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Arthur
May 2008
Vol 2, Number 29
www.arthurmag.com
arthurworldservice.com

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Laris Kreslins
Publisher Emeritus

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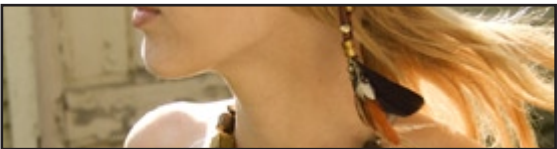
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Letters to the Editor

Someone knew Someone Who Knew A Rabbi...

Dear *Arthur*,
So it's been a few months since the clan decamped from Brooklyn and moved back to my old stomping grounds of New Orleans, and it's been an incredible experience so far, and if I had to sum it all up all of its strange beauty in one sentence, it would have to be this:

I'm convinced that if New Orleans didn't exist, Alan Moore would have to invent it.

Folks here are dreamers and schemers, and the majority of the scheming and dreaming goes on in the city's bars, taverns, watering holes, speakeasies and so on. Tall tales, big plans and big ideas are everyday currency, and whether they realize it or not, it's my opinion that everybody in New Orleans is a pulp writer at heart, a spinner of weird tales of the fantastic and supernatural, a closet Stan Lee or Robert E. Howard. Everybody here is a godlike creator of alternate realities. There's one New Orleans, the "real" city, which is pretty bizarre and fantasmic in its own right. It needs no help to be confounding, dangerous and beautiful, because it's all of those things automatically.

But then there's the Uber-New Orleans, the even stranger city, the one invented in the bars. (Let's pay DC Comics a tribute and call it New Orleans-2) is populated by armies of great bands, classic films, sublime paintings, amazing books and so on. This is not to say that people here DON'T produce things—there's art going on in New Orleans, art and industry and mad creativity that is at a constant boil. But coming up with mad, drunken ideas for epic works of fiction is a favorite sport of three in the morning New Orleanians, a pastime so endemic that folks here joke about the amount of effort spent talking about things instead of doing them.

If ten percent of these ideas were ever seen to completion, the world would be a much weirder, much more interesting place. I'm certain that the same story could be told about bars the world over, but there's just something about the way it's done in New Orleans that makes me feel that it's a city of a million would-have-beens and could-have-beens, the urban equivalent of a thousand issues of What If...? comics.

But let me get to my point. Every once in a while, just like in a comic book, New Orleans and New Orleans-2 intersect and there's a massive crossover event and continuity just goes all to hell and it's wonderful. This happens when someone makes one of these bar ideas actually happen, as was the case recently when my friend Alison Fensterstock had a brainstorm. The idea?

To have the Noisician Coalition, a marching club made up of a loose aggregate of ne'er-do-wells and malcontents who bang on trashcan drums and jerry-rigged electronic noisemakers, to play at a local Purim service. Of course!

And this is where New Orleans-2 comes in – the idea was repeated in the light of day and it was run with. Someone knew someone who knew a rabbi, and the rabbi was cool, so the gig was booked—the Noise Parade would be part of the traditional drowning out of Haman's name at the Anshe Sfard Synagogue over on Carondelet Street. When yours truly got the news that members of the N.C. were needed to add to the ruckus, he was in a bar and semi-disbelieving, but agreed to it nevertheless.

So cut to Purim—only six members of the group can make it, but that's plenty: group founders Matt Vaughan Black and Robert Starnes, L.J., Churchy, Fensterstock and me. We're decked out in our traditional red, black and white garb. The congregants in the synagogue are dressed even more outlandishly and it's rad. Finally, the service starts. An older gentleman begins to read the Megillah of Esther in Hebrew and we're all waiting around to hear the magic tragic name of that sneaky murdering bastard Haman to be uttered and when it is—wham! The Noisician Coalition erupts quickly and messily. Sirens wail, Theremins are distorted and I, the sole member on percussion, bang out the barely recognizable rhythm of "Big Chief." Smiles erupt throughout the synagogue. This, the assembled folks seem to be thinking, is RAD.

And so the megillah continues, and with every "Haman" we



Alia Penner

blast it out again and again and again, even going so far as to actually parade around the joint a couple of times. The service winds down, then, and everybody hustles down to the basement for raspberry hamentashen, meatballs, kosher wine and whiskey. Dancing erupts, thanks to the tunes of awesome local jazz-klezmer-marching mutants the Panorama Jazz Band. Dudes are doing flips, people are clapping and every once in awhile a teenager tries to snake a drink.

Later, as yours truly and a few members of the Coalition share a butt in front of the synagogue, a car rolls up, stops. The passenger side window rolls down and an African-American gentleman leans over to speak.

"What y'all doing in there?"
"It's a Purim celebration, man!"
"Can I come?"
"Hell yeah. C'mon in."
"Okay," he says. "But you see, I'm in a wheel-chair. I drive with some gears."

He demonstrates how the gears work. We're all impressed – it's a cool set-up.

"So I'm going to drive around and be back later. Is that okay?"
"Sure!"

And then he drives off, using his gears, and we watch him go and, well, all there is to say is thank heavens for New Orleans-2 and crossovers in general.

Until the next time, I remain,

Gabe Soria
New Orleans, Louisiana

UPDATE FROM OUR OLIGARCHY '08 CORRESPONDENT

The Republican Illuminati/Kingmakers wanted McCain—so it is written and so it shall b). In this post-chad environment, I'm not sure they can rig Florida again.... They have almost nothing to lose this time—whoever takes over this mess is deeply screwed. If I were a conservative oligarch, I'd focus on Congress and let the Democrats hang themselves; then come back strong in 2012 with "I told you so"-style propaganda.

Stephen Malkmus, *Portland, Oregon*

LABOR DONATED BY...

Eisa Ambrogio lives in San Francisco and plays music in The Magik Markers.

Joe O'Brien edits *Flop Sweat*, a bottom-tier comedy publication, and is at work on his first novel. He lives in Los Angeles. *Two-Lane Blacktop* is his favorite film.

Eryn Branch studies fashion in Los Angeles and enjoys listening to rap music.

The Center for Tactical Magic is a moderate, international think-tank dedicated to the research, development, and deployment of all types of magic toward achieving the "Great Work" of positive social transformation.

Byron Coley plays the hand he's dealt.

Erik Davis is a writer, fingerpicker and speaker who lives in San Francisco. His last book was *The Visionary State: A Journey Through California's Spiritual Landscape*. Nearly all of his published articles can be found on his website, techgnosis.com, where he regularly posts on music, religion, technology and other abiding mysteries.

Kevin Ferguson contributes to L.A. Record and District and is about to eat a cornbread waffle.

Molly Frances and **Mark Frohman** have completed their term as *Arthur's* art directors. They promise only to nick a few office supplies on their way out. colornational.com

Lisa Hanawalt lives in Los Angeles and enjoys drawing conquistadors, car accidents, creatures and complicated clothing. lisahanawalt.com

Joseph Harper and his psychic ferret (singing together as Virgin Rosemary, myspace.com/thevirginrosemary) look forward to the arrival of the love epidemic when our souls leave

our bodies to be sewn up into a beautiful universe quilt.**Nance Kiehm** is a radical ecologist, system designer, urban forager, teacher, artist and mad scientist of the living. She has worked in Australia, England, Scandinavia, the Caribbean and various places in the United States and Mexico. She is a promoter of direct participatory experiences.

Jeaneen Lund spent all her Junior High School afternoons searching for the Valley Girl soundtrack on vinyl. She really digs Sparks. You can see more of her photos at jeaneenlund.com.

Thurston Moore is in studio working with Religious Knives on new d-o-pe jammer.

Joe O'Brien edits *Flop Sweat*, a bottom-tier comedy publication, and is at work on his first novel. He lives in Los Angeles. *Two-Lane Blacktop* is his favorite film.

Alia Penner is collecting pieces of the Rose Constellation for a new psychedelic healing visions project. aliapenner.com

Plastic Crimewave aka Steve Krakow writes/draws the *Galactic Zoo Dossier*, the "Secret History of Chicago Music" comic strip and numerous posters/album covers. He guitarjams with Plastic Crimewave Sound, drmwpm and various ensembles. He also curates the occasional festival, tv show and gallery show.

Ned Raggett ponders cooking with kohlrabi, the evanescent nature of digital culture, political follies and eight million books—among other things—at nedraggett.wordpress.com.

David Crosby Reeves is working on a militia project and riding around on a motorcyle trying to eat everywhere that Jonathon Gold eats. Also sometimes he writes.

Joseph Remnant spends most of his time at a drawing table, avoiding human interaction and thus failing to establish meaningful and healthy relationships. Hence his artwork. Remnantart.net

Arik Roper is at his desk working very hard on an illustrated book about psychoactive mushrooms.

Chris Rubino as a child lived on a commune in New Mexico, then in Boston with Irish people, now lives in Brooklyn with Italians and college graduates. www.chrisrubino.com

Sharon Rudahl marched with Martin Luther King. She was one of the original Underground Cartoonists. Her most recent work is *A Dangerous Woman, the Graphic Biography of Emma Goldman*, published by New Press.

Douglas Rushkoff writes books about media, technology, and values. He's currently working on a project called "Corporatized," which will explore how chartered corporations disconnected us from reality. rushkoff.com

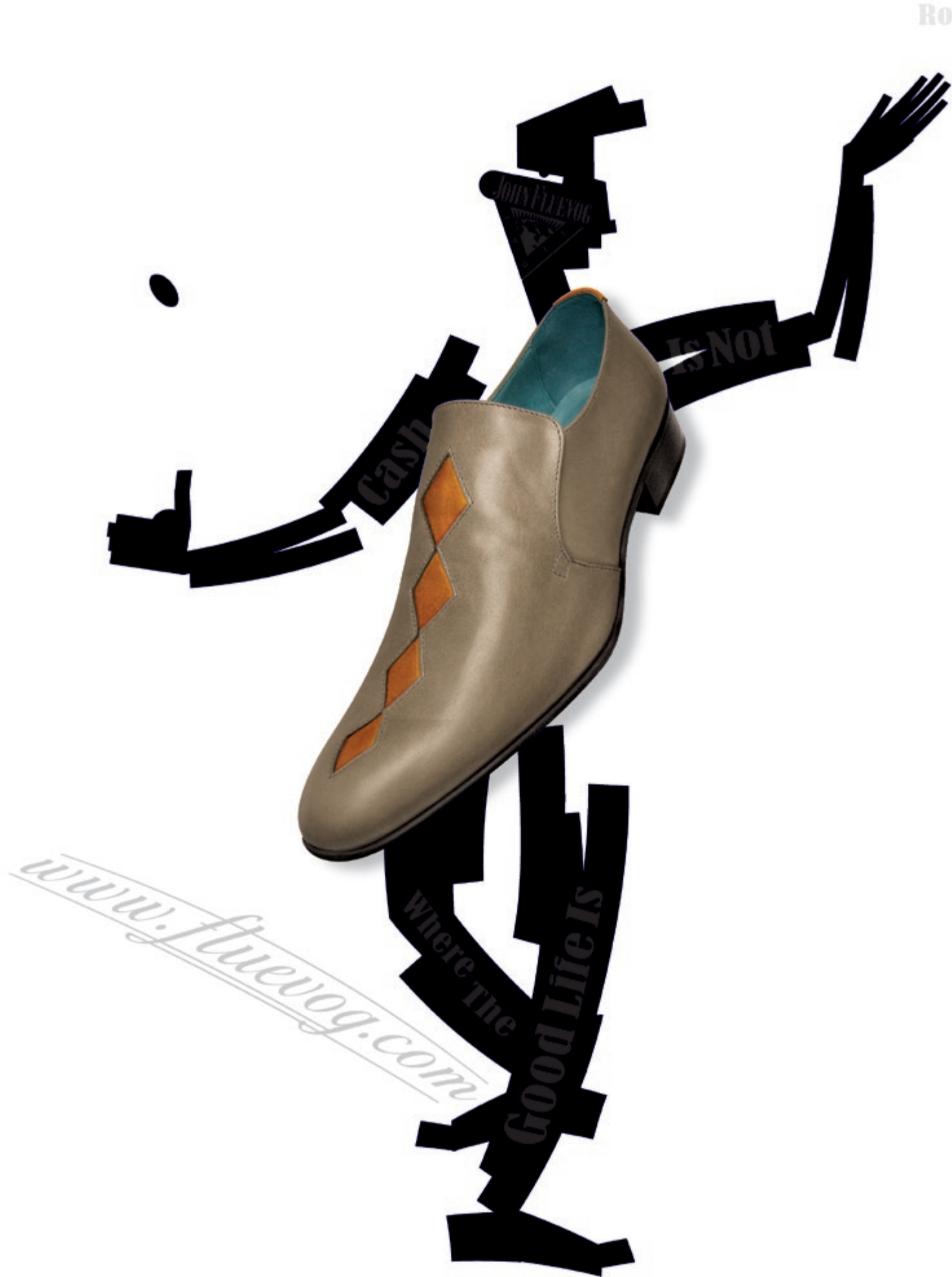
Greg Shewchuk is the director of the Land of Plenty Skateboard Foundation. www.thelandofplenty.org

Aiyana Udesen lives in San Francisco and rescues mice from the animal shelter.

M. Wartella is an underground cartoonist and animator in New York City.

Peter Lamborn Wilson is a poet-scholar of Sufism and Western Hermeticism and a well-known radical-anarchist social thinker.

Chris Ziegler is editor of *L.A. Record* and music editor of *District* and is about to drink a cup of coffee.



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There's two kinds of people asking me about the economy lately: people with money wanting to know how to keep it "safe," and people without money, wanting to know how to keep safe, themselves. Maybe it's the difference between those two concerns that best explains the underlying nature of today's fiscal crisis. Is what's going on in the economy right now really worse than anything that's happened in the past few decades? Are we heading towards a bank collapse like what happened in 1929? Or something even worse?

On a certain level, none of these questions really matter. Not as they're being phrased, anyway. What we think of as "the economy" today isn't real, it's virtual. It's a speculative marketplace that has very little to do with getting real things to the people who need them, and much more to do with providing ways for passive investors to grow their capital. This economy of markets was created to give the rising merchant class in the late middle ages a way to invest their winnings. Instead of actually working, or even injecting capital into new enterprises, they learned to "make

What we think of as "the economy" today isn't real, it's virtual. It's a speculative marketplace that has very little to do with getting real things to the people who need them.

markets" in things that were scarce. Or, rather, in things that could be made scarce, like land. That's how speculation was born. Speculation in land, gold, coal, food...pretty much anything. Because the wealthy had such so much excess capital to invest, they made markets in stuff that the rest of us actually used. The problem is that when coal or corn isn't just fuel or food but also an asset class, the laws of supply and demand cease to be the principle forces determining their price. When there's a lot of money and few places to invest it, anything considered a speculative asset becomes overpriced. And then real people can't afford the stuff they need. The speculative economy is related to the real economy, but more as a parasite than a positive force. It is detached from the real needs of people, and even detached from the real commerce that goes on between humans. It is a form of meta-commerce, like a Las Vegas casino betting on the outcome of a political election. Only the bets, in this case, change the real costs of the things being bet on. That's what happened in the housing market and the credit market—which, these days, are actually the same thing. Here's the story, in the simplest terms: Bush's tax cuts and other measures favoring the rich led to the biggest redistribution of wealth from poor to rich in American history. The result was that the wealthy—the in-



illustration by M. Wartella

vestment class—had more money to invest, or lend, than there were people and businesses looking to borrow. The easiest way to bring more borrowers into the system—and to create more of a market for money—was to promote homeownership in America. This is precisely what the Bush administration did, touting home ownership as an American right. Of course, they weren't talking about home ownership at all, but rather pushing people to borrow money tied to the value of a house. If people could be persuaded to take mortgages on homes, real estate values would go up for those already invested (like land trusts and real estate funds) and banks would have a market for the excess money they had accumulated. In short, there was a surplus of credit in the system. Americans were encouraged to borrow in the form of mortgages, which created demand for the credit banks wanted to sell. In many cases the credit itself wasn't even real, but leveraged off some other inflated commodity that the bank or investor may have owned. Banks and mortgage companies invented some really shady and difficult-to-understand mortgage contracts, designed to get people to borrow more money than they could. Banks didn't care so much about lending money to people who wouldn't be able to pay it back, because that's not how they were going to earn their money, anyway. They provided the money for mortgage companies to

lend, and in return won the rights to underwrite the loans when they were packaged and sold to other people and institutions. So a bank might provide the cash for a bunch of loans, but then get it back, plus a huge commission, when those loans were packaged and sold to someone else. Lots of people take out mortgages, and housing prices rise. This is used as evidence to convince more people that real estate is a great investment, and more people buy into the housing bubble. Lots of these people put little or no money down, and buy mortgages whose interests rates are going to change for the worse. But they believe the price of their home is inevitably going to go up, and pin their futures on the idea that they can refinance their mortgage before their rate changes. Since the house will be worth more, the mortgage for what they owe should be easier to get; it will represent a smaller percentage of the new total cost of the house. Of course, this was dumb. Banks didn't really care (because they weren't holding the bad paper) but the people investing in those "mortgage-backed securities" were slowly getting wise to the fact that many of the borrowers were in over their heads. What to do? The credit industry went ahead and lobbied Washington to change the bankruptcy laws. While corporations could claim bankruptcy and stop paying for their retirees' health

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SOME NEW CRIMEWAVE STUFF

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This month I ditched my old 17 inch Sanyo TV and bought a big flat acronym—an Samsung LNT2653H LCD HDTV to be precise. My main motivation was visual hedonism. Though I don't watch a ton of movies, I am something of a cineaste, having gone to college in the days when a decent sized campus like ours might boast a dozen film societies. Until recently, I fed my Janus jones in rep cinemas, while at home I watched lighter fare—B movies or anime or leeched HBO shows. But rep cinemas are dying, even in a deeply mediated town like San Francisco, and I am simply not willing to squint any longer at letter boxed DVDs. I wanted a screen with an aspect ratio, if not a size, worthy of The Man from Laramie or Kagemusha. And so I entered the cacophonous purgatory of Best Buy to check out the wares.

I've always found TV shops kind of disturbing. It's something about having all the machines simultaneously replicating the same program, like a flickering clone farm. But what really spooked me out this time was an immense split screen that was designed to demonstrate some Samsung feature called Auto Motion Plus 120Hz. On deck was the last Pirates of the Caribbean movie, a product that will also get you thinking about clones. On the right, you had the "normal" image, which looked like

This is the sunset of cinema, folks, a blazing analog dusk, and it is giving way to a digital night that is full of data and noise and still can't really get the blacks right.

a somewhat tinny and pointilistic film—HDTV's reasonable digital echo of the silver screen. But the Auto Motion Plussed image on the left was so lifelike and three-dimensional that it destroyed any sense of film at all. It was as if the screen was no longer an enchanted mirror, but a telepresence window onto a Hollywood sound stage where an overpaid babe in a costume was stumbling around with some dumb props hoping the CG guys would make it all make sense.

In his much-reproduced essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," written in 1936, Walter Benjamin saw cinema as the paradigm of a new kind of technological media that would undermine the traditional "aura" of art, the semi-sacred quality of being that once infused individual works of creative genius. Looking at Keira Knightly's makeup flake into the empty air of Auto Motion Plus, it was suddenly clear to me that we still have some aura left to lose: the analog aura of film itself, an aura that has a great deal to do with the complex chemical processes which give certain film stocks and eras an unmistakable timbre. This is the sunset of cinema, folks, a blazing analog dusk, and it is giving way to a digital night that is full of data and noise and still can't really get the blacks right.



Illustration by Chris Rubino

Then all the screens around me started throwing footballs in unison, and it started to make sense. The future screen, the future TV, is not about cinema but about simulating presence, a carnal ultrafidelity that's good for sports, and reality TV, and porn. I must have had low blood sugar or something—box stores do this to me—but a vague apocalyptic dread descended upon me, as I imagined these home theaters invading millions of homes and literally sucking the life out of them, like phantasmic vampires, or digitally remastered portraits of Dorian Grey. Screens that grow more lifelike in exact proportion to the ontological exhaustion of the world outside, a world flattened and set groaning under the weight of us, our distractions, our hunger for figments. A verse from the book of Ezekiel welled up from the depths: "Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, the Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth."

That said, as long as we are stuck in our chambers we might as well get some good imagery on the wall, which is why I shook myself out of my apocalyptic fugue and continued to shop. But what to buy? If I was a rich guy with a big house I'd definitely buy one of the big LCD HDTVS with Auto Motion Plus (for the...sports). But I share a small apartment with a lovely lady who doesn't really watch or want a television at all, and who certainly does not want one lording over our wood-paneled living room with all the warmth and grace of an MRI machine. So I bought a 26 inch LCD with good stereo sound to keep in the office. That night I emailed the Pilkdown Man in London, and mentioned the TV's "unfortunately small" size. "Wow," he wrote back, "we've entered a world where a 26" telly is small." I felt like an idiot.

We are not a cable household, which means that we watch TV, when we do, the old fashioned way: by suck-

ing analog signals from the sky with a cheap V-shaped antenna stuck on top of the set. Though this method may strike you as Paleolithic, old school aerials are still the signal suckage method of choice for roughly twenty million American households. These include folks who can't be bothered, people who can't afford cable or satellite, and cranks like us who don't want all that shit lurking just one remote away, ready to strike. Whoever we are, a great sword of Damocles now hangs in the airwaves over our heads, or rather, over our sets. Because as of February 17, 2009, the FCC has proclaimed that the entire analog broadcasting system, known as NTSC, will be permanently retired to make way for all-digital television. Without digital tuners, our old analog TVs are nothing more than monitors.

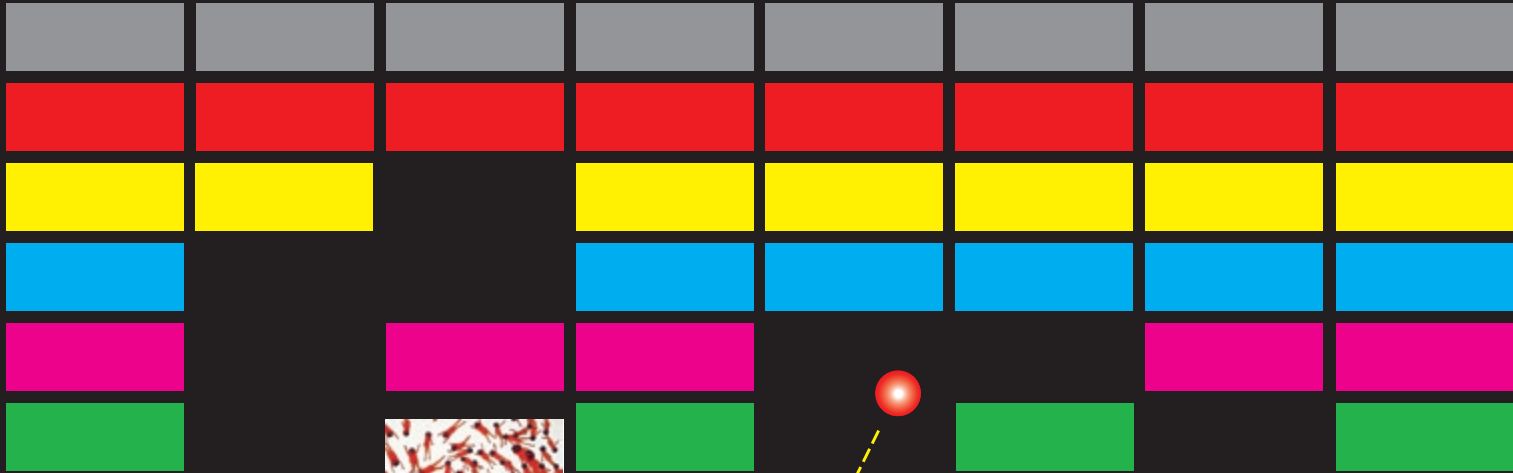
The United States is by no means paving the way here. Some European countries have already left analog behind, and pretty much everybody is signed up to make the switchover. The main reason for the change, of course, is money: manufacturers get to sell new-fangled sets, TV stations have the possibility of creating a number of new revenue streams, and the government gets to auction those tasty, wall-penetrating frequencies previously occupied by NTSC. One of the first things the government will do with that cash is to turn some of it over to local artists, pirate radio crews, and media activists who are being empowered to create innovative noncommercial programming and micobroadcast it over the freed-up channels—which after all are a public resource, like the national parks—to help prepare local communities for the imminent collapse of postmodern America.

JUST KIDDING! Instead, some of that auction money—up to a billion and a half dollars—will be used to cover the cost of a conversion program that will allow owners of analog TVs to continue to use their rigs. If you want to, your household can call up the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (Orwell

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NEW RELEASES IN STORES NOW

BREAKIN OUT



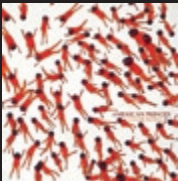
BELL X1
Flock

With hooks galore amid a tapestry of moody, introspective nuances, **Bell X1** is now poised to ride the wave of their UK success on this side of the Atlantic. The US release of *Flock* is a limited-edition enhanced CD that includes three live videos, the "Rocky Took A Lover" animated music video, and two special tracks including a Chicken Lips remix of "Flame."



THE APPLES IN STEREO
Electronic Projects for Musicians

The Apples in stereo's new album *Electronic Projects for Musicians* is a compilation that includes b-sides and rarities recorded between 1995-2007. It features three previously unreleased tracks: "Stephen Stephen," "The Apples in stereo Theme Song," and the highly anticipated "Dreams," an unfinished track from *Tone Soul Evolution*.



AMERICAN PRINCES
Other People

"A few friends have said it's our '80s record, but it's probably more Tears for Fears or Tom Petty than New Order," says singer/guitarist David Slade. The group recorded at NYC studio The Fireplace with Chuck Brody, who's worked on records by the Wu-Tang Clan and Peter Bjorn and John.



HELOISE & THE SAVOIR FAIRE
Trash, Rats & Microphones

An electrified collision of late-70's disco-infused dance punk and 80's synth-pop, the band has described by The Times UK as "somewhere between Goldfrapp and The Scissor Sisters." The album features guest vocals by Debbie Harry who recently called **Heloise & The Savior Faire** her favorite underground band.



THOMAS FUNCTION
Celebration

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JAMIE LIDELL
Jim

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THE ROOTS OF CULTURE

“What kind of times are they, when talk about trees is almost a crime because it implies silence about so many horrors?”
—*Bertolt Brecht* (To Those Born Later)



Most people have an appreciation for plants and make an effort to occasionally hike among them, repose in their shade or even co-habitate with them. And while it's safe to say that we recognize plants' value and usefulness, it's also a fair assessment to state that the plant kingdom is frequently taken for granted. When we're not trampling it, cutting it down, or eating it, we're usually ignoring it altogether.

Perhaps that's why the vast majority of modern people who encounter the idea of human/plant communication—or “psychobotany,” as we prefer to call it—find it strange. But it's equally strange that this viewpoint has become normalized. After all, anthropologists largely agree that people have been attempting communication with the plant kingdom for as long as there have been plants and people. So why is it considered “abnormal” to attempt communication with plants today? And what can we hope to accomplish by entering into such a conversation in the first place?

