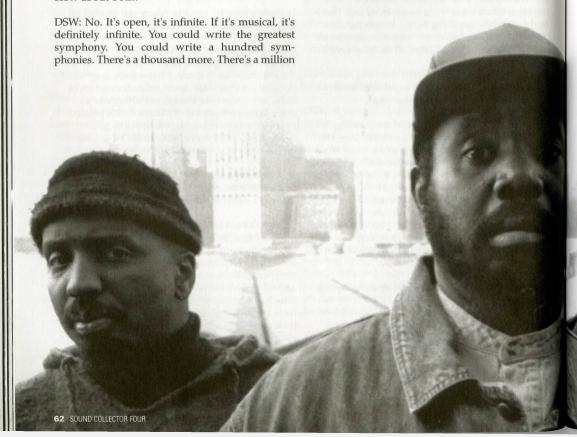
DSW: You talkin' about a musical level or a spiritual level?

#### How about both?

more. Spiritually, I don't know what enlightenment is on that level. I could sit down and tell you theoretically what they think it is. It's just theory. I don't know an ultimate. All I know is that it's ongoing. Something can be the ultimate for the moment. I had a friend back in the 1960s, he was one of my mentors. He was a genius thinker. He came up with the concept of musical avatar. In other words, for that moment in time your music is the highest music in the universe, in all of creation. Your music is so supreme, you're the musical avatar. Now, maybe a concept like that is possible. You might the ultimate for a certain time. Then it's gone.

In terms of other people dealing with your music - for people who've never heard your music - what can expect from the David S. Ware Quartet listening for the first time?

DSW: Don't expect to hear any formulas. You hear all this formulated music everywhere. Pop culture is full of formulated empty shit. This is music that has no formula. This is spontaneous music. It's open-ended music. And it's music I think it full of meaning inside of it. The sound carries a message, a meaning. It carries a message, it carries images, it carries knowledge. Knowledge of what? Knowledge of spirituality. Knowledge of subtle realities. Knowledge of subtle values, spiritual value systems.



#### What can the listener get from your music?

DSW: Everything. Knowledge of themselves is available to them. The music is a catalyst to open them up. To open up their thinking, because thinking is the key to everything. Thinking is the key action. Thinking is the key achievement. Thinking is the key, partially, to happiness. It's the kinds of thoughts that allow you to be happy or unhappy. Through thinking, you can achieve anything. Thought is the most powerful.

Do you think your environment - living at this time, in this culture - plays into your music? It is inescapable? Or it separate?

DSW: To tell you the truth, I look at it completely separate from the times. We're like in some kind of capsule. You know why? Because, I look at the shit that's goin' on, man. The shit in pop culture not that I don't like anything but jazz, it's not about that - there all kind of great music, it can be rhythm and blues, it could be hard metal, it could rock, it could be folk, it could be anything, that's not the point. The question is: What is the projection of it? The projection of it and the message of it and the meaning of it, what is that about? It could be any form. I'm not hung up on what form it is. What does the form include? That's the point. What I hear has no message. The shit that I hear has no message - it's empty. It has no meeting. Why? That's the times we live in. That's the age. That's the position of the heavens. The heavens predict this stuff, man.

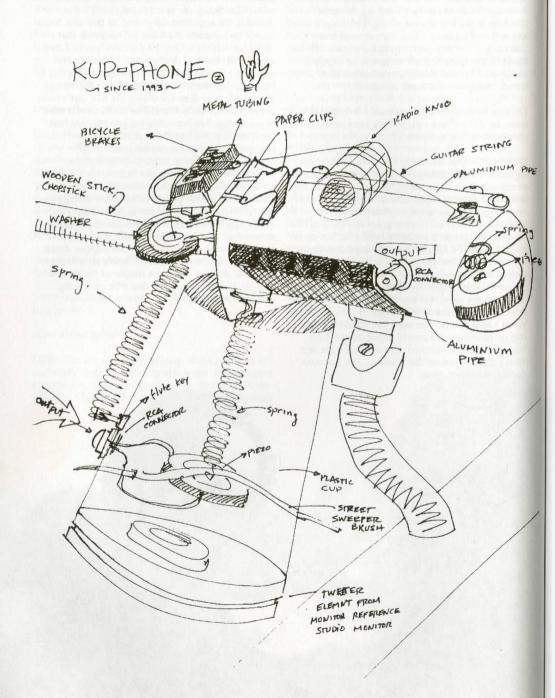
As far as music today, is there anything you listen to? Do you listen to music anymore?

DSW: I'm not a heavy music listener. I listen to some CDs that given me. I listen to MTV. I see that shit. I watch "Rap City" and all that shit. I flick it on for a few minutes. I skim by all that shit. I see who is selling 10 million albums. I see what kind of shit is doing that... In the '60s, for example I saw John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins blowing their brains out right their in the Village Vanguard, now they are telling me that our music is too much to be in there. The 1960s were a time of searching. You have this happening, you had psychedelia, you had Beatlemania, you had marijuana culture - I'm not saying good or bad through a lot of those cultures people were engaged in a genuine search for something. It wasn't the drugs just for themselves. It was a genuine. Through that psychedelia times, many people arrived at an Eastern philosophy. They discovered yoga, they discovered meditation, they discovered all of those Eastern paths. There was a shift around the late '60s. That can happen again. That can happen again now. There's an undercurrent that shifting now. In a couple of years, all of a sudden that undercurrent could be on the top. This music is for that.



#### soundcreator

# CARLOS VIVANCO



BY HASON

Some people are like onion cats. Not just nine lives, but endless layers enclosed within bones, brains and skin. You meet them in one context and it's hard to imagine a life outside the discipline or action in which you interact. They drop hints though, or make little comments of experiential wells that you've never plumbed. If you dig, perhaps they tell you more, but then you just realize that there probably is no bottom, that this person somehow has condensed dog years to a human scale. Has done a million disparate things and they are all interesting. A well lived life. A fully lived life. And it's still happening, and will continue to for a long, long time.

A fascinating person. Sounds better than onion cat, anyway. Carlos Vivanco is such a person. The article that follows deals with just one facet of his well-lived life. No mention of living in castles, running the avocado farm, indigenous magical training, Tai Chi master-status, or acting career. Just music. Sounds, their creation and perpetuation. But if, somehow, someday, you manage to run into him, and he likes you, and invites you to sit and chat, take him up on it. Peel some layers. You will be entertained, amazed, anything but bored.

Carlos Vivanco is an inveterate sound collector.

"In Mexico I had the first Walkman; it was 1978 or something, and I would walk around Mexico City with it. The Walkman could record, and there were long bridges that were very beautiful. If you hit the railings of these bridges with your ring it made wonderful sounds. I would walk around hitting everything with my ring and recording it all."

Even before that, as a child in the pre-sampler era, he had a few low-end, Nagra-style reel-to-reels. He would make long loops that stretched across the room and play them simultaneously. When anyone came in they would see tapé everywhere, moving, mapping points in a sonic landscape on multiple levels. He learned to play guitar at age 6. Around the same time he constructed his first instrument, a tiny guitar cast of tin alloy, made in his father's metal shop. It had a built-in pickup

and a fretboard made of bamboo and a metal nail file. Soon, family members were getting angry because young Carlos would steal watches (and other things with moving parts) out of their rooms to disassemble and use for his musical creations.

This was the beginning of his long career as musician, composer, and instrument creator. Guitar playing took precedence over guitar making in his teen years when he played in Mexican experimental bands such as Queso Sagrado, Sycoma, and Atras del Cosmos. "We would do Mexican Stockhausen, with 15 secretaries playing typewriters for the percussion section, 15 FM and short-wave radios going, and my friend and I jamming on guitars over it all."

Somehow, in the midst of rocking (and rioting, but that's a whole other long story), he managed to get his masters in architecture from the University of Mexico City in the mid 80's. It was in New York, at his recording studio on Ludlow Street, that I first met him in 1993. He was (and is) always kind and considerate, and opened his doors to me, a 19 year old would-be singer from the Midwest. He was already well-known as both composer (credits for film, animation and television, including numerous PBS specials with Bill Movers, and PSA AIDS work with Debbie Harry and Richard Butler of the Psychedelic Furs) and ambient musician (Zenith was released on Fax Records, and other projects include Matahari with Elliot Levin and Frank Bambara, Like Wow, Muse Mob, and Volti (released by Cramp Disc in Belgium).

Descending into his basement studio was always a delight. In the front office there were boxes of instrument bits, metal, leather, wire, glue and tools, and you were welcome to construct something if you so chose. The other rooms were filled with recording equipment and instruments, both manufactured and homemade, including one (nicknamed the Cellodrom) made out of a Chinese vinegar barrel and a cello neck, with the strings descending through a drum head affixed to the top of the barrel. Tons of guitars, amps, microphones, art on the walls, keyboards, a piano - it was like a musical candy store.

