

# Rock & Roll

Michael Hardaker, HRDMIC006

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award  
of the degree of Master of Arts specialising in Creative Writing

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2017

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:           Signed by candidate                Date:   2017-08-21

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.



## ABSTRACT

Through unfolding, fragmentary memoirs, the disconnected odyssey of Nick Numbers, a rock music critic working in London and LA through the 1970s into the early 1980s, *Rock & Roll* explores the multiple realities that exist between documentary, *documentable* fact and supposedly pure fiction. Real people and verifiable occurrences are interwoven with invented characters and situations in a way that blurs any clear distinction between the two. The book also sees how the power of additions such as images and footnotes can add, or perhaps undermine, authority and credibility to a story.

Meanwhile, stories connect the twin musical and lyrical strands, black rhythm and blues and the writings of the Beat generation, that somehow merged in the mid-1960s to produce *rock* music. They play with the self-imposed otherness of the self-defined rebel, and how this normalises behaviour that would be unacceptable outside the bubble of exemption. They connect, in passing, Nick Numbers' odyssey with earlier models, Homer, Joyce, C.P. Cavafy and Richard Fariña, heroic, anti-heroic and mock-heroic. And they grapple with the very nature of storytelling itself, the relationship between the storyteller and the story, between the storyteller and the audience, something that goes right back to an essential distinction between Homer, the bard, and Odysseus, the teller of tales who gets to relate his own remarkable, perhaps even incredible, adventures.

In a world of *truthiness*, of *alternative facts*, a *post-factual world*, how can fiction respond to increasingly abstract or, perhaps, simply cynical notions of truth and veracity? If the real world can cut its facts from whole cloth to suit the needs of the occasion, where does that leave the storyteller? If the role of any artist or creator, as Hamlet says of playing, is *to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature*, one response is to reflect and highlight the untrustworthiness of everything. *Rock & Roll* does not merely have an *unreliable narrator*, it explores an *unreliable world*.

The book is followed by “Why I Write What I Write,” a self-reflective, or reflexive essay that explores the route I took to start writing it.





# Rock & Roll

*a novel*

MICHAEL HARDAKER

MICHAEL HARDAKER

Copyright © 2017, Michael Hardaker

*Maupassant déjeunait souvent au restaurant de la Tour, que pourtant il n'aimait pas : c'est, disait-il, le seul endroit de Paris où je ne la vois pas.*

—Roland Barthes

*The music business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free, and good men die like dogs. There's also a negative side.*

—Hunter S. Thompson



• **ONE** •





Errol Washington told me this story on a tour bus near Murfreesboro TN, a long time ago:

“Well, I knew Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg back since the Times Square–Fifty-Second Street scene in forty-nine or fifty or so, but I only met Neal Cassady this one time, in San Francisco. *On The Road* hadn’t yet hooked itself a publisher so it was before Neal had to bear the weight of being Dean Moriarty and he was still just Neal Cassady that night, the night of the Six Gallery reading in October of fifty-five, where Ginsberg did ‘Howl’ and everyone drank wine, and then all the poets went out to Chinatown for Chinese food and more wine. Later on they tacked the two big cars, Neal’s and Gary Snyder’s, through the tricky seas of North Beach, till they tied up at The Place on Grant Street alongside the bohemians and the hipsters and the afterhours negroes, and drank pitchers of beer brought to them by Sheila from the strange place out back of the building where the beer lived that nobody had ever seen.

“And Kerouac, with puffy eyes and fleshy lips from the wine at Six Gallery, and more wine at Nam Yuen, and now the beer at The Place, grabbed my arm as I walked past them and set me down beside Neal, saying that we two needed to be as brothers because, man, Errol’s a guitar-player who blows jazz like a dharma angel and nobody’s more jazz-gone than Neal. And I said that jazz was dead, killed stone dead like a dog by the bopsters, partly because it was my genuine opinion, but mostly because I was also a lot more interested in engaging the attention of the strawberry blonde girl squeezed against my left leg, with curly hair cut short like a boy, and this raw-boned quality to her, and sassy eyes that looked like she was digging some wisecrack the rest of us hadn’t heard.

“And everyone just called her *the redhead* but I caught that her name was Natalie, and she said she was Neal’s girlfriend, although the way she said this wasn’t in any manner discouraging to me, haw haw, and she said she worked as a shopgirl but that she was mostly a writer. Jack and Neal were slinging a lot of noise in my direction, insisting that jazz wasn’t dead and I was a hincty fool, a goat, a madman for thus-thinking, and I should have seen Allen at Six Gallery tonight blowing wild jazz with words like he was the Lester Young of language, and there’s me saying right back at them that jazz *words* may be in mighty fine

shape but *jazz music* is fucked, pardon me, and nothing more than gimcrackery since be-bop sucked the joy out of it and how, hell, maybe I'll just split town for someplace where I can play dancehalls every night and get paid to entertain folks, anyways.

“And we lost a few stray cats along the way, but I ended up at Natalie and Neal’s pad on Franklin, and Allen was there too, with his fine-boned punk Peter Orlovsky, and we were smoking reefer and sipping from the neck of a poorboy of California Burgundy. And Allen was taking off his clothes like he always did, and Natalie handed me these poems written on canary-colored onionskin, full of stuff that women don’t write about using words that women don’t use, with long, rolling lines and a jiggedy-jaggedy rhythm. And while I’m reading her poetry she steps into the next room and steps back out wearing just a tee-shirt with some strawberry-blond hair peeking out the bottom of it, and I smoke some more tea and drink some more wine and read some more poetry. And Allen is trying to get Peter hard through his pants, and Natalie asks me if I’d like to make it with her dog-fashion while she blows Neal, and Neal casts me an encouraging glance and, well, the five of us wind up probably breaking some laws they ain’t even written down yet, haw haw, with the redhead cutting out to the phone in the hallway sometime after dawn to call in sick to her shopgirl boss-lady. And an hour or so after that Neal is washing down a couple of bennies with a big cup of joe before sloping away to his gig on the railroad, a grinning wink-and-salute my final vision of him, me all folded up in an arm-chair as Allen and the beautiful white boy and the blonde redheaded girl drift off in the narrow bed.

“And Allen was awake when I opened my eyes, laying back against the headboard with his hornrim glasses on and smoking a cigarette, with Peter under his right arm and Natalie his left, her curls scrunched on his chest. He just smiled at me as I collected my pants and my shirt and my coat and my hat, and my socks and shoes, and tied my tie and picked up my guitar case from where I’d leaned it against the wall. And when I left we didn’t say goodbye but we just sort of nodded to each other. Outside, I caught the nip in the morning air, what with winter scooting in on fall, but I sparked up a Viceroy and started off walking, and I walked, and I walked on some more, and I smoked cigarettes

until I walked up to the music store that used to be there on Fillmore, over from the Presbyterian church, and I walked in reeking of sweat and sex and stale jazz and carrying a Gibson L-7 guitar with a Rhythm Chief pickup fitted to it, and I walked out carrying a used Fender Telecaster solid-wood guitar in my left hand and a brand new Fender Deluxe amplifier in my right hand and feeling like I'd had the hottest of hot showers. And I ducked into the Santa Fe ticket office, then walked over to my hotel in South of Market, where I settled for my room and paid for an actual hot shower before walking off to get a Hippo-Burger at the Hippopotamus Hamburger Restaurant on Van Ness Avenue, and then back to pack up my clothes and gewgaws and hit my cot for an early night.

“And the next day, Sunday morning, there was a bus from the Santa Fe Terminal on Fourth Street to Oakland, and then the California Zephyr carried me through California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Nebraska and Iowa, and into Illinois and Chicago, which it attained early on Tuesday afternoon. Walking through the cold clean city air and up into the offices of Local 208 of the Chicago Federation of Musicians, with my solid-wood guitar in my left hand and my Fender amp in my right hand and my cardboard suitcase tucked under my left arm, I received directions to a deputizing gig with a rhythm and blues act whose guitar-player had been busted for dope, and to a clean and fair-priced hotel that, I was assured, bore no prejudice against musicians nor colored people.”



Your standard-issue rock music scribe, of the fully-inserted, *gonzo* variety, that is, not the sort of hack that sits at home wearing headphones all day, will, along with the liggers and the groupies, and the drug-dealers and the promoter's

nephews and nieces, and all the other non-specific hangers-on, whether backstage, on the tour bus, or in the bars and around the pools of identikit hotels and motels, generally spent their time trying to get as close as possible to *the star*, possibly even close enough to touch, in the hope that some thrown-away phrase will provide them with the unforeseen diamond heart of their story. Or maybe they're just imagining that some of the star magic might rub off, your standard-issue rock music scribe being, beneath a veneer of carefully-groomed cynicism, a squealing, seat-wetting fan at heart. But me, I mostly preferred to hang with the sidemen and the roadies, the make-up girls, the dressers and the guitar techs, the stage-hands and the other supporting roles, because I'd worked out that it was the way to get better material and, from the sidemen at least, to learn more about the music. If you want to know anything about most stars' music or, indeed, anything else about most stars, Nick Numbers was always ready to assert, the last people to ask are the stars themselves. I'd always get more from the likes of Errol Washington, who was mostly a session musician in Los Angeles, but insisted on touring as a sideman for a month or two each year, to keep himself in shape, as he put it.

Over the years I got a bunch of good stories out of Errol Washington, even if few of them made it into print, for Errol was, I had decided in the early days of our acquaintanceship, one of the great bullshit artists of his time. As with all such characters, and I was always careful to distinguish between *bullshit artists* and mere bullshitters, it was probable that every single verifiable element would turn out to be a hard fact if checked, and on those occasions when I had done this they did, indeed, check out. But the glue that held those bits together was not the sort of thing that was worth risking a professional reputation on, even in a field with such a tenuous connection to reality as rock criticism.

Reading through the transcription I made of the tape at the time, it's clear that Neal Cassady's girlfriend, the *redhead* that Errol Washington describes, is Natalie Jackson, which is a surprise, as I could have sworn I first heard of her from Cooleridge, that time I was stuck in Paris.

Harper's Guide  
TO  
PARIS  
AND THE  
Exposition of 1900

*Being practical suggestions concerning the trip from New York to Paris; a comprehensive map and guide to the City of Paris; a complete description and guide to the Exposition, with French phrases translated; and maps, diagrams, plans, and illustrations*



NEW YORK AND LONDON  
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

1900

A year or so after I was stuck in Paris that time I picked up a copy of *Harper's Guide to Paris and the Exposition of 1900* in the Strand Book Store on Broadway, paying a dollar for a book that cost a dollar when it was new, seventy-eight years earlier, which seemed fair. From it, I learned that 98 Boulevard St-Germain, in Paris's Quartier Latin, had been home to the Café des Ecoles Réunis in 1900.

Today, if you visit 98 Boulevard St-Germain with thoughts of eating, you will be served a McDonald's but back when I was marooned in that area it was the site of the Self-Service Latin-Cluny, where I ate three nights in a row while I waited for some money to arrive at the American Express office on Rue Scribe. My travellers' cheques were in my suitcase and my suitcase was on Iggy Pop's tour bus on the other side of the English Channel, heading north for Manchester and then Newcastle upon Tyne, before turning south and west, through Birmingham and on to Bristol, where I would eventually be reunited with them and a chance to shower and change into some clean clothes at the Holiday Inn in time for Iggy's show at the Colston Hall.

I didn't know how long I'd need to stretch the few hundred francs of walking-around money I had in my hip pocket and maybe even the five emergency ten-pound notes and five emergency ten-dollar bills I always kept in the lining of my right boot, so I ate at the Self-Service Latin-Cluny, just around the corner from the fleabag hotel where I'd found a room, this being an era when there was still an excellent selection of fleabag hotels in the 5ème. I ate *steak minute frites* Sunday night because it was the cheapest full-sized dish on the menu and then the same thing Monday and Tuesday nights because it was a pretty decent nosh, all things being considered. In those days I never gave that much thought to food.

On that first evening, the Sunday, I was grumpy, having missed a bus that had a departure time set for even fools like me to meet. And I probably looked grumpy, even by Parisian standards, with my spiked Keith Richards haircut and my black shirt and my skinny black corduroy Levis and my black motorcycle boots and my big black coat and my black pretty-much-everything else. I figured I was probably managing to communicate my grump to the rest of the world but, after I had finished my steak and was sipping at the remainder of my half-bottle of red wine, a man put down his tray opposite me at the formica-

topped table and sat down. He had also opted for the minute steak, along with a green salad which, in the France of that time, meant a small bowl of lettuce leaves with some mustard vinaigrette and nothing else. Judging by his face, he was somewhere between a high-mileage fifty and a clean-living sixty. He was carrying a full, but trimmed, beard. I felt there was something vaguely familiar about his cowed eyes. On his head he wore an embroidered kufi skullcap thing like Carlos Santana had just started wearing, with wisps of silver hair poking out from it in front of his ears. His outer layer was one of those olive-drab West German army-surplus parkas that kids all over Europe wear, shorter than the US Army parkas that Mods used to favour in the sixties, but heavier. Long fingers wearing pink- and turquoise-striped fingerless knitted gloves poked out of the sleeves and picked up a single fry at a time, drawing it lightly through a dollop of ketchup and then transporting it to his mouth, where he crunched it a couple of times before swallowing. Every four fries, he picked up his knife and fork, cut off a postage stamp of steak, transferred the fork to his right hand, American-style, and sent the meat in to slipstream the fries. Under the parka was a red and blue, Indian-looking quilted jacket, then a mustard yellow Argyle vee necked sweater and a bottle green mock turtleneck. More reds, yellows, greens and blues came from a rope of wooden beads around his neck, on top of the mock turtleneck but inside the vee of his sweater.

I had picked up a copy of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* at one of the bouquinistes by the Quai Voltaire, mostly because it was, at fifty centimes, the cheapest of the used English-language books I found after checking every bookseller along the Seine, thanks to its back cover being half torn off. I was pretending to study the title poem while I checked out this character opposite me. I was pretending, but the man was actually reading my book, upside down.

"It's still a fine, fine poem," the man said, speaking crisply. "But I always felt sorry for Allen. Mmm. When a career begins like that, there are probably only two ways to go. Down or mad. Allen seemingly opted for mad, which was probably wise." American, as his eating habits had implied, with some kind of New England accent. He stuck out a gloveletted hand. "Cooleridge," he said.

I was just about to take a sip of wine and, with a fistful of wineglass, I couldn't immediately shake the offered hand.

“Cooleridge,” the man said. “Mmm. That’s what folks call me. Like Cooleridge,” he said. “But cool.”

“I had a good job with the International Business Machines Corporation in Poughkeepsie, New York,” Cooleridge told me. “An engineering job that paid thirteen thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars per year before tax, which was good money in those days. And I had a nice house with a thoroughly modern kitchen, self-cleaning oven, the whole bit, and a two-car garage where I parked a Cherokee Red nineteen fifty-five Buick station wagon. And I had a loving wife called Sally and a beautiful two year-old daughter called Lisa who had her mother’s eyes. And one winter evening Sally was driving our Buick back from taking Lisa to see her grandmother in Shenandoah and it was dark, and it was raining, and there was a truck parked with no lights showing, and Sally just drove that Buick station wagon straight under the back of that truck at about sixty miles per hour. And so I buried the two of them. Mmm. And I went back to work, and one day it seemed like a fantastically good idea to climb into a gin bottle, so I did, and then all of a sudden it was nineteen sixty and I wasn’t working as an engineer with the International Business Machines Corporation in Poughkeepsie any more but I was a stagehand and hanging lights at a little theatre that used to be just around the corner from here, and fixing things when they broke, and speaking bad French, and everyone called me Cooleridge. Mmm. They still do,” he said. “And that’s where I first met them.” His hand was still sticking out so I put my wine glass down then reached over and shook it.