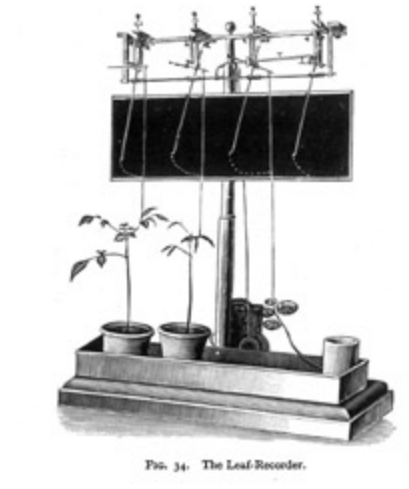
From engendered grudges and evolutionary angst to theological quibbles and accusations of entrapment, the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has certainly been fertile ground for all sorts of controversy. But surely there's an upside. At the very least the Bible has given us a glimpse of Utopia: proto-hippies living blissfully in a magic garden. In one corner of paradise they receive vital-

The ancient tree-huggers are reputed to have awarded wayward lumberjacks with disem-bowelment and death.

ity from the Tree of Life; in another they gain consciousness of self after sampling the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.

Of course Genesis isn't the only religious text to promote the divinity within nature. The Egyptian god Osiris was often associated with the Acacia tree. The Babylonians regarded the Cedar to be divinely virtuous. In Norse mythology, Odin created humans from the ash tree. And Zeus could be beseeched at his oracle in a grove of giant oaks. Within Hinduism the great banyan tree still features as a prominent site of worship. Polynesian cultures maintain a belief in the mana that permeates not only the plant kingdom, but the entire world around us. Similarly, the indigenous Japanese Shinto religion (as well as a great many other pantheistic belief systems) still holds Nature to be imbued with various spirits.

And nature worship features prominently amongst pagan sects today much as it did thousands of years ago amongst the original Druids. Holding firm the belief that trees were sacred beings capable of communicating guidance and knowledge, these ancient tree-huggers are re-



Diagrams: Sir Jagadis Chunder Bose's Leaf Recorder and Plant Autographs. Photographs: Stills from a series of 1976 performances originally recorded for the film *The Secret Life of Plants*.

puted to have awarded wayward lumberjacks with disem-bowelment and death. (A punishment that makes Earth First!, Earth Liberation Front, and other so-called “eco-terrorists” of today look tame by comparison). In some cases, the Druids constructed elaborate rites and ritual celebrations to consult the trees. At other times it was enough to simply relax in the shade of a whispering willow.

On the other side of the planet, indigenous communities across the Americas looked to trees, plants and Mother Corn for guidance and wisdom. The insights hiding within mushrooms, peyote, morning glory seeds, and ayahuasca could be released through consumption, while tobacco, marijuana, and salvia divinorum spirits were consulted through smoking. In fact, the Aztecs reputedly built complex herb gardens and divined messages through visions encouraged by psychotropic plants and fungi.

When not directly communicating with the inner divinity of flora, the ingesting and smoking of plants and herbs could assist in lubricating efforts at diplomatic communication amongst various peoples. For example, the Native American “peace pipe” served as a sort of botanical moderator between warring clans, competing tribesmen, and the European colonizers. In Fiji and other South Pacific islands, kava kava continues to serve much the same purpose. By sedating the body but keeping the mind alert, the milky brew helps insure a peaceful resolution to disputes brought about through conversation rather than fisticuffs. (Perhaps other world leaders should take a swig...)

In addition to the tale of Aladdin in the magic garden and the famed Cedars of Lebanon (as featured on the



Lebanese flag), the Middle East provides at least one other prominent account of humans communicating with plants: Moses talking to a burning bush. Even today, or rather especially today, the notion is still considered appealing to many residents of the region as evidenced by the growing number of press photos featuring folks crowded around a blazing effigy of George the Decider. Although the message comes across loud and clear, perhaps this contemporary twist on the burning bush doesn't quite qualify as a sincere attempt at human/plant communication. Yet, there have been other modern efforts to learn from our leafy friends.

In 1966, Cleve Backster, a former interrogator for the CIA and a leading authority on lie detection, conducted experiments in plant ESP, using polygraph (lie detectors) techniques. His experiments supported the idea that plants are sensitive to human thought. These conclusions, linked with growing interest in cybernetics, and well-established evidence regarding plant sensitivity to environmental changes, spurred additional research interests. In 1970, defense engineer L. George Lawrence remarked, “...a few stunning discoveries of excellent promise [have] prompted those most active in this field to predict that, in time, parapsychological methods might well rival the orthodox communications arts and sciences currently in use.” (Electronics World, April, 1970).

It appears that Mr. George has yet to be proven wrong. Thirty-eight years later, the U.S. Department of Defense has taken great interest in plant communication. Specifically, DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency), the DoD's budget-gobbling R&D branch,

continued on pg. 18



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21 RECENTLY DISCOVERED DELIGHTS

By Elisa Ambrogio



A Tragic Honesty: The Life and Work of Richard Yates by Blake Bailey (Picador, 2008)
The Bailey came out this past year or so, but I would recommend first reading Yates' easiest-to-find novel, *Revolutionary Road*, before it goes out of print again. Eros, pathos, flop sweat, it's all there; a man outside and inside his own time. Highs and lows as a writer, but at his best it does not get better; more of a grown man than Salinger and less of a prick than Updike: the comic and horrible desperation of the 1950s middle class white guy. I can't get enough! The biography is filled with his drinking, mother, teaching, TB, women, self-defeat, madness, work, beard-growing and sadness.

Alex Nielson & Richard Youngs *Electric Lotus* LP (vhf, 2004)
Two guys make glue-sniffing rock and roll cast in the crucible of the entire recorded history of time and act really nonchalant about it.

Giant Skyflower Band show at the Hemlock
Closing out the show under swirling lights, Jason stumped out deep crazy timpani, Glenn sawed away at melodies and chords like an old-timey German cobbler channeling Dave Kusworth and Shayde "Mushmouth" Sartin slunk out basslines like a somnambulant Greg Lake. It was a night to remember. They've got a CD on Soft Abuse called *Blood of the Sunworm*, and name notwithstanding, it is effen rad.

***Evolution of a Cromagnon* by John Joseph (Punk House, 2007)**
Finally. But don't take my word for it. Adam Yauch has this to say: "So if you want to remember what NYC was like in the '70s and '80s, if you are interested in selling fake acid at Madison Square Garden, or dressing up like Santa Claus in a wheelchair to hustle money for the Hari Krishnas... put a read on this." Also available in audio book form, AH! Now,

Donovan Quinn



anyone who is anyone knows that this year John Bloodclot is also coming out with his own nutrition and fitness guide. Here is what he had to say in his press release: "I'm sick of people, who are either ignorant of the facts, or even worse, have hidden agendas, dissing vegetarians because we care about animals and the environment. What, do you want to live in a barren wasteland, dick wad?" Amen.

Joshua Burkett *Where's My Hat* (Time-Lag, 2008)
The album long awaited by those who played holes into Gold Cosmos so many years ago is finally here. Joshua Burkett is known for co-owning Mystery Train—the best record store in Western Massachusetts—and for being a bit of a mystery train himself. Though a master musical craftsman, he rarely plays live and takes years to release records. Where's My Hat starts with a bold electric bagpipe somewhere between an emergency siren and a diseased fog. Josh's guitar braids mental rugs and smooths down the rough edges. Though I think of Simon Finn at his gentlest, or Pip Proud or Skip Spence, it is not like anything else. And if you think it is you are wrong. There are efforts that wish they were this but they are not. You can hear the difference. Attempts at peace and a knowing ill-ease permeate the record, but it is above all a work of intricate idiosyncratic beauty.

Americatown
Using the law to strip citizens of their human rights is the first step Hitler took after growing that dippy moustache, so maybe check out the Center for Constitutional Rights and spoonfeed yourself some spit-take facts. <http://www.ccrjustice.org>

***Spectre Folk The Blackest Medicine* (Woodsist, 2008)**
Here drum-dilweed extraordinaire Pete Nolan takes on new dimensions of low fidelity radness through the Woodsist imprint, the infamous label in charge of releasing other super-jammers such as Axolotl, Loosers and Blues Control. So many good songs, I don't know where to start; it's like Gene Clark in a manhole with Von LMO in Bushwick. This is another artist criminally unappreciated for his solo work, most probably due to his surly manner. Just cause the man don't hold doors for people doesn't mean he doesn't know how to build castle bridges of strangeness into the void. LISTEN.

***Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints: Essays* by Joan Acocella (Vintage, 2007)**
Since she works the dance circuit for *The New Yorker*, this is a little heavy on the choreographer/ballet dancers for my plebian tastes, but has been one of the books I come back to again and again. As a warning, despite her beautiful prose, do not look up Bob Fosse clips on youtube. You will probably not be as moved by the musical *Damn Yankees* in this cultural context as Acocella was, and you will feel funny if anyone sees you. This compilation of biographical



essays that all focus on what makes people get work accomplished as artists is stellar, with essays about Italo Svevo, Penelope Fitzgerald and Stefan Zweig.

Viz U.S.A.
VizUSA is the new psychedelic simple, hard: the rock and roll of Buddy Holly bare bones with the doors of perception jimmyin' and repetitious riff milkin' of Les Rallizes Denudes. The first time I came into contact with these dudes, Caitlin was wearing tight neon pink spandex pants and a white furry coat; she was surrounded by a bunch of scuzz-duh dudes in Paris, talking real French to French folks. Calder looked like he just dropped out of Alice in Chains and had his hair in a big momma hippie braid down his back. They were the nicest people I talked to all tour. They were playing with Excepter then; most recently I saw them with Richard and John from Sightings with Blues Control in New York, which was an amazing show. Look for the epic full length out on NNBB imprint The Serth, ASAP.

Donovan Quinn
Though best known for his work with the Skygreen Leopards, Quinn has been culling his private weird recordings since he lived in a rotting trailer in the suburban sprawl of Walnut Creek, California. Due to popular insistence, the man has finally gone solo. Quinn is a Marlboro man mystic channeled through Francois Hardy just woken from a nap: frowsy, surrurant and surly. He curls out chords like Duane Eddy on ludes, strumming on some ether plane of American guitar groupmind. It warms my heart that perhaps people will hear Donovan and be able to discern a true contender from the hollow trees out there. Spring finds old Donovan releasing a 45 with regional hits "Sister Alchemy" and "Rabbit Tracks," to be followed by the full length LP on Soft Abuse. I might as well mention two other criminally under-jammed records, which are the *Jehovah Surrender* EP by the Skygreen Leopards and the self-titled *Flying Canyon* LP, respectively found on Jagjaguar and Soft Abuse.

***Kill All Your Darlings: Pieces, 1990-2005* by Luc Sante (Yeti/Verse Chorus Press)**
Using New York City as shorthand for America, Sante writes in a dry, elegiac prose style and lived in Alphabet City when it was scary. He captures a very specific time in New York and bridges this with more current essays on Giuliani, 9/11 etc. Sometimes he can sound a little arch, like when he's talking about the low 'genius' quotient among the Nuggets garage rockers, but his essay on the plastic injection mold alone is worth the price of the book. "There remained the lingering aura of the Wobblies, of the miners' strikes and auto workers' strikes of the 1930s, as well as a cascade of images from the Paris Commune and the October Revolution and the Long March. We imagined basking in the radiance of that aura when we wore our blue chambray shirts and listened to the MC5, not suspecting that within a decade or two most of Americans would be exported or terminated. Then the remnants of the working class would either be handed neckties and told they were middle-class, or forced into fast-food uniforms and told they didn't exist."

The artwork of Mick Turner
Despite being prolific and beautiful enough in his work as a solo musician and with such rad dudes as Venom P. Stinger and the Dirty Three, Mick Turner has got the nerve to paint perfect pictures. Walking through a thick bright landscape of women, kangaroos, the sea, alligators, fences and open sky, Mick paints like the best dreams: lucid, precise in emotion, and juxtaposing disparate images and ideas into perfect sense. Paintings like his were already there, but no one ever bothered to get them down on canvas.

Colossal Yes
Colossal Yes/Jack Rose at 21 Grand, Colossal Yes at the Make Out Room, Colossal Yes at the Rite Spot before Christmas. Drinking something kind of like alcoholic coffee lotion, Utrillo played the piano with his back to the audience and his radness on full display. Like Goffin/King if it was just one dude in a Hawaiian shirt, his songs are beautiful narratives, melodically perfect and lyrical bitches. Never obvious, he hides his brutal snapshots of human nature and ideals under rubrics of sweet piano in the greatest tradition of American songwriting. He makes me wish my ears heard better, because every time I listen, I find something new. At the Rite Spot show, Utrillo, Adam, Charlie and Ben played acoustic jams and brought down the house, then a spontaneous conga line broke out. I think *Acapulco Roughs* was one of the most underated albums of 2006, but luckily, Kushner has another album in the works as we speak that kicks its ass. Slog your way through the Beirut promos on the Ba Da Bing site to see when it comes out.

Mick Barr (Ocrilim)
This guy is a mindblowing guitar player, and yet he infuses all of his technical, joint destroying dexterity with some kind of heavy spirit and meaning. I guess they call it phrasing, but I think it might be mojo, which Barr has got in spades. The first seven-inch record I ever bought was by a Connecticut band called Thinner, which, it turns out, Mick used to play in. Not only is this guy an axe-master, but he was really nice to me when I was 16 talking at length about the lyrics to "New York Crew."

Coffee Plant Demos
Cam Archer sent this my way, and I have been listening to it. Skip Cathouse Blues, the song about the Goldfish and Garbo. The rest: PURE gold. Especially hearing Lindsey



Flying Canyon

Buckingham's twerpy self-introduction at the start of a set—"And now! Buckingham Nicks!"

Tony Rettman's Detroit Hardcore article in *Swindle* No. 12
Finally. Dedicated to Larissa Strickland, Tony talks first person to the people who you idolize: This from Steve Miller of The Fix on the D.C. scene and straightedge: "[A]ll those kids in those hardcore bands were throwing out their Aerosmith and AC/DC records. It all seemed fishy to me." This, Barry Hensler, Ian Mackaye, Dave Stimpson, Tesco Vee, and John Brannon chatting like they're at a sleepover. Tony's gift as a writer is not what he knows, which borders on the obsessive, but his ear for the language and music he loves, and his gift for capturing rhetorical pratfalls. This is his head and his heart. The best music writing in a periodical since before I was born. Now will someone please pay him to write about Abba and/or Roger Nichols?

Jason Wambsgans' "Seagulls Attack!" piece for the *Chicago Tribune*
Jason is a photojournalist for the Tribune and the sounds and the photos of suburban Illinois here are Jason's, as is the sense of mystery and narrative in the photos. This series deals with that every-17-year-blight, cicadas, the bugs that Basho slung into epic haiku history: "soon to die/yet no sign of it:/a cicada's cry." Here in these black and white photos the bugs are set in opposition and parallel to the busy residents of a carefully tended Illinois suburb, overwhelmed by the sudden force of nature disturbing their controlled environment. The world of glossy geometric lawns and two-car garages he captures is vulnerable and temporary, both the humans and the bugs, soon to die yet no sign of it. He combines empathy with his subjects with a sense of human absurdity that he is complicit in. I encourage you to write him and demand a showing of his back catalogue.

Joe Carducci
Reading *Rock and the Pop Narcotic* kinda changed my brain, and I even saw where he was coming from on Springsteen. This year Mike Wolf gave me his copy of *Enter Naomi: SST, L.A.* and *All That*. Carducci on the bands Naomi shot: "When the German or Japanese reissues, or the wireless ring-tone file-sharing eco-system, or the film documentaries, or Archaeology itself allows their rediscovery by some future kid dropping out of their over-produced, over-sold



John Joseph

pop hell, they will find this music as clean and pure as field recordings. It's the last music recorded in our world before noise-gates and digital delay replaced space and air with a virtual reality that promised a lie better than truth." Fucking A. Carducci writes like a fan dances, and it can be maddening what he leaves out or obscures, but what he puts in lifts from the page to become bass relief illustrations in your mind to explain much bigger and more complex things. Reading about SST always reminds me of how important work and discipline is, and reminds me to pony up and stop being a pussy. "Get it happening, this ain't Van Halen!" Just don't think about the money, lawyer, life-long feuds, stuff that happened later. As a companion to the times from an entirely other mind, I recommend *Saint Joe* by Joe Cole.

Falk, California
Up north near Eureka, California, there is a redwood forest that used to be a logging town and mill. Covered in new trees and old stumps, there is a trail that gets wilder the deeper you get into the woods and will take you all the way to Fortuna. You can walk inside a stump of a redwood that a logger used to live in, and there are a couple of signs that there were humans there once but mostly it is a forest. Awesome to know how quickly elaborate mechanations of humans can be totally invisible to the naked eye in only a few generations.

Mick Flower
The house Mick renovated in Leeds is clean, filled with light and stellar, like his dopest jams but less psych. Seeing Mick play live is insane. He is so precise and attentive to detail but then flies into other time and space and in his precision gets buck-ass-wild. Solo, with the Vibracathedral Orchestra and in all incarnations Mick taps into a genetic memory of sound. With Chris Corsano this year, Textile Records released *The Radiant Mirror*, one of the best records of, 2007, and I will bet 2008 too. I hope one day shitty Customs lets him back into the U.S.

Playing with Six Organs of Admittance in Europe
Besides getting to play music with Ben, and making fun of the way Fitz talked, this tour was also awesome because it included running into Spencer Clarke wearing a lei in Den Haag and having dinner at Helbaard, seeing wet naked Finnish people running from the cops, jamming in a Swedish cave, and sleeping under a cafeteria table on an overnight ferry.

Some stellar books to check out: *Ordeal by Hunger: The Story of the Donner Party* by George Stewart; *Skeletons of the Zahara* by Dean King; *The New Science* by Giambattista Vico; *The Gnostic Gospels* by Elaine Pagels; *Anarchy and Alchemy: The Films of Alejandro Jodorowsky* by Ben Cobb. 🍷

MELLOW YELLOWS



I first tasted dandelion wine when I bought a bottle of it at a folksy gift shop in the Amana Colonies (yes, Amana of the appliance fame). The Amana Colonies is an Amish community dating back to 1854. It was settled by the communally living German pietists then known as: The Community of True Inspiration or The Ebenezer Society. Their tenets included avoiding military service and refusal to take an oath. The Amanas are nestled in the middle of what is now a sea of genetically modified corn and soybeans known as the Midwest, more specifically Iowa.

I had wanted something to drink at my campsite that evening. When I opened the bottle, I anticipated something more magic than what met my tongue. It was cloying yellow syrupy stuff, which resembled soft drink concentrate. I poured it out next to my tent, returning it to the earth where she could compost it. I was sure that I'd never get close to it again.

That was fifteen years ago, and now I have been drinking dandelion wine for about two years. The new stuff is stuff I've made myself from dandelion blossoms gathered in Chicago. I'm happy to say that it is divine. I am sure now that the colonists actually keep the good stuff in their private cabinets.

Upon mentioning "dandelion wine", Ray Bradbury usually comes to mind. However, after I heard a radio

When you notice lawns and parks spotting yellow, it's time to gather. The general rule of thumb is to collect one gallon of flowers for each gallon of wine you want to make.

interview with him a few years back when he passionately made a case to colonize the moon so we can ditch this trashed planet and survive as a race, I got confused. Enough said.

So the point is, I am going to tell you how to make dandelion wine. I encourage you to do this because dandelions pop up everywhere and every place. They are nearly ubiquitous pioneers in our landscapes of disturbed and deprived soils. Consumed, they are a magnificent digestive, aiding the heath and cleansing of the kidneys and liver. Amongst vitamins A, B, C and D, they have a huge amount of potassium.

As a beyond-perfect diuretic, dandelion has so much potassium that when you digest the plant, no matter how much fluid you lose, your body actually experiences a net gain of the nutrient. In other words, folks – dandelion wine is one alcohol that actually helps your liver and kidneys! Generous, sweet, overlooked dandelion...

When you notice lawns and parks spotting yellow, it's time to gather. The general rule of thumb is to collect one gallon of flowers for each gallon of wine you want to make.



Illustration by Aiyana Udesen

Enjoy your wandering. People will think you quaintly eccentric for foraging blossoms on your hands and knees. Note: collect blossoms (without the stem) that have just opened and are out of the path of insecticides and pesticides.

So here's how I make dandelion wine...

I pour one gallon boiling water over one gallon dandelion flowers in a large bowl. When the blossoms rise (wait about twenty-four to forty-eight hours), I strain the yellow liquid out, squeezing the remaining liquid out of the flowers, into a larger ceramic or glass bowl. I compost the spent flowers (thanks dandelion!).

Then I add juice and zest from four lemons and four oranges, and four pounds of sugar (4-4 = E.Z.). Okay, now what I think is the best part - I float a piece of stale bread in the mixture sprinkled with bread yeast. This technique is used in Appalachian and some European recipes.

Then I toss a dishtowel over it so the mixture can both breathe and the crud floating around my house stays out. I continue stirring the wine several times a day until it stops fermenting. This takes about two weeks or so.

When I am certain it has stopped "working", I strain, bottle and cork it up and bid it farewell until months later. In fact I wait until the winter solstice, when I can revisit that sunny spring day by drinking it in.

Transition: as such an effective diuretic, dandelion is also know in French as "pis-en-lit" or "pee-in-the-bed". Which brings me to YELLOW LIQUID #2 ... that's right, pee!

Pee is 95% water and 5% salts and minerals. When it comes out of the body, it's sterile. Admittedly, I haven't drunk my first whizz as part of my yogic practice, however, I habitually save my pee to potentize my compost as well as for making a nitrogen-rich fertilizer for my

plants. Our bodies are nutrient factories – let's value our post-consumption products and offer them back to the Mother.

Us humans pee on average a bit more than a quart a day, at a dilution rate of 1:5 (the recipe). Each one of us are producing more than two gallons of free plant fertilizer a day. Or around 750 gallons a year - which is enough fertilizer to grow 75% of an individual's food needs for that year.

Did you know that most of the algae blooms - whether in the Los Angeles river, the shore of the Great Lakes, the mouth of the Mississippi and many other waterways - are largely due to agricultural run-off of nitrogen fertilizers applied to our corn-fed nation's farmlands?

Peeing directly into your compost pile is great. So is collecting it in a jar or a bucket and dumping it into the pile later. Not composting? Then just dilute it fresh (remember the recipe again, 1:5) with some water and use it directly on plants or let it oxidize and turn into a nitrate (i.e. leaving it out until it gets nice and dark) and then apply it undiluted. Not only is this something that has been done for ages around the world, it is still being done. Most people are just hush hush about it.

Why are our municipalities cleaning water so we can flush our toilets with it? The separation of the solid and liquid body waste is an extensive and costly process for the water treatment plant and we pay that cost twice by flushing it all away. We have urine blindness...

Before I sign off, I want to put a bug in your ear – this terrific yellow liquid that our own bodies produce can also produce gunpowder. But maybe I'll approach that topic in other column – or maybe you'll just have to do the research yourself. 🐛

"Ten affirmations of Ayers' eccentric gifts on this very welcome comeback." **Rolling Stone**

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NEW MUTATIONS FROM CRUCIAL BLAST:

NADJA

DESIRE IN UNEASINESS

Following a wave of recent reissues and re-recorded versions of older CD-R titles, Desire in Uneasiness is an album of all new material from the acclaimed Canadian dreamsludge weavers Nadja. Five colossal jams of eternally-fuzzy, ethereal dirge that is powered by the interlocking bass guitars of Leah Buck, areff and Aidan Baker, setting loose a wave of monstrous grinding bass riffs amidst a fog of beautiful, swirling electronic effects. Desire also marks the first Nadja album to feature a live drummer in place of the drum machine programming that has driven the band's previous recordings. The organic drumming here takes Nadja's music into new realms of spacious jazzy exploration, dubby rhythms and cavernous psychedelia, while also delivering some of the band's most grooving, crushing hypno-bliss yet.

TREES

LIGHTS BANE

The debut album from the Portland quartet Trees delivers two epic tracks of monolithic, blackened doom metal with a twisted, noise-damaged approach and a dank basement vibe. Trees craft glacial abstract riffs and rivers of ashens amplifier goo that fans of feedback-laden heaviosity will find highly satisfying, a kind of grinding, slow-motion black hole psychedelia that has a similar hypnotic death-ritual quality as artists like Bloody Panda and Khanate, but with their own unique trance state of swirling guitar textures, horrific jet black dronescapes and ghoulish, excoriating vocals. Features members of the PDX psych-sludge outfit Tecumseh (Important Records). This disc comes in a Stoughton printed 4-panel gatefold case.

WILDILDLIFE

Six

Part gnuvy pop hallucination, part psychedelic blast furnace, part metallic skullcrush. Super melodic and catchy but vaguely menacing and dark at the same time. This is WILDILDLIFE. Their debut full length Six follows up a fistful of CD-R and vinyl documents and summons a wicked whirlpool of dense, distorted riffage and choral voices, celestial FX freakout and raging metallic percussive pummel, tribal rhythms and crushing effects-soaked guitars, subdued floatational drones and ecstatically gorgeous melodies, all let loose in a series of psychedelic slowcore eruptions and swirling cosmic sludge. - Harvey Milk meets Animal Collective? That's one reference point that has been getting slung around lately. This is a brilliant album, no matter how you slice it.

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Anyone who claims to know what skateboarding is “all about” is full of shit. To define it as sport, art, science, transportation, play, culture, lifestyle, or anything else is to minimize the unlimited potential within the form. Skateboarding is inherently meaningless. Its lack of meaning is what allows it to be such a progressive and influential experience.

The origin of skateboarding cannot be localized to any single point. The skateboard was never invented; it was discovered by children across America simultaneously as apple-crate scooters of the 1940s and 50s were broken down and converted into the legendary 2x4” with roller-skate trucks. Thus, the skateboard has no intention behind it: no inventor, no purpose, no ownership, no goal, no rules. Nothing in the creation or design of the skateboard assumes any meaning or value. It is a perfectly uninhibited vehicle of action-oriented possibility.

As the skateboard was refined with technical advancements (urethane wheels, slight changes in board and truck design) and influenced by surf culture and technique, it evolved and attracted the daredevils and visionaries who crafted the form as we recognize it today. The terrain of streets and sidewalks led to ramps and pools and drain-

Finding the center in these dramatic curves, attaining balance in the midst of this tremendous spiraling movement, is as much an internal discipline as an external one.

pipes, and eventually begat massive concrete skateparks. Journalists and photographers and filmmakers developed a symbiotic relationship with the athletes, documenting the physical forms and commenting on the culture and surrounding artworks and personalities.

The masters of the form, the leaders and great events of skateboard history, the varied terrain and infrastructure: all of this has been documented and pored over by an appreciating audience. And yet, for all of the journalism and vicarious entertainment that surrounds skateboarding, there’s never really been a deeper examination of the form— specifically the subtle internal and energetic processes—of skateboarding itself.

The technique of actually riding on a skateboard is not that different than standing still. The skateboard is a vehicle, with wheels and axles and a platform to stand upon, but there is no drivetrain. A skateboard moves by the kinetic energy of being pushed, or by taking advantage of its potential energy positioned at the top of a hill or transitional wall. Once the skateboard is up to speed, the majority of the techniques start and end with simply riding along—standing still on the platform of the skateboard, while the world rolls beneath one’s feet, occasionally in excess of 40 miles an hour. In this standing position, the skateboard and rider may cover larger distances, they



illustration by Joseph Remnant

may roll up and down steep inclines, they may ride up circular transitions above and beyond the vertical axis, they may launch into the air and cover great distances through empty space before returning to solid ground. The skateboarder, more than anything, must shift his or her weight and stance to accommodate these changes in trajectory. The technical aspects of contemporary trick performance include a lot of board flipping and body spinning and sideways sliding and shifting and grinding, but the foundation of riding a skateboard in a casual, two-footed stance remains.

The standing skateboarder experiences dramatic changes in acceleration and frame of reference. Dropping into a ramp or bowl sets the rider off on a path of varying degrees of linear and radial acceleration. Physics students are aware that radial acceleration—the way a skateboarder will circumnavigate a bowl’d transition, or a planet will orbit a star— results in acceleration towards the center of the curve. This curious feature of Newtonian physics segues neatly into Einstein’s theory of relativity, involving acceleration along the curvature of space-time. Einstein postulated a geometric interpretation of the “force” of gravity, and this revelation completely changed the way we view and understand our world.

