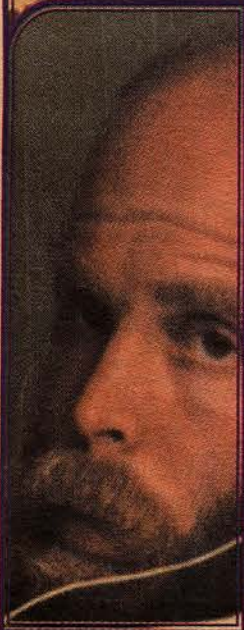


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OCS,
2

The second OCS (John Dwyer of the Coachwhips) release spanning the years of 2001-2003. The sonic layering, texture of sound and perfectly captured moods. It is a rare gift to see Dwyer stripped to an acoustic guitar and a collage of noise. Highly recommended.

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Shortstack play a lonesome demented version of old school hillbilly country & western blues dragged through the rockabilly swampland of Washington DC. For fans of Gun Club, Motorhead, Harry Smith, The Cramps, Stanley Brothers, Folkways & Charlie Feathers.

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Matt & Bubba Kadane
(of Bedhead and The New Year),
Music from the film Hell House

The first new recordings from the Kadane brothers in 2 1/2 years. An instrumental EP of haunting melodies and shimmering guitars. Recorded by Steve Albini at Electrical Audio Studios in Chicago.

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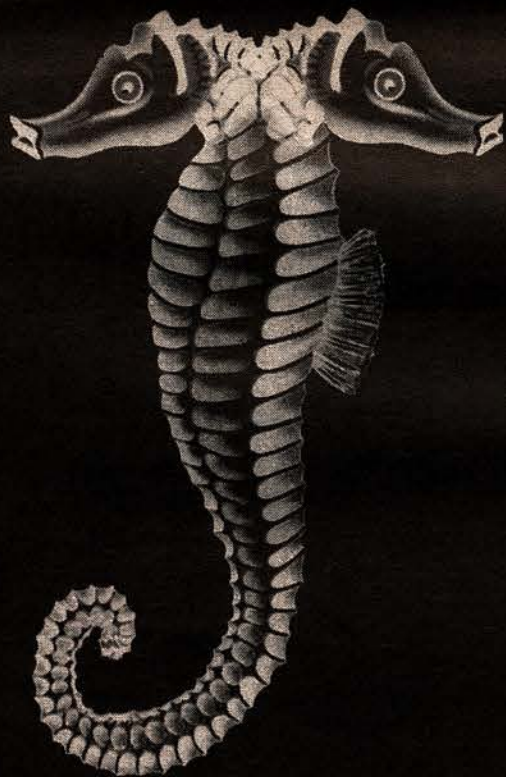


The Robot Ate Me,
On Vacation

On Vacation blends crackly samples, vitriolic political commentary, waltz-time rhythms, sweetly innocent electronic bleeps & gurgles, and cryptically wonderful lyrics into a bizarre yet enlightening musical mélange that walk the line between insanity and sheer brilliance.

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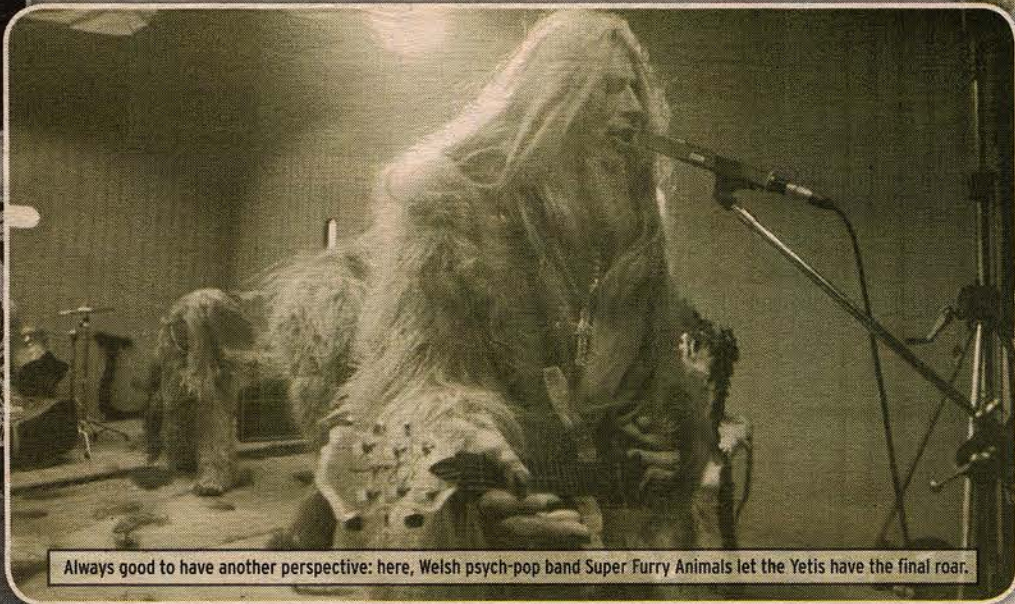
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Always good to have another perspective: here, Welsh psych-pop band Super Furry Animals let the Yetis have the final roar.



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EDITORIAL

AWAKE AT THE WHEEL

David Cross has a great riff on his new album that sums up the general mood and perspective in the *Arthur* bunkers these days. "I don't think Osama Bin Laden sent those planes to attack us because [as Bush says] 'he hates our freedom,'" he says. "I think he did it because of our support for Israel and our ties with the Saudi family and all our military bases in Saudi Arabia. [silence] You know why I think that? BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT HE FUCKING SAID! [laughter] Are we a nation of six-year-olds? Answer: YES."

There it is, right? Cross is talking some brutal reality—recognizing that this is a nation of uncomprehending six-year-olds, powerful and smug in their willful ignorance, impossible to reason with, governed and manipulated by mean, duplicitous, demagogic assholes—but the other important thing he is doing is not giving up. He's figured out how to link observation, righteous indignation and some right-on humor and *get through* to people. Even if Cross is just comforting the afflicted, that's *something*. Recognizing that shit is going down does not have to make us fatalists or defeatists or negative ninnies. So, to cop Burroughs' phrase, you've seen what's at the end of the fork? Cool. Now it's your responsibility to not just keep staring at that fork. You've got to do what you're capable of doing to deal with the situation. You've got to learn how to bend the fork.

Arthur is trying to help you with all of this.

The most important thing is, you've got to laugh. That's what Dave Tompkins' *Fog of War*-like interview with Godzilla in this ish will help you do. You've got to eat right: that's what Will Oldham's pie recipe is for. Of course you've got to keep your perspective on things that are important: T-Model Ford has some zen-like words on this subject. Then, it's helpful to try to engage with the best of the arts—as a creative person, as an attentive audience, as both, as whatever. Making art, taking in art—these are not frivolous pursuits best left to children and the decadent and the debased/debasing mega-media corporations. The arts have an enormous impact on our lives—they form and sustain the metaphors and stories and worldview we live by—and as such, they can have a tremendous positive (or negative) effect. What we make, and what we take in, affects how we see the world, and thus how we act. Check out Kristine McKenna's extraordinary interview with filmmaker Guy Maddin in this issue: it's about working with suffering and despondency and melancholy—not wallowing in it, but to a degree, respecting it, and in doing so allowing it to inspire creative work that somehow alleviates pain.

Of course, it's not always easy to find the best of the arts—many important artists, like Guy Maddin, are doing absolutely vital cultural work that is under-recognized or unappreciated in America's six-year-old-supreme mainstream. That's why *Arthur* digs deeper—to find the treasures, and the people that make them, so we can bring them to your attention NOW, because time is short. The things can be old, or new—or old-new, as in the work of the incredible young folk musicians profiled in this issue.

Thus fortified, you've got the energy and inspiration to take responsibility for your actions, and for your planet: that's what Merrick is getting at in his column on the effects of coltan mining in Central Africa. And, to a degree, that's what Daniel Pinchbeck is talking about in his column about approaching Jesus Christ's message in a more adult way. A way that is more considered, more adult: less Mel Gibson, less George Bush. Less six-year-old.

Jay Babcock, editor
April, 2004
Los Angeles, CA

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IN THE MARGINS
C & D bicker and enthuse about all these new records.

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ON THE COVER:
Devendra Banhart by
Melanie Pullen.



T-Model Knows Better

T-Model Ford says a lot. He says he's 79 years old. He says he's "the Boss of the Blues! The Taildragger! From Greenville...Mississippi." He says he doesn't need his cane anymore. And he says he can help us. So, every two months, Arthur calls up T-Model and asks him for some advice. T-Model gives his sage answers, then we transcribe the conversation with some interpreting help from Bruce Watson at Fat Possum, the Oxford, Mississippi record label that releases T-Model's original bad-ass records (more info on 'em at fatpossum.com). We love T-Model 'round here: his last album, the Jim Dickinson-produced Bad Man, is still on the Arthur office turntable, two years after its release. But whatever. If you've got some non-math questions for T-Model, and we know that you do, email 'em to editor@arthurmag.com and we'll pass 'em along, if they're any good.

Arthur: One of our readers asks, "How come an older man can go with a younger woman, but you never see an older woman going with a younger man?" Is that true, T-Model?

T-Model: Yep. Well, the main one problem with the young womens, and then their problem is with the older women. They want a little harder piece of candy. That's the difference in it. You see that happening in your life ever? Oh yeah, man. It's happening right now. [laughs]

doin' nothing what he say he gon' do. That's the way it happens. I ain't done bad ever who be the president, and I ain't done too good ever who be the president. It don't matter. I ain't never voted!

Do you want your kids to vote?

That's left up to them—they grown. [laughs] You know what? My part, I don't worry 'bout nothin'. I don't even worry about a woman. If they do, it's all right, and if they don't, it's all

"I AIN'T DONE BAD EVER WHO BE THE PRESIDENT, AND I AIN'T DONE TOO GOOD EVER WHO BE THE PRESIDENT. IT DON'T MATTER."

Here's another question. One of our readers asks, "T-Model, are you a voting man? Who are you planning to vote for president this November?"

I ain't even interested in it. I ain't never voted in my life. Anything they do is all right with me. If they do good, it's all right, and if they do bad, it's all right. If they do bad, it's all right, and if they do good, it's all right. See, when you vote for somebody, it's like a woman... You see a woman yonder, you get on your head, you want her whether or not. Then when you get her, it ain't what you thought. And that's the same thing with you voting for somebody. You vote for a person, he'll talk sweet to you 'til you get in, then when you get in, you get SOUR. He ain't

right. Then I won't have to be thinking about it, worrying about it, grieving about it, can't half eat, can't do nothing good, so just don't let that get in your head. You know what give a man a hard blues? When the bottom wear off his last pair of shoes. He can't walk on no briars, he can't walk on the gravel hardly, and he sure can't walk on no coals on fire if he ain't got no shoes on. If he do, I want to see him! [laughs]

One more question, T-Model: What wood makes the best walking stick? You ever use a stick when you're walking around?

Oak ain't too good. Hickory is the best. You can't bend an oak like you can hickory. Go with the hickory. That's what I got in my hand right now!

LETTERS OF COMMENT

WE HATE THEM TOO

I loved the January issue (No. 8) of *Arthur*. The anti-SUV poem "R.I.P. SUV" by Charles Potts was great. I hate SUVs please print more SUV-bashing articles. Keep up the good work!

Elizabeth Wasserhelt
Phoenix, Arizona

Thanks Elizabeth, glad to have been of service. We had some fantastic SUV-bashing last issue in the interview with MC5 documentary filmmakers David Thomas and Laurel Legler, but I'm sorry to report that this issue we've come up a bit short in the anti-SUV department. We promise to do better next time round. In the meantime, perhaps Merrick's piece about Coltan on page 54 will tide you over.

unconsciously give others the permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Michael Caldwell
San Diego, California

Thanks for your kind words, Michael. The joy of low-frequency soundwaves is known to the few, but those who know, KNOW. It was a privilege to be able to present the words of the learned Wino at length in the pages of *Arthur*. And if you're looking for some modern doom-riddled super low-frequency soundwaves—and if you'd like to support *Arthur*'s endeavors at the same time—you may be interested in checking out the *Arthur*/Bastet ad on page 45...

BEHOLD, THE MIGHTY WINO

Stooping to swoop up my copy of *Arthur* No. 9 (March 2004), I almost threw out my back reeling from the shock and delight of beholding WINO on the cover. Fortunately for my spine it was my mind that was thrown back (in time). Suddenly I was sitting in the car with my parents on the way to Quakerbridge Mall, in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, and a local college station was playing what I thought was new or rare Black Sabbath. Thank the gods of thunder that the DJ told me who the group was—St. Vitus—or I would surely have gone insane. Oh yes, certainly insane. The music was heavy enough for Sabbath, only the vocals were different and the music was slower, much slower! Heretofore my eighth grade brain could fathom nothing more doom-riddled, but eighth grade brains are malleable and on that day the plodding progressions of low-frequency soundwaves were forever implanted in my gray matter.

Thanks for putting life into your magazine. To quote Marianne Williamson, "As we let our own light shine we

ARTHUR, HOW TO GET IT.

Your magazine is terrific! It made me think and laugh very superior writing throughout, and brilliant comics. There is no way to subscribe? Is it distributed regularly in New York City?

Michael Lindgren
New York, New York

Thank you, Michael, for your praise. To answer your questions. 1) Yes, there is indeed a way to subscribe. Go to page 45 for more info, or visit our website at www.arthurmag.com. 2) Yes, *Arthur* is indeed distributed regularly in New York City. Locations are listed at—yep, you guessed it—our website. Demand for *Arthur* is far outstripping supply, so we do advise ordering a subscription as the simplest way to ensure that you obtain every issue of *Arthur*. Otherwise, it's off to eBay with you...

Send correspondence to *Arthur* Editorial Offices, 3408 Appleton Street, Los Angeles CA 90039 or email to editor@arthurmag.com. *Arthur* reserves the right to edit letters for clarity.

NOTES ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

"Camera Obscura" columnist **Paul Cullum** is a regular contributor to the *L.A. Weekly* and numerous subversive micro-publications across the planet that pay suspiciously little. He is God's lonely man.

Trinie Dalton (Devendra Banhart and CocoRosie profiles) is a writer living in Los Angeles. She has a book of stories forthcoming from Little House On The Bower/Akashic Books.

Captain Sensible of the Damned once remarked that **Oliver Hall** (Faun Fables profile) "looks like Elvis after 20 years in the fucking coffin." Hall's band Prayers operates out of Valleycat Ranch in North Hollywood, USA.

Kristine McKenna (Guy Maddin interview) is based in Los Angeles. She is presently organizing "Semina Culture: Wallace Berman & His Circle," an exhibition that begins a tour of five U.S. museums in September, 2005. Her second volume of interviews, *Talk To Her*, will be published by Fantagraphics this summer. She'd like everyone around the world to please stop fighting.

Merrick ("Gorilla Killers") is from Northern England. Despite his favorite place being bed, he still manages to be an activist and writer on an assortment of cultural, political and environmental subjects. He helms the U-Know site at Julian Cope's headheritage.co.uk website, as well as working with the Godhaven publishing "coollective" at godhaven.org.uk

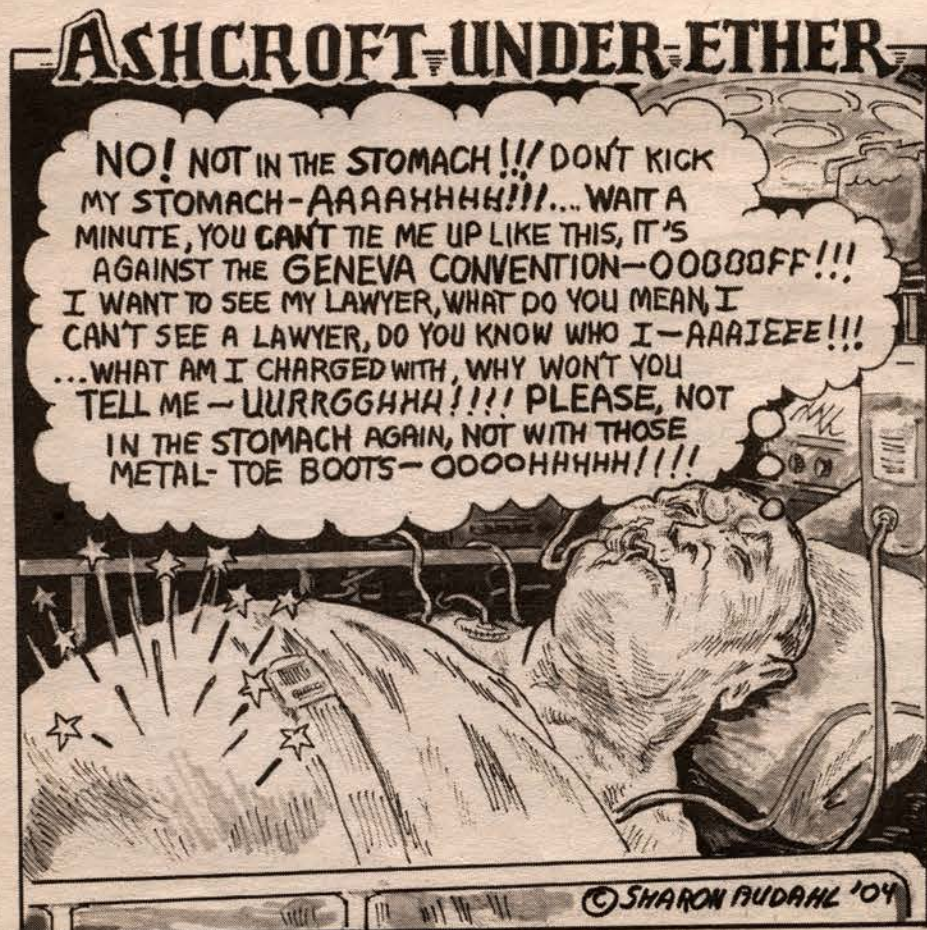
James Parker ("Lemmniscences") is the author of *Turned On: A Biography of Henry Rollins*. He was born in London in 1968 and lives with his wife and son in Boston, where he works as a night baker and writes for the Boston Globe.

Daniel Pinchbeck is a founding editor of Open City Magazine and the author of *Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism* (Broadway Books). More info at www.breakingopenthehead.com

Melanie Pullen (photographs of Banhart, CocoRosie, Joanna Newsom and Faun Fables), in her own words, is currently working on a lot of photos that complete the entire series "High Fashion Crime Scenes," which will be exhibited at the LACMA (MUSE) show in Los Angeles from June 12-July 12, 2004. She sometimes gets some sleep.

Gabe Soria ("Come On In My Kitchen") is 31 years old, living in Brooklyn and thinking about New Orleans. He's embarking on writing a novel that incorporates both good science fiction and good soul music, critics and good sense be damned.

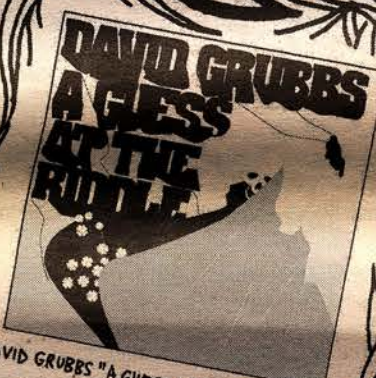
Dave Tompkins (Godzilla interview) recently interviewed The Abominable Dr. Phibes for *I Have No Vocoder and I Must Scream*, an electrode book that'll be out once he's finished. He insists you pick up the P Brothers' Zulu Beat Promo mix. He lives in Brooklyn, USA, Earth.



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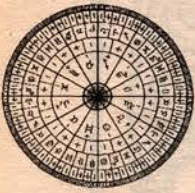
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Predestination; a concept older than free will and borne out by recent scientific elucidations on historical dialectics, genetics and chemical psychology. Each of us is caught in a tangled labyrinth of circumstance and cosmic programming, acting out our grotesque fate in an awful, ignorant manner.

The restless contractions of the astral bodies affect us in a profound way, each offhand movement of a planet can have enormous repercussions for humanity and our various client species, via magnetic fields, space dust and thoughtless lunar alignment. The moon can likewise be an irresponsible entity, tumbling through the sky carelessly, without regard to the tidal waves it may or may not cause. A correlation could be drawn to our own unthinking rearrangement of ant life or microscopic organism culture. This column is a transmission then, not only to the Arthur readers (who have star signs), but to the stars as well, an attempt to get them to understand that even their nonchalant actions have repercussions.



Aries

Once, Man looked on the natural world for his metaphors and archetypes. Your people were dubbed "the ram" for that animal's stubborn ferocity. Today the Ram is nearly extinct, an abstraction to the modern techno-child. People are alienated from "nature"; most couldn't tell you what a ram was, let alone its characteristics. Because astrology, like all other things, must change with the times, you are now Aries—"The Ram"—but named after the pick-up truck by Dodge, hailed by its adherents as "Ram Tough." This means your astrological qualities now include:

- 1) Whopping big four-way disc brakes for much better stopping power
- 2) A frame with hydroformed parts for less vibration
- 3) A more friendly interior, with more storage space and facilities for child seats and extra passengers
- 4) Four new grilles, one for each body style, the most muscular going with the Sport model
- 5) Another 40 horsepower in the base V6 as a result of the swap from the 318-based 3.9 liter to the much more modern 4.7-based 3.7 liter engine. Congratulations!

Ben Katchor

recently collaborated with musician Mark Mulcahy on *The Slug Bearers of Kayrol Island*, a new music-theater production at the Kitchen in NYC. Visit www.katchor.com for details.

I'M JUST SAYIN'



This issue's chef: Will Oldham of Louisville, Kentucky.

Come On In My Kitchen

I'VE BEEN MAKING different kinds of chess pie for most of my life; it's like pecan pie without the pecans in it. I think vinegar pie is similar, and transparent pie is similar. It's just slightly different proportions of the different ingredients and consistencies, otherwise it's the same thing: the magic of sugar mixed with butter mixed with eggs thrown in a pie crust.

There's a place in Louisville called Homemade Ice Cream and Pies that makes a really insane chocolate chess pie, and that might be where I first had it, 'cause it opened when I was a teenager. [In Louisville] there's also Derby Pie, which is pecan pie with bourbon and chocolate chips in it, but that's not a full-on chocolate experience. In Birmingham, Alabama there used to be a place by the airport called BJ's on the Runway and they made the best pies ever. They had a chocolate meringue pie, and the chocolate was... it was like a black hole. You got sucked into the whole thing and you didn't come out until the pie was gone. It was six or seven inches high, with this meringue. Amazing pie. I think that that was when I realized what the possibilities were in a

Will Oldham's Double Chocolate Chess Pie

1/2 c. Butter
2 oz. Chocolate, unsweetened
1 c. Sugar
3 Eggs, lightly beaten
1/4 c. Crème de Cacao liqueur
2 tbs. All-purpose flour

1 1/2 tsp. Vanilla extract
1/8 tsp. Salt
1 Pie shell
Vanilla ice cream or sweetened whipped cream (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a saucepan over low heat, melt butter and chocolate. Remove from heat. Blend in sugar, eggs, liqueur, flour, salt and vanilla extract into melted butter and chocolate. Beat until smooth. Pour into the pie shell. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes or until set. Cool on a wire rack for at least 30 minutes.

chocolate pie.

[I make chess pie] probably three times a year, 'cause sometimes it's easier to go to Homemade Ice Cream and Pies to get a slice. I'll make it for a recording session and we'll just eat it over the course of the session. You get the rewards all along the way. It helps the music stay psyched. This [recipe] is nice, though, because it has this Crème de Cacao, and that's a very good liqueur. I like it. I can have a scoop of vanilla ice cream with whiskey poured over it. It's good. In Italy they call it an "Apogato," which means drowned man, and you can have it with your choice of liquor. Sometimes sweet potato pie with a little bit of bourbon or rum cooked into it can

be really delicious.

Chess pie and sweet potato pie are two things widely available in varying recipes all across Louisville. It's a very exciting place for pie. There's a bakery in Louisville called Plehn's Bakery that makes a caramel ice cream, and the caramel ice cream from there mixed with the chocolate chess pie from Homemade Ice Cream and Pies is... it's beyond description. When you take a bite of it, it's like... how you know... it helps you recognize how omnipotent and indescribable God is. Because this food, you know, goes beyond, and obviously God, you know, God would go beyond anything a pope could tell you, or an imam could say

about, or rabbis, you know? They can pretend that they can tell you about God, but it's way fucking beyond their comprehension, no matter how many books they read or how much they whip their back or do whatever they do. It's the same thing with the pies when you realize that the way things work is way beyond anything you could comprehend. We can put [the ingredients] together, but we can't explain why, when you put them together, why they do what they do.

—As told to Gabe Soria.

Will Oldham's latest records are *Seafarers Music* (Drag City) and, as Bonnie "Prince" Billy, *Sings Greatest Palace Music* (Drag City).

Hotel & Farm

by Ben Katchor



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Taurus

"The Bull." You've ruled the roost for a while now, epitomizing toughness, rutting pompously about and snorting at those who defy you. Unfortunately, due to newly perfected cloning techniques, you've been rendered redundant—there is no need for the bull anymore. Your sperm is irrelevant; they've got Elsa's uber-bovine DNA in the lab. Soon, there will be no Taurus astrological column, because there will be no bull. You will be a picture on the Sierra Club's wall, toasted by donors at environmentalist fund raisers, your name accompanied by tremulous piano plonking. As everyone relates their stories, praising your noble character, only I will have the guts to say you were an asshole.



Gemini

They say that twins often dress the same, act the same and even can use telepathy to communicate with each other. Can you please use that special power to tell what's-his-face to shut the hell up?



Cancer

As a Cancer, you have a deeply poetic sense which is integrated with a mild form of Tourette's. You always say something brilliant, yet offensive in public. This leaves a tangled web of wounds and shaken pride in your wake. You are usually oblivious to the carnage, focusing instead on the tiniest problem of your own. This works out fine though, as you surround yourself with masochists who await your next acrid pronouncement with barely disguised glee. Your tiny problems are enshrined by these followers and tended in a garden as their own. These maladies never need disappear, therefore, but can be revisited during assigned "periods of nostalgia."



Leo

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Here and Now

by DANIEL PINCHBECK

The Dispassion of the Christ

LIKE FAST FOOD NATION, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* may have converted some of its audience to vegetarianism. The film was like watching a slab of wounded roastbeef stagger through an elaborate literalization of the New Testament's nasty bits. Calling to mind the Smiths' anthemic "Meat Is Murder," *The Passion* was long on flayed flesh and short on fun. Apparently, Gibson escaped cocaine addiction by connecting with his Higher Power, and the film could be seen as a metaphorical enactment of Mel's ordeal as the stages of the 12 Steps.

Fundamentalists in the United States—the core audience for *The Passion*, and supporters of the Bush agenda—maintain a self-serving and atavistic understanding of the Bible. Since Fundamentalists consider themselves automatically among the "saved," they believe they have the right to ignore the most basic biblical commandments. These still-fresh ideas include "Love Your Enemy as Yourself," and "Thou Shall Not Kill." The Fundamentalist attitude seems to be that as long as you are "saved," you can support a government that kicks global ass, toxifies the biosphere, gobbles the Earth's resources and converts "developing nations" into cheap labor camps.

At the same time, "spirituality" is increasingly trendy among the wealthy elites of the modern-day West. This "spirituality" generally has an Eastern caste, avoiding Christ and the Bible altogether. Models and their stockbroker boyfriends spend thousands of dollars to attend yoga and raw food retreats, where they practice asanas and mantras in tropical locales. Corporate executives and their trophy wives decorate their country homes with Hindu statues and Tibetan thangkas. Architects incorporate a bit of feng shui into their designs. Nightclubs are called Karma and Spirit, while bands are Nirvana and Spiritualized. Millions meditate and chant, seeking relief from anxiety and some undefined feeling of "unity" with the cosmos.

Words can turn into their opposite. They can be emptied of meaning altogether. This seems to be the case with the common usage of "spirituality," which is amputated from the processes of life. Devoid of meaning, the term is banalized into a new system of commodifiable life experiences, a way of making a pampered and guilt-ridden class feel better about themselves. Although it is crude and perversely violent, *The Passion of the Christ* does imprint the idea that pursuit of meaningful "spirituality" might require some form of tangible sacrifice that goes beyond vegetarianism or om-chanting.

Over the last few centuries, Christianity's ambience of guilt and repression and its denial of the flesh increasingly repelled the modern mind—and rightly so. The Christian religion remains a destructive element in world affairs. Yet as Westerners, we can reclaim our own tradition. This requires careful thinking about this

tradition, to reach a deeper level of understanding. As the Sufi philosopher Frithjof Schuon writes: "The sufficient reason for the existence of the human creature is the capacity to think; not to think just anything, but to think about what matters, and finally, about what alone matters." Thinking should be part of a spiritual path. Dedication to truth is a spiritual discipline.

Perhaps our separation from the biblical and Gnostic Christ is a necessary part of the process of return. We needed to be cut off from this tradition so we could recognize it as if it was new and original. The significance of the events relayed in the Gospels can only be revealed to each individual through

In the Gospel of Thomas, Christ proclaims the necessity of achieving direct knowledge—gnosis—of the Divine: "Open the door for yourself, so you will know what is." He also declares: "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you." The essence of Christ's "doctrine" can be summed up as: "No more bullshit." There is no hierarchy, no priest caste, and no mediation.

To transmit, a receiver is required. Without reception, there can be no meaningful transmission. The Gospel of Thomas, along with other gnostic texts, was found in a jar in the Nag Hammadi

**THE FACT THAT RELIGIONS TODAY
SQUABBLE AND MAKE WAR OVER
PARTICULAR SPOTS ON THE EARTH
ONLY REVEALS THEIR DEFICIENT
AND OUTDATED MENTALITY.**

his or her own process of introspection. You must come to it in your own time, and in your own mind. What follows is my personal interpretation, a thought experiment I have made, borrowing ideas from Rudolf Steiner, Carl Jung and others.

From my psychedelic experiences, I think of consciousness as a kind of vibration or frequency. There might be an infinite number of possible vibrations of consciousness, of levels of soul-development, at various planes of intensity. In this sense, the purpose of Christ's "mission" was to bring a more intensified form of consciousness to the Earth.

Christ's incarnation not only fulfilled the prophetic traditions leading up to his arrival but pointed the way to the future. The vibrational frequency of consciousness that Christ brought to the Earth was too much for humanity at that time—save for a few—and up until the present day. Of course, "descending" as he did from a more intensified phase of Being, Christ knew this would be the case. That is why he said he did not come to bring peace, but a sword—not to unite, but to divide. And indeed, the legacy of Christ's coming has been two millennia of incessant bloodbaths and primitive horrors.

World avatars are frequency transducers who step up the voltage of Mind. Christ's parables are not just "mythologemes" but devices to store and transmit higher energies. The receptivity of his audience to his impacted fables and statements was in itself miraculous—as much a miracle as any of his suspensions or transmutations of seeming physical laws. There is an almost cybernetic quality to much of Christ's discourse. His parables break open ordinary logic to introduce a "supramental" element or higher-level logic that can only be conveyed through symbolic speech. His disciples listened in wonder, but understood only in part. Their amazement becomes apparent through reading a stripped-down version of the Gospel of Thomas, which dates from the same period as the canonical texts.

desert of Egypt, in 1945. I suspect that these lost scriptures were intended for our time. Throughout Thomas, Christ reiterates: "Those who have two ears better listen!" We are the subjects with the capacity to understand, and it is to the advanced present-day consciousness that Christ directs his statements.

We develop "ears to hear" by reconciling modern empirical cognition, which accepts the quantum paradoxes of spacetime discovered by physics, with a new understanding of myth. Myth is not antithetical to science. A new attitude to myth is described by William Irwin Thompson in his books *Imaginary Landscapes* and *Coming Into Being*. Thompson proposes we make a shift "from a postmodernist sensibility in which myth is regarded as an absolute and authoritarian system of discourse to a planetary culture in which myth is regarded as isomorphic, but not identical, to scientific narratives."