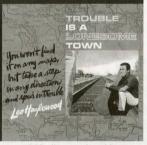
#### LEE HAZLEWOOD



1970 album on cd Cowboy in Sweden



New cd of popular standards Farmisht, Flatulence, Origami, ARF!!! and me



1963 album: cd and lp
Trouble Is A Lonesome Town



1971 album: cd and lp
Requiem For An Almost Lady

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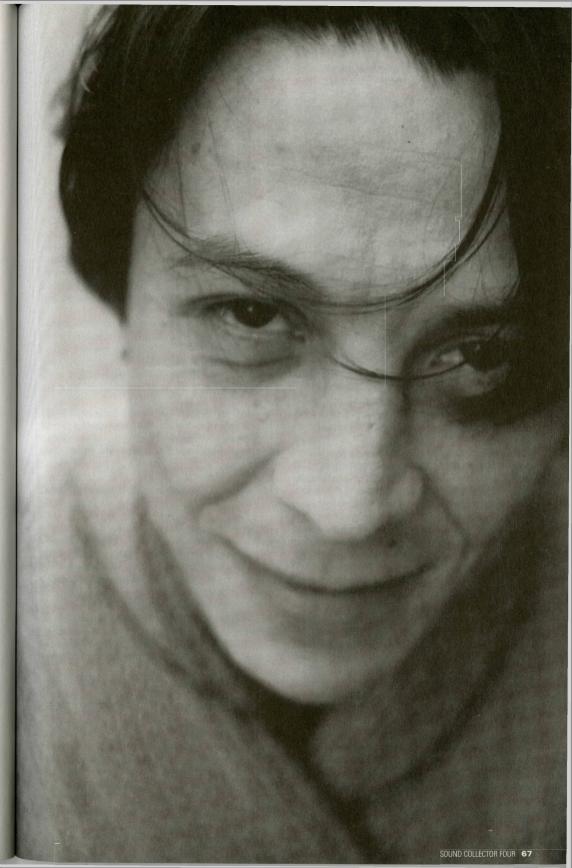
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The kup phonos, though, were (and are) the most impressive instruments he has created thus far. Each individual kup phone utilizes a guitar string, metal tubing, assorted random bits and pieces (see diagram), and a rigid plastic cup for a resonating chamber. Then, the kup phones are assembled in multiples on a p. a. stand that resembles the arsenal that Marvin the Martian used to direct at planet earth in the old cartoons. The whole contraption is played with chopsticks by up to three people at a time, and sounds like the best industrial band you've ever heard. Each kup phone has a stereo pickup, so theoretically, the kup phonos I tried out should be connected to ten amps, but we only played it through four. It was still really, really loud.

Carlos says he was inspired to re/use New York's prodigious garbage by the example of Jun and Mixa, Pluto Cat clothing/houseware designers, who also inhabited Ludlow Street in the early to mid nineties. Clearly, his background in architecture and childhood in Mexico also inspired him and gave direction to his ideas. In addition to the kup phones, he creates two and three stringed instruments and single-watt amps made out of a shoebox and the innards of old microphones, kaleidoscopes, and other sound producing objects that defy description. He composes and records using these instruments. He is such a sound collector that he had to create the mechanisms to produce more and newer sounds to collect. His creations may be made of street detritus, but they look like works of art, and to that end were exhibited at Max Fish in 1995. He has sold his kup phones to musicians in Germany, Japan, and the US, including Sam Bennett (ex Hugo Largo) and Tetsuo Inovue (Yellow Magic Orchestra). Though recently relocated to Santa Fe. Carlos Vivanco continues to make and collect sounds of all descriptions.

Hason is a nomad scholar/professor of text, image, + sound. Currently living in the Inyo National Forest, researching the American Dream and perfecting flying trapeze skills.





BY DAVID CROSS

Something happened in Ohio twenty five years ago, and no matter how/who you ask they aren't giving away any answers. The now much romanticized Cleveland (and Akron) 1975 scene was completely ignored by the big city types who were calling the shots at the time. Pere Ubu didn't care. Pere Ubu didn't want to move to New York, they wanted to be in Cleveland. Pere Ubu invented their own musical language, all on their own, and darn quick too.

Pere Ubu have always relied on their own unique (mis)logic and (un)reason, and have always existed for themselves. Never static, the band has to date had 8 different lineups. Most have recorded, a couple haven't. When things went south with the band in 1982 they had the good sense to call it quits. After some time they somehow heard and answered the call and began again in 1987. This work continues through today... one excellent project at a time.

A very large presence looming over Pere Ubu is vocalist/lyricist David Thomas. Very much capable as solo artist (for decades now) and as an equal member of Pere Ubu (some might say more than equal, depends on who you ask), the world has always looked to Thomas and wondered "What's his problem?"

This interview will not complete your knowledge of Pere Ubu (or Cleveland) but perhaps it will give you insight into one of the driving forces behind an utterly unique, master rock band. David Thomas has just seen the US release of his large scale solo production "Mirror Man" as well as a couple Pere Ubu reissues (with a couple more in the works) on Thirsty Ear in the US.

This interview was conducted through July 1999.

SC: You have made frequent use of role and/or character as an artistic device. There are examples of this from your very earliest work (that I know about anyway) to it's highly developed use in *Mirror Man*. Have you thought about using non-musical mediums (i.e. screenplay, theater)?

David Thomas: *Mirror Man* IS theater. I would like to produce *Mirror Man* for tv. I'm not a writer. I'm not an actor. I can't paint. I'm a musician. Being a musician allows me all the scope I want and feel capable of. I don't want to rise to my level of incompetence.

SC: Mirror Man blurs the literary, the musical and the theatrical with a confidence of an extremely large group of superbly talent ed individuals. How does it feel to steer a pool of talent like that?

David Thomas: Uh... it feels good. Can you be more specific?

SC: Sure. With a large scale production with many, many individuals with many, many view points there is the possibility of winding up with a grand production that actually is a disorganized patchwork pinch loaf. *Mirror Man* seems to have been assembled by the hands of a master quilter. You realized the potential of all the individual elements and assembled them accordingly. Does the work resemble the scope you has envisioned or is it something completely different?

David Thomas: Yes it has the scope and shape of what I envisioned. All the "cast" put themselves forward to be cooperative and to merge themselves with the gestalt of the piece. It was a magnificent communal accomplishment. The ambition of it was breathtaking. To paraphrase Thoreau, if you set yourself a goal you may as well make it ambitious cuz you might just achieve it. We were all stunned by the experience.

SC: There has been some controversy regarding the fact that you changed some of your solo material for it's recent re-release. Should artists be allowed to revise their history?

David Thomas: Absolutely, It's my art, (see http://www.projex.demon.co.uk/boxfag.html) "The studio seizes a snapshot of a flow. The musician is satisfied (or not) according to where along the course of that flow the snapshot is taken and according to the amount of photoshop fixing that can be applied in postprocessing to "correct" the final image. VOAT had to be recorded with a very small budget & under considerable pressure. The pressure was so severe that it warped my judgment and I have always been unhappy about the result. The listener judges according to different criteria. You loved it. I hated it. Who is right? Time will judge. Who should dictate? The artist... always."

SC: I know that this is something you've discussed a bit but could you possibly give us an understanding of the influence of Ghoulardi on yourself and, perhaps, Cleveland as a whole?

David Thomas: It's impossible to go further unless you've seen Ghoulardi and, more than that, seen him over time. Culture happens in secret.

SC: The sonic clarity of the remastered Pere Ubu recordings is astonishing. The Ubu Projex website has the "Bug Report" in which the post production flaws of previous pressings are revealed in detail. Is this anal retentive nitpicking or is technology finally able to reproduce the sounds you made twenty years ago?

David Thomas: The remastered versions are close to what we heard when we were recording and mixing. The studio is as good as the sound ever gets. That's why every producer I know has nothing more than a boom box at home for listening to music. Everything outside the studio is a disappointment that should lead to dangerous questions like, "What am I doing?" Vinyl always clouded what we wanted to do-which was to make use of silence and space. Digital is better because you can achieve the power of silence. It's not ideal. And it's only better in specific ways.

We love sound and fear it. We note faults with the reproduction of it because civilians need to appreciate the issues involved. We do it for YOU. SC: Was sonic detail lost between then and now?

David Thomas: No. There was no appreciable deterioration in the tapes.

SC: CDs are too long, I like extra tracks and all that... but I can't bring myself to put in a 75 minute long Beach Boys CD. How was it that you decided to retain the original track time and running order?

David Thomas: An album is not a collection of unrelated songs. It is a gestaltist entity.

SC: Do you think Pere Ubu has only influenced one generation?

David Thomas: I doubt if we even did that.

(note from ed. - I was delighted to find this question and response listed as #1 of Pere Ubu's Most Frequently Most Asked Questions list 2 days after asking Thomas this question)

SC: Do you think rock journalism influenced Pere Ubu?

David Thomas: No.