“Nick Numbers,” I said. I picked a packet of sugar out of the bowl in the middle of the table for a bookmark and closed the poem around a sketch of a woman in a beret serving herself a meal that looked pretty similar to mine.

“Yes, that’s where I met Mister and Missus Ginsberg,” Cooleridge told me. “Allen, I mean. And Peter, naturally. Well all of them, I suppose. Kerouac not so much, but Corso, of course. The South African fellow, Sinclair Beiles, he was there, and Harold Norse. And Bill Burroughs, obviously. The whole crowd. They all used the same bar as the actors and the technical staff and the administrators and the front-of-house folks from the theatre. Gloomy little place, in a sort of damp cellar, but there were dozens of wonderful framed photographs of pre-war French boxers on the walls,” he quickly mimicked the solemn face, shoulders-

back, wrists-cocked pose of old boxing photos. “And the drinks were cheap. In fact, the drinks were free, more often than not, because the owners knew that the freaks brought in customers, paying customers, so they’d give the freaks free drinks to keep them around. Mmm. People, lots of people, good people, society people, would come in to our little bar to watch the freaks perform, and the more free drinks the freaks were given the more they would perform, and the more real drinks the society people would order. Until one night, a famous night, when Allen, who was standing on one of the long tables having recited an impromptu poem, carefully pulled down the zipper on his pants, then unfurled, there’s no other word for it, he *unfurled* his penis and began urinating on the table. Chaos ensued. It was magnificent. Transcendent. People trying to run away, and crashing into each other, and falling into the very stuff they were trying to avoid, screams from women, angry bellows from men. Allen’s piss was everywhere, splashing into people’s drinks, running off the tabletop on to their trousers and skirts. And Allen, an innocent, a beatific grin on his face, seemingly unaware of the bedlam, producing an apparently endless supply of wonderful, golden urine from, from *somewhere*,” he wiped his eyes with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand before taking a breath, and then another. “But after that the people stopped coming to see the freaks, so the freaks stopped getting free drinks, and we all went out rather less. Mmm.”



In a photograph taken by Allen Ginsberg at his 1010 Montgomery Street, San

Francisco apartment during the spring of 1955, Natalie Jackson stares straight at the camera, strong eyebrows above pale eyelashes surrounding sardonic eyes, and her strawberry-blond frizz, a Harpo halo of hair, an Art Garfunkel corona of curls, framing her face.

The photograph is over sixty years old now and it is faded and scored, distorted with what looks like water damage, so it almost looks like a tintype from a century earlier, the very timelessness of Jackson's face feeding into this illusion, along with the crumpled, mannish, collared blouse she is wearing. Only the General Electric refrigerator in the background gives that notion the lie. Although, again, the shot presents itself as contemporary too. The refrigerator could almost be a modern take on an old design while the image degradation could easily be faked.

Cooleridge told me about Natalie Jackson's death as we sat in his room in the eaves of the same fleabag hotel where I was staying, drinking some cheap red wine that came in litre glass bottles with plastic pop-tops and five-pointed stars engraved around the neck, and smoking some Red Lebanese hash joints made from the foil-wrapped stash I had in my left sock. My hotel room was furnished in the standard fleabag style found throughout France that I like to call Eclectic Spartan, with an absolute minimum of equipment but every visual element working against every other, including a wardrobe that had been wallpapered in a different, fuchsia-based, floral pattern to the rose-heavy design used for the wall at which it stood, a design that was itself different from the three different patterns papering the other three walls, which had another floral featuring begonias, a coffee-and-cream pinstripe and a swirling vinyl Op Art acid trip in yellow and orange. Cooleridge's space was very different. There were North African scarves billowing from the ceiling and used as curtains over the tall, skinny windows, there were overlapping oriental carpets covering the floor and the tables and the seat-backs and serving as a bedcover, there were brass coffee pots and brass censers and other brass trinkets, bibelots, nicknacks and what-have-yous. All of this, Cooleridge told me, he had inherited when he moved into the Beat Hotel at 9 Rue Git-le-Coeur to take over the room of one of Burroughs's old Tangier buddies, who had committed suicide by throwing himself

off a bridge in the Parc des Buttes Chaumont, and he brought it all with him when the Beat Hotel closed down in 1963 and he was forced to move to the other side of Boulevard St-Germain.

Cooleridge sat on his slippered heels, on a wingback chair with strands of horsehair stuffing peeking out from the sides of the carpets that covered it, just like his hair peeked out from his skullcap, in front of the only wall that didn't feel like the medina, shelved from floor to ceiling, the shelves crammed with old wooden, bakelite and pressed-steel radios, wireless sets, I supposed, and with shoeboxes that, judging by neatly hand-printed labels referring to microfarads and kilohms, contained radio parts. I sat at Cooleridge's desk-cum-workbench, on a simple wood and straw chair that was the spit of Van Gogh's in Arles, with loose spindles that gave just enough at each movement to make me want to keep as still as possible. I had cleared a space on Cooleridge's desk, pushing aside a soldering iron, some radio parts and a pile of papers held down by a brass Ganesh, to create a rolling zone, since Cooleridge, despite all the radios, had no record player and consequently none of the gatefold sleeves that had been my rolling surface of choice for years, even in the days when I didn't even care for reefer. I finished up a basic triple-skinner and, having checked it was properly lit, leaned gingerly over and, making sure the chair didn't fold under me, passed the fresh joint to Cooleridge, who took a deep hit and winked at me. There was definitely something familiar about Cooleridge's eyes, familiar enough that it had nagged at me throughout the evening, if not enough for me to pay it any notice after I left his company in the small hours. His lungs full of smoke, Cooleridge started to tell me about the end of Natalie Jackson's short life, as related to him by Bill Burroughs, gasping out the first dozen words until he finally decided to exhale.

Cooleridge told me about Neal Cassady's foolproof scheme to win big on the horses, and how Neal persuaded Natalie to forge the signature of his wife, Carolyn Cassady, who was waiting in Los Gatos for this latest of Neal's love affairs to end, in order to draw ten thousand dollars from their joint bank account to fund a day at the Bay Meadows racetrack, a withdrawal that Neal considered as more borrowing than stealing, so sure-fire was his scheme. While Neal was in jail he'd learned from a character named Knee-Walking Jackson,

who was not related to Natalie in any way, that in any given race the third favourite is the horse most likely to upset the favourite and make the big bucks, since it is always undervalued, due to the first two favourites receiving excessive attention. This thesis he tested to destruction, the destruction of all ten thousand dollars, the next day at Bay Meadows. With no money to pay back into the Cassady bank account, and fully aware that she had committed a Federal crime by faking Carolyn Cassady's signature, Natalie, whose rangy physique masked a personality that always tended towards the unstable, became increasingly consumed by anxiety, and began to slide towards a paranoid state, a decline that was not reversed even when Carolyn Cassady signed documents to authenticate the withdrawal, documents that protected Neal and, by extension, Natalie from prosecution. When she tried to cut her wrists with a kitchen knife, not necessarily with suicidal intent, Neal prevailed on Jack Kerouac, who was in town, to babysit her for a few hours while he was at work, hours that Kerouac spent drinking red wine and attempting, unsuccessfully, to bring Natalie enlightenment though his idiosyncratic personal version of Buddhism, a scene he lightly fictionalised in *The Dharma Bums*, with Ray Smith as a proxy for Kerouac himself and Rosie Buchanan for Natalie. Cooleridge told me that Burroughs considered this scene in the book to be artistically compromised by Kerouac's ego crashing drunkenly into every sentence. The next morning, with Kerouac gone and Neal back home, but asleep, Natalie, dressed only in a tee-shirt and a bathrobe, made her way to the roof of the building, 1041 Franklin Street, where she slashed her throat with shards from a shattered skylight and started dashing to and fro on the roofs of that and the adjacent buildings. Two police officers, following a call from a neighbour, arrived only a few minutes later and one cop made his way up three stories to the roof where Natalie, paranoid, bleeding, convinced that she would be imprisoned for signing Carolyn Cassady's name, standing on the outside of the fire escape rail of the building next to her own, backed away. The officer grabbed for her but she fought him, her hands were greasy with blood and she simply slipped through his grip. Clutching again, he could only grasp a handful of the bathrobe from which Natalie fell, to the sidewalk, where her strong bones snapped like twigs.

Woken by the commotion, Neal, anticipating lengthy questions from the

police, a body of citizens with whom he sought as little contact as possible, split the scene, stopping at a payphone to call Carolyn before heading to the safety of his wife and Los Gatos. Calmed and encouraged by Carolyn, he did return to the city the next day, identifying the body at the Coroner's office, which allowed Natalie's mother, Irene Jackson, to be informed and therefore make her way from Newark, New Jersey to San Francisco, with consequent funeral arrangements being made, a service that would be attended by none of the Beats. Irene Jackson, Cooleridge told me, cleared out Natalie's possessions from the apartment her daughter had shared with Neal Cassady. When she came across Natalie's poems, she burned the lot.

# Woman Fights Off Rescue, Leaps 3 Stories to Death

An unidentified woman leapt from the top of a three-story building about 10:30 p.m. and landed on the sidewalk below, where she was killed. Police officers arrived at the scene about 11:30 p.m. and found the woman lying on the sidewalk.

## Out of Sight, Out of Money, Widow Finds

James M. ... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...

... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...

... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...

... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...

... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...

... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...

... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...

... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...

... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...

... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...

... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...

... widow ... money ... out of sight ... out of money ... widow finds ...



This is 1041 Franklin Street, where an unidentified young woman leaped to her death yesterday, started fire.

## Gas Price War in East Bay

A gasoline price war started yesterday along the East Bay ... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

... gas prices ...

## Fifth Fugitive From Preston Surrenders

The last of five fugitives ... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

... surrendered ...

## Livingston's



### **Woman Fights Off Rescue, Leaps 3 Stories to Death**

An unidentified woman about 35 years old slashed her throat on a rooftop at 1041 Franklin Street yesterday, then kicked free from the grip of a husky policeman and jumped to her death from a third-story fire escape.

Wearing only a bathrobe and a T-shirt, she stood poised outside the railing of the narrow fire escape walkway as Officer O'Rourke lunged through a window to grab her. "All I could do was dive through and grab," he said. "I got a grip on one arm and her robe just as she tried to kick loose. But I couldn't hold her. All at once I was just holding the robe, and she had fallen." His partner said she might have slashed herself with fragments from a broken skylight.

—*San Francisco Chronicle* (1 Dec. 1955), p. 2. As edited and abbreviated in Caroline Cassady in *Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg*.

On Wednesday 18 May 1997, two days before my forty-fifth birthday, I was drinking coffee and eating carrot cake with a particularly cantankerous Sinclair Beiles at the Time Square Café in the Johannesburg suburb of Yeoville, conducting an interview for a project that never quite got off the ground. He was, as Oscar Wilde once said of Frank Harris, thinking about Shakespeare at the top of his voice before digressing into a thoroughly-rehearsed anecdote about Burroughs and the pre-publication of *The Naked Lunch*, a digression that I interrupted with my story of spending time with Cooleridge in Paris nearly twenty years before, a man who had claimed Beiles's acquaintance at the Beat Hotel.

"Cooleridge?" Beiles said, and then, louder, "Cooleridge?" He looked belligerently at me. Then his brow unfurrowed and his face softened with dawning comprehension. "Ah, you must mean Sammy Taylor," Beiles said. "Nobody called him Cooleridge but himself. It was an affectation. His private joke. No, it was *me* who told him about Natalie Jackson, and I first heard the story from Allen Ginsberg, who was quite troubled by it for some years. Burroughs was in Tangier when all that happened, as, indeed, was I. At that epoch I was editing the *Tangier Gazette*. Burroughs knew sweet fuck-all about Natalie Jackson and probably cared less.

"And Ginsberg never pissed on any tables," Sinclair Beiles said. "That's just Sammy Taylor trying to ginger up his story with a more notorious poet. The table-pisser in that tale of yours, should you ever write it down, must be correctly identified as me."

"Of course darling," she breathed, "of course it's all so boring."

He turned bored eyes on her. "Do you know how boring it is?" "I'm only a woman," she swelled with mammalian power and containment. "I know nothing, but I can feel a male's boredom. I can feel how boring it must be for him. The closest I can come to knowing," she stiffened her empty fingers, "is through feeling what the man is knowing, because," she entwined her body with his, letting her luxury of scarlet tresses cascade his weary face, "I am only a woman."

THE NAKED LUNCH by William S. Burroughs (T.C. No. 76; publ. August; Frs. 1,500). Mentor to the Beat Generation? The novices better wise up more. This is El Hombre Invisible in the toughest book of the year:

## THE NAKED LUNCH

After a while the ass started talking on its own. He would go in without anything prepared and his ass would ad-lib and toss the gags back at him every time... Then it developed sort of teeth-like little raspy incurving hooks and started eating. He thought that his ass ate at first and built an act around it, but the ass hole would eat its way through his pants and start talking on the street, shouting out it wanted equal rights. It would get drunk too, and have crying jags that nobody loved it, and it wanted to be kissed same as any other mouth. Finally it talked all the time, day and night. You could hear him for blocks screaming at it to shut up, and beating it with his fist, and sticking candles up it, but nothing did any good and the ass-hole said to him, "It's you who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don't need you around here any more. I can talk and eat and shit!

During his first severe infection the boiling thermometer flashed a quick-silver bullet into the nurse's brain, and she fell dead with a mangled scream. The doctor took one look and slammed the steel shutters of survival. He ordered the burning bed and its occupant immediately evicted from the hospital premises.

"Guess he can make his own penicillin," snarled the doctor. But the infection burned the mold out. Lee lived now in various degrees of transparency. While not exactly invisible he was at least difficult to see. "Some kind'a fight trick or neon advertisement," people said.

They are drinking Victory Punch compounded of paregoric, Spanish Fly, heavy black rum, Napoleon brandy and canned heat. The punch is served from a great, hollow, gold baboon, crouched in snarling terror, snapping at a spear in his side. You twist the baboon's balls and punch runs out of his cock. From time to time hot hors-d'œuvres pop out the baboon's ass with a loud farting noise. When this happens the huntsmen roar with bestial laughter, and the fags shriek and twitch.

Picking up a needle I reach spontaneously for the tie up cord with my left hand. This I take as a sign I can hit the one sizeable vein in my left arm. The needle slides in on the edge of a callosity. I feel ground. Suddenly a thin column of blood shoots up into the syringe, for a moment sharp and solid as a red cord.

The body knows what veins you can hit, and knows this knowledge in the spontaneous movements you make preparing to take the shot... Sometimes the needle points like a dowser's wand. Sometimes I must wait for the message. But when it comes I always hit blood... I look down at my filthy trousers which haven't been changed in months... The days glide by strung on a syringe with a long thread of blood... I am forgetting sex and all sharp pleasures of the body, a grey junk bound ghost. The Spanish boys call me El Hombre Invisible—The Invisible Man...



“They were girls,” Cooleridge told me, as we padded through the back streets of the Latin Quarter, slowed by a barely-perceptible limp that checked Cooleridge’s stride more than it changed his gait. “They were young. Five years younger than the men, maybe more. They liked to dance. You couldn’t dance worth a damn to Charlie Parker or Dizzy Gillespie. Bill Burroughs told me that as soon as Neal Cassady walked out the door to go work on the railroad, Natalie Jackson would turn the radio dial to one of the popular music stations, and that’s when she’d start writing poetry, standing up at the kitchen table, shaking to that fine, fine music. Mmm. The men were always trying to get the girls to sit down and listen to jazz, but they were all the same. Natalie Jackson, Helen Weaver, all of them. Mmm. They dearly loved to dance around to all those rhythm and blues songs,” Cooleridge told me. “Rock and roll music. That’s when folks started calling it that, around that time.”

*A dream letter from John Holmes, containing statements of new found principles—*

*“A Shropshire Lad’ was written under a cloak rag or shroud.*

*“The social organization which is most true of itself to the artist is the boy gang” (not society’s perfum’d marriage).*

—Allen Ginsberg



• **TWO** •





A gunshot. A gunshot that changed the world.