This means that the skateboarder, in his ongoing dance

with gravity and acceleration, can use the fine instrument of the central nervous system to examine the most dramatic and fundamental forces in the universe. This movement affects physiological change, in the form of blood flow and oxygenation and chemical release and so on, but also affects awareness and psychological change. Finding the center in these dramatic curves, attaining balance in the midst of this tremendous spiraling movement, is as much an internal discipline as an external one.

Over the past ten years I have considered skateboarding in the light of two disciplines which are often grouped together as “mind-body” practices, Taiji (also Taijiquan, T’ai Chi) and Yoga (specifically Hatha Yoga). While the comparisons have been made before, a deeper investigation is overdue. Taiji and Yoga are physical practices with corresponding philosophies that have endured for literally thousands of years, drawing from the sophisticated and profoundly spiritual cultures that spawned them: Taiji evolved with Chinese Taoism, and Yoga evolved with Indian Hinduism and Buddhism. A greatly simplified explanation of their intention is to prepare the human participant for the discipline of deep meditation.

Taiji and Yoga use the body-mind correlation to enhance and actualize the understanding and expression of spiritual connectedness. In Yoga, the intention is to “yoke” or unite with the divine through mental refinement and physical alignment in the flow of universal energy. The intention of Taiji is to follow the way—the Tao—by “uniting heaven and earth”, balancing the opposing forces of the universe internally and externally. The famous “yin yang” symbol is actually called the Taiji—it means supreme ultimate, and is intended to suggest that the universe in its true state is in perfect balance.

Considering skateboarding as a mind-body activity and relating it to Yoga and Taiji can allow insight into the less than obvious internal processes at work. It is not sheer athleticism—strength, endurance, etc.—that make a good skateboarder; a good skateboarder must be a master of balance, focus, perseverance, creative ingenuity, and fear management. It takes heart and vision (and a good sense of humor) to ride a skateboard, not muscle. Cultivation of the heart and vision are among the primary intentions of a traditional mind-body activity, and they do not involve a painstaking enhancement of the ego, but quite the opposite. Skateboarders have as much to learn about the physical aspects of their craft from these ancient disciplines as they do about the internal, mental, and spiritual aspects.

Regardless of whether these systems are studied or adopted by skateboarders, the point is that there is an opening here for some higher purpose. When you are skateboarding, any goals or obligations are self-created. The intention of your skateboard practice is up to you. For someone who has been skating for 20 or 30 years, the reasons for skateboarding have probably changed greatly. What begins as sport, art, play, a job, etc. can become an opportunity to merge a physically balanced form with open-minded spiritual potential. This can take place by studying Yoga or Taiji, or by incorporating another religious philosophy (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Zen Buddhism, and so on) into the mix. It is certainly not necessary, but the choice is yours.

Whatever you choose, you will not be alone on your path. In 50 years skateboarding has developed into a worldwide culture with millions of participants, growing and evolving at the speed of life, and every flavor 🍷

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16 arthur

Applied Magic(k) cont’d

has sought to enlist plants in the so-called “War on Terror.” Their Biological Input/Output Systems (BIOS) Program attempts to create “sentinel plants”. When the plants are in the presence of certain triggers—chemicals released by explosives, for instance—they will supposedly offer a bioengineered response such as glowing/fluorescing, or ceasing the production of chlorophyll. Articles on the subject report that de-chlorophyllized plants over a broad geographic area would show up in satellite imagery as a once-green landscape now turned brown or even white.

The plants themselves haven’t yet stated how they feel about the whole affair, and the silence that we received from the animals we attempted to question can hardly be interpreted as enthusiastic support for the project. However, we did manage to get a few brief responses from some of the scientists who have received government funding for the aforementioned research. Although they weren’t exactly willing to provide details (or go on record), they strongly hinted that the program was a flop and has since been shut down.

But flop or not, we find ourselves faced with a situation that is both shadowed and illuminated. On the one leaf, the uber-technologized war machine has added to its slash-and-burn arsenal an environmental attitude that seeks to create a bio-engineered and fully militarized version of nature. On the other leaf, the interrogation of plants has somehow managed to bring us closer to our roots and to an acknowledgment that the nature of consciousness and the consciousness of nature is more magical than we might ordinarily suspect. Even though it currently seems difficult to maintain clear lines of communication within our own species, perhaps the notion of psychobotany can help to radically rearrange the way we think about communication in the first place. It may complicate matters for vegetarians, but expanding our capacity to communicate with other life-forms could plant the seed for a whole new breed of ecological alliance. 🍄

The Analog Life cont’d

anyone?) and demand up to two \$40 coupons for digital-to-analog converter boxes to extend the life of your tube. OF course, the government stands to earn much more from auctioning off the spectrum, and their pals will do quite well selling the converters, so don’t feel like we’ve gone socialist or anything.

For the rest of us, broadcasters are promising a new magical world of digital television, because, after all, digital is “better.” Because my Samsung picks up both NTSC and digital signals, I can tell you that the quality of a strong digital transmission is definitely richer. But as usual, digital is not a standard but a sword that can be wield-

ed with widely varying degrees of finesse. In order to make more money, broadcasters can choose to compress their digital channels in order to pack more services into the available bandwidth—including, possibly, other stations that would be sent over the same digital channel. The more you compress, the more lame artifacts are destined to spooge up your screen. If you already use the Internet to liberate movies and TV shows from the evil grip of copyright holders, you will know what I mean: the splotchy walls, the stuttered time-slips, the eruptions of Cubist ectoplasm.

The spiritual difference between digital and analog, it seems, is clearest where the signal decays. A weak analog signal is often bathed in snow, and its fuzzy “ghosts” can not only be tolerable and even charming, but can still be reasonably enjoyed way out in the boonies. Millions of earthlings have had ecstatic TV experiences watching World Cup matches on 13 inch TVs with crap reception. The relative smoothness of analog noise makes it simply easier for the mechanism to receive signals and for our eyes to make sense out of faces in the clouds. Ghosts like it, because ghosts like organic things. Digital signals, on the other hand, decay with neither grace nor charm. Instead, as the signal weakens, it swiftly passes over what is known as the “digital cliff”: a sharp, jarring plunge into jagged visual noise followed by zippo.

Cathode ray tubes are strange devices: evacuated glass teardrops outfitted with what amounts to a ray gun, blasting electrons at an array of glowing phosphors that, in color TVs anyway, look like psychedelic Op-Art. Sending phantasms invisibly through the air to dance across the surface of these crystal balls has always been a somewhat necromantic act. But if we are going to talk of analog ghosts, we need to talk of analog corpses: the millions of old school TVs that are now being sacrificed to the landfill lords of forced obsolescence. Plenty of people will get their hands on converters, of course, but plenty more will just toss out their CRTs and dive, like me, ever deeper into the digital wave. The guy who runs Electronic Recyclers, one of the largest e-waste recyclers in America, thinks that roughly 80 million analog sets will get tossed out over the next year or two. According to a back-of-the-envelope calculation, that’s just under a million and a half tons of TV—a mass that surpasses the weight of the Twin Towers. And that’s not to mention the amount of lead oxide in the glass. Let’s just say I hope outfits like Electronic Recycler are ready to get their hands dirty.

I just left my Sanyo on the street one night and it was gone by morning. In San Francisco, the street still giveth and taketh away. But a relic of the boob tube remains. Because we don’t have cable, we still need to use an antenna to pick up the terrestrial digital broadcast signals. So there sits my home theater: a sleek, if modestly-sized Samsung LNT2653H, looking like the monolith from 2001 laid on

its side, topped by a pair of bent aluminum rabbit ears, duct-taped to the back of the set, flashing its peace sign at the principalities of the air. 🍄

Advanced Standing cont’d

of humanity and human achievement is accounted for. This progressive, diverse living community is more available to spiritual development than perhaps any other group of people in the history of the world. In America, where freedom of such pursuit is a constitutional right, we have a unique opportunity to follow our own path and uncover personal insight into the deepest workings of the universe, a balanced experience that might as well take place while standing on a wooden plank with trucks and urethane wheels.

I don’t want to try and define skateboarding, nor do I want to attach any extra importance to it. Its meaninglessness is its ultimate value, and any rewards are up to the individual to discern. That said, the internal processes of skateboarding are available for anyone at any level to explore—but to do so you will have to see beyond the obvious, and you are well-advised to take a cue from some ancient wisdom. Skateboarding goes deep, and it can be about a lot more than fame or success or being cool; it can quickly transcend any imaginary differences between human souls. Skateboarding is a real, life-



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HERETICS UNITE!

Peter Lamborn Wilson on GREEN HERMETICISM

In September 2003 a small conference on “Sacred Theory of Earth” was held in New Paltz, New York, where the idea of Green Hermeticism arose out of discussions amongst hermeticists, poets, Christians, Buddhists, neo-pagans, Sufis and assorted heretics. At this meeting, the obscure and little-read text *Novices of Sais* by the German Romantic poet was presented as a virtual manifesto of Green Hermeticism, which might be defined as a spagyric approach to the environmental sciences (and to their “crisis”), an approach both empirical and magical.

Here’s what that means:

The god Hermes began life as a heap of stones marking the boundary of some Neolithic Greek farm field. He still incarnates (as Mercury) on dimes and pencils, and his Caduceus (two snakes in double helix coiled round a staff) has been misappropriated by the AMA.

As god of communication and silence, commerce and burglary (his first feat as a newborn babe is to rustle the cattle of Apollo), Hermes naturally becomes the patron of secret and dangerous arts such as writing. Thus he’s identified with the Mesopotamian Nebo and the Egyptian Thoth, Ibis-headed baboon scribe of the gods, and eventually grows into Hermes Trismegistus (“Thrice-Great”), patron of alchemy, magic and the hermetic arts.

Worshipped from Celtic Gaul (as Lugh, inventor of all arts) to India (as Buddha, Wisdom, the planet Mercury), Hermes becomes the focus of a cult in Ptolemaic Alexandria that produced the Greek *Corpus Hermeticum*, a synthesis of ancient Egyptian and Indo-European wisdom traditions. Alchemy (the art of Khem, Egypt) takes on its classical form around the same time (say, 200 BC to 200 AD).

Hermeticism passed from its cradleland onward in time and space to Judaism, Christianity and eventually Islam, as well as Hinduism and even Taoism. Since it’s neither a religion nor a science in the narrow sense, but an Art, it can be reconciled with any religion—or with all religions. Modern science can be seen as the theft of its secrets by such keen but closeted alchemists as Isaac Newton.

If modern science’s origins lie in Hermeticism then post-modern science now begins to sound like alchemy again, with its cyclotronic transmutation, mystical quantum leaps and chaotic attractors. Hermeticism seems relevant also in the ecological and environmental sciences—

because Hermeticism has always been “green.”

“As Above, So Below,” the Hermetic doctrine of correspondence between micro- and macrocosm, derives from The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus, a Greco-Egyptian text preserved only in Arabic.



The Emerald Tablet

Emerald green is the heraldic color of Prophetic Islam. In Sufi alchemy the “highest” color, that of the Philosopher’s Stone, is gold-green. The Hidden Prophet Khezr is the Green man of Sufism, an immortal adept of vegetation and the water of life. Wherever he walks, flowers and herbs spring up in his footsteps, and he patronizes the hermetic arts.

The eighth century Iraqi Shiite (or possibly Manichaeen) alchemist Jabir Ibn Hayyan (called Geber in the West) first developed the famous dyadic principles of Sulphur and Mercury. This occidental yang/yin symbolism spread as far as China and lies at the heart of alchemy’s worldview.

The great 16th-century Swiss alchemist-physician Paracelsus inherited the Sulphur/Mercury concept but realized that it required completion by a third term: Salt. Sulphur is soul, Mercury is spirit, and Salt is body. In one sense, this constitutes a Trinitarian solution to the problem of dualism. In another sense it represents a discovery of the dialectic. (The mystic Jacob

Boehme picks this up from Paracelsus and passes it on to later German philosophers, eventually to Hegel and Marx—minus all magic.)

Paracelsus also shifts the focus of alchemy from transmutation of metals to the art of healing. Both plants and metals are used in this new medical alchemy, which

Now that Marxism has crumbled, one victor holds the field: Enlightenment Rationalism’s greatest victory: the Free Market as inexorable law of nature. The only possible dialectical negation of this thesis, I think, must come from the long-abandoned and even repressed Hermetic Left, and from Romantic Science, and from spirituality. Green Hermeticism.

Green Hermeticism can be the basis for our approach to the coming revelation, the coherent spiritual movement that constitutes the only imaginable alternative to unending degradation of Earth and humanity. Hermeticism has no need of authoritarian cults, but also no need to reject the traditional authentic on ideological or dogmatic grounds. It can be practiced alone, in groups, or congregations—openly or in secret—as part of any religion or outside them all—without violating its traditional integrity. It can be practiced without formal training, but not without direct experience.

The ideal social group for Green Hermeticism now, perhaps, might be the “think tank”—the equivalent of the Dark Age monastery. We can think of “tank” in the Hindustani sense of a cool shady pool of water with stone steps on all four sides, a few water lilies and lotuses, not as a military tank, or an aquarium or a gas tank. No doubt traditionalists would prefer a term such as “Invisible College.” The whole point this time would be to keep it from turning into yet another Royal Society, selling out to the ruling paradigm. Funding must come from outside Capital—but outside Capital there is no funding. Catch 23.

The semi- or roughly secret society, think tank or Invisible College we hypothesize would have to concern itself with the entirety of Romantic Science and Green Hermeticism. But where consciousness itself (or “sweet love”) is deemed a crime, the College must be prepared to think like a nest of heresy. “Heretics Unite!,” as Henry Corbin used to say. (Actually, anarcho-federation might be better.) Anyway, there’s nothing to lose but chains of false consciousness—and everything to gain: the Sacred Earth.

Excerpted from “Green Hermeticism,” as published in Green Hermeticism: Alchemy and Ecology (Lindisfarne, 2007). www.lindisfarne.org

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THEE SILVER MT.ZION VIC CHESNUTT & GUY PICCIOTTO MV & EE
PAAL NILSSEN-LOVE/MAGNUS BROO RETRIBUTION GOSPEL CHOIR
KEN VANDERMARK SOLO NEPTUNE HARD CELL (BERNE/TABORN/RAINEY)
SCARNELLA MT.EERIE AARON DILLOWAY THE LOLIPOP PEOPLE
RAINER WIENS' IN C ENSEMBLE PAUL FLAHERTY SANDRO PERRY
ALVARIUS B. & SIR RICHARD BISHOP PLAY SUN CITY GIRLS SO COW
GLEN HALL/WILLIAM HOOKER/DOMINIC DUVAL K.A.N.T.N.A.G.A.N.O.
BACZKOWSKI / PADMANABHA TIM HECKER AUN GRANT HART

Montreal Québec Canada suoniperilpopolo.org

ENDARKENMENT MANIFESTO

PETER LAMBORN WILSON'S HALF-SERIOUS PROPOSAL FOR A POLITICAL MOVEMENT TO UPHOLD AND PROPAGATE THE IDEALS OF GREEN HERMETICISM



At least half the year belongs to Endarkenment. Enlightenment is only a special case of Endarkenment—and it has nights of its own.

During the day democracy waxes, indiscreminately illuminating all and sundry. But shadowless noon belongs to Pan. And night imposes a “radical aristocracy” in which things shine solely by their own luminescence, or not at all.

Obfuscatory, reactionary and superstitious, Endarkenment offers jobs for trolls and sylphs, witches and warlocks. Perhaps only superstition can re-enchant Nature. People who fear and desire nymphs and fauns will think twice before polluting streams or clear-cutting forests.

Electricity banished shadows—but shadows are “shades,” souls, the souls of light itself. Even divine light, when it loses its organic and secret darkness, becomes a form of pollution. In prison cells electric lights are never doused; light becomes oppression and source of disease.

Superstitutions may be untrue but based on deeper truth—that earth is a living being. Science may be true, i.e. effective, while based on a deeper untruth—that matter is dead.

The peasants attacking Dr. Frankenstein’s tower with their torches and scythes were the shock troops of Endarkenment, our luddite militia. The original his-

torical Luddites smashed mechanical looms, ancestors of the computer.

“Neolithic conservatism” (Paul Goodman’s definition of anarchism) positions itself outside the ponderous inevitability of separation and sameness. Every caveman a Prince Kropotkin, every cavewoman Mrs. Nietzsche. Our Phalanstery would be lit by candles and our Passions avowed via messenger pigeons and hot-air balloons.

Imagine what science might be like to day if the State and Kapital had never emerged. Romantic Science proposes an empiricism devoid of disastrous splits between consciousness and Nature; thus it prolongates Neolithic alchemy as if separation and alienation had never occurred: science for life not money, health not war, pleasure not efficiency, Novalis’s “poeticization of science.”

Of course technology itself is haunted—a ghost for every machine. The myth of Progress stars its own cast of ghouls and efreet. Consciously or unconsciously (what difference would it make?) we all know we live in techno-dystopia, but we accept it with the deterministic fatalism of beaten serfs, as if it were virtual Natural Law.

Technology mimics and thus belittles the miracles of magic. Rationalism has its own Popes and droning litanies, but the spell they cast is one of disenchantment. Or rather: all magic has migrated into money, all power into a technology of titanic totality, a violence against life that stuns and disheartens.

Hence the universal fear/desire for the End

of the World (or for some world anyway). For the poor Christian Moslem Jewish saps duped by fundamentalist nihilism the Last Day is both horrorshow and Rapture, just as for secular Yuppies global warming is a symbol of terror and meaninglessness and simultaneously a rapturous vision of post-solar-powered gemutlichkeit. Thus the technopathocracy comes equipped with its own built-in escape-valve fantasy: the Ragnarok of technology itself and the sudden catastrophic restoration of meaning. In fact Kapital can capitalize on its own huge unpopularity by commoditizing hope for its End. That’s what the smug shifts call a win/win situation.



Winter Solstice (Chaos Day in Chinese folklore) is one of Endarkenment’s official holidays, along with Samhain or Halloween, Winter’s first day.

Endarkenment stands socially for the Cro-Magnon or “Atlantean” complex—an-archist because prior to the State—for horticulture and gathering against agriculture and industry—for the right to hunt as against the usurpation of commons by lord or State. Electricity and internal combustion should be turned off along with all States and corporations and their cult of Mammon and Moloch.

Despite our ultimate aim we’re willing



to step back bit by bit. We might be willing to accept steam power or hydraulics. The last agreeable year for us was 1941. The ideal is about 10,000 BC, but we’re not purists. Endarkenment is a form of impurism, of mixture and shadow.

Endarkenment envisages a medicine advanced as it might have been if money and the State had never appeared, medicine for earth, animals and humans, based on Nature, not on promethean technology. Endarkenment is not impressed by medicine that prolongs “life span” by adding several years in a hospital bed hooked up to tubes and glued to daytime TV, all at the expense of every penny ever saved by the

Endarkenment also feels some critical admiration for Col. Qadhalfi’s Green Book, and for the Bonnot Gang (Stirnerite Nietzschean bank robbers). In Islamdom it favors “medieval accretions” like sufism and Ismailism against all crypto-modernist hyperorthodoxy and politics of resentment. We also admire the martyred Iranian Shiite/Sufi socialist Ali Shariati, who was praised by Massignon and Foucault.

Culturally Endarkenment aims at extreme neo-Romanticism and will therefore be accused of fascism by its enemies on the Left. The answer to this is that (1) we’re anarchists and federalists adamantly opposed to all authoritarian centralisms whether Left or Right. (2) We favor all races, we love both difference and solidarity, not sameness and separation. (3) We reject the myth of Progress and technology—all cultural Futurism—all plans no matter their ideological origin—all uniformity—all conformity whether to organized religion or secular rationalism with its market democracy and endless war.

Endarkenists “believe in magic” and so must wage their guerrilla through magic rather than compete with the State’s monopoly of techno-violence. Giordano Bruno’s *Image Magic* is our secret weapon. Projective hieroglyphic hermeneutics. Action at a distance through manipulation of symbols carried out

dramaturgically via acts of Poetic Terrorism, surrealist sabotage, Bakunin’s “creative destruction”—but also destructive creativity, invention of hermetico-critical objects, hieroglyphic projections of word/image “spells”—by which more is meant (always) than mere “political art”—rather a magical art with actual dire or beneficial results. Our enemies on the Right might call this political pornography and they’d be (as usual) right. Porn has a measurable physiopsychological effect. We’re looking for something like it, definitely, only bigger, and more like Artaud than Brecht—but not to be mistaken for “Absolute Art” or any other platonic purism—rather an empirical strategic “situationist” art, outside all mass media, truly underground, as befits Endarkenment, like a loosely structured “rhizomatic” Tong or freemasonic conspiracy.

The Dark has its own lights or “photisms” as Henry Corbin called them, literally as entoptic/hypnagogic phosphene-like



phenomena, and figuratively (or imaginally) as Paracelsan Nature spirits, or in Blakean terms, inner lights. Enlightenment has its shadows, Endarkenment has its illuminati; and there are no Ideas but in persons (in theologic terms, angels). According to legend the Byzantines were busy discussing “the sex of angels” while the Ottomans were besieging the walls of Constantinople. Was this the height of Endarkenment? We share that obsession.

Jan. 1, 2008

I found Ralph Bakshi's work at a crucial time in my life, maybe the perfect age. I was maybe 13, exploring underground comix, *Heavy Metal* magazine, classic rock—all the common things adolescent males used to check out, before the internet was unleashed. Around this time, my father told me about a film called *Wizards*. I don't know how it came up, maybe he saw one of my Vaughn Bode books and was reminded of it, but his description of the movie was intriguing: a dark, animated fantasy epic with violence, sex and an army from hell modeled after the Nazis. I had to see it. The year was 1986. The population was at the mercy of cable TV and whatever had been released on VHS to satisfy our movie desires. Fortunately *Wizards* existed on video and I managed to find a copy. It was moody, psychedelic and dark; it spoke to my interest in nature and

Willfully Disturbing

Artist Arik Roper on the art and inspiration of Filmmaker Ralph Bakshi

mysticism, with some humor and voluptuous fairies thrown in. It blew me away. My drawings became more and more about this occult fantasy world, influenced by Bakshi and the others who designed the film.

Wizards was significant, but the real mind-warping was yet to come, and started the day I came across the video box for *Fritz the Cat*. An X-rated cartoon! I had intuited something like this must have been made by someone somewhere, and here it was. I put it back on the shelf scheming about how I could see this thing. I knew if I told my best friend Greg about *Fritz the Cat* that he'd rent it, since he didn't care what his mother thought. Then we would sit back and lose our minds as we watched anthropomorphic cartoon pornography. I told Greg, he said he'd look for it. I was vaguely aware of the R. Crumb comic it was based on, so I looked for that in the meantime.

The thing invaded my consciousness; I became so obsessed with the movie that I started to have dreams featuring the as-yet-unseen Fritz the Cat film. Finally Greg came through with the videotape and we watched the infamous flick. I was baffled and a little disturbed. Sure there was a lot of sex and drugs in there but what was with all the violence, the revolution, the racism issues? There was something nightmarish about seeing these talking animals screwing and killing each other. It was heavier, more bleak than I expected. And though it left me feeling slightly haunted, it didn't diminish my interest in all things Fritz. I drew the character on my notebooks at school; I made a clay figure of him holding

a cigarette and machine gun in my 8th grade art class; I even painted him—and my art teacher put it on display, eventually submitted it for a school art show. The gun and cigarette got it disqualified.

Naturally the next step was to find out what else this guy Ralph Bakshi had made. I checked out library books on animation, read old newspaper articles on the Microfiche to learn more about the man. I managed to discover some other movie titles: *Heavy Traffic*, *Coonskin*, *American Pop*, and a version of *Lord of the Rings*. But where was I going to find this stuff? I didn't even know if it existed on video. Every month I scoured the cable TV listings for any sign of Bakshi's films, but nothing. Then one day Greg got his hands on *Coonskin*, or "Streetfight" as it had been renamed at the time. I borrowed it, brought it home after school one day and checked it out. I had read that it was considered offensive, so I was expecting shock value, but *Coonskin* was more than shock, it was from some dark place that I hadn't visited before. It was relentlessly raw and visceral, the violence was staggering, and presented in the goriest of detail. I had some understanding of the laborious task of creating an animated film, and was amazed that anyone had put this much time and effort into making something so willfully disturbing. Where did this movie come from, who was it for? I didn't quite get it at the time. I wasn't really sure if the racism was being parodied or promoted, although the fact that no race, religion or sexual orientation was left unscathed was a clue that this was some form of harsh social satire. But there was much more to the movie than shock value. Later as I reflected and eventually read more about the film, I started to put the pieces together. *Coonskin* was basically a blaxploitation flick, and loosely modeled after Disney's super-controversial, removed-from-circulation *Song of the South*. It was a look at racism in America from the black perspective,

an urban fable full of crooked cops, hookers, mobsters, and the prison system all conspiring against the soul of America. It was very much a product of the times, saturated with that 1970s grit and melancholy that defined many films of that era.

After seeing *Coonskin*, I knew Bakshi was something of a maniac—an unpredictable and possibly psychotic artist who was liable to go into any territory with his films. Nothing was sacred or off-limits. This was why I liked him. And why I was surprised to learn in 1988 that he was directing a new series of *Mighty Mouse* cartoons for the Saturday morning slot on ABC TV. (What I didn't realize at the time was that this was full-circle for Ralph. He had started out at Terrytoons in the 1960s working on such TV cartoons as *Spider Man* and *Deputy Dawg*.) I was ready. I recorded every episode as it aired. I even got the episode where Mighty Mouse unexpectedly pulls out a crushed flower from his pocket and snorts it up, which was edited out for subsequent airings for some reason. The show lasted one season then was gone, but launched the career of its designer John Kricfalusi who redefined modern animation in the 1990s with his new project *Ren & Stimpy*.

During the next year or so I caught up on some of Bakshi's films. *Lord of the Rings* had an entirely different look and feel. It was rotoscoped—an animation technique of tracing live actors on film—which was a stark contrast to the loose cartoon design of Bakshi's previous films. Comical characters doing awful things resulted in maximum impact, but rotoscoping led to a more realistic style that was ultimately less personal and expressive. I felt something was lost in the process—the technique spoke louder than the content at times. I had the same impression of Bakshi's *American Pop* (1981) and *Fire and Ice* (1983). Though the art was elaborate, they seemed to lack the fundamental soul of the earli-

er films. Still, they were boldly sincere and imaginative efforts which expanded on new concepts in animation. I realized that even as Bakshi struggled with the changing industry through the late '70s and early '80s to realize his visions, seemingly always on the verge of quitting, he'd never run out of ideas. Here was an artist with a vision who wasn't content to compromise. Somehow he took "cartoons" and made them into "films" for adults (which includes adolescent males). He was inspiring.

Which is why it's such a pleasure to behold *Unfiltered: The Complete Ralph Bakshi*, by John M. Gibson and Chris McDonnell (Universal/Rizzoli). At long last, over 35 years after his first movie came out, somebody decided it was time for a Bakshi retrospective. It's a striking hardback volume, loaded with previously unpublished photos, illustrations and tons of precious info. We get the insane stories behind the groundbreaking films (*Wizards* was Bakshi's attempt to make a 'family film', to get back to his early interest in sci-fi fantasy and prove that he could deliver impact to a PG picture), and how most of them almost didn't happen due to production nightmares, studio underfunding and protests from offended citizens. In short, *Unfiltered* is the book I've been waiting to read since I was 13, but one I can appreciate as an adult.