One can understand the meaning of the "Christ event" from several different angles. From one perspective, Christ's incarnation initiated the descent of the Logos into humanity. This process continues—realizes itself, I suspect—in our own time. Realization of the Logos illuminates the human soul from within. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," so begins the Gospel of John. The Logos is the light that came into the world, "and the darkness comprehendeth it not." Through awareness of the Logos, consciousness realizes its self-identity with the Divine.

God is not a conscious being. God is the Logos, who, as William Blake wrote, "only acts, and is, in existing beings and men." Immanent rather than transcendent, God, the Logos, comes to consciousness in humanity. Man is a Logos-being. Reality is syntax.

Only in stages of intensification that naturally appear in the physical realm as the destructive shocks of a historical process can consciousness be brought to realization of the Logos, and achieve awareness of its direct participation in the creative process. Christ says,

"The Kingdom of God is within you." No external temple or mountaintop contains the Sacred. The Sacred is everywhere. As Black Elk realized: "Every place is the center of the world." The fact that religions today squabble and make war over particular spots on the Earth only reveals their deficient and outdated mentality.

From the Jungian perspective, Christ's arrival humanizes the God-image. The tyrannical and patriarchal God-image presiding over the Old Testament represents phases in a dialectic. Humanity looks up to see itself in the mirror of the God-image, the God-image beholds Himself reflected in humanity. Both are shocked by what they find, and evolve as a result. Conflict creates consciousness. As human consciousness develops more sensitivity, the previously barbaric God-image becomes sensitized and compassionate.

In "God's Answer to Job," Carl Jung suggests that humanity's moral and intellectual progress forced God to incarnate in suffering humanity. This is His mercy. First, He "descends" as a special and singular being, the Christ, thereby introducing the new vibrational level of consciousness. Eventually, God incarnates—seeks to know Himself—within the larger body of

prosaic humanity. History is this story of the "descent" or incarnation of the Logos into humanity. At the same time, in fulfillment of His wrath, He prepares the Apocalypse. Edward Edinger, in *Archetypes of the Apocalypse*, describes the Apocalypse as "the momentous event of the coming of the Self into conscious realization." Like the human psyche, the God-image unifies opposites: Creation and destruction, male and female, being and nonbeing are fused in Him, as in us.

Theorists have proposed that consciousness was not fully individualized in the pre-Christian era. It may be that consciousness was first experienced as an extrinsic voice or presence—as Julian Jaynes outlined in *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. For Rudolf Steiner, before Christ's incarnation, a person identified him or herself with their "group soul" or ancestral line. When the Bible says that Abraham or another patriarch lived for many hundreds of years, it signifies that the descendants of Abraham had an awareness of themselves that was not clearly distinct from their originator, hence the descendants also considered themselves to be "Abraham." Christ instilled the "I AM" in the human soul. He said, "You have to leave your father and mother to follow me." In other words, people had to break from any diffuse connection with their lineage or tribe, and awaken to their own individuality. Once the process of individuation is complete, the Ego can be consciously sacrificed.

According to Steiner, the materialization of the Earth and the Ego increased the powers of demonic or Ahimanic forces, seeking to drag humanity down into the mineral world, the inorganic and the death-trap of

continued on page 52



Virgo

The time you spend on the toilet is legendary. Here is a ballad written around this epic rite: "The time you spend on the toilet seat is certainly no mean feat if you had a bed in there I'd think it's where you sleep. When I pass the door I hear the moans and innumerable sounds of a soul left hanging before god as his best work drowns."



Libra

If Libra were a car, it would be a classy little number, not vulgar but with an engine that meant business. If Libra were a film, it would be foreign, but with a sense of humour—not inscrutable. If Libra were a food, it would be a pasta primavera or something else elegant but suitable for a cafe and with a touch of freshness. Unfortunately, Libra is a person and they are absolutely insufferable.



Scorpio

Some of your subjects seem to suddenly realize they are without what you might call "complete autonomy." They realize their actions have been guided as from enormous strings from on high, and that you hold the strings. Only, there are no strings. Just a series of mnemonic symbols and repetition-induced brain control as learned via an operative from the CIA. Soothe their fears. Tell them that they're on a "secret operation," that brainwashing is just "another kind of cleaning." People wash their hands—don't they?



Sagittarius

The great Sagittarian martyrs, Jimi, Jim and Janis, all died from wretched excess. They are admired for their art, but imitated for their bacchanalian imbibements; every night young acolytes strive to ingest as much as they did, in deferent homage. The poseurs! They think it's a matter of choice. They don't understand that it's a kind of a curse to be Sagittarius, "the patron saint of consumerism." It gets tiresome embodying the culture's endless pursuit of youth, sensation and desire, living as the market's role model. There can be no rest for you though, this is your destiny. Show these tourists how to "super size" their order!



Capricorn

You are toughest, when it comes down to it. Your resolve always trumps everyone else's fancy plans. When things get tough, remember the Capricorn Stalin against the Nazis; he could not be defeated! The Capricorn Mao against the imperialist running dogs—"sometimes a retreat can ultimately be an advance"! These are the examples of dogged resistance in the face of almost absolute odds you must recall when things seem hopeless. Just don't think about the Capricorn Nixon, who got set up by his own party with "Watergate." Ouch! Or Howard Hughes who flopped with that "Spruce Goose" and then became a weird recluse and CIA asset. Wotta loser. Or Batista...his whole army beaten by twelve guys in the jungle. Don't think about those Capricorns though; focus on the winners!



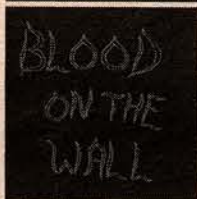
Aquarius

You are a spoiled sultan splayed out in the sun, eating "dolmas" or grape leaves. You've handpicked the eunuchs and the harem and you're ready to ravage the latter but you, being "Aquarius," want to be evenhanded. You will spread your sensual generosity evenly among your sexual slaves without regard to their gender or lack thereof. Bravo! Eunuchs need love too.



Pisces

You are the fish. Few people realize that we are living through the "fish holocaust" right now. That, because of people's faddish proclivity for sushi and fish in general, combined with the terrifying efficiency of modern fishing trawlers, your kind don't stand a sporting chance anymore in the wild. To combat your complete eradication in fact, you must enlist the help of the sleeping Leviathan which lies nesting on the floor of the Atlantic. This thing is a monstrous creature, it's exact size can't be speculated, but it is quite beyond imagination. The KGB and the NSA are aware of its existence but no one dare speak its name, because a slight tumult on its part would send tidal waves crashing absolute ruin onto "civilization." Your mission must be to awaken the beast and destroy mankind. The problem is simple logistics. As it is, fish are stratified by level; this is not unlike humanity with their class system, but with fish it is quite literal. Different fish at different levels rarely communicate with one another or even see each other. The lowest fish, the ancient sturgeon and prehistoric glowing fish must be your messenger. The problem is: they don't understand the gravity of the situation, being so far away, near the bottom and removed from the slaughter of their brethren. Therefore, you must show them this astrology column! Subscribe them to ARTHUR. I will be your messenger!



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THE SADDEST FILMMAKER IN THE WORLD

Director **Guy Maddin** is highly resentful, terribly romantic and prone to melancholy. He also makes wondrous, utterly unique films. Kristine McKenna asks him how he does it.

GUY MADDIN WAS BORN IN WINNIPEG, Manitoba in 1956.

He's of Icelandic descent, and his father was a prominent hockey coach who lost an eye as an infant when his mother pulled him to her breast and pierced his eye with the pin from an unfastened brooch. Maddin's mother ran Lil's Beauty Shop, a salon she named after her beloved sister. As a child, Maddin received a piggy-back ride from Bing Crosby. When he was seven years old his teenage brother committed suicide; when he was 14, his father died. These losses can be seen resonating in the films he's subsequently made.

After earning a degree in economics at the University of Winnipeg, Maddin became increasingly obsessed with film while working a series of crummy jobs that included housepainting and banktelling. When he was 29 he played a character named Concerned Citizen Stan on the cable access television show, *Survival!*, and the following year he completed his first film, the 26-minute short, *The Dead Father*. A moving portrait of a young man whose dead father haunts him in daydreams and nightmares, the film contains all the seeds that would later blossom into Maddin's mature style.

Maddin has described digital effects as "grotesque artifacts of the present" and his predominantly black-and-white films operate on one level as an homage to the silent cinema of the '20s. Artificially aged through the incorporation of jarring edits that suggest old, broken reels of film clumsily spliced back together, soundtracks riddled with cracks and pops, and the mannered, melodramatic performing style he coaxes from his actors, Maddin's films seem to call out from a remote, murky past. At the same time, however, they're clearly the work of a modern man well acquainted with the astonishing trauma of the late 20th century. Fraught with anxiety and dread that often erupts into black humor, his films invariably circle back to a

thematic point you'll never find in an old silent film: the inevitable loss of that which we hold most dear.

In 1988 Maddin teamed up with his longtime collaborator George Toles on the brilliant *Tales From the Gimli Hospital*, a wickedly funny study of male rivalry and romantic longing. Two years later he completed his second film, *Archangel*, after which he contracted an incurable neurological condition called myoclonus which causes him to feel as if he's constantly being touched. He soldiered on, nonetheless, and in 1992 he completed *Careful*, the story of an alpine village whose residents must forever speak in hushed tones, lest they trigger an avalanche. *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* was released in 1997, and four years later he directed the filmed ballet, *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary*, which will be released on DVD in May by Zeitgeist Video.

Maddin's sixth film, *The Saddest Music in the World*, is currently in theaters. Based on an original screenplay by Kazuo Ishiguro, it's a Depression-era melodrama set in Winnipeg, where a beer baroness (played by Isabella Rossellini) hosts a competition to determine which ethnicity produces the saddest music. Out this August will be *Cowards Bend the Knee*, a film installation Maddin premiered last year in Rotterdam that will be released as a single panel projection. Maddin has also completed 18 short films; they're difficult to find and they're all fantastic, so don't miss them if they come to your town. I spoke with Maddin in March, and these are some of the things he said. 



(From left) *Archangel*'s star-crossed lovers fly into the sun; in *Careful*, a reckless son decides to throw caution to the wind and make a play for mom; Maddin, in 2002, films the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's homage to Bram Stoker, *Dracula: Pages From a Virgin's Diary*.



What's your earliest memory?

My mother showing me her naked breast and telling me that's where milk came from. My mother is no naturist, so that's a strong memory. I also remember being stuck to the floor of the beauty salon where I grew up because everything there was coated in layer upon layer of ancient hairspray. I'd play on the floor and crawl around the nyloned ankles of all the women sitting in a row under the hairdryers, and whenever someone spilled a tray of curlers I'd gather them up and build little castles out of them. I was pretty young to be glued to a beauty salon floor.

Do memories enhance or impede our ability to enjoy the present?

You couldn't make anything of the present without memories, so they make our enjoyment of the present possible. We're constantly building up our library of memories, but we're constantly losing memories, too, because we haven't revisited them enough and finally they fade away. It's as if you're building on a beach that's constantly eroding, so memories don't really provide much of a foundation.

To what degree do we unknowingly fictionalize our own past?

Most people have a small set of stories they tell repeatedly that take on the quality of tales told around a campfire by cavemen. Those stories do become more like cave paintings than an accurate recounting of something that happened, and they become more beautiful and useful as a result. I willfully fictionalize my own past as much as possible, but strangely enough, I find the more I attempt to mythologize my own past, the more raw and cathartically confessional I become. In *Cowards Bend the Knee*, the protagonist is a man named Guy Maddin who's a triple-murderer, hairdressing, hockey player—none of which I've ever been. But in the way that fairy tales can be incredibly true, despite the fact that they involve talking wolves, the character feels like an authentic version of me.

Is it true that in directing *The Saddest Music in the World* you copied

various descriptions of depression and synonyms for sadness onto index cards to create a deck of 52 cards, then had each actor draw a hand of cards every day and use the suggestions on them to shape their performance that day?

Yes. I'm willing to try anything because I'd be revealed as complete impostor if I tried directing my actors conventionally. So I had these beautiful little sentences from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and synonyms from *Roget's Thesaurus*, and it was just a way of forcing the actors to channel their lines of dialogue and their gestures through the suggestions on the cards. It worked, too—I think it refreshed their approach every day.

What elements of Ishiguro's original script remain in your adaptation?

I had a real free hand in adapting his screenplay. In his version there was a contest, as there is in mine, but his took place in London on the eve of Perestroika. I switched the place and time to Winnipeg on the eve of the dissolution of Prohibition. Ishiguro's main concern, which he made sure I included in every draft of the script, was the heartbreaking irony of Third World countries who are already suffering under immense privation, but are still compelled to exaggerate their privations because the competition for world charity is so stiff. So you get this grotesque sight of a starving populace pretending to be even hungrier than they are so they can be the sexiest charity of the season. Ishiguro wrote his script in the early '80s when the Ethiopian drought sparked several all-star pop fundraisers, so his concerns were essentially political. I've never been a political filmmaker, though, and I wasn't interested in making a political satire.

Is it possible to make a film free of politics?

If you succeed in being honest about your characters a political reading will always be possible, but I think you can have a story that's more timelessly political and explores the way hegemonics invariably work out. Some countries have more power than others

and it forces them into inevitable roles. That's apparent in everything from Euripides to Archie Comics.

Archangel includes a scene where a shower of bunnies rains down on a group of people huddled in a barn. You've described the scene as being so delightful that it's a portent of something bad, which suggests you feel that any high point of joy must inevitably be followed by a fall. Do you think that's true?

Yeah, I guess it's that feeling you get right after the first time you masturbate—everything is cute until you're on the far side of the parabola. Those white, fluffy bunnies seemed to fit so niftily into a phrase like "the white fluffiness of forgetfulness." I wanted everything to look cozy because forgetfulness can be as comfy as getting tucked in beneath a giant, goose-down duvet. In Henry Green's novel, *Back*, there's a man who loses a leg after being shot by a sniper hiding in a rose bush. There's not just a thorn in the rosebush, there's a bullet too—it's fun to combine things like that. **What's the difference between nostalgia, melancholy and grief?**

Nostalgia and melancholy are relatively benign, but grief is something I'm terrified of. There've been times in my life when grief was called for and I just didn't have it—when my father, my brother, and my Aunt Lil died, for instance. Instead of grieving in one big payment, I think I grieve on the installment plan in my films and in my dreams, where I encounter all sorts of unfinished business. The bill collectors come around almost every night, and I engage in uninhibited grieving in my dreams, then I wake up refreshed.

What do you think happens after death?

I'm afraid it's nothing. It's funny, if you believed it was nothing it shouldn't be frightening at all. But then, no one understands what "nothing" really is.

You've said, "I don't need anything to happen to me anymore. I have plenty of sadness in reserve. I can lie down with a fine, vintage memory and sip it all night long." This suggests that

sadness is a source of comfort for you. Most people go to great lengths to avoid feeling sadness; how do you explain your ability to embrace it?

I avoid pain like a normal person, but I digest sad memories the way other people listen to CDs or watch movies. I don't do it so much anymore, though, because I'm such a busy adult with this movie-making, and melancholy takes time. You need big, white expanses in your daybook to enjoy it properly, and I've been a bit too busy. My girlfriend, who I've been with for four years, has sort of trained me not to talk about it so much, too, but it's always been a major pastime for George Toles and I. Don't get me wrong—we're not just sitting around reminiscing about funerals—but when we're screenwriting we're openly fabricating our past and transforming it into an exotic blend of melancholy and joy, much in the way people blend whiskey or tobacco. When a sad song strikes someone at a point of the compass that's so completely personal and unique that they can't even explain why it's so deliciously sad, that song has been transformed into a fantastic commodity.

Name a song that always makes you cry.

This is really sick, but some songs actually make me cry tears of pride. It has to be a song that's not too good, because a really good song is beyond envy. But if it seems so simple and clumsy that I almost could've done it myself, I find myself sliding into a temporary reverie that I was, in fact, the author of this work. That's why I like basement bands, early rock, and any period of the Ramones. There are primitive films that affect me that way, too—Buñuel's *L'Age D'or*, for instance, or Jean Vigo's *Zero for Conduct*.

What was the essence of Vigo's genius?

Some people have taste and aspire to make things, but they don't have the technical skill or the experience to do it, but Vigo's voice coincided perfectly with his talent. He was a primitive and he knew exactly what to do with that primitivity. He was probably aware



(Clockwise from top left) In *Heart of the World*, Maddin takes the pulse of the human race; *Archangel* reminds us that war is hell; *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*, an ambitious experiment that failed to coalesce; Maria de Medeiros is *The Saddest Music*'s femme fatale, who harbors a tapeworm that offers her guidance; *Saddest Music*'s grief-stricken cellist brings down the house with a tortured rendition of "The Song Is You."

he only had enough command over his actors to get stylized, blocked out performances, but he knew how to use that style of performance. And he gave his gifted cameraman and editor the same careless, open, free-for-all he allowed his actors. Every aspect of his work is so consistently primitive and out of control that it takes on a quality of control. Jonathan Rosenbaum made the observation that when some lost scenes were restored to *L'Atalante* it didn't make the movie any better or worse, and you do get the sense that you could remove or reorder the sequence of the scenes and it wouldn't affect this great movie at all. I'm not great at talking things out with actors, so my approach has always been to use broad narrative strokes, then try to cover up with lots of baroque effects and film grain. So I'm always looking for people who work in analogous ways.

You once commented "sometimes it's liberating to be self-destructive." Could you elaborate?

I may've been referring to a foolish decision I made a few years ago to have my diaries [*From the Atelier Tovar*] published. I happened to have them with me on an occasion when I met a publisher, and it came up in conversation that I kept these diaries. He asked if I'd ever considered publishing them and I replied no, then he asked if he could take a look at them. I said "Sure, take them—you can publish them as far as I'm concerned." I regretted that instantly because I knew as I handed them over that a lot of people would be mad at me—and they were. But it sort of cleared the air, and I found out who my friends were. I'm really not sure what's in the diaries because I've actually never even read them. The sound of my own voice, even written on a page, bothers me, so I don't like the sight of my own handwriting. I'm kind of phobic—I'm about two steps removed from late Howard Hughes right now.

You've also said "you do the darnedest, broad stroke, crazy things when you're in agony." When was the last time you were in agony, and what crazy things did you do?

There's nothing like mad love to force

you into a surreal experience of your own life, and when I said that I was probably referring to the agony of unrequited love. The first time it happened to me I was about 20 and I didn't know how to deal with it at all so I made a jackass of myself. One of my favorite scenes in *L'Age d'Or* is when its star, Gaston Modot, responds to getting jilted. He wanders around in an apartment, he tears open a pair of pillows and puts a handful of feathers on a windowsill, he picks up a giant plow, then he throws a burning Christmas tree out the window. It's pretty liberating being that irrational because you get to blast things to smithereens. The second time I got hit I was old enough to have some dignity, which I unfortunately didn't have. I was once at a party where this girl I loved was ignoring me, so I responded by phoning up a taxi for each person at the party—and there were about 50 people at the party. I remember pointing at people and saying "this taxi is for you!" I finally realized I was making a fool of myself and got into one of the taxis myself.

What's the most destructive thing about romantic love?

There's all sorts of damage done, but it doesn't feel like damage at the time because it feels so good to surrender yourself to the other person. It feels like everything you've been waiting your whole life for, and you give up so much of yourself in those early days without any sort of negotiation. But you've actually just signed over huge parcels of land that you can never reclaim unless you want to start a war at a later date. And maybe it's just an excuse to have a war, because they feel pretty good too. It's no mystery why love can turn to hate because those two emotions are extremely close when the stakes are so high and two countries are sharing a border. I'm in love with romantic love, that's for sure, but there's always a price and you have to decide whether it's worth it. I've considered the alternative, which is being without my girlfriend, and that's not an idea I'm crazy about. It's not that I'm afraid of being alone—I can be alone standing on my head for 14 years and I've done it in

the past—but I'd miss her and always be thinking of her.

What's your definition of a bad decision?

Something that looks ludicrously irrational from the outside. But the thing about wild gestures and ill-conceived battle plans that cause massive collateral damage is that when the smoke clears, the desired result is often still attained somehow. Maybe the desired result *was* all the collateral damage, or to make a huge, imperialistic claim for your romantic self. There are many lessons to be learned from nature, so we're well advised to remember those marshland mating rituals with giant animals making bizarre noises while opening themselves up to their natural enemy.

Jung says we're all archetypes playing out ancient, eternal fables. Freud says we're simply animals enslaved by biological drives. Which sounds more accurate to you?

I've never been a very good student of either of them, but I have groped out a murky, working theory for myself that embraces aspects of both those positions. I believe there are stories painted on the insides of our stony heads, there for reading and re-reading and palimpsesting ourselves. But I also can't help but see us as selfish alimentary canals sort of bumping into one another.

How selfish? Are people incapable of truly putting the interests of someone else above our own?

Probably, but that's too reductive. If you love other people and are even willing to sacrifice your life for them, yet that somehow satisfies some need in you, are you selfish? I suppose you could call that selfish, but you'd be doing a disservice to the extremely complicated and inscrutable transistor-sized wiring of what's really going on in our heads. But human nature certainly feels selfish enough of the time without it having to be selfish 100 percent of the time.

Is evil contagious?

It can certainly spread like wildfire, and it probably has a very short incubation period. Unfortunately, its symptoms

usually aren't so apparent to the host organism, even when they're fully infected.

Your collaborator George Toles has described the impulses that swim up from the unconscious as "deliciously unsavory, unsightly and extreme." Is the unconscious basically a fetid swamp?

Yes. It's a bog filled with sperm and eggshells and old teabags and discarded statuary. There are lyrical things down there too, and every now and then, through an act of will and imagination, you can make something beautiful from those raw materials. But mostly it's a roiling, furious, unforgiving and stinking realm.

You've commented, "Most filmmakers don't have the nerve to be really cruel to their characters, to give them what they deserve and what the audience secretly wants, even if they don't know it." Do people enjoy witnessing the suffering of others?

Yes. A lot of it is just glee that it's not them, and a chance to vicariously wonder what it would be like if it was them. That's why people slow down around car wrecks. When I was a teenager I had this *Lord of the Flies* fantasy and I used to wander around the beach naked throwing stones at birds. In time I developed a really strong throwing arm, and one day I actually hit a sea bird in the head. It was surrounded by its flock, and all these birds cried as this bird floated off. There was an off-shore breeze that day, and the birds cried for hours as this bird slowly floated away. I've never thrown a stone since.

You've said that when you saw *Eraserhead* you thought "Wow, this is my biography. How did someone read my mind and project it onto the screen?" What aspects of that film resonated with you?

The general state of delirium Henry Spencer films himself in. I'd been a father of an unplanned pregnancy—I assume David Lynch had as well—and I remember feeling plucked from a state of quasi-virginal youth and stuck into this domestic situation with me as the

"WHEN WE'RE SCREENWRITING WE'RE OPENLY FABRICATING OUR PAST AND TRANSFORMING IT INTO AN EXOTIC BLEND OF MELANCHOLY AND JOY, MUCH IN THE WAY PEOPLE BLEND WHISKEY OR TOBACCO."



In *Tales from the Gimli Hospital*, (left) a trio of saucy nurses administer to the needs of a patient they're partial to and ignore everyone else; in *The Saddest Music*, (right) Isabella Rossellini plays a beer baroness with a broken heart and two glass legs.

completely impotent papier-mâché patriarch of a family. The tenor of my life during that period coincided exactly with the tenor of *Eraserhead*, which evokes those middle-of-the-night trips to the washroom where you don't quite have your balance and you're staggering and you have to brace yourself against a wall and you're scared you're not even peeing into the toilet. Then all of a sudden one of life's truths comes swinging out of the darkness at you and says, "You're 20 and you're married and you have a child and your father's dead and you'll never see him again." During waking hours when the sun is high all sorts of misty veils pile up and envelop you in a sort of amnesia, and your troubles seem somehow abstract or fictionalized. But in the middle of the night there are moments when there's an unavoidable, painful truth right at the center of everything, and that's what *Eraserhead* felt like to me.

How did you go about surfacing from that very deep lake?

I wasn't aware that I had to because I kind of embraced it in a way. Parenthood has tremendous rewards and I loved it, just as Henry does. Every now and then he gives a little admiring look down at the baby—although mostly, of course, he just stares into his radiator. When you have a child you love that child more than anything you will ever love, and my daughter is a wonderful person. She's a designer and someday I'd love for her to design a picture with me.

The actor Ross McMillan has said "In every scene George Toles writes there's someone doing something to someone else." How would you describe Toles' sensibility, and what makes him an appropriate co-writer for you?

George is always doing something to someone else, and he's never happier than when he's manipulating a situation to create conflict. He treats every room like a stage in which a short scene must be played out, and he's perfectly willing to fabricate misinformation or involve wives and lovers to get things

going. George treats human beings like pinatas, and once you understand that about him it can be fun to be part of his ongoing theater improv involving real human stakes. I thought we would've broken up long ago, but we've only had one little bump in the road, and we both mourned each other's absence so much that we decided to repress what we found annoying in each other. It hurt too much to be alienated from each other. **Toles has described your third film, *Careful*, as "a pro-incest movie;" do you see it that way?**

I don't think it converted many people to incest, but we did try to work under the banner of making a pro-incest movie. It's hard to control an ideology, even if you're a skilled propagandist, which I am not, and I think it ended up being a pro-repression movie that offers a patent lesson in what awaits you if you let yourself slip and do what you want to do. Everyone in the film ends up getting punished for letting slip.

A central theme in your films is male rivalry which you describe as a situation that's homosexual without the sexuality; what sort of territory does this theme open up for you?

I'm just trying to make sense of male rivalry. I know that when I've been intensely competitive with someone they become a point of principle for me, and I actually come to my rival's defense if someone else attacks them. There's a certain jailhouse logic operating there, and it's not much of a stretch to find some kind of sexual analog in it.

You've described yourself as highly resentful and competitive; who are you competing with now?

Right now I'm competing against the clock. I had a very elderly uncle, my Uncle Ron, who's been in most of my movies, and he recently passed away at the age of 95. He tricked the system because everything went right for him—he lived a great life and died painlessly. But somehow, his death finally brought it home to me that you die. I can't count on living to 95, so while I still have my

health I'd like to make one masterpiece. That's my dream.

What are the qualities a work must have in order to be a masterpiece?

It must have the quality of something that was always there, but was waiting to be expressed, and now it has finally been said. It carries an element of surprise with it because it's obviously so right that it's startling its gone unexpressed for so long. It doesn't have to be big—in fact, my favorite writer, Bruno Schultz, is considered a minor writer because he didn't leave a huge body of work. His complete body of work is, nonetheless, a masterpiece.

Which of your films is most fully realized in your opinion?

With *Archangel* I thought I was on my way to saying everything there was to say about how we love, but I was kidding myself and I confused myself and my viewers a lot in its execution. I was pretty happy with [2000 short] *The Heart of the World*, but it's not trying to do as much as some of my longer films. I'm really proud of *The Saddest Music in the World* because there are moments in the montage sequences where the music works the way music is supposed to—as a mnemonic device that drags up all sorts of cargo. And there are things I really like about my hugely autobiographical film, *Cowards Bend the Knee*, which is a very primitive, low-budget movie.

What historical period is most compelling to you?

Although it's true that all my films seem to exist in the past, I've never been much of a historian because I hate doing research. Every once in a while some historical episode does engage me, though, and at the moment I'm trying to learn everything there is to know about the Borgias. I'm drawn to them because they were bad and charismatic, they had cool, sexy names, and there were no small gestures in that family. There was fratricide and incest and it was all true—not that that should matter at all, because nothing's really true anyway.

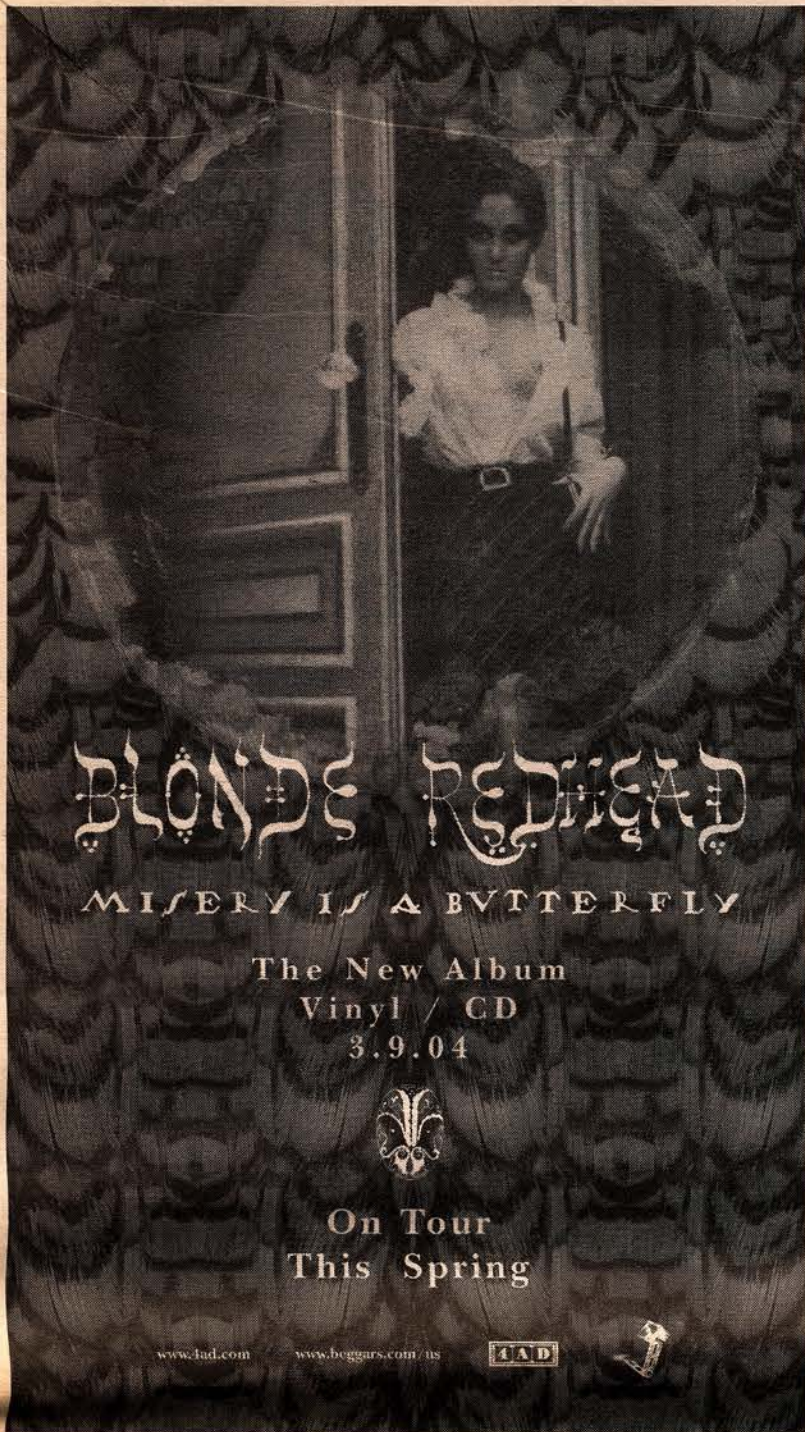
I'm always amazed when a film boasts "based on a true story." Who cares? Whether it happened or not, it's how a story is told that's important.

You lost many of your ancestors to an 1876 pox epidemic in a Canadian town called Gimli, and you now maintain a Winnipeg scrapbook of newspaper clippings that include stories of mad dogs dragging off children, hockey stick bludgeonings, and a father shooting his children during a fight over a snowmobile. This brings to mind Michael Lesy's book, *Wisconsin Death Trip*, which in turn is evocative of the Bunuel film, *Land Without Bread*, the Brecht/Weill opera, *Mahagonney*, and your second film, *Archangel*, which is set in a region of Russia that experienced a collective amnesia following World War I. All these works deal with places that seem to have fallen under a sort of dreadful bewitching; do you think there are places that are cursed?