Not coming from a book depository in Dallas, nor on the streets of Sarajevo. Not outside the Dakota Building, nor in the state box at Ford's Theater, nor aimed at the second floor balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, nor on bended knee in New Delhi, nor in a private room in City Hall, San Francisco, nor even at the Audubon Ballroom in Manhattan. This gunshot left its barrel on 16 June 1965 in Columbia Records' Studio A, 799 7th Avenue, New York City, although I didn't hear it until a little under two months later, when it, and the six minutes that followed it, changed my world.

Crack.

Just the one shot. Crack. That was all it took.

I was thirteen years old and nearing the end of the summer holidays, conscious of another impending school year glowering in wait. I'd spent the summer barely leaving my room, refusing haircuts, following the cricket, including John Edrich's 310 not out against New Zealand at Headingley, although the Pollock brothers' memorable performances for South Africa at Trent Bridge were still a couple of days away, getting accustomed to my freshly-broken voice, working rapidly through my parents' bookshelves and listening endlessly to pop music. I'd *liked* pop music well enough for as long as I could remember, starting with Cliff Richard and the Shadows when I was only seven or eight, although they were soon eclipsed by the Beatles and, to a lesser degree, Herman's Hermits. But everything had changed when I went to my first beat music concert earlier that year.

My parents would never have allowed it, but they were in Brighton for the weekend, my mother accompanying my father to a one-day conference covering recent developments in reinforced concrete and staying on an extra day, so I slept over at Darius Evans's house. And so, in the early evening of Friday 5 March 1965, in the middle of the Spring Term, I found myself at the Regal Theatre in the north London suburb of Edmonton, subbed by Darius's father to the tune of twelve shillings and sixpence, and ready for the first of two shows the Rolling Stones, the bad boys of pop, were to play that night. I have no memory of the support acts, whoever they may have been, but just a rising surge of excitement as the moment approached when the Stones scampered on to the

stage, plugged in guitars and bass, and launched into “Everybody Needs Somebody to Love.” The inevitable and constant screaming, which had been getting louder from the first hint that the band was due on stage, ratcheted up five, ten levels as the music began, first merging with it and then, essentially, drowning it out, so I could see Mick Jagger preening, stamping his flamenco patterns, and curling his lip at the microphone, but I couldn’t quite hear him. It didn’t matter, though, because it was enough to be there, caught up in the magic of the occasion, with Brian Jones simpering beneath his blond bob and Jagger strutting and twitching like an electric bullfighter. It was wonderful to be there, surrounded by pubescent girls shrieking and howling, weeping and wiping away their tears as they screamed ever louder, not shaking to the inaudible music but vibrating with it, shimmering, and not just screaming but, I soon noticed, touching themselves, some rubbing furiously, others tentatively, young girls with their skirts hitched, seemingly unaware or unconscious of their surroundings, hands, everywhere, flying dementedly over white cotton panties. And the smell, a smell I’d never experienced before, warm, earthy, almost animal, not quite sweaty but still salty, unmistakably female, but somehow, it seemed, more profound, more fundamental than anything I had ever known, a smell that was rising with the level of the screams, with the insistent rhythm of the kick drum and the bass guitar pulsing through the floor, melding to produce something I couldn’t describe or specifically identify, but which I knew was the most wonderful thing I’d ever known. I felt something on my right ankle and I looked down to see that the girl standing beside me, maybe fourteen years old, blonde hair in a ponytail, hands to her face, peering through her fingertips at the band as she howled, was, oblivious, peeing through her panties, the urine running down her leg, splashing off her shoes and on to mine. I then looked left to where Darius Evans was gaping at the malevolent form of Keith Richard prowling the terrain in front of his big amplifier, Darius standing stock still, his dark eyes shining bright, wide open and unblinking, his right hand inside the belt and down the front of his blue jeans, not rubbing, not moving at all, merely holding on to his penis as if it could provide some form of safety, or reassurance. I suddenly felt the need to check whether I was, in fact, doing the same, which, to my relief, I was not. I lip-read Mick Jagger singing *I need you, you, you* five rows

in front of me, and I realised, no, it's us who need you, really *need* you.

I don't remember shouting, or even doing anything except standing still and watching, but I must have been yelling along with everyone else because, when we emerged from the side door of the theatre into the cool night, and then into the warm embrace of Mr. Evans's two-tone teal and cream Austin Cambridge Countryman, I found I was hoarse, only able to gasp out my words. And when I woke up the next morning, in the vast double bed that the Evanses had in their spare room, my voice had broken, sparing me the weeks or months of vocal complexity that all my classmates would experience, and resulting in my immediate removal from the school choir the following Tuesday. I walked into that Rolling Stones concert at the Regal Theatre, Edmonton a boy soprano and walked out a baritone.

Having experienced, for the first time, the power of pop, from then on little else mattered. I immersed myself in its world, rapidly evolving from an indiscriminate consumer of whatever appeared on *Ready Steady Go!* to something of a connoisseur, my tastes refining by the week as I sought out the artists who my own favourites claimed as influences, mainly black rhythm and blues musicians, tracking them down in the second-hand section at Dobell's on Charing Cross Road. I learned to call my music rock rather than pop, and to look down my nose at those acts who merely recorded formula songs by Tin Pan Alley writers. I chose, instead, only those whose music was, at the same time, original while clearly owing a debt to the founding fathers of rock 'n' roll, whether that was pre-Army Elvis, Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly or Muddy Waters. To my parents' clear distress, the transistor radio I had been bought so that I could listen to cricket commentary on the Third Programme in the privacy of my own room was always on and tuned, except during the playing hours of Test matches, to Radio Caroline or Wonderful Radio London, pirates beaming waves from the sea, who were moored just beyond the three-mile limit but might as well have been on the moon, when their casual liberty was contrasted with the official broadcasts of the BBC, clamped tightly into its Reithian chastity belt.

The summer of sixty-five was also when I learned to read, not, clearly, in the technical sense, but in the sense of enjoying, loving even, the process of reading. I made my way through my parents' books indiscriminately, with nobody to tell

me what was good or bad, or why, completely happy to follow a morning reading *Clochemerle* with *The Power and the Glory* after lunch, ploughing through Penguins and Fabers, devouring Dickens, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Wyndham, Françoise Sagan, Raymond Chandler, Margery Allingham, Ernest Hemingway, Eric Linklater and John Steinbeck, alongside *Thorne Smith's The Night Life of The Gods*, Ludwig Bemelmans' *Hotel Splendide*, Damon Runyon's *Guys and Dolls*, Compton Mackenzie's *Whisky Galore!*, George Mikes's *Little Cabbages*, and *The Penguin Book of Comic and Curious Verse* and, thanks to my father's one-time habit, in the late 1950s, of buying a volume of the Penguin Classics every Saturday morning while my mother dragged me around the weekly shop, the likes of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Twelve Caesars*, *The Four Gospels* and Herodotus' *Histories*. When my parents were out of the house I would sneak into their bedroom, where the books I wasn't supposed to know about were kept, which is how I got to read *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, *Madame Bovary*, *The Alexandria Quartet* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, crouched on the floor beside my parents' bed, ready to tip the book back into its drawer and bolt out of the room should I hear the front door opening unexpectedly below me. My favourites, such as *Dubliners*, *The Outsider*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and T. S. Eliot's *Selected Poems*, transferred themselves to the small bookshelf in my room, stacked beside *The World of Pooh*, *Finn Family Moomintroll* and *Wind in the Willows*, and I read them three, four or five times each. Throughout this orgy of literature, both high and low of brow, Radio Caroline and Radio London provided a constant thrumming soundtrack, interrupted sporadically by Test cricket and, somewhat more frequently, spontaneous and quivering erections calling for my urgent attention. Except for sporting and masturbatory interludes, I did little else with my waking hours across the entire summer but consume literature and the rock 'n' roll that my father continued to call "jungle music" even after my mother had completely stopped pretending to laugh. But it never occurred to me that the two worlds could intersect, much less that that they *should*, the idea of intelligent or literate rock 'n' roll music seeming absurd, vaguely oxymoronic. That didn't mean the music had to be completely juvenile, whatever my father may have thought, and there were signs that rock 'n' roll,

like me, was somehow getting through puberty in 1965, with songs such as “Satisfaction.” This was rock music, I knew, that wasn’t peddling the adolescent world of dancing and hand-holding that had filled my pop years, but was more straightforwardly about having sex, or, as I was just learning to call it,  *fucking* , it having escaped me that the subject matter of even as early a Beatles song as “Please Please Me” was, a smoke-filled Paul McCartney confirmed to me at a party at Miles’s place in early 1972, “Basically asking a bird for a handjob.” So yes, I reasoned, rock ’n’ roll music could mature and possibly was maturing. But it couldn’t, shouldn’t, be  *smart* , as that would spoil all that made it magic. And then,  *crack* , a gunshot.

Not from an actual gun. Just a beat on a snare drum, and not a spectacularly loud one, at that. It marks the four of the song’s count-in bar, a common enough lead-in device in popular music. You can hear it on the Impressions’ “It’s All Right” and the Beatles’ “Any Time at All,” where Ringo’s rimshot sounds much more like actual gunfire. But still, common as it may be, this one fired itself out of the loudspeaker of my red Roberts R300 radio on that warm early-August evening like nothing I’d heard before, and it shot me right down dead on the floor. What followed was full, rich, supple rhythm and blues, with a barrel-house piano, a quicksilver guitar and a throbbing Hammond organ fighting to be the lead over a simple two chord riff and then Bob Dylan, a musician I’d already, with the crisp and absolute decision-making that characterises early adolescence, decided to detest, and then Bob Dylan, of all people, starting to tell me a story. “Once upon a time,” he sang, sneered, snarled, spat at me, at once haughty and self-amused, imperious, distant and cool, yet intimate, in my room, beside my bed, face to face with me, spittle from his words flecking my cheeks, my startled face reflected in his dark sunglasses.

Whatever I was reading I stopped reading and I stared at the metal speaker grille of my radio from a foot or two away, as if I could see the words and music coming out of it, passing through the air, into my ears and through to my brain, which Dylan busied himself with reconfiguring. “How does it feel?” Dylan asked, and I had no answer, because I was befuddled, although it felt good, that much I did know. I’d already understood, thanks to the Rolling Stones, that rock ’n’ roll music carried in its form the possibility of being one of the most

important things in the world. Now I knew that it had the potential to be the only truly important thing in the world, a potential that Dylan, with “Like a Rolling Stone,” had been the first to realise, magically melding Elvis Presley and T. S. Eliot, a marriage I redefined two years later as Ray Charles and Allen Ginsberg, once I’d finally encountered and devoured more rhythm and blues, and the Beats. Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone” performed that alchemy.

That Saturday, my pocket money bought me, on the orange CBS label, the 45 r.p.m. recording of “Like a Rolling Stone.” It was backed with “Gates of Eden,” which turned out to be exactly the sort of song that had made me decide to detest Bob Dylan in the first place. I struggled to reconcile the creator of a whiny, self-important acoustic dirge with the rock ’n’ roll magus who had scrambled up my mind with “Like a Rolling Stone.” Not that it mattered, as I was happy to sit cross-legged in front of the radiogram in the living room, volume as high as it would go, quarrying the landslide of words on the A side while trying to understand how the overall sound could seem so musically whole, a project I approached with such tenacity, not just playing the disc at 45 r.p.m., but also at 33 r.p.m. and even 16 r.p.m. to see what invisible secrets might be thus unconcealed, that my father was forced to buy me a secondhand Dansette from the classified ads in the *Richmond and Twickenham Times*, a record-player that I was assured should be treated as an early Christmas present and not an ad hoc gift, so he could watch the evening news and *Town and Around* in peace while I continued my studies behind a closed door, in my own room.



5 vi 1971

Waiting for Mr. Richard

It's a calm June evening and I am sittin' outdoors Somewhere On The French Riviera, dontcha know, sipping<sup>g</sup> at a snifter of Rémy Martin cognac and watchin' the sun set over a picturesque harbour with fishing boats bobbing around in it making SPLISH SPLISH noises. I have just eaten a three-course gourmet meal prepared by a talented gent bearing the striking, yet accurate, soubriquet of Fat Jacques, a repast that was washed down by copious quantities of Château-bottled wine. An abundance of smoking materials, not restricted to cigarettes and cigars (Cuban, natch), has been presented to me, with an open invitation to help myself to whatever tickles my fancy. If it all sounds rather civilised that's because it is. The only problem is that I'm here to work, not to wallow in Sybaris's soft bosom, and I haven't done any work since I got here. Furthermore, unless something dramatic happens, I'm unlikely to get any work done before B.E.A. flies me back to the rain, brown rice and warm beer Worthington E in the a.m..

The house, the villa, the PALACE where I am seated enjoyin' my post-dinner lull is the current abode of Rolling Stones guitar-slinger Keith Richard and his consort, the exquisite Anita Pallenberg. I am here, at the behest of the group's London office, to interview Mr. Richard, along with his colleagues Mick Jagger, Bill Wyman, Charlie Watts and Mick Taylor. about the long-player that they are planning to record in this very location. Most rock groups go in to recording studios to make records; the Rolling Stones have brought their

MICHAEL HARDAKER

own studio with them to this Mediterranean paradise; they have a MOBILE recording studio. It has all the makings of an excellent story, especially as this is the first time in aeons that the Rolling Stones organisation has seen fit to beckon a representative of Rootie Her Majesty's Underground Press into the inner sanctum.

There's only one little fly in the ointment, a single grain of sand in the Ambre Solaire, as I sit surrounded by all this luxury, lappin' it all up while feeling as phony as the Talented Mr. Ripley in Patrica Highsmith's interestingly perverse novel. Unfortunately, Mr. Jagger is on honeymoon with his new bride, the Nicaraguan socialite Bianca, who he married last month along the coast in San Trop. Or perhaps he's with her in Paris. Or perhaps they're on honeymoon in Paris--nobody seems quite sure of the details, but he's certainly not at his house north of Nice, about a forty minute drive from where I am sitting. Mr. Wyman is comfortably ensconced at his manse in Grasse while Mr. Taylor is relaxin' at his abode in ~~Est~~ Biot, both perhaps an hour away; and Mr. Watts strides his domain in Arles, which is a good six-hour drive. And it seems that none of them see any real point in budging unless Mr. Jagger and (or) Mr. Richard are going to be present. Although I'm in Mr. Richard's house--in all likelihood, I'm within thirty or forty feet of him--of the many things the talented Mr. Richard may be, present is not one of them.

--He should be down later, Spanish Tony sez.

I was met at Nice Airport by Spanish, who serves as batman, majordomo and general factotum to Mr Richard, and who fairly whisked me, once we'd crawled our way ponderously through the

traffic fumes of the Promenade des Anglais, to the village-cum-resort of Villefranche-sur-Mer. This is where perches Villa Nellcôte, the neoclassical fin de siècle palace to which Mr Richard and Miss Pallenberg have newly transferred their world. During the drive, which Spanish used to demonstrate the fearsome power and high-speed cornering capabilities of Mr. Richard's convertible E-Type Jaguar, I was told that Keef, as Spanish calls him, had ~~injured~~ banged himself up quite severely in a go-cart accident and was thus temporarily indisposed. However (Spanish said), it was of no matter as the rest of the boys were bound to be able to help me. I understood "the boys" to mean the rest of the Stones, but, as I have intimated, I clearly misapprehended the situation.