Ralph Bakshi hasn't made a feature film or TV special since 1992, which is a cultural shame. But the times have changed again, and in some ways, his vintage work feels current. Art and culture have caught up to some of his ideas, and

the climate is now more welcoming to adult animation. But, at the same time, nobody in the US is using as a serious medium for storytelling. Meanwhile, computer animation has reworked the field, eliminating most traces of individuality and style. It is unlikely that Bakshi's films could be made today: they are time capsules in both content and execution. He was a pioneer, merging the cutesy world of animation with with raw realism, cutting social satire, sex, violence, drugs, music and all the other "adult" themes which had previously been kept outside the court of acceptable themes for a medium that was thought to be for children. Bakshi knew one of the great powers of animation: that the hyperbolic drawn image has the potential to express more than live action ever can. By injecting the zeitgeist's innocent image of cartoons with unflattering and dark sides of the modern era, he exploited a schism in the pop culture's mind. Underground comics started this; Bakshi took it to the screen. ■



Serious FUN

Chris Ziegler and Kevin Ferguson

visit veteran *sui generis* pop duo

SPARKS in L.A. as they

prepare to perform their

240-song oeuvre in a single

month-long London engage-

ment in May. "We're actu-

ally better than we thought,"

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEANEEN LUND

Sparks have about 60 days to finish learning the five million notes necessary to reproduce live their entire 38-year discography—20 old albums, select b-sides, one new album, and a special song for anyone willing to buy tickets for the entire month-long event in London—but brothers Russell (vocals) and Ron Mael (keyboards and songwriting) remain relaxed and ready in Russell's home studio, where a portrait of Elvis watches over rehearsals so intense that Russell can't stop singing his songs even in his dreams. Brand-new album *Exotic Creatures Of The Deep* will debut live this summer in London after prior nights each dedicated to an existing Sparks album—a marathon physically and psychologically and an occasion to revisit a band almost totally untangled from the industry music mess just miles away from Russell's Los Angeles home.



ARTHUR: Ron said that you'll be playing 4,825,623 notes during the complete 21-show run. That works out to about 230,000 notes per album and maybe 34 notes per second. Does that seem accurate?

Russell: On some of the early albums it's probably true—the Island albums are probably 64 notes per second. Those were really hyper.

Did doing that kind of statistical analysis on your lifetime of work reveal any greater truths?

Ron: It's actually a leveling. A lot of the ones we had maybe less love for are kind of good in retrospect. It would have been sad to go back and realize they weren't very good.

Russell: Fortunately that wasn't the case.

Ron: But we are prejudiced.

Russell: We're actually better than we thought.

well. We're figuring out how to be true to the original records and doing it live. It's a good concert experience.

Are you offering any kind of Sparks Value Pack for the entire run?

Russell: The golden ticket! For that you also get—we're gonna record one song and give a CD of this one song to the people that choose to dedicate an entire month of their lives to Sparks. That warrants receiving a song that no one else will get.

Ron: And there's gonna be at least one book or maybe two about the whole experience afterward, and we're thinking if we can get up the energy, we'll try to keep a journal.

RON: We've been lucky. We would never have 21 albums if we weren't fortunate to have some things work really well commercially.



Above, Sparks circa 1977; above right, circa 1974.

So you're not nervous.

Ron: We're still nervous. It's awesome.

Awesome in the sense that building a pyramid is awesome?

Ron: On all kinds of levels. It's like going back to school. We haven't even heard most of the songs for 20 or 30 years, and most of them we never played live anyway, so part of the process was figuring out how to do that. We couldn't cut any corners—we're doing everything, including a lot of b-sides as

Why no hometown show in Los Angeles?

Ron: We have a larger following in London. It's so expensive to put this on that the only viable way was to do it in London.

Will you be including any Sparks alumni in the live bands?

Russell: Each of the bands had a certain character to them—someone even suggested it'd be great if we had each of those bands. In a conceptual way, that's good. In

a practical way, I don't know if it would work. It's a real test to find people—the fans who are going to spend a month of their lives with us, and then for the band, musicians who want to stick it out for three-and-a-half months of preparation, which is unheard of. When you prepare for tour, you have maybe 20 songs, and this is 240. And you might say, 'Oh, that's not so hard,' but when you think of songs on the albums that fade out and you have to have an ending for that song now. To figure things like that out times 240 is so time-consuming. Just the sheer volume you have to digest.

Are you dreaming Sparks songs yet?

Russell: I'm singing songs when I wake up—I swear. And it's not a happy dream. It's like, 'Oh my God, I can't even shut them off!'

Can you think of an equivalent to the total creative energy invested in the Sparks discography? Half a cathedral or the Pennsylvania tablet from the Epic of Gilgamesh?

Ron: It could never be done by a visual artist, really—we don't feel like we're doing imitation, and we don't see them as finished, necessarily. When we play live, we're kind of inventing them again. You hear of classical musicians that do a composer's complete piano works—that kind of thing. But this is kind of trickier. I don't know for a fact because I've never done that, but it seems like more things are involved.
Russell: We'd be allowed to read music, but we don't read music.

Will you be correcting anything when you play the albums live?

Ron: There are things we'd like to do that for—a couple lyrics here and there—but that would be kind of cheating the process. The things we'd like to change the most would ruin the whole affair.

Russell: Because somebody might like that album!

Ron: There are maybe a couple of tunes that don't feel as relevant to the current psyche as they did at the time. But in general, I'm kind of surprised—it's lucky because it could have been more depressing than it is now.

It's depressing now?

Ron: Daunting, not depressing! But we're not fazed by it. You just have to sort of plow ahead and those shows will be there and we'll be doing it! There isn't even real fear about it—that implies we could back out, and we can't.

After four decades, what have you learned about the nature of timelessness in pop music?

Russell: Sparks was timeless even when we did it originally. It wasn't of an era—it wasn't some trend happening then. Even songs like 'This Town,' which is probably our most known song in Europe—that's not a typical pop song. It didn't fit in at the time, but it's really striking—powerful lyrically with structure not typical of a pop song and kind of this faux-classical feel to it. You can kind of say that in a general way, maybe that made

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At Home, At Work, At Play: A Listener’s Guide to Sparks

By Ned Raggett

There aren’t many recording artists in their fourth decade of recorded work whose new albums consistently merit not only attention but, more often than not, a round of applause. But Sparks were an unusual band from the start, so perhaps, perversely, their virtually unprecedented no-fade career arc is to be expected. The full story of the musical partnership of brothers Ron and Russell Mael is worthy of a thick book or two (or at least a really good documentary), but the basic body of their musical work—20 studio albums preceding their newest, the forthcoming *Exotic Creatures of the Deep*—can at least be talked about here. Not all are front-to-back classics, some may not even be keepers, but the standard of excellence is so high, the continuous artistic risk-taking so audacious, and the number and range of artists they’ve inspired in the last 35 years so vast—from Queen to Morrissey to Pet Shop Boys to Faith No More to Bjork to Franz Ferdinand—that even the rare misstep deserves examination. Onward, then...



SPARKS (1972) Though L.A. performances and a number of demos helped get the initial word out about their distinctly unusual take on pop and rock—the demos still for the most part unreleased, though noted Sparks freak Morrissey has showcased a couple here and there over the years via compilations and show intro tapes—it was the self-titled debut album that first brought the Maels and company into the public eye. Getting Todd Rundgren as producer was key. Probably no one else in America had both the relatively high profile to get the recording ball rolling and the artistic appreciation for the curious yet compellingly catchy pop the Maels and their band were creating. Balanced



Sparks in the '70s; above, '76 and opposite '74.

between a whimsical fragility and a dramatic rock punch that stacks up to any proto-metal group of the era, it's not merely the tension between the sides that makes Sparks' first album so memorable, it's the fact that it's so instantly enjoyable. If, as the story goes, opening track “Wonder Girl” was a hit in Montgomery Alabama and nowhere else, it wasn’t because it couldn’t be hummed. It can. The band's whole approach can be heard in this single song: the intentional use of a cliché in the title, Russell’s sweet-with-a-twist-of-sour singing (then and now, one of the most uniquely beautiful vocals in modern pop), Ron's sprightly keyboards and lyrics which are sunny only if you're not listening closely. But it's also a tour de force of production—listen to the crisp hits of Harvey Weinstein's cymbals (no, not that Harvey Weinstein) and the almost electronic smack of the beats. On the rest of *Sparks*, songs change tempo on a dime, harmonies swirl in and out of nowhere, strutting rock snarling melts into boulevardier swing, with the monstrous album closer “(No More) Mr. Nice Guys” rocking just as hard as the similarly-titled song by Alice Cooper that it predates. The sense of theatricality so integral to Sparks is already present, but this is as far away from the inanities of such “rock” Broadway efforts as *Rent* as you can get—and thank heavens for it. The whole shebang really is art rock without apology.



Note: This album was released under the original band name of Halfnelson, with the brothers then switching to Sparks after the prompting of their then-manager/label head Albert Grossman, who was convinced this was the key to success. There have been stranger solutions.

A WOOFER IN TWEETER'S CLOTHING (1973) In some ways *A Woofer in Tweeter's Clothing* is the first album redux. Unchanged lineup, same number of songs, and the first song on the album is, again, about a girl. But this time the stakes were a little higher:

“Oh, no! Bring her home and the folks look ill
My word, they can't forget, they never will
They can hear the stormtroops on our lawn
When I show her in...”

Imagine that being sung by Russell with an almost sweetly diffident air over a chugging rhythm, with a chorus that soars down to the backing pseudo-Col. Bogey whistles and you've got “Girl From Germany,” one of the wickedest songs ever. From there Woofer's could do whatever it damn well pleased, and did. Beergarden polka singalongs crossed with minimal drones that transmute into a rapid roll of drums, frenetic high-speed instrumentation and a mock Mickey Mouse-style letter-by-letter cheerleader/gangshout for the titular character, “Beaver O'Lindy.” A tune called “The Louvre” sung, but of course, in French, sounding—at least initially—like a random 1968 Beach Boys number drop-kicked across



the Atlantic, trailing sparkling keyboards in its wake. A concluding song, “Whippings and Apologies,” begins like Stereolab warming up for a 20-minute freakout and then keeps stop-starting—including a great fake ending—so Russell can discuss the situations a tender-hearted sadist must face. “Do-Re-Mi”—yes, THAT “Do-Re-Mi,” from The Sound of Music, not one of the lyrics changed, turns into a high-speed gallop halfway through the second repetition of the words and gets even more over the top after that point. Nearly the whole album is so insanely fractured, and once again, so astonishingly catchy, that it's hard to know what to highlight. At the heart of the album lies “Moon Over Kentucky,” the only song bassist Jim Mankey wrote for the band (with Ron sharing the credit), and arguably the landmark of the first incarnation of Sparks. It's all five members at their most dramatic, with the opening piano and wordless vocals given a steady, darker counterpoint with Mankey's bass. This gets contrasted with verses shot through with a nervous keyboard rhythm, Weinstein's rolling drums and a snarling riff that sounds like a Tony Iommi line delivered in two seconds. Russell yodels like a lost ghost somewhere in the woods and the end result feels like what Nelson Eddy and Jeanette Macdonald would have done if James Whale had directed one of their films, down to the horror-movie organ final flourish.

KIMONO MY HOUSE (1974) What to say about an album that endless amounts of musicians openly refer to as a touchstone? The one that was Bjork's first

record she bought with her own money (“My mum and my stepdad didn’t like it and I did, so that was my statement.”), the album that turned Morrissey into the massive fan he is (“Ron Mael's lyrical take on sex cries out like prison cell carvings. It is only the laughing that stops the crying. Russell sings his words in what appear to be French italics, and has less facial hair than Josephine Baker.”), the album with the cabaret-rock-opera sound that Queen, who were opening for Sparks at the time, would appropriate immediately? Where to begin? Easy—the beginning. It starts, not like a thunderclap, but like a gentle shimmer of spring rain, a keyboard figure easing up in volume step by step. Then a voice zooms in, almost but never once tripping over itself at high speed, building up to the briefest pause, and then: “This town ain't big enough for both of us!” A massive pistol shot rockets across the speaker range. “AND IT AIN'T ME WHO'S GONNA LEAVE!” The full band kicks in and it is all OVER. And it's only just begun.

Kimono My House shouldn't have been;

had Ron and Russell decided not to take the chance they did in moving to London and signing to Island Records after initial UK appearances before the release of *Woofers* turned out splendidly, it wouldn't have been. They did, and “This Town Ain't Big Enough For Both of Us” crashed into the UK Top Five in early 1974 and what had been a low-key pleasure for some turned into pop star mania. Tales of suicides happily singing down to girlfriends in the still-living world, celebrations of the most exclusive genealogical background ever (concluding with “Gonna hang myself from my family tree”) and specifically uncelebratory non-holiday carols were suddenly all the rage. The lunatics hadn't taken over the asylum, but their observers were genii at portraying their foibles in entertaining form. The new backing band—guitarist Adrian Fisher, bassist Martin Gordon and drummer Dinky Diamond—weren't necessarily as outré as the first, but as a crackerjack combo, perfectly in tune with the over-the-top glam hysteria of the day, they were essential. “This Town” is just one example of many songs dis-



playing Ron's ever-increasing compositional talents—consider other smash U.K. singles like “Amateur Hour,” with its quick, ascending main guitar line completely working against the typical descending rock melodies of the time and place, or “Talent Is an Asset,” a music-box riff accompanied by hand-clapping and foot-stomping rhythms celebrating the young life of one Albert Einstein. If Ron's keyboards often times seemed drowned in the mix of the songs that he himself wrote, they weren't absent—the organ adding further beef to the mix of “Here in Heaven,” the combination barrelhouse R&B swing and cabaret glow on the concluding “Equator.” Perhaps the album's most emblematic song was “Hasta Manana, Monsieur,” with its lovely piano melody at the start and Russell's bravura extended vocal break towards the end ... oh, and the words too:

“Leaving my syntax back at school
I was thrown for a loss over gender and simple rules
You mentioned Kant and I was shocked
You know, where I come from, none of the girls have such foul tongues.”
And that was just one verse.

PROPAGANDA (1974) *Propaganda*—featuring the band's first outright classic album cover, showing the Maels as bound and gagged kidnap victims—was a logical follow-on from *Kimono*, much as Woofer's had continued onward from the debut. The producer remained the same. The backing band jiggled a bit, with Ian Hampton replacing Martin Gordon on bass and Trevor

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RUSSELL: We don't feel like we're slumming by doing pop music. It sounds kind of banal but we're genuine about what we're doing.

stuff timeless. We wanted to fit in as much as the next guy because when you're in a band, you like as many people to see you or hear you as possible, but part of the reason it's sort of timeless is it hasn't really ever fit in, even though it's connected with the public in the world at various times. I think the people that really like Sparks the most feel they're part of a little club that's sort of outsiders. They understand what we're up to and they don't want it to fit in with the rest of the pop world. They want it to be their own secret band they don't have to share. Ron: There's two kinds of timeless. There's timeless like Bruce Springsteen, where the songs sound like a part of history in a way—like a form that's always been there. And our kind of timeless is just that we've been able



As above, so below: The Mael brothers with select pieces from Russell's collection.

to do it for a long time, and the sensibility is almost part of the longevity of what we do, and that's continued despite stylistic changes. And also the sensibility is not something we applied to it—it was sort of there since the beginning without even thinking about it, and that's one part of the process.

Do you think of yourselves as outsiders?

Ron: We've always straddled the commercial side and the outsider—for want of a better word—artistic side! We were always a little bit of those things—sometimes they negate one another. We had a problem in the '70s in England. We were taken as one thing once, and when the screaming started, we were taken as something else. Obviously, when you're working you don't think of this stuff. But when you look back, you do feel more comfortable in periods of commercial success—but you know there's something more to what you're doing than typical pop music.

What about the European model where musicians can get government grants? Or how visual artists can work the same way in America? What do you think about musicians in America having to make it totally on their own?

Ron: Obviously it makes it more difficult. But having to think a little how you'll be accept-

ed—maybe that's helpful to what you're doing. It makes it more difficult knowing you've got to fit in some way that's commercial, but to have that a little in the back of your mind is a good thing. If you were given a grant and you could do anything you wanted working any kind of way, maybe there'd be so many possibilities—you would kind of have no guidelines about what to do. I'd love to have that situation—it's kind of tragic, especially in the U.S., that there's so little of that—but I think it kind of weeds out the people that don't have the stamina to play within those rules. We've been lucky. We would never have 21 albums if we weren't fortunate to have some things work really well commercially, so we have the luxury of being able to do what we're doing. But I'm not so sure that not having any concern for commercial aspects is completely positive.

When was the last time you felt like giving up?

Ron: Yesterday? At times you're so frustrated at the lack of commercial success at something you thought was good—both in a creative way and a commercial way—but then a week later, something happens or you move on to the next thing or kind of forget about it. There aren't other things we can do. It kind of helps that there are no other possibilities. It makes you more accepting of bad situations you do go through.

How many people have you met in the music industry that were musicians themselves?

Russell: The whole thing about A&R people—it's a nebulous job description! You don't know where those people come from. It seems to us that the people that have some musical side to them are the ones we always got along with. Tony Visconti we worked with a lot—he's both got the sensibility and is totally into pop music, but he's a musician, too, and a really talented engineer. He's got all the facets covered. It's the people who see it as a business—kind of—but are kind of musical that we seem to get along with better.

How long until Sparks separates from the industry and becomes completely self-sufficient?

Russell: The new album is something akin to that. I'm not sure what the situation in the states is gonna be, but we'll have distribution by Universal in England, and then having the label and all that is our own thing. In England especially you can compete against the big guys because the system is smaller and there's BBC radio. Other stations, too, but you have the same access on the BBC as anybody else. In any case, we were offered a situation with the best of both worlds—you can guide your own destiny, but have distribution by a good distributor so you know it'll be out and about. And we have an English manager.



White starting to handle the guitar. (Queen's Brian May alleges the Maels tried to persuade him to join them by proclaiming his band were "washed up"—which makes that group's Sparks-like breakthrough hit "Killer Queen" all the more eyebrow-raising.) Otherwise Sparks kept up the same glam-rampage approach. But here, everything was more in sync then ever.

The album begins with something new—an a cappella performance from Russell, his over-dubbed singing providing wordless melody and rhythm as well as words, packing wartime slogans, militaristic imagery and that thing called love into about 20 seconds. Then a stentorian delivery from the full band heralds "At Home At Work At Play," whose combination of volume, giddiness, hyperspeed melodies and Sparks-trademarked tempo shifts and pauses is clear evidence that by this time Sparks had come pretty close to being sui generis. Even songs like "BC," which on this album feels just a touch like a "typical" Sparks number, would be utterly atypical for practically anyone else.

There's a winsome jauntiness on *Propaganda* at points, musically if not necessarily lyrically, almost as if Ron and Russell were creating World War II vaudeville singalongs for their temporarily adopted home country. "Reinforcements," playing around again with ideas of love and/as war, almost begs a high-kicking chorus line to back Russell on stage. In a different vein entirely is a power ballad of



the most arch sort, "Never Turn Your Back On Mother Earth," which has it all: strings, heroic guitar solo, a lot of background echo (check out the drums at the end!), Ron on what must be harpsichord, and a beautifully alien mid-song break where Russell sings in fragile tones over heavily flanged violins. On the lyrical front, Ron's eye for the knowing cliché in the title again reigned supreme—besides "At Home At Work At Play," we get "Thanks But No Thanks," "Something For the Girl With Everything" and the concluding "Bon Voyage." And then there's "Achoo," probably the only song in existence with a sneeze as its title. And even if it isn't, it's definitely the only one that starts, "Who knows what the wind's gonna bring when the invalids sing."

INDISCREET (1975)

Indiscreet ended up being the conclusion of Ron and Russell's first run of hit UK albums, as well as their English residency. If nothing else, they wrapped it up in style, working with an emblematic producer of the era—fellow US expatriate Tony Visconti, whose collaborations with T. Rex and David Bowie helped define the times as much as anything. It turned out to be an inspired combination as Visconti's ear for orchestral arrangements, familiar from T. Rex's many singles, was in top form. The result is a rich sounding album, a big-budget effort that doesn't sound overblown.

The band personnel remains essentially the same from *Propaganda*, though songs like the opening "Hospitality on Parade"—part neo-Gilbert and Sullivan triumph, part hypnotic proto-Suicide drone—suggest that the Maels were starting to feel that their band was holding them back creatively as much as they were crucial to their success. That tension shoots through the entire album, with more conventional rock-band compositions contrasting sharply to such songs as the merry 1930s kick of "Without Using Hands" or the wonderfully energetic big-band recreation of "Looks, Looks, Looks." "Under the Table With Her" is that tendency in excelsis, with string and flute accompaniment as the sole musical element to match one of Russell's most elfin vocals.

That said, the Sparks instinct for pop smashes in their own particular vein remains strong. There's the careening blast of "Happy Hunting Ground"—the mid-song dropout to just drums and vocals is sheer pleasure and opening single "Get In the Swing" is an everything-and-the-kitchen sink affair with a marching band strut, band majorette whistles, a message from God to his creations and the memorable line "Well I ain't no Freud, I'm from L.A."

The sleeper hit, though, has to be "Tits"—a thematic sequel of sorts to the previous album's "Who Don't Like Kids," but which, in its slow unfolding musical drama, resembles the epochal "Moon Over Kentucky," shot full of sequins. For all the celebrations of the female bosom in pop music before and since, this is probably the only one narrated by a married man complaining over an increasing number of "drinks that are something warm and watered down" about how the presence of a kid



alters a certain dynamic in their household:

"For months, for years
Tits were once a source of fun and games at home
And now she says, tits are only there to feed our little Joe
So that he'll grow."

THE BIG BEAT (1976)

The final album the Maels did for Island has a straight-up brilliant cover, created by famed portrait photographer Richard Avedon. Russell is bare-chested but vulnerable behind folded arms and tousled hair; Ron looks to the side, his face in shadow. If only the music on the album were as striking as that image.

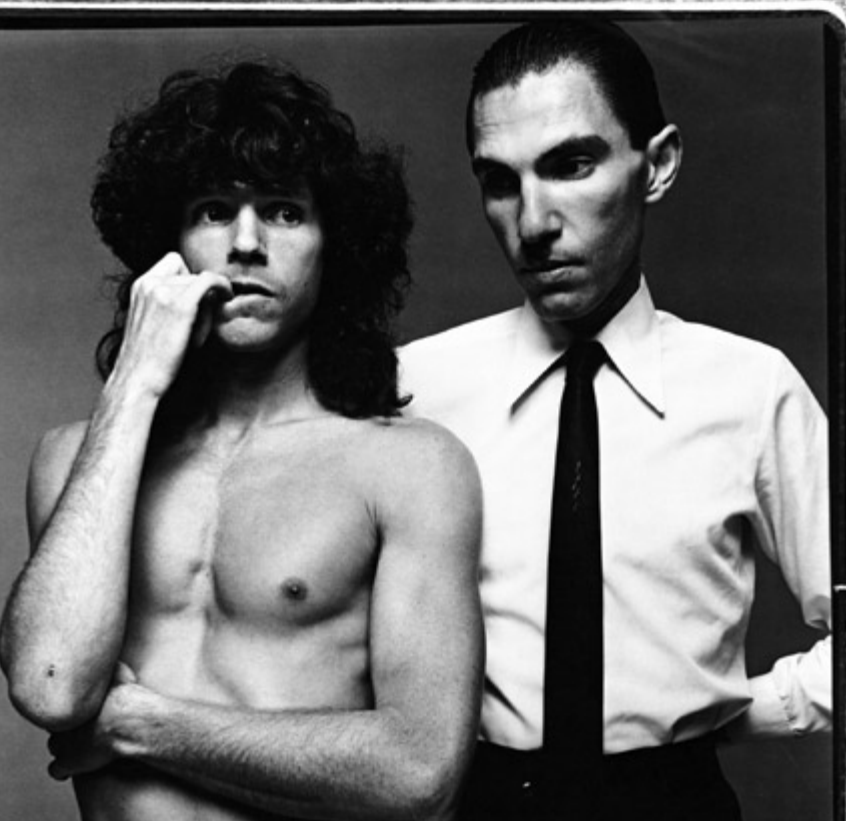
The Maels had returned to Los Angeles just as their star began to fade in the UK, where the punk and New Wave soon-to-be stars they'd inspired were only beginning to gear up. In L.A., Ron and Russell recruited drummer Hilly Boy Michaels, bassist Sal Maida and guitarist Jeffrey Salen from local bands and made a punk/power-pop album, featuring sharp

Rupert Holmes production, tight arrangements, generally quick running times and a neo-'50s bite ("Fill 'Er Up). It was a new approach, but opening song "Big Boy" captures the problem of The Big Beat in general—it's strident and forced where earlier rock-out efforts had felt nearly effortless, the emphasis placed on Salen's competent but fairly earth-bound riff instead of Ron's piano. There's still much to recommend The Big Beat: "I Bought The Mississippi," "White Women" and "Everybody's Stupid" show that the Maels' just-off-center view of the universe remained intact, and "Nothing To Do," certainly *The Big Beat's* highlight in its catchy portrayal of random boredom, is so good that Joey Ramone later claimed that he wanted his group cover it. Still, there's a sense of compromised horizons, of narrowing scope and less ambition, especially in the wake of the Technicolor wide-screen impact of *Indiscreet*. Thus, it's no surprise that "I Love Girls," the album's grandiose cover, actually dates from the first incarnation of the group.

INTRODUCING SPARKS (1977)

After six albums of often avant garde pop, the bizarrely titled, hilariously packaged *Introducing Sparks* kept the band's wit but removed the musical edge. The whole thing was recorded with very capable L.A. session musicians (Lee Ritenhour and Mike Porcaro among them) but their airbrushed professionalism is deflating and pointless; flashes like the merry Russian Cossack kick of "Goofing Off" aside, this is an album of occasionally inspired songs struggling to break through—and failing. The opening "A Big Surprise" features smoothed-out, tame pseudo-Spectorisms and the slightly revolting presence of generic

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Morrissey on Sparks: "At 14, I wanted to live with these people, to be—at last!—in the company of creatures of my own species." Above, *The Big Beat* sleeve photo by Richard Avedon. Left, from *Kimono My House*.