Yes, and they're there for anyone who chooses to see them. There are invisible cities piled up all over the place, and if you occupy those spaces with just the right focal length on your spectacles you'll see the skyline in all its, horrific, lugubrious, glowering splendor. And all it takes is a population of humans to create one of these places. Artists have been trying to pinpoint our humanness for a long time, and we seem to be inexhaustibly cruel and compassionate by turns, but nobody's ever figured out why.

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"DURING WAKING HOURS WHEN THE SUN IS HIGH ALL SORTS OF MISTY VEILS PILE UP AND ENVELOP YOU IN A SORT OF AMNESIA, AND YOUR TROUBLES SEEM SOMEHOW ABSTRACT OR FICTIONALIZED. BUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN THERE'S AN UNAVOIDABLE, PAINFUL TRUTH RIGHT AT THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING."



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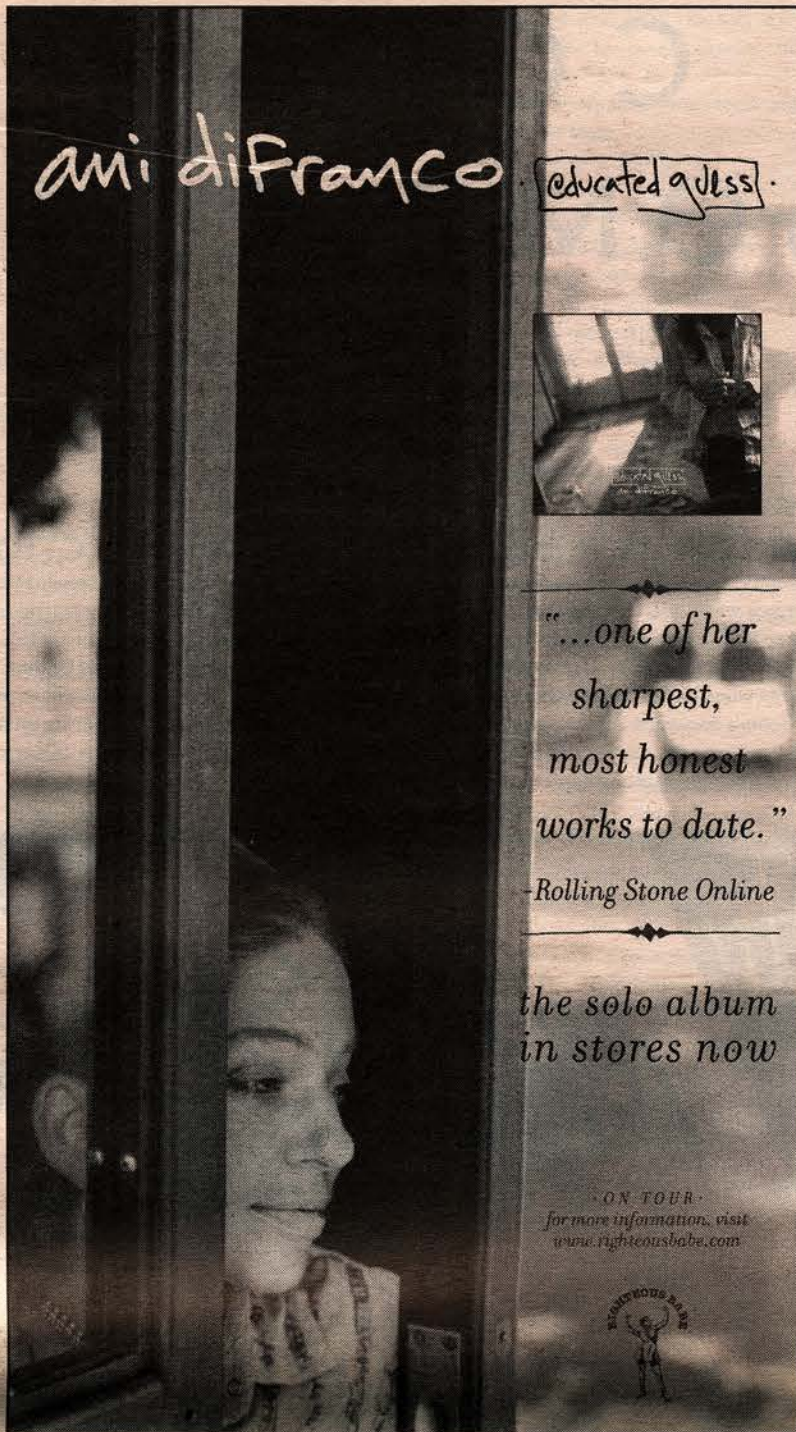
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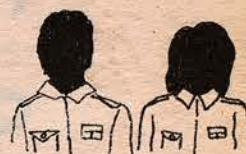
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Reviews by

C & D

Eagles of Death Metal
Peace Love Death Metal
(Records Records/
AntAcidAudio)

C: [Singing along to "Kiss the Devil"] "Who'll love the devil? Who'll love his song? I will love the devil and his song!"

D: Ha! This is party-starting rock n roll music! They should've called it, "There's Beer in the Fridge."

C: No doubt. Doubtless. No doubt about it. Doubt-free. [Sings along:] "I will kiss the devil on his tongue!"

D: He is the male Peaches!

C: The singer-guitar player Jesse 'the Devil' Hughes has the best moustache going in rock, and he knows it. I can hear him now: "C & D, you've been rocked by The Moustache." Have you seen his cape?

D: This cannot be. What year is this? It's like Mick wearing the Omega at Altamont. Totally Rolling Stones.

C: Jesse is Jumpin' Jack Flash and Josh Homme—he's the guy from Kyuss and Queens of the Stone Age—is just here to do Beat Number Three on every song and help shift some units. They say it's

"Canned Heat vocals with stripper beats" and you can't beat that description so let's not even try. It's a pretty raw recording, sounds like a rehearsal tape with all the talking.

D: We will have to subtract points for that.

C: Yeah, all that between-song tech talk is the rock equivalent of skits on hip-hop albums. Funny the first time, maybe, but after that?

D: Eagles of Death Metal, you were rocking the party, and then you're talking amongst yourselves about when to come in on the beat?!

Thanks for fucking it up!

C: "Speaking in Tongues" is the coolest song. Can you hear that sound?

D: Is that a car honking?

C: It's the CD! They mixed it in!

totally brilliant! [singing along] "Toot scoot! Boots! Scoot scoot!" I have no idea what he's saying but I like it, I like it. I said, I like it.

Pink Grease

This Is for Real
(Mute)

C: Okay, let's get this party started again...

D: It is the Cramps. Wait, it can't be the Cramps. Is this that "Fire in the disco" band?

C: Not it's not Electric Six, it's Pink Grease. Which sounds like a nightmare lubricant. Really good name for this band...

D: [hearing the riff kick in on "Fever"] Whoa! They're the house band for a creepy kind of party.

C: This is music for the wasters, and their married friends who are tying one on again, just this once.

D: In the right circumstances, this could finish somebody off. This is music for that kind of party where you do something you regret for weeks. [musing] Possibly even for the rest of your life...

C: They've got a cool thing going on—garage rockin', good drums, new touches when you don't see it coming: saxophone, a good chorus, some slide guitar, an out-there keyboard solo. [dreamily] They should tour with the Dirtbombs and Eagles of Death Metal and Peaches and Ween...

D: Could someone tell me why there are so many good-rockin' dance bands right now?



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"I COULD USE SOME FLIP-FLOPS"

What if **Godzilla** was one of us? A slightly testy King of Monsters reflects on his long career in this exclusive interview with Dave Tompkins.

KNOWN FOR HIS BAD SENSE OF DIRECTION, Godzilla "King of the Monsters" was recently spotted lumbering around Long Island, insisting to bewildered local officials that he was on "Monster Island," asking where the hell was Rodan and in general making a big mess. Apparently, the Kaji Eigu legend hadn't been notified that local mecha-faced rapper MF Doom had transferred the title of God's former stomping ground to a New York suburb known for its tasteful lawn furniture, cracked toenail polish and a crew of rappers called the Monster Island Czars. Confused but flattered, Godzilla was in good spirits when *Arthur* correspondent Dave Tompkins found him resting comfortably in an orange floral lounge, popping beta capsules in Doom's backyard. After an unprecedented 50 years in the monster game, Godzilla is happy to finally retire—though he'd still suit up at a moment's roar. Under a bruised sky, the bomb-born icon reflected on his career, quoted Public Enemy and marveled at how he nearly had his ass whooped by a moth.



BRIAN RALPH

ARTHUR: Godziller, wake up.

Godzilla: I dreamt I was a 400 foot tall black guy having sex with a volcano.

That was the *Dave Chappelle Show*...

He was Blackzilla. The volcano was a very active Mount Fuji. My name is everywhere... from Yankees pitchers to Parliament bass players. I can't be mad at that.

Paul Hogan spoofed you too.

An atomic drunk Australian in flip-flops, crumpling Foster cans..

Booming burps upon the people—

If you're that large you don't burp, you eructate.

If you wear flip-flops, you burp.

I could use some flip-flops. I've been walking all over towns for half a century and my gods are barking.

The same gods that squashed Bambi in *Godzilla Vs Bambi*.

Whambi. And just like that, I'm wearing fawn-flops.

But that didn't really happen.

Of course not, it was animated.

Have all the documentaries been accurate?

Not really. That heap of bones at the end of the first one Inoshiro Honda did in 1954 wasn't me. And if Dr. Serizawa didn't deoxidize the ocean, we'd be shit out of fish. At least he immolated himself so his invention couldn't be inflicted on humans. Nice touch. Japanese version only.

The US version woke you with a hydrogen bomb instead of the A-bomb.

The Americans splice in Perry Mason and the Japanese splice 'em out. Japanese version wasn't intended to be anti-American, just anti-nuclear. What destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki merely got me out of bed. Something's really wrong with that. I'm a constant reminder of one of history's darkest moments. Talk about guilt. I have a military-industrial god complex. It's confusing. I could be defending Tokyo and the next thing I know they're popping peashooters. Bullets sting like sweat bees and my feelings get hurt. Then I find it was the Americans who initiated the atomic testing. They woke me up. Like that Pharoah Monche song that says "Get the fuck up!"

Right, "Simon Says," the one that sampled your theme music.

They got my horn section. Actually they got the composer's horn section: Akira Ifukube. Monsters would kill for a horn section like that. Dun-dun-dun-dun! How could I not tromp Tokyo?

And The Roar. Sounds like two rusty frigates slow dancing.

Again, Ifukube. Rubbing a resin-coated leather glove against a contra-bass. It's on the Godzilla Alarm clock.

So you woke up and started swinging at

Japan.

Japan was close and convenient. It was instinctive and I was groggy. Grogzilla. Can you be instinctive and groggy?

A groggy man's instinct is to not look where he's walking.

See? And they woke me up.

To meet your metaphor.

To mash my makers.

They made you a star.

Loved, feared, merchandised. Maybe I helped Japan economically avenge itself. But they didn't need me to crush GM. There's a Nissan named after me now, 1000 BHP. I'll step on it. And where do you watch me crush Tokyo? On your Sony Trinitron. Not some GE jalopy.

Japan is very forgiving of you.

I'll never be able to set foot in some towns again.

Like the island of Odo?

(Snort) I feel bad about that. I had no idea where I was. My head was in an atomic fungus cloud. I was looking for the island from *Attack Of The Mushroom People*. Imagine taking a global economic power while on toadstools. That would've really tinkered my perspective.

Now kids can be giants and stomp their Godzilla models.

The tables turn.

Suckers burn to learn.

They can't disable the power of my fable.

The Godzilla legend lives on eBay and DVD.

It's crazy, right? Use your Godzilla Calculator to add up all the damage. Estimated 6 trillion yen just in Godzilla 1985 alone.

Too bad the movie didn't rake in—

Watch it!

I haven't—

Next question.

You've been lionized by the very culture you destroy.

I'm king of the beasts. At least I've defended the world from Ghidra—the three headed garden hose gone wild.

And Monster Zero.

Who's got zilch on me.

Godzilla's got jokes for the folks.

You've got to when the United Nations Godzilla Countermeasures Center is funding all this Mecha-Mitsubullshit. And I get blamed for every oversized space cricket that craps in a crater. I wasn't the one who defrosted that giant grasshopper in the Arctic.

That was a mantis.

You say mantis, I say locust—whatever. One man's plague of bad movies is another's childhood. Meanwhile every A-Bomb boob in a monkey suit wants to chin-check me.

You still talk to Kong?

Sometimes. We're cool with each other.

It's kind of like professional wrestling. Minus the bad hair and fake moves. But I don't think Kong should get back in the ring. Reminds me of when OJ played for the 49ers with his shot-up knees. Kong and I've had great seasons but, I dunno. My knees are in a bad interarticular space right now. Low on elastoviscosity.

Kong kicked your tail huh?
Kong grabbed my tail and threw me across Tokyo.

Helicopter spin!

Sometimes it doesn't pay to have a tail.

Kong doesn't have a tail.

Kong is paid.

So it ended in a draw.

It ended in the ocean.

And Kong won.

If you buy the American version.

In the Japanese version, Kong surfaces in the water but we hear you roar.

Hear me roar!

Did Kong roar?

Kong didn't have the pipes.

What started the beef between you and Kong anyway?

It started when Kong clobbered that Tyrannosaurus at Skull Island back in '33. That Rex was my prototype, minus the isotopes. Plus Kong was salty that I was labeled "King of the Monsters" without being tested.

But you were atomically tested.

Still, Kong wasn't trying to share his crown when he thought he could whoop Leroy Brown's junkyard dog's ass.

So it was a title thing. Tohos before bros.

Also, I'm Gojira—Japanese for gorilla. So I'm Gorilla King of the Monsters. That's funny. That really enriches my uranium. What a Donkey Kong dumbass. Actually I'm supposed to be this monkey whale combo.

And you don't see Orca bitching about that.

Because Orca's dead.

My bad.

So, you have Kong, Malay god of Skull Island, billed against me, the Manhattan Projectile Ray Leonard. Still, Kong taught me a lot. That flying drop-kick I used on Megalon? All Kong. Nothing mamby Bambi about that. And Kong learned it from Willis O' Brien, the great stop motion animator who "created" him, if you will. 'Obie' O' Brien, in addition to being a genius who mentored Ray Harryhausen, was a big boxing fan. He trained Kong as this pugilist.

Who had a problem with dinosaurs.

Maybe it was a mammal-reptile thing. I don't know. I always resented being tagged a mutant dinosaur. Dinosaurs are stigmatized as old folks, broken down bulldozers and purple pills.. If Peter Lorre

can be down with the Flintstones... It got too cute didn't it? Gamera. The Flying Turtle. Mothra and the Peanuts Sisters.

Mothra was female, good-natured and wasn't played by a guy in a rubber suit.
It's beHEmoth, not beSHEmoth.

Dude, it's not 1954 any more.

But fighting a moth?!

Her larva silked you up and you fell off.

I fell off a cliff. Talk about bad threads....

I was impressed with Mothra as a caterpillar—in a *Monster That Challenged the World* kind of way. But they should've hired the amazing Mooncalf from *First Men in the Moon*. Now there's a caterpillar!

Yeah Mothra never really scared me. Neither did Kong for that matter.

Don't let Kong hear you say that. His new manager, the hobbit guy, knows there's a lot of qualified monsters out there, chomping for a comeback. Remember how Gorgo took London. The Ymir took Rome. Reptilicus took Stockholm.

Sweden had a monster problem?

Reach out of the darkness, son. Who didn't have a monster problem back then? The atom ants of Arizona? The big-ass rabbits in New Mexico?

I'm surprised the gnat wasn't supersized.

Gnatmare on Elm Street, Gnat of the Hunter, The Gnat That Saved Pittsburgh. Then there's the *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms!* The Rhedosaurus.

They say he died like an opera singer when he got electrocuted by that roller coaster.

Yeah, that was sad. At least he took Manhattan. Okay, he flipped a few buses. Took his lonely monster blues out on Greyhound. The Muppets had an easier time taking Manhattan. Or Gork.

Gork?

Gork Eats New York And Gets A Thank You Note From President Ford.

But Fred G. Sanford fabricated that one.
Another example of my influence.

Do you have credibility issues because you've always been played by a guy in a rubber suit?

I've got incrediblity, son. I'm the most popular monster on earth. I never had the discipline for stop-motion animation. I got into modeling for the glue. And CGI may be fancy but the rubber "suitimation" get-up has the charm. I'm analog like Yog.

You needed more than a rubber suit for Hedora, the smog monster.

Here comes the sludge! That guy was a mess, a real chudsucker. How do you shog a 400 foot industrial wasteoid who can turn into a Frisbee that spits acidic mud?

Mule Team Borax?

Hedorah showed up in '71 just after the Chisso Corporation finally started compensating victims for dumping nearly

70 tons of mercury acetaldehyde in the Minamata Bay—especially during WW2. While Chisso's plastic production was booming, they were poisoning people and fish. Not that I'm Mr. "Save The Whales" or anything. I breathe radiation for crying out loud! But Hedorah played on fears like the Minamata disaster. He came from tadpoles hitching a ride on a contaminated meteor.

What are your concerns about raising a son in a world that's gone in the ecological shitter?

My concerns are like any other parent's. Crappy movies, SARS and the fact that a lot of warheads aren't screwed on too tight. We might all need rubber suits soon. Thawing giant grasshoppers is one thing. But unfreezing nuclear weapons program... I guess no one listened to me.

Or Bulgasari.

"The North Korean Godzilla." A left-wing revolutionary DMZilla from 1985—but backed by Kim Sung-II. He gave the director (Shinn Sang-okk) suggestions on how Bulgasari should look. Dude needed help, considering he was named after a "starfish." Luckily they imported my personal image consultants from Japan and monstered him up.

Bulgasari was the people's monster with a strong anti-nuclear stance.

The government wanted to convert confiscated farm tools into weapons—to quell a peasant revolution. But Bulgasari ate all the metal. And Kim Sung-II

endorsed this! And now his son antes his arsenal while his people starve. Talk about irony.

While you were flossing your teeth with Tokyo's bullet train.

(Sigh) Talk about stupidity.

Talk about man.

Nukes, biohazards, genetic engineering—how does that old song go? The message is the monster. You know it's time to hang up the contrabass when they're using your own DNA against you.

Godzilla Cells! Spliced with a rose bush haunted by a mad scientists' dead daughter and...

Voila! "Bioallante!" A plant named after an enviro-friendly Cadillac.

Greenhouse in effect! Your biggest opponent.

The greenest but not the meanest.

Speaking of asexuality, there've been questions about gender ambiguity. Does your son sometimes feel like a motherless child?
Hmph.

Struck a nerve?

More like a plothole.

Your son helped slay Ghidra in *Destroy All Monsters*. That must be a special memory.

But Monster Island wasn't too happening. It wasn't like we were dancing around singing "I Scrumble For Ya." You know that movie was also called *Godzilla's Electric Battle Masterpiece*. *Destroy All Monsters* has been adopted as this cultural battle cry. Take a look around. I'm the least of your worries. Like the *Twilight Zone* guy with the eyebrows once said: "The monsters are on Maple Syrup."

That's Maple Street.

That's splat. Flat as a Bambi pancake.

Please stop.

Did you just call me Godziller?

☺

(below) Kong helicopter spins Godzilla: maybe it was a mammal-reptile thing?



"WHAT DESTROYED HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI MERELY GOT ME OUT OF BED. SOMETHING'S REALLY WRONG WITH THAT. TALK ABOUT GUILT. I HAVE A MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL GOD COMPLEX. IT'S CONFUSING."

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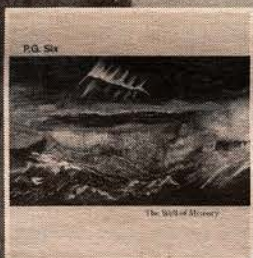
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John Wilkes Booze

Five Pillars of Soul

(Kill Rock Stars)

C: Then again, there's this.

D: "John Wilkes Booze"?

Terrible name.

C: I know. I gave it some time on the hi-fi cuz of the booklet. I mean, how bad can a band that salutes, in text, at length, Albert Ayler, Marc Bolan, Yoko Ono and Citizen

Tania be?

D: Very, very bad, from the sound of it!

C: Is this a Make-Up and Jon Spencer parody band? Talk about putting the high back in high-conceptualism.

D: "Five pillars of soul"?!?

Fake soul is the worst!!!

C: I'm embarrassed for these people—they have some cool inspirations and ideas about what they want to do but they don't have the chops or the instincts to pull it off yet. Maybe they'll get better...

D: They're from Indiana? HA

HA HA HA HA!

C: I'd like to see them try this

in New Orleans.

The Thermals

Fuckin' A

(Sub Pop)

D: [Definitively:] Guided by Voices. But harder, with more of that old piledriver beat.

C: It's actually a whole different band, a trio called the Thermals. I like 'em. It's urgent. Reminds me of Lee Renaldo from Sonic Youth, bashing away in his garage with the neighborhood teenagers cutting school. Oops, dude just knocked over the ten-speed.

D: [shaking head furiously] I just spilled my beer!

C: This guy's got one of those voices where you don't care if he doesn't really sing. 12 songs, 28 minutes. No solos, but it's not hardcore or screaming emoters. Just cool. He's determined, he's holding on.

D: These are high-energy super-tight anthems! Where's the towel?

C: [singing along] "Anything you break, you can probably mend/Anything you can feel, you can feel again/Hold tight, remember today." Shit, those are words to live by.

D: Wisdom from a man called Hutch Harris. Thank you, Thermals! Yo don't have a moustache but you have rocked C & D!

Mission of Burma

ONOFFON

(Matador)

C & D: [stunned silence]

C: How can it... How did they...

D: How can it be this good?

C: They haven't made a record in 22 years... Some of the people in this issue of *Arthur* were born and grew into adults in the time between Mission of Burma albums.

D: They sound hungry and creative. [singing along] "Now I live inside the circle!"

C: Inside the circle, but still outside the box. How to describe the pleasures of Burma for the people...hmm... well, it is guitar rock, it has melodies and punch and strange flair, and again, like that Thermals record, there's a sense of no wasted breath, no gloss, no glamour, just direct intention-into-thought.

D: It's like a greatest-hits record from the last 22 years, except not only were these songs not hits, they weren't even released!



SO RIGHTEOUS TO LOVE

Devendra Banhart is here and he plays folk music. **Trinie Dalton** finds out where he's coming from. Photography by **Melanie Pullen**.

A FEW MONTHS AGO I HIKED high on mushrooms in the Redwoods, and Devendra Banhart's first album served as my bridge between fantasy and reality. His music isn't about tripping out on drugs—I'm not belittling it that way—but its soothing quality makes one feel peaceful in any state of mind. As I interviewed him over the phone in late February about a myriad of topics, Devendra often returned to talking about folk music's universality, about how one of its most noble purposes is to make listeners feel comfortable.

Hearing 23-year-old Devendra talk like this reminded me of how closely related late-1960s psychedelic rock bands were, in spirit and sense of idealism, to the folk singers Devendra loves so much from the same period: their considerations for listening to and hearing music were at the forefront of their playing. But Devendra's tastes extend into the present, and there appears to be just as many neo-psychedelic musicians playing today as there are neo-folk rockers. Is it due to the current abominable political state? I don't know. I didn't care to discuss politics with Devendra because I was more fascinated by his reverence for nature—by his belief that music can bring one closer to not only self-understanding but also learning about one's place in the environment, whether it be forested or urban.

Devendra's new album *Rejoicing in the Hands* cultivates this respect for life under the auspices of yet another new hybrid-Banhart sound, this time combining old-time blues with the troubadour-ish balladry, psychedelic rock and acoustic guitar traditions of folk. The sound of this record is both familiar and absolutely unique, although Banhart's singing does get compared in the press to Marc Bolan's and Billie Holiday's to an unfortunate, almost irritating degree. *Rejoicing in the Hands* is perhaps his best work—it's hard to say that, cuz they're all so great—in that the guitar playing achieves more complexity, at times becoming as strong a force as the vocals. Not that his first two releases, 2002's *Oh Me Oh My* album (Young God), and 2003's *The Black Babies* EP (Young God), didn't feature some fantastic guitar sounds, but until *Rejoicing*, I'd heard Devendra's guitar as more a complement to his vocals than having its own individual drive.

I figured this increased guitar-playing skill must mean his shows are getting better and better, so I started our talk by asking him about performing live. His speaking voice became more melodic and animated when he talked of things he felt passionately about. When he began to talk about his favorite types of venues to play, things got interesting...





You prefer to play at galleries and churches...

I try...I don't entirely like playing rock clubs and bars because it doesn't lend itself too well to the kind of music we're playing. When I play a church, the acoustics are so wonderful. You have to play an environment that suits what you're doing, and churches are built to have incredible acoustics. Some Aztec churches, the acoustics are built so wildly, they're so psychedelically manipulative, that if you clap into a certain passageway, it responds like the sound of a sacred bird that the Aztecs worshipped. They really thought about it. It makes sense for people who play non-electric music, or quieter music, to play in a place that augments that instead of in a place that drowns it completely out. Those people that are used to dealing with 8,000 amps and four drum sets, the whole building [a rock club] is built to suck in the sound.

It gives your music a richer sound, or has a more spiritual atmosphere or something...or there's more than just sound going on, with the other senses too.

There's a vibe.

I think of your music as a mixture of folk and psychedelic. I read up on your

big influences, but you didn't mention psychedelic bands, more of the folksy psychedelic rock, like Incredible String Band, Fairport Convention. Do you listen to that kind of music?

I really do. "Psychedelic," to me, just means a sharp awareness of your surroundings, a heightened aesthetic sense, and a sensitivity...it's like this ultra-sensual state. Psychedelic words bring out that state in objects that might be considered mundane. Usually they're in nature, because usually you're not going to find psychedelic qualities in a stapler, you know? But a tree, you feel it. It's like a magic spell, or alchemy, using certain words to bring out the psychedelic life and energy, the core, God's vein, the blood of the gods.

Back to the music, I'm so easily influenced and affected by music. I love Incredible String Band. But I'm not as big a fan of them as I am of Clive Palmer, the guy who started them. He played on the first record. The real song to me, on that one, is Clive's song... "You know my ____ friends/ Singing baby..." [starts singing it] I like Robin Williamson's solo records, they're incredible, and I like Mike Heron's solo records. It's unbelievable to think that they're both fucking Scientologists now. Some of these records are just now getting re-released, so they won't just be available on bootleg anymore. Like Clive's Original Band, and Clive's Famous Jug Band. As far as British psychedelic stuff, Fairport Convention has never been too psychedelic, they're more like rock-folk. Then there's Trader Horne...

Currently, I've been getting into more current psychedelic stuff, via my friend, Steve Krakow, who goes by the name Plastic Crimewave. He has a magazine devoted to all things psychedelic, that he writes and draw by hand, called *Galactic Zoo Dossier*. He also has a band called Plastic Crimewave...he's a scholar of the psychedelic ways, he's an incredible person. It's a good road to go down. A band that I recently saw that was the awesomest epitome of bar psychedelia, is Comets on Fire. They get everybody grooving.

The whole reason I started associating that music with yours is through your lyrics. Some of the songs on your new album are so bluesy, but then the lyrics are super-psychedelic...cool rhymes, the senses are all mixed up. It seems like something you think about a lot. What is your lyric-writing process?

I spend so much time on the lyrics, to then talk about the lyrics, I'm never prepared for that...one thing, if I could have the chance to say, is that, it's not...what's it called when you just make shit up?

Free association? You're not just channeling lyrics or something...

No, it isn't that, it's thought out, and systematic, but not industrial. It's

"EVERY PHYSICAL THING AND EVERY SPIRITUAL THING, TO ME, ARE INTERTWINED. WHEN I PUT MY MIND IN FOCUS THEN THINGS BLEED INTO EACH OTHER. AND SO I CAN DESCRIBE A PERSON'S EYELASHES AS BEING ROOTS AND HAIR AS BEING INSECT WINGS. IT ALL BECOMES INTERLINKED."

inspired but it's a lot of work. I think of it as real writing, as a craft, like cooking. It's inspired by animism, magic realism, and my definition of psychedelia, nature. A lot of people conclude that there's a relationship between everything, and that's why you can mix it all up.

You mean mix up the senses or the genres of creativity, like writing, music, art?

The senses. Every physical thing and every spiritual thing, to me, are intertwined. I derive all that from this one truth, that every single thing surrounding me is derived from nature. I mean this telephone, at some point, was a derivative of something manmade, and we're all manmade. How natural it is for all of us to just die and become soil...when I put my mind in focus on that way of looking at everything, then things bleed into each other. And so I can describe a person's eyelashes as being roots, and their hair as being insect wings...it all becomes interlinked.

What's great about blues music is that it takes a sad sound and turns it positive or something—there are all these emotions mixed up. I love how you do that in your songs, too. Like you'll have a sad bluesy lick or fingerpicking pattern, then you put these cheerful lyrics over it. What do you love about those old blues songs?

It's what you're saying...I mean, joy isn't something we're not to suffer for. But unfortunately, and maybe in a way I do play the blues, but the word "blues" has always been a no-no for me for some

reason. I don't know why. Maybe my songs are blues, my own version of them, but I would never call a song "something-something blues." But I guess that's the whole point, I mean, to sing them away. I hate hearing self-conscious music or ironic music or music that wallows in its own misery, or music that wants to bring you into it, or share its own misery with you. It's unpleasant. I don't understand why anyone wants that.

Like goth music?

I don't know, there's probably good, happy goth music. I'm talking about the kind of stuff, it's like somebody putting dogshit in your mouth, and they have dogshit too, and it's like, "I have dogshit too, let's go make out." But the blues aren't interested in that. They're not meant to bum you out.

That's true. The Carter Family is my favorite band, and they get all into tragic stuff, the murder ballads, couples getting separated, dying of diseases, getting lost at sea...it's great because it's so moody.

For me, the Carter Family...I grew up on this one food that my mother used to give me, called Familia, Family, kind of like pudding or porridge. As I got older, once in awhile she'd give it to me, and I'd feel so good, just to remember the taste of it. It was so soothing, like feeding off this emotional nipple. My point is...I was in upstate New York with my friend who had done a bag of mushrooms and there was some old hippie cats who had given him some acid, so he was on a pretty heavy dose of psychedelics. He was

starting to freak out a bit. We went into this room, and there was a Carter Family record there, and he ran at it, put in on, and was calmed, that was the equivalent to him. It's really comforting is what it is. However morose the lyrics may be, they're not a bummer.

You're right...their music taps into something deeper—it reminds one of growing up, for example. You probably get sick of people trying to pinpoint your music or saying, it sounds like this or it sounds like that. I'm not trying to do that at all because your sound is so unique. But at the same time, I hear people calling your music “classic” or “timeless” and maybe that's what it has to do with. It has a sound that tries to tap into that comfort. Do you think so?

It's certainly not the product of any trend. I do feel that what I do is quite natural, I mean, everyone should make music that's natural to them. It's not a product of trying to jump on someone else's bandwagon.

A CD I was thinking about related to this, and as far as the whole folk revival thing, is that first Moldy Peaches CD. I loved that when it came out, but now it sounds dated in some way. Did you like that CD?

I can't listen to it now...I'm moving to San Francisco at the end of the month. It's something that I could give a long speech about, but every time I go on tour I realize that the magical land that calls to me, where, I keep saying this, where nature feeds on its own nipple, is the West Coast...also the Southwest. But New York, and what you're talking about, I mean, I don't know if I should talk about this, but I have no association with the anti-folk scene. That's a totally different bag. There are a few people who have been classified as anti-folk, that I don't think there's really that claim. One of them is Diane Cluck, who I'm going to put on the comp I'm doing. [*Golden Apples of the Sun*, available on Arthur's Bastet imprint, via arthurmag.com]. She's a really non-careerist person who just started playing with friends and plays those kinds of shows. I think Adam Green [of the Moldy Peaches] is really funny and I like listening to him, and I know him, but generally, I think the perspective of anti-folk, their awareness of folk is like, James Taylor and Crosby, Stills and Nash, and Tori Amos...John Denver. So if that's your awareness of folk, naturally you'd be anti-folk...so they can say things like “pee pee poo poo caa caa” and get away with it. I don't think you'd consider yourself anti-folk if you knew about Nick Drake, Incredible String Band, Bert Jansch, John Renbourn, and even Donovan, Syd Barrett.