The Mobile chugged into Villa Nellcôte the same day as me. It's a remarkable vehicle that somehow packs all the electronics associated with a conventional recording studio into the back of an unassuming, khaki BMC lorry. Once berthed, thick cables were run out of the lorry like sleepy boa constrictors and through to Villa Nellcôte's extensive network of steamy basements where, variously, guitar amplifiers, pianos and other keyboards, and a drum kit were to be found. Soundproofing baffles were fitted, microphone stands were erected and there was even the installation of a television camera that allows the record producer and recording engineers sitting at the controls in the vehicle outside to see what the musicians are doing. Not that there were any musicians doing anything and there were no producers nor engineers to watch them, Spanish Tony explaining to me that Jimmy Miller, who is the Stones' current knob-twiddler, was only due to arrive, along with wingman Andy Johns,

MICHAEL HARDAKER

IN A WEEK OR THREE. Spanish also said that the basements had been used to torture members of the Resistance when, as Keef had told him, the villa was the Gestapo's headquarters during the war. He showed me swastikas cast in to the air vents that did such a unsuccessful job of bringing cool air into the basements.

--Fuckin' Nazis, Spanish growled.

I'm no historian of architecture but the iron grilles looked to be as old as the house, and I remember reading that, long before Hitler, the swastika was a popular decorative motif considered by many to be a totem of good fortune. But if Keef wants to believe they're evidence of the fuckin' Nazis, who am I to argue?

I hang around Villa Nellcôte, waiting for Keef to come down, wanderin' the mirrored ground floor with its belle Époque décor, watchin' the recording paraphernalia creep ever deeper into the basement, throwin' a tennis ball for Keef's lumbering labrador (who is called Okefenokee the Swamp Dog, for reasons nobody can explain satisfactorily), suppin' well and sippin' better, and listenin' to the conversations of other people doing much the same, a cross-section of good-looking minor aristocrats, beautiful young girls and various other, mostly languid, ~~paix~~ often faintly translucent personages. It's pleasant enough but it gives me no meat for the planned exhaustive (exhausting?) piece on the Rolling Stones' forthcomin' record and the way in which it will be captured to tape. Spanish Tony does share a number of highly entertainin' stories regarding the Rolling Stones and Keef in particular that I am, sadly, unable to share in print, partly because they'd almost certainly result in expensive litigation and even

criminal prosecution, and partly because I don't know quite how much they have been embellished in the tellin'. Otherwise, little of the dialogue is about the band, music in general or, indeed, anything of consequence; it is the idle chatter of the idle rich.

Feelin' out of place among this opulent indolence. What catches me by surprise is the awareness that Keef not only embraces it, but is the instigator of it. This is his--I was going to write his pad, but it's no such thing, despite the guitars, scarves and records strewn around. This is Keef's KINGDOM, and the people in it are his courtiers. Except it isn't that, either. This is a pure example of what Thorstein Veblen described, back at the time Villa Nellcôte was being built, as conspicuous consumption, a classic tic of nouveau riche behaviour. How, I ponder, did the Rolling Stones' ~~screeen~~ rebel yell turn into (urgh!) this?

The signs have all been there, of course, the Cheyne Walk houses, the Aston Martins and Bentleys, the moated country piles. Yet somehow, through the late sixties, it felt as if they was, somehow, a form of anti-establishment behaviour and that we were in on the joke. Here at Villa Nellcôte I can assure you that it's no joke, and ~~people~~ folks like you and me are very much OUTSIDE.

It's only feels like a couple of years since Mick Jagger's interviews for Rolling Stone and the N.M.E. were crammed with Marxist/Leninist, even Anarchist thinking, just as you'd expect from a good LSE student. But Mr Jagger is in his late twenties now, and has graduated, if not from the London School of Economics, from a school of economic hard knocks that have

turned him into the sort of capitalist he once affected to despise. He is the Managing Director of The Rolling Stones & Co, Ltd., aided by a merchant banker called Prince Rupert Loewenstein, the Stones' business advisor and financial manager. I saw the Rolling Stones at both the Roundhouse and the Marquee Club earlier this year and dug it. The performances were groovy, and suggested that the group had recovered the primitive magic that it displayed on stage five or six years ago, magic that was dissipated in ill-conceived psychedelic ramblings and Brian Jones's increasing withdrawal from active participation. But now I wonder. Was what I watching really raw and earthy, or just a show? Was it a contrived PERFORMANCE?? Were the band members merely PLAYING THE PART, however expertly, of a sweaty, sexy rock group??? For Stones fans it may seem blasphemous to ask such questions of their idols' musical sincerity, to imply the possibility of hypocrisy, but surrounded by all that Villa Nellcôte offers, and all it implies, such questions are unavoidably begged. . . . .

So I am cogitating upon these matters while sipping at some of Keef's fine hooch and enjoying a calming smoke when, over the chatterboxin', I hear the BAF BAF of car doors slammin'. Several well-constructed gents bundle up the wide staircase and I identify, among them, Bobby Keys and Jim Price, the ~~rockin'~~ swingin' saxophone and trumpet duet that has brought a taste of the Memphis Horns to the Stones' recent work. Torpid figures spring into action, or as close to springing as the warm night and Villa Nellcôte's many pleasures will permit. As I listen to the overlapping voices it seems something dramatic is indeed going to happen, giving my earlier cynicism the lie. There is

going to be, whisper who dares, A RECORDING SESSION.

Down in the basement I scribble notes as microphones are set up and the two horn men work through some slow tuning-up exercises, the heat and humidity playing havoc with their intonation. I make my way out to the BMC lorry and climb carefully in, avoiding the thick snakes of wire that threaten to send me sprawling. I ~~mark~~ hover in a corner while a technician I have never seen before calibrates the 16-track tape machine with a pure tone that's recorded on the tape's leader. I get my own compact tape recorder ready when it eventually looks as though he'll cue up an actual track. I try to watch the horn men on the television monitor, but it's mostly static. Eventually the man at the controls is ready (we are now, it should be noted, some three hours down the line from the initial springing-into-action).

--Okay boys, he sez into the talkback mic. This is a run-through, not a take. And he rolls the tape.

--It doesn't sound like the Stones, I opine, as an inoffensive boogie piano line kicks the tune off. The engineer laughs. He chortles. He guffaws, even.

--Bobby and Jim are booked to do an overdub on some stuff recorded in LA, he sez. It's the new Barbra Streisand album.

Barbra Streisand? Barbra Fucking Streisand!?!

So, before I leave, this is what I have learned about the forthcoming Rolling Stones record. If their guitarist ever comes downstairs, it will be recorded in a khaki BMC lorry and a dark, hot, humid basement that may (or may not) have Nazi vibes, by people who can't really see each other, with instruments that won't stay in tune, and who have warmed up by crashing ~~karts~~ go-

MICHAEL HARDAKER

carts, gallivanting in Paris or Provence, or recording parts for Barbra Fucking Streisand.

Spanish Tony pops his head into the lorry.

--Keef should be down tomorrow, he sez.


I think have seen the future of rock 'n' roll and it's pretty bleak. The Rolling Stones may be one of the first bands to work like this, but they won't be the last. If they can interrupt their conspicuous consumption (with the ~~stress~~ stress on the CON) for long enough to produce a decent record under conditions of appalling musical and artistic compromise that are a by-product of an ineluctable need to ~~fuel~~ fuel that conspicuous consumption (did I mention the CON?), it'll be a bloody miracle.

--ENDS--


**BEA** in-flight magazine      your personal copy to take away

SUMMER 1971

# TRIDENT



**BEA SILVER JUBILEE  
1946-1971**



Another marvellous day for Patrick Campbell  
Leningrad, the city that changed the world  
Anthony Grey short story-written in Peking  
Fair Isle, home of the most exclusive woolly

I wrote about Villa Nellcôte for *Pootle*, which was pretty much at its short-lived peak then, in the summer of seventy-one. This piece, which I dashed off at my Olivetti, at a small table on the villa's terrace with a bottle of cognac for company, isn't the one I filed, even though I planned to when I wrote it.

The next morning, as Spanish Tony was driving me back to Nice Airport, I decided to take a more temperate approach. The story that appeared, without directly lying, suggested very strongly that all five of the Stones were present and rehearsing while I was there. All the words attributed to the band members were their own and, while the reader might reasonably infer that they were spoken to me rather than carefully selected from my growing library of imported music publications, mostly bought at Camden Town's Compendium bookshop, this was at no point explicitly stated. Finally, I argued that the use of the Stones' Mobile and the villa's basement would undoubtedly provide the creative spark necessary to create a record of rare genius. Which turned out to be right. When *Exile on Main Street* finally appeared in 1972 I had to admit that it was, indeed, a bloody miracle.

That trip taught me to have my passport on me at all times, whatever the apparent odds of actually needing it. An invitation to visit the Rolling Stones on the French Riviera would normally be handled automatically by one of *Pootle's* editors, under publishing's universally-understood rules of *droit de seigneur*. But when the call came through I was the only one in the office who could drop everything, pass by my squat, which was just around the corner, and be at Heathrow airport inside the two hours the Stones' people specified, the seat having presumably been originally booked for somebody else. So Nick Numbers, just turned nineteen, got a gig that gave his career a key boost.

The carbon copy of my brandy-inspired first draft did, somehow, make it into the wild, where it was passed around a number of journalists before ending up, inevitably, in the hands of the Stones themselves. They were said to be unamused. Three and a half years later, a fairly wired Mick Jagger buttonholed me in the back room at Max's Kansas City and demanded if I'd written it, because someone had suggested the style resembled mine. I did not lose my cool. I flatly denied having any part in it.

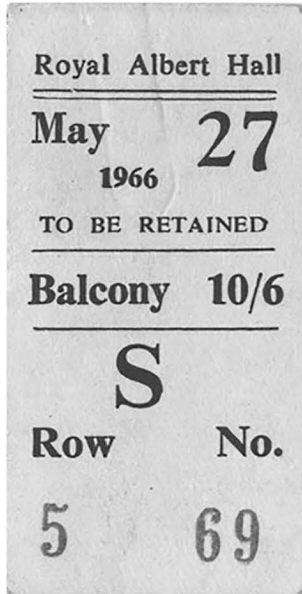
"Are you sure?"

“Mick,” I said. “I think I’d remember,” I said. “I actually wrote about you rehearsing.”

“That’s right. Yeah,” he said. “You were there for the rehearsals. I’d forgotten that.” He pursed his lips. “Barbra fucking Streisand,” he said. “I *ask* you.”



Over the years, I heard all the bootleg outtakes from Dylan’s two days of recording in June 1965. All are uniformly drab, suggesting that the song, like many Dylan compositions, would never have seen the light of day if they were all that had been taped, that “Like a Rolling Stone” would never have really *existed*. I also saw Dylan play it live again and again, starting with both shows at the Royal Albert Hall in May 1966, a grudging fourteenth birthday present from my parents, performances that varied from exhilarating, through vaguely bearable, to quite shit. But nothing got close to that record.



*I'm not saying it's better than anything else—I'm saying that—I don't think any—I think 'Like a Rolling Stone' is definitely this thing which—which I do—and that's to write songs—I don't like to—I'm not going to sit any more now—after writing that I wasn't interested in—in writing a novel—or y'know—or a play—or anything like that—I knew I just had too much—I wanted to write songs y'know—the—the—because it was just a whole—whole new category—I mean, nobody has ever really written songs before really—*

—Bob Dylan



• **THREE** •





In the Lower Fifth my friend Darius Evans and I discovered the Beat writers and read all we could find, trying to work out how we could bring a Beat sensibility into our lives. Darius Evans's antihero of choice was Neal Cassady, as written into the character of Dean Moriarty and Kerouac's various other pseudonyms for him, and Darius Evans swore that he'd one day drive non-stop from New York to San Francisco, loaded on bennies and listening to jazz radio stations, although probably not indulging in vigorous bisexuality. Mine was Gnosso Pappadopoulos, the beatnik Leopold Bloom in Richard Fariña's *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me*. I resolved that, once I learned what it was, Metaxa would be my drink of choice, that I would carry vine leaves in my rucksack and that I would smoke cigarettes that had been soaked in paregoric, which was, like Metaxa, a substance made all the more romantic because I had no idea what it might be. I also decided that, like Gnosso, I was Exempt. I wasn't forced to break the rules like lesser mortals. Instead, there were rules that simply didn't apply to me, norms from which I had been granted Immunity for *not losing my cool*.

And so we continued into our O levels, something from which, I accepted, not even I was Exempt, although I took great care not to lose my cool over the fact. Then, at the end of the summer holidays that year I arrived to join the Sixth Form only to find that Darius Evans had gone. Someone told me that the family had moved to West Germany because of his father's work, but someone else said it was Singapore and yet another person mentioned Glasgow. I don't think anybody knew, but when facts are missing it is easy to fill any void with a swiftly-fashioned fiction.

I didn't really become friends with anyone else at school in the three years after Darius Evans left. Friendship was, I decided, an area in which I was privileged to be Exempt.



Some of us at OZ are feeling old and boring, so we invite any of our readers who are under eighteen to come and edit the April issue. Apply at the OZ office in Princedale Road; W.11, anytime from 10am to 7pm on Friday, March 13. We will choose one person, several, or accept collective applications from a group of friends. You will receive no money, except expenses. You will enjoy almost complete editorial freedom. OZ staff will assist in purely an administrative capacity. If you like, write before March 13 and tell us who you are and would like to do with a 48 page two colour magazine . . . OZ belongs to you.

I read the advertisement in *OZ* 26, and on Friday 13 March 1970, after the school day ended, I walked from the main gate of Latymer Upper School across to Ravenscourt Park station as usual, but went up to the far platform, the one with tracks heading into town rather than out towards Richmond and Ealing Broadway. Six or seven years earlier, when a wave of obsessive ticket-collecting swept the school, an encyclopaedic knowledge of Underground stations had suddenly seemed more important than just about anything else on earth, and although any thought of wanting to own a ticket from every single tube station was long forgotten, I was able to use my expert grasp of the network to take the District Line to Gloucester Road, and then the Circle Line to Notting Hill Gate. I rode the escalators down to the Central Line, which took me one stop to Holland Park, where I rode a different set of escalators back up to daylight before walking down Holland Park Avenue, turning right into Princedale Road and arriving in front of number fifty-two at about half past five.

I was surprised to see some other boys from Latymer among the fifteen or so teenagers lounging around the table with the *OZ* editors, although I didn't know

them particularly well, and had never considered them as fellow freaks. Deyan Sudjic was something of a skinhead, for a start and, like Peter Popham and Colin Thomas, was an editor of the school magazine, *The Latymerian*, which was hardly known for its deep links to the counterculture, although they were quick to point out to me over the next weeks that this wasn't for their want of trying. We smoked cigarettes and passed around joints, with initial hesitancy, but then greater freedom, and chatted fairly aimlessly about sex and marijuana, about schooling and music, about Vietnam and so forth. I was struck by how the *OZ* editors, Richard Neville, Jim Anderson and Felix Dennis, seemed genuinely interested in the opinions the kids in the room held, with no attempt to boss the conversation. Richard did control things, I guess, wielding the power that comes with being genuine Pop royalty. Jim, blond and bespectacled, and wearing a silk jockey's jacket, told us all he was gay, which caused a few backs to stiffen, but nobody was uncool enough to say anything, and Jim was so relaxed, and so generous with his Afghan Gold hash, that everyone soon forgot about it. I think it was the first time I, and probably most of the kids in the room, had heard the word *gay*, which I'd seen written down in the underground press but was seemingly never said out loud, and it was certainly the first time we'd heard anybody admit to *being* gay, which was pretty impressive.

There was something almost unsettling about Felix Dennis and I got the sense that Felix would have liked to control things if he had the chance for, while he had wild hair and a freak beard and could talk as randomly and profanely as anyone in the room, I felt there was something very organised about him at heart, that the suit he was wearing, far from being a disguise to help him sell advertising to straight businesses, was as much a part of him as the wild hair and the freak beard and the snakeskin boots. At one point Felix rolled a joint and just smoked the whole thing himself like a cigarette, which was even more impressive than Jim's frank admission of homosexuality. Felix's eyes were carefully, and very obviously, sizing up each of the schoolgirls present as a potential sexual conquest.