TABOO By Anna Sommer



BOY'S CLUB By Matt Furie



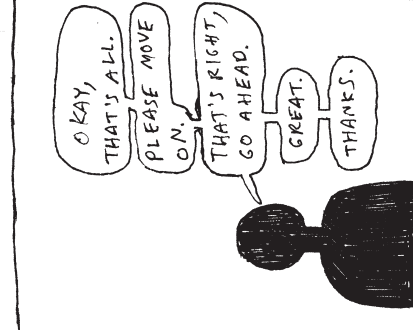
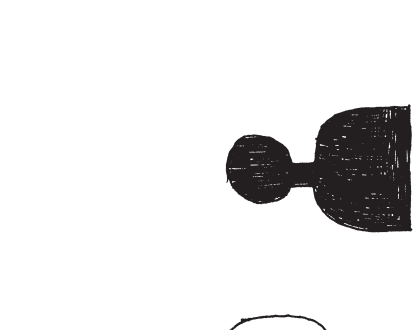
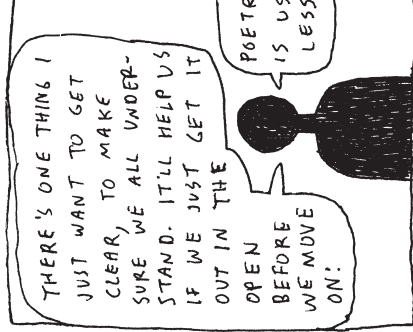
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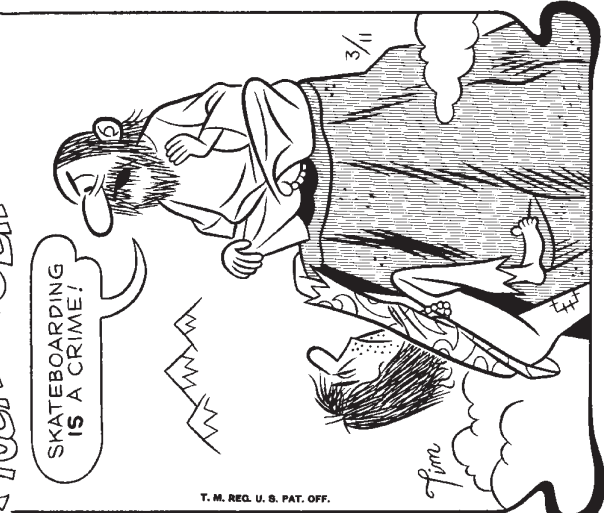
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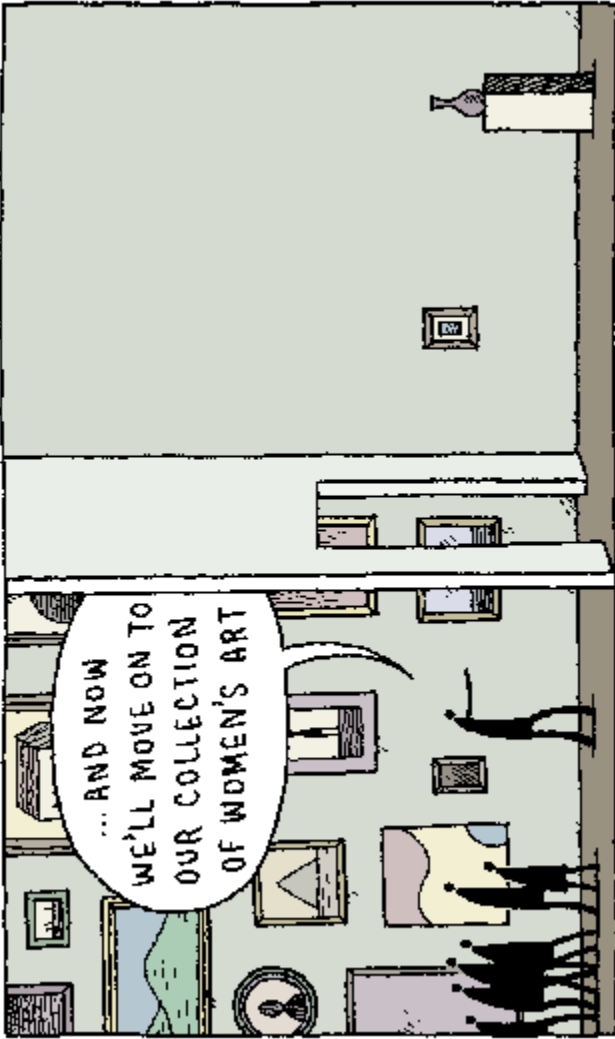
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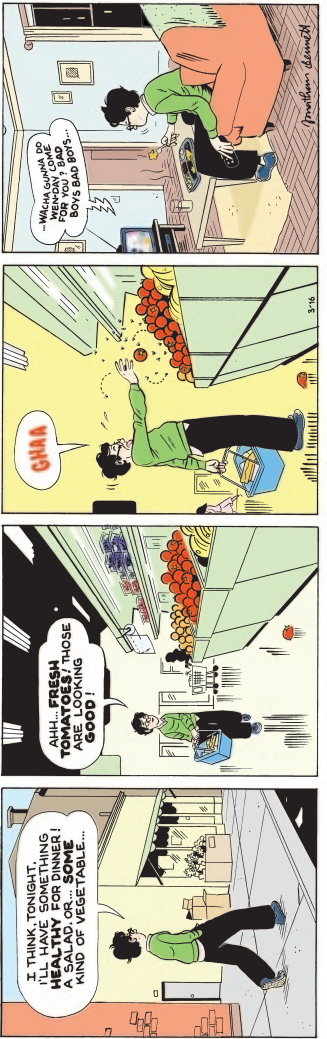
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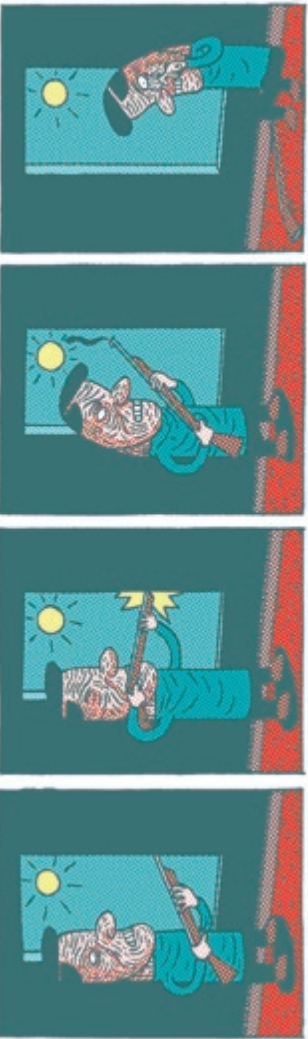
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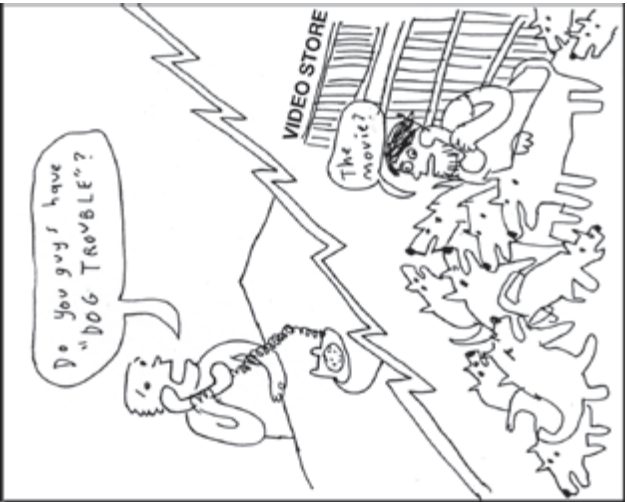
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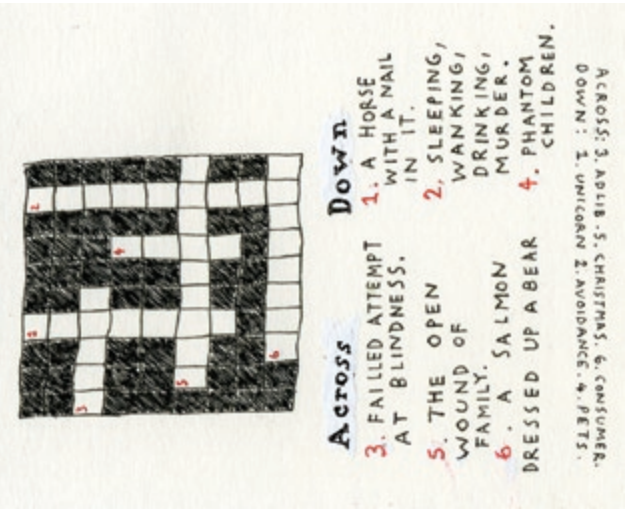
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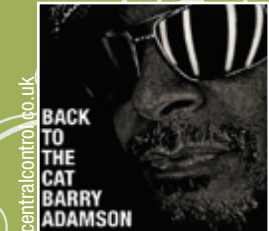
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Barry Adamson
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Various Artists
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DON 731



This DVD documents what Corleone Records has been doing the last ten years, featuring a video—live, animated, or MTV-style—by just nearly every band the label has worked with. Over 9 hours of viewing pleasure, including a short film by Jason Farrell (**Swiz, Retisonic, Bluetip**), bonus videos, a poster gallery, two commentary tracks, a 12-page color booklet and a full live set by **The Body**.



Lazy Magnet
He Sought For That Magic By Which All Glory and Glamour of Mystic Chivalry Were Made To Shine, Or, Is Music Even Good?
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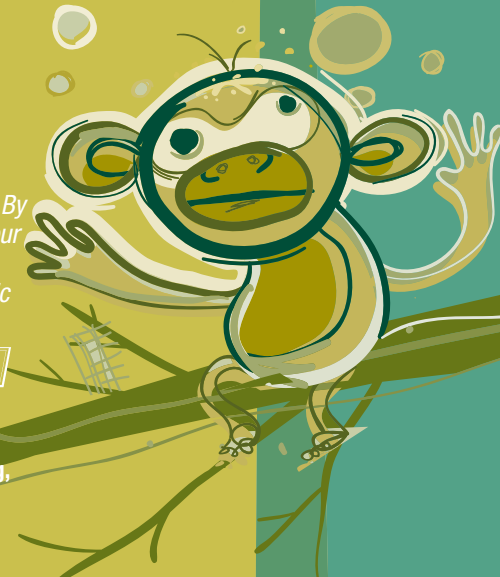


Never Enough Hope
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It seems Sparks becomes more self-contained with every album.

Russell: The last few albums are exactly that. We are really self-contained—it's the two of us working in a room. The new album took a year. We worked exactly one year in this room without any sort of outside stimuli. Our mindset has been that we want to make what we're doing to be as extreme as possible—still being accessible, but to make it not conform. You know the pop music world just seems sort of bland—it feeds off itself. There isn't enough kind of adventuresomeness with people, and with the last three albums, we wanted to make them as uncompromising as we can. But we always feel in the back of our heads that we're a pop band. And the more albums you have, you want to not repeat yourselves as much as possible. If not, it's a real slog. We just find new ways to impress ourselves. Ninety percent of pop songs, in the first couple seconds you can kind of tell where it's coming from and where it's gonna be, and for us that's really sad. What you really like about pop music—it's kind of about shocking you. Not in a spitting-on-the-ground way, but jolting people in some kind of way. And when pop music becomes really safe, then it's not what it originally set out to be achieving—something that would jolt other people. Now there are few things that do that.

What do you think of the idea that the TV commercial is the new hit single?



Ron: Obviously the way a band can sustain itself had to be opened up to other possibilities. It was a stigma before to be in an ad, and now all that's kind of gone. I hear some cherished songs—sacrosanct—used for baby's diapers and all. Kind of necessary in a way, if you're not going to have any other means of promoting your song. It's just a fact of life. One thing we're both a little conservative about is the idea that a song can be cherry-picked from an album. An album can be an amazing thing—bigger than the sum of its parts. Now with iTunes and iPods, people can kind of go through what you've done, and that sort of democracy is not something I'm liking too much. When we do record, we see it all as one thing, though we love singles as much as the next guy. But when someone can take track five out, the

RUSSELL: When pop music becomes really safe, then it's not what it originally set out to be achieving—something that would jolt other people.

whole structure collapses.

Russell: Now artwork isn't really relevant. That's troublesome. It's the whole package! It's part of the fun—opening up the package—and now more and more no one cares. Even the thing of CDs—that shrunken-down image is the first step in the image getting smaller and smaller, and now you buy it online and download lyrics or something. It's part of the tactile thing. It's like a book—you like to touch it and stuff, too. Something more than just the music.

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You've talked before about modern pop being conservative music for conservative times.

Ron: It seems pop music is so out of the basic psyche of things. In our minds, politics is almost more of an adrenaline rush than pop music, to be honest. It's hard to put them together—when 'Johnny B. Goode' was played when McCain won, it's like, 'Wow, that's... something.' I'm really not sure how the back-and-forth political aspects work or what the effect is on pop music with the



backing singers cloyingly adding their unwelcome voices to Russell's. These backing singers would stick around for the whole album. And so it goes. With Ron's piano pounding and Russell's unique vocals, you're never gonna get a bland-sounding, anonymous Sparks album. But introducing comes close.

Introducing Sparks does have its defenders, and perhaps the live performance of its songs as part of the upcoming London residency/retrospective will help bring it more positive qualities to the fore. Yet in the end *Introducing* can be summed up by this simple fact: until the band finally re-released it themselves in 2007, it was the only Sparks studio album for years and years that had never officially appeared on CD. But they say it's darkest before the dawn, and the follow-up to *Introducing* would be one of the most amazing albums ever made.

NO. 1 IN HEAVEN (1978)

There's a story that David Bowie tells that goes like this: During the recording of one of his late '70s Berlin albums with Brian Eno, he was in the studio when Eno burst in with a copy of a new single, excited as all hell. "This is it, this is the future of music for the next 15 years," Eno allegedly said. The record, "I Feel Love," would indeed become an epochal, era-defining smash for Donna Summer, part of her continuing collaboration with producer Giorgio Moroder and drummer Keith Forsey.

Spirit of '78: Sparks with the No. 1 synthesizer in heaven..



Ron and Russell heard it as well. Rather than imitate Moroder and Forsey's sound, they decided to work with them directly.

Just hearing the start of *No. 1 in Heaven* is like a message from the future still, but hearing it in 1978? It must have caused jaws to collectively drop around the world. "Tryouts for the Human Race" was unlike anything that Sparks had done before—no keyboards, no guitar, just gentle space tones and a bit of synth glimmer, a hint of motorik starting to speed up and up and up until a trademark Moroder synth-bass line comes in, Forsey's beat suddenly moving into a massive propulsive push (his fills and breaks later are pure drama in the space of seconds), topped off by Russell's voice materializing:

"We're just gleams in lovers' eyes
Steam on sweaty bodies in the night
One of us might make it through
All the rest will disappear like dew."

The four-way collaboration at work throughout *No. 1* is just perfect—the frenetic melodies from Ron, with Russell's beautiful voice, suddenly seeming so much more freer than before, set against the relentless electronic hyperactivity Moroder conjures up along with Forsey's just plain monstrous drums. Even the non-singles on the album—out of six songs,



three were hits—have all the pieces in place, but man, those singles. Besides "Tryouts," there was "Beat the Clock," another bona fide classic, Russell semi-whispering the title like a mantra and breaking into glorious falsetto on the chorus, Ron's melodies riding on top of a rhythm so clean and strong you could run transit systems off of it—dig Forsey's breakdown on the mid-song break—and lyrics saying, among other things, "Entered school when I was two/PhD'd that afternoon."

And then there's the close, "The No. 1 Song in Heaven," all seven and a half minutes of it. In a career of perfect songs, this might be the most perfect song Sparks ever did—and it's one of Moroder's best as well—a moment of pure sonic celebration and exaltation, its vocal overdub intro sounding like (but of course) angels singing down from on high, a stately first half transforming into an explosive concluding section: dance fueled by atomic energy.

"In cars it becomes a hit
In your homes it becomes advertisements
And in the streets it becomes the children singing"

No. 1 In Heaven marked the beginning of Sparks' ongoing association with dance and electronic music scenes, it's the album that showed that Sparks were keeping their ears open to what was around them, and it holds up (and then some) today. In short, it is one of the greatest records ever made.

TERMINAL JIVE (1979)

The artistic and commercial success of *No. 1 in Heaven* bode well for the follow-up next year, *Terminal Jive*. The Maels had demonstrated that their combination of pop ears and lyrical invention could appealed to a mass audience in more than one musical setting. Working again with Moroder (assisted this time by Harold Faltermeyer), Sparks seemed to be primed for a run of records capturing a time and place like the Island/glam-era releases did, perhaps with similar amounts of fame and fortune.

That didn't turn out to be the case, though. Going back to guitar heavily on a number of too-strident songs—the title "Rock'n'Roll People in a Disco World" says it all—just didn't work much of the time. *Terminal Jive* really is the proverbial album that would make a good EP. There's one big highlight, though: "When I'm With You," a beautiful love song with a gorgeous chorus, just a bit of guitar

snarl to add to the beats, and another example, like "The Number One Song in Heaven," where a bit of self-conscious referencing proves a perfect touch: "It's the break on the song/When I should say something special." "When I'm With You" was literally, as they say, big in France, and further added to Sparks' reputation as genre innovators; here they helped kick-start the entire '80s synth-pop era without intending to. The fact, however, that the band had to fill out the album's length with an alternate instrumental version of said hit gives an idea as to how inspiration was sadly running a bit low again.

(Note: Some fans give a bit of love to "Young Girls," though to be perfectly honest it's actually just a touch creepy—and given some of the songs Sparks had written up until then, that's saying something!)

WHOMP THAT SUCKER (1980)

Sparks' first album of the 1980s found them back with a three-piece LA-based rock band as collaborators—essentially the same set-up they had at the beginning of their career. This time around, the Maels recruited most of an entire group, Bates Motel, namely guitarist Bob Haag, bassist Leslie Bohem and drummer David Kendrick (the latter two also continued to record separately as Gleaming Spires). With Ron now playing his complex melodic runs on a bank of early digital synthesizers, and Giorgio Moroder partner Mack handling production, the crisp *Whomp That Sucker* placed Sparks firmly in the New Wave movement that they had no small part in inspiring.

This '80s rock and roll version of Sparks was a much simpler and direct one than those of earlier years—instead of frenetic performances and instant stop-start changes, the feeling here is steady riffing and straightforward rhythms, immediate but less astonishingly unique (though if anything, songs like "The Willys" indicated how Sparks were listening to bands that had followed in their wake, like Devo and XTC). Even compared to the Big Beat-era band, everything here is pretty easy to get one's head around—not a criticism in this case, since the arrangements can often be fun, but the feeling is still quite basic. In ways, this is the sound of a new group still finding its feet, and the end result is a bit uneven. Still, plenty of songs have the sensibility of Sparks at its most theatrical, such as "Where's My Girl" and "That's Not Natassia," while Russell's voice is as vividly dramatic as ever, especially in the choral overdubs.

But it's the in-your-face numbers that score the most here, such as the hyperactive smack of "Upstairs," the absolutely hilarious "Tips for Teens" ("Don't eat that burger/Has it got mayonnaise/GIVE IT TO ME!") and especially "Funny Face," with a gorgeous "When I'm With You"-style chorus anchoring the tale of a man so perfect in appearance he despairs of never being left alone by admirers. He tries and fails to commit suicide by jumping from a bridge and lives a happy life from there, after his appearance is permanently marred. This was one of the album's singles, by the way.

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ANGST IN MY PANTS (1982)

Angst in My Pants consolidated the strengths of Sparks’ early ’80s incarnation into a smash commercial success—at least within a certain context. While they’d long had a strong cult following in the area since they started, at this point Sparks were near-gods in their hometown of Los Angeles at long last, establishing themselves as favorites on local radio powerhouse KROQ. But this didn’t translate into national success—a pity, since in many ways Angst is one of the group’s most playfully daring releases, hinted at by one of their best album covers, featuring Russell dressed as a groom in a spangled suit and Ron the blushing bride.

With keyboardist James Goodwin added to the group and Mack following up on his Whomp production duties, Angst starts out with one of the Maels’ all-time winners, the title track. Russell sounds downright sad and desperate in the opening words of each verse as well as the chorus, and the bite of the lyrics (“You can be smart as hell, know how to add/ Know how to figure things on yellow pads”),

None More ’80s, from *Angst*.



surprising that the Disney monolith didn’t try and sue the song out of existence for copy-right violations, but such is the weird nature of multinationals.

IN OUTER SPACE (1983)

Sparks finally got their first—and so far, their only—American Top 40 success with the lead song on this album, “Cool Places,” a duet between Russell and Jane Wiedlin, then riding the peak of her own fame as one of the Go-Gos. Wiedlin was herself a Sparks fan since the ’70s—she also appears later on the album with “Lucky Me Lucky You”—and the resultant single, although one of the Maels’ most straightforward compositions (especially lyrically), is a fun kick. It’s also one of the most straight-up synth-pop style numbers the band had ever recorded—drummer David Kendrick sounds more like a drum machine than Keith Forsey had done back on the late ’70s albums—and reflects *In Outer Space* as a whole, with a number of songs being practically guitarless, though the core backing quartet remained unchanged from Angst. (Note that Bob Haag is credited with playing guitar synthesizers as well as his chosen instrument.) Perhaps the Maels, producing themselves for the first time since the debut album, wanted to experiment a bit more with other electronic approaches, rather than replicating their successful work with Moroder. Whatever the motivation, a new slew of Sparks highlights are the result: “Popularity,” a dryly hilarious portrayal of hip young things out on the town, and its brilliant lyrical flipside “I Wish I Looked a Little Better” are both winningly sung and performed electronic pop at its best, an enjoyable tip of the hat to groups like Depeche Mode and Bronski Beat, among others, who had worn out their copies of No. 1 in Heaven long before.

That said, *In Outer Space* can be a bit too stiff for its own good—a song like “Prayin’ for a Party” tries to replicate the monster stomp of “I Predict” without much success. Add in some more uninspired lyrics and arrangements at points—“Please, Baby, Please,” despite a few good lines, sounds scarily MOR towards the end—and this isn’t a start-to-finish winner like Angst. But it’s still one of the band’s finer efforts, and any album with songs (and titles) like “All You Ever Think About Is Sex” (“All right with me!”) and “A Fun Bunch of Guys From Outer Space” has its snarky heart in the right place.

PULLING RABBITS OUT OF A HAT (1984)

Though *In Outer Space* had its moments and even a top 40 hit single, the Maels clearly felt a little change was needed for their next album. They switched back to using an outside producer, in this case Ian Little, while concert keyboardist James Goodwin departed to be replaced by John Thomas, who would eventually become the Maels’ studio mixer and engineer, and the group’s longest regular collaborator. Also, they reversed their recent tendency toward lyrical simplicity, amping up their continuing amused critique of the human species out in the field instead of relying on the per-

formance to imply it, admittedly “Cool Places” had admittedly done so well.

The resultant *Pulling Rabbits Out of a Hat*—featuring another classic Sparks cover, this time a none-more-’80s style painting showing a typically stone-faced Ron operating Russell as a hand puppet—made less of a commercial mark but feels much more cohesive all around. It also includes that relatively rarest of Sparks efforts: a straightforward love song. “The gentle, warm chorus and sprightly arrangement of “With All My Might” recalls “When I’m With You” in its winningly romantic spirit, this time minus any self-conscious verse. That latter sentiment, however, appears in full on another one of the album’s high points, “A Song That Sings Itself.” Even if it doesn’t capture the outrageous heights of “The Number One Song in Heaven,” Ron’s sparkling keyboard loop, the great full-band performance, and Russell’s calm but still almost heroic vocals, make the song a fan favorite that has endured.

If *Pulling Rabbits is Sparks* starting to sound less like its own distinct take on New Wave and synth-pop and a touch more like what the ’80s mainstream did with it—check the already-starting-to-be-overused orchestral synth-hits on the otherwise great title track, opening the album with an energetic bang—it’s still more varied than *In Outer Space* and more intent on showing that the clever brain lurking deep inside Sparks is still operational. Squelchy keyboard break aside, “Pretending to Be Drunk,” with the narrator arguing that his plan was to try and impress an unnamed love with his behavior, is an absolute highwater mark on this album, while “Everybody Move,” the most basic song on the face of it, has this great take on exercise/aerobics culture: “Unwanted pounds will disappear/You’ll have a itty bitty rear/Better lay off of the beer.”

MUSIC YOU CAN DANCE TO (1986)

It may be pushing the parallels a bit, but *Music You Can Dance To* is most nearly equivalent to The Big Beat in terms of Sparks’ ’80s versus ’70s career—namely, the point where returns on a recording strategy are definitely diminishing. The core band remained on board and inspired moments aren’t absent by any means, but compared to the ’80s incarnation’s previous albums, this, its fifth and final one as a fully operating band, feels more like a collection of songs that filled out an album, with low points outstripping the best efforts.

Those high points are enjoyable enough. “Change” is a huge-sounding, epically love-lorn yet ultimately positive ballad. It’s the first recorded instance of Russell speaking verses rather than singing them, something he’s done on almost every album since. And “Modesty Plays,” originally conceived as a theme song for a proposed *Modesty Blaise* TV series and re-recorded here from its first 1982 single version, is fun too. But generally the band is starting to sound a little stranded. What had previously been energetic and modern sound has become shopworn and clichéd. Missteps abound. The execution of “The Scene” is flawed, but in its multipart structure there’s



at least some ambition, especially compared to the cover of Stevie Wonder’s “Fingertips,” which sounds far too much like the dull horrors of so many other washed-out Motown remakes from any number of ’60s burnouts during the Reagan years. Sparks were starting to show their age—a state of mind that they weren’t yet going to escape for a little while, though calling the most trudging song on the album “Let’s Get Funky” demonstrated their sense of humor was still present.

As a weird final note, the album was later re-released on CD as *The Best of Sparks*, a thoroughly inaccurate take on the contents

This caption’s not big enough for the two of us. Below, circa 1983.



and as appropriate a name as Introducing Sparks was a decade earlier. Caveat emptor, and then some.

INTERIOR DESIGN (1988)

If Music You Can Dance To was the decline, *Interior Design* is the fall, equaling Introducing Sparks as a well-meaning but ultimately troubled career low. In retrospect, it’s clear that this is an album that’s not important for what it is but for how it was made—that is, this it’s the first effort fully created by Ron and Russell in the comfort of their newly completed studio, built in Russell’s Hollywood Hills house. Initially nicknamed the Pentagon, this is where all their subsequent albums have been recorded.

The fact that this is the most notable thing about *Interior Design*, though, tends to indicate the quality of the album as a whole. No longer working with their ’80s backing band of Bob Haag, Leslie Bohem and David Kendrick—keyboardist John Thomas had begun the transition to being the group’s regular engineer, while guitarist Spencer Secombe completed the ad-hoc line-up—the Maels have a few flashes of their trademark wit and melodic gift at play, but it’s just not enough here. At best Interior Design should be seen as a home



demo record that didn’t deserve release—it’s there, but for most listeners it’s not needed.

GRATUITOUS SAX AND SENSELESS VIOLINS (1994)

After *Interior Design* Sparks seemed to hibernate for six years, quietly but steadily working on other still-unreleased projects and a one-off single or two. When the Maels focused their attention back on a straight-up album, presumably they hoped at the least just to reestablish themselves a bit in a musical environment that had radically changed in their absence. But *Gratuitous Sax and Senseless*

Violins did more than just that: it kicked off their third great period of extended commercial success, this time starting in Germany. Far from being out of it, Sparks ended up back in the thick of things, in Europe at least, seemingly without effort.

The key to success lay in Ron and Russell keeping their ears open to what was going on around them, much more than they had done in the late ’80s. In the same way that hearing “I Feel Love” led them to work with Moroder, they realized that electronic Europop offered a set of musical approaches that, as Ron remarked in one interview, hadn’t yet become clichés. Sparks took to techno like ducks to water—it didn’t hurt at all, certainly, that the music’s fast temp perfectly suited Ron and Russell’s predilection for swift-as-heck melodies. Another clear inspiration was the splashy, theatrical disco that the Pet Shop Boys had cooked up on Very. The Pets’ had borrowed much from Sparks’ overall approach in the Moroder years, down to Chris Lowe’s near-perfect impersonation of Ron’s unemotive appearances at the keyboards. The song titles on *Gratuitous Sax*—“I Thought I Told You To Wait in the Car,” “Now That I Own the BBC”—have the air of barbed homage.