SC: The early (and current) Pere Ubu records incorporate found sound, great start/stop rhythm section muscle and complex layering of previously unknown timbres. Did you spend a lot of time in the studio figuring that out or was it more of an organic process at the practice space?

David Thomas: That's the way it happened when we got together the first day. It's a product of how we reacted with each other. It's why we decided to keep being a band-- because what we were doing together was worth doing. We should be credited for recognizing the worth of the discovery, for not screwing it up and for allowing it to evolve.

SC: Did you guys practice/tour a lot?

Davis Thomas: No to both.

SC: Where did the overwhelming sense of urgency of the early Pere Ubu records come from?

David Thomas: I wasn't aware that there was sense of urgency. How does it show itself?

SC: Well, the emotion of most of the early records is pretty tense throughout. A good example of what I was referring to would be your delivery on "Life Stinks", which in my



opinion, is pretty over the top. I could comment on the specifics of some of the other guys but, really, you can't say what they were thinking (and or feeling).

David Thomas: Well, it was extreme I guess but it seemed fairly obvious.In any case I can't remember what the idea was. It was hardly a terribly complex lyric and the idea was probably something that was direct. I still can't see why it would indicate an urgency or something inordinately tense about the emotions. I think you want to see this. The ideas we were using were simpler then so the impact tended to be more immediate. People get nostalgic about simpler things.

SC: Do you take the same approach to Pere Ubu now that you did 25 years ago? Do you talk about what your next move will be or do you just do it?

David Thomas: Our ideas haven't changed. There's no need for them to change. Good ideas don't need revision and exist outside the temporal chaos of changing fashion. Pere Ubu is based on two principles involving the role of sound in the production of musical activity and a method of working. We don't talk in Pere Ubu. The next step is indicated by the direction of the current work. It is never a rational process and I repeat that we never talk about it.

Cleveland Museum of Secret Popular Culture - entry #313: Ghoulardi

Ernie Anderson (later, widely know as the voice of ABC) created the character Ghoulardi as host of Cleveland's channel 8 "Shock Theater."

Ghoulardi's character was both elegant and irreverent, ridiculing and paying tribute to (local) television, bad films, Cleveland and its suburbs with aplomb. No doubt Ghoulardi was an influence to anyone in Cleveland who ever wore black in the Seventies.

"Shock Theater" found its voice through odd character sketch, unrelenting parody, and numbing repetition (many, many movies were run 3 or more times over the Ghoulardi tenure from 1963-1966). Fans would watch the same films over and over to catch the intermittent dialogue.

Catch phrases: "Turn Blue!," "Hey Group!," "Stay Sick!," "You Knif!," "Cool It!," and others too numerous to mention.

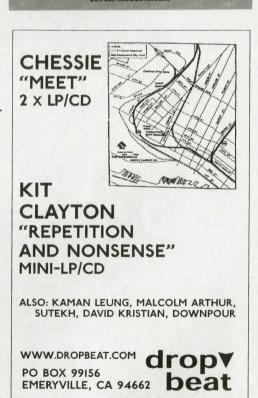
Ernie Anderson died February 6, 1997.

Recent Ghoulardi sightings: on various T-shirts of "the working class slob," Drew Carey, on The Drew Carey Show.

Ghoulardi: The Real Story behind the Most Subversive Show in Cleveland,s Television History. (Rich Heldenfeld, with Tom Feran ISBN 1886228183)

Dave Cross is the trombone player for jazz troublemakers Coffee and The Arthur Doyle Electro-Acoustic Ensemble. He has resided in Rochester, NY since the late 80's.





soundinterpretation

### ANTHRO-BIO-MOLE-INFO-MORPHIC MUSICOLOGY

TEXT AND IMAGES BY TAKU KUWANO

The music moved away.

Notes bend like blues, and slid, chromatically, from mode to austere mode. It was as if her major influences, [...] were late Sonny Terry and early Stockhausen.

Samuel R. Delany, DAHLGREN (1975)

# (No... just Random notes for Random lines... DNA-Retrovirus-Klezmer)

#### In/outro

In the history of European music (as well known as... metaphysical history, yes, yes), the systematic music structure has been constructed/ deconstructed continuously/incontinuously.

Contemporary music history...

The twelve-tone compositions of Schoenberg and the decompositions of Berg...

Minimalism-Minimalism-Minimalism...

The adoption of "silence" (zero symbol in a semiotic sense?); of "chance" (game theory or complexity in a post-structuralist/modernist sense?), of Cage...

Minimalism-Minimalism-Minimalism...

Amorphous situations... Nihilistic Hegelian, the end of music history? The end of the movement of construction/deconstruction of the structure in music history?

Cul-de-sac-cul-de-sac-cul-de-sac...

The out of modernity

The in of post-modernity

The disappearance of in/out

In this, a post-historical/modern situation... Is music still alive? I would like to say "dada"...Fuck the pseudo post-Hegelians, post-moderns, and all those post-shits (except the post-office... actually, the theme of my next essay is going to be "music and the mailing system").

Music is everywhere... being assembled within the socio-econo-politico-technosphere as with any other art/cultural form...

computer systems. Recent studies of molecular biology discovered that reverse transcription (protein to DNA) of information is also possible...

#### **Epistemology of Klezmer**

Klezmer originally came from Hebrew, "music instrument."

Epistemology of Hebrew, Epistemology of Jew Judea, the rise and decline of the Egyptian empire, the distraction of the first and the second temples...

The dissemination of Jews, dissemination of Judaism...

after the long journey of dissemination/diaspora, Klezmer was formed as folk music...

#### **DNA, RNA and Retrovirus**

Discovery of retroviruses proved reverse transcription. Retrovirus (RNA-virus), in the same way as other viruses, contains information within a protein shell, translates the information to RNA. and creates its own copy after it has entered the host cell, and the copy is inserted inside the hosts DNA via the RNA. After the transcription, the virus can produce new viruses utilizing the host cells' DNA mechanism. From the recent studies, we have learned that this transcription of information is actually quite common, and, in fact, DNA contains various kinds of retroviruses (HIV is the most in/famous one, but most of them are harmless for the host), which give various information to be functioned (self-organized) within the complexity (environments)...

#### The deconstruction of DNA theology

Our body, bio-molecular-info-morphism, complex and self-organized Information...

"Hybrid, therefore I am"

Inside the music manifold... music has been manipulated at the atomic level. The sound waves collide and are transformed to new sound waves on a desktop computer as if the particle accelerator in a quantum science lab becomes a home audio system. On the macro level... the McLuhanian approach of music has been developed and expanded as an art form ever since Glen Gould hid out in the recording studio in Canada. The possibility of the reproduction music, as Walter Benjamin observes in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936).

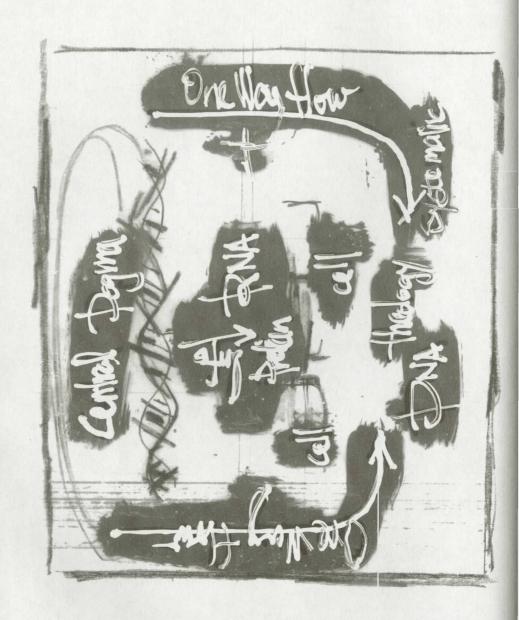
The current post-modern paradigm (the post-Hip Hop era?) reveals the incorporated complexity of micro and macro systems of music. In this condition, we need a new authenticity to perceive the complexity of music. Here I want to draw some zig zag lines between molecular biology and music (specifically Klezmer) to synchronize with the complexity and play a few random notes...

#### **DNA and RNA**

"DNA, therefore I am" (DNA = central dogma)

DNA-theology has been believed for a long time.

As is well known, DNA is genetic information storage. However, DNA cannot manipulate (copy or edit) its' own information by itself. RNA, the molecules created by DNA, translates the information from DNA to proteins, which form the structure of the human body. It is akin to the function of a hard disk (DNA) and CPU (RNA) in



#### **KlezmaticTM**

Klezmer was self-organized within the complexity of cultures...

A hybrid of languages (German, Polish, Russian, and Hebrew) makes Yiddish...

A hybrid of Oriental (rhythmic) and Occidental (recitative) music styles, Klezmer...

Klezmer is the mark of dissemination... the mark of Jewish history...

Synagogue flows like blood under the overlayers of texts, folklore and poems from all over the Orient and Occident...