I would love to say that working on *OZ* 28, the infamous *OZ School Kids* issue, was a liberating, exhilarating experience, but I honestly found it all very claustrophobic and, above all, tedious. The schoolkids actually did very little,

but spent many, many hours doing it, starting, in the last week of April, at Richard Neville's basement in Palace Gardens Terrace, and then, after Richard flew off to join his girlfriend in Ibiza, at Jim Anderson's place in the same building. That was when I decided I definitely wanted to be a writer and certainly not an editor, because writers don't have to attend meetings. Meetings, I decided, were something from which I was Exempt. I skipped a few editorial sessions, missing the uniforms-and-boaters photo-shoot in Jim's garden, and then showed up at Jim's flat with a finished piece, a thousand words or so on the current state of Underground Music, delicately picking through a variety of genres and carefully showing my cultured eclecticism, only to find that the afro-haired Charles Shaar Murray had written a similarly-themed piece that happened to be much better, a matter on which everyone, including me, agreed. That was the last time I showed my face at *OZ*, at least until Felix was editing it in a rather more structured fashion a couple of years later. I didn't bother to tell anyone. I didn't lose my cool. I just stopped turning up.

I may have been all through with *OZ*, but I'd seen the underground press from the inside and I was determined to be part of it. On my secondhand Olivetti Studio 44 I drafted, and re-drafted, and then typed up a fair copy, plus carbon, of a deeply countercultural review of the Doors' *Morrison Hotel*, in which I asserted that the good songs on the album were about Jim Morrison's penis and the bad ones about his dreams. It was five paragraphs long, and I'd numbered each of the paragraphs, almost like a legal document, an affectation I'd developed while searching for something that would make my writing somehow unique. I didn't know of any underground writers who numbered their paragraphs, so I decided to become *the cat who numbers his paragraphs*. I then added my address and my parents' telephone number, and bylined myself with my carefully-selected pseudonym, false names being popular among the likes of underground writers and pirate radio disk jockeys, as they were believed to complicate the lives of *the pigs* should they try to track you down for your revolutionary activities. My pseudonym, selected with all the wit a seventeen-year-old can summon, was Nick Name.

On Saturday 9 May I carried this precious document to the front door of *International Times*, which was then at 27 Endell Street, where I demanded to

speak to Mark Williams, the editor of *MusicIT* and, I felt at the time, possibly the best rock critic operating in the United Kingdom. While I'd enjoyed the often illegible iconoclasm of *OZ* since I tripped over a copy of *OZ 2* in the spring of 1967, my real spiritual home in the underground was always the harder-edged, more news-oriented and more frequent *IT*, which I'd been reading even longer. What I didn't know, as I trudged along Endell Street, was that *IT* was in some turmoil. It was suffering heavy collateral damage following a bust at the end of 1969, for printing gay personal contact ads, and the subsequent preparation for the court case that was increasingly imminent. In the chaos, Mark Williams was in the process of splitting to form the fortnightly rock paper *Strange Days*, and Steve Mann, who was a typesetter, had been shoehorned into the Music Editor desk. It was Steve who opened the door to me and ushered me into the main room, a madhouse of paper, smelling of joss sticks, hash oil and sweat. He didn't seem surprised when I thrust an arm out and handed him my manuscript. He held it delicately between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand and read through the words.

"What am I supposed to do with this?" he said.

"Publish it," I said. "If you dig it enough."

"I can't pay you much. Or anything, really. Bread's kinda tricky at the mo."

"That's cool," I said.

"Okay," he said. "Thanks, man," he said.

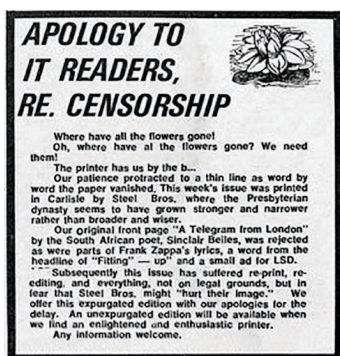
I couldn't think of anything else to say and Steve's eyes didn't seem to be encouraging me to say anything else, anyway. "Cool beans," I said. "Thanks, man." I turned around and let myself out.

"Drop in any time, man," Steve said, as I was leaving. That evening I watched, on the television news, what was said to be seventy-five thousand people, although it looked like a million, rallying against the Vietnam War near the White House in Washington. It was, I decided, a most propitious day.

Sometime later, Steve told me what happened after I left. He corrected a couple of spelling errors and cut back an overlong sentence, and then, correctly assessing that the review might be better without the paragraphs being numbered, wrote *Numbers?* on the page, which he then underlined for emphasis, before handing the paper to Hamburger Mary for typesetting. Unfortunately,

his underline had gone straight through the Name part of Nick Name, so Hamburger Mary, when she set to work on the IBM Selectric Composer, interpreted the annotation to mean that, if she agreed, Nick Name should be changed to Nick Numbers. She agreed.

When I first saw my review in print I was delighted to see that my carefully-numbered paragraphs had survived the editing process, but quite shocked to see my byline, although I did not lose my cool. Then I decided it was a pretty copacetic way of remembering what *the cat who numbers his paragraphs* was called. Within weeks I'd stopped numbering my paragraphs, but I kept the name. It felt like a solid name for someone who was Exempt.



I started going up to town and hanging out at the *IT* offices whenever I had the chance. After all, I reasoned, I had been invited. People seemed to be cool about me hanging out, or hanging around, or, at least, nobody was uncool enough to object. I tried to make myself useful, mostly by making tea for people who looked thirsty. I offered to roll a joint at one point, seeing an opportunity to demonstrate a skill at which I considered, after much practicing with dried lawn-cuttings, I had reached an advanced level, but it was made very clear to me that joint-rolling, along with making strange macrobiotic mush that tasted vaguely of topsoil, was *a job for the chicks*, the seemingly inexhaustible supply of biddable diaphanous women floating in and out of *IT*'s doors and that epoch in general with no apparent role in life but to roll joints and cook up gravelly brown food. Sometimes I'd type up a fair copy of an article or a letter that had

arrived as a semi-legible scribble, but mostly I just hung out, smoking charcoal-filter Lark cigarettes, and waited to see who else would turn up, which happened, over that summer of 1970, to be pretty much everybody associated with the counterculture. I barely spoke, but would be casually introduced as Nick Numbers, a name that gradually became completely part of me. Hi, Nick, I would hear several times a day, as Michael X, or Mick Farren, or Germaine Grier, or Felix Dennis, or Rosie Boycott, or Dick Pountain, or Marsha Rowe, or Michael Moorcock, or R.D. Laing, or Heathcote Williams, or Caroline Coon would pass through *IT* to connect with Hoppy or Miles, or drop off some editorial copy, or some flyers, or some magazines and newspapers from elsewhere. William S. Burroughs passed by occasionally, but never, to my chagrin, when I was there.

One of the first I encountered was the poet Sinclair Beiles, who I blindly hero-worshipped as the co-author, along with Burroughs, Gregory Corso and Brion Gysin, of *Minutes to Go*, the first book of cut-up Beat poetry, a volume that intrigued me as much for its complete unavailability as the radical thinking behind its content. Beiles was passing through London en route from either Athens or Johannesburg, he seemed unclear which, to Amsterdam, and I spent the best part of an afternoon looking for and eventually finding the original manuscript for a piece called "A Telegram from London" that had been censored by *IT*'s printers in 1967 but was now, Beiles told the room, to be published by *Suck* magazine, thanks to the efforts of Bill Levy. I would meet Beiles quite a few times as Nick Numbers, and on each occasion he would have no recollection of having ever met me before, which slowly eroded his status as a hero, until it finally vanished the time he borrowed twenty pounds off me in 1976, *only till tomorrow*, before disappearing, as he often did, for another extended period. He had, or affected, no recollection of this loan when I raised the matter at our next meeting, some months later, and that's how I justified stealing Sinclair Beiles's typewriter from his Notting Hill flat in early 1977, an almost new Olivetti Lettera 32 which replaced my imploding Studio 44. It is a typewriter that I still own, although I haven't used it for years, and it is notable, thanks to its South African keyboard, for a handy set of dead keys, so accents can be typed, and a completely superfluous key for the glyph 'n.

When I met Beiles in Johannesburg during the 1990s he did manage to remember who I was from meeting to meeting. Perhaps his South African doctors were less comfortable than their predecessors in the 1970s when it came filling his pockets with Librium and antidepressants to calm his *madness*, a cocktail that I suspect of triggering more psychosis than it cured. By the nineties, though, it was all too late. Beiles always had to cope with a well-stocked menagerie of demons but by his seventh decade, whatever the cause, they'd done their damage, and my interviews with him mainly involved him weaving his way through long and often complex anecdotes I'd already heard several times in earlier iterations back in London. Beiles famously never edited or went back to his poetry once it was written, a true adherent of the *first thought, best thought* dogma that, for the rest of the Beat poets, was more honoured in the breach than in the observance, but he honed and buffed the stories of his times with Burroughs, Leonard Cohen, Camus, Giacometti and Picasso, until they shone like jewels. He may have been, to be polite, uneven as a poet, but as a bullshit artist he was up with the greats.

# MINUTES TO GO

WM BU  
RROU  
GHS.

BRIO  
N GY  
SIN.

SINC  
LAIR  
BELL  
ES.

GREG  
ORY  
CORS  
O.

TWO CITIES EDITIONS

Not a lot changed in my life when I started at University College London in October, except that I moved in to the first of a sequence of Ladbroke Grove squats, to the acquiescent disgust of my parents, a move that meant I could spend even more time hanging out at *IT* and the other alternative publications. My summer of hanging out had connected me with editors of various underground papers, who increasingly accepted Nick Numbers' copy. At the end of August I made the trip south to the Isle of Wight Festival where, although lacking a press pass, I managed to blag my way backstage and conduct a few interviews, the star interview being the acme of rock writing in the days before more in-depth critical analysis became acceptable to the counterculture's editors. My Philips compact cassette recorder, which I'd sold my guitar to buy, captured the thoughts of Rory Gallagher, who was there with Taste, Shawn Phillips, Tiny Tim, Pentangle's Bert Jansch, who looked resigned when I informed him that Led Zeppelin had pinched "Black Mountain Side" from him, which I suspect he already knew, and Donovan, who looked smug when he informed me how he'd taught the Beatles to fingerpick in Rishikesh when they were all over there with the Maharishi. When these were published in *IT*, *Freudz*, *Pootle* and *ZigZag*, although typically edited down to a fragmentary state, Nick Numbers had the beginnings of a career.

Plenty of stars turned down my requests for interviews at the Isle of Wight, while others had minders to prevent me getting close enough to ask, but there was one who I didn't even approach. There was something in Jimi Hendrix's eyes that seemed to say *stay away* and I stayed well away. Since I first saw Hendrix play at the Marquee in January 1967, when he was still an unknown quantity, I had been struck by his humour and humanity as much as by his quicksilver guitar-playing and immense, through-to-the-bone, musicianship, but these qualities seemed to have been sucked from him and replaced by *nothing*. I didn't know what was wrong, but it was clear that *something* was wrong, and his performance during the small hours of Monday only reinforced that view, a performance in which he fought to put on a good show, but just didn't seem to quite connect with his instrument or his fellow musicians. There are those who saw the same show and will rhapsodise about Hendrix's brilliance, but I saw a man who, and this is the only way I can describe it, *didn't want to be doing this*

any more. I never got another chance to interview Jimi Hendrix, who would be dead within three weeks.

Things got pretty exciting in November when the Yippies' Jerry Rubin, free on bail as he appealed his Chicago Seven conviction, came to town and invited a bunch of freaks to be part of the audience when he appeared on *The David Frost Programme*. I went along to the Wembley studios for the ride, and was in the group that invaded the interview on cue, after Rubin had offered Frost a joint, in a chaotic scene that is now famous. I somehow managed always to be behind someone when the camera was pointed in my direction, allowing me to deny to my parents that I was even there, unlike Felix Dennis. As most witnesses remember it, the critical moment was when Felix became the first person to say the word *cunt* on British television, as a consequence of which, Felix later told me, his mother didn't speak to him for three years. It hadn't struck me as particularly memorable at the time, however, perhaps because the word was in such heavy rotation during those years, as we battled to liberate ourselves from the sexual repressions of our forebears by replacing their rules with equally strict rules of our own.

I was more impressed by the remarkable eloquence of Mick Farren, remarkable because he'd drunk the best part of a bottle of vodka in the greenroom before the show, so it was a surprise when he stood up straight and tall, eyes wide and hair akimbo, to lecture the smartly-dressed majority of David Frost's audience, especially Robert Ardrey, who was sitting in the front row, waiting his turn as the guest to follow Rubin, and who had just described the behaviour before him as *infantile*.

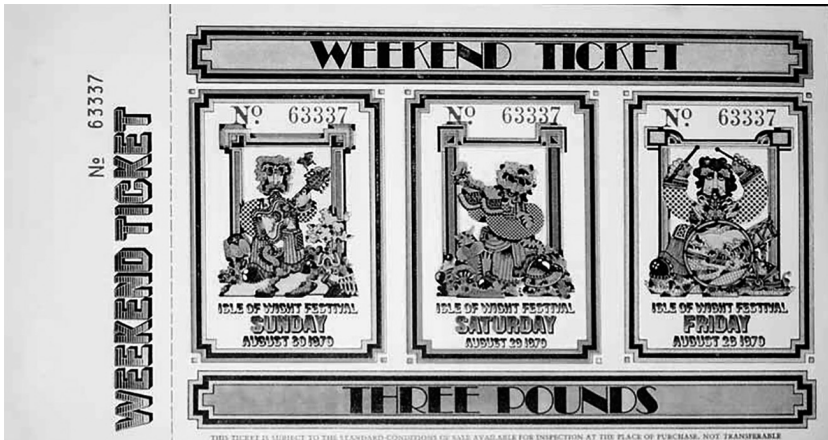
"With your society, with all your culture, with thousands of years," Micky said, punctuating with a jabbing index finger. "You. Are. Poisonous. If somebody takes a bite out of you they will die. The DDT content inside you is toxic."

Ardrey, looking more and more dyspeptic by the second while giving as good as he got when it came to the finger-jabbing side of things, responded that Farren was putting himself "farther and farther out on a limb that is going to *smack* off." Micky's response was calm and simple. "We don't want it," he said. "We don't want to discuss alternatives. *We do not want* your culture."

He tried to continue, but another voice, I think Felix's, shouted over him,

“We don’t *need* your culture. We’ve got our own culture, man. We just take it.” At this point the vodka seemed to hit Micky and he sat down, quite heavily. A babble of voices surged again but I barely heard a thing.

Years of arguments from parents, from schoolteachers, from lecturers, demolished in six words. *We do not want your culture.* That was the moment when I decided to accept Mick Farren as my spiritual leader. The lead singer of the Social Deviants, the founder, and sole member, of England’s White Panther Party, was the only other human being I had encountered who understood what it meant to be Exempt, the control that came with Exemption. I decided that he would be my guide as I moved through my life in rock ‘n’ roll. I never bothered to mention this to Mick himself, but when I found myself at a fork in the road I would ask myself, *what would Mick Farren do here?*



The answer to, *what would Mick Farren do here?* was, as often as not, *have a drink.* Although he was right at the heart of the counterculture, and a key aspect of counterculture life was taking drugs, Mick Farren, oddly, wasn’t really very good at taking drugs, although he was a very good drinker indeed. I wasn’t really all that good at taking drugs either, although I did eventually get much, much better, so I was quite happy to take a drink myself. A lot of people looked down their noses at drinking, which was seen as unhip and even *square* but, like Mick Farren, I didn’t care. For, like Mick Farren, I was Exempt.