Do you listen to Elizabeth Cotten much?

Oh, I absolutely love Elizabeth Cotten.

I was reading about how you were into Mississippi John Hurt, and then thinking about Elizabeth Cotten...When I play guitar, I listen to those two and try to figure out what they're doing. Do you do that? How do you study the people you love? Do you try to copy their songs or just internalize the sound and then make up your own songs?

The guitar players that I love so much are so good that it seems futile to try to play like them. My favorite folk guitar player, of all the people I know, is this guy Kevin Barker, who has this band Currituck County. And then my favorite classical guitar player is Noah Georgeson, who's also in a rock band called The Pleased. He's Joanna Newsom's boyfriend. And then my favorite electric guitar player is Nick, from Planaria and Quixotic, but old-school people...I have to find heroes. I just recently turned into a person who loved guitars, instead of approaching it as some weird, Dadaist shape. I used to be like, What the hell is this thing that I'm playing? In the earlier shows I'd only play guitars for maybe 25 percent of the time, the rest I'd hold the guitar up and sing a cappella.

Is that because you didn't know how to play guitar as well as you do now?

I don't know, I think I was approaching

it more as a performance in a different, arty-farty kind of way. That was right after art school. You could ask the people at the Silverlake Lounge in Los Angeles, they could be testament to the kinds of shows I used to play. But, guitar people... Elizabeth Cotten invented her own style, and I love her guitar playing, but I can't even try it. Maybe my favorite guitar player is Caetano Veloso, he's unbelievable. There's a song on *Rejoicing* called “Tit Smoking in the Temple of Artists and Mimicry,” which is an instrumental song, and it's for John Fahey. On the inside of the sleeve it says, “For John Fahey and the guitarist of Canned Heat.” I didn't try to play a John Fahey song, I just felt inspired by him. So the title is like, I'm in the temple of artists and mimicry, and he's a real artist, a temple, and I'm just tit smoking.

That's a really good point: if you can't directly imitate someone you can absorb their greatness and then give back what you can, instead of trying to do cover songs or something. Do you ever cover songs?

I do cover songs, selectively. I just recorded a cover of an Ella Jenkins song, she's a big inspiration to me. I just played a show, and I did a Townes Van Zandt song, I do one Johnny Thunder song, and I do a Fred Neil song, one Elizabeth Cotten song, a John Hurt song, but that's about all the covers I've ever done. I have a side project called Abra that I do in drag. I shave, my name is Honey Brown, there's a percussionist named Charlie Feathers, and a piano player called Captain Catnip. We're just a cover band, we do Linda Perhacs, we do a Tim Hardin song, a Nina Simone song, a Robert Johnson song...

What about glam? A lot of people compare you to Marc Bolan, and I read that you never heard him before you recorded your first record. Are you into that scene? Maybe not Gary Glitter, but the earlier stuff, like Tyrannosaurus Rex?

Gary Glitter has his place. The world would be a lot darker without the glitter. I love Tyrannosaurus Rex so much, it's so easy to love, so righteous to love, and so

natural to love, I can't imagine anyone not liking it. What I was saying in that quote was that I was so relieved to never have heard it before I started writing songs, it was a fucking relief. I wrote maybe 18 songs, put them on a tape, gave the tapes to some friends, and then someone said, Whoa, you have to hear this! If there were any artist I could say has influenced my style of singing it would be Karen Dalton. I love her so much and felt influenced by her, but not by Marc Bolan.

The Redwoods always remind me of those Tyrannosaurus Rex albums. I like unicorns, so I always think of stuff like that when I'm up there. Do you have any mythological creatures in your songs?

I feel like I do. I suppose the creatures that I sing and write about could be categorized under mythological, but I don't think they're direct references to past mythological things like unicorns, elves, fairies and trolls. I love them though, and I grew up hearing about them when I'd go to the woods in Venezuela. In Venezuela, the gnomes and trolls are all green, and you're supposed to leave a space in your bed for them. I always think about that when I go to sleep, I say, I need to leave a little space. To this day, I leave a space.

Are there lots of mushrooms there too?

Did you used to go mushroom hunting? Not that I remember. But maybe I was too high on mushrooms to remember.

There are a lot of them in the Redwoods. You must know a lot about that if you lived in San Francisco...

I can't wait to take trips up there. I have so many friends up there...Ben Chasny, from Six Organs of Admittance, he spends a lot of time up there. He's the big daddy. I don't know what word to choose for him yet. He's been around for a long time, he's released a lot of records, and he's maybe the king of psych folk. He's one of the most prolific songwriters and one of the best guitar players, the whole thing. He's been releasing records on the Holy Mountain label and on Ba Da Bing!, and he's also in Comets on Fire. He's a hero, that's what he is. He's a guitar god. He's like a furry alligator.

Wasn't Karen Dalton into that New York early '60s folk Greenwich Village scene, like with Dylan and The Fugs?

Yeah, she was part of that scene, she actually sang on the Holy Modal Rounders record. Fred Neil discovered her, and on her record she covers his songs, and people like Dino Valente, she does one of his songs, and she makes it her own, the way Jimi Hendrix made “All Along the Watchtower” his own...she was probably friends with Tim Hardin—I love that whole period. I've been listening to those records quite frequently.

Did you move to New York to study and to trace that?

I moved to New York for three reasons. One was because Young God Records wanted to release these recordings, and I wanted to release them with Young God. And then because Damo Suzuki was playing a show at Tonic, and because of The Fugs—I heard Tull Kupferberg was hanging around. And he was! I walked right into the Bowery Poetry club and he was doing his weird versions of Beatles songs. [starts reciting “Nowhere Man”]

Don't you have an album coming out that's all in Spanish?

That's going to take a little time, because I want to record it right. My best friend and the only person I can write music with is Andy Cabic, from Vetiver—they have a record coming out in March. He's the inheritor of the Neil Young canon. We've already written the songs but we want to record it in Brazil. It's inspired by “Domingo,” by Caetano Veloso and Gal Costa. I'm trying to get help from people like Arto Lindsay to find a studio. It'll be in Spanish and Portuguese.

Do you alphabetize the records you own?

No, I just try to keep it all good. I keep a few little cubbies of favorites.

Talking about listening to music...do you find an album you love, like your favorite Karen Dalton, and just listen to it over and over and over for days, or do put on a variety of things throughout the day?

I've learned that what constitutes a record I'm going to listen to constantly is



**"IN VENEZUELA, THE GNOMES AND TROLLS ARE ALL GREEN,
AND YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO LEAVE A SPACE IN YOUR BED FOR
THEM. I ALWAYS THINK ABOUT THAT WHEN I GO TO SLEEP,
TO THIS DAY, I LEAVE A LITTLE SPACE."**

if I can draw to it. If I can draw to it, it's a good record. If it can exist in that realm, as good ambient background music but also as full frontal, subconscious and conscious, that's a record.

How did you get your name? Is it Indian?

Yes. I was named by a teacher named Prem Rawat, a guru, someone who shared knowledge in the same vein as Kabir, and Rumi. [My parents] asked him to name me...my middle name is Obi, after Star Wars. That was my mom's doing.

Does "Devendra" mean anything?

Yes, but it has so many, to me, what sounds crazy, over-the-top definitions, that I like to just say it means Tom, because it's the equivalent of Tom in India, there are so many people in India named Devendra. But its definition is King of Gods.

That's pretty serious.

I know. When I was a kid, I used to stare at the ocean and be like, I want a tidal wave, man! And it coincided with my first psychedelic experience, which was that I stepped on a fish that had a spike in its head, its called a horny toad fish that digs itself in the sand and just leaves the spike—I stepped on it, and they had to give me a medication, but it was Venezuela in the mid-'80s, so everything is kind of back, so it's probably medication from the '70s...needless to say, it had a very strange effect on me, and the ocean turned vertically. I thought, careful what you wish for.

I'd like to collect psychedelic water stories. There seem to be a lot of similarities. I've seen water catching on fire, but I've never heard of it turning vertical. That's crazy.

I wonder if it has to do with water's constant motion? The way its motion influences the stillness in the mind, and the movement creates some kind of inertia, or domino effect in your mind. You start moving with it, and it starts moving things in your mind.

Also, it's one of the four elements, so it's just a hardcore, powerful thing.

And you envisioned it with one of the other elements...

And then seeing something turn vertical

from horizontal, that seems to be based on your actual vision, the cones and rods in your eyes. It's based on physical chemistry. That's pretty cool.

That is pretty cool. That can be our conclusion.

⊖



The Icarus Line
Penance Soiree
 (V2)
 C: I saw these guys last year. Their singer reminded me of Richard Ashcroft in the vintage Verve days, when they were at their most cosmic and loose and desolate and swaggering... 1995... Skinny dude with cheekbones, just GONE, going for it—
 D: [hears guitar break in on "Up Against the Wall"] YES!
 C: —amidst the maelstrom. This one is called "Spit On It." Okay, this is what you call RIGHTEOUS SQUALL. Mixed by Alan Moulder, who did stuff with My Bloody Valentine, so there you go...
 D: [laughing] Alan Moulder spat on it! That's holy spit. The old Moulder grease...
 C: [listening to "Spike Island"] See, and just when you think it's all shaped noise, here comes a song with a solid, almost disco rhythm and a guitar refrain—something to pull you, something to grasp onto.
 D: They're an L.A. band. There's a little Jane's Addiction in them, isn't there? Especially in the vocals!
 C: That's true. But Perry always had something interesting to say. I don't know about these guys, I can't understand a single word he's singing.
 D: He's hiding behind the Wall of Squall.
 C: Then again... [listening to the beginning of the 9:07-long "Getting Bright at Night"] Well, here we go.
 D: They bring it down to earth so they can go back into space!
 C: I just want to tell the people that at 6:15 in this song, this simple thing happens that makes you love rock 'n' roll turned up to overwhelming. I know we were talking about finishing people off earlier, but maybe this is the real Finisher right here.
 D: Right now, my ears love me.
 C: Searched, destroyed. Now let's see if they can write a song on an acoustic guitar.

The Secret Machines
Now Here Is Nowhere
 (Reprise)
 C: Well, they've got a good drum sound, that's certain. But...um... Is he going to do that same tempo for nine minutes?
 D: Sounds like it. I think I'll be needing to smoke some more of those special cocktails for this one. [Leaves room, returns happier.] Ah, now it's changing. This is good. They're originally from Texas, this really takes me there, out to the nudist lakes, drinking some Shiner, laying back in the sun with your girl, nobody around, music coming up over the sand from the box, lookin' up and just tripping out to the great big... big I don't know...
 D: The big Big.
 C: Yep...
 C: [repeating lyrics to "Road Leads Where It's Led"] "We communicate by semaphore/ No language/ We've got flags of our own." I like that.
 D: They're so laidback, they're almost out of the pocket. A big cinematic sound with lots of air between the different sounds...
 C: They've been watching *Zabriskie Point*, I'm guessing.
 D: They've definitely been visiting the dark side of the moon. Especially on this song ["Pharaoh's Daughter"].
 C: You know it. "Breathe, breathe in the air." [listening to the concluding/title track] There's the Neu/Can/ Kraftwerk motorik rhythm, done right—this is like Flaming Lips used to sound sometimes, back when they'd let it out a little more when Ronald was in the band... [listening to the song explode around 7:00] Yes!
 D: Big but not pompous, psychedelic but not goofy. Yes! I nominate these guys to do a co-headline tour with The Icarus Line.
 C: Good stuff from secret machines and special humans. Thank you again, Texas.

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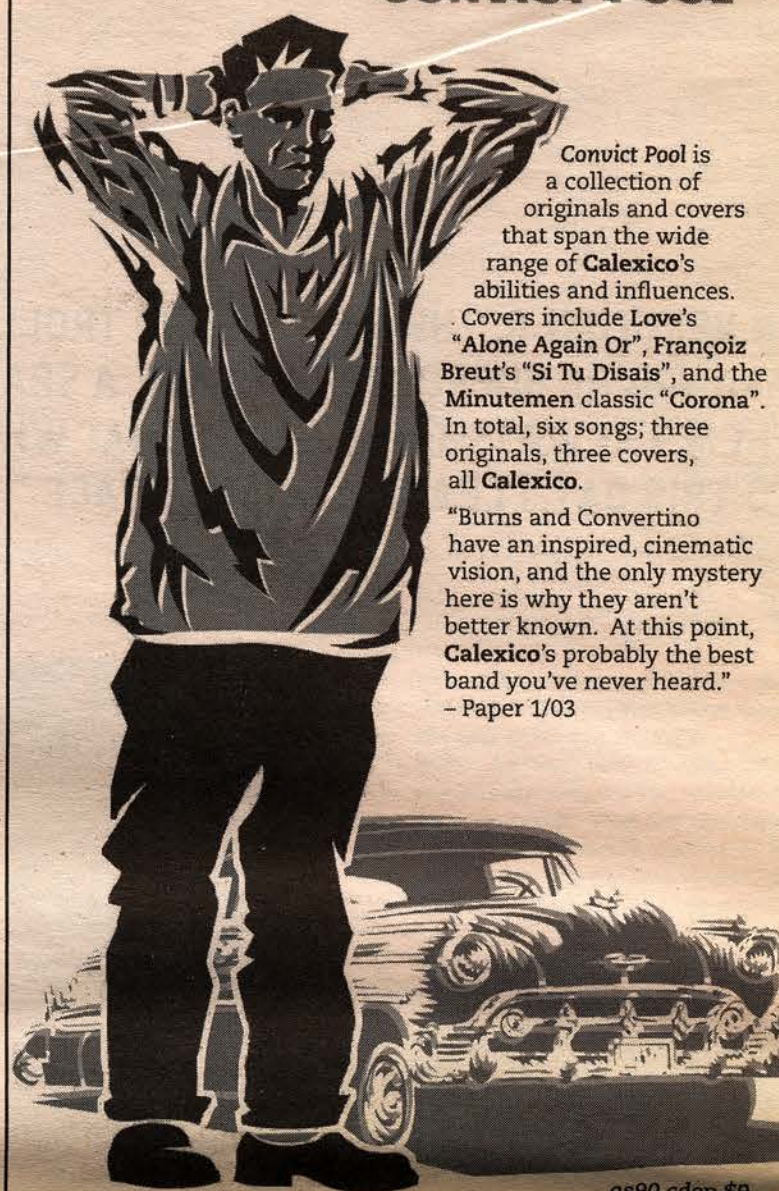
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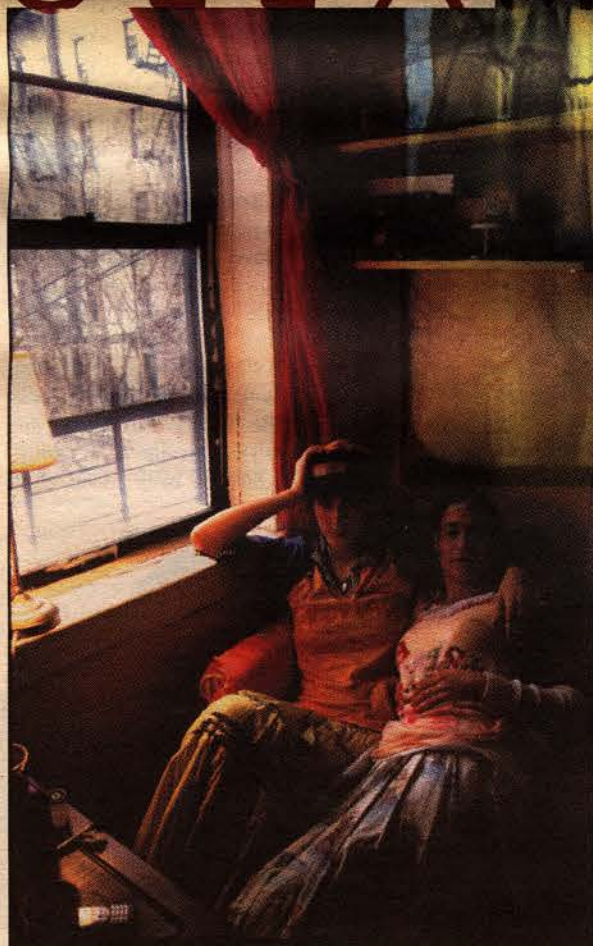


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Bianca and Sierra: sisters in arms.



GLITTER AND GLEAM



The two sisters who are **CocoRosie** have made an astonishing, haunting debut album.

Trinie Dalton asks Bianca Casady how they did it. Photography by Melanie Pullen.

COCOROSIE'S DEBUT "LA MAISON DE MON RÊVE" capitalizes on its sexy feminine allure to seduce the listener into a dream state, one that's half bliss, half nightmare. CocoRosie's two singers and sole band members, Bianca and Sierra Casady, could be sirens if their wailing was deeper instead of high-pitched and tweaky like Billie Holiday's on 45rpm. *La Maison*, released in March on the Touch and Go label, gives you an opiated sense of well-being; here are two beautiful young ladies singing sweet harmonies together, their lyrics about Skittles and diamond rings and other things being disturbed by an undertow of discontent. CocoRosie songs put old folk tunes into new perspective; take the sardonic lyrics in their cover of "Jesus Loves Me": "Jesus loves me/but not my wife/not my nigger friends/or their nigger lives/but Jesus loves me/that's for sure/'cause the Bible tells me so." The last song on the album, "Lyla," is about a child prostitute sold into slavery who "ate McDonalds all day/ and never had a chance to play." Toys, penny whistles, Casios, and thrift store drum machines keep the beats: they're reminders of sinister deeds. The magic of childhood is built up, then trashed like a sandcastle.

The acts of reminiscing, relishing and examining childhood were a natural place to start for two sisters who hadn't seen each other in years, Bianca explained in a recent phone conversation with me. She'd been living in the U.S. while Sierra studied music in Paris. Once Bianca decided to move to France, they found their interests finally overlapping, as Bianca had just begun to write songs...

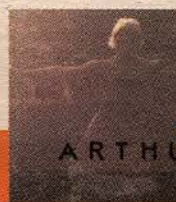
Sierra studied gospel and opera. Did you study music too?

Not at all. I didn't even start singing really until over a year ago. I used to read poetry out a lot but there was something unsatisfying about it. Then I wrote a small series of songs that weren't very typical, they didn't have choruses or anything, and I did a show where I sang them a capella. I felt really good singing. That was right before I went to Paris. I had never sung in front of an audience.

Was it scary when you first started performing?

Yes, it was. It was scary but it was a wonderful high simultaneously. I got sort of addicted to it. It was way more intense. I think that my writing is more accessible

through music, or more enjoyable. Sierra has been singing most of her life. She always sang. In junior high she was in a choir, she got really into choral music, had a special teacher who encouraged her. Immediately her teachers saw that she had an operatic soprano voice and pushed her into that. She just went for it. So she spent the last five years in music school. She did really well, got many accolades, won awards...she was told that she should go for it. But it takes 100%. Not just of your time, but you can't want anything else. It's a thing that's so hard to succeed in, that you can't even lie to yourself, you have to want it all, and she didn't. It was creatively stifling. They didn't encourage her to compose,



or try other types of music. It's as if that's your only job in life.

CocoRosie isn't a one-album-only lark, however. They're both fond of being sisters in a band together. The song "Butterscotch," harkens back to their childhood, but delves into much deeper territory. Bianca set me straight after I got over attempting to guess what toys they used in recording it.

One of my favorite songs on the album is "Butterscotch." I remember having this Fisher Price farmhouse when I was little, and when you opened the door it made this mooing sound that's on the song. Did you use that on the song?

We didn't. We bought all these toys in Paris, so they're French versions of those American toys. You can hear, in "Madonna" and in "Terrible Angels," the French take on the tiger and the elephant. They weren't Fisher Price, but we were very conscious about it so the sounds could ring home to the American childhood of our era.

The line "black widow and white wood" reminds me of making up spells with my girlfriends when I was little. That's another great sound you have, a real girlie one. Do you think that sound happens because you're sisters? How does sisterhood influence your music? That song is so complex, with what conceptually is going on. It's really specific but it's not one thing. Definitely childhood and sisterhood have a huge influence on the record, but I think that we're probably moving out of that. Sisterhood was the first place, the most intuitive place for us to connect, because we kind of grew apart and had different artistic experiences for the last ten years. So our first instinct was to reference our early times together. That song is so complicated, it's dealing very much with childhood... "the black widow and white wood"...it's not that important. I'm going to explain it to you, but what's more important is that each individual response is completely right. It's not important to me that listeners understand where I was coming from, it's more important how it came off and what imagination it sparks.

So, in the dictionary I looked under "black" and "white" and started making lists of what I associated with black and with white. Black widow was the last one on the black list and white wood was the last one on the white list, and they're actually explorations about race for me. So they were automatic writing responses, about the white man and the black man. The references to "mailman" and "baseball player," those were my first responses. Then I made lists of what my instant responses were as a child. The black character was someone to run from, this drug-dealing character. The rest of "Butterscotch" is about early taboos we learn regarding sexuality. How things feel good that are taboo.

Isn't the line "the darkness of a forest eerily returns" in that song? I love that line. It undermines all the cheerful girlie stuff. That totally comes through. The racial issues come through in the other songs too. It's interesting that you were exploring why people trip out on race, black and white, while your sister was studying gospel singing...is that a place you two come together a lot?

Yes. For her, it's more of a basic affinity for gospel. I use it as an opportunity for cultural commentary. How Christianity comes into play, how racial politics come into play within Christianity in America. The contradictions...like in "Jesus Loves Me." So I think the predominant themes are girlhood, religion, and sexuality.

Do you think you were coming at the religious skepticism from a more sarcastic point of view? There's a cool contradiction there too. "Jesus Loves Me" is sung from a male point of view, but you have this high-pitched female voice. It seems sarcastic, making fun, but also not, because you're respecting that tradition of music.

Yeah, there's a fine line. I feel really sincere that the lyrics are ironic but

"THERE'S NO LOOPS, THERE'S NOTHING DONE ON A COMPUTER. THERE'S SOME KIND OF MAGIC TO NOT HAVING MATH IN THE MUSIC."

they're also representative of both sides as opposed to slandering one. Coming from the source of those things but then showing the flip side of them.

What's unique about CocoRosie's approach to irony is that they maintain an essentially positive attitude. Their songs aren't cheerful but thematically almost every song on the album is about love. Working with this subject matter distinguishes them from many bands (in the tradition of Joy Division) that are fatalistic-life sucks: ie, the world is fucked, there's nothing you can do about it so kill yourself. But as many new bands take up similar depressing concerns regarding political corruption, religious hypocrisy, racism and poverty, there seems to be a renewed sense afoot that love's power can overcome hardship.

If you do have this disillusionment about Christianity and racial issues in this country at least, it seems like ultimately the album is optimistic in the sense that these are romantic, lovely songs. It's a question of beliefs. If things like this exist that are so ridiculous, the contradictions in Christianity and all that, then there's still love that's good in the world. Did you think that too or did you consciously make the album overall an optimistic thing?

I think it's just who we are. Even though we're conscious and aware of the things we've said, none of this was very

intentional. Our attitude is generally positive but it's also deconstructing society and culture. I think it's important in art. Art's more successful if you can come across with beauty and with something positive while still shedding light on stuff, not ignoring things. So I'm pleased if that's coming through. People can stomach it. Also, in our complimenting each other, Sierra has this way of making hooks and melodies that are really easy to handle, pretty, and simple. So combine that with my overtly political and ironic [approach]...that's probably our strongest point.

That definitely comes through. It's hard not to think about that when you're listening.

A lot of the songs too, are from the child's perspective on sexuality and religion. Obviously, I'm writing the songs as an adult but that childhood attitude isn't at all cynical or even judgmental. The music's pretending to come from that naïve place. I tend to objectify myself and my childhood perspectives as a way of studying where I'm at. So that's what's happening, it's that innocent voice.

Maybe this ability to tap into "that innocent voice," a place devoid of cynicism, has to do with the fact that many of these musicians now in their early twenties were raised by hippies and idealists. Bianca said the Casady sisters grew up "sort of on the West Coast, but moving a lot. Sierra was born in Iowa. I was born in Hawaii. My mother just likes to move, and our parents are separated. The time we spent with our father was spent strictly on the road. He drove us around the country. There was a lot of time camping and being lost in the wilderness. We lived all over California, New Mexico, Arizona..." When I asked whether this made her detest natural settings, Bianca replied, "I became the city slicker. I fell in love with New York. I came here about five years ago. Sierra's always been more of a nature girl. She really likes the ocean, loves to swim in it at night. I like the extremes—going into the middle of nowhere. But I think I got too much of it growing up, being in all the national parks...I'm just more interested in the dynamics of the city."

CocoRosie's music acknowledges nature as an inherent part of the romantic music tradition. "Good Friday," for example, is an ode to nature in that it relies upon actual sounds in nature (birds chirp in the background), while the lyrics attest to nature's hypnotic allure: "I once fell in love with you/Just because the sky turned from gray into blue." But other songs obliterate nature's grandeur by showing love developing as the world implodes on itself; in "West Side" they sing, "I'll wait for you until the streets become sand/and all the ceilings in New York have come down/I'll wait for you until the stars dominate the skies again." Bianca thinks of this song as "almost apocalyptic." These contrasts give listeners the hint that

CocoRosie's music is more than just a throwback to 60s psychedelia or folk.

Yet the connection between folk artists of the past and new musicians who can be seen as revivalists—artists like CocoRosie and Devendra Banhart—can be drawn because of their affinity for acoustic instrumentation, and also because of their interest in considering love as the most important force in the universe. Songs about love are the oldest kinds of songs!

I was researching what people have said about your album so far, what the critics are saying, and you're already being compared to Devendra. You're being grouped together as this new positive force in music. Maybe that's why people call it a sort of folk music, even though you use all different kinds of technology. There was this whole thing recently about how there could be no more good love songs, and I think you're completely proving that wrong. Are you really into love songs, or who did you listen to when you were growing up? What about the Beatles?

It's funny, I've been hearing comments about love songs and I thought "we don't write love songs," but when I listen to music, it's usually the love songs that I love. Even though I thought I would hate writing love songs. I think it's because we're not writing love songs about our love. We're not referencing our lovers, it's more historical. Growing up, I wasn't a huge music listener. I was never into the Beatles. But I love Nina Simone, Bob Dylan, some of his softer love songs. Sierra's been much more

The CocosRosies, joined at left by the ubiquitous Devendra B.



into folk music, obscure '70s stuff. I've just recently been getting exposed to it. She's a music connoisseur. I've been in my own world. I don't listen to many new things. She's been in love with Vashti Bunyan for years.

What about earlier classic rock bands, pop songs?

I don't think our music is very influenced by other music. There's definitely a bluesy, old Billie Holiday sound, but I haven't saturated myself in too much of it.

The idea that a musician isn't necessarily influenced by other artists is one that Bianca stood behind in our discussion. That perspective in itself stems from an entire tradition of female musicians who argue that complete originality is viable. It's one of the tenets of folk: an artist can develop their truest sound if exposure to other music is kept to a minimum. Think of Elizabeth Cotten, who worked as a housekeeper her whole life, or the bizarre version of pop The Shaggs came up with in their garage. Perhaps that notion is more female, though, rather than folk-based. Early European female punk bands like The Slits, Kleenex, Lilliput, Ut, who have been reinvented by women like Chicks on Speed and Peaches, delineated "female" sounds from "male" within their genre. Odd, irregular beats, screaming, bitchy vocals matched with coy purrs, and lots of harmonization differentiated their brand of punk from the speedy, driving sounds of their manly contemporaries. Folk, punk, or somewhere in between, the do-it-yourself approach to music making is another parallel between CocoRosie

and generations of fiercely independent female musicians. This sense of individuality can be traced all the way down to the recording level: CocoRosie produced their album almost completely on their own and are adamant about retaining creative control over future projects.

"We did all of it on four tracks and we took our time, and found ourselves to be pretty good engineers," said Bianca. "Sierra does most of the mixing, she has a knack for it. We mixed the songs over and over again until we had them right. She did 'Lyla'; I actually left Paris after I'd written the song and sung it. When I left, she gave it another stab. She took the four-track to one of the rooms at her school that had a piano in it, and it's all natural reverb. It was so beautiful, so we kept it. So, there's no loops, there's nothing [done on a] computer. Even on 'By Your Side,' there are no loops, she just sang the part over and over again. She knew why she was doing it, she was trying to get that effect. There's some kind of magic to not having math in the music."

Do you only have four tracks on each song or did you bounce tracks?

We didn't bounce any. But you can use the fifth track when you're mixing two tapes, so we did that. It's funny, we never did any recording before but we were really good at it. We were sharing vocal tracks. We had to break the headphones apart so we could each have one. There was so much pressure when my parts came up because we just passed the mic without making mic grips! We were so careful, so we never peaked out or anything. We only had so many choices in mixing.

Are you still working with that or are you going to record your next record in an official studio?

We've been playing around in a couple studios that have 16-track tape. It's interesting to see the difference. But we're definitely going to keep going with the four-track.

You can be in the space you're most comfortable in, which is a big element. We'll just keep experimenting. We don't have any ideas that we're not willing to change.

Do you have another album coming out or are you just working on songs?

The situation is pretty much that [Touch and Go] are into us and hopefully they'll put out whatever we have. When we're ready we'll give it to them. If they're not into it, we'll give it to someone else. They're really supportive at the label, even personally. It's really cool, just like 'do what you want as the artist.'

Yeah, it's so much better to go with a good, small label.

It's just about working with whoever will let us do exactly what we want.

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The Veils

The Runaway Found (Rough Trade)
D: Echo & the Bunnymen?
C: Hal He DOES have a bit of the Ian McCulloch in him. This is a 20-year-old fella from Australia. There's some real beauty on here, D... [clicks ahead to "The Leavers Dance"]
D: Radiohead. Starsailor.
C: Yeah, I guess... But listen to those strings come in... it's so gorgeous. I think sometimes people like us get too caught up in "spot the influence." It's one thing when you're hearing straight, passionless, contrived mimicry-plagiarism—but it's another when folks' voices are just...similar. What are they supposed to do? Not sing at all cuz that voice is taken already?
D: [thoughtful, agreeing] To paraphrase Gertrude Stein: "A good song is a good song is a good song."
C: Anyways, I think it's beautiful stuff. There's some vintage Britpop rave-ups, there's ringing guitars. There's some middling tempo numbers, which are hard to do, when you think about it... And there's these autumnal, oaseside ballads. [listening to "Vicious Traditions"] You can see how it could get all histrionic and spittle-flying, but he reins it in just right.
D: [quietly] So young, and so anguished already...

White Magic

Through the Sun Door EP (Drag City)
D: At last, a female voice!
C: [listening to opening track "One-Note"] This is one of my favorite songs of the spring.
D: Charging piano!
C: It's serious, but not Tori Amos melodrama. "Something is a-bide-ing!" Hmm...
D: "White Magic."
C: Best name since Comets On Fire. Lotsa witchy stuff going on right now, eh? [listening to "The Gypsies Came Marching After"] Wow here's another stormer. This is probably referencing Fairport Convention or Incredible String Band or Pentangle but I just don't know that stuff well enough... I guess you'd call it folk-rock—it does swing, you can move to it—and they use traditional acoustic and electric instruments and so on.
D: I like her voice. Strong, feminine, with hints of tenderness and loss.
C: This song ["Apocalypse," the EP's final track] is a sorta blues groove—it's like Heart, if they were amazing.
D[musing]: PJ Harvey, with flowers and beads in her hair.

ESPerS

ESPerS (Locust Music)
C: More really lovely, absolutely spellbinding boots-over-pants modern two girls-one boy psychedelic chamber folk-rock for you...
D: [eyes closed, rapt] My, my, my.
C: Reminds me of Damon & Naomi and Ghost. Very, very pretty, and not at all dippy or precious, which is the way these things can so easily go. [listening to "Meadow"] See, cuz they can write actual songs, they're not just inhabiting a texture or a form...
D: It cannot be possible. What woods are all these people coming from?
C: They come from the Shire, sire. Actually they come from Philadelphia.
D: [listening to "Voices"] There's no drums, there's no backbeat, but, [quietly, seriously] I can dig it anyway. Listen to me when I say this: This is music that lifts the veil.