Times passes... on another continent... In the late 40's through the mid 50's, the exotic music trend dominates the US pop music industry in the post W.W.II era. Mickey Kartz arranged and parodied exotic pop music with Klezmer (a parody of the parody of "Orientalism?"). The Klezmer flavored exotic pop music played over the radio waves...

Forty years later, his music is rearranged and performed by Afro-American jazz musicians... "Wedding Dance - Don Byron plays the music of Mickey Kartz"

Klezmer DNA, Jewish history, the marks of dissemination...

Klezmer RNA, environments and cultures, the catalysts of the music...

Klezmer retroviruses, information form other cultures, other contexts...

Music is a hybrid (Klezmatic), just like our history, just like ourselves (DNA)...

medium please!...maybe more like wasabi...lovely noxe runner!!

#### Post-script

Is this just an anthropomorphic analogy? We can easily draw the lines of relationships between DNA and elements of music... DNA-history, RNAculture, and Retrovirus-information...

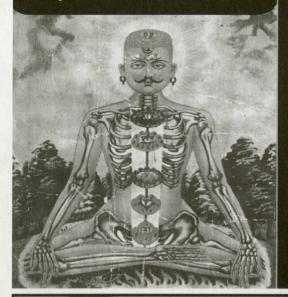
As I said in the beginning, we need a new authenticity in this current music condition... I am not saying that this bio-molecular authenticity is the new structure within which to observe this situation or the new way to self-organize new sound. The complexity has been within the immanence of music history, and this is just an approach to see the fragments of dynamic complexity of music... However, the only way to truly perceive the complexity of music is diving right into the chaotic ocean of sound...

Tak Kuwano, La Kidoo do stuff: scritti-scrunchin itch'in in text-mext (spicy-spacy)...nmmm...middium-

or Keep on Rockin...

# DJ Me DJ You Rainbows and Robots

Vintage analogue synthesizers, cheesy Italian soundtrack music and rare Indian sitar groove mixed with 90's breakbeats.



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# muşi imaginary films

Italian mondo madness. Indian sari-operas, French murder mysteries: 14 theme songs from groovy movies that have yet to be made.

> Emperor Norton Record 102 Robinson St., LA, CA 9002 www.emperornorton.com ¥ info@emperornorton.com

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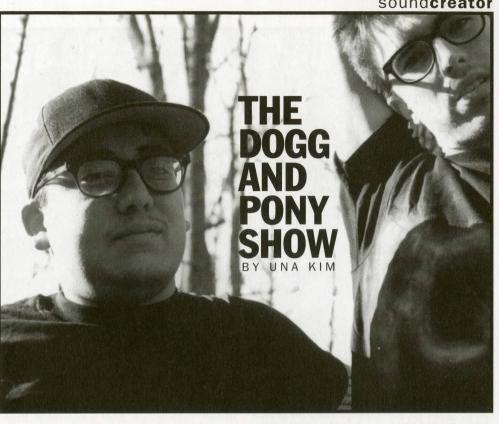
range

cr22 - pengo - ...climbs the holy mountain cr21 - the 1985 - obscured by pink clouds

out in spring '00... new hilkka cd

drone/noise/experimental compilation cd

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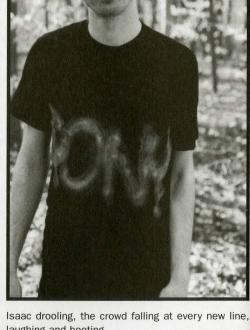


First, a break down, an explanation of the simple mechanics that propel two people and an arbiter into becoming the greatest show you've ever seen. This is how it begins. On the turntables find DJ Pony, cutting, scratching, mixing the most danceable hip hop around, the real hits, Hot 97 incarnate. On the mic, there's Dogg, taking you where no MC has ever ventured, a world where his freestyle lyrics cannot rhyme, lest he face the wrath of the referee who listens stone-faced, hand above the bell, tongue against the whistle, waiting for the Dogg to slip up. Take a step back and what do you have: a rap group that cannot rhyme, a daunting cleverness, pure entertainment, a crowd pleaser, the Dogg and Pony show.

Formed barely one year ago in a wood-paneled basement apartment on 29th St., Charm City, the prolific Dogg and Pony quickly gathered a cult following over the ensuing months. They released their first tape, entitled "Demonstration," a onesided, barely seen, barely heard masterpiece followed by a sprinkling of Baltimore shows in the spring. "Demonstration 2" soon followed that summer, a white label cassette offering a lengthy onetake, a live recording of reefer enhanced brilliance, hitting everything, going everywhere, even to the grave and back again. October found Dogg and Pony







touring the Mid-Atlantic briefly, unforgettably playing among other venues Sound and Fury in New York and Providence's Ft. Thunder. Still, their greatest show took place early this year, a hometown Baltimore event at the Ottobar, marking the finished recording of their first 12" to be released in the spring of 2000, followed by a summer tour.

Dogg and Pony are two guys, Isaac Ramos and Brendan Fowler respectively. You may know Isaac as the Punk Rock Comedian or the mastermind behind www.brownpants.com. You've probably seen the products of Brendan's Group B Label, namely the astonishing and substantive "Sex Sells Magazines," Issues one and two. At first glance they may propose an unlikely pair, Brendan, a tall, skinny white kid in Ben Davis pants, Isaac, a first-generation Mexican with an entire forearm emblazoned with a tattoo of the Virgin of Roses. Certainly these two share things in common: a deep love and respect for hip hop and graffiti; dark, thick-framed glasses; a die-hard sense of humor of a particular ilk; even, upon occasion, matching sneaks and sweatshirts during their live performances. Yet, it still seems insufficient to explain how these two young men, on their cassettes and their upcoming 12", and most apparently on stage, become an amazingly unified

entity, a cohesive whole, Brendan beat matching,

laughing and hooting.

It is their live show that is the essence of their act. What does a typical Dogg and Pony performance consist of? There have been several variations, new twists, different editions. Pony will start off spinning, getting the crowd rowdy and dancing, precluding the raucous introduction of the Dogg who, unofficially, seems to always begin with an "Oh, oh, oh" or a "Dogg and Pony!" He'll break his way into the crowd, this is the Dogg and Pony style, the involvement of others. He'll strut, spit flying everywhere, talking up a storm and tormenting the ref, begging him or her to call him out until he screws up and actually rhymes, the natural habit of the tongue used to the melodies of language. The crowd good-naturedly boos and the Dogg bows his head in shame before starting all over again. He talks about anything, about your hair, his hair, about his new belt buckle or the alley outside. He'll prompt Pony who occasionally joins in with a shout, a response or a hug. The crowd listens eagerly, necks craning, ears straining, attentive, ready to catch the referee if he or she misses a rhyme, not sure whose side they're on if there are sides in the first place. The last tour incorporated deadly falls into the performances, complete with fake blood capsules spurting everywhere. At Ft. Thunder, Latino free-stylers of the regular type had some time at the mic, somehow seamlessly interwoven into the non-rhymes of the Dogg. A show in Princeton guest starred MC Unknown, a masked man whose answers to all questions were "I don't know" or "I won't tell you" in some pseudo-Ukranian accent. That performance ended in a choreographed, coordinationchallenged dance between the two of them, finishing with a backspin of such slow momentum it defied the laws of physics. Recent shows have included games of the latest Baltimore craze, Flip. "You wanna flip?" the Dogg will challenge, and on stage in front of everyone you go head to head with your dollars on the ground, waiting for your heads or your tails to win you some money. The crowd goes crazy, whoever wins. Rowdiness is imperative.

I have never met anyone who did not have a good time at a Dogg and Pony show. A blanket statement perhaps, a generalization for sure, but at the same time, unabashedly, the honest truth. There is simply something even beyond the fake blood, the theatric falls, the humor in Dogg's non-rhymes, resembling free association more than the typical freestyle, a choppiness that's more like a distant cousin to "flow" than actual lyrical skill. There is something that the stodginess of stock-still, lockkneed, head-nodding indie rockers never allowed, that makes you scream louder, give shout-outs to anything, to Baby Jesus, to Korea, whatever the Dogg wants, whatever the Dogg needs. It is essentially the epitome of the live show. Dogg and Pony exists for the crowd, raps about the crowd, spins for the crowd. Not a generic crowd, but the actual kid standing in front of you wearing that Miller Light tank top, or the prepped out college guy who wants a piece of the mic and gets shouted down but never by the Dogg who is humble and gentlemanly, if at times harmlessly mocking by the rest of the crowd, the punk kids, the emo kids, the indie kids, the wet ones at the bar, all who suddenly are loyal to the group who is there for them, who takes itself seriously in its desire to have a good time, the one and only Dogg and Pony. To go to their shows is to get wrapped up in a freedom and craziness afforded to a few moments in time; the kind of blissful insanity that only the young and the funny are afflicted or blessed with. When I said they had a cult following, I really meant it. Watch one of their shows, watch the crowd go down on their knees prompted by the Dogg's, "Let's go down, down, down," laugh at them, and at yourself, because you're on the floor with them, having the best time of your life. I don't mean to suggest that they never have an off show, that their genius is swallowed by everyone. It's based on a liberty not exercised by all, coming easier to the young at heart, the stoned or the drunk. But if you're lucky, and you're ready to let yourself go, the Dogg and Pony Show just might be the thing for you.