My drink of choice was, for many years, Metaxa, just as I had sworn it

would be, especially when I got to the States, where it was easier to find. If I was in a hurry, I took my Metaxa straight. If I was thirsty, I would drink Metaxa and Canada Dry, with a lot of ice and a dash of orange bitters.

“If regular brandy and ginger ale is a Horse’s Neck,” John Mendelsohn said to me, early in the summer of 1974. “That’s a Horse’s Ass.” John Mendelsohn wrote for *Rolling Stone* magazine, he drove a Porsche and he was a snappy dresser, not just by rock critic standards, where simply wearing clean clothes can pass as dapper. He liked to call himself the King of LA, and he liked it even better when other people called him that. Lester Bangs said that John Mendelsohn acted like his shit didn’t stink but he’d just trod in somebody else’s that did. Yet John Mendelsohn had a quick mind to go with his smart mouth and was seemingly the only other person in the continental US who hated Led Zeppelin, so I did not lose my cool. I nodded and raised my glass in salute. Within a couple of weeks, every bartender on the Strip could mix a Horse’s Ass.

John Mendelsohn took some pleasure in noting that, while a Horse’s Ass soon became a reasonably popular drink among the West Hollywood crowd, it was never, with the exception of me, served to men. In fact, John Mendelsohn informed me, some bartenders had assured him that, were any man other than me to ask for one, they would refuse.

*Before repressive tolerance became a tactic of the past, Oz could fool itself and its readers that, for some people at least, the alternative society already existed. Instead of developing a political analysis of the state we live in, instead of undertaking the patient and unsparing job of education which must precede even a pre-revolutionary situation, Oz behaved as though the revolution had already happened.*

—Germaine Greer

• **FOUR** •





## RECORD REVIEWS

By M. H. Orodęnker

Lightface portion of reviews is intended for information of all record and music users. Boldface portion is intended for guidance of juke box operators.

### WOODY HERMAN (Columbia)

**Happiness Is a Thing Called Joe**—FT; VC. **Caldonia**—FT; VC.

It's been a long time between jump disks designed to really make the fans hop and holler, and Woody Herman rings the bell with a resounding smack for Phil Moore's "Caldonia." It's a swing serenade to a groovey gal, and with the Hermanites imparting a driving force that makes the music rock and roll as it spins along. It's a dish of jive and jam that really jells. The ensemble riffing and solo riding, particularly of the tenor sax, trombone and piano, plus the potent blues shouting of the maestro, gives it all a glory setting that is socko thruout. A contrasting note for the needling is provided for in the plattermate. For with the band setting forth a smooth yet scorchy musical background, it's the terrific lyrical projection of Frances Wayne for the slow torch ballad, "Happiness Is a Thing Called Joe," remembered as being from the movie "Cabin In the Sky."

It's a clinch that there will be an immediate flow of coins in the music boxes for "Caldonia."

After I moved to the States at the beginning of 1974 I used to pick up old music newspapers and magazines whenever I came across them, mostly old copies of *Billboard*. On weekends I'd go to yard sales and buy up or, as often as not, be given any that were lying around, and I found more in the basements and back rooms of used bookstores. I ended up with huge piles of them.

The first mention of *rock and roll* I found in *The Billboard*, as it was then, dates to 28 March 1942 and refers to the Boswell Sisters song, "Rock and Roll," originally recorded in 1934 for the soundtrack of the movie *Transatlantic Merry-Go-Round*, itself the probable first published use of the term in a musical context. The title refers to the "rollin' rocking' rhythm of the sea" and it is not clear whether lyricist Sidney Clare knew of the phrase's use as a euphemism for sexual intercourse, therefore being deliberately, if obscurely, risqué, but the lyrics do support the possibility. However, it's certainly not "rock and roll music."

The first hint I can find in *The Billboard* of the term as a musical *attribute* is from 7 April 1945, in a review of Woody Herman's release of "Happiness is a Thing Called Joe," backed with "Caldonia." The review leads with the second track, telling the reader, "It's a swing serenade to a groovey gal, and with the Hermanites imparting a driving force that makes the music rock and roll as it spins along."

Two weeks later, in the 21 April 1945 issue, is the first use of the term to

describe a distinct type or style, in a review of Erskine Hawkins' recording of the same song that reads, "It's right rhythmic rock and roll music that provides plenty of inspiration for the jump in Phil Moore's 'Caldonia.'" In the 28 September 1946 issue, Bobby Sherwood's "'Least That's My Opinion" has "a contagious rock and roll beat."

My preferred variant, *rock 'n' roll*, first makes an appearance in the 3 May 1947 issue, with "Dean Elliott's work setting the catchy rock 'n' roll rhythmic pattern" in Martha Tilton's "I wonder, I wonder, I wonder," although it doesn't reappear until the 1952 release of Anita O'Day's "Rock 'n' Roll Blues," with the next mention after that being a story on Alan Freed's Rock 'n' Roll Ball in New York, in the 22 Jan 1955 edition. It rapidly became *The Billboard's* preferred variant after that, although *rock 'n' roll* and *rock and roll* coexisted for a while, alongside *Rolling Stone's* preferred *rock & roll*, which I first note appearing in a list of Leading Cocktail Lounges published in the *The Billboard 1944 Music Year Book*, thanks to the Rock & Roll Inn of South Merchantville NJ.

The reviewer of Jimmy "Baby Face" Lewis's recording of "Lonesome Road" in the 28 June 1947 issue tells us it "holds an instrumental duel between guitar and the ork, but it's Lewis' rock and roll shouting that emerges the ear-winner." Jimmy "Baby Face" Lewis's career was just beginning at this point, two years to the week before a young Jerry Wexler was instrumental in *Billboard* renaming its *race* record category to *rhythm and blues*, but the singer-guitarist would continue to perform and record rhythm and blues music for another sixteen years. Lewis was unusual in forming his own record label, Ment Records, on which he released his later material. His career was ended by his arrest on narcotics and weapons charges on 29 March 1963, an arrest that police later claimed led to the exposing of a national narcotics ring. According to the *Chicago Tribune* of 30 March 1963, in addition to heroin, cocaine, marijuana, equipment for cutting drugs, and a range of knives and firearms, police found an address book with more than a hundred names in it. "The book listed mostly musicians," the *Tribune* continues, "Some of them prominent. Police said it could be a customer list, but there was 'nothing we could go into court with.'"

# JET

Vol. XXIII No. 26  
April 18, 1963  
A Johnson Publication

## CRIME

### Delinquency-Fighting Singer Faces Narcotics Rap

After returning to New York from a Boston benefit show staged to aid the fight against juvenile delinquency, 30-year-old Jimmy (Baby Face) Lewis, a former member of the Ray Charles Singers, was arrested on narcotics and gun charges after cops, one wearing a grass skirt, posing as musicians seeking an audition, gained entrance to Lewis' West End Ave. apartment and allegedly seized \$180,000 worth of narcotics. Confiscating a list of alleged show business customers, police said the records will "break the show business narcotics problem wide open." Meanwhile, an upcoming criminal court hearing promises to be hot because Lewis, freed under \$10,000 bail, charged he was "roughed up" by police, and police charge they were met by five dogs and a shotgun held by Lewis when they entered his apartment. Lewis' wife, Jane, a blonde, said police also roughed her up when they arrested her husband. Police said they were investigating the charge.



*Soul singer Lewis (l) undergoes questioning, while cop (r) models grass skirt used as ruse to get in Lewis' apartment.*

Some mornings in LA I'd go to the Tropicana Motel in the hope of bumping into some visiting musicians or, if none were in residence, and he was around, maybe hanging out with Tom Waits, who lived in a bungalow out back, which he'd somewhat modified with a handsaw so he could install a piano. It was Waits who explained the colour scheme that graced my 1958 Buick Super to me.

"General Motors, Buick, might *call* it something friendly like Desert Sand Metallic or whatever," he said. "But technically, if you talk to the manufacturer, the Duco people, to the folks at DuPont that actually make it, you'll find out that, *technically*, that color is always, by every person involved, *technically* described as monkey-shit brown."

Other mornings I hung out at Louis Moretti Management's offices on Wilshire Boulevard. If the Listening Room wasn't in use, and that was most of the time, Sawbuck Lou was happy to let me root through his company's record collection, which included discs going right back to when he started Rocketstar Records in Chicago in the early 1950s. I could also dip in to his library of bound *Billboard* magazines, which is what first inspired me to start collecting them myself.

I started at the beginning. Diving into *Billboard*, I took a step back in time and read about rock 'n' roll as it was being created, and from Sawbuck Lou's record collection I played the artists that were being mentioned, who didn't always feature the sounds I had associated with early rock 'n' roll. The rock 'n' roll music that reached the charts in the Britain of Eden and Macmillan was mainly white and uptempo, records made by hillbillies playing blues tunes a little too quickly. Bill Hayley paved the way for Elvis, Buddy Holly and the Crickets, the Everly Brothers, Jerry Lee Lewis, Danny and the Juniors, Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran. Then came the British imitators, Tommy Steele, Cliff Richard, the Shadows, and Larry Parnes's wonderfully-named stable, acts such as Vince Eagar, Marty Wilde, Billy Fury, Johnny Gentle and Lance Fortune. Black performers, including Larry Williams, Fats Waller and Little Richard, were present only as a small minority. But when I read in *Billboard* about the two nights of Alan Freed's first New York Rock 'n' Roll Ball at the beginning of 1955, I was looking at a bill with no white performers on it at all, and music that didn't necessarily connect with my understanding of what rock

'n' roll was. Sure, Big Joe Turner, riding high on the success of "Shake, Rattle and Roll," which I'd only heard in Bill Hayley's bowdlerised version, rocked hard enough. Fats Domino also melded boogie-woogie with the Basie Beat to produce something that was recognisable, to my ears, as rock 'n' roll. But there were jazzier voices too, including Ella Johnson, and doo-wop acts such as the Moonglows, the Clovers and the Harptones. And then, of course, had I been in New York at the St. Nicholas Arena on 14 or 15 January 1955, I would have seen and heard the remarkable Twistelettes.

I had never even heard of the them, never mind heard their music, but when I cued up the Twistelettes' 78 r.p.m. records I travelled far into another world. Two discs, in particular, reached out of the loudspeakers and shook me by the scruff of the neck. One was recorded for the Columbia label, and the second carried the imprint of Sawbuck Lou's own Rocketstar Records. Both discs together, four sides in total, delivered some of the most sinewy music I had ever heard, with a swaggering female lead vocal, lifted by exquisite harmonies, delivering knowing vocal lines, dripping with innuendo, weaving in and out of a pounding but supple bass part that could have been recorded ten years later at Stax. Sawbuck Lou was out of town for the week at an industry jamboree in Miami, so I couldn't ask him about the record. Errol Washington, the session bassist, who I'd met a few times while I haunted the studios, was listed on the Rocketstar labels as a sideman playing guitar, assuming it was the same Errol Washington, but he was away on tour, with Eric Clapton, I think, and wouldn't be back until June or so. In the meantime I spent several mornings working painstakingly through copies of *Billboard*, noting down everything that I could about the Twistelettes, which turned out to be not much at all.

*Billboard* told me that the Twistelettes were sisters Ruby and Yvonne Whyte, joined by Gloria Dixon, three girls from Chicago who were signed to Rocketstar Records and released their first record, a version of "Candy Man," in November 1954. This was followed by "Rock Me Daddy" and then a bare-bones recording of Connie Allen's "Rocket 69," the first side to feature Gloria Dixon's husky contralto in the lead. These three discs are pleasant enough, but they barely hint at what followed, four tracks that had all originally been recorded as jump blues by Julia Lee, the four sides that so amazed me when I first heard them. "My

Man Stands Out,” backed with “Don’t Come Too Soon,” came out on the Rocketstar label at the end of 1955, while “King Size Papa,” with “I Didn’t Like It The First Time” on the flip, was released by Columbia in February 1956, reaching #2 on *Billboard’s* national rhythm and blues chart, and crossing over to make it to #25 on the pop chart. All four sides exploded from the shellac, with that sinuous bass providing the foundation for a savage, stuttering guitar part with the sultry vocals piled on top like whipped cream. I played the four songs again and again, and wondered why Errol Washington played session bass if he could play guitar like that.

A ten-inch long-player, *Meet the Twistelettes*, came out in May, but sold poorly, which, having listened to it carefully in the perfect environment of Sawbuck Lou’s Listening Room, didn’t surprise me. New label Columbia had apparently decided to clean up the girls’ image and replaced the raunchy blues-based songs that had been at the heart of the Twistelettes’ repertoire with anaemic close-harmony numbers as sung by the Chordettes and the McGuire Sisters. The compact rhythm and blues unit that had driven along the early singles was out, too, replaced by a string orchestra. Two singles flopped even more heavily than the album from which they were taken, but that didn’t stop Columbia serving up more of the same on *Twistelettes Sing!* at the beginning of 1957, a record which performed worse still, and provides the last ever mention of the Twistelettes in *Billboard*, in the edition dated 26 January 1957. I could find no sign of the Twistelettes or its members after that. They had disappeared.



I probably should have known better than to get involved with Sawbuck Lou Moretti, but I was involved before I really knew it had happened, and it was before I met Tiffany Lightning and she hipped me to some of the unwritten rules of the LA scene. I'd flown in to San Francisco four days before 1974 arrived, full of piss and vinegar and determined to work for *Rolling Stone* magazine on my way to becoming the best rock 'n' roll writer in the world. I had already, at least to my own satisfaction, achieved my goal of being the best rock 'n' roll writer in England. But nobody at Rolling Stone magazine gave a rat's ass about anything I'd written five thousand miles away and cared even less for my ideas on how their magazine could be improved. So, the day after New Year's, I flew down to LA, because, I reasoned, that was where rock 'n' roll music was actually made. San Fransisco, or the bits I'd seen of it, was just a post-Haight-Ashbury wasteland full of speedfreak panhandlers.

In London, music had carried a mystical force as the harbinger of a new and better society. In LA, music wasn't nothing but a business, but I figured that, if I was going to be the best rock 'n' roll writer in the world, I had better muck down and learn just how that business worked.

"D'you wanna be useful, kid?" Sawbuck Lou said, surprising me. I was

crouched in the back corner of the control room at Sunset Sound Recorders in Hollywood, a notepad on my lap and a yellow #2 pencil in my hand. After maybe six weeks spending most days in the back corner of one or other of the various studios in town, nobody paid much note to *the limy reporter* any more and days would go by without anyone speaking to me. Louis Moretti, who everybody called Sawbuck Lou, except to his face, was the manager of the performer being recorded that day, a singer-songwriter whose name I forgot a long time ago. A lot of stories were told about Sawbuck Lou, and some of them were even true, such as the time where he dangled a record plugger by his ankles off of a tenth-floor balcony at the Continental Hyatt House on Sunset Boulevard in order to clarify some point that the record plugger had misapprehended. I'd spoken to people who were in the room when that happened. If Sawbuck Lou wanted me to be useful, I was happy to be useful.

"Sure," I said.

So I set to work moving acoustic baffles and microphones around and doing whatever else I was told to do by Jim Ellison, the softly-spoken New Yorker who was engineering the date. I shifted stuff around for the rest of the day, and as the afternoon dragged on, Jim sent me out to buy a pack of Chesterfields. I considered all this as a valuable part of my education, so I was as surprised as I was pleased when, at the end of the session, as the musicians were packing away their instruments, Sawbuck Lou reached into his billfold and handed over a twenty, before pausing to think for a moment and then peeling off five singles too.

"You a look kinda Italian." Sawbuck Lou spoke with a distinct accent, which varied in intensity depending on his state of bonhomie. Surrounded by friends, with the Chianti flowing, it was hard to tell that Sawbuck Lou was even speaking English. When something or someone was vexing him, he spoke regular American.

"My mother, Mister Moretti. Her parents were Italian."

"What's your name, kid?"

"Nick Numbers, Mister Moretti."