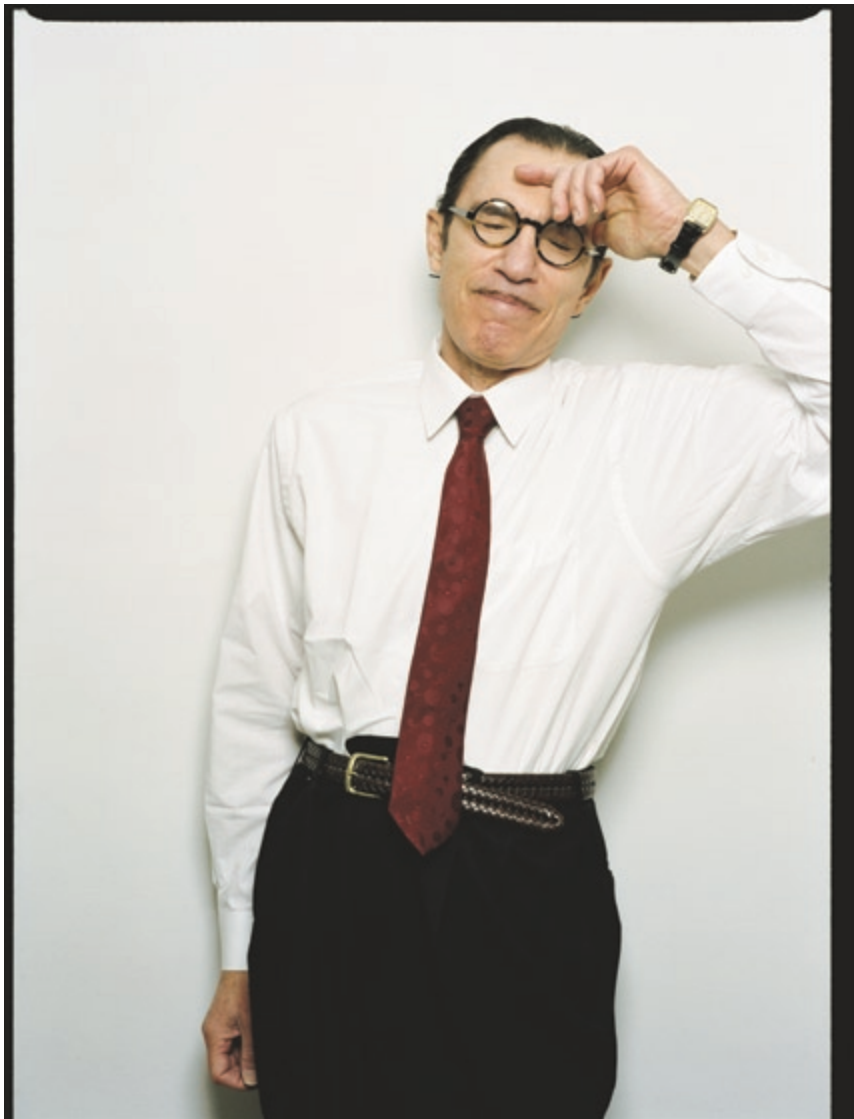
This isn’t a perfect album but there’s so much to enjoy, from the surging conclusion in “Let’s Go Surfing” to “Tsui Hark,” one of the all-time oddest Sparks numbers, featuring the legendary Hong Kong director talking briefly about his body of work. And that’s about it. Other highlights are “When I Kiss You (I Hear Charlie Parker Playing),” which features Russell doing his best version of rapping—not too surprising given his own abilities with rapid-fire tongue-twisting vocals—and the gorgeous “When Do I Get to Sing ‘My Way’?”, the tale of someone waiting for his chance, whatever it might be, which ends up referencing both Sinatra and Sid Vicious. Sleek and winning, *Gratuitous* was just the recharge that Sparks needed – and it wouldn’t be the last.

PLAGIARISM (1997)

The Sparks’ 17th release was their most unusual yet. The initial idea was for Ron and Russell to curate a tribute album of other artists covering Sparks songs. But, at some point, they decided to pay tribute to themselves instead, revisiting their now massive back catalog and rerecording the selections in new or different styles. The perfect extra ingredient for this was their old collaborator Tony Visconti, who had done such a stunning job with his production on 1975’s Indiscreet.

With Visconti handling full orchestral arrangements throughout the album, plus an eight-person choir to boot, *Plagiarism* showcases a variety of approaches: some featured Sparks’ more recent techno-influenced style, while others, like the dramatic opening take on “Pulling Rabbits Out of a Hat,” see the Maels adding relatively little to the string-swept settings Visconti was creating— a strategy that foreshadows where they’d be going in the near future. A further example of the depth of Plagiarism’s inspiration lies in its choice

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Arthur: When was the last time you felt like giving up? Ron: Yesterday?

crossing of the two. It seems like sometimes the biggest pop stars are the politicians, and they look better than the pop stars!

That’s a little generous.

Russell: Well, at least Barack Obama. Ron: I was being selective!

After four decades, what broad changes can you spot in popular music?

Ron: Sometimes it’s hard to know how much is you. You’ve heard so many records and experienced so much, maybe you’re dulled to the initial excitement of a record. But looking back—which always makes me kind of sad to say that!—when you heard a record and it just kind of made your hair stand on end—it kind of was such an important thing at that time! You couldn’t believe it! Both of us—our musical education, if there is such a thing, is from records.

How did that affect the way the band works?

Ron: We don’t feel like we’re slumming by doing pop music. It’s not like classical musicians who moved into that area. It sounds

kind of banal but we’re genuine about what we’re doing.

Are you accused of not being genuine?

Russell: Sometimes if you have humor at all in music, if one doesn’t investigate what it is fully or get into the lyrics, you can think it’s kind of lighter weight. Not as meaty if it has humor to it! Where if it’s something about relationships only on one level where you know exactly what it is and it’s done seriously—‘Oh, that person has a lot of integrity!’ But if you have humor—it can’t possibly have depth to it because it has humor! You think sometimes people may like what we’re doing, but it’s ‘Oh, they’re FUN!’ To be honest, we hate when people just think it’s FUN. There are maybe some fun aspects to some of this stuff, but we see it as more to it. If you look at all the lyrics—even the lyrics that are fun—the fun-ness is coming in a way that is.... I don’t know how to say it.

Serious fun?

Russell: Serious fun! There’s a lot of thought in it.

Ron: And reconciling the thing of having this

be our 21st album but still doing pop music—you can’t even analyze the ridiculousness of that! You just have to do it! We’re not really into doing soul-searching kind of music in that way. We think our music is revealing of our personalities but maybe not in a way other people have done albums—we’re not interested in that kind of exploration of our backgrounds. It’s really really difficult to do music in the general area we’re working—to be able to do it at this stage and not in a nostalgic kind of way. Particularly in England—we have a certain audience still there from the ’70s and we get offered package tours.

Cruise ships?

Ron: Shows of ’70s bands, and maybe we’re delusional but we never considered us a ’70s band. Or an ’80s band—in L.A. we get offered ’80s things! We’re playing music for people that are maybe born in a different decade, but we feel there’s something about what we do that appeals to some of those people. The live shows—so many new people are coming to see what we’re doing now! That’s what’s really exciting, and

that’s the reason we’re doing these twenty shows before the 21st—in an utterly pragmatic way, it’s a way for us to call attention to what we’re doing now. Not our audience so much but people like press and radio who are so blasé about what we do—‘Another Sparks album...’—so this is kind of an attention-getting device.

Was there a need to announce it?

Russell: We’re really proud of the new album and we think it’s really good, and we didn’t wanna run the risk of it trickling out and only a couple people hearing it. We really want people to hear what we’re doing now. And this was the best idea we came up with.

What was the second best?

Ron: Killing ourselves! Maybe looking back—‘They actually were underrated!’ And this is only slightly more of a pleasant experience. 🐼



of songs: relative obscurities like “Big Brass Ring,” from the misbegotten Interior Design period, and In Outer Space’s “Popularity,” receive wonderful makeovers, the latter turned into a lovely high-speed gallop, while recent hit “When Do I Get to Sing ‘My Way’?” becomes a Visconti-scored epic, toning down but not removing the strong beat of the original. Hearing Russell ably tackling the challenging “This Town Ain’t Big Enough For Both of Us,” 23 years on, is a further treat.

The original plan for a tribute album wasn’t forgotten, however, and a variety of tracks also appear that turn out to be full-on collaborations, including an absolutely mindblowing dance/rock take on “Angst In My Pants” by Eskimos and Egypt. Faith No More, whose fractured, spazzed-out art-metal is clearly in retrospect derived from Sparks’ own maniacal exercises in the early ’70s, prove to be perfect partners on “This Town Ain’t Big Enough for Both of Us” and “Something For the Girl With Everything.” Mike Patton’s yelping bark is a particularly fine contrast to Russell’s sweetness. Erasure takes a bow on “Amateur Hour,” while one of the few singers to sound even more angelic than Russell, Jimmy Somerville, knocks the ball out of the park with his stately take on “The No. 1 Song in Heaven.” The end result is unique—a tribute album that’s actually worth listening to more than once.

BALLS (2000)

In the same way that *Gratuitous Sax* and the more electronic reworkings on Plagiarism drew on fluid techno pulses, Balls incorporates ideas from harsher hip-hop and dance influences. The brawling, drum-heavy attack of the title track, which opens the album on a fierce note, is more than a little touched by the Prodigy’s “Firestarter,” though Russell’s gleeful singing is hardly Keith Flint’s rasp—and a good thing too, since that idea is pretty hard to imagine—while the core melody remains a pleasant affair, in spite of all the air-raid siren noises. “Aeroflot” and “It’s Educational” also ride the electro-riffs hard. Russell’s voice is as supple as ever and memorable melodies abound, along with Ron’s usual dry wit. The Mael gift for cliché-reworking song titles is in full effect—the horn/string-tinged and very Gratuitous-like “The Calm Before the Storm,” “More Than a Sex Machine”—while “How to Get Your Ass Kicked” is, naturally, one of the gentlest songs on the album. Meanwhile, the concluding “The Angels” makes for a sweet,

lush end not merely to the album but to a life-cycle of the group—and not only that, it gets away with lines like “I saw the angels cry/They feel ashamed/Because you look so fucking good.”

In retrospect Balls can be seen as the farewell to an era, with the Maels seeing out their dance-influenced ’90s on their own terms rather than clinging to an exhausted approach as they had done at similar points earlier in their career. Like *Gratuitous Sax*, Balls falls short, but it’s a stronger album than others in the band’s extensive history.

Li’l Beethoven (2002)

Each new decade seems to find Sparks introducing a new set of musical ideas or tones that they will then work for the duration of the decade. *Li’l Beethoven* continued the pattern. Indiscreet’s “Under the Table With Her” showed what a combination of Russell’s vocals and Tony Visconti’s strings (and nothing else) would sound like, but *Li’l Beethoven* pushed the idea to the limit. Working again with Tammy Glover on drums (she’d joined the band ahead of Balls) while completely jettisoning their previous dance-beat approach, Sparks created a series of lush, orchestrated numbers that, in a way, finally brought the theatrical aspect of their work completely to the fore.

All this would be conceit if the songs didn’t live up to the inspiration, but the band was on a total creative roll. “The Rhythm Thief” is a statement of purpose for the whole thing (“Say goodbye to the beat”), while the hilarious trashing of the nü-metal hangover with “What Are All These Bands So Angry About?” and the equally funny “I Married Myself” (“I’m very happy together”) are high up there too. “My Baby’s Taking Me Home,” though lyrically one of the simplest songs the band had ever done—the words are the title, and one spoken word break from Russell aside, that’s about it—is a masterpiece, as close to a Steve Reich tribute as can be imagined in a pop format, topped off with some slamming drums from Glover.

But it’s the final two songs that are the best. “Suburban Homeboy,” a witty-as-hell rip on upper-class fake gangbangers that allows them to once again indulge a fondness for the show tune style, is flawless. And “Ugly Guys With Beautiful Girls,” with muscular guitar riffs suddenly exploding into the mix as Russell ponders the mystery in the song title, is even more notable, forming as it does a bridge back to a crucial element of early Sparks: loud electric guitar. There was more to come.

HELLO YOUNG LOVERS (2006)

After *Li’l Beethoven*, the band not only recruited a new full-time guitarist in that album’s guest player—Dean Menta, from the Maels’ *Plagiarism* partners Faith No More—but played the entirety of Kimono My House back-to-back with *Li’l Beethoven* at a memorable 2004 date in London as part of a Morrissey-curated festival. It’d be easy enough to say that *Hello Young Lovers* is a combination of *Kimono* and *Beethoven*, but it would also be



inaccurate. Rather, as Sparks weaved more rock instrumentation into still predominantly classical orchestrations, they also returned a bit to the world of dance music, making Hello Young Lovers not only one of Sparks’ greatest albums but perhaps also their most truly wide-ranging.

The opening “Dick Around,” introduced with multiple Russells singing “All I do now is dick around,” moves from sweeping flourishes to loud-as-hell guitar/bass/drum rampages, Russell tackling everything from soft crooning to insanely quick and precise deliveries matched by equally high-speed performing from Ron, all the while singing lines like:



“Through with you, through with you, through with you, through with you/Yes I think I got the point and bam there goes my motivation/What to do, what to do, what to do, what to do/All that I could think of is that I’m tendering my resignation.”

If Queen had ever swiped anything from Sparks—and they did—then not only had the Maels taken it back, they had completely upped the ante.

And that’s just the start. Touching on everything from more straight-up orchestral numbers (“Rock, Rock, Rock”) to sly, finger-snapping grooves (“Perfume,” the lead single and yet another example of the Maels’ knack for pop at its best and most immediate) to a multipart concluding epic, “When I Sit Down to Play the Organ at the Notre Dame Cathedral,” at once a Parisian song of romance and a paranoid tale of work jitters. Highlights come fast and furious, but two of their most outrageous numbers ever will serve as examples—“Baby Baby (Can I Invade Your Country?),” which takes the words to the US national anthem and goes from there into uncharted but appropriately martial waters, is one of the few post-9/11 songs worth a damn, while “Waterproof,” like “Dick Around” a perfect fusion of classical

strings and rock epic moves, details the story of a lover’s heart crushed by a heartless bastard—told from the point of view of the bastard, naturally.

While not a perfect song-for-song album, Hello Young Lovers comes so very close. Astonishing.

A NOTE ON VARIOUS SPARKS COMPILATIONS, RARETIES AND VIDEOS

The number of compilations released over Sparks’ career has been extensive, ranging from repackagings of the first two albums as a full set to any number of “greatest hits” sources on a variety of labels—the perhaps inevitable end result of the Maels’ label-hopping



over the years. Rhino’s 1992 two-disc Profile compilation remains the best starting point but even that is incomplete, stopping as it does with “So Important.” Meantime, rarities, b-sides and remixes abound, some collected on re-releases (the four Island albums got a much improved series of CD remasters last year, augmenting some previous bonus cuts with even more extras), many others still floating free. (Track down 1993’s “National Crime Awareness Week” if you can.) To top that off,



the amount of wonderful TV one-offs and appearances over the years, not to mention a stream of underappreciated videos, deserves a serious study of its own—for now, search for their original Top of the Pops appearances for “This Town Ain’t Big Enough For the Both of Us” and “Looks Looks Looks,” as well as their Saturday Night Live performances of “I Predict” and “Mickey Mouse.”

Until the day of the ultimate Sparks box set—or if that day ever even arrives, given technological and music business trends both—have fun out on the happy (musical) hunting ground. 🐼

ON THE DRIFT

Rudy Wurlitzer and the Road to Nowhere



By Joe O'Brien

“The horizon,” Rudy Wurlitzer says on the commentary track of the new *Two-Lane Blacktop* dvd, “is everything that the rear-view mirror isn’t. It’s the unknown.” Wurlitzer has been an itinerant traveler all of his life, between Los Angeles, New York, India, Greenland, Burma, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Nova Scotia. On and on. Sometimes alone, sometimes with a film crew, often with his wife, photographer Lynn Davis. His books and films are mythic reflections of that journey.

Most novelists work in Hollywood as hired guns. They do it for the money and there’s not much connection between their fiction and the scripts they produce, unless they’re adapting their own books. Wurlitzer is one of the few exceptions. He came on the scene during a very short-lived and now almost magical-seeming time—the *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* days—when mainstream publishers like Random House and Dutton would put out defiant, challenging fictions like *Nog* or *Quake*, when Universal would

not only release a glacial, plotless tone poem like *Two-Lane Blacktop* but *Esquire* would see fit to publish the script in its entirety and feature the hippie-looking cast on the cover of the magazine. In those days, ensconced in the Tropicana and various other L.A. motels, Rudy’s contemporaries and cohorts in the film world were people like Sam Peckinpah, Monte Hellman, Hal Ashby, Robert Downey, Jim McBride, Harry Dean Stanton and Warren Oates. The books written during that time—*Nog*, *Flats* and *Quake*—were heralded by pioneers such as Donald Barthelme who described *Flats* as “an excellent book, full of unhealthy mental excitement” and Thomas Pynchon, who famously heralded *Nog* as evidence that “the Novel of Bullshit is dead.” Today, his literary influence is apparent in writers as diverse as Sam Shepard, Dennis Cooper, Patti Smith and Gary Indiana.

Rudy is a renegade descendant of the Wurlitzer jukebox dynasty, founded in the 1800s when they originally made pianos and theatre organs. Coincidentally, musicians have been a fixture in nearly all of his films. In *Two-Lane Blacktop*, Beach Boy Dennis Wilson plays The Mechanic and James Taylor (before he was bald and marked for death by Lester Bangs) is The Driver. The most famous case is of course Bob Dylan’s involvement in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, featuring his monumental score and his enigmatic acting debut as Alias, a member of The Kid’s gang. *Candy Mountain*, which Wurlitzer co-directed in 1984 with Robert Frank, features a rogue’s gallery of left-field musical figures—David Johansen, Dr. John, Tom Waits, Arto Lindsay, Joe Strummer, Leon Redbone—all of whom add oddball color to the road movie about a man trying to scheme his way into the music business by tracking down a reclusive guitar maker. Frank, the Swiss-born photographer



Above left: Wurlitzer during the shooting of *Candy Mountain*. Above: Three classic covers, from the days when literature could be published as a mass-market paperback. Opposite: Original 1971 *Two-Lane* movie poster.

best-known for his book *The Americans*, the Kerouac-narrated short film *Pull My Daisy* and the banned-by-Mick-and-Keith Rolling Stones documentary *Cocksucker Blues*, was a longtime collaborator with Wurlitzer and a great figure in the music world. In Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, where they both lived, Wurlitzer and Frank collaborated on bizarre, little-seen short films like *Keep Busy and Energy And How To Get It*. *Candy Mountain* is their only feature-length collaboration and the only film Wurlitzer has directed. Ten years later, Wurlitzer took the music connection a step further, writing the libretto for Philip Glass’s version of Kafka’s *In The Penal Colony*.

For most of the ’80s and ’90s, Rudy’s film work was mostly outside of the United States, working with European directors. He wrote *Voyager* for Volker Schlöndorff, *Little Buddha* for Bernardo Bertolucci and

the anarchic, anti-imperialist gem *Walker* for Alex Cox. He also collaborated with Michelangelo Antonioni on *Two Telegrams*, a project which unfortunately never materialized. On the literary front, he released *Slow Fade* in 1984, a dark, masterful novel written in a more straightforward style than his earlier work. It is set in the divergent worlds of Hollywood and India, and finally Nova Scotia, and exudes a spiritual exhaustion tied in with frustrations with the shuck and jive of the film business. This theme is carried further in 1991’s *Hard Travel to Sacred Places*, a heartbreaking Buddhist road memoir recounting Rudy and wife Lynn’s travels through Thailand, Burma and Cambodia on a photography assignment after the death of her young son.

Now, after 40 years of writing books and scripts, there’s a bit of a Rudy renaissance happening. Two of his classic films—Monte Hellman’s *Two-Lane Blacktop* and Alex Cox’s *Walker*—have been given the deluxe



speaks of this without much bitterness and even laughs about it. His old friend Alex Cox, however, is not so kind. “Jarmusch just stole the idea, which was really shocking,” Cox said when I called him at his Oregon home. “I haven’t been able to speak to Jarmusch since that happened. Rudy could’ve sued him. I would’ve sued the guy’s ass.” Rudy ultimately lets his work set the record straight with *Drop Edge*, an old hand laying down what may well be the best piece of writing he’s ever done.

These days, Rudy and wife Lynn Davis divide their time mostly between Cape Breton, Nova Scotia and Hudson, New York, taking the train in to the city a couple times a month. Rudy and I were supposed to meet at New York’s legendary Cedar Tavern to conduct this interview. I remembered it being quiet in the afternoon and it had a long history of being a haunt of writers and artists — de Kooning and Frank O’Hara drank there, Jack Kerouac was reportedly given the 86 for whizzing into an ashtray. Unbeknownst to us, the Cedar had been recently razed to make way for more condos. We met in front of the rubble. After I introduced myself and apologized, he just laughed and said, “What do we do now, man?” We adjourned to a nearby sports bar and conducted the interview in a less historic setting.

Arthur: I can’t believe the Cedar Tavern’s gone.

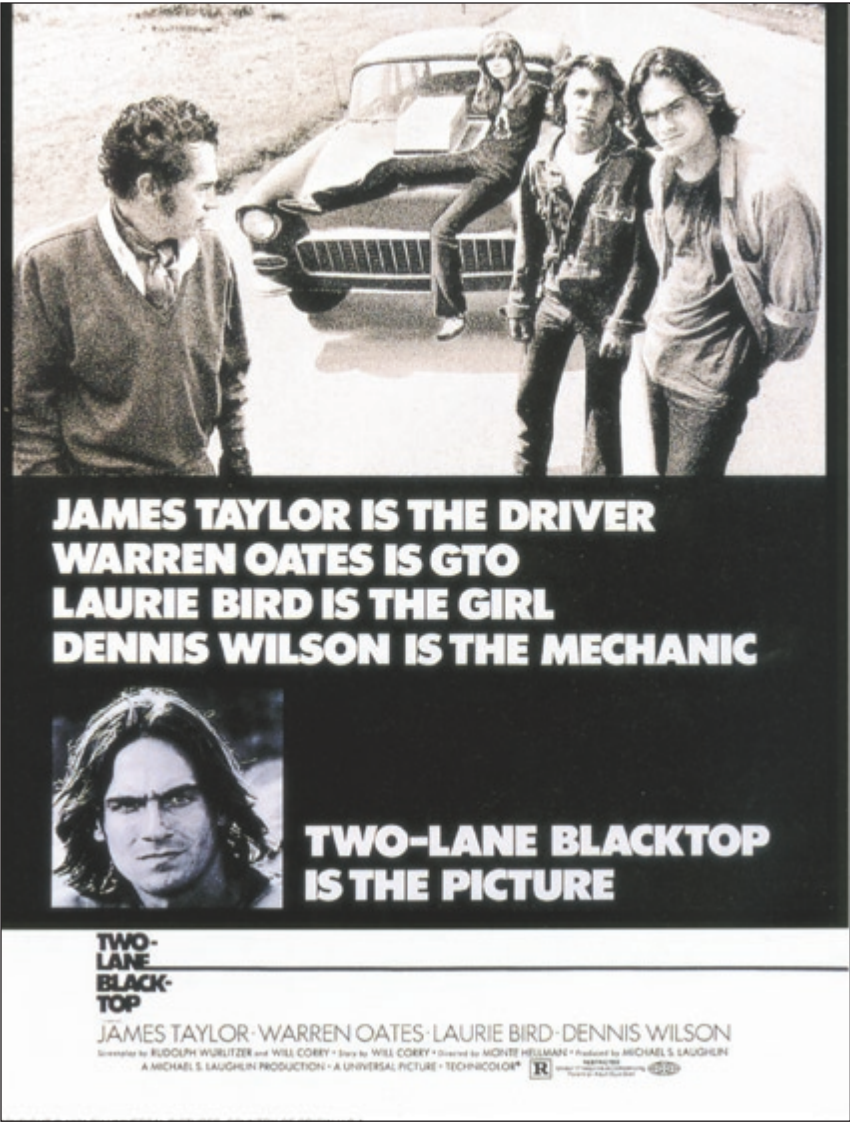
Rudy: I was thinking when I was coming down here about how I used to go there in the 60’s in the last residue of the time when you would go to the Cedar to try to catch a glimpse of Jackson Pollack or Franz Kline or some other art warrior.

I used to go to the Minetta Tavern a lot. They still display some of the drawings that Kline used to pay for his drinks with.

Yeah, in the early days those guys were all broke and they dealt with it. Now the whole consumer culture has strangely suspended that. At least in this particular pocket of lower New York. It’s made everyone very anxious. It ruins conversation for one thing.

It seems like the New York publishing world has changed a lot since Random House published *Nog* in 1969. *The Drop Edge of Yonder*, is being done by Two-Dollar Radio, an independent press out of Brooklyn.

It’s a very interesting thing to have lived long enough to be at the end of one culture and not know what’s coming next. So working small becomes practical in a certain way. A small press keeps the book on the shelf longer, you’re more involved in the process. It’s outside the corporate grid. I just couldn’t go uptown anymore. I used to be very isolated with the publishing process. But now with Eric Obernauf and Two-Dollar Radio, I feel very relaxed. Eric has a genuine passion about books and is willing and even eager to risk going to bat for what he believes in.



I don’t feel like anyone uptown has a passion about books anymore. Not my kind of books anyway. They’d all tell me, ‘You’re time is over, babe.’

How did *Nog* do when it came out?

RW: It did really well in paperback, but I never got much money for it. And I didn’t really want to make my living teaching. I didn’t want to be in the academic world. I don’t think I would have survived that imprint. So I went to LA and tried to get myself really fucked up. And I did. [laughs] But it supported me, you know, enough to go up to Nova Scotia and build a cabin and occasionally write what was inside of me.

You got the *Two-Lane Blacktop* gig because Monte Hellman liked *Nog*, right?

Yeah, Monte liked *Nog*. Monte is, I don’t know how to put it, like a Zen director in the sense that he’s into the art of non-directing. He lets people be who they are. I was left alone. I could really work with my unconscious and surprise myself. There was nobody else in the room. He shot what I wrote and it was fun and it was loose and it was interesting and nobody knew where it was going to go. The script got published in *Esquire*. It was probably as good a writing experience as I’ve had in film, because it was so free. Of course it helped that there

was no such thing as a film school in those days and I didn’t know what I was doing or, more to the point, what I should be doing.

Did you have to learn a lot about cars to write *Two-Lane* or were you kind of a gearhead?

The only way I prepared for *Two-Lane* was holing up in a LA motel and reading car magazines, as well as hanging out in the San Fernando Valley with a bunch of obsessive mechanics and stoner car freaks. I didn’t know much about cars and still don’t. But I did know something about being lost on the road.

After *Two-Lane*, weren’t you going to go to India to direct a film?

In the early ’70s there was a very short-lived wave of small films that were made by people like Dennis Hopper, Monte Hellman, Bob Rafelson, and, of course, Terry Malick and others, and I was sort of washed along in that wave. After Universal gave me a small amount of development money based on a script I wrote that took place in India, I went off on a location scout with the producer and a production manager. While we were wandering around Benares, we stopped in a small shop to have something to drink and got unexpectedly whacked out on some kind of hash-opium concoction which left

“The way I prepared for *Two-Lane* was holing up in an LA motel and reading car magazines, as well as hanging out in the San Fernando Valley with a bunch of obsessive mechanics and stoner car freaks. I didn’t know much about cars and still don’t. But I did know something about being lost on the road.”

us barely able to crawl. We got totally lost and ended up on the river where dozens of bodies were being burned over huge wood-piles like some kind of surreal barbecue. When we got back to the hotel, the production manager, who had never been outside of California, was so freaked out that he refused to leave his room except to go to the airport. By the time the producer and I returned four weeks later, we were barely allowed in the parking lot at Universal.

Then Dennis Hopper made *The Last Movie*.

Right. That just about closed it up. The whole climate changed for those kinds of films.

There’s a direct connection between the themes and mood and style of your books and the scripts you’ve written. How have you managed to pull that off? It’s rare.