If they're not on tour, listen to the recordings. Listen to them in your car, if you have one, on the bus, when you're walking, in the bathroom, in the bedroom. The key is to listen frequently. At times, they areinaudible, garbled by laughter. But listen again and again, and every time I guarantee you'll discover in the denseness of it all a new gem it's the gift that keeps on giving. Lines like "scary like a cross on a mountain" that are so simple and somehow completely brilliant, things that make no sense and then you step back, you listen to it again, you take another hit, and all of a sudden a world is revealed, a universe constructed of parts and phrases and the sensible, affable madness that is Dogg and Pony. You follow them on this nonstop, goofy, halting, and ultimately clever journey, wide-eyed and laughing, because they are silly and crazy in the way you want to be crazy, in the way you'd love to talk nonsense, like a kid. This is their genius and this is what they offer, all within the confines of hip hop taken to another level. The only small remorse you hold after listening to these so much and taking so much away from them, is that no live show is the same, no songs are the same, so you can't sing along. But instead, this leaves you with another option, and at every performance, magically, the mood is familiar, you trust the DJ and you trust the MC and somehow they lead you to knowing the words.

Keep an eye out for their latest, their masterful 12", one side the rhymes and the beats, the other pure instrumental. This time, they enlisted the help of their friends to create their own beats and backing tracks, though still sampling everything from Steve Albini to a ringing telephone. The songs are more thematic but just as rowdy. The opening track called "no-titled" begins with the chanting of the producer's mother. She sounds good too. Other tracks strive to spread and explain the latest street vernacular, Damon-Locks-style, from "making room" for something good to "being Jimmy," that guy who uses friendship with girls who have boyfriends as a cover for his true intentions. Again, this 12" was recorded live, and it is true testimony to the skills of Dogg and Pony when you hear the voi es of the zealous crowd gathered at the studio, who with no prepping respond to the calls of the MC. It's all on tape. Or on vinyl I should say. Pure, physical evidence of crowd-invoking talent, which you could see anyway at their shows.

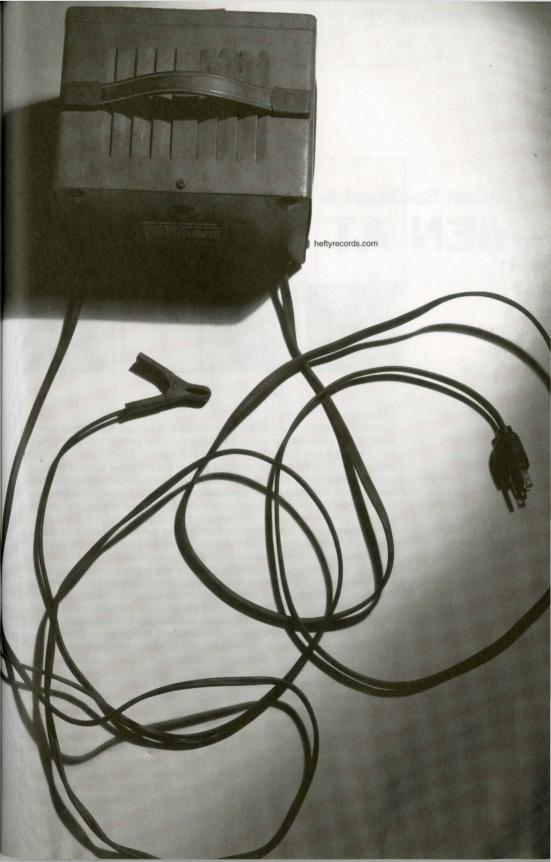




At the end of it all, the Dogg and Pony experience I am talking of, the shows and the recordings, there is a release. You cannot help but laugh. For one brief period of time, your life gets boiled down to funny and not funny, what the Dogg says and what he doesn't say, what the Pony spins and doesn't spin. And somehow they have this lasting effect, an afterglow of sorts, even after they've finished and the tape clicks off or you've gone home to bed still stinking like a cigarette and a lousy Flip player. I think they call it talent, or maybe it's just the simplicity of it all. It's a reminder, a kick in the pants, of having some fun. And when they ask, "Can you make room for the Dogg? Can you make room for the Pon-y?" you respond without hesitation, without a second thought, even days later, months later. It is a rare something that can hit you at any time, while your mind's occupied with other thoughts, a trigger of sorts. Yeah, you say, I can make room for that.

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# Captain Beefheart & His Magic Band MEN AT WORK







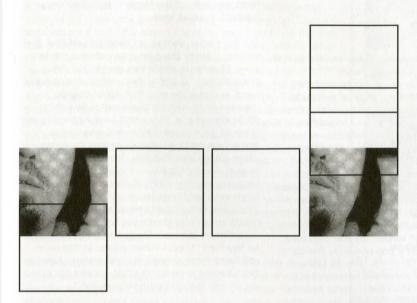


### BY BILL MEYER

Halfway through the summer after my first year of college, my parents and most of my family left the country. I whiled away the second half of that season, working a crummy job and listening to a stack of records that I had borrowed from a guy I'd met the previous year at the dorm. He was too busy trying to reconcile his newly-awakened, born-again Christianity with his affection for Rush and Peter Gabriel-period Genesis, to listen to his big brother's stack of mid-70's art-rock and jazz records. But he was glad to loan them to me.

Eighteen years later, the one record that endured is Captain Beefheart & His Magic Band's *Trout Mask Replica*. At first, I really didn't know what the hell to make of its 28 songs; each a cacophonous mix of clangorous guitars, free-jazz horns, and rhythms, that shifted from one impossible time signature to the next, like jumping beans hopping from a burger grease puddle to melted bacon fat smeared on an overheated Denny's grill. And, the hallucinatory, jump-cut lyrics were sung in what I didn't yet recognize as a Howlin' Wolf's growl. But I did tape it, and as I proceeded to wear-out first the cassette, and later a vinyl copy of my own, the music's collisions of styles and sonorities took on a magical aura - could music like this really be made by ordinary men?

When I went back to school that fall, another friend pulled out the Captain's new album, *Doc At The Radar Station*. That album's release occasioned the publishing of a few articles which perpetuated some pretty incredulous tales. These fueled the notion that this music was definitely not sired by ordinary hombres. The Captain, according to legend, was a painter named Don Van Vliet, who lived in a trailer in the Mojave desert. He had a four-and-a-half, five-and-a-half, or an eight-and-a-half octave vocal range. His songs sprung fully-formed from his imagination, and he taught them via verbally conveyed images to a devoted group of disciples (the current bunch was, he rather acidly noted, much more musically capable than the pseudonymously credited crews who played on the old records).



It all added up to quite a yarn, and I didn't really question any of it as I gradually accumulated more Beefheart records over the next few years. I certainly didn't encounter any dissenting views; the music press wasn't serving up any interviews with Drumbo, Zoot Horn Rollo, Rockette Morton, Antennae Jimmy Semens, or the Mascara Snake. Van Vliet had monopolized coverage of the Magic Band ever since Langdon Winner wrote an entertaining but incredulous cover story about him for Rolling Stone in 1970. It began with an anecdote that implied that Van Vliet possessed extra-sensory perception. Then, it and related a fanciful story about Don billing his record label for the services of a tree surgeon, whose services he'd retained in order to express his thanks to the oaks and cedars for not falling over after hearing his music1. Winner lavishly praised the guitar-playing on Trout Mask, but only identified the players by their aliases. He stated that they played in a style that Don had developed<sup>2</sup> - never mind that the man could barely play guitar (and doesn't do so on record). The article went on to repeat, without question, Van Vliet's assertion that he "sat down at the piano, and in eight-and-a-half hours wrote all twenty-eight songs included on Trout Mask," and then spent a year teaching it to his musicians3. One

thing Winner didn't overlook was Don's paranoia, which was often directed towards those most sympathetic to his cause: "What Beefheart cannot seem to see is that he has nothing like the number of foes he thinks he has. There are literally dozens of people who would do anything to enable him to perform on stage again<sup>4</sup>."