"Nick Numbers? With a name like that," Sawbuck Lou said. "You oughta be a drug dealer."

Being a drug dealer turned out to be a lot more enjoyable than I'd have imagined. I cruised around the Hollywood Hills at the helm of the monkey-shit brown 1958 Buick Super that I bought at Dollar Bill's Easy Autos for next to nothing, delivering carefully-crafted packages to Sawbuck Lou's roster of stars, would-be stars, former stars, associates and a brace of his ex-wives. One of the ways that Sawbuck Lou took care of his charges was by insisting that if they must take drugs, something of which he essentially disapproved, but accepted as part and parcel of the industry, they should take drugs that were of a known and superior quality, and sourced in a way that minimised or, ideally, removed any risk of arrest and incarceration. By the time I came along at the beginning of seventy-four, he had decided that the best way to achieve these objectives was to source and supply the drugs himself. His clients paid for the drugs, along with a small handling charge, as an additional line-item in their monthly management account.

My seven-day-a-week job was to prepare the packages at the special desk inside the walk-in safe at Sawbuck Lou's house, and then deliver them. I'd start work at about one in the afternoon, weighing up the powders and counting out the various pills and capsules before bagging everything up. I'd be on the road by half past two, and be finished by five-thirty or six o'clock, so I had the mornings and evenings to myself. Each Friday, Sawbuck Lou paid me three hundred dollars in cash and gave me a little bag with any drugs that had been paid for but, for whatever reason, not delivered. Maybe someone wasn't home at the appointed hour, or their guru had swung by and they'd decided to have an unscheduled day of yoga, meditation and Japanese Sencha tea. Each Friday evening, I took the bag of drugs home to the walk-up efficiency apartment I rented in a stucco box on Hayworth Avenue and put it in the empty typewriter case underneath my bed. I often felt as if I were the only person in the Greater Los Angeles area, at least among those born after Pearl Harbour, who didn't take any drugs at all. I didn't even smoke reefer any more. I'd struggled on with it for a while, despite its tendency to make me paranoid, but when I figured that it made me nauseous when it didn't make me paranoid, and that sometimes it made me paranoid *and* nauseous, I stopped. I figured that Sawbuck Lou somehow knew that I didn't take any drugs at all and that he knew it before he

even spoke to me that first time at Sunset Sound Recorders. I often wondered what Sawbuck Lou expected me to do with the drugs I was given, that I put in my empty typewriter case each week.

**CHANGING TIMES** *The Kiplinger Magazine*

May 1955

5

**Off-color phonograph records** are blamed for the rise in juvenile delinquency, along with television, movies, comic books and pulp fiction. The Houston Juvenile Delinquency and Crime Commission has issued a long list of records of songs with lyrics said to be objectionable. Local disc jockeys are asked to keep them off their turntables. Other communities are picking up the campaign, and if it gets widespread, there will be cries of censorship.

“The Twistelettes were my partner’s act, kid,” Sawbuck Lou told me. “Only partner I ever had. I needed fifteen grand when I started Rocketstar, and I didn’t have it. So I brought in my brother-in-law, my sister’s husband, who did have the dough and was also good at fixing electronics when they broke. He’d been to MIT and they’d made him an Engineering Officer in Korea, so he knew all that shit. And he’d picked up a thing for rhythm and blues from some enlisted men when he was in the army, and he had this little radio show on a Saturday nights on a local station, I don’t recall which, not that it matters. WBBN? Doesn’t matter. Anyway, he was playing rhythm and blues records to white kids, just like Alan Freed was in Cleveland, and some other characters were down in Texas and I figured that would help to promote the records I made, because I planned to focus on Race records, as we called them then. See, you could say things in Race music that you couldn’t in white people’s music, kid. You could make records about fucking. The folks on pop records held hands. They billed and they cooed. Folks on rhythm and blues records didn’t bill and coo, they *fucked*. And I could see that more and more white people, young people, the teen-agers, that’s how we pronounced it then, with that little catch in the middle for the hyphen, these

teen-agers were listening to rhythm and blues precisely because of this. Listening to characters like Alan Freed, who had found a way of beaming the sounds of fucking directly into the bedrooms of white America teen-agers. And I saw money in that, kid.”

Sawbuck Lou had been standing in the doorway of his walk-in safe, smoking a Chesterfield, while I was at my desk, counting out turquoise and red Tuinal capsules. He squeezed past me and I heard him rustling through some papers behind me as I moved on to the Quaaludes. He dropped a black and white photograph on to the desk, covering the pile of drugs.

“There we are, kid,” he said. “Round about fifty-four, fifty-five. He liked that English tailoring.”

Two men were standing outside a stone building’s arched doorway, with ROCKETSTAR RECORDS painted around the arch. A much younger Sawbuck Lou, as pugnacious as ever, was in a boxy chalkstripe suit cut loose in the American manner, and looking like a small-time hood. Beside him was a taller, slimmer thirtyish man with hooded, slightly sleepy eyes wearing a closer-cut houndstooth check three-piece, looking like a physics professor or maybe a little like a young James Joyce. They seemed unlikely partners. I slid the photo aside and started counting out pills again.

“Samuel Emerson Taylor,” he said, still going through papers on the shelf behind me. “Anyway, he wasn’t supposed to get too involved with running the business, which was my job. So I take on some acts, and make some records, and pay some deejays to play the records, and we get some other deejays laid, and we get some needletime and we sell some records, and then one day Samuel Emerson Taylor walks into the control room while I’m recording these three girls who want a disc for their ma’s birthday, you know, straight to shellac, because that was still the bread and butter of the business. The Whyte Sisters, they call themselves, and they’ve brought in their little friend Gloria because she has a guitar and she can play a few chords. And something cracks in Samuel Emerson Taylor and he decides then and there that he’s going to manage these girls and make them fucking stars. Maybe he just wanted to show me he could do my job better’n me. There you are,” he said, and dropped down a promotional photo captioned TWISTELETTES *Rocketstar Recording Stars* featuring three

young black girls with process hairdos, in matching white dresses.

“Gloria Dixon’s the little one in the middle,” he said. “The other two, well, you can see they’re sisters.”

I put the picture on top of the other photograph.

“So, kid, to cut a long story short, I come up with a dirty name for them, because *doing the twist*, back then, before the dance craze, was a term for screwing, just like *rocking and rolling* was. And we make a few quick records of dirty blues which I engineer, because that’s my job, and they do okay regionally, and even in Cleveland and New York, because Freed is playing them on his show. And then I go out on the road for a few days with one of my acts and Samuel Emerson Taylor decides he’s gonna go into my control room and actually make a record all by himself. So he brings in some musicians and then he spends twelve whole *fucking* hours recording just four sides. And when I find out about this I, well, I, ah, make my displeasure known. He’s already arranged for the first disc to be pressed so we’ll have to release that, but I make it clear that we’ve got to unload this stupid act and run the business like a fucking business. In fact, the record sounds pretty good, as it fucking should after twelve fucking hours of recording, so I manage to sell the Twistelettes contract to CBS, together with the master for the two songs we haven’t released, for twenty-five grand. A good day’s work.”

Sawbuck Lou squeezed past me again and took up his position leaning in the doorway again.

“I don’t think he ever forgave me for selling the Twistelettes, kid,” he said. “Samuel Emerson Taylor was never much of a drinker but he just turned into a boozehound. Fell to pieces. Got kicked offa his radio show for not showing up. Then Joyce, my sister, left him, so I bought him out for the fifteen grand he’d brought into the business in the first place. Then he took a powder. I never saw him again. I haven’t given him a thought in years.”

I handed the photographs back to Sawbuck Lou, but he waved them away. “Keep ’em,” he said. “Maybe one day you’ll write something about the Twistelettes. Who knows?”



One night, backstage in Memphis in 1979, I finally remembered to ask Errol Washington about the Twistelettes, mentioning how I loved his guitar work on the four sides featuring him, especially “King Size Papa.” He laughed, *haw-haw-haw-haw-haw*, long and loud.

“That ain’t me playing the guitar on those songs,” he said. “Sure, Mister Taylor booked me as a guitar-player and I showed up to the gig with my guitar and my amplifier and all everything, and I was meant to play guitar, and they even put my name on the record label as the guitar-player, but I didn’t end up playing guitar on none of those Twistelettes’ records. Let me, haw haw, explain it to you,” he said.

“I showed up to the gig, maybe eight thirty, eight thirty-five in the morning. And the two sisters were in the corner drinking coffee while the little one, Miss Dixon, was running all around the house, placing microphones and setting up baffle boards and what-have-you while Mister Taylor was keeping his own counsel in the control room. And there was no sign of Sawbuck Lou, which was unusual, seeing as he was always mostly the cat doing the recording. So I had a cup of joe myself and sat down with Charlie Preston and we watched all this activity while Hops Mitford set up his drums and Doc Meakin warmed his

fingers up on the keys and maybe half an hour in we were ready for a take, no run-throughs or nothing, straight to one-track tape.

“The take was clean enough and Mister Taylor played it back through the studio’s speakers and I personally thought it sounded pretty damn-ass good, because those girls were harmonizing real nice and us players had locked into a groove that just sat nicely under their voices, but little Miss Dixon wasn’t happy. She called Mister Taylor out from the control room and told him to pay Charlie off for the day and tell him to take his bull fiddle out of the way, which Mister Taylor, somewhat astonishing all the folks present, immediately did.

“And then Miss Dixon picked up a Fender bass, an electric bass y’know, we just called them Fender basses back then because Fender was the only outfit making them, and she picked up this Fender bass without an amplifier and patched it straight into the console, one of those RCA broadcast consoles, through one of the electric boxes that Mister Taylor was always tinkering with, and then we got ready for another take. And we only got a little way into the number, ‘King Size Papa’ was the first song we were recording, when we saw we had a situation. Miss Dixon was doing a mighty fine job of playing that big Fender bass, but being such an itty-bitty slip of a thing she had to sit herself down to play it, and when she was singing while she was seated down she couldn’t hit her low notes.

“And so she said to me, ‘Can you play the Fender bass?’ and I said, ‘sure,’ because I figured it couldn’t be that difficult, because, hell, an itty-bitty slip of a girl could play, even if she had to play it seated down, and so I said, ‘sure.’ And so she said for me to give her my guitar, which she *could* play standing up and I picked up that Fender bass. And I’m here to tell you I was surprised as all hell when I heard what she could do on my guitar. She gave me back my guitar pick and she just *spanked* those strings with the back of her hand, and she made my Fender Deluxe amplifier bark and howl like an angry hound dog. I hadn’t been paying too much mind to what she’d been doing up till that point and, if I’m being truthful with you, I’d been getting somewhat frustrated by all the time that her shenanigans and fooling about were taking up, and I’d been wondering when Mister Taylor was going to take charge of matters, but now I came to the understanding that Gloria Dixon was a real *musician* and not just a vocalist and

I maybe even felt a little guilty about feeling frustrated, at that. So we went for another take and I had fine old time playing that Fender bass even though I couldn't hear a damn thing seeing as how I didn't have no amplifier.

"And when we played it back the bass sounded real rich but it was killing Hops's kick-drum plus I'd missed a couple of notes what with not being able to hear myself play, although it may have been because I'd never played a Fender bass before, also. So Miss Dixon takes the microphone that was there for the upright bass and swings it down right in front of the kick drum, almost touching the skin and Hops tells her that if she does that and they try to make a record the needle'll just jump right outa the groove, and she, very calmly, tells him that no it won't. And, so as I can hear myself play, she gets Mister Taylor to patch the output from the console through to the playback speaker in the studio, and we get into another take.

"So, for this take I'm standing right in front of a playback speaker and I get to hear exactly what the track is going to sound like, or that's what I think. It's a clean take and we go to playback from the tape, and I don't hear what was coming out of the speaker when we were recording, but something much bigger and fuller and richer and just generally better than anything I'd ever yet heard in a recording studio, because the recording has picked up the singers and musicians but also the live playback coming through the speakers, so it's kinda doubled every part just a little bit, but not too much and, I gotta tell you this, with the girls' voices and our groove and the Fender bass and that kick drum there was something sexy, real, real sexy about it, really rocking and a rolling, like you could *smell* it in the room. By the end of that session I was hornier'n a three-balled tomcat, haw haw.

"And, yeah, that's how we cut the four songs, with me on the Fender bass and Gloria Dixon spanking the life out of my Fender Telecaster.

"Mister Taylor had a good enough ear, and he loved rhythm and blues music, but he was an engineer," Errol Washington said. "Not a recording engineer or a sound engineer but an *engineer* engineer, an East Coast boy with degrees from Harvard or MIT or some such place. He knew how to *make* hoojamaflops for the recording studio like the gizmo that let the Fender bass plug straight into the console, but he didn't really dig how to use them. But Miss

Dixon, she'd spent two months, since the last sides she cut with Sawbuck Lou, she'd spent two months practically living in that studio every chance she got because, if she was going to make a better record, she wanted to understand how records are made. I reckon she waited for a day when Sawbuck Lou wasn't around and just twisted Mister Taylor around her finger. There's a different sound on those four sides because Gloria Dixon had both a special kind of mind and a musician's ears, and she took both of them into the control room, which Mister Taylor let her do because, I do believe, Mister Taylor was more than little bit in love with Gloria Dixon, although that must have been somewhat inconvenient what with him being a white fellow and married and so forth, haw haw. Anyroad, when Sawbuck Lou sold the Twistelettes he just kinda fell to pieces. It was ugly. They say that when he sold out to Sawbuck Lou he just dropped his bottle of gin in his leather briefcase, put on his overcoat and his scarf and his hat, and walked out into that dark Chicago winter day never to be seen again by human eye.

"Although," he said. "I wasn't there, you understand. It's just a story I heard.

"And so that's how I first ended up playing the rock and roll bass guitar," Errol Washington told me, as we sat together in that Memphis dressing room, smoking a thin joint of lazy sinsemilla from Baja California, sipping at glasses filled with ice and topped up with scotch and soda, waiting for showtime. "I don't believe I ever told nobody that story before," he said.

*Popular music stirred up controversy in 1956, largely because of rock 'n' roll, a type of music previously known as rhythm-and-blues.*

*—The World Book Encyclopedia*



• **FIVE** •





The first time I shot somebody, it was an accident.

At the end of the school day, Darius Evans and I would stand on the same platform at Ravenscourt Park station, but his District Line train took him to Ealing Broadway station and then a short walk to his house, while mine took me to Richmond, where I switched to the British Railways side of the station for the train to Teddington and a twenty minute walk before I could let myself into my home. The children I'd known before going to Latymer were still in the area, but my going to a distant, posh school, combined with the time needed to get to and from it, forged a blade too keen for the bonds of juvenile friendship to resist, so I generally played records or watched the television, lying on the living room floor with my elbows on the carpet and my chin cupped in my hands while I waited for my mother and then, later, my father to return from work. As my mother increased in seniority at ABC, and later Thames Television, that sequence would increasingly be reversed.

Although our houses were only half an hour away from each other by car, Darius Evans and I had to use public transport, which put us quite a bit more than an hour apart and, at least during the school holidays, ate into our limited financial resources. Consequently, our friendship would simply be parked at the end of one school term to be started up again at the beginning of the next. During school terms we could at least visit each other without paying. Technically we should have paid for the stretch of the journey that wasn't covered by the season tickets that we had for getting in and out of school, from Turnham Green to Ealing Broadway in my case, and from Turnham Green to Teddington in his, but we soon learned that ticket inspectors never bothered to read the small print on season tickets, especially season tickets that had spent a few grimy weeks in a small boy's pocket, therefore a quick flash of green cardboard could take us anywhere we wanted on the network. Even so, the length of the two-way trip meant that we didn't see that much of each other outside of school.