Well, I tried to maneuver myself into situations where that would be somewhat possible, without being fired out of hand. Over the last 20 years, that’s meant working mostly in Europe. In the early days when I was starting out I was fortunate to be around people like Sam Peckinpah. It took me a while to realize how rare it was to work with someone like Peckinpah. Aside from being a lot of fun, there was a certain amount of danger involved with Sam [laughs]. He was venal and rapacious and often an emotional killer, but he always had a passion and even an honorable desperation to make a good film. He attracted a lot of old rogues and character actors and he was defiantly anti-establishment. In his sort of outlaw style, he almost always managed to survive the politics of the game, even if he had one boot planted in opposition to all the bullshit and studio-speak.

Dylan had a part in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* and did that amazing score. How did that happen?

When Dylan heard that a Billy the Kid film was in the works, he came to see me at my place on the Lower East Side wanting to know if there was any way he could be a part of it. He said he was Billy the Kid in a past life. After I wrote a part for him, we flew to Durango so that he could meet Sam. We walked up to his house after dinner where Sam was drinking alone in his bedroom and staring at himself in a full-length mirror. He turned to Dylan and said, “I’m a big Roger

Miller fan myself. Not much use for your stuff.” Dylan seemed okay with that, in fact I think he was excited by it. Of course, Sam was holding a pistol in one hand and a bottle in the other. In the script I gave Dylan the name Alias, which seemed appropriate now that he was an alienated and mysterious part of the Peckinpah posse. To get through the usual long delays and boredom of a film shoot, we wrote half a script together, based on Truffaut’s *Shoot the Piano Player*. I forget why we never finished it, maybe because Sam was going off the rails fighting with the studio, or I split for a while or we lost interest. Later on, after the film was shot, Dylan went to Mexico City where he scored the film, lyrics and all, in the space of a few days, mostly with street musicians in the park.

You have a tendency to make an appearance in your films. I just watched *Walker* again the other night.

[Laughs] Yeah, how’d you like my performance?

I thought it was really funny.

I never got any offers after that one.

In *Two-Lane* you’re the hot rod guy in the drag race. Who were you in *Pat Garrett*? I was killed very early on.

Oh, in the house with Kristofferson at the beginning?

RW: Yeah. Sam fired the guy who was supposed to play that, and just said, “Oh, we’ll get that fucking writer to stand in. Kill the writer. That’ll be fun. I always like to kill writers.” [laughs]

One theme that seems to run through all of your work is what you describe in *Drop Edge of Yonder* and other places as the road to nowhere. In *Two-Lane*, Warren Oates as G.T.O says he’s got no time for sidetracks, but so many characters in your books and films are on some sort of journey only to get completely sidetracked and almost forget about any sort of destination altogether.

It took me a while to realize that most of the films I’ve written or worked on have to do with the road. Also, most of my novels are about some form or other of incessantly moving on for its own sake. One of my obsessions has always been the frontier. Not just the West, or India and the far East, but the whole

idea of finding a state of mind that expands or even dissolves the cultural boundaries of who you are and what the self is supposed to be. I went to the West fueled by the belief, most likely mistaken, that I could re-invent myself. I was on the drift. So I've always been haunted by the West and the idea of the frontier. And also the end of the frontier and the echoes and illusions of the frontier and how the whole frontier was replaced by a kind of cultural grid which is beginning to eat itself. Now everyone wants to leave the



On the set of *Candy Mountain*, left to right: Tom Waits, Rudy Wurlitzer, Kevin J. O'Connor, and Robert Frank.

“Sam Peckinpah was drinking alone in his bedroom and staring at himself in a full-length mirror. He turned to Dylan and said, “I’m a big Roger Miller fan myself. Not much use for your stuff.” Dylan seemed okay with that, in fact I think he was excited by it. Of course, Sam was holding a pistol in one hand and a bottle in the other.”

two-lane blacktops and get to the interstate. Go from to A to B. In the early days, I would start to drive West and it didn't matter if I went left or right. Sometimes it might take a month or two to get across. I didn't know what was going to happen. And that whole state of mind about not knowing, or the action of non-action, empties into something else. You can start to get underneath the usual kind of information. You know, like the idea of literature as information or naturalism. You can really start to play with the dilemma of the first person and whether there even is a first person. I've always been sort of obsessed with pushing that as far as it would go and kind of breaking down or dissolving the traditional way of thinking about what a story is, what the narrative self is, or isn't. I still struggle with breaking out of a linear way of thinking. Which is an irony for me because films are totally linear. Not to say that I don't take a certain pleasure in being confined to the security of a time grid. A beginning and an end with hopefully enough juice in the middle not to fall asleep. But it's interesting to go from that tradition into my own sort of self-induced anarchy in a way.

You published three novels—*Nog*, *Flats* and *Quake*—in the late '60s and early '70s and didn't publish another one until *The Slow Fade* in 1984. Were you mostly preoccupied with films in the meantime?

In the early days I would do a film and then take a year or two off and do a book. But the problem was that films became more and more complicated. I had to spend more and more time in LA and the effort of writing endless drafts and going through the pro-

I'm off that case. And I feel relieved. But I'm not so much of a purist that I can't do it to one of my own books.

Your new book is sort of the opposite in that it started with *Zebulon*, a script that you wrote in the '70s. *Zebulon* the mountain man is the main character in *Drop Edge*. How did the transformation go from film script to novel?

It's not the same story, but the script got me interested in the idea of the book. The mountain man represented another world that I was completely fascinated and haunted by. Just the restless, abandoned way they chose to live, outside of civilization and any cultural reference. They had a sort of enraged freedom, a quality of just being completely in the present. A state that happens, I suppose, when your mind is connected to your body and you're hooked up with the rhythms of nature. But I think that *Drop Edge* is sort of the end of my romance with the frontier and what's left of this country's myths of origin. There are other frontiers to explore.

Did you write *Zebulon* for Peckinpah?

Sam was going to direct the first *Zebulon* script that I had written, but he died. Then Hal Ashby was interested in it and he died. I was going to direct it up in Canada but I couldn't get it on. I came close. After a while I just dropped it because the whole adventure was beginning to feel cursed.

Jim Jarmusch was interested in it too, right?

Right, Jarmusch was going to direct it but after talking about it for a few weeks it became clear that we each had a different point of view of what the script was going to be and we went our separate ways. I was surprised when he lifted some important themes from the script for his film *Dead Man*. Let's just say that was an awkward situation. [laughs] At least for me.

I'd seen *Dead Man* before I read *Drop Edge* but some of the similarities are striking.

Yeah, he took a lot. But I think the book is sufficiently different. And in a way, the good part of it is after a while I felt compelled to write my own version to get away from what had essentially been contaminated. Not just by Jim, but by the whole long journey of the script. I'd done a lot of research in each variation, along with a script on the gold rush that I never got on. So I had all this stuff in me. And after years of reading and inhabiting that world, I became very much at ease with the vernacular. And that always seemed to me to be very important in a so-called historical novel. I didn't want it to just be a novel about historical information. So all the film stuff provoked me to go underneath, to explore some other layers.

I like the idea of a character being stuck between worlds.

The first draft of *Drop Edge* was more directly about the experience of somebody who woke up dead, so to speak. So in a dharmic sense it was more about a direct experience of the bardo. You never really knew whether this guy was alive or dead. On another level, that's what being alive is about. Like when you know you're going to die, really know you're going to die, you start to feel alive. So on one level I was exploring that. But I felt that the first few drafts were too much of a plunge into that in-between state of mind. I felt like I had to set the table in a more deliberate way. So that's why I introduced the idea of the character being cursed to float between worlds, not knowing if he was dead or alive. Before it was just being caught between worlds without any explanation and I thought it was too confusing, too alienating. I was trying to seduce the reader into the journey itself, this 19th-century journey. Sometimes I think of *Drop Edge* as an 18th-century book about the 19th century with 21st century overtones. [laughs]

In your books, it's the dialogue that keeps the reader sustained through some of the plunges into the more abstract parts. I think it's connected with why I like your scripts so much, your mastery of this almost non-sequitur type dialogue. In *Flats*, that's what really kept me going. I don't know if you intended it that way, but I think *Flats* is a really funny book. The way a lot of Beckett is funny.

RW: I meant it to be funny. Everyone described it as this post-apocalyptic nightmare, which surprised me. In those days I was reading a lot of Beckett and I actually had to give up reading him because I liked him too much. But during the final draft of *Drop Edge*, I was thinking a lot about what you're saying. Because for me, writing a novel is a lot like writing music. There's a point, after you've got the foundation of whatever world it is you're trying to invent, that you can go back and listen to what you've done and the dialogue becomes like chords, not so much naturalistic exposition. More like little moments that present a different sound or energy that interrupts the narrative line. It's about always trying to be in the present. I feel compelled to create a situation where you're just in the moment and you forget about turning the page, when the whole linear progression is interrupted for a second. That's what I wanted to do with *Drop Edge*, make it circular and end it where it began. Because I think in the circular rhythm there lies some other chords, some other sounds. So, in a way, it's almost like a sonata form.

Something that bothers me is the generalization of books like *Nog* or *Quake* as these stream-of-consciousness screeds. Like the writer just took a tab of acid and scribbled in his notebook all night.

Those books are the opposite of stream-of-consciousness. I wasn't just turning on the faucet. It would take a long time just to write a sentence. But I worked hard

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to make the prose seem seamless and not connected to a conceptual design and to pull the rug out from traditional literary intentions. And that seemed to energize me. It gave me a sense of making the journey come alive. There was a play back and forth between the exterior journey and the interior journey. I take a lot of satisfaction, not to mention relief, in the ordinary practice of joining one word to another. And trying to find the emptiness and space between words. And the irony is that I tried to do that



Wurlitzer, circa 1972.

while I was moving. I wrote a lot in motels. Because when you have those breaks, sometimes you get a glimpse of that silence that can point the way to some sort of illumination, without being too romantic about that word. Sometimes when turning around and inviting that silence you can get to the other side of that and feel a certain open-ended phenomena or discovery. A kind of startled innocence.

Quake was the first book of yours that I read and it's set partly at the Tropicana Motel in Los Angeles. I've always been fascinated by the history of that place, reading about it in the liner notes of records. It seemed like sort of a West Coast version of the Chelsea Hotel. I spent time there off and on. Some of my butter is on those rolls. [laughs] It was cheap, for one thing. It was near the center of town. It was a place where people could get into all sorts of bad things and be glad they did. A step or two or three below the Chateau Marmont.

Do you still find yourself that world from time to time?
L.A. can be an informative place to be creatively alienated in, so to speak. Because if you're not hooked up in the music world or the film world or the TV world, it has an interesting vaporized energy to it. It can put you through a lot of changes. Good, bad and ugly. I got a lot of work done there be-

fore I got hired to do anything. Then as soon as that happened I couldn't wait to get out. It becomes kind of a curse after a while. It was a way to shake the money tree, to survive writing novels that never made a dime, but I've been at the end of that trail for a long time. I haven't had a good experience in film in years, probably since Candy Mountain. I had no idea how lucky I was to work with directors like Peckinpah, Monte Hellman and Hal Ashby and, of course, Robert Frank. What I took for granted and sometimes even

complained about is now forever gone. So I think I've come to the end of it. Even if I do it again. [laughs]

Monte Hellman's not gone. Would you work with him again?
I'd do one with Monte anytime. You know that long bench in front of the *Trail's End Saloon*? I've got a spot on that bench and it's right next to Monte.

Another interesting project you worked on was the libretto for Philip Glass's *In the Penal Colony*. You mentioned that writing novels was a lot like writing music. What was it like writing directly for a musical piece?
I was always aware of the score when I was writing, but I saw my role as more of a midwife, or coordinator, which meant sublimating myself to Kafka's language and Phil's music.

Is it a coincidence that there are a lot of musicians in your films?
Kind of. I mean, I've been in that world a little bit. But for instance on *Candy Mountain* which I co-directed with Robert Frank, Robert was a great figure to a lot of those musicians, coming from Kerouac and Pull My Daisy.

And the notorious Rolling Stones film *Cocksucker Blues*.
RW: He was definitely in that world. 📺

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coverage, individuals would no longer be able to claim bankruptcy, and even if they did, they would still owe their creditors the money they borrowed, forever. The credit industry spent over \$100 million lobbying lawmakers for the new provisions.

Then, just like the credit industry predicted, loans start going bad. (The industry labels these loans “sub prime” because they want to make it look like the borrowers were somehow less-than-respectable people. But the term really just refers to a less-than-respectable loan.) As homeowners default on their mortgages, housing prices start to go down. This, in turn, makes it impossible for people to refinance their mortgages when they thought they would; in fact, now many homeowners actually owe more on their home than the home is worth. How can you refinance a million-dollar loan on a house that is only worth half that? You can’t, so instead you have to hold onto the variable-rate loan that you foolishly bought from the predatory lender. The rate rises higher and faster than you can pay it.

Lenders go ahead and start foreclosing on properties, kicking out the mortgage holders who can’t pay. But this creates another problem: what to do with the house? It’s not even worth the outstanding portion of the loan, in many cases. And even if they can sell it, how to distribute the money? No one even really knows whose mortgages belong to whom, as they’ve been sold as parts of packages, again and again, to different lenders, pension funds, money markets...you name it.

This leads to what became known as the “credit crunch” or “liquidity crisis.” No one feels good about lending money anymore because so much of it was tied in one way or another to these bad mortgages. The creditors don’t want to take possession of all these foreclosed homes, and they turn to the government for help.

Under the guise of helping homeowners “stay in their homes,” the government starts bandying about various “relief packages.” The Treasury department and the Fed are actually taking a two-pronged strategy towards fixing the problem. One prong is cynical PR, and the other is just plain stupid.

First, they want to create the illusion that something is being done, so they talk about “superfunds” to bail out homeowners, freezes on rate hikes, checks mailed to every taxpayer, and other useless gestures. They do all this to appease angry consumers and consumer advocates because they won’t want real lending industry regulation (like what Barney Frank and other progressives are pushing for) to gain any traction.

Second, they want to make more money available to the creditors (banks), so they can keep lending money—because this is

their business. So the Fed lowers interest rates again and again. Banks get more money, and guess what? We’re back where we started: with tons of money and nowhere to invest it! By lowering the “prime lending rate,” they simply add to the surplus cash that created the problem in the first place.

Of course, both measures serve to stave off panic selling, because it seems as though something real is being done. Homeowners may get a slight delay in the paralyzing rate increases on their mortgages, giving banks and creditors the chance to make a more orderly exit. They will bail from these mortgages while selling the artificially secured credit to the likes of you and me through money market accounts and other retail products. They just need time to make sure the real losses trickle down to someone else.

And remember: this whole mortgage fiasco is just a little preview of what happens next year when the credit card industry faces the very same self-imposed “crunch.” In the case of mortgage lenders, at least the terms of the loans were disclosed. Credit card companies—which are some of the very same banks that are in the mortgage mess today—are busy rewriting their policies, increasing rates, and adding fees to the policies of people already in debt to them.

You know those little ‘inserts’ in your credit card bill? Read them, and you’ll find out, like I did, that some credit card companies have begun charging interest on your purchases from the moment you make the purchase. You pay finance charges even if you pay your whole bill every month. Most people carry big balances, so they won’t notice the additional charges, or at least that’s what the credit card companies are—quite literally—banking on.

After a certain point, consumers just won’t be able to pay their bills. Even though they’ve paid the cost of their purchases several times over, they’re simply buried in interest and interest on the interest, sometimes compounding at a rate of 30 or 40 percent per year. The creditors know this, which is why they’ve sold a lot of this debt to other banks, pension plans, money market funds...you get the picture: the kinds of places where we invest our retirement money. The banks invested in us; we were the assets. Now that we’re about to go broke, they’re busy selling us to other financial institutions in a game of musical chairs that will cost the last debt-holder a lot of money. Of course, unless we can convince some foreign sheiks to buy some lousy US assets with their oil money, that last debt holder will end up being you and me.

Over the past few months I’ve spoken to top strategists at some of the biggest banks in the world, and they share my perception of the scenario. Most of them are “holding cash” as their main investment

strategy, spread out over a few of the major currencies. Those making money are doing so by short-selling shares of other companies in the same finance industry that they supposedly work for.

The bigger picture, of course, is that speculation just worked too well for too long. The disparity between the market values and real values (rich people and poor people) got too large. Every asset class, even money itself, got too expensive. We became more valuable for our borrowing power than our labor—which also meant there was no way to work off our debt. Meanwhile, the people using reality as an investment vehicle have overwhelmed the real economy on which their “structured investments” are based.

Sure, this has happened before. It’s just that, traditionally, when wealth disparity got too great and there wasn’t enough money in the right places, the wealthiest bankers temporarily suspended their greed to bail out the system. Or progressive tax policies opened corporate coffers, permitting a “New Deal” that employed people while rebuilding the infrastructure required to make real things and provide real services to citizens.

Today, however, such temporary restraints on greed are systematically untenable and philosophically unthinkable. Conservatives are still so angry about New Deal reforms of the 1930s that that they have infused politics and banking with an economic ideology that sees any regulation of worker exploitation or predatory investment as anti-capitalist, anti-American, and even anti-God.

So instead we are the beneficiaries of “wink” reform: stuff that’s supposed to make us feel good while reassuring the speculators that their interests will remain paramount. A few hundred dollars mailed to every American family creates the illusion that government is lending a helping hand, but this money is not redistributing anything. It’s being taken from the same people who are receiving it, in the hope that they’ll just pump it back into the system at Wal-Mart or the Exxon station.

Whether the coming economic crisis will be deep or shallow is left to be seen. We may be at the start of the kind of depression our grandparents lived through in the ’30s, or we may simply experience what our parents lived through back in the ’70s. Foreign investment trusts may come in and buy our biggest banks and turn us into global citizens through the very World Bank policies we were hoping would turn all of them into US vassals.

Whatever the case, the best thing you can do to protect yourself and your interests is to make friends. The more we are willing to do for each other on our own terms and for compensation that doesn’t necessarily involve the until-recently-almighty dollar, the less vulnerable we are to the movements of markets that, quite frankly, have nothing to do with us.

If you’re sourcing your garlic from your neighbor over the hill instead of the Big Ag conglomerate over the ocean, then shifts in the exchange rate won’t matter much. If you’re using a local currency to pay your mechanic to adjust your brakes, or your chiropractor to adjust your back, then a global liquidity crisis won’t affect your ability to pay for either. If you move to a place because you’re looking for smart people instead of a smart real estate investment, you’re less likely to be suckered by high costs of a “hot” city or neighborhood, and more likely to find the kinds of people willing to serve as a social network, if for no other reason than they’re less busy servicing their mortgages.

The more connected you are to the real world, and the more consciously you reject the lure of the speculative ladder, the less of a willing dupe you’ll be in the pyramid scheme that’s in the process of collapsing all around us at this moment.

Think small. Buy local. Make friends. Print money. Grow food. Teach children. Learn nutrition. And if you do have money to invest, put it into whatever lets you and your friends do those things. ■

Wurlitzer cont’d

And Tom Waits we knew through Jarmusch. I knew Dr. John. In Pat Garrett, Kristofferson was cast as Billy the Kid and he brought in some other musicians to be in his gang. Two-Lane was just James Taylor and Dennis Wilson, who I didn’t know before the film. Often it’s fun to work with non-actors and try to capture what’s natural about them and not studied and be willing to go with whatever awkwardness they might have. But yeah, I don’t know, maybe because of my name they thought there would be a jukebox in the movie.

What is the story there?

A common American story, the first generation comes over and starts a small business, the second generation delivers the goods and builds it up to a huge company, the third generation enjoys the spoils and rides the wave only to lose it or give it all up. I was fourth generation so I never got any of the robber baron gold. I don’t even have a jukebox.

Was the Wurlitzer company based in Cincinnati?

There and Chicago, Buffalo and Germany. I was born in Cincinnati. But I grew up in New York. We moved here when I was one. My father left the company and became a rare stringed instrument dealer and never looked back.

I read somewhere that you were from Texas.

That’s just on the wanted poster. ■



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Monster Magnet, an American rock band, featuring front band lead, Vito Hertz.

THE MONTAGNA AND THE COMING OF THE MONTEAGNA ~ 15 yrs. of Comic Book Retailing ~ 2008

Great new LP by Portland's **Jackie O Motherfucker** may be our fave of theirs since *Flat Fixed*. Spaced out jabber and float with casual/urgent female vocals that almost sounds like certain moments of Fuzzhead at their most blues-wailin'est, interspersed with Velvetsy *volk* moves, and overlaid with swabs of smoke & jibber. The slab is called ***Valley of Fire (Textile)*** and it's a monster. Also out from Jackie O is a sprawling 2 LP set, ***America Mystica (Dirter Productions)***, which was recorded in various caverns by the touring version of the band between '03 and '05. Not quite as precise as *Fire*, but its muse is savagely crunchy in spots and never so formal as to appear in a bowtie. It's an open-ended weasel-breeze you'll happily sniff in the dark. Is that a hint of Genevieve's crack?

This young noise dude from Minneapolis named **Oskar Brummel** who records and performs under the name **COOKIE** has released his first entry into the new new American underground noise forest and it is frothingly balls-deep: good n' harsh. It's a cassette titled ***Ambien Baby*** and it flows with both a FTW sexual undertow and a strange-feeling/shit-coming rejoice. There should also be rejoicing over the fact

Sinclair's *Guitar Army*. This is one of the great American underground revolutionary texts—ecstatic, naive, visionary and powerful. It's a little funny to glom a few of the embedded old (old) school opinions about what is happening, but it's still a wonderful read, and a doorway into eternal truths, if you can stay open to its music. The new layout is pretty good. We miss a few visual aspects of the old one (like, where's the Frantic John flyer?), but the new pics more than make up for it, and the bonus CD—music, interviews, rants, poetry—is fantastic. As is **Paul Drummond's *Eye Mind: The Saga of Roky Erickson***. We've read endlessly about Roky over the last 30 years, but this book is jammed (JAMMED) with new facts, reproductions of fliers, posters, photos and ephemera we never even imagined, and Drummond really covers the subject the way he deserves to be covered. It's really an overwhelming effort. The same is true of **Robert Scotto's *Moondog: The Viking of 6th Avenue***. The writing can be a little *sere*, but the story is juicy enough to mitigate this dryness. We finally get to read the story of how the collaboration album with Julie Andrews came to be. There are meetings with Arturo



the new edition of **Hall of Fame's** 1999 album, ***First Came Love, then Came the Tree (Amish)***. Originally released on CD, it's now on limited vinyl, with a swell bonus CDR of the band live. These guys were a superb trio, and went on to a lot of interesting ensembles—JOMF, MVEE's Bummer Road, etc. But their original blend was lovely, light-assed improv-volk with an experimental undercurrent that always sounded great. And how goddamn splendid it is to have this as an LP! Another gang with a long overdue LP is **Egypt Is the Magick #**, whose ***The Valentine Process*** was recently issued by Wooden Wand's **Mad Monk** imprint. Seems like the unit has expanded to trio size (they were but one, last time we checked), but the music remains a primitive (almost Godzian) blend of street-volk-ritualism, with some Excepter roughage tacked on for good measure. Really fine **Sara Press** cover art as well.

Interesting batch of small 'zines and booklets arrived from **Brass Tacks Press**, out L.A. way. They've got an extensive list of publications, and the few we saw are pretty whacked. ***The Snake Pit*** by **Baretta**, is a memoir of life in a weird derelict surfer/hippie commune/village in Lower Topanga Canyon. It's a casual read, but presents a side of the greater L.A. experience that had previously eluded us. ***The Last Nowhere*** is a collection of "Crap Poetry" by **Log** and **Toilet**, who also authored the bi-lingual ***5 Poemes Crap***. The poetry isn't particularly good, but we're not sure it's supposed to be. What it actually reminds us of is record reviews by the great Rev. Norb in the pages of his legendary *Sick Teen* fanzine. Last up is ***Voyage of the Timeship Medusa***, a comic book by **Toyllit**. *Voyage* is a very stoned-feeling post-hippie image/word blur about rabbits and cops and puke and we-know-not-all-what. Suffice to say, it's good readin'. Also extremely notable from a visual standpoint in the newest collection of drawings by **Bill Nace** (of XO4, Vampire Belt, etc.). Called simply ***Drawings (Open Mouth)*** it's a strange-ass collection of pen and ink illustrations, which have been so important in defining the look of the Western Massachusetts underground. Open Mouth has also just done a CD version of their classic **Daniel Higgs** cassette, ***Plays the Mirror of the Apocalypse and Other Songs***. It's one of Higgs' strongest pieces of extendo string ramble (with a short jaw harp break) and should make happy ears wiggle.

The new double-12-inch by Brooklyn's **Mouthus** has no title (**No Fun**). It also has no suggested playing speed, so we tried it at 33, 45 & 78, and also played it backwards. All versions sound pretty good, although we're currently preferring 45. It's a little less underwater-sounding than it is at 33, but it maintains a certain energetic edge at that speed we find very captivating. Definitely a 33 player is **Hive Mind's *Cast Through Shallow Earth*** LP (**No Fun**). Monolithic in a manner almost suggesting tune-fullness at times, this set slowly uncoils itself into a thick length of very krautly design. It's actually quite akin to some old school slow motion electronics of the Ohr label era. Nicely done. Also nice is **Aaron Dilloway's *Chain Shot*** LP (**Throne Heap**). Less ambo than some of his more recent work, this one's a cluttered collage of loops and thumps on metal and/or horns. Gets very crunky towards the end. Which, you'll have to agree, is a plus.

We NEVER get promos from **QBICO** anymore (hint, hint), but we did manage to lay hands on a great new LP they released called ***Early Free-Form Waveforms*** by **Psychatrone Rhonedakk**. We're not sure exactly what the hell this is, but it appears to be an old electronic project that involved Brian Turner, the current program director of WFMU, which is probably the best radio station we've ever known. Brian plays very Chrome-ian guitar on one side, the flip is a pure Zolar gloop of electro-whizz. It's a formidable space jam, champ. And before we change topics, you *have* gotten the WFMU program guide anthology, right? It's called ***The Best of LCD***, it's edited by Dave the



Spazz, and it's published by **Princeton Architectural Press**. The book is crammed to the nips with great writing, amazing art and cultural detritus of a remarkably diverse nature. Because Mark Newgarden's bro, David, was the program director when the 'zine started, they always had an incredible assortment of artists. The stuff here (by Panter, Burns, Clowes, Beyer, etc.) is not reprinted anywhere else. The writing's fine, too—Tosches, Linna, Marshall...a winning selection of the greats, and definitely the bathroom book of the season.



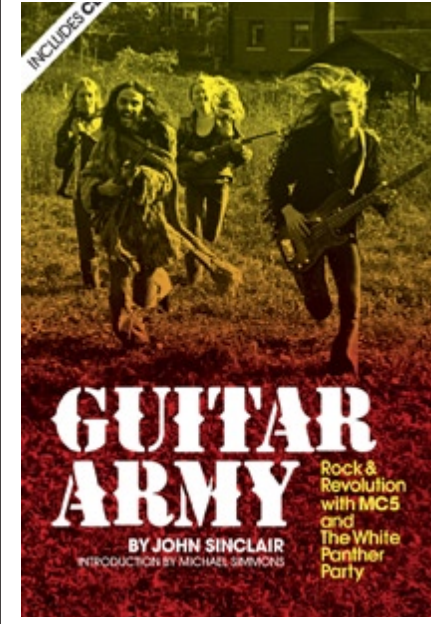
BULL TONGUE

EXPLORING THE VOIDS OF ALL KNOWN UNDERGROUNDS SINCE 2002

by **Byron Coley & Thurston Moore**

that **Times New Viking** seems to have made their transition to **Matador** with their instincts intact. Their new LP, ***Rip It Off***, is as grumbly and fucked sounding as any blast of gas they emanated previously. Nice thick vinyl, too. I guess you need it heavy when the needle's buried this far into the red. Smooth!