The Rolling Stone story set the mold for most subsequent coverage of the Captain and his frequently unaccredited crew. Writers responded to the album's bent brilliance and hopeless commercial prospects by writing feverishly adulatory reviews, whose proselytizing tone never seemed to persuade the masses that their lives were incomplete without hearing "Neon Meate Dream Of A Octafish." Even Lester Bangs, who penned mainly euphoric celebrations of each new Beefheart release for Cream, Rolling Stone, and the Village Voice, seemed unable to approach Van Vliet's claims with any critical distance. In the late 80's, John "Drumbo" French played on several Henry Kaiser records. French still wasn't talking (or rather, no one was publishing what he had to say), but Kaiser was. He repeatedly and emphatically asserted that the Magic Band's members weren't just human canvas on which Van Vliet would paint,



but creative interpreters who "were more than half responsible for some amazing music5." Boxed sets are usually money-spinners of the most cynical sort - bloated, greatest-hits packages, larded with just enough alternate versions, remixes, and/or b-sides to make serious fans feel obligated to buy an overpriced collection of music that they already own. Grow Fins, a five-CD set released in June, 1999 by Revenant records, bucks the trend. Some of it has circulated on bootlegs for years, but none of it has been legally issued before. It traces the history of Captain Beefheart & His Magic Band from start to finish, skipping only the unfortunate "Tragic Band" years when Van Vliet signed to Mercury and tried (and miserably failed) to be a pop hitmaker. The compilation includes: one CD of the Safe As Milk era demos and live tracks recorded between 1965 and 1967; another disc of live material from the Magic Band's 1968 European tour; two discs of instrumental tracks and conversations taken from the initial effort to record Trout Mask Replica in the field; and a final disc of concert performances, work tapes, and radio broadcasts made between 1969 and 1982. Disc four also includes a CD-ROM with live footage from the late 60's and early 70's.

Most of the material on Grow Fins turns up elsewhere in the Beefheart discography, and some tunes appear several times in differing versions. It's a fantastic collection, but you need to know the other records to appreciate this one, which definitely makes it one for hardcore fans. I'd direct a neophyte to Lick Off My Decals, Baby, Shiny Beast (Bat Chain Puller), Doc At The Radar Station, Safe As Milk, or Trout Mask Replica. Still, if you're a serious Beefheart fan, you really mustn't be without it - the compilation's 78 cuts are nearly all prime Beef. It comes packaged in a lavish, colorfully illustrated, 12-page, hardbound book that includes a worshipful appreciation written by David Fricke, and John Corbett's erudite track-bytrack commentary. But the bulk of the tone is devoted to John "Drumbo" French's oral history of the Magic Band, which draws on interviews with most of the band's surviving major players. French worked with Van Vliet more often than any other musician; he joined the band for the first time in

1966 and finished up playing guitar on "Doc." In tandem with the five CDs, his chronicle, entitled "There Ain't No Santa Claus On the Evening Stage," tells a tale that's seriously at odds with Van Vliet's own fantastic claims about the music's creation. Although Don was indisputably the leader and conceptualist, none of this music would have happened without the Magic Band's hard and intensely creative work.

The live tracks, demos, and acetates on Disc 1 present a Magic Band far removed from the ferocious thresher machine that hacked out Trout Mask Replica. In 1966, they were a rocking party band, scouting the already mapped boundary between heavy electric blues and radio-worthy R&B-inflected pop. Van Vliet's keen harmonica and sneered lyrics about voodoo and unavailable women sat pretty comfortably within the blues idiom, as did Alex Snouffer, Doug Moon, Rich Hepner, and Jeff Cotton's barbed guitars and the choogling rhythms of PG Blakely, Jerry Handley, Vic Mortensen, and John French. The large number of musicians reflected a turnover born out of Van Vliet's struggle to control the band. Nonetheless. says French, the early Magic Band wrote its material together: "I recall compositions at this point still being more a result of collaboration. Although Don seemed to be the catalyst, he was not coming up with the music singlehandedly6."

The balance of sonic responsibility tilts back and forth between band and singer on Disc 2, which is mostly devoted to live tracks made during the tour that immediately followed the recording of Strictly Personal and its out-take cousin, Mirror Man. The Magic Band, like many other ensembles of the time, liked to take blues forms and stretch 'em out. To their credit, they were pretty good at it; on "Electricity" and "You're Gonna Need Somebody On Your Bond" Snouffer and Cotton play churning guitar jams that are mercifully free of the "pay me by the note" grandstanding of, say, Cream. The heat really turns up when Don's raspy, harmonica punctuations and sinuous, overblown, soprano, sax lines mix it up with the guitarists' interlocking parts. But this is still not far from blues country. You can hear Van Vliet just beginning to push the band beyond such conventions on "Kandy Korn." whose relatively conventional structure is obscured by a-linear, stop-start, guitar rhythms.

Convention went out the window on *Trout Mask Replica*, a 28-song double LP, recorded in 1969 for Frank Zappa's Straight Records. Instead of reworked blues themes and straightforward love songs, Don spun surreal tales that celebrated nature and documented alienation from society, with stops along the way for unambivalent carnal jokes, anti-war protests, pro-fat anecdotes, and hallucinatory sea shanties. The music matched

the vividness and discontinuity of his lyrics. Dueling guitar parts, in different time signatures, ground remorselessly forward, plumbing dissonant depths (then unknown to rock), while muffled drums clattered-out rickety, non-repeating frameworks that didn't so much make the music coherent as to keep its pieces aloft like some juggling act.

A lot of this music is obscured on Trout Mask by Don's roaring voice, which dominates the mix. The home recordings on Disc 3 were intended to be the album's backing tracks until Don decided that producer Frank Zappa was being a cheapskate, and demanded that they be recorded again in a professional studio7. These tapes of the Magic Band, in its natural habitat, allow one to hear clearly the clashing chord patterns, jigsaw rhythms, and preposterous transitions that churned underneath Don's voice. This unlikely music was the outcome of a drastic change in the Magic Band's dynamic. Van Vliet now dictated the music to the band by banging out a series of ten-fingered, made-up chords on the piano. Then, French would translate them into musical notation, which the band then had to turn into coherent music during months of 16-hour-aday rehearsals. Since the notated music called for the guitarists to play anatomically impossible chords, and Don's tapes didn't provide any guidance on how to get from one part to the next, the players had to work out the transitions in more rehearsals. Even after the parts were worked out, they were subject to immediate change at Van Vliet's whim.

The band kept up this pace for months. They rarely left their house, didn't play any gigs, and subsisted on a diet of soybeans. Van Vliet kept them on task by conducting harrowing, marathon, encounter groups that lasted up to two days. French recalls that Van Vliet would pit band members against each other until the identified bad guy broke down<sup>8</sup>. And Harkleroad reports episodes of band members, fueled by Don's opprobrium, beating each other up<sup>9</sup>. "It was," writes French, "a truly cult-like mixture of brainwashing, intimidation, and coercion10." Adding insult to injury, after *Trout Mask Replica* came out. Van Vliet loudly and persistently proclaimed himself to be the sole creative agent in this process. In retaliation for leaving the band, French's name didn't even appear in the original press's credits.

The sad thing is that the band members' accomplishments, if disclosed, wouldn't have diminished Van Vliet's achievements one iota. After all, does anyone think less of Dylan because he relied so much on The Band, or of John Coltrane because Elvin Jones was so indispensable to the sound of his quartet? More likely his stature would have been enhanced. Both Harkleroad and French credit him with opening up their imaginations and getting them to play in ways they'd never have come to on their own. It's too bad that Don didn't understand that fact. If he had, he might be remembered now as a grand band leader as well as a brilliant and original musical conceptualist.

FOOTNOTES 1. Langdon Winner, "I'm Not Even Here, I Just Stick Around For My Friends - the Odyssey of Captain Beefheart" Rolling Stone, No. 58, p. 38, 5/14/1970. 2. Ibid, p. 38. 3. Ibid, p. 38. 4. Ibid, p. 40. 5. Henry Kaiser, Hope You Like Our New Direction, Reckless Records, p. 5, 1990. 6. John French, "There Ain't No Santa Claus On The Evening Stage;" Grow Fins, Revenant Records, p. 36, 1999. 7. Bill Harkleroad, "Lunar Notes," SAF Publishing, p. 47, 1998. 8. French, p. 53. 9. Harkleroad, p. 68 10. French, p. 53.

### NOD



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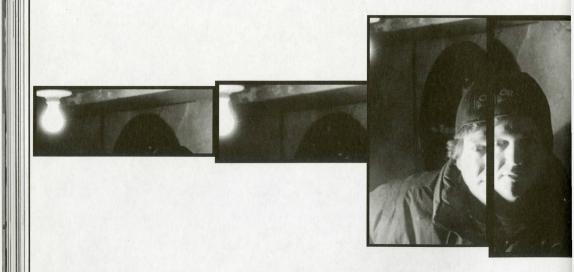


BASEMENTS AND STYLOPHONES:

NOD refuse to die. Why? Because perseverance and sanity are far more important than getting over the fact that no one knows who they are, or what their music sounds like. Just think of the local dive down your street that serves the best hamburgers on the planet, and have for about fifteen years, on the strength of no advertising at all. After almost ten years together, NOD's stuff has an organic miasma that is unparalleled by any of their contemporaries. The sound? Well, if you're one of those flatulent sluggards whose sensibilities are forged by Rolling Stones' "one-hundred greatest albums of all time," then their aural references could be Stooges, Velvet Underground, Jon Richman... However, I'll be glib and say that their influences remain their coffee makers and kind-bud, but they have a long history, not to mention an even bigger collection of records and television sets to draw influence from. This interview was conducted on Breck Street in Rochester N.Y., where at least one of the members of NOD still lives.