I do remember one visit to Darius Evans's house, one glorious sunny day in 1964 or so. He lived in a large house on Madeley Road with a long garden that backed on to a cutting that went down to the railway line, right by the platforms of Ealing Broadway station. The bottom of the garden was quite overgrown and the two of us had crept on our bellies through this undergrowth until

we had a clear view down the slope to the passengers waiting for trains. I was holding Darius Evans's air rifle, a rare privilege for me as airguns were banned by my father. Darius Evans had sneaked into his brother Xerxes's room and had his BSA Meteor, which was substantially more powerful than Darius Evans's own. The game we were playing was simple. We waited until someone, preferably a city gent in full banker's rig, striped trousers, waistcoat, the works, stood in front of the large enamel station sign that was directly in front of us. Then, when the mark was in position, I shot a pellet at the sign, causing it to ring like a dull bell. If all went according to plan, the mark then turned to identify the sound, at which point Darius Evans would shoot him in the buttocks. The mark would spin around, looking for whatever had just stung him and, finding nothing, move on looking perplexed. The hardest part of the whole exercise was keeping ourselves from laughing, for there are few things funnier to a twelve year-old boy than the sight of a banker being shot in the arse with an airgun by a concealed sniper, and it doesn't get any less funny if you keep on doing it, which we did for perhaps two hours.

Then, just as we were lining up another mark, Darius Evans saw something glinting in the bushes just below us and leaned forward to see if he could reach it. He tried to use the barrel of the air rifle I was holding for support. This pressed the fleshy area at the base of his left thumb over the end of the barrel. I had the trigger under pressure, ready to ping the station sign. The airgun exhaled and the pellet hit him point blank, causing a cry that was equal parts pain and indignation. Several sets of eyes looked up from the station towards our hide-away, where neither of us moved. Darius Evans's face was scrunched up as if he was trying hard to stop himself crying, but it gradually unscrunched itself. He gestured with his hand, as we'd seen Steve McQueen gesture in *The Magnificent Seven*, and the two of us crept slowly backwards through the undergrowth until we were out of anyone's line of sight, when we were able to stand up and run back to the house.

In the kitchen we saw, under the running cold tap, that where the pellet had hit Darius Evan's hand was a hard, round crimson blood blister, as tall as it was wide.

# This could be you...

...if you tell Dad that top of your list for Christmas is a B.S.A. Air Rifle. For instance—



**B.S.A. METEOR AIR RIFLE**  
.177 or .22 made from top-quality, lustre-finish steel, with Scandinavian hardwood stock and a Mark I, three-power telescope.



**B.S.A. AIRSPORTER AIR RIFLE**  
.177 or .22. Powerful performance for sport or competition. Complete with feather-weight telescope and special cocking lever for loading.

WITH A B.S.A. 'METEOR' or a B.S.A. 'AIRSPORTER' YOU'LL BE A BIG SHOT IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD!



**B.S.A. GUNS LTD · STUDLEY ROAD  
REDDITCH · WORCESTERSHIRE**

*place your order with dad — RIGHT NOW!*

A few weeks after I started delivering drugs for Sawbuck Lou, I was just leaving his house with the day's supplies when he called me back.

"Here, kid," he said. "You might find this helpful." He handed me a snub-nosed Model 36 Smith & Wesson .38 Special revolver and a cardboard box of shells.

"I wouldn't know how to use it," I said.

"You point it, kid. And pull the trigger."

"I don't even know how to load it."

So Sawbuck Lou showed me how to load and unload the revolver, and I took it with me and popped it into the glovebox of my 1958 Buick Super before driving off. I drove round the corner and pulled over to the side of the road, where I took the gun out of the glovebox and, using what Sawbuck Lou had taught me, removed the shells and put them back in the cardboard box, before putting the gun and the bullets back in the glovebox and heading off on my circuit. I may have been carrying an American passport, thanks to my mother, but I had a very British attitude to guns. They were not my bag at all. The only *real* gun I had ever fired was a .22 Winchester at an amusement fair shooting gallery, where I pretended to be James Stewart in *Winchester '73* for the thirty seconds it took to fire five shots, and I planned for things to stay that way. That

evening, I took the Smith & Wesson and the shells up to my efficiency apartment and put them in the typewriter case under my bed where I stashed the extra drugs that Sawbuck Lou gave me.

My sex life changed gear when I got to the States. There was quite a bit of sex in and around the London counterculture, of course, even if the reality often fell far short of the rhetoric in the underground press, less *fucking in the streets* and more fumbling in the cloakroom. In the end, most of us, all of us, in effect, were products of the British middle-class, and that's a heavy burden to shift. I was once on the receiving end of a semi-serious pass made by Germaine Greer that had me diving for cover since Germaine scared the living daylights out of me, not just intellectually, but because it was well known that she'd challenged Jimi Hendrix to an arm-wrestling match one night at the Speakeasy and won. I didn't exactly have a chance to turn down the protean German editor of *Suck*, Didi Wadidi, who had me almost in passing, not exactly against my will, but much to my surprise, as if I'd been in her way and she'd decided it would be quicker to go through me than around. Although, and I never quite worked out how I felt about this, the encounter didn't make it into "Didi Fucks London" in issue 6 of *Suck*. Most of the time, however, it was joss sticks and candles in bedsits and squats, long nights of talking about Susan Sondheim with Ravi Shankar on the record player, and then a generally tentative affirmation of one's complicity with the counterculture's obligatory sexual liberation.

But things were different in the States. The Americans, at least those I met in Los Angeles, treated sex, *balling*, with an intensity, a ferocity, almost, that took my breath away. I'd grown accustomed to quiet, intimate, slightly clumsy moments of tenderness but had to adjust to an activity that had a vigorously competitive aspect, although who was competing against whom was not immediately clear.

Tiffany Lightning was different. I knew her name even when I was in London, as one of LA's supergroupies, those who had their pick of the visiting English musicians passing through, English musicians being at the top of a hierarchy of sexual desirability where scribes barely made the lower rungs. But

even before she turned eighteen, she had turned her back on that life, and assumed a certain superiority over the girls who waited for a musician's crooked finger at the bar of the Whiskey or, especially, the girls as young as twelve or thirteen who used Rodney Bingenheimer's English Disco as their base, girls who Miss Pamela of the GTOs, herself a retired supergroupie, crisply termed *tartelettes*. Quite why Tiffany Lightning chose to take me home one night was a mystery to me and, indeed, to pretty much everyone else on the strip, although John Mendelsohn suggested it may have been because I looked and sounded more like an English musician than a typical LA scribe, with my pale skin, my Carnaby Street togs and my Latymer-Upper-School-meets-Norf-London accent.

Sex, for Tiffany Lightning, was a serious matter. It was a subject to be studied, analysed, practiced and then performed to the best of a person's abilities. Tiffany Lightning treated sex the way I treated rock 'n' roll criticism and, similarly, aspired to be the best in her field, if she wasn't already. "Life," she told me. "Is too short for bad sex."

There have been some truth in John Mendelsohn's suggestion, but I think the real reason Tiffany Lightning took me home that night is because she saw me, in some way, as a potential *project*. After our second, or perhaps it was our third hook-up, she lit a Virginia Slim and, lying back on the double bed in my efficiency apartment, started blowing smoke rings up towards the ceiling. I lit a charcoal-filter Lark with my Zippo. That's when she laid out the ground rules to me. She wouldn't quite be my girlfriend, but she would teach me how to have sex. I would need to work hard, even when I felt I was too tired, but I would see the results of her coaching within weeks. Days, even.

"Rock music is about sex, kiddo," she said. "That's what I first noticed about it. What first made it interesting. But then I grasped that everything is about sex. Everything," she said. "Except sex itself," she said. "Sex," she said. "Is about control."

Tiffany Lightning, while she wasn't quite my girlfriend, taught me how to shoot a gun just as she taught me how to have sex. A few weeks after we first hooked

up, I told her how Sawbuck Lou gave me a .38 Special revolver and how I just stuck it in my typewriter case under my bed. She made me crawl under the bed and get it out and, having checked that I was telling the truth about it being unloaded, pointed it around the room at various items of furniture, my typewriter, and the Fender Telecaster guitar I'd bought from her mother, Lori Beauregard, and pulled the trigger a few times.

"It needs oiling," she said. "You cannot just leave a gat laying around, kiddo," she said. "You gotta look after it."

It took three days, out in the desert, for Tiffany Lightning to turn me from awkward and gun-shy into someone who could manage a handgun with a degree of assurance. It got so that, when I pulled the trigger, I didn't flinch, or close my eyes, and the shell went more or less where I aimed it. This was, Tiffany Lightning assured me, all that was strictly necessary. Tiffany Lightning had specific firearm skills that I lacked. She could draw faster than Swifty Morgan and she had other tricks, too, such as might normally be seen only at a State Fair or a rodeo. But these, she said, were just gravy, and it was unnecessary for me to trouble my noodle over them. They were the result, she said, of a daddy who chose to spend his leisure time out in the desert with pretty much anything from a derringer to a Sherman tank, taking pops at rocks, beer cans, and any rattlesnakes or other small critters that had the mischance to be sunning themselves on the sand.

"As soon as I was old enough to handle a double deuce," Tiffany Lightning said. "He started taking me along."

Tiffany Lightning liked to dress like, and talk like, a character from a thirties movie. Her speech was always slightly too fast and peppered with slang that seemed randomly selected from the previous five decades. I could normally keep up, but I had no idea what a double deuce was.

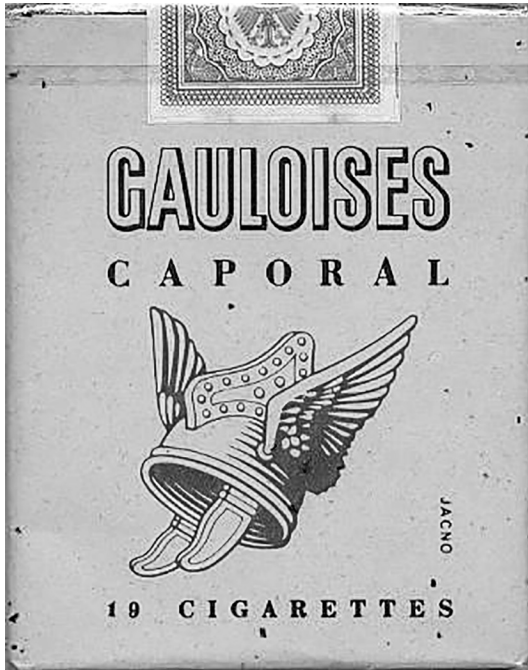
"It's a twenty-two calibre rifle, ya big lummoX. Thanks to my daddy," Tiffany Lightning said. "I can field-strip an M1 carbine and I can cuss for ten minutes straight without using the same word twice. He is also the nimrod," she said. "Who gave me my stupid name."

"Tiffany is not so bad," I said.

"I only started going by Tiffany when I was fourteen or fifteen," she said. "I

saw *Breakfast at Tiffany's* on the tube and something flipped. I changed my handle and started growing out my fro. No," she said. "Lightning," she said. "He named me after a fighter plane. A Lockheed P38 Lightning. Only a nimrod names a baby after a fighter plane," she said. "Lightning Jones," she said. "It is a jive name for some straw-haired tomboy in the flicks," she said. "But not so jive for a po' lil colored girl going to school in a mostly white neighborhood."

In the end, I lent the gun to John Lennon, when I got roped in to help with the negotiations taking place regarding the master tapes of John's *Rock 'n' Roll* sessions, master tapes that Phil Spector had taken home and locked away, and was holding to ransom. Phil Spector always carried a gun to meetings and John told the room that he felt kinda naked without one. My efficiency apartment was nearby, so I saw a chance to help out. I wasn't needed for the next meeting, which turned out to be the definitive one, and I never saw John or the gun again. But John Lennon did introduce me to Gauloises cigarettes.



I smoked pot, like everyone else, until I decided it was doing me no real good, and I tripped on four occasions, twice deliberately and a couple more times

when I was spiked at parties, which is how I learned one of life's most valuable lessons, to *never to drink the punch*. LSD, in my firmly-held but heterodox opinion, was less a recreational drug than an enabler, a tool for opening doors to places, experiences, emotions that might never be discovered without it. Once those doors had been opened they couldn't ever be closed again, so there was no need to take any more acid, because you wouldn't find anything new. And there were a few leapers for those seemingly endless nights at various underground newspapers, and maybe a red, just to smooth the edges off the come-down of the speed on the morning after. But nothing I'd consider actual, serious drugs. Drugs, although I'm sure they were around, didn't directly impinge on my life while I was in England.

America changed that, though. Drugs were everywhere. I'd only ever seen hard drugs, in quantity, being treated as an everyday matter at Keith Richard's villa on the Côte d'Azur in 1971, although never I wrote about it after Spanish Tony asked me, politely, but with clear and unmistakable menace, not to. But that was life through the coke-dusted looking-glass, where the normal rules of real life didn't apply. Real life in Los Angeles was clearly played to different normal rules than real life in London.

Quaaludes and cocaine seemed as ubiquitous as a pot of tea had been at *IT* or *Frendz*, and heroin was starting to make a strong showing as the beautiful people in the city's valleys and canyons started following a trip uptown, or a line of coke, with a trip downtown, a balancing snort of smack. I didn't see the attraction, although I was working pretty hard on my drinking at the time, which might have helped. So, for the time that I was delivering drugs for Sawbuck Lou Moretti in 1974, the typewriter case underneath my bed, where I tipped my week-end bonus, slowly got fuller and fuller.

My customers, as I considered the people with whom I would drop off drugs each day, would often invite me in for a coffee or a soda and a chat. They'd make me comfortable and disappear into a bathroom with their little bag, returning with either a little more or a little less animation in their conversation, depending on what was in that day's bag. It was in these chats, in the living rooms and beside the swimming pools of the Hollywood Hills that I first began to understand the realities of the music business as a business, as musicians seem com-

fortable to talk about things with their drug connection that they'd never mention to a journalist. I heard about the rip-offs and the opaque financial reporting, of the hidden clauses that made a great deal into a turkey. And I learned a lot about different styles of management, and particularly Sawbuck Lou's. "He asked me what I wanted," Billy Trenton, the lead guitarist of Overland Trail, told me at his Laurel Canyon cabin. "I told him, 'Money.'" He waved his hand, indicating his surroundings. "I got money," he said. "Sawbuck Lou's honest enough, that way. But Lou got more money. And it was the wrong answer, anyway. I should have told him I wanted control. The folks who have control get to make the decisions. And most of the money." Billy Trenton tipped the brim of his hat with the index finger of his right hand. He always wore a beige Stetson with a rattlesnake hatband, indoors and out. I never asked why.


Billy Trenton was one of very few people who got a daily allocation of heroin from the first days of my delivery runs, although it never occurred to me that he might be a drug addict, a *junkie*, as I'd been assured by a number of people that you couldn't get a habit from merely snorting high-quality dope. Drugs that scared the bejabbers out of me in London were just understood by everyone to be part of the all-round fun that the California lifestyle embodied and, while I wasn't taking any of them myself, I was quite happy to play my part in facilitating this aspect of that fun. And I could tell that Billy Trenton wasn't a junkie, anyway, because junkies don't look tanned and toned, as if they've just climbed off a surfboard which, in Billy's case, was often literally the case, for I doubt he loved anything better than catching a perfect wave, although slender blondes probably pushed it into a close second.

It seemed that every delivery I made found a different slender blonde, and they were always slender blondes, lying flat on a lounge by the pool, nude apart from a pair of sunglasses and perhaps some bracelets, working to deepen a tan that was already the colour of butterscotch. I never saw them move. Sometimes, if I was chatting with Billy inside the house, I would hear the splash of a body diving into the pool, but by the time I looked through the french doors, the blonde would be back in position on her lounge, the only sign that she'd been for a swim being beads of water popping on her skin and catching the sunlight in her pubic hair like diamonds. The blondes were so slender and so immobile

that I almost suspected Billy of strapping them, alongside his surfboard, to the roof-rack of his vintage Packard