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Harp-playing folk singer
JOANNA NEWSOM
talks history, theory and
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Photography by
Melanie Pullen.

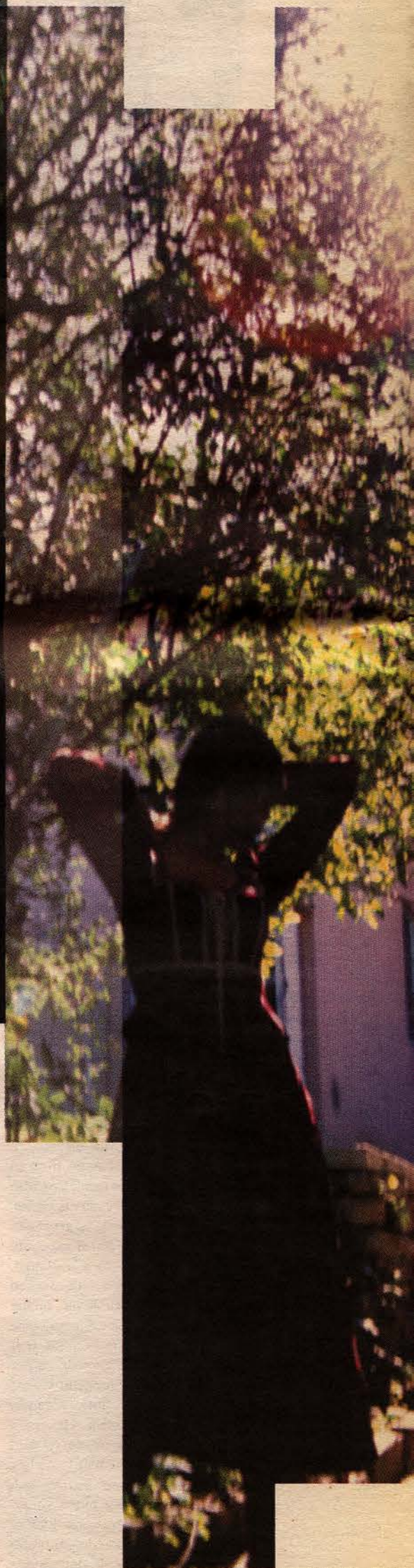
THE LYON & HEALY PEDAL HARP is not a regular presence in rock clubs. It's expensive, it's big, it's complicated. It has 46 strings, which cannot be retuned between songs during a performance. It's difficult to master—basic competence requires years of training and practice. Outside of Bjork's last album and recent tours, it's an instrument almost without history in pop music.

So, when the 22-year-old Joanna Newsom appears onstage, alone, playing this exotic device, attention is inevitably paid, not just cuz you never see it done, but because, as Newsom says, the harp is usually associated by contemporary listeners with a single cheesy sound: the glissandi, a simple, artless running of the fingers across a broad span of strings, used as a decorative cue in sitcoms, films and commercials. Which means the simple act of witnessing a harp really being played—of runs of notes plucked with one hand while the other plays a fixed pattern—is gonna be novel. It's as if your only experience of the electric guitar was the sound of a single power chord, and then suddenly you witnessed the playing of whole riffs, whole rhythms, whole melodic lines, whole *songs*...

Songs. It's Joanna Newsom's songs, it's her lyrics, it's her singular voice—accurately described by Currituck Co.'s Kevin Barker as “eight and 80, dawn and dusk”—that makes the gawkers stick around after the initial curiosity of seeing a harp played by a pixie from a California Gold Rush town wears off. Because what Newsom is doing is neither experimental, avant garde stuff, nor the pretentious bloat generally associated with the use of classical instruments on the rock stage. It's instead firmly rooted in the folk tradition: verse/chorus songs with careful attention paid to lyrics and vocal performance. When Newsom sings “This is an old song, these are old blues/This is not my tune, but it's mine to use,” she's stating both fact and ambition. She's making a claim.

With support and advocacy over the last couple of years from friends and admirers such as Will Oldham, Devendra Banhart and Cat Power, she began to record her music and perform live. After making two home-recorded CD-R EPs, she debuted on Drag City this spring with the stunning full-length, *The Milk-Eyed Mender*, and will be touring with Banhart in the early summer.

Two weeks after seeing her wow drunk hipsters in a Seattle rock club, and after tagging along on the photo shoot for this piece, I interviewed Newsom for an hour by mobile phone. I was struck once again by her essential singularity — it extends into her speech, which is learned, humble and passionate. Here is some of what we talked about.





FORTY-SIX STRINGS AND SOME TRUTHS

You're living in San Francisco, which seems to be a hotbed of folk music talent at the moment. What is it about the city that is attractive to you? I think that things that require closer listening in order to get have an audience here: things that have more layers to them and maybe aren't quite as bold on the outside. I visited New York last year and, granted I wasn't there long enough to get any sort of a realistic view of what the music scene is like, but my first impression was that in order to get noticed there for what you're doing musically, it seems like the work has to be sort of heavy-handed, I guess. Music that's done in big broad strokes. Subtlety or strangeness or delicacy have, for the most part, not seemed to be qualities that attract a lot of people's ears in other cities.

You grew up in Nevada City, California, a small Gold Rush town.

It's a really, really strange town. Basically every building there has been there since the Gold Rush. There's still stage around that had a lot of Gold Rush-era performers come through, people like Lola Montez and Lala Crabtree and Mark Twain. There's miles of boarded-up mines and tunnels. And in downtown Nevada City, there's a network of tunnels that

had to do with a system of brothels that existed during the Gold Rush. I worked in a coffeehouse downtown, which was located right above this hive of little tunnels, and it was definitely haunted. Pretty much everyone who worked there would see the ghosts of Gold Rush whores. I'm convinced I saw one.

What kind of people live there now?

It's a really weird combination of extremely rural farm-type folks and older retirees, but there's also a lot of art people and hippies and composers and artists and poets. There's seven hills ringing the town, dotting around the edges of Nevada City. That's where a lot of the people live... Gary Snyder lives there. Terry Riley the composer lives there. Utah Phillips lives there. I grew up neighbors with the singer of Supertramp, Roger Hodgson, who has a big pool shaped like an electric guitar next to my house.

Were you living in the woods, then?

We were surrounded by trees. From the back porch in the house that I grew up in, all you see is mountains, graduating in height, getting more and more purple as you go further back, until you see the Sierra Buttes and the snowcaps. That was my view. We had your average Northern California forest wildlife: deer, birds... I saw a mountain lion a few times. And there is the river—all you do in the summer time if you're a kid growing up in Nevada City is go to the river every single day, and it's beautiful and it's clear and there's swimming holes. I loved it as a kid. I know a lot of kids got bored. But I had a good situation—I really liked my family a lot. If you didn't get along with your family, I imagine it wouldn't be a good place to be *at all*. Because there

would be very little way to carve out your own space and have a network of people who supported you and had things to do to distract you from it. I had a really wonderful experience but I don't mean to paint it as this perfect utopia because it most certainly is not.

How did you end up playing the harp?

From about the time I was five, I had been telling my parents I wanted to play the harp. They took me to the harp teacher in town, who does exist, an amazing harp teacher in Nevada City, and she said that she didn't want to take a student so young and that she thought that I should probably take piano lessons first, so I took them for a number of years. When I finally started taking the harp lessons, I think I was around 10. From the very first day I took lessons I was in love with it. I think it was the first and perhaps only thing I've ever done where it was just a perfect fit. Nobody had to tell me to do it because it just resonated with me so much.

Harp is expensive instruments. Did you have one in the family?

My parents rented one for me, and then when I was a little older they bought me a Celtic harp, which is a little different from the one that I play now. It has levers that change keys instead of pedals. It has fewer strings and it's much less expensive. Later, maybe in my freshman year of high school, I became really sure that I needed to be playing a pedal harp. I'd started writing my own music and I wanted to have the flexibility of changing keys and have the sort of range of expression that a pedal harp allows you that a Celtic harp doesn't. A Celtic harp has a really pure, beautiful sweet sound—it's lovely, but it's sort


of limited to that, in terms of timbre, whereas the pedal harp can be really percussive, it can be loud, it can be soft: It has the ability to express a lot more. So, my parents helped me buy a very used one, which is now very much used. A new pedal harp, nowadays, is about 30-to-40 thousand dollars, and that is so far beyond what I can afford. It's really unfortunate because at this point I would love to really get a beautiful new harp.

Having long fingers is helpful if you are a guitarist. Are there any physical attributes that are helpful to have when you play harp?

[laughs] Well, I always got compliments on my fat finger pads, because the fleshiness of the tip of your fingers makes a big difference in tone. With most other tonal things, you can just learn: You can learn the right position for your hand, and the right amount of pressure to put on the strings, and the right sort of attack, and the way, what you do with your hands right after you play a note, all these different things surrounding plucking a note that make it as good a sound as possible. But if you have a really bony fingertip, it'll make a harsh sound. And you can't have any fingernail *at all*, or else it'll make a really metallic harsh sound.

You were writing your own music as a teenager, as opposed to spending all of your time learning a formal repertoire.

I had a really exceptional teacher as my first harp teacher. She introduced me to improvising, which I think is something that not a lot of harpists learn, in the way that a lot of guitarists might. When I was really young, she introduced me to the idea of playing a fixed pattern with my left hand and improvising with my right hand: sort of rudimentary stuff like that. Somehow, I really loved improvising more than anything else. As I got a little older, it turned into me loving to *write* music. So I went to Mills, which has a



"THE HARP HAS BEEN SO ILL-USED IN A LOT OF POPULAR MUSIC. BUT I BELIEVE IT'S CAPABLE OF AMAZING, PERCUSSIVE, SHIMMERING, INTERESTING, CONTRAPUNTAL MAGIC."

one of my most often read and studied books.

You cover an Appalachian traditional song, "Three Little Babies." Do you have many of those old mountain songs in your repertoire?

No, I don't. I listen to plenty of them but that one's really significant to me. When I heard it sung by a singer named Texas Gladden at an American Music class at Mills, it somehow allowed me to sing. I realized that her voice was conventionally not beautiful and yet it was so worthy of being listened to, and so affecting. Before that, I knew that I wanted to make music and I knew that I had things to sing about, and I knew that I could employ my voice, to whatever degree it was polished, in my songs and do something with it that I wanted to do with it. But something about hearing her sing was a comfort. Most of the people around me were saying it was really ugly, but for me, it was sort of like time stopped. I felt like I was gonna cry in the middle of class. I was so bowled over by her voice.

Although that song is deeply connected to all the Appalachian tradition, and to the body of work of all the other recorded Appalachian artists, for me it wasn't just that she was from where she was, and that she sang in the tradition that she sang within, it was that she was *her*. Her voice, in and of itself, is magical. Her interpretation of the music is magical. And rare. And has never been replicated by anybody else.

You're also an admirer of Ruth Crawford Seeger, who I'm not familiar with.

She was a really amazing composer, who in her 20s, was part of the loosely organized movement of composers spearheaded by Charles Ives and Carl Sprague Ruggles and Henry Cowell. They were all trying to formalize a specifically American sound—it involved a lot of experimentation that had never done before. She played around with a lot of exquisite dissonances: It's really brave, confident work, and she got a lot of critical praise. Of course, a lot of it was tinged with that underlying misogyny of the era—"Miss Crawford's work is so virile you can hardly tell she's a woman"—that sort of thing. But it really was incredible work, and has stood the test of time.

It's also a small body of work because, basically, she met Charles Seeger and married him, and had difficulty reconciling being a composer and also being a wife and mother. He had some kids already when they married and they had kids together as well. She helped

him to author a book on dissonant counterpoint. Most of this histories say that she was dictated to, that she basically wrote down all of his ideas, but now historians acknowledge that she probably had a lot to do with actually coming up with this methodology.

Their children grew up to be Peggy Seeger, Mike Seeger, Pete Seeger: all the famous folk revivalists in the '60s. I think her last compositions were around the '40s. Then she just slipped fully into mama mode. The interesting thing about her is that once she was doing that, she began to work with the Lomaxes. She scored and did all the arrangements for all their pieces, including a book of children's folk songs. You can recognize her watermark on the pieces. They're supposed to be these extremely true representations of American folk songs, and they *are*, and it's wonderful that they did that, but they're also totally her pieces: there are slots where she'll just slip in these really strange dissonances. It represents this really unique and rare intersection of art music and folk music. And an equal reverence, on her part, for preserving history and moving forward. **I can see why she would be inspiring to you...**

I know I'm doing something completely different, but her life is sort of a distillation of all the things that are important to me, except for the fact that she gave up our life's work because she didn't believe she could be a composer and also be a mother at the same time. Even then, it's interesting to me that their children grew up very much focused on the work that she was pursuing, rather than the work that their father was pursuing, which continued to be formal "new music." So, she definitely had an effect on everyone around her. It was like she gave up one thing, but her involvement with folk music was *not* half-hearted. She was very passionate about it.

When I first heard your recordings, I assumed there was some overdubbing. But when I saw you perform, I realized that you're actually playing all the notes at once.

Some of those songs I recorded the vocals and harp separately. But it's very much not overdubbed. I work so hard on the harp pieces. They're hard to play. I'm so untrained as a singer and the singing

really well known composition program, with the intention of being a composer. But it became obvious that I hadn't really known what it meant to be a composer: all I knew was that I liked to write music. There is an emphasis on melody that I have that, as far as a formal discipline of composition, didn't really have much in common with what was being focused on by everybody else there.

I had written songs for years but didn't really sing them above a whisper. I don't know whether this is connected, but I switched majors from composition to creative writing and I was doing a lot of writing. I have a really big interest in the sort of ideas that don't have much weight placed on them in modern poetry programs, such as rhyming and the number of syllables per line and strange embedded rhyme patterns, as well as rhymes at the end of the lines. Silly stuff like that. I certainly didn't make it the focus of my writing, but... Anytime that something was supposed to be a poem it ended up really resembling lyrics to a song. I don't think that's what made me write songs—it just sort of was a parallel. At one point I was started singing, and I don't really know why.

You seem to take a lot of care with your lyrics.

Nabokov is a huge influence to me. Because he was such a perfectionist, and because he had such a strong relationship with the senses, it's almost as though he overcompensated for English being his second language by having every single word that he wrote be so carefully thought out, and its relation to all the words around it, and the rhythm of every line, and the kind of alchemy that happens when the different words bump up against each other. There is this heightened tension and heightened impact because it wasn't familiar to him. It was like he placed a lens on his own writing. It isn't entirely natural, but at the same time it's like the purest type of writing, to my mind. Whether or not it's reflected in my own writing, his sort of relationship to words is very influential to me. [laughs] And I love Faulkner! *Sound and the Fury* is



is so much more intuitive, whatever comes out comes out, but the harp, I'll work on arranging and practicing those parts for months and months. I'm not super-prolific. I'll often have one little figure that I'll play with for like a year, some little harp thing that doesn't have a home yet and then all of a sudden the right lyrics will come along and they'll just meet and they'll work out.

I saw a painting the other day of this gypsy lady that had a skirt covered in pockets everywhere and there were little things in all her pockets. Sometimes I feel like that: I have little objects and every once in a while I take them out of my pockets, lay them all in a row and I like the way they look next to each other, so that's a song! [laughs] But I've had them in my pockets for such a long time.

I write songs with the intention of covering as much ground on the harp as possible: playing the high range, the middle range, and the low range. Just cuz that doesn't get done very often in music. I try to make them as interesting as possible to listen to, because the harp is such an incredible instrument. I feel like a lot of people don't understand what it's capable of because it's been so ill-used in a lot of popular music. You hear modern symphonic pieces or classical symphonic pieces and they all just use this horrible, gratuitous glissandi all over the place. To most people, that's what the sound of the harp is. But I believe it's capable of amazing, percussive, shimmering, interesting contrapuntal magic, and I work so much to come close to doing what I think it's capable of doing. I don't know if I've gotten there yet. Someday.

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Acid Mothers Temple and the Melting Paraiso U.F.O.

Mantra of Love (Alien8)
C: Speaking of lifting the veil: here's the new Acid Mothers Temple studio album, two very long tracks. The first is a traditional vocal, with Miss Cotton Casino singing, that goes...

D: [6:25 in] There it goes now, off into the universe... Happy trails everywhere. C: For those out there who don't know, the Acid Mothers are a Japanese psych outfit known to the acid cognoscenti for volume, trance and hair frizz. They're on a serious far-out trip and they're gonna do it, sometimes on the turn of the dime, whether or not anyone else is interested. I've seen them play a 100-person room like they were playing for the galaxy...

D: This is the best-recorded AMT album I've ever heard! C: You can actually hear the Hawkwind psych-bleeptronics and Acid Mothers "super guru" Kawabata Makoto's super-guitar guru-ifying all over the place. A proper mix, finally. [listening] Aaaaand then back down to the central melody. This is humanity at its finest: dignified-cooperative-transcendent.

D: So good! I must nominate the Acid Mothers as this planet's ambassadors to the Galactic Council!

Merzbow

Last of Analog Sessions 3-CD box set (Important Records)
D: Ack! What the???

Something's wrong with the needle!

C: Oh, D. So easily confused. This is Japanese noise artist Merzbow, that's what the stuff sounds like...at first. Then you get into it. You have to listen closely.

D: I will NEVER get into this!

C: Well, that's your problem. For the non-philistines out there in Arthurworld, I want to say that his packages three Merzbow albums—Catapillar, Medamaya and Springharp—recorded from '97-99 by Masami Akita, in his final analog tantrums before he went digital. As it says on the back of this beautiful silver-on-black package, "Akita plays Self-built Junk."

D: Yeah this is junk alright—C: —with contact mics, various filters and ring modulators, various effects pedals, EMS Synthi A synthesizer, EMS VCS3 Synthesizer, Moog Synthesizer, GR-500 Guitar Synthesizer, Tapes, EXD, Drum Machine and Oscillators." It's good stuff, although a little of this goes a long way and I couldn't tell you what my favorite track is. You've got to be in a very certain and very open mindset to listen to this stuff, but it's worth it. Shit is meditative, bro!

D: Listen, I get this when the DVD isn't connected right to the stereo, and that's free of charge.

Loren Connors
The Departing of a Dream Vol. III: Juliet (Family Vineyard)

D: Much better. Lonesome guitars sounding occasional hopeful notes in the desert.

C: It occupies its own unique space. Not quite ominous, but not settled either. Restless, haunting. Just one man doing "guitars, tapes, sounds."

D: This is what that Daniel Lanois guy wishes he could sound like.

C: It's only 30 minutes, but I swear it feels like six hours. This will slow you right down, just like yoga or a good bath or chopping vegetables... Wow.

D: [asleep]

The Silver Mountain
Reveries (Pretty Little Lighting Paw)

(Constellation)
C: Four tracks thirty minutes. "More Action! Less Tears!" is a great title: it's like Godepseed You! Black Emperor gone early Spiritualized, with a sense of humor. [Listening to "Microphones in the Trees"]

D: Now we're getting down to the REAL anguish of the evening. Guitarist-vocalist Efrim is Wayne Coyne realizing all hope is lost, actually, and death is no comfort. But there's this ease at the end of the song, a moment of brightness. Epiphany? Or maybe it's just the street lights buzzing on, like in Antonioni's *L'Eclisse*...

D: [stirring deep into the 10-minute "Pretty Little Lighting Paw"] What is this...? A choir from the dark stars...

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I saw where the Root Hog lives.



Craig Taborn
Junk Magic (Thirsty Ear)
C: Future jazz from nowtime. Reminds me a bit of Carl Craig's Innerzone project from a few years ago. Whatever happened with that, anyhow? Jazz and digital electronics: a treacherous and therefore unexploited frontier? Tonight at 10! D [drifting]: ...Cinematic Orchestra...
C: This is heavier, swings a bit more, and goes further out, leaving the drums behind altogether. A little more intense. These are compositions, not jams, you have to follow it along. It's cool in a tough situation.

Vetiver
Velvet (DiCristina)
C: This is my other new favorite record. Really lovely folk stuff from some San Francisco cats, led by Andy Catic on vocals, guitar and banjo.
D: He sings so nakedly. There's some Nick Drake here...
C: It reminds me of that third Velvet Underground album. Or any Velvets when they're quieter: that sort of foggy country-folk that Lou would do then. Kind of hushed and candlelit, away from the streets and the squalor and the squalor, in a bohemian garret in the city or a tent in the woods. It's a balm, like that last Six Organs of Admittance record.
D: There is a gauzy, dreamy feel to this.
C: The songs are really well structured and arranged- there's cello and violin all over the album. (Looking at the CD booklet.) And gaze upon this centerfold, it looks like a vintage Sally Image! That's Joanna Newsom playing harp on "Amerilite," and of course that's the ubiquitous Mr. Banhart sings and plays guitar on a couple songs that are almost hoedowns. Colm O'Cloisig, from My Bloody Valentine and Hope Sandoval's band, plays drums on a couple of tracks... and then there's Hope herself, singing backup on "Angels' Share." Goosebumps...
D: There is a real Mazzy Star thing going on here! It is Mazzy Star with a sensitive boy singer.
C: They both go back to the Velvets, don't they. Oh, the Velvets! I'd give this to the people in the coffeehouses of America digging Cat Power and Beth Orton. Such beautiful songs.
D: These are modern songs, but these are not modern world people.

Blanche
If We Can't Trust the Doctors... (Cass Records)
C: Another stylish country-folk softie, with a distressed cover, and banjo and quietish voices by people less than happy with the present day and their present circumstances.
D: A little bit Lyle Lovett, a little bit Buck Owens...
C: They're from Detroit. This first song has Brendan Benson singing backup, and there's a perfect little Jack White guitar part...
D: This is nuts. How can there be so many good bands coming out of one city at one time?
C: It does boggle the mind. It's not just the music, though, which bypasses the alt-country tedium you might be fearing and heads for that stately old country bluegrass thing, it's good lyrics too: "Who's to say that I'm obsessed with everything you do/just because it seems my schedule seems to shadow you/who's to say that tired cliché, there's more fish in the sea/I don't mind treading water, you're the one for me."
D: And male-female duets -always good, rarely done, rarer still done well.
C: [reading lyrics] "Life once again is carefree/where we tiptoed, now we waltz/past the black cats and the mirrors we cracked/without our fingers crossed..."
D: They are admirers of the old ways, but they are not worshippers.



Los Lobos
The Ride
(Hollywood)
C: What can you say? It's the new Los Lobos. Fucking buy it already.
D: One of America's greatest living bands.
C: They're the house band for America. They can do everything, and they do everything with taste, and they're not afraid to venture out. Always. Year after year! I mean, what do you call them, how do you categorize them? A jam band? Okay but they've got SONGS! A rock n roll band? Sure, but they've got so much soul, they can do traditional Mexican folk stuff, and they can flip into so many musical spaces and styles, for all the occasions of life: carnivals, barbecues, funerals, weddings, lonely drives. They're the ascended masters, they're our nation's poet laureates. They should be on the radio all the time, on Leno and Letterman ever week. The true music fans know this, the true musicians know this. This album is like a testimonial to Los Lobos—it's the band with a ton of guest stars doing new songs, some covers, all over the map stylistically. I'll just list em: Cafe Tacuba, Willie G, Dave Alvin from the Blasters, Bobby Womack, Tom Waits & Martha Gonzalez, Ruben Blades, Richard Thompson, Elvis Costello, Mavis Staples...
D: Wow. Somebody call NPR!
C: That's some heavy hitters, but I'd be buying this anyway, bro. I found an amazing quote from Mickey from Ween the other day on Los Lobos. He said, "I love Los Lobos, that's a band that's out there that really does it for me that I'll go see. I don't know why people aren't really hip, because Los Lobos, to me... Like people say that Phish filled in a void for the Dead when they were gone, for a variety of reasons. You know, they played long sets, they jam a lot, they changed their set list every night. [But] Los Lobos play a very long set, they change their set lists all the time, it's as much good, quality guitar that you could want. They've been doing it forever and they give off the vibe on stage that they have. They have that telepathy going."
D: So true, so true.
C: When I hear David Hidalgo's voice, I tear up, just automatically.
D: Like War said, the world is a ghetto. But the world is a barrio too, and I want to be there.

Toots & the Maytalls
True Love
(V2)
C: Let's wrap this up with another celebrity testimonial album... Toots Hibbert—
D: Toots & the Maytalls!
C: —joined by a bunch of folks doing some of his old songs, and some new stuff, with a constellation of stars. There's some total sheened-up clunkers on here, but damn, any time there's a chance to hear Willie Nelson singing reggae, I'm there.



Eddie Ruscha is a musician/artist that created these drawings which cloud the borders of infinity and no one's sanity. Respond to zotborg2000@earthlink.net IF YOU FUCKIN' DARE.

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John Porcellino is currently working on his second book collection of stories from his long-running minicomic, *King-Cat Comics and Stories*.

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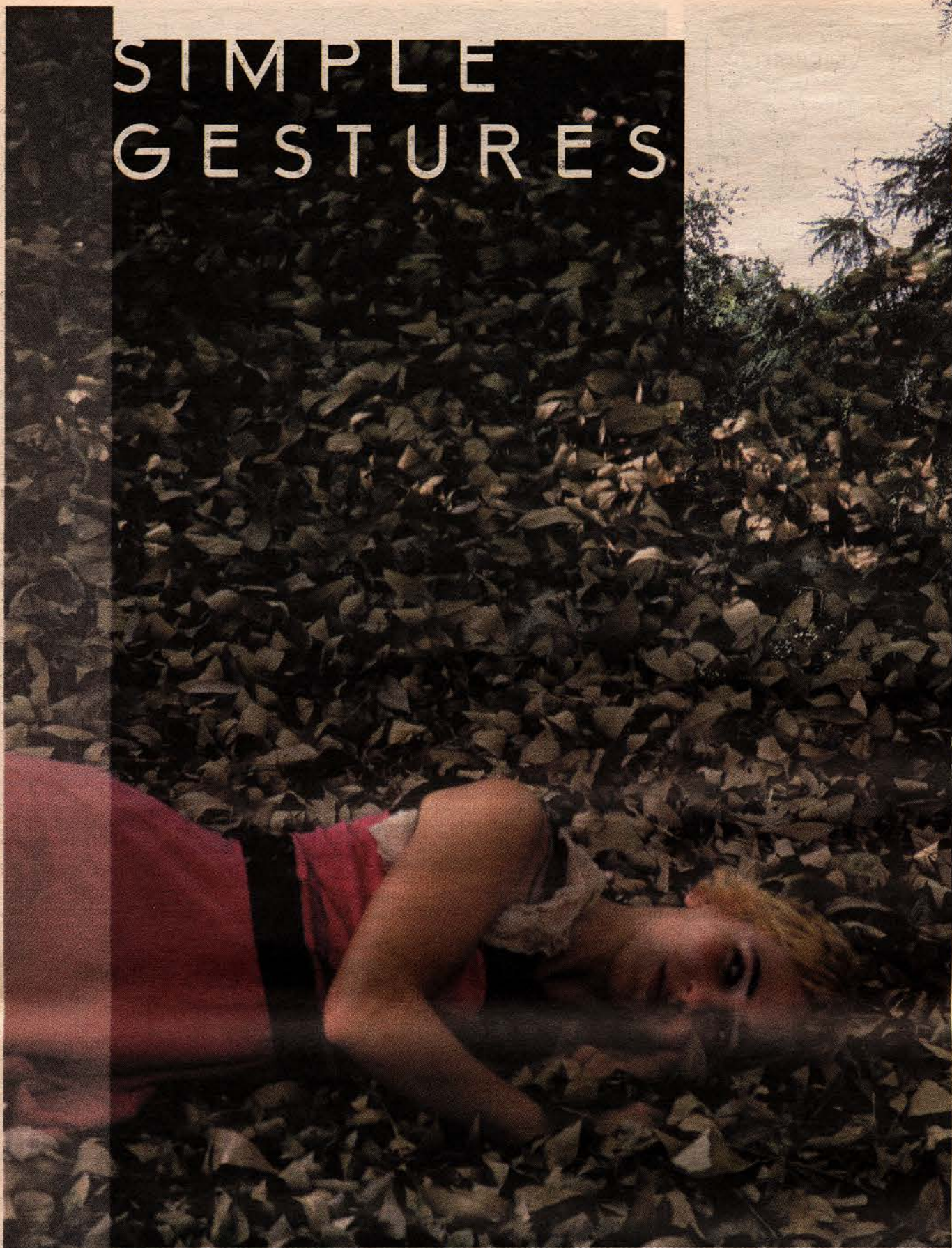
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SIMPLE GESTURES



Oliver Hall raps with radical traditionalists **Faun Fables**. Photography by Melanie Pullen.

THE AIRWAVES ARE SO SATURATED with false memories of childhood you can't walk around without a helmet or you'll become a legal idiot—I mean, the playground loves of heartstruck emo people, the barely fetal fancies of Radiohead stillborn colder than forceps, the general irresistible reflex contractions against dilation of the idios kosmos, not to speak of Michael Jackson, Jon Benet Ramsey and her twin that lived, Britney Spears.

The urge toward the nubile has expressed itself nowhere more strongly than in folk music. Once a deeply weird idiom devoted to the mysteries of hardship, tradition, games, abundance and death, questionable politics have transformed folk music on the one hand into dead pledges of allegiance to corpses of the Stalinist left, on the other into personal confessional songwriting so banal as to make you yearn wholly and bodily for a gruesome fatal mining disaster. But there are a few musicians who have the brains and guts to struggle with the old questions, the old answers; in other words, one thing you can do on a Friday night is witness the miraculous music of the Bay Area's Faun Fables.

Mainly you should do this because Dawn McCarthy, the Faun of Faun Fables, can totally, cruelly possess an audience like no other performer I've ever seen, except maybe Clevelanders David Thomas and Robert Kidney. Most recently I saw her do this at Spaceland in Los Angeles on Valentine's Day, but I'd seen her do it—participated in the thrill even—seven or eight times before, in *all* kinds of situations. In bars throbbing with the old procreant urge, I've heard Dawn raise her voice to a pitch and volume no one could ignore, shutting up the whole meat market; at Faun Fables' recent concert at downtown L. A. rockhole the Smell, she began the show walking through the audience yodeling, winning hearts and minds one by one with voice and presence. (Dawn: "If you talk about yodeling to people they laugh about it,

and they go 'Oh God, yodeling, that's so corny and weird,' but you just *do* yodeling and it *does* something to people. Must be a code in the DNA...") Dawn and her collaborator Nils Frykdahl, of the heavy, funny, scary bands Idiot Flesh and Sleepytime Gorilla Museum, tour the country playing avant rock clubs, churches, high schools.

Speaking to Dawn at Spaceland before her show I said, I feel like there's something in both of you guys that likes the challenge, maybe, of getting up in front of a room of people without knowing how they'll react?

"Yes! That's very true, because I've come to realize that not all musicians like that. A lot of musicians don't even like performing. It's nice to play the

shows where everything's all set up and controlled, and bright lights, but there's definitely something about the excitement of just working a room and the workout of it, being almost athletic, like 'This is part of the challenge!' In a way, the worst thing is when there's a room of people that are just *still*. It's not so bad when people are rowdy, 'cause it gives you something. Even with heckling, there's something to [work with]. We both get into that. We've cut our teeth playing *all* kinds of situations, all kinds of rooms, amplification, no amplification, surprising people."