> AN INTERVIEW WITH NOD

> > BY LAWRENCE FELDMAN



Tim Poland - bassman Joe Sorriero - gitbank and warbs Brian Shafer - pounds

(At varying intervals, Brian, Joe, and Tim hum Bob Welch/Fleetwood Mac's "Sentimental Lady," [!] NOD's new CD, Radio Giddyup, [Smells Like Records] plays in the background)

**Sound Collector: So what's the new disc called?**Joe Sorriero: *Radio Giddyup*!

### SC: Where'd you record it?

Brian Shafer: One floor down! Tim Poland: (proudly) 288 Breck Street! With a big budget of Zero!

SC: Did the herb and food bill exceed recording costs?

TP: We had to record in the basement because Steve wouldn't give us any money! (percussionist and proprietor of Smells Like Records)

SC: They don't pay you to record!? BS: No.

SC: Actually, I knew that. (Whole room laughs)

### SC: Any extracurricular NOD activities?

(Talk of Dave Mathews Band, Hootie and The Blowfish, and the inundation of jam-bands at local clubs)

SC: That rhythm guitar thing: CHOONTDIGGGACHOONT-DIGGADOONT! A lot of the new album reminds me of that.

TP: This is our jam-band record.

**SC:** There are grooves on it, but they're actual songs. JS: Yeah, there are songs, the albums got structure, it isn't just noise, I guess.

BS: It seemed like, when we were working on it...

BS: It felt more like a classic rock album.
TP: It was like a ZZ Top record, their second.

JS: Halibut?

BS: It did feel more like classic rock than other stuff we've done.

NOD jet all over a trans-continental, sonic seascape, and chuck Rock, ROCK, and Rawk, down the cardboard chutes of bystanders like a ton of Lincoln Logs. They assemble their music in fragments, which summon the bizarre, and the familiar. Think of the time you first heard "Black Dog" on the FM. It sounded one hundred years old at first hearing, yet, your Mom was probably sitting right there worrying about what you'd become if you, God forbid, bought the record. Worse yet, it might have been "Paranoid" or "Space Truckin" you were blazing up to. Lester Bangs was dead wrong dissing the 70's big acts. Not only did Zep, Sabbath, Floyd, etc. sound humongous, they carried it off with such chutzpah you had to marvel at the force (all the while silently snickering at the music's execution and the people involved). So, the big acts made money and were on major labels, SO DID THE STOOGES, MC5, RAMONES, PATTI, TELEVISION, et. al., and STILL people were polarized into thinking that "punk" was the "pure music." What is now "classic rock" really altered people's perceptions of popular music. NOD knows better. That's why you hear riffs, quotes, reference points from all over the FM dial thrown in with their own DIY aesthetic.

JS: It's funny, you said the mention Yardbirds as a reference for our album. The formula is basically the same, only it's from like, thirty or so years ago.

SC: Would you consider yourselves as a traditional outfit?

BS: (snappily) Reference Rock!

SC: The New Traditionalists!



BS: All Hail!! There's a lot of new traditions! There are some Funky bluesy elements on "One More Time Yeah," which ends up sounding like Hendrix jammin' out with Lou and Sterl. "New One" and "Love Is On Fire" are slow and ominous, the latter copping a great Yardbird come Sonic Youth riff.

Joe displays his usual epiglottal scope in "I Love It Too" with an awesome yelpy, yip-dog falsetto on the choruses. Small, aural reminders of the past nail a vibe better than going flat out retro, especially stacked on top of another in the same song. "For Me For" has a Velvets/TV feel, but benefits greatly from it's own unique rhythms and instrumental break riding the song out. "Water Down" and "The Point" are reminiscent of Neil Young and Crazy Horse, taking a break after "Tonight's The Night" sessions. "Tree Fort" has Captain Beefheart licking Jimmy Page's decals off all the way from Lancaster to Kashmir, however, what stands out are the last two tracks. Appropriately titled, "Pathetic Ditty" and "Ditty." The first, "Pathetic Ditty," sizzles and stutters like "Swineburne Stomp" and "Baby, You're a Rich Man," played and sung by Syd Barret with the 3rd Ear Band. The last cut, "Ditty," is spare and gorgeous. Joe Sorriero's lone acoustic guitar and cracked fragile whisper transport me to the Spence/Drake universe of the sonically neglected.

## SC: So, what's the difference between "Pathetic Ditty" and "Ditty?" Is the latter less pathetic?

TP: One's a little more soulful.

### SC: Do you alternate instruments?

TP: On some of the tracks

BS: On the basic tracks we're in our regular spots, but added overdubs and party noise later.

## SC: I notice that on "Pathetic Ditty," there's a woodwindy, kinda mellotron, whiny sound...

BS: That's a washing machine and a Stylo-Phone.

### SC: What's a Stylo-Phone?

TP: Isn't that a Tandy product?

BS: Yeah, Radio Shack!

TP: It's like a door buzzer.

BS: Yeah, It's like a door buzzer set up like a little keyboard. It's a hand held. It's got a pitch adjustment on the bottom so you can bend the notes. There's contacts... like a pen with a wire in it...

JS: You touch this metal thing and it goes, "ERRRGGGH." (hums)

BS: There are lines, like a keyboard, so you know when you're going up to the next note. It even came with a songbook.

TP: There's sort of an infinite amount of notes in between.

# SC: RED RED RED GREEN GREEN GREEN BLUE BLUE GREEN GREEN YELLOW (Hums to the tune of "Good King Wenceslas," a tune in which Joe appears to borrow the main riff for his own "Queens Of Lattice," featured on NOD's first eponymously titled disc.) [See extensive discography]

BS: So, yeah, "Pathetic Ditty" probably has the most overdubs on it. Well, not really overdubs but, definitely the most instrumentation. Most of the other tracks usually just get an extra percussion track. We rarely use all our available tracks.

### SC: I've heard people complain about the fact that you use so few tracks for your first CD.

TP: Well, what we did there was, we took 24-inch tape and ran twelve to save tape, and ran it twice so there was two sets of songs on one, twenty-four track tape. BS: We should just put out that CD again, only have all twenty-four tracks playing at the same time.

### SC: You don't believe in big studio budgets?

JS: No. We don't really have any choice. BS: I'm not sure we'd take it if we had it.

### SC: If the group had a lot of money and could book time in any studio, would you?

JS: I wouldn't do it much differently from what we're doing now.

BS: We benefit a lot from comfortable spaces. I think that where we are when we play has a lot to do with the way things come out.

JS: Yeah, I think if anything, I'd bring fancy equipment to the basement. Ultimately, I like the sound of the basement.

BS: It's just what we're used to.

### SC: I like the way you keep a live feel on the records. JS: Yeah.

BS: As a band, we do it. As individuals, I don't know. Mostly it isn't like "Oh, we're ready to go into the studio now.% As a band, it's more like, "It's Saturday, and we have songs; let's record 'em today" instead of preparing. We're not big on preparation.

# SC: When you listen to Television, their albums are really fastidious, but live they were really raw and noisy. I always wished their records were more like that.

JS: I know, live. I like feeling over "quality.
BS: You saw the Neil Young movie (The Year Of The
Horse). In the beginning he describes each band member
in non-musical terms, telling what each member did.

### SC: He wasn't some Berkley student...

BS: Right, he used completely emotional terms, like "so-

and-so is the edge of the band, or whatever. I just thought that was interesting the way he described Crazy Horse. It made me think of us.

SC: Right, they related to each other according to what the other did. The Ramones did that, too.

JS: They find themselves while they're doing it.

SC: It's like learning to play in your group!

BS: And they stand on stage as far apart as we're sitting now for the same reason we want to record in a basement that can barely fit us.

SC: Yeah, it's pretty great to see Billy Talbot, Frank Sampedro, and Neil, jumping around on this huge-ass stage like they're chained together. They've got a huge stage to jump around and...

BS: Be rock stars and shit.

SC: But they still maintain that proximity of the garage.

TP: But we're a basement band, remember?

SC: Somebody once called Galaxie 500 a "Bedroom Band." I remembered seeing that and saying, "What's so wrong with that?"

JS: (sadly) It's hard to get out of the bedroom. (group laughs)

TP: That's where the side projects come in. Those are bedroom bands. Pretty soon we're going to do a living room band for our parents over the holidays.

SC: What have people compared you to? When most people write about NOD, they usually namedrop Velvets, Stooges, yada-yada, whatever from their encyclopaedias

of rock.

BS: That's really weird because before and after the last CD (Magnetic Anomaly) came out, nine out of the ten bands we were compared to in reviews, we hadn't even heard of.

TP: The Shaggs! We got accused of sounding like the Shaggs!

SC: Accused!?!?

BS: We stand accused! It'll be interesting to see what they say about the new disc. It's completely different from the last one.