It has taken a little while to actually read the bastards, but now that it's done, there can be little doubt that **Process Books** has blasted out three of the best music-related tomes to have been peeped by our tired eyes. First up is the new edition of **John**



Toscanini and Edgar Varese. It's quite a tale, and Scotto has done his homework. The only frustrating note is that there really isn't a comprehensive straight discography. If there's a second edition, it would be a welcome addition. Also, while the CD tracks are bitchin'—especially the early recordings by (one presumes) Steve Reich—some notation there would be cool, too. Other'n those quibbles, we couldn't be more celebratory 'bout popping our corks. Buh!

We reported a while back how the horn has become a significant sound source in basement noise life with the weirdo bleat/junk processing of John Olson's reed kill with Wolf Eyes, Dead Machines etc., and certainly Slithers, and to a mighty free jazz extent the always amazing Paul Flaherty. Furthering all this way hep ghost-trance-sense improv is Dan Dlugosielski's new(ish) project **Uneven Universe**. Dan oversees the **EXBX Tapes** label and has recorded great gunks of noise-jam as **Haunted Castle**, plus he's spooGED out a few Uneven Universe documents. The one we keep going back to is ***The Rattling Caverns***, on sweet Ohio label **Catholic Tapes**. It will make you wanna huff smoke-think and drink brews and maybe get some arm-around. If yr lucky.

'Nother fine Ohio product is the first LP by **Mors Ontologica**, ***The Used Kids Session*** (VSS). Because this was recorded by **Mike "Amrep" Hummel**, it's hard not to smell gusts of Cayuhogan breeze in every note. Never sure if this is a concept we generate in our own fevered brainpans, but the album *feels* sporadically redolent of everyone from the Quotas to Death of Samantha. The basic pummel is *tres* garagey, but it's blasted throughout with croak

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SOUTHERN LORD



It's possible this one's been out for a while, but it's such a massive effort that speediness has very little to do with it. We speak, of course, about **Ashtray Navigations' A Monument to British Rock** 3 LP set (**Smokers Gifts**). Originally released on CDR, this vinylization of the sessions is an awesome and gorgeous thing. The band here is Phill Todd, Melanie Crowley, Alex Neilsen and Ben Reynolds (at various points) and the sonics are a sluffy combo of synthesizer camel-toe, guitar of a very Jandekian nature, and the clatter of pencils in a metal cup. Portions of it are utterly brilliant extensions of a very specific kind of post-genre bedroom improvisation, others mine a very classicist post-Hawkwind space-shaft-continuum, others just sound like a mess. Which means this's a wild, beautiful ride and one well worth taking.

Willie Lane, one of our fave guitarists from the haze-light of New England, and a critical element in the MV/EE Golden Road investigations, relocated to some weird other road in Pennsylvania and we were sad. But now we are brightened! A message beam has been fireflied into our homes via an amazing re-cording collab betwixt Willie and Grant Acker (gtrist from ex-Siltbreeze lost-art spacialists UN). They are called the **Slurp Dogs**, the tape is called **Postal**



Bill Nace

Licks and it's on the consistently worthwhile earth-psyche label from Belgium, **Sloow Tapes**. Real singing amplifier bent note drone wah magic mind music here and all in high order. Super recommended.

Our fave saxophoner list is one on which **Wally Shoup's** name is prominently displayed. This Washington state dadaist is an alto player, visual artist and musical composer of the highest order. And he has recently been present on a pantload of precious poop. One of the best is **Suite: Bittersweet** (**Strange Attractors**), an LP which features a trio of Wally, guitarist **Nels Cline** and drummer **Greg Campbell**. The session was a radio broadcast from '05, and it is a motherfucker. Wally bloots and slurs notes like a Tristano-ite gone berserk, Nels fills the air with intense mid-range squeedle, and Greg slugs them both with fists wrapped in metal. Especially on the b-side, it's a goddamn beautiful thing, both fully blasted and under control every inch of the way. Not as recent, but equally brilliant are the two LPs cut by the trio of Wally, drummer **Chris Corsano** and saxophonist, **Paul Flaherty**. One is **Bounced Check** (**Records**), the other is **Blank Check** (**Tyffus**), and both are full-on spankers. Recorded one fateful night in Seattle, **Bounce** blares a bit more, but **Blank** wiggles like an eel. The playing format (two horns and a drum) is pretty maxist, especially with Corsano on tubs.

Speaking of Corsano, this young honorary Limey has just had his first solo CDR, **The Young Cricketeer**, reissued on LP by **Family Vineyard**. It doesn't sound like much is different, except the playing format. Recorded at home in Manchester, it's a brilliant mix of Chris's fantastic percussion work, plus the crazy tootling and tinkling that're probably what got him hired by Bjork. Shoup then raises his shiny pate again for **The Sound of Speed** CD by **Ghidra** (**Sol Disk**). Another trio, this one features **Bill Horist's** guitar and **Mike Peterson's** drums. **Sound** is their second release, and it's a great combination of Beefheart-damaged psych-noise string energy, intensely focused percussion scrums, and Wally's anticy keening sax-work. Nicer work, Shoup don't do.

Always a treat to get a new issue of **Mike Stax's Ugly Things**. This guy has cracked the code on garage greatness, and he's consistently producing the best music 'zine this side of *Kicks*. Issue 26 has a great Rob Tyner interview, a fantastic piece on the Pop Rivets (Billy Childish's pre-Milkshakes group) and more sweet content than you can shake yr bangs at. If you are at all interested in rock & roll, you cannot afford to miss an issue. UT has also published a new book, which we've started, but not quite finished.

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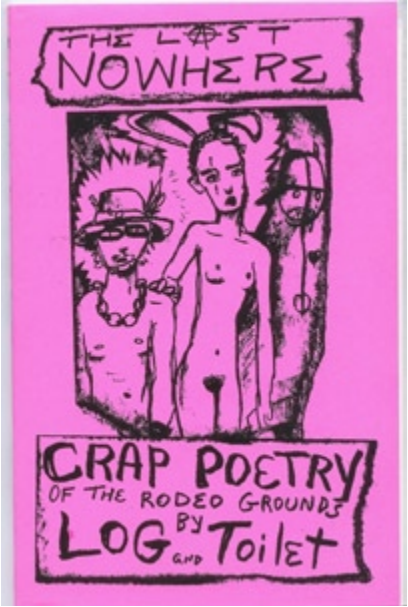
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gets pulled at the end —always a sign of success). Hot stuff from a label with nefarious psycho-graphic aesthetics. The LP is obi-banded with soft yet supple plastic netting and a pin featuring a hirsute asian bondage woman. Crazy. Make sure you grab the



Rolla **Arserection** cassette from Trash Ritual as well for utter sound gutting.

Seems like we've mentioned **Chrome** a couple times in passing. It should be noted that Jim Gibson's newly-reactivated **Noiseville** label has followed their superb Helios Creed two-LP set with reissues of three crucial Chrome albums on CD: **Alien Sountracks**, **Half Machine Lip Moves** and **Third from the Sun**. These albums track the early development of this legendary Bay Area psych combo, from their garage roots into their deepest Neu/Suicide trance states, on to the syncretically fused punk-space hybrid they perfected. Three great albums. And if you write Noiseville, don't forget to ask about the **Wicked King Wicker**. It is a brutal guitar piece taken to a near-Skullflower level. We shit you not.

The new issue of David Greenberger's **Duplex Planet** is out. It's #180, and brings to mind how long ago it was that we first ran into David. It was back when he was working at the Duplex Nursing Home in Jamaica Plain in 1980. He was involved in a band then, Men & Volts, which had originally been formed to play Beefheart covers. He was also doing a strange little magazine of interviews with the nursing home's residents, documenting the depth of their histories as well as the wildly funny answers they'd give to questions they couldn't quite figure out how to answer. The issues were built around themes and there were some classics. David has done lots of *Duplex*-related work, releasing a book by the almost indescribable poet, Ernest Noye Brookings, then curating a series of albums on which various bands sets Ernie's

words to music. He has also developed a series of great spoken pieces, which he does live and on CD with various musicians. He has also been on NPR fairly regularly as a music and social commentator. He's a total genius, and has really been involved in some amazing projects over the last three decades. Anyway, you can check out the *Duplex Planet* site for more info, but this new issue is really the berries. It's another "music issue," and is illustrated mostly by pictures of the '60s bands David himself had: Happy Scab, Scotland Yard Fantasy, etc. Issue 180 is a good one, and reminds us what an important cultural figure Greenberger is. If you don't know his work, check it out.

No one mentioned to us that the genius Santa Cruz band, Residual Echoes, had imploded. So imagine our surprise when we got the eponymous LP by **San Francisco Water Cooler**, a band birthed from Residual Echoes' ashes (**KDVS Recordings**). The album's formatting is a bit irksome (one side's 45, the other's 33, making for much confusion amongst stoners), but the sounds are great. There's a very psychedelic whiff to the guitar, but it's all done inside a sorta *neu noise* context that blends keys with gloop with whatsis in a truly modern way. Pretty amazing stuff.

New tape label **Custodian**, **Color Zoo Containers** hits a high sonic marker with a sweet foray into heavy, heavy excitable music/bliss blizzard drone love with the one man Oakland dude (since relocated to Prague) **Jorge Boehringer** aka **Core Of The Coalman**. His tape **Canarsie** is blindingly beautiful, a scorched sky of hyper sound and it will leave you stunned and spinning. Boehringer's been around the Bay Area scene, hanging out with the experimental head-cases at Mills College and local freaks like Rubber O Cement, Gowns *et al* for a few years. Dude is sick and his violin noise makes us think that the violin is turning out to be the premier instrument of the mid 1st decade 2000 avant/experimental scene (check C. Spencer

Yeh, Samara Lubelski). Did Violinski presage this? No. Custodian, Color Zoo Containers has also issued a cassette by **Take Up**

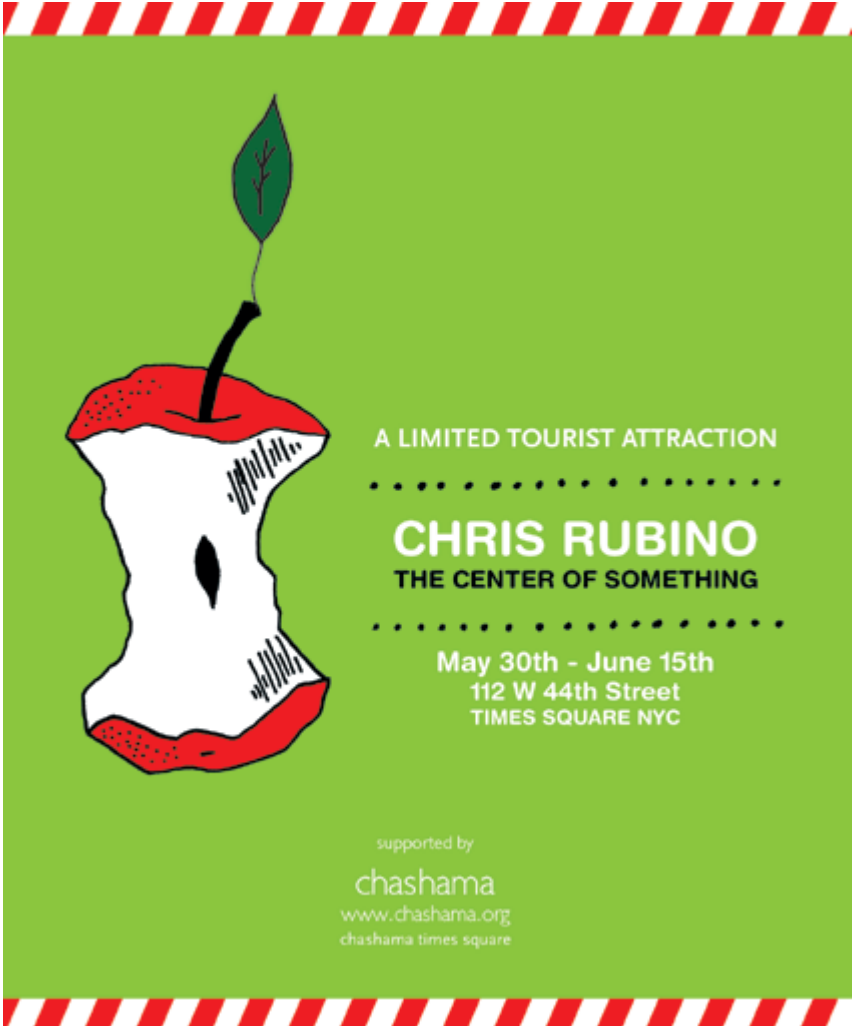
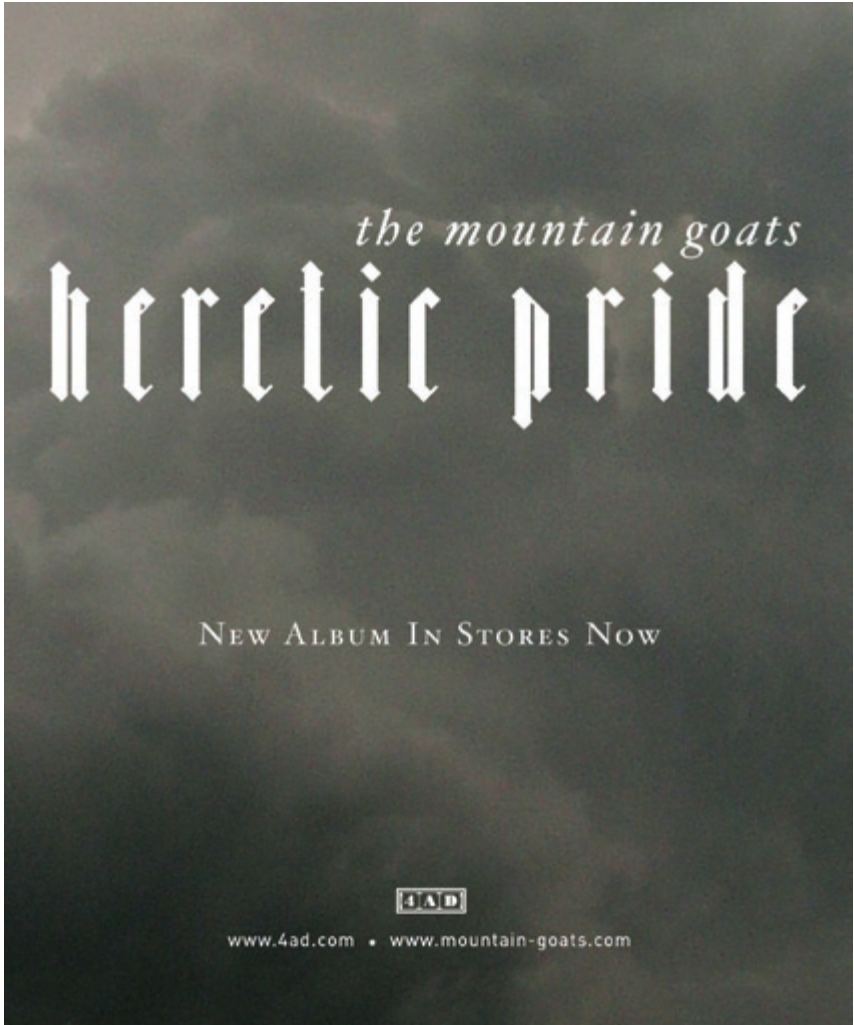
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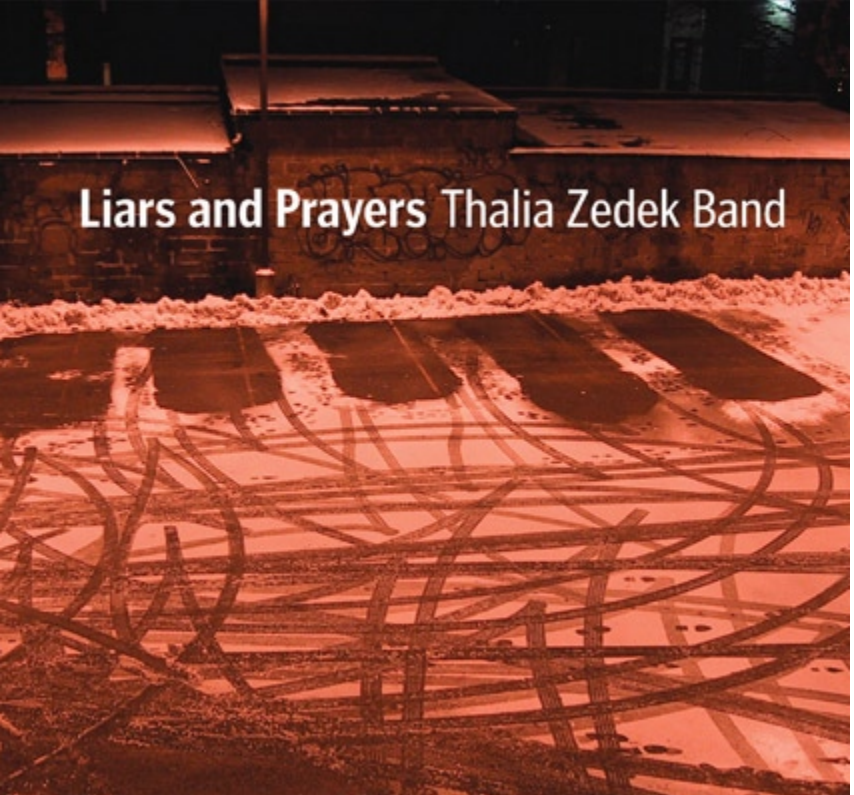
Serpents called **Swollen** And Full Of **Parasites**. These

guys are an S.F. crew of rowdies, since located to Colorado, and they have the classic knees on the floor, butts high, hands on the knobs gutter improv. Like black metal, it's the only way to really have some fun these days. Both these releases are worth seeking and sooner than later as there are less than 50 copies of each. We found ours at **Aquarius Records** in S.F.

While we're hanging, happily, around S.F., a city which can still bring on the hootch charm so lost from the island of Manhattan, let us hep you to the swarm-



Super Roots 9 is a concert recorded on Christmas Eve 2004 in Japan and features a 20-person choir. The CD comes packaged in a special custom-made Mini Gatefold LP style jacket and includes a 40 page perfect bound booklet.



Over two decades, **Thalia Zedek** through **Come**, **Uzi**, **Live Skull** and on her own has earned a reputation as one of the strongest vocalists and most pronounced creative presences in music. **Liars and Prayers** is her first record with her new full band and a masterwork. Limited edition LP version comes with a free download of the entire album.

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ing density of **Usputuspu**, which is the one-man slow burn of this cat Matt from local panic trance rockers Wildidlilie. The cassette release **Liturgical Alcoholik** (White Lodge Tapes) is a real sweet and weird mind-scoping trip and definitely worth yr seek.

Any old school Bay Area improviser/spirit music freak can tell you that **Henry Kuntz** has, since the late '70s, been one of the most audacious and interesting free improvisers on the scene non-stop. His documentation has been typically subterranean starting from his initial recorded sounds on Henry Kaiser's 1977 *Ice Death* LP, a flashpoint record for many a guitar experimentalist (Jim O'Rourke *e.g.*). For most of the '70s Kuntz edited and published a great newsletter called *Bells* (available to read online at www.metropolis.com/bells). Throughout the '80s Kuntz released LPs, cassettes and CDs on his own Hummingbird imprint of solo and group free-playing, all of which have amazing moments of deep spontaneous thought-love-composition. A fantastic compilation of this material, plus recordings from Kuntz's **Opeye** project self described as "avant-shamanic trance jazz," can be had on the beautiful four cassette boxset, *Speed Of Culture Light*, from Belgium label **Bread & Animals**. The label plans on systematically re-releasing the Hummingbird cassettes throughout this year. Essential music for the ancient/modern axis alive in any sentient brain. And each package comes with complimentary plastic dinosaur. So no excuses.

Been keeping an eyeball on this **Tompkins Square** label since they issued that *Imaginational Anthem* comp back in whatever year it was. The label has developed a very cool catalogue of stuff, ranging from reissues of American Primitive guitarists (**Robbie Basho's Venus in Cancer**, **Harry Taussig's Fate Is Only Once**), parallel contemporary work (**Berkeley Guitar** and **James Blackshaw's The Cloud of Unknowing**), newly recorded coots (**Spencer Moore**, **Charlie Louvin**, **Ran Blake**), and a mind-blowing new comp. *People Take Warning!* is a collection of murder ballads and disaster songs, so strongly collated and beautifully presented that it rivals any of **Revenant's** or **Dust to Digital's** recent triumphs. Three wild CDs of lost sounds recorded between 1913 and 1938. Some real nice stuff about the Titanic and Hindenberg. They really knew how to balladize the situation in those days. Fucking cute!

Another damn cute reissue is **Robert Martin's Long Goodbye** LP (Yik Yak), which has rather mysterious origins. It may have been recorded originally in '85 or so, by some California surf dude. But it appeared in '01 as a CDR and got passed around at stoner parties in Northern California. Anyway, it eventually ended up on LP, but its story is no more certain than before. It's acoustic and homemade feeling, rather lo-fi. There are some similarities to other

outsider stuff of that period, but they seem incidental, and the overall vibe (if not the sound) is actually closer to the Bobby Brown/Carolyn Kleyn wing of California surftown weirdos. But it's not as showy as anything those guys ever cut. Just low-key, damaged and nice. We keep thinking it's veering into some sorta Christian swamp, but can never catch it actually doing so. Huh. One thing we've seen it compared to is **Bobb Trimble**, so it's worth noting that Bobb's first two legendary LPs, *Iron Curtain Innocence* and *Harvest of Dreams* have been reissued by **Secretly Canadian**. We've always loved *Harvest*, with its bizarre-world take on Marc Bolan pixie carnivals, but the real revelation has been *Iron Curtain*. For whatever reason, this new issue, which presents it in hermetic form (rather than as part of a twofer) and its apocalypso-folk-psych-pop damage is a mysterious and wonderful thing to behear.

Alright, those wanting to run the risk of our attentions are directed to send two (2) copies of DVDs, LPs, books, mags, cassettes, nude snaps, etc. to BULL TONGUE, P.O. BOX 627, NORTHAMPTON MA 01061 USA.

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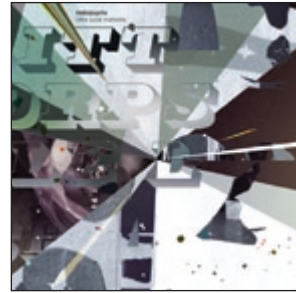
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Debut full-length by this Bristol, UK duo, now on a major tour and taking the world by storm. Like some unholy marriage of **Whitehouse**, **The Spacemen 3** and **MBV**, *Street Horrsing* fuses tribal beats, beautiful melodies and in-the-red vocals painting a space-boat cruising into the galactic navel.



MOTORPSYCHO
Little Lucid Moments CD/2LP

With *Little Lucid Moments*, Norway's stoner rock pioneers **Motorpsycho** broaden their sound without abandoning their signature epic-length tracks. "Motorpsycho have got the musical chops, they've got a brilliant, bizarre way with songcraft (think *Super Furryies*) – all they require is your attention." –Mojo

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PRINCIPLES OF GEOMETRY
Lazare CD

The French duo of **Guillaume Grosso** and **Jeremy Duvall** are two bearded cosmic hippie-nerd twins who are obsessed with **Aphex Twin**, moustaches, NASA videos and the forest. Guests include **Cannibal Ox** and **Sebastien Tellier** on the stellar "A Mountain for President."



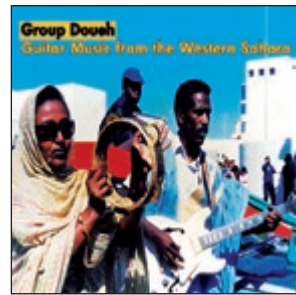
CHARLEMAGNE PALESTINE
From Etudes to Cataclysms 2CD

This is the first solo work by **Charlemagne Palestine** on Sub Rosa, and one of his most devastating works. A single 140-minute composition based on a unique instrument – a dual keyboard with one set being played by the feet. *Etudes* is a dense, swirling harmonic journey through oceans of total sound.



SUN CITY GIRLS *You're Never Alone with a Cigarette* CD

...(Singles Volume 1). Recorded during the sessions that birthed the legendary *Torch of the Mystics*, these 9 tracks represent the other songs for the then-proposed 2LP version of that record. That version was scrapped, some tracks were released as 7"s, but now they're back with additional songs – a bullet straight to the third eye.



GROUP DOUEH *Guitar Music from the Western Sahara* CD

CD reissue of the first Sublime Frequencies LP, which sold out in a day back in early 2007. If you think you've heard all the great electric guitar styles, think again. **Group Doueh** play raw and unfiltered *Saharawi*, the music of the Western Sahara. Distorted, loud and uninghed music from a group of global sonic sages.



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Bollywood Steel Guitar CD

Bollywood Steel Guitar is the most comprehensive collection to date of steel guitar pop instrumental music from India. The 21 amazing tracks compiled here were film hits from 1962-1986, and all of the masters of the style are represented: **Van Shipley**, **Kazi Aniruddha**, **S. Hazarasingh**, **Sunil Ganguly** and **Charanjit Singh**.



PHILIP JECK
Sand CD

This is **Philip Jeck's** 4th solo album for Touch, a set of 7 new compositions that highlight his mastery of evoking personal and collective memories through the use of vinyl manipulation. *Sand* is at once elegiac, celebratory, mournful and uplifting.

TOUCH



Lee Everton
Inner Exile CD

Inner Exile is Zurich-based **Lee Everton's** debut full-length, and the singer crosses the borders between roots reggae, blues, country and soul with surprising ease, and the result is a new sound somewhere between **Bob Marley**, **Bob Dylan** and **Van Morrison**.



VARIOUS ARTISTS *Oh, Run Into Me, But Don't Hurt Me!* CD

...*Female Blues Singers - Rarities 1923-1930*. Sub Rosa presents a fascinating collection of works by female blues singers, exploring the question: what can be said about a singer whose complete works reside on a single 78rpm record? 24 amazing tracks from 14 singers, including **Memphis Minnie** and **Ivy Smith**, as well as many obscurities.



VARIOUS ARTISTS *Migrating Bird: The Songs of Lal Waterson* CD

Honest Jon's presents a timely and loving tribute to one of the titans of UK folk, **Lal Waterson**, whose influence on bands like **Fairport Convention** and **Steeleye Span** is indisputable. Features tracks by **Michael Hurley**, **Vashti Bunyan**, **Victoria Williams**, **Richard Youngs** and many more.



VARIOUS ARTISTS *The Mighty Striker Shoots at Hits* CD

Moll-Selekta presents a compilation of vintage tracks from legendary one-man hit machine "Striker" Lee, celebrating the boom-time of roots reggae from '73-'79. With killer cuts by **Cornell Campbell**, **Horace Andy**, **Leroy Smart**, **Johnny Clark**, **Barry Brown**, **Delroy Wilson** and much more.



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Opposite page, Eryn Branch wears **GREY ANT** To The Point mini dress, **POPPY AND QUAIL** white braided leather and feather headband.

This page, Joseph Harper wears **GREY ANT** Taffeta print men's pant, vintage shirt and shoes.



Above, Eryn wears **GREY ANT** Cat tank over **AMERICAN APPAREL** white tank, **GREY ANT** belted jean shorts.



Above right, Joseph wears **GREY ANT** yellow silkscreen t-shirt, **GREY ANT** Spring zip-up jumpsuit.

Right, Joseph wears **AMERICAN APPAREL** striped tank under **GREY ANT** Spring overalls. Eryn wears **GREY ANT** Pyramid dress, **POPPY AND QUAIL** burgundy braided feather headband.

Opposite Page, Eryn wears **GREY ANT** Cardigan Clip-on, **POPPY AND QUAIL** feather and turquoise headband, vintage necklace.



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