Traditional songs are not interesting to the extent that they are "relevant," i.e. covered in video game noises and made to sound like Volkswagen ads, which indeed





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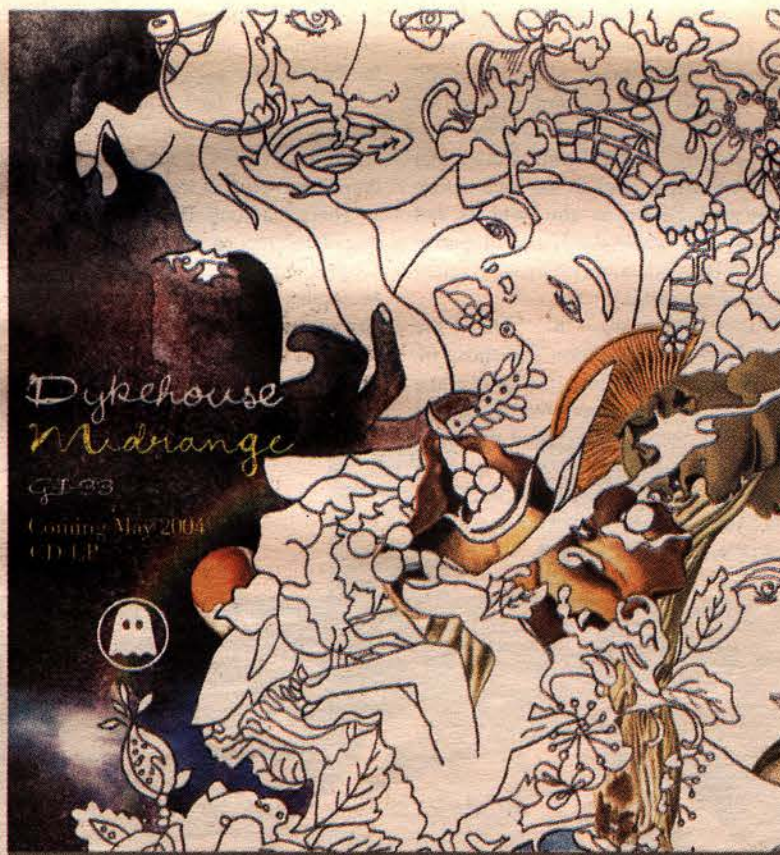
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they often become. For sure, folk and blues music can be endlessly renewed in myriad interesting ways, maybe more, but few of these are open to cheerful positivists surveying the knowable ordinary with e-meters and iBooks. Beck and Moby, without a skeptical thought between them, are perfect products of the reigning technocratic, infantile serenity. Dawn and Nils are smart, feeling adults who have lived in the world. I wouldn't bring this up if you couldn't hear it in their music.

Here's what I mean. The first time I saw Faun Fables, in late 2000, my friends had dragged me there. They were the sort of friends who thought it was healthier to drink in a bar listening to confessional singer-songwriters than to drink alone in study hole listening to the Damned's "Drinking About My Baby" on repeat. With friends like those etc., but I went, and suffered an endless set by a bunch of whimsical carnivalists in madrigal outfits whose nostalgia for the good old days of plaguey inquisitional Europe was exceeded in terrifying stupidity only by the enthusiasm of the mobbing crowd. When they finished and the club began to empty, I was slogged and relieved. Can we go now, I wondered.

Then Faun Fables began their performance on the barroom floor in paper plate masks as alter egos the Two Dimensions. Dawn McCarthy opened her mouth and everyone else shut up. It's the only time a band I was not prepared to like delivered me absolutely from my cares, rages and sickness.

I asked Dawn what she thought of revivalist folk types, say people who dress in madrigal outfits. She was far more charitable than I have been, but concluded, "I'm definitely an explorer, to just say 'I wanna go back and recreate a time that was' wouldn't do it for me."

She didn't even have to say it, you'd know from the songs written by Traditional and Anonymous in Faun Fables' repertoire: "Only A Miner," "The House Carpenter" and my favorite "She Is Gone" (where does the song come from and where has it gone?). All are songs about death and a resulting sense of loss and doom compensated, sometimes meagerly, sometimes abundantly, by mysteries of faith. Toward the end of their set the Fables used to play "Live Old," during which Dawn would age herself, drawing lines in her face before a compact mirror, as she sang its sad melody and made death sound pretty good: "better not count on dying/you just might be immortal."

This willingness to see the complications of tradition and those of, uh, *life*, set Faun Fables apart from many of their neofolk colleagues. We talked a lot about how the band lives and the small economy it inhabits in Oakland, growing food and bartering with neighbors. There was a term for their way of life and music that Dawn particularly liked.

DAWN AND NILS ARE SMART, FEELING ADULTS WHO HAVE LIVED IN THE WORLD. YOU CAN HEAR IT IN THEIR MUSIC. WHEN DAWN OPENS HER MOUTH EVERYONE ELSE SHUTS UP.

"Radical traditionalist, have you heard of that? I just saw it in some little book that was about Norse mythology and different folks that are getting into a lot of the stuff I'm talking about now..."

"I realize saying, 'Oh, hey, I'm gonna chop my own wood!'—I realize that at this point we have the luxury to be able to see those things as a grounding thing, to see the good things about it. Before, it was survival, and you would spend the bulk of your day just to take care of your food needs and all that. Do I wanna get to a state where that's all I'm doing? No, I don't, but I realize that we're in an interesting position right now where we can look at this stuff and choose how much we're gonna have it in our life. It's quite a privileged position to be in, to be able to say 'I wanna make some things by hand, but if I don't have time to do everything I'll go to the store, I can order from the farm.' Instead of baking bread and kneading it by hand being a chore—"Ooh God, I gotta do this every day and it's all I do all day"—we're able to see just the wonderful, grounding things about it... I guess my point is I don't have any *romantic* notions. It's something that has to do with where we're at now in the modern, present world."

Since Faun Fables' new album, released on Drag City, is called *Family Album*, I began the interview with a stupid question about Dawn's family.

"They were in the show, last week. Mom played the piano, brother played the piano, brought the house down with Beethoven," Nils said.

"The thing about *Family Album*," Dawn responded politely, "is it doesn't have to be specifically about my family or Nils's family. It also expands to archetypal family themes, family issues, but also 'family' meaning anything you feel kindred to. I tried to get into creaturely, non-human stuff as well."

"There's a song about the neighbor's dog on the record, you know," said Nils.

Nils's band, Sleepytime Gorilla Museum, played with Faun Fables at Spaceland. After a set of gorgeous folk

songs and some thrilling martial covers from postwar Europe, featuring the ghosts of Harry Lime and Holly Martins on zither and balalaika, it warmed my heart to hear Nils introduce a song thus: "THIS SONG IS DEDICATED TO ALL THE RICH MOTHERFUCKERS RUNNING FOR OFFICE," or to hear Sleepytime Gorilla Museum's Unabomber song, which recuperates *The Man of La Mancha* from tweed or showbiz ideology, casting Ted Kaczynski as Don Quixote ("to dreeeeaaam the impossible dreeeeeeeeeeaaaaam"). To be fancy about it, Dawn and Nils share a historical imagination: the European numbers mentioned above are Brigitte Fontaine's "Eternelle" and the showstopper, Ewa Demarczyk's "Karuzela z Madonnami," or "Carousel with Madonnas," both on *Family Album*. For this last song, Dawn had to go to the railroad tracks in Emeryville to meet a mysterious Polish man who translated the lyrics for her; if you've ever been to Emeryville, you'll know it takes a powerful historical imagination to transform it into a setting for a spy movie.

Nils grew up in Oakland and has been playing music there over fifteen years. On the Idiot Flesh album *Fancy*—as in "fancy eggs"—the song "Teen Devil Worshipper Jonathan Cantero's List of Equipment for the 12th of October," a true crime song about matricide, helpfully annotated: "The following servants of darkness appear on Cantero's list: Venom, Judas Priest, Ozzy, Slayer, Mercyful Fate," is a fine example of his Rock Against Rock sensibility.

I asked him if it wasn't kind of, you know, *scary* sometimes being a honky bohemian among the resentful downtrodden poor. The vaguely racist premise of the question made him uneasy.

"At that level, those people are so down and out they don't have a whole lot of *fight* in 'em. And they're just like, 'Here's some people who've got more dollars than me, I'll ask 'em for two bucks and maybe they'll give it to me.' But yeah, there is a potentially heavy feeling in the areas where the artists come through, but it always starts with the bands; there was no loft scene going on then, it was just bands living in warehouse conditions, so that was not a threat, just kind of an anomaly. [Idiot Flesh's] first opening night party, we did have a gun pulled on us. Some local gang came by, like 'What's going on here? Don't fuck with our turf.'"

"They put the gun up to his chest," Dawn said.

"I said, 'We're just here to play music, and we're not the cops, you know.'"

Dawn, "How many years ago was that?"

Nils: "A long time ago, '89, '90, something like that."

My girlfriend at that first show cried inconsolably afterward. "Aw c'mon, they weren't *that* bad," I joked. "It's just that someone can... *do* that," she said. Again and again I've seen Dawn's voice upset and quiet people this way: in Berkeley, a train of goth girls would line up after the show for her benediction; in New York, my best friend Brie, herself a great singer and a hard sell, gushed "you're a *goddess*" as she bought a copy of the band's second album, *Mother Twilight*. And Faun Fables' music really did salve a wound or two of mine back when I was a sodden mess. It may be only because of this emotional commitment that *Early Song* is my favorite of their albums (it's available from faunfables.net, along with tour dates, etc). Anyway, it captures the band's live sound as the other two albums don't, and captures songs they don't often play anymore. In terms of sheer beauty, it is comparable to *Astral Weeks* or Sonic Youth's *Dirty*. Arthur eagerly awaits the return of *The Transit Rider*, Faun Fables' musical, which Dawn and Nils hope to take on the road again later this year.

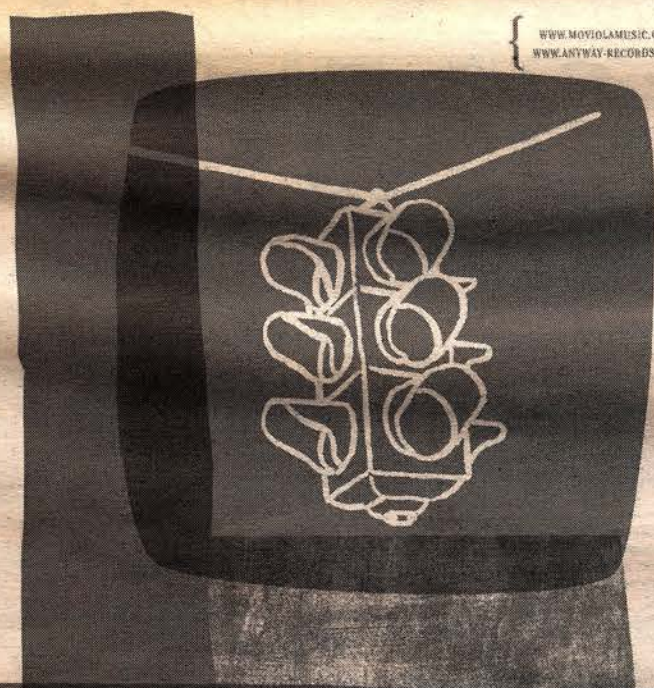
Singing with her face in a handheld frame, Dawn ended the Spaceland set sending framed family pictures out into the audience, one an old picture of an old woman, another a recent snapshot of two teenage girls dissolving in conspiratorial laughter. As the photos circulated, the audience was visibly transformed by the tenderness of it, here by the pathos that vanity comix artists seek in lost family photos at flea markets, there by the recognition of familiar loves and disappointments in the daily ancient household tragedy, everywhere by the worry *how will she get those pictures back and what if she doesn't?* Like Faun Fables' music, the simple gesture made everyday things precious, old junk sit up and speak with the whole pagan earth barking and roiling around you. You don't have to be an animist to visit this world but you will have to leave your room.

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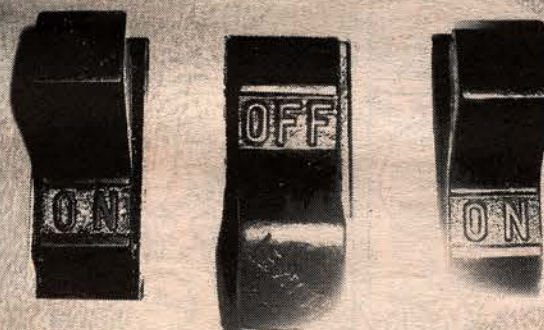
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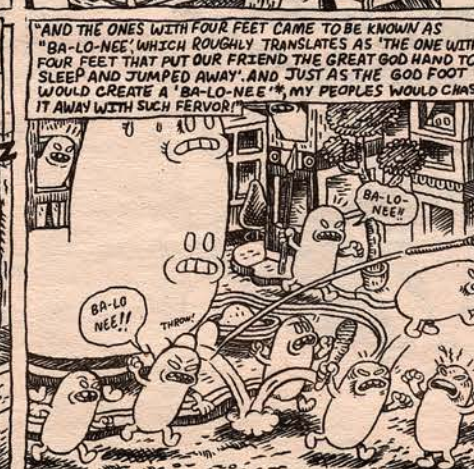
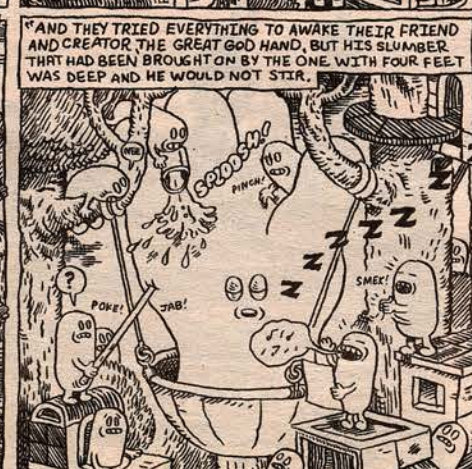
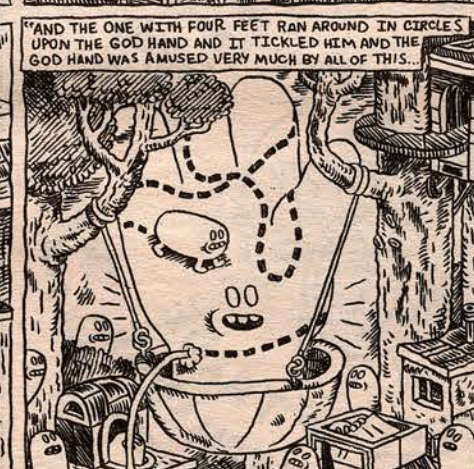
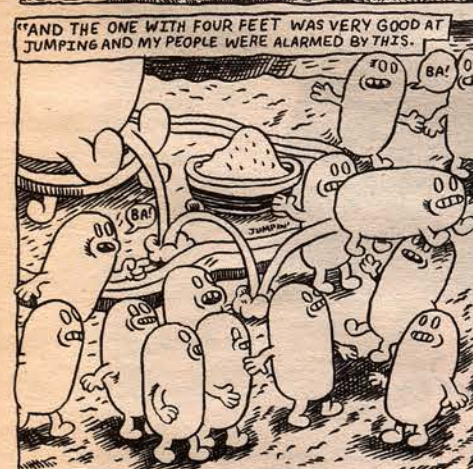
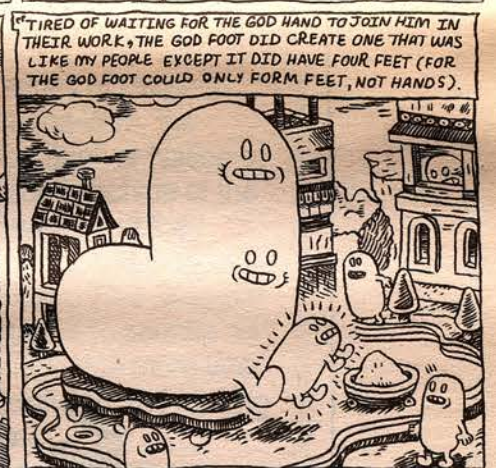
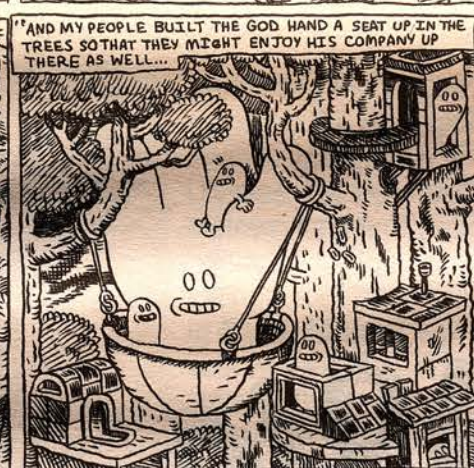
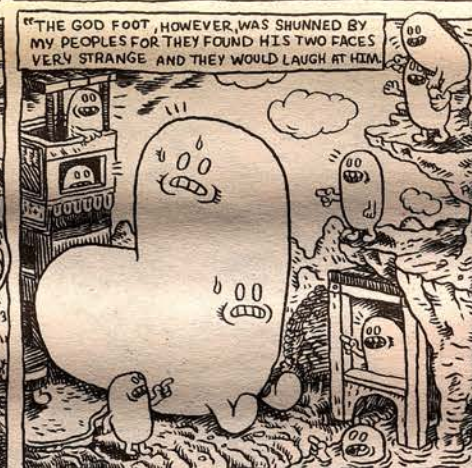
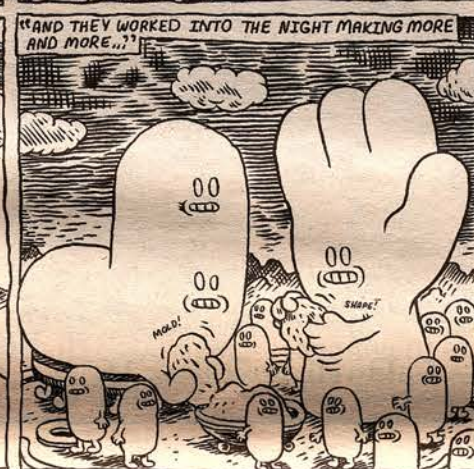
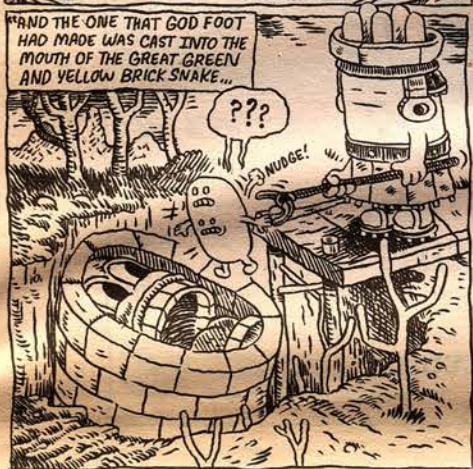
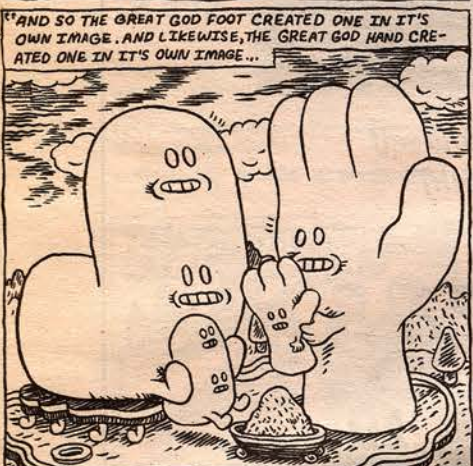
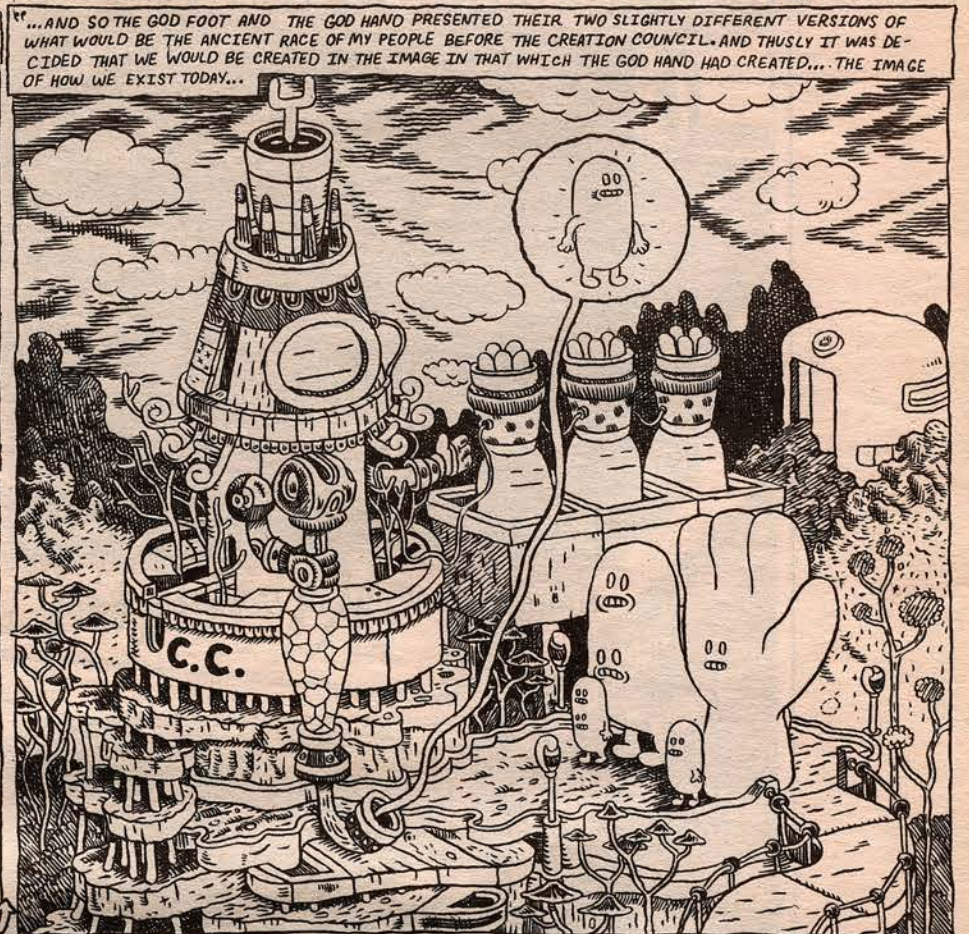
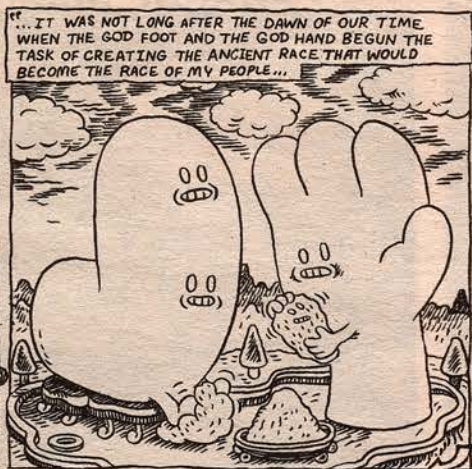
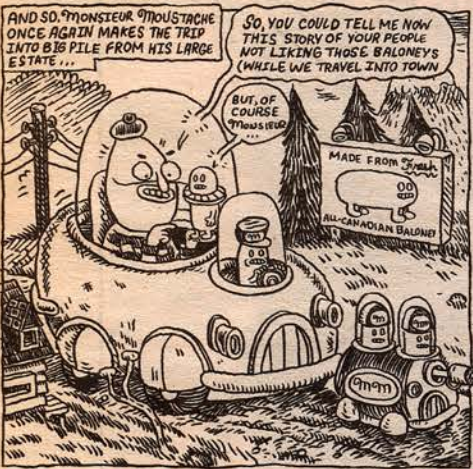
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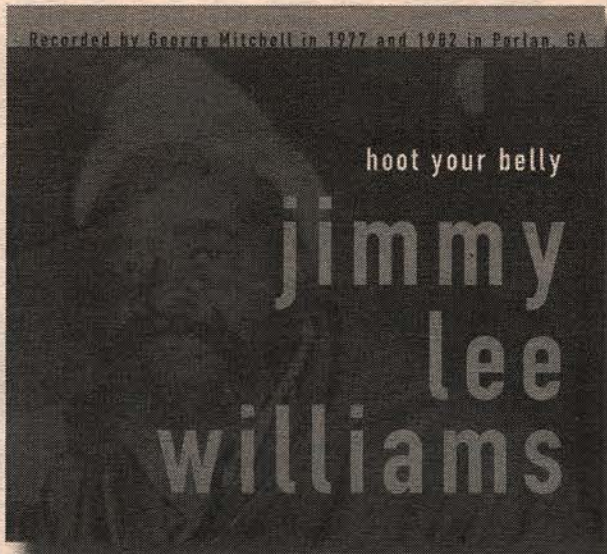
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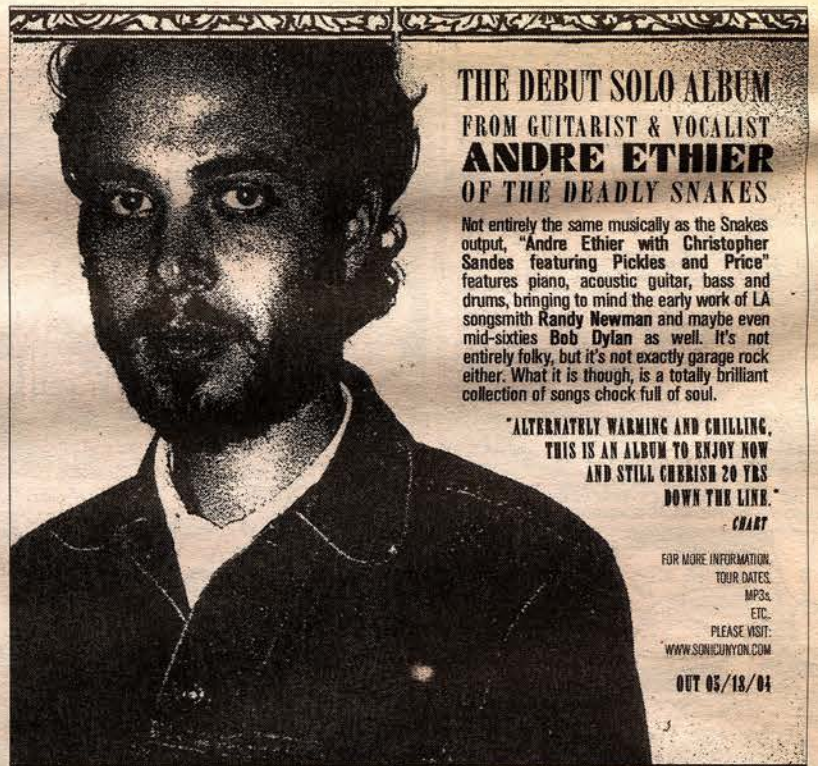


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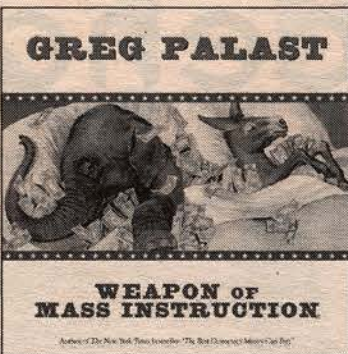
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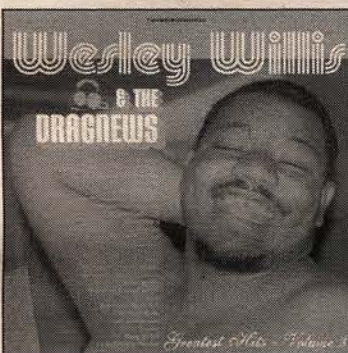
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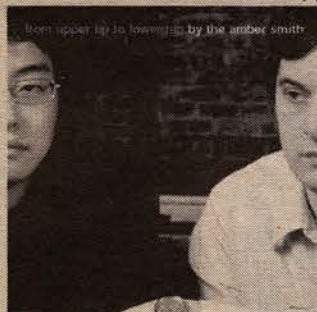


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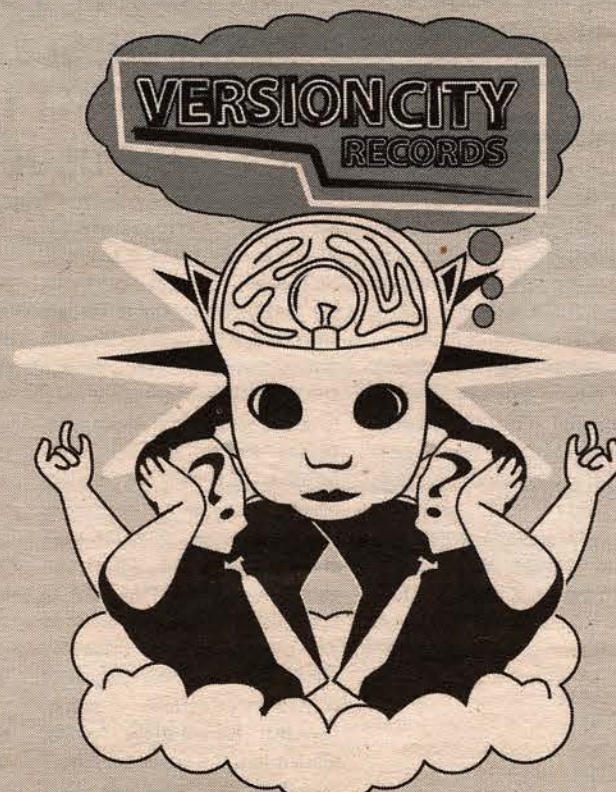
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Leminiscences

James Parker on the autobiography of Mr. Kilmister.

WHEN I WAS AT an English boarding school in the '70s, a sweatless boy among sweatless boys, all of us with scuffed shins and hard little minds, there was a brief craze for fainting. It swept through the school like some hot new type of dance. Chapel was the place for it: eight o'clock in the morning, leaky grey light, prayers humming their mothwings, and the pale unbreakfasted boys would sigh and slump from their pews, one after another, in mild reversals of boy-energy. Low blood sugar had something to do with it—we were scandalously, I would say almost criminally underfed—but you couldn't doubt the narcotic properties of the prayers themselves. There was this Marian chant from the 15th century which we would do from time to time: the Litany of Loreto. A real trance-inducer. "Mystical rose!...PRAY for us...Tower of David!... PRAY for us... Tower of Ivory!... PRAY for us"—and so on, repeating and building in pounding, swaying dactyls until the brain cuts out. Years later I heard this rhythm again, in the same call-and-response measure, on a re-release of Hawkwind's live album *Space Ritual*—"Time we left... (This world today!)... Brain police... (Not far behind!)... Trying to make you... (Lose your mind!)... Bastards! I smelled again stale pieties of incense, and felt a draught upon my knees as if I were in short trousers.

But this is all by the by, and only slenderly related to my theme, which is the new book *White Line Fever*, by Lemmy with Janiss Garza. Lemmy was of course in Hawkwind, playing his bass, and for a while he was the best thing about them—*Space Ritual* is dark hippy wreckage anyway, a huge crude monomaniacal bummer with drums dolefully thrashing and vocals following sax following guitar following bass through riff after drug-blind riff. Quite impressive, in other words, but one wearies of the mindfuck. One wearies of Bob Calvert sneering "Sonic attack—in your district!" through metallic sinuses, the seedy psychedelic warlordism of it. Only the steady, earthy rumble of Lemmy's bass keeps you listening. I love his sound on this record—surging, human, refusing the pull of outer space and the gnawings of paranoia. It's not the definitive Lemmy sound, not the tremendous slobbering chordal attack he perfected in Motörhead, but it's full of personality. In the midst of the Hawkzone, it's comforting. Lemmy is very funny about Hawkwind in *White Line Fever*, about DikMik's fit-inducing sound machines and Dave Brock's regular delusion that he'd bitten his own tongue off, or his habit of leaning out of his car to shout "Spank! Spank! Spank!" at passing schoolgirls; "Hello girls! Spanky-spanky!" About Nik Turner—"one of those moral, self-righteous assholes, as only Virgos can be"—Lemmy is candidly bitchy,

which is even better. Only prolonged night-after-night exposure to Turner's farmyard sax-playing, his bleats and clucks and moos, could have distilled this weary disenchantment: "He was holding the saxophone and capering—he was a great caperer, Nikky." Or (my favorite line in the whole book) "He'd get drunk as a cunt on wine."