SC: I hear Joe crooning more. It's less of a punk-rock record.

BS: Yeah, there are touchpoints. There's never any sound. (looks crestfallen) There's no NOD sound! (All laugh) I mean, there are one or two songs that are kind of "mechanically groovy" sounding. That's probably true on every record.

SC: The group's been around for almost ten years.

JS: Nine, actually! In spring of 2000 it will be ten years. TP: Maybe we should have our CD release party then! (mockingly)

SC: Are you all Y2K friendly?

JS: I think so, it's the age of Aquarius.

BS: Joe's all set! He's an Aquarius.

JS: I just have to get there.

SC: So what do we all have to do?

BS: My drums might explode... The Stylo-phone may not make it...



### NOD EXTENSIVE (but not complete) DISCOGRAPHY

CASSETTES (private)

NOD Status Rock - (1990)

Eponymous - Saxon Studios (1991)

SCRAPPY JOE - with the Unknowables (1989), with the Blue Leeches (1989-90)

Startle (1993)

The Great Sorriero (1994)

TIM POLAND Gasoline Thumb (1993)

7" INCH SINGLES (Baby Music):

NOD Disguise\I Got A Home\Don't Talk (Joe Open Mouth Sleeve) (1991)

Nutmeg\Chicago (NOD on TV Sleeve) (1993)

Shit Blues\Essentials Go To Richmonds (Tubular Bells Sleeve) (1993)

I'm Around\Ba Dum Bump BUmn(Creature\Inchworm Sleeve) (1994)

COMPACT DISCS:

NOD - NOD (Baby Music CD) (1992)

I'm Around (Baby Music CD) (1995)

Magnetic Anomaly (SMELLS LIKE RECORDS CD) (1998)

Radio Giddyup (SMELLS LIKE RECORDS CD) (1999)

TIM POLAND - Tim Poland's Breck Rock Dub Star CD (private) (1997) 12-inch EP NOD - Don't Go Breakin' My Heart 12-inch Ep (Hugh in woods w\ dog Sleeve) (I Was

French In The Morning Records) (1997)

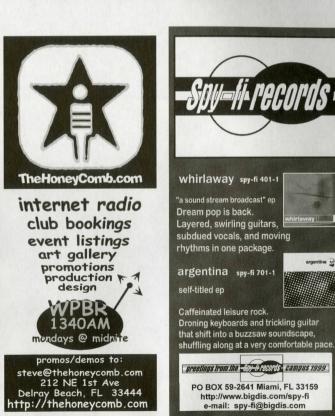
Lawrence feldman is a resident of Rochester, NY. He frequently plays in solo context and less than occasionally with his long running band The Darlings. Lawrence was the first and only person to be kicked out of NOD, so far.





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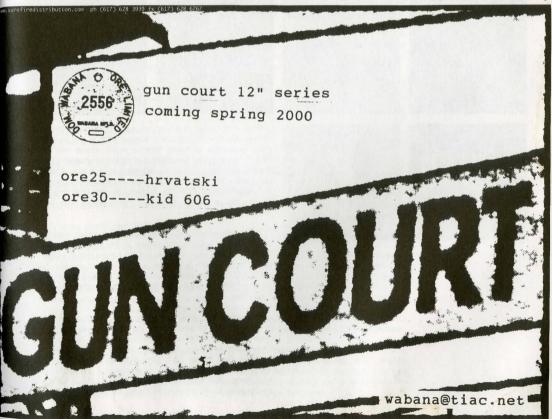
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The time is two hours before to convince readership why

# Sound Collector goes to press. I've been allocated 1,000 words worth of precious space to convince readership why **RECOVERY** PROJECT is one of our current era's more important hard rook boards.



By Justin Farrar Photos: Jeff Winterberg





















Neil Burke (guitar, keyboard, vocals, programming) and Sam McPheeters (vocals, keyboard) formed MRP in the early 90s when thousands of bands flooded record stores with LP's, CD's, 7"'s, etc., etc. This trend has persisted unabated to the present day and mainly to the detriment of hard rock. Now, any band with some get rich quick sound releases a CD. The world is inculcated with visionless, fashion-following little Spencers. These discs are rapidly piling up in every record store in the

Some subscribe to the notion that all this shit is necessary in order to fully realize the virtues of the good. It's a point. However, this is essentially an excuse for the lazy. If I have to be the fascist who tells you that your art ain't art, but shit, then call me Der Furher. MRP are not one of these transgressors. Even when they mis-fired you know they are reaching for something vital.

The sound of early MRP, excellently documented on Vermiform Records' compilation The Golden Triumph of Naked Hostility, is a schizophrenic collection of short, blasting hardcore, McPheeter's spoken word passages and electronic noodling. They sound like a band trying to escape their past. That's good. Most vital rock uses escape and alienation as its fuel. Songs like "Enjoy Life", "Normal Man", and "Abort" are aesthetically familiar ground for musicians who used to play in Born Against, but MRP inject a paranoia into these clipped rockers. One that reflects the fact that the post-hardcore community Born Against operated within turned into just another set of rules and token gestures.

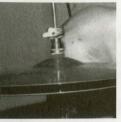
This story could have gone two routes which most of their peers opted for. 1: Allow the alienation to slowly consume their desire to make rock. 2: Screw adventurous hard rock and go for the gold by cutting what works with post-rock preservatives and/or mod-revivalism. I'm going to start a mod-prog rock band.

Instead, MRP shifted gears from a group that was escaping a sound to a band looking for a new one. This shift is similar to what happened to Alice Cooper from 1969-1974. The Coop's first



















two records for Frank Zappa's *Straight* Label are dense affairs containing a minute or two of just about every possible way a band in 1970 could rock. By *Love it to Death*, the Coop's sound is simplified but more highly evolved in terms of fleshing riffs out and working out rhythms that kick some high octane ass. MRP's early work, originally released on a slew of recording formats (You name it; they pressed it.), contains the seeds of their current electronic-rock monolith, some decent period pieces, and a truckload of failed experiments better left for dead. No band exits the womb fully developed. MRP have discarded what doesn't work and expanded on what has.

With the release of *Resist the New Way* on Vermiform last year, MRP revealed the sonic terrain they wanted to investigate. The spoken word, hardcore chaos and electronics are coalesced into one unified sound with bizarre and frightening characters floating in and out of each story like "Frank and Judy." "Judy works in a bubble on the ocean floor. Franks works in a room under the South Pole. Judy loves Frank. Frank loves Judy. So, every weekend they express mail their private parts to each other."

The MRP of late have cut back their appearances on various compilations and seven-inches and chose to finish their magnum opus and newest release, *Bolides Over Bosra* on Load Records-a concept album about life in the Middle East. *Bolides* is MRP's most consistent and most successful release to date. Each song is a dense sordid rock-jam mixing-n-matching live drums, samples, tape loops, guitars and McPheeter's searing choked-up shrieks.

In terms of electronic experimentation, *Bolides* continues some of the ideas that bands like Cabaret Voltaire and the Residents introduced but suddenly dumped by '82. Live drums work with samples as well as drum machines anchoring the jamming of live musicians. MRP are one of the few groups that look to breathe some humanity into all these digital machines that have become the adoration of the Thrill Jockey crowd. Why sit there and record your self timidly fondling a machine's controls like Microstoria or Rome or whoever. Who wants to hear that? Hell, grab a hold of that drum box and make it create sounds that no one ever intended for it. Now is not the time for tasteful sonic exploration. The death of indie rock has cleared the field of all get rich quick scammers. MRP are now crossing that terrain without the economic and community safety net semi-adventurous rock was privileged to have in days of *My War* and *Slip It In*. Both *Resisting the New Way* and *Bolides Over Bosra* are mutant off spring of this indifferent climate.

Years ago MRP were dedicated to a frontal attack on American society like any self-respecting hardcore band. They would have ridiculed the current state of affairs openly. But, what's an infinitely stronger political statement is hard rock music that is the product of dudes willing to turn inward and follow their deranged muse to whatever completely retarded end it might come to. Now that's liberating and that's why MRP are important and great rockers.

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### Sunset Valley

Boyscout Superhero

Portland's new wave pop choirboys team up with Tony Lash (Heatmiser, Dandy Warhols). Out this October.



### Beulah

When Your Heartstrings Break

Delicious orchestral indie pop from the San Francisco branch of Elephant 6.



### Diane Izzo

Jagged dark pop that falls in the space between Townes Van Zandt and PJ Harvey.



### Family of God

We Are The World

Mystic disco with a poetic ambiance.



### Scraps

Photographs By Michael Galinsky

Galinsky looks back at the insular indie rock world of the early '90s via photos and CD with tracks by Yo La Tengo, Two Dollar Guitar, Fuck, more.



### birddog

Ghost Of The Season

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### Jon Langford

Skull Orchard

Mekons frontman Langford's solo debut is his hardest rocking effort since Mekons' "Rock and Roll."



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