I'd like to know precisely how *White Line Fever* was written, the mechanics of authorship as it were. Behind every book like this is a very interesting sub-book, which is the story of the hack and his or her subject, and how they got it together, how long it took,

and how they suffered mutually, etc. *White Line Fever* smells of Lemmy in his quarters, his LA apartment with the curtains drawn against the late afternoon and the walls prickling with WWII memorabilia, and the great man filling ashtrays and bullshitting away, forgetting names, remembering dates, swirling through anecdotal loops, mumbling and thinking and chuckling. Nine-tenths of it is unmistakably Lemmy's speaking voice, the voice of a roughened but still elegant old-school raconteur: "But back to Robbo. I'd known him for years—we met under a table at Dingwalls." Lemmy's memories—his Lemmories or Leminiscences—have a patchy, refracted fog-and-strobe quality, which is just as it should be. It gives them depth; early in the book we get a prismatic flash of the Beatles at the

Cavern, playing odd-shaped guitars, telling jokes and "eating cheeserolls while singing" and headbutting hecklers. They sound as violent as the Marx Brothers. "Hard men," says Lemmy, and goes on to disparage the Rolling Stones: "Fair enough, the Stones made great records, but they were always shit on stage, whereas the Beatles were the gear." The gear! Later on we are granted a piercing glimpse of Sid Vicious, "this fucking bundle of pipe cleaners in a pair of tennis shoes," taking on a huge Maltese bouncer. Now and again the prose turns professional, breaking

("I believe that is when I acquired my taste for cold food...")—to his succession of pre-Hawkwind bands: Motown Sect, the Rocking Vicars, Sam Gopal, Opal Butterfly... You can hear the blossoming of psychedelia in that list of names, but the freakiest material by far is before 1968, when Lemmy was moving through a sort of rock'n'roll Arcadia, a pre-lapsarian wonderland where bands wore the Finnish national costume ("reindeer-skin boots, white trousers with lace-up flaps, these smocks from Lapland and vicar's collars. I thought that was very big, you know...") and

that's more or less how it turned out. We were a blues band, really..."

Ex-Thin Lizzy guitarist Brian Robertson, brought into the band after the grumbling departure of "Fast" Eddie Clarke, flashes across the Motörhead story like some sort of insanely virtuosic ballet-slipped phantasm, trailing the acid wisps of his guitar-sound. His dyed red hair, his skintight emerald green shorts—the defiant androgyny of it!—his mercurial refusal to commit to Motörhead, his pain-in-the-assness, his states of extremely private and useless intoxication (Lemmy tells of finding him in the lobby of a Spanish hotel, on his feet but with his face smudged against the glass of a display case full of "crystal teddy bears and shit like that," a bottle of Cointreau in his hand, asleep)... Robbo was truly Hermes, the on-the-move godling, and the band couldn't hold him. Or he couldn't hold his guitar. Or something. At any rate he got fired, but not before his wild style had torn Motörhead loose from their own beery bottom-end for the most beautiful album of their career: *Another Perfect Day*.

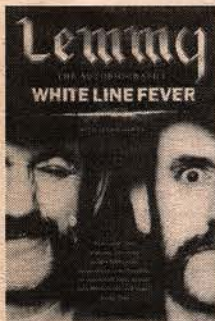
I wonder how much Janiss Garza got paid for doing this. I hope it was a decent amount. I once asked an older journalist what the point was of writing 'as-told-to' books and he said "Well, do you like money?" So maybe she did okay. On the other hand, as Lemmy himself insists to an almost maudlin degree, his stock in the industry is rather low at the moment: no hits, no buzz. Just a living legend. But how it lives! If you haven't heard him doing "Shake Your Blood" on Dave Grohl's Probot record, do yourself a favor and buy it quick: it's the best Motörhead track for some time, classic Lemmy, from the end-of-the-line sloganeering of the lyrics—"Rock out—strike it rich/My, my, my—it's a bitch"—to the shattered catarrhal abyss of his voice. Grohl's music, plainly written on some monstrous "Ace of Spades" adrenaline-spike, is almost a hallucination of Motörhead: a shimmering refinement, two feet off the ground. The best any of us can do is rise to the occasion, and Lemmy always does. He's always up for it, up for anything, pathologically game—he'll step up and play bass with Frankie Goes To Hollywood if it means he can go to the party afterwards. Last year he popped up on the Rollins-sponsored *Rise Above* album, doing Black Flag's "Thirsty and Miserable." What a performance—his sodden grandeur overpowers. He has lived, and paid for it, and swayed and sobbed and lived again, and got his face stuck to the table, and risen up to live and pay some more. He is a great Englishman. He should be knighted, or decorated, or given some strange and unique peerage, a thousand acres of savage highland where he can breed his Nazi llamas.

LEMMY'S DRUG-TAKING, FROM VERY EARLY ON, SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN LIMITLESS. EVENTUALLY, A DOCTOR TELLS HIM THAT HIS BLOOD IS NO LONGER HUMAN.

into jauntily anonymous as-told-to-ese—"We only had a fortnight to record *Overkill*, our second album and first for Bronze. Considering our checkered recording history, however, it was a world of time for us"—but that's just Ms. Garza doing her job, getting the facts in. By and large the Lemmy ramble flows phlegmy and untainted. "I did die once—well the band thought I had, at least. But I hadn't. The whole thing started when we were going home from a gig in the van. This guy, John the Bog, was our driver—actually, he died, about two years after this incident, come to think of it..."

The book is basic in structure, being the story of Lemmy from boy to man, through his years as a "dosser"—sort of a countercultural vagrant in a US army jacket, living in caves and barns

everyone was called Tempy or Ciggys or Scroggy or Noggy, like little woodland animals. It was in this era that Lemmy learned his showmanship and his taste for the scrum of life on the road; his drug-taking, from very early on, seems to have been limitless, and his matter-of-fact account of it builds quite gently towards the not entirely surprising moment when his doctor tells him that his blood is no longer human. After Hawkwind fired him in the middle of a US tour he came into his own, forming an early version Motorhead within weeks, and thereafter the pace picks up and the focus narrows a bit. The Motörhead blueprint is revealed: "I wanted it to be sort of like the MC5, since that was the big hero band of most of the underground, and throw in elements of Little Richard and Hawkwind. And



Reviewed:
White Line Fever
by Lemmy Kilmister
with Janiss Garza
(Citadel Trade)
320 pages, \$14.95

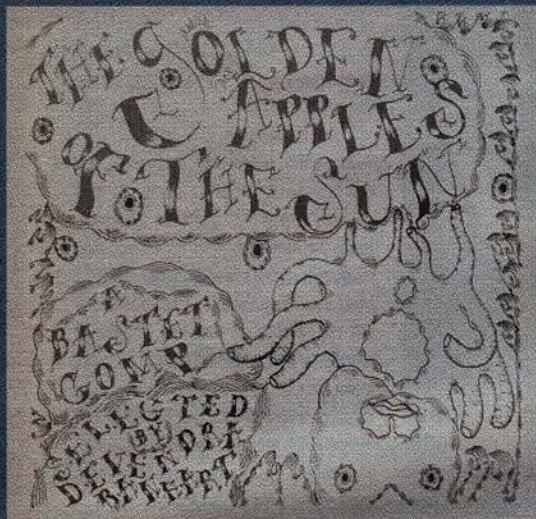
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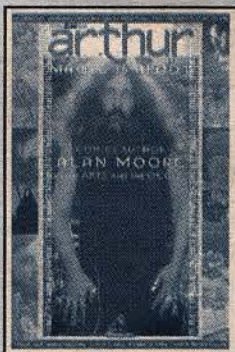
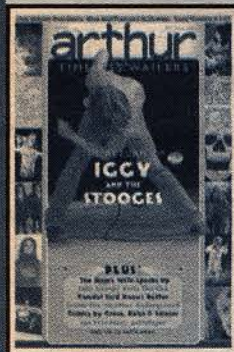
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Arthur No. 9 (Mar 04) Legendary doom metal/stoner rock lifer **WINO**, **MC5**, **Liars**, **Pirate Radio**, **Daniel Pinchbeck**; the Great Arcata-to-Ferndale Kinetic Sculpture Race; Plus: T-Model Ford, Seldon Hunt, Leif Goldberg, Ivan Brunetti, John Hankiewicz, Tom Hart.

Arthur No. 8 (Jan 04) Karin Bolender on **Dollywood**; **Fiery Furnaces**; **Brother JT**; the cult of Maximon, the Guatemalan patron saints of thieves and whores; Brother JT; Holly Golightly, chef; "R.I.P. SUV" by Charles Potts; comics by Gary Panter; Steve Aylett on the Matrix; (LIMITED QUANTITY)

Arthur No. 7 (Nov 03) Cover by **John Coulthart**; **My Bloody Valentine's Kevin Shields**; **Sun Ra**; underground psych bands **Sunburned Hand of the Man**, **Comets On Fire** and **Six Organs of Admittance**; Ask **Peaches**; photos by **Susannah Breslin**; John Geiger on the **Dream Machine** and the **Beats**; Plus: T-Model Ford, Steve Aylett and Brian Evenson on terrible diseases; comics by **Sammy Harkham**, **Megan Kelso** and **Souther Salazar**. (LIMITED QUANTITY)

Arthur No. 6 (Sept 03) **Iggy & the Stooges**, interviews with **Iggy and the Ashetons**, **Mike Watt** tour diaries and amazing live photos. Plus: Holly Golightly, the **L.A. Cacophony Society**, the **Weather Underground** documentary, T-Model Ford, Erin Cosgrove's **The Baader Meinhof Affair**, Mrs. Nugent's memoirs, horoscopes, Paul Cullum, Byron Coley & Thurston Moore, and comics by **Jordan Crane**, **Megan Kelso** and **Souther Salazar**. (LIMITED QUANTITY)

Arthur No. 5 (July 03) "Arthur Against Empire" special featuring **David Cross**, **Chris Hedges**, **Alan Moore**, **David Byrne**, **Michael Moorcock**, **Art Spiegelman**, the **GLAMericans**, **Michael Brownstein**, **Charles Potts**, **Amy Trussell**, **Daniel Pinchbeck**, **Sharon Rudahl**, **Robbie Conal**, **Godspeed You! Black Emperor**, **John Coulthart**, **Patti Smith & Jem Cohen**, **Peter Kuper**, **Megan Kelso** with **Ron Rege**, **Bill Griffith** and **David Lasky**. Plus: the **Electric Six**, **June Carter Cash**, **Paul Cullum**, **Byron Coley & Thurston Moore**.

Arthur No. 4 (May 03) **Alan Moore** on art, magic and consciousness; On the road with **The Black Keys** and **Sleater-Kinney**; Ask T-Model Ford; Karin Bolender salutes **Othar Turner** and **Bernice Pratcher**; **Alissa Quart** on how corporate marketers target kids; comics by **Martin Cendreda**, **Renée French**, **Luster Kaboom**, **Steven Weissman**, **Johnny Ryan**, **Jordan Crane** and **Sammy Harkham**. Plus **Byron Coley & Thurston Moore**.

Arthur No. 3 (Mar 03) A wake for **Joe Strummer**, with a lengthy interview by **Kristine McKenna** and magnificent photos by **Ann Summa**; The **Polyphonic Spree**, profiled with portrait by **Paul Pope**; an excerpt from **A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album**; **John Lurie** deals advice; artist **Shirley Tse**; comics by **Sammy Harkham**, **Jordan Crane**, **Johnny Ryan**, **Sam Henderson**, **Marc Bell** and **Ron Rege Jr.** Plus **Byron Coley & Thurston Moore**. (LIMITED QUANTITY)

Arthur No. 2 (Jan 03) Unseen photos of the **Velvet Underground**, **Lenny Bruce**, **Anita O'Day**, **James Baldwin**, **Marlon Brando**, the **Black Panther Party** by **Charles Brittin**; **Sue Carpenter** joins the circus; **Devendra Banhart** profiled; **Douglas Rushkoff** talks with **Genesis P-Orridge**; **Steve Aylett** on **Jeff Lint**; except from **Caetano Veloso's** autobiography; Ask T-Model Ford; comics by **Kevin Huizenga**, **Jordan Crane**, **Anders Nilsen** and **James Kochalka** and **Sammy Harkham**; **Byron Coley & Thurston Moore**; and **Peter Relic** remembers **Jam Master Jay**.

Arthur No. 1 (Oct 02) Premiere issue featuring **Mat Hoffman**; **Peaches** interviewed by **Ian Svenonius**; **Daniel Pinchbeck**; at home with **Arthur C. Clarke**, with a portrait by **Geoff McFetridge**; a frightful fairytale by **Dame Darcy**; **Eddie Dean's** **Blue Ridge Mountains** ice cream truck memoirs; **Joe Carducci** on contempo culture, with painting by **Camille Rose Garcia**; one-panel comics by **David Berman**; a profile of **Lift to Experience**; **Neil Hamburger** gives advice; **Paul Cullum** on **Eagle Pennell**; and **Byron Coley & Thurston Moore**.

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Camera Obscura

"The Outsiders"

BY PAUL CULLUM

"Listen, you fuckers, you screwheads. Here is a man who would not take it anymore. A man who stood up against the scum, the cunts, the dogs, the filth, the shit. Here is a man who stood up."
—Travis Bickle, *Taxi Driver*

"New rule: You can't be an outsider if you're already president."
—Bill Maher

Was it Richard Nixon who invented the outsider in American politics? Nixon, the festering Quaker, who so resented the Kennedys, the liberal Harvard elite, the charismatic cabal of ineluctable privilege, that he made his presidency an armed encampment, and codified his enemies into the world's most exclusive guest list?

Before him, the century's presidents were patricians and gentleman intellectuals, academics and company men, generals and crooks and tentacled leviathans rising from the Senate. *Après* Nixon and his designated stand-in Ford, we got Carter, the peanut farmer-nuclear physicist; Reagan, the rancher-statesman, and his stand-in Bush; Clinton, the wonk-lothario-honorary black president; and now Bush Redux, the Jim-Bowie-at-the-Alamo president. Trailing behind them was a comical retinue of apron-clad inepts and third-party spoilers—H. Ross Perot, the Weenie King from Preston Sturges' *Palm Beach Story*; Ralph Nader, the stooping Jimmy Stewart from *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Their only thing in common was that they were somehow outside the institutional cesspit of D.C. power—"in," but no longer "of."

Nixon was certainly the unsung inspiration for '70s cinema, the flailing windmill against which the disaffected tilted. It's not just that the '70s were the '60s on film, the natural bridle of adolescence against authority. The decade is a bell-shaped descent converging on the vortex of Watergate and Nixon's flight from power in 1974. A Shakespearean figure who screened *Patton* repeatedly the weekend before he ordered the bombing of Cambodia, Nixon was the role model for Michael Corleone in the *Godfather Trilogy*, the dissembling mayor in *Jaws* and the Emperor in *Star Wars*, and the literal heavy of *Hearts and Minds*, *Medium Cool*, *Shampoo* (staged on the day of his reelection) and *All the President's Men*. His tenure directly inspired the agitprop of *M*A*S*H*, *Catch-22*, *Coming Home* and *Apocalypse Now*; the political paranoia of *Taxi Driver*, *The Parallax View*, *Three Days of the Condor* and *Marathon Man*; and the institutional corruption of *Serpico*, *Chinatown*, *The Conversation*, *Sugarland Express*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Night Moves* and *Network*. But no more political allegory survives the decade than Robert Altman's *Nashville*—conceived



during the Watergate hearings, filmed during Nixon's resignation and released in time for the Bicentennial.

In honor of the election year, Altman's six-hour miniseries *Tanner '88*, originally made for HBO with *Doonesbury* satirist Garry Trudeau during the 1988 election, is currently being rebroadcast on the Sundance Channel, complete with recently filmed one-minute "Fireside Chats" with the original cast to accompany each episode (which hopefully will show up on the rumored Criterion DVD due this fall). But *Nashville*, available in widescreen format with plenty of extras from Paramount Home Video, is where the director first explored the nexus of politics and celebrity. Altman's putative masterpiece is contractually the story of the country music capital of America, although like *Taxi Driver*, it is revealed in its final moments to be a pathography of political assassination. In Jan Stuart's *The Nashville Chronicles* (Limelight Editions Books), an artfully researched volume of behind-the-scenes anecdotes and historical

these kinds of films really are about is tone and behavior. And so the words, in a funny way, are like clues. But you cast for behavior and cast for tone, or against it, to bring it to life." (Tewkesbury is currently a consulting producer on CBS's *The Guardian*, which is doing some interesting stuff under the radar.)

The finished film follows Tewkesbury's script scene for scene, beat for beat, and she constantly worked with the actors to keep their improves on point. Altman, who had hired real Vietnam draft dodgers living in Vancouver to populate the mining camp in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, and who would use ex-addict Synanon members as casino gamblers in *California Split*, packed real country music fans into every frame, and added session players like fiddle phenomenon Vassar Clements for, in Tewkesbury's elegant phrase, "unencumbered authenticity." And politics, which hung like an ominous cloudbank, seemed to infuse everything. Tewkesbury patterned Triplette after John Dean and other Watergate witnesses,

brother Rubel's campaign for governor of in 1963, which virtually invented the Mississippi Republican Party. Once on set, his family's political connections proved invaluable: He pulled strings so the British Chaplin could get her work visa, got permission to close down Interstate 65 to film the opening traffic jam and recruited extras for the political smoker and striptease (and confirmed that such things occurred when cast and crew were horrified by the reaction). With Denver political operative Ron Hecht, acting on Altman's instructions to "invade my movie," he set up an actual campaign office and strategy in the midst of the primary election for Tennessee governor.

With a voice like warm syrup, in the manner of Shelby Foote or David McCulloch (the Ken Burns/*Seabiscuit* guy), Phillips recorded his voiceover in a single 18-minute speech—which, in some sort of karmic transfer, is the exact length of the missing portion of the Watergate tapes. Full of folksy palliatives and Old Testament constructions like "It is

Electoral College is long overdue.

Those parts of the speech excised or indecipherable in the film itself, but included in the full text available in Tewkesbury's published script, make the point all the more:

"With proper leadership and effort, we can wipe out crime as surely as this country wiped out polio or smallpox... Today in America, with its unmatched resources, it is exceedingly ridiculous, a total absurdity, that any citizen with any ailment, mental or physical, should go medically unattended... Can it possibly make sense to regiment farms and farmers when people are ill-fed, if not downright hungry?... To tax the salaries of people on poverty-level incomes, then turn around and give back in food stamps twice the amount of the tax?... Every community needs special programs for the mentally ill, the aged, the retarded, the handicapped. To fall short in these areas is to bring disgrace on all our houses."

Tracked down at his rural home in Corinth, Mississippi, Phillips, now 80, claims he was totally sincere.

"I more or less believe what I wrote," he says. "I don't know where they got that, because I had my whole heart in it. It was different, but we were running a different race. The things that I believe in, a Republican or a Democrat could both say them. Carter hadn't come on the scene yet, but that was what I was thinking of. And I really took it seriously, that any candidate that would come out and say some of those things would get a lot of attention."

At Altman's behest, Phillips revived the Walker character once more in 1987's *O.C. and Stiggs*, but by then he had slipped into parody, more Wally George-style Orange County wrestler-Republican than aging idealist. Walker has just published his first novel in two decades, *Red Midnight*, and claims he's a Hillary Clinton supporter in 2008.

Altman and Nixon's paths crossed once more, in *Secret Honor*, a one-man play starring Philip Baker Hall as a paranoid, suicidal Richard Nixon with raccoon eyes and Eddie Munster hair who looks like Robert Blake in *Lost Highway*. Nixon's "secret" is that he faked the Watergate tapes "to lead Congress to the tip of the wrong iceberg," hiding the fact that his superiors planned to keep him in the White House for eight more years and the war going indefinitely, ensuring a steady flow of heroin to the Mob and kickbacks of U.S. aid from Saigon into CREEP, the Committee to Re-Elect the President.

These days, they just give the money back in tax cuts and cut out the middleman.

VIEWED THREE DECADES LATER, WALKER'S CAMPAIGN PLATFORM IN NASHVILLE SEEMS TO PUSH PROGRESSIVISM TOWARD A NEW MILITANCY, IN A WAY THAT IS LESS MODEST PROPOSAL THAN COMMON SENSE

context, Altman calls the film his "Grand Motel."

Coming off of *Thieves Like Us* in Northern Mississippi, Altman sent writer Joan Tewkesbury to nearby Nashville to sop up the city and keep a rigorous journal. Working from instinct, Tewkesbury charted two dozen characters on a grid and compiled a 175-page script, which despite numerous memorable lines (Ned Beatty's Delbert, the local fixer, tells Michael Murphy's John Triplette, the oil-slick California advance man, "Well, I admire your optimism, I was just wondering if it was regional."), Altman tossed in the air, hoping through improvisation to hew closer to an America they all felt was about to redline.

"It was set up like a rug," remembers Tewkesbury, "like you were weaving a rug. And when he told the actors to throw away the script and forget the dialogue, there were actors who did every stitch of dialogue as it had been written, and then there were others who had this magnificent other stuff. What you find out is that the words are nice and dialogue is great in plays and on television, but what

which Murphy expanded to include a college acquaintance who became a rafter, one of Nixon's dirty tricks team. Music City patriarch Haven Hamilton (initially written for Robert Duvall), based on country music titans like Hank Snow, Conway Twitty and Tex Ritter, was played by Henry Gibson based on Henry Kissinger, for the power, and Bob Hope, for the longevity. It was Gibson who, wounded in the final assassination scene, improvised the line "We're not Dallas." (Murphy starred in *Tanner '88*, and both actors showed up in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* as an Altman homage.)

Looking for a way to unify the film's emerging politics, Altman added third-party candidate Hal Phillip Walker, whose radical platform is voiced via a loudspeaker mounted atop a campaign van that segues between scenes. To handle the rhetoric, narration and logistics of the campaign, Altman approached Thomas Hal Phillips, a novelist who had been invaluable on *Thieves Like Us* as the head of the Mississippi Film Commission, and whose family was heavily involved in state politics. Phillips identified himself as an FDR Democrat, but had run his

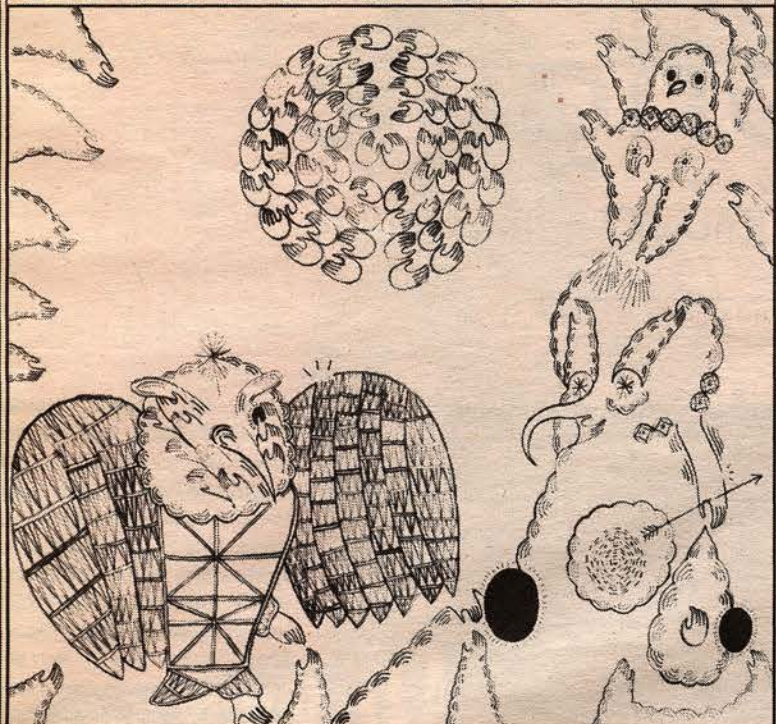
the very nature of government to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel," his declarations were considered extremely prescient when Jimmy Carter mounted a similar down-home populism to win the Presidency a year later. Consequently, many interpreted it at the time as Altman's cynical jab at soft-headed demagoguery. Yet, viewed three decades later, in once again newly politicized times, Walker's platform seems to push Howard Dean or Dennis Kucinich-style progressivism toward a new militancy, in a way that is less modest proposal than common sense. His call to ban lawyers from Congress may be a legislative stretch. ("A lawyer is trained for two things and two things only: To clarify, that's one; and to confuse, that's the other. He does whichever is to his client's advantage. You ever ask a lawyer the time of day? He told you how to make a watch, didn't he?... Congress is composed of 535 individuals; 288 are lawyers.") And replacing the National Anthem with Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land" might border on the comical. But taxing the churches' "vast holdings of land and corporate investments" or abolishing the

Works discussed in this column:

Nashville (1975), directed by Robert Altman, written by Joan Tewkesbury (Paramount Home Video)
Tanner '88 (1988), directed by Robert Altman, written by Garry Trudeau (HBO Home Video)
Tanner "Fireside Chats" (2004), (The Sundance Channel)
Secret Honor (1984), directed by Robert Altman, written by Donald Freed and Arthur Stone (Vestron Video)
The Nashville Chronicles, by Jan Stuart (Limelight Editions; www.limelighteditions.com)

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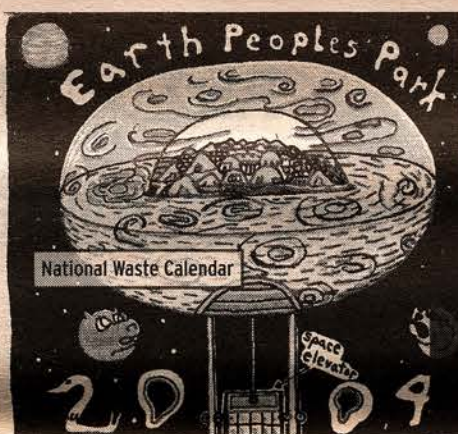
by BYRON COLEY and THURSTON MOORE

HOLY CROWS OF MARCH. The **SUN CITY GIRLS**, a trio first of Arizona, more recently of Seattle, are amongst the very busiest of bees. There have lately been new recordings by them, archival tapes dubbed to vinyl, associated releases, a series of CDs and DVDs they released documenting Asia non-popular culture. And we're sure there's more, because, hey, there's *always* more. And the latest package of SCG genius contains the six videos that they have released through *Abduction*; videos which span from 1990 to 2003, showing the incredible sonic and textual evolutions that have gripped the band in that time. Watching them sequentially makes for a heck of an interesting evening.

The first is *Cloaven Theater* and it kinda sets the procedural stage for all that follow. The format is largely based on hand-held cameras, recording both live performances as well as set pieces, random blasts of junk, and plenty else, presented in a way that suggests a post-nuclear vaudeville review. Bits of this, bits of that, all strung together with a specifically wrecked sense of humor and a genuine urge to confuse. The elements here include lip-synching, live improvisation, beverage guzzling, crudely exotic costuming, video burn, a JFA t-shirt (slyly acknowledging the band's hardcore roots), noise jams, musical rituals, globe balancing, one-eyed food slurping, chicken puppets and even a dramatic reading of a surrealist cartoon strip. Musically, it's the very early '90s, when the band was in a transitional stage, really beginning to incorporate heavy Asian thinking into their sound for the first time, and this tape gives a fairly swank overview of this period.

The Halcyon Days of Symmetry includes footage recorded between '90 and '00, and is again, all over some maps. It includes film collages, "found" Asian pop music samples, footage from a very stripped-down gig at a record store, manually conducted studio experiments, and a great live take of the epochal "Space Prophet Dogon" (from the *Torch of the Mystics* album). My only caveat would be to those parents who might like to purchase this as a birthday present for some special tot: there is one long collage sequence of a decidedly erotic nature, which may be unsuitable for young children. So take note!

It's Not Over 'Till the Skinny Arab Lights the Fuse is another potpourri. It showcases their first truly sophisticated use of puppet musicians (don't ask, just watch), an excellent example of the band's avant-garage approach to the questions raised by gamelan orchestras, another great live take of "Space Prophet Dogon" (with Emynd Kang on violin), and some more extended forays with Alan Bishop's "Uncle Jim" character, a true king of certain kinds of knowledge. Another parental warning must be issued for this one, however, as one of "Jim"'s soliloquies has a mockery of race-baiting that might not be suitable for tiny ears. In a way, though, this one really seems to revolve around a line from one of the skits: "I'm gonna shoot those birds someday. I don't like no one singin' around my house." In these words lies a mysterious key.



Don't be afraid to burrow for meaning.

If It Blows Up Park It is much more of a straight live documentation of the band than any of the other tapes. And that may make it one of the better ones to use as an intro for the unfamiliar. Documenting several performances from '93, this one really shows the band approaching their fulsome and fatty width. The way they combine the dialectics of free-rock with an unsurpassed aptitude for gobbling (and excreting) the music of the world is just stunning. There are, of course, a few comedy routines tossed in, as well as a brief trip to Rick Bishop's rare book store. Which looks really nice!

The Burning Nerve Ending Magic Trick has live material from the '96-'97 season, plus more of a focus on solo forays (in all known dimensions). There're also dancing statuettes with rather enormous penises, "Uncle Jim" begins to start sounding a bit like Beefheart in terms of word-construction, and Emynd Kang again guests on violin. This is not really one of the more music-heavy entries in the series, though; just so you know. But it does have one of the best smoking puppet scenes on film anywhere (we dare you to name a better one) and there are many confounded laughs to be had here.

Myths and Legends of the Blue West contains the most recent live stuff, shot just last year. So it is easily the best demonstration of what the band is like currently, and the strength of their mature sound is overwhelming. All of the turf they have stripped really comes together in a big flaming ball. And the sidebars are pretty neat, too. The Saddam mask is a nice touch, as is the Mike Tyson footage, the film

collage, and the "Uncle Jim" footage, which is more hardboiled this time around, and includes some of the finest smoking pedantry we've seen in a year of goddamn Sundays. So, really, this may be the very best point of entry to their video shelf. And we hope like mackerels that you will take the splash.

Really fine little art zine arrived from an Amsterdam club called **ANTI STROT**. It combines ratty graphics with punky drawings and collages, visual jokes that cross language borders easily, and even some smuts! Hey! Beautiful eye candy also comes in the form of **WASTE #5** (Paper Rodeo), edited by **LEIF GOLDBERG** of Providence, RI. (Mr. Goldberg's artwork was featured in the last ish of *Arthur*—see his full-page piece on page 10. —Ed.) The drawings have a spectral crudity that makes me think a little of Bruce Duncan and also of some guy who used to draw for *Arcade*. And, as it's from Paper Rodeo, it naturally has a ginchy silkscreened cover. And don't forget to ask Paper Rodeo about Goldberg's *National Waste 2004 Calendar*! It tweets! Ginchy art is also what one expects from the fantastic **GEORGANNE DEEN**, and her new book *Season of the Western Witch* (Perceval Press) has plenty of that, as well as some of her fine super-fine poetics, and a goldarn CD as well! LOOK at Georganne's cracked and visionary art! READ Georganne's organic baby-meat wordspew. LISTEN to Georganne's voice as she decants her lyrics in full-color with music tapping nearby (by Viggo Mortensen & Thurston, no less). It's a gas, baby! Also got a nice little DIY art/rant 'zine called **DREAMLOGIC**, which is another explicit example of how having a

friend who works at a copy shop can help feed the revolution to free the souls of humankind. In the same bag, but slicker than fudge, is the first issue of *Sleep Tight*, which is a sweet little color zine filled with images, drawings, photos and other visual fuckeroo. And it's only a buck!

Has anyone seen **VAMPIRE BELT**? They've only played twice as far as we know, but both gigs were supposedly ferocious enough to scare even the cops called to the scene to squash the riot. All we know is it's the first real hardcore exposition of mysterious noise snake Bill Nace and his buddy, Chris Corsano. Chris you know from the multitude of critical slather his liquid fire drumming has demanded these past few years. Bill, on the other hand, no one knows too much about, except for his brief sojourn in the UK wood-shedding with Dylan Nyokis and Karen Lollypop of Decaer Pinga and Smack Music 7 infamy. Bill ain't a Brit, but he ain't anti-Anglo either. He's a New England boy and he likes to crank out relentless raunch. At least that's what's in evidence on the one and only CD release of Vampire Belt, *Dead Is OK*. It's released on the way too long dormant Hot Cars Warp Records, Corsano's label, in conjunction with what is probably Nace's own label, Open Mouth. The whole affair rocks like congealing lava after a heavy broil, which may be due to the fact it was recorded live in a bait shop.

For psychedelic reading, two of the best zines ever have new issues out. There's Phil McMullen's **PTOLEMAIC TERRASCOPE** #34 with great archival pieces on the Electric Prunes, United States of America, Ill Wind and Quicksilver, amongst

others. And contempo coverage of England's Lazily Spun and Clive Palmer, plus such doughty Americans as Comets on Fire, Steven Wray Lobell, Steve Wynn and plenty more. Plus, of course, a CD featuring many of the above. There's also George Parson's **DREAM MAGAZINE** #4, which mixes good music stuff (Terry Riley, Fursaxa, Tanakh, Volcano the Bear, etc.) with other cultural coverage (Gary Snyder, Rick Veitch, Bernard Stollman, Last Visible Dog), with eight gazillion record reviews, in a way that will keep you glued to the toilet for hours. So get one of those squishy seats and lean back.

YOUNG PEOPLE are as unassuming-looking a band as we've seen since Lovechild came along. There're two friendly, duppy-esque guys, and a girl who looks like she secretly runs the show. The music they make on their second album, *War Prayers* (Dim Mak) has a lovely kind of stutter to it. In a way, it's basic drums + guitar (by Jeff Rosenberg, former tubster for Pink & Brown) + female vocals material (think many bands of the post-K galaxy), but it really kinda avoids cliches of both bigness and smallness, as well as loudness and softness. And yeah, this naif turf has been well worked in the last few years, but there is something really special about the quality this Brooklyn ('though L.A.-born) trio purveys. The drums click like fingers applauding the play, the strings cavoot with nice little slides and stagger around like skunks fresh from hibernation, the vocals float in and out of everything like silver clouds. People say that their live shows are more like a cross between cracked country and sonic booms, but this whole thing's as smooth as a butter rub from Jesus' own fingers. Which is a pretty cool thing. Come on, admit it!

Anyone with a serious interest in the history of underground comix is hereby directed to pick up Bob Levin's **THE PIRATES & THE MOUSE** (Fantagraphics). Although Levin writes like the lawyer he is (meaning this is no fast read), the story he tells is so cool you won't care. In the early 1970s a group of underground cartoonists (some more willing than others) decided to fuck with Disney and copyright law in general by producing a comic book that used Disney characters in thoroughly counter-culture fashions. Thus *Air Pirates* was born. Disney ignored them for a while, but eventually went after them and the ensuing lawsuit wound through the courts for years. Levin has written a completely thorough history of the case, the context of its times, and individual portraits of many of the key players. There are good illustrations, tons of oral history about previously-unknown topics, and it's a great thing to have consumed. Just make sure you have the spare time to tackle it first!

Not since Black Flag jammed with the Minutemen to create Minuteflag has a collaboration between two rock blasts been so anticipated as that of **BLACK DICE AND WOLF EYES**. As legend has it the Dice, on one of their subterranean jaunts cross country, hit the Club Olson basement and spewed so freaking loud that it created a "quiet center" in the space; all the volume manifested itself as physical "concrete trash" outside the basement

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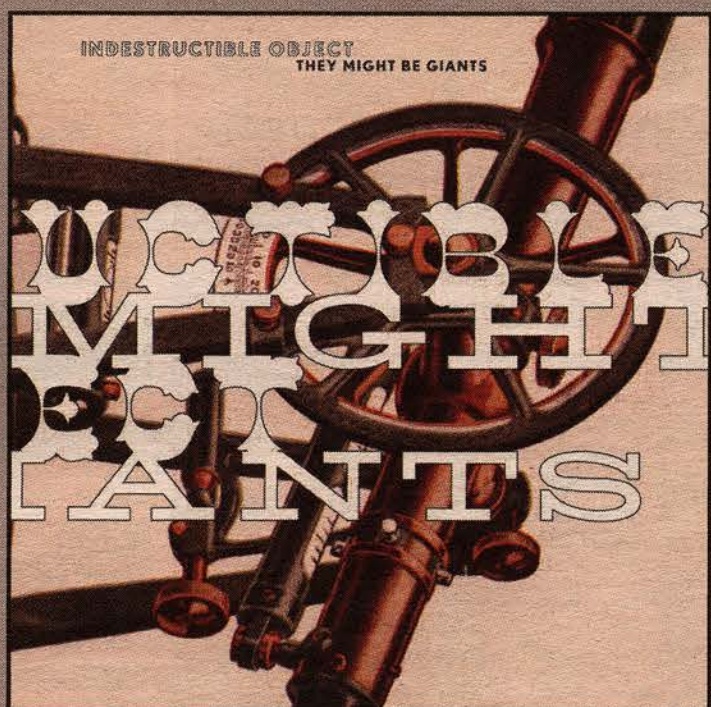
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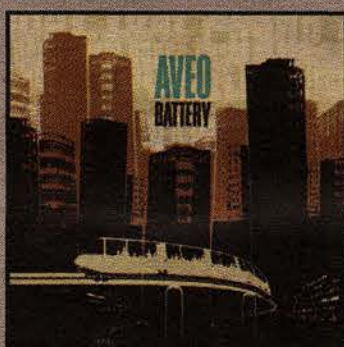
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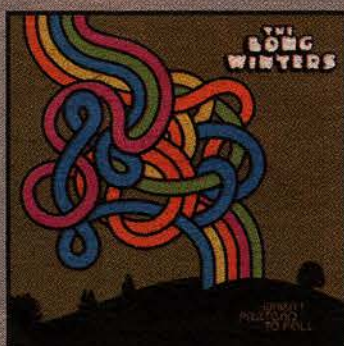
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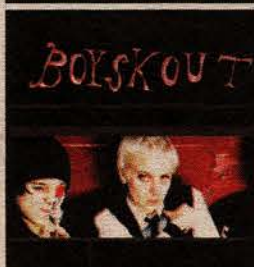


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doors. I remember seeing BD do this in some sterile gallery scene in Chelsea at a Richard Phillips opening. I was a little put off as BD were wearing gun muffs for protection, but it was nice to see the art poodles blown out into the streets. Anyway, Wolf Eyes were very turned on and the beer bongers from Ypsilanti decided to tie one on with the Northeastern aesthetes. A couple of CDRs appeared on Olson's American Tapes label but it's this LP on Fusetron which is a total mindmeld. You would think this was going to be brutal darkness, and sometimes it is, but for the most part it's a sophisticated study in patient noise unfolding. What could have been a speaker-ripping festival of noise gore is instead an emotional soul burn at the speed of death. Up there with Lightning Bolt's *Wonderful Rainbow* (Load) for progressive USA noise moves.

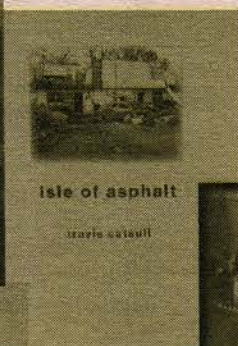
Very few combos have the brains, guts or chunks to actually use Richard Hell's sound as a specific model, no matter how huge his cultural influence has been for the last (almost) 30 years. Well, **THE PONYS** (of Chicago, Illinois) kinda refute that operational contention once and for all on their debut LP, *Laced with Romance* (In the Red). Lurking within their mix of garage spumage, '60s/70s punk revisionism, and Thunders/Velvets' mood-cops is a huge sprawl of Hell's unique vision. A certain kind of yelp, a special brand of slur, a way of chopping up guitar riffs, it is all referenced in a buncha places throughout the album. And it sounds hot as fucking tar! In the Red really knows how to sniff out the best current rock & roll on the planet. If you are not hip to their chuff, you are out of some loops, pal. Way out.

It's good to see John Fell Ryan back on the boards. Though I suppose he never really left. John is the Olympia, Washington rhythm riot rocker who was a founding member of No Neck Blues Band, but had to split cuz well maybe he was just too weird for those guys (if you can imagine such a thing). I do remember first time I saw NNBB live, Ryan really got his head wrapped around playing a lengthy sewing scissor mantra. It was great! As was hearing him play some solo junk machine beatbox wrecked techno damage at a party on Canal Street one summer's eve. At the end of his NNBB tenure he fancied himself a lead vocalist, which gave the band a unique twist away from whence they came (improvised instrumental whatsis). Indeed, it was the era of No Neck's boogie fried research, which culminated in a legendary weirdo tour across the USA with John Fahey. Ryan split and every time I had asked where the lad had disappeared to, all I'd get were shutdown stares. I was doubly curious, as John had published a fascinating graphic staple zine called *The Yellow Spade* in 1998. But he's back, or like I said he was never gone, he was in Brooklyn. Hey, Brooklyn is a thriving zone, but we don't walk the streets there too often and maybe we're too old and too tall and maybe we just didn't "see" John ambling about. Nevertheless he's in goddamned Brooklyn and he's mixing it up with a pretty hot clam collective called **EXCEPTER**. They have a 12" called *KA* (Excepter Records 01) available thru the sleepless Fusetron enterprise. The music is fluid yet bleeping electronic improvisation with definite cosmic swoops in titles such as "Breast of the Wave Offering." The exquisite Caitlin Cook lassoes your brain with siren improv-vox, whilst Ryan and pals Dan Hougland, Macrae Semans and Calder Martine dance in gleeful psychosisia.

Table of the Elements' recent **RHYS CHATHAM** box set seemed pretty



effing magazine



Isle of Asphalt



Rupert Wondolowski

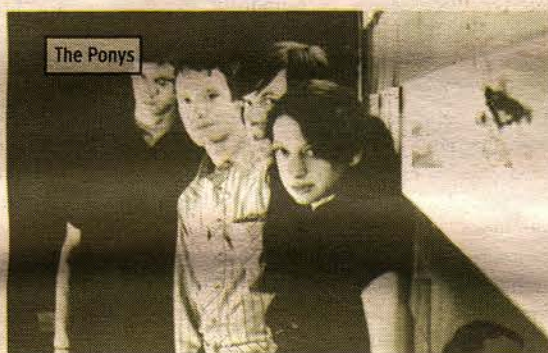


Lisa Jarnot



The Residents

Niagara



The Ponys



Dimitri Devyatkin, Shridhar Bapat, Rhys Chatham and Steina Vasulka

definitive, but the new LP they helped with, *Piano Music: Echo Solo* (Azoth Schallplatten) is totally unlike anything else in Rhys' previously known bag. The two piano pieces on this album are wonderful blends of different modernist threads, combining a somewhat percussive attack based on post-Cage dynamics, and a lyrical compositional voice rooted in early 20C French guys like Satie and Poulenc. The pieces are spacious and lovely, with lots of breathing room and a wonderful weightless quality that comes from somewhat unresolved melodic motifs. They hang on the air like tendrils of opium smoke and are just as comforting to breathe. If we could find that old Jefferey Lohn solo LP, we could check to see if this reminds us of that, too; but it's filed in a country far away. Sorry!

WOODEN WAND & THE VANISHING VOICE are arisen from the ashy grave of the Golden Calves Band (prime progenitors, along with Tower Recordings, of the Hudson Valley Mystique) and their debut LP, *XIAO* (De Stijl) takes things in all kinds a fine and lost directions, somewhat in the style of ESP-Disk legends, All That the Name Implies. Flute, piano, percussion, voices and strings combine in gently anarchic ways, sheering great hunks of hair from all available heads with soft, blunt clippers. The band is listed as an octet and it sounds like there might be even more of them, lurking in the shadows, panting through their noses and waiting for their turn to pounce out of the pumpkin patch and scare the heck out of improvisational thinkers everywhere. But truly, the table manners of this set are as mild as toast. Even babies will love it.

Honest. And if you like the lighter side of underground free-thought action, you will too!

LISA JARNOT is a fairly young poet, younger than us at least, from the intensive workshops of the 1980s/90s years at St. Mark's Poetry Project. She's just published her third collection of verse, *Black Dog Songs* (Flood Editions), which collects early and contemporary work of hers in fast sharp economic relief. As a student of Robert Creeley's you can feel Lisa's poetic eye drawing spare and heartbeat fast word action to paper. The poems are off-putting and sometimes crazy/funny, which lifts them from heavy mind spew. With high recommendations from John Ashbery and the late Stan Brakhage, she is very much worth checking out. She's currently hunkered down writing a book-length bio of Robert Duncan.

Damn, what a great record! We are talking, of course, about **JEFF FUCCKILLO's** *Disturbed Strings* LP (Roaratorio). Jeff has previously tooled for Wham-o, the Irving Klaw Trio and others, but this is solo acoustic guitar stuff, not unlike that of the great Alvarius B. That would be enough to raise the temperature here. The hepness of the way this guy bends and hammers strings makes it impossible to peg stylistically, seeming as it does, to owe equal debts to Derek Bailey, Robbie Basho and that Jandek. But what makes our personal air even warmer is the accompanying sound effects, which arose from John Fahey's garbage bag of tricks. Fahey, it seems, had met Jeff and proposed an LP session. When Fahey showed up, he was laden with cassettes of all sorta junk, and he feeds those sonics into the

mix like the possessed maniac he most surely was. There are antic similarities to *Parachute*-era Chadbourne, and maybe that's why Fahey deemed the session "too nice" to be released on Revenant, but we have no such qualms and you shouldn't either.

The writing scene in Baltimore, MD continues the left-of-reality vibe that area has been warping with since John Waters scripted *Hag in a Black Leather Jacket* in 1964. Local scribe Blaster Al Ackerman's motto for lit life in Baltimore is, "live unknown, die unknown, but bun a knee." And those are words any of us should only hope to measure up to. Ackerman is a great writer, some say as good as heavy American stalwarts Fredric Brown and Theodore Sturgeon, for depicting reality drop-out in daily bizarro life. He, and other like-minded folk (such as the long running, always happening John M. Bennett and the frighteningly surrealist Mary Knott), throw down little pieces strewn about in Balto lit journal **SHATTERED WIG REVIEW**—now on it's 23rd ish. *SWR* is edited by Rupert Wondolowski, himself an interesting writer, particularly in short-form broken synapse pieces. His latest sole effort is *The Whispering Of Ice Cubes* (Shattered Wig Press) and like the journal is very ready for your bedside endtable.

Sheesh. Just realized it's been 30 years since I first heard **THE RESIDENTS** and, while that makes me feel even more codger-like than usual, it also gives me a chance to get excited (as a mature adult) about their new DVD, *Demons Dance Alone*. Although I did not see the tour, the *Demons* album was one of my favorites of the band's recent oeuvre. It is a suite of short,

rather poppy songs that recalls their classic *Duck Stab/Buster & Glen*-era in all its glory. The DVD is a live document of the tour, and although it is fairly straightahead (for the Residents, anyway) it has a damn peculiar look and feel. Shot in infrared, everything has a rather odd glow to it, and this makes the way that the characters interact on stage seems especially sinister. Which is good! The music is superb. In Eric "Kitabu Black Jew" Feldman, the Residents have found a wonderful collusionist, and other key players include guitarist Nolan Cook (the goddamn second coming of Snakefinger) and vocalist Molly Harvey (who sounds at times like she's channeling Jandek's partner Nancy). Watching everyone cavort around the stage set, with bizarre dancing lights accompaniment, and the fart-joking demon, is really a nice visual cocktail after a long day spent shoveling snow. Let the Residents tend to your sore muscles, their fingers might work even better than Jesus's!

Austin has been a veritable hotbed of small press poetry these recent weird years and a new one has just hit called **EFFING PRESS**. The first two chapbooks they've published are *Isle of Asphalt* by Travis Catsull and *Underpony* by Doug Warriner. We've ripped through Catsull's book and it's a killer. His thoughts wing their way through burning tire smoke all in search of sweet rejoining sleep. Or at least a baked snack. Effing Press also has a po' journal called *effing magazine* natch which presents a rollicking selection of young word snappers, local and beyond. Of note is Dale Smith, co-editor of Austin's Skanky Possum Press which we hipped you to a few issues back. Remember?

Token "regular" CD of this issue, is an artistic set that is credited to **NIAGARA**, although is really a little more broad-based than that. *Beyond the Pale* (Amphetamine Reptile) is a glorious 3CD block in deluxe silk-screened packaging that was put together for a recent show of paintings by the Michigan songstress, hosted at one of Tom Hazelmeyer's booze emporiums. And there is a bunch of Destroy All Monsters on it (mostly stemming from the band's Asheton era), an equal amount of Dark Carnival (the band Niagara and Ron Asheton formed subsequent to DAM), and a few tracks by Venus in Furs (Niagara's newest unit). The DAM material includes their singles and some other tracks (most of which were on a French LP a while back), plus a few live things previously unheard, including a small selection from a reunion of the band's proto-art-rock-devils-line-up (with Mike Kelley and Jim Shaw in the ranks). DAM were a great band in all their incarnations. Much as we love the rugged sloth of the early unit, the Asheton version had some great Stoooge/5 power, and Niagara's vocals always have a total chirp-sex edge. Hard to resist. Dark Carnival we have had less contact with, but the disc with their live set, recorded at the Knit in '95 is pretty cool, too. They're slower than DAM, but tackle the same sorta material (indeed, many of the same tunes) with swell abandon. The third disk has the reunion stuff, some more Dark Carnival live tracks and a handful by Venus in Furs. These are all pretty good, but perhaps not as nice as the package itself, which is signed by Niagara in an edition of 200, and packed to gills with visual beauty. But hey, take a bow, all you dudes.

KEVIN DAVIES is a poet from Vancouver. Nanaimo actually, homeplate of Jack T, you know the big dude who sells rare garage and psych records at the WFMU fair and runs Lance Rock Records? Kevin has



a new book out which is amazing and Jack has issued a new Lance Rock 7", first one in like ten years, by a slashing group of Texas oldster punks called the Ka-nives. Whether Kevin, who has since moved to Brooklyn, or Jack, who still resides in Nanaimo ever met up is hard to say, but they both have a magic grip on the intangible thought-world of today's rocket-riding youth. Davies blew open minds when he published the volume *Comp.* (Edge Books) in 2000. *Comp.* took the fearsome breath of Charles Olson and the (let's say) playful breath of Frank O'Hara, and shot it through with a very approachable blend of the experimental and straightahead. It was modestly exhilarating and he's taken it to an even keener climb with *Lateral Argument* (Barretta Books). Funny ("Refusing to work requires great discipline. Waiting in troll clothes under a bridge requires great discipline."), angry ("Send a ham to the widow Cheney") and musically alive, this guy Davies has got a killer beat. As do the goddamned Ka-nives, ex-members of Houston garage grunts 1-4-5's, Junior Varsity and sister group, The Jewws. And one guy supposedly is the son of Jandek. Whatever. If you dig the wayward snarl of proto-punkers Joe and The Furies' "Weasel" and Chuck Berry's schlong-bonging "Dear Dad" then you're in luck cuz both masterpieces are ripped into bloody shreds on this 7".

Ben Chasny, better known as **SIX ORGANS OF ADMITTANCE**, has been creating singular vistas of acoustic guitar suspension for a good while now. And some of his releases have been more obscure than ancient doughnuts. One such is the *Nightly Trembling* LP, originally issued as a lathe-cut in an edition of 30. Now Time-Lag has put it out in a populist version of 500 or so. And it is as lovely as stone—a juggle of gorgeous flourishes, vocals drawn from the well of mystery, and even some passages of refined raunch. There's plenty of other Chasny around these days, too, especially now that he's part of the Comets on Fire juggernaut. (Both *Six Organs* and *Comets On Fire* were profiled in *Arthur* No. 7, still available from *arthurmag.com* -Ed.) So grab your ankles and take a whiff. On us!

But, perhaps, maybe the most amazing record this time out is the picture disk LP, *Iconic Distortions* by **THE GUITARS PROJECT** (Box Media). Hampshire College grad Jenny Sheppard (also a member of Bride of No No and Metalux) was doing investigative art work with elderly women, some of them suffering

from Alzheimer's Disease, when she decided to lead six of them in an experiment in improvisational guitar. And it is nothing short of astounding. Rhythmic, minimal, flowing and wild, the pieces here are immediately stripped of any novelty aspect by their sheer beauty and otherness. This could easily be the work of several avant garde composers and like all such works, really raises a lot of questions about technique and art in the post-Duchamp's universe. Easily the best LP by a Hampshire grad since Orchid Spangiafor's *Flee Past's Ape Eff*, and that's saying something!

Like, so long!

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(continued from page 9)

technology. Without the spark or seed-impulse provided by Christ, impelling consciousness and feeling to a new vibratory level, humanity would have surrendered completely to materialism. The separation of human souls into discrete individualities necessitated the new commandment that Christ brought to Earth: "Love one another as you are loved."

In the modern age, Colonialism accelerated the materialist urge in its most destructive aspects. On the other hand, Colonialism spread the "word of Christ" across the planet, although this was done through the most brutal means. This process is, again, dialectical. Despite the genocide and cultural annihilation inflicted upon them by Colonialist powers, indigenous people understood and accepted the doctrine of Christ, incorporating it into older traditions. In this dialectic, the intensifying of consciousness first manifests naturally as destruction and capitulation.

These days, certain movies seem to be noospheric events—a means for the collective unconscious of humanity to speak to itself. This was the case with *The Lord of the Rings*. I would say that the "ring of power" represents the Ego, with its delusory temptations of power. The ring has to be carried until all the psychic dark matter is revealed, then tossed away. As Jung wrote, "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious." This is one element of the collective process taking place in our time.

It is only as a fully self-reflective individual consciousness that one can make the choice, out of free will, to reconcile with the Divine, the Logos, through sacrifice, or supercession, of the Ego. As Christ says: "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

In his words, his actions, and his inner being, Christ exemplified such a sacrifice. Unfortunately, Christ did not "save our souls" through the crucifixion. Instead, he showed us the path—a model for selfless action that can be internalized, and followed, if we make the free choice to evolve. Christ is only a "savior" when we follow his lead. We still have to save our own souls. Alas, this is no easy task. But without real sacrifice, there is no spiritual progress.

(continued from page 54)

One of the major tantalum refiners is German company H C Starck, who said, "H C Starck is not being supplied with material from the crisis areas of central Africa." They get their raw coltan from a number of sources, including the British-based A&M Minerals & Metals, who said "it would be silly for us to try to pretend that we know the origin." They did say, however, that they buy their coltan in Uganda. So, speaking about exactly the same batch of coltan, we go from "we know, and it's none" to "it would be silly to say we know," with a nudge-nudge that they do know and it is indeed Congolese.

In December, 2002 a peace deal was signed between the governments and militias fighting in DRC. While this promised an end to the colossal bloodshed, it did not provide a solution to the environmental and social problems caused by coltan mining. Indeed, in contravention of the peace deal, the fighting is still going on in the eastern DRC because of the coltan mines. The same brutal military leaders run the operations, using the same sites and methods of mining. The people of DRC stay impoverished and starving, with 40% of their children dying in infancy.

Now that there's a supposed peace in DRC, no companies have to obscure the routes for Congolese coltan. The trade can be formalized, hastened and expanded. This means the land over the reserves and the wildlife it supports will meet with an even quicker end. The only thing that can stop it is a drastic and immediate reduction in the demand for coltan products.

Unfortunately, there's another use for tantalum. Its ability to stay stable at high temperatures means it's not just the only metal for computer processors—it is also the ideal material for covering things that are going to get hot by flying very fast. The Bush administration is going to need a shitload of tantalum for the Star Wars project. George Bush Sr. has foreseen this and is already on the board of Barrick, a Canadian mining conglomerate and third-largest buyer of coltan on earth.

Even so, the bulk of the tantalum market is, literally, in our hands in the form of the latest high-tech gizmo. The pressure on the high-tech companies to stop using Congolese coltan had been based on the war in DRC. The environmental impact should also be more than enough reason to stop using Congolese coltan.

Last year the USA threw away around 50 million mobile phones. On average they were 18 months old, and most of them still worked. So, if we all kept our phones for three years, we'd halve the phone makers' use of tantalum at a stroke.

We must stop being seduced by pointless upgrades. We have to ignore ads that goad us into being "ashamed" of a phone that works. We have to resist Nokia's campaign telling us that owning one of their gorilla-killers is "a declaration of independence." (Expensive consumer goods are actually a declaration of dependence). Technology should not be a fashion accessory, especially when it's technology that uses rare and unrecycleable materials like coltan.

Eastern Lowland gorillas, with whom we are a cousin species equally evolved from a recent common ancestor, face extinction. As the UN says, it would be "the first great ape to be driven to extinction—a victim of war, human greed and high technology." To remove such a wonderful, intelligent species from earth forever is not worth any amount of digital cameras or mobile phones.

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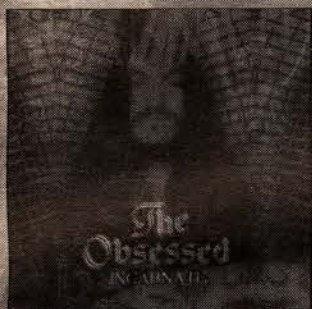
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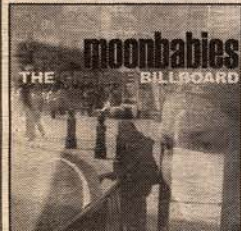
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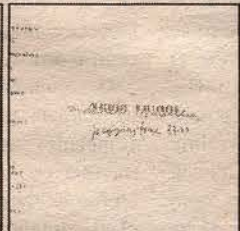
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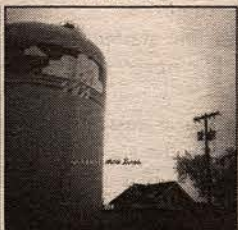
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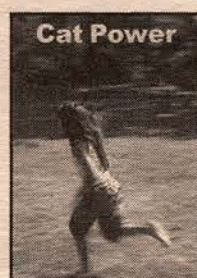
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In our consumer society, we don't often consider the full history of the things we consume. It feels like stuff just appears in shops, then it disappears when we put it in the trash. This effect is magnified when we buy something with no idea what it's even made from.

The stuff we're craving most these days is consumer electronic goods: Playstations, DVDs, PCs, cel phones and the like. Because these gadgets are dinky and lightweight, it might seem like they're not resource-intensive to make. But, according to a recent United Nations report, computers take about ten times their weight in fossil fuels to manufacture, compared to one to two times for items like washing machines.

In fact, making this technology lightweight has presented new problems for engineers. Fortunately for them there's a substance called tantalum, a refined metal that stays stable at very high temperatures. Tantalum is the *only* thing capable of making such tiny electronic processing chips work so well. It's in absolutely everything that has a small processing chip, and by far the biggest user is mobile phones.

Tantalum is not only essential for all processor products, it is also unrecycleable. All these amazing gadgets—MP3 players, heart monitors, in-car GPSs, automatic shop doors—all use tantalum. But tantalum is running out at an ever-increasing rate. We sometimes wonder what the best computers will be like in a hundred years time. The answer may well be "about 40 years old."

Tantalum is refined from an ore called

columbite-tantalite, or coltan for short. Coltan is only found in a few places on earth. By far the largest amount, some 80% of the world's reserves, is in central Africa. Some 80% of that—two-thirds of all the coltan on earth—is in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a massive country straddling the equator with vast rainforests, home to a range of diverse and rare wildlife. The forests in the east of the DRC are the last home of the Eastern Lowland gorilla. These forests have been declared National Parks and UN World Heritage sites on account of their amazing and precious ecology. They are also right on top of all that coltan.

Tens of thousands of people have moved into the National Parks and have dug out the riverbeds, panning for coltan. This has poisoned the waterways on which much of the local wildlife depends. Such huge numbers of new human residents also need food, and with few other sources available, many supposedly protected animals—including the Eastern Lowland gorillas—are being killed for meat.

Six years ago there were around 8,000 of the gorillas in the wild. Since the war and coltan mining, there are around 500, and the numbers are falling.

Coltan mining in National Parks is completely illegal, of course. Which not only means miners are working outside of environmental considerations, but outside of human rights and safety considerations. In February 2002, 36 miners were killed when a shoddily excavated riverbank collapsed on them. The illegality of the mining has allowed the controlling militias to use child labor and forced labor. They've also turned to other illegal trades, such as ivory. In the Kahuzi-Biega National Park, all but two

OUR DESIRE TO PLAY MAKE-BELIEVE WARS ON PLAYSTATIONS HAS DEEPENED THE REAL WAR IN CENTRAL AFRICA.

of the 350 elephant families disappeared in three years. Two tons of tusks were traced to the area in late 2000.

Around a third of the children in eastern DRC have left school in order to mine for coltan. And you can hardly blame them. If vast reserves of diamonds were found a few inches under the surface of our nearest National Park, how many of us would still respect the environmental integrity of the place? The blame for this has to rest primarily on the shoulders of those who make coltan so valuable, and that's the people who buy it. That's us.

And while the coltan miners get more than they would at any other enterprise available to them, the real money in coltan is made by those who trade it. The traders have to be people of real power. Nearer the consumers, that's wealthy Western corporations. At the mining end of the chain, military leaders from DRC have been running the trading. Huge parts of eastern DRC have been invaded by Ugandan and Rwandan militias, who then take the coltan out and sell it from their own countries.

The war that started ten years ago in Rwanda has never stopped in central Africa. Indeed, it has expanded, drawing in troops from at least ten countries, from Zimbabwe in the south to Libya in the north. It has left tens of millions of people dead. Its effect on Africa is akin to that of the First World War on Europe.

It has been intensified, prolonged and largely paid for by money Westerners have paid for Congolese coltan. The UN

described coltan trading as "the engine of the war," confirming that all parties are using coltan as their funding source.

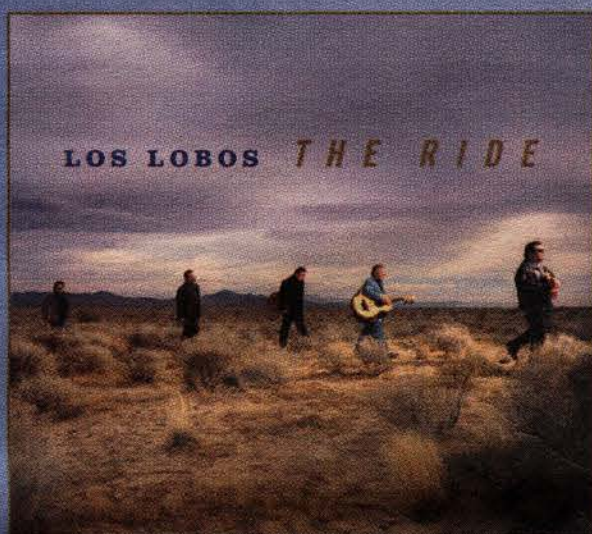
The World Bank has praised Uganda for the way its economy is doing well under WB advice (curiously, they don't praise Argentina, who also followed WB advice to the letter, and to economic collapse and social chaos). But the revived Ugandan economy is based entirely on stolen minerals from the DRC. Since its troops went into DRC in 1998, Uganda has suddenly started exporting phenomenal quantities of gold and diamonds. In the year after Uganda invaded the DRC, "Ugandan" coltan production went up 2,800%. Much of this money was swiftly converted into weapons for what is still inaccurately called the "civil war" in DRC. Our desire to play make-believe wars on Playstations has deepened the real war in central Africa.

As concerned Westerners began to understand this, the high-tech companies were quick to distance themselves. Ericsson, Intel, Nokia, Motorola: they all assured us they never used tantalum made from Congolese coltan. Given that their suppliers are a bunch of warlords and their friends, how could they trust their assurances? Outi Mikkonen, communications manager for environmental affairs at Nokia said, "All you can do is ask, and if they say no, we believe it." No further checks were made.

The chain of supply is so convoluted that no electronics buyer can ever be sure of the origin of the raw coltan in a certain product. Each shipment can have a dozen or more intermediary owners between the mine and the consumer.

(continued on page 52)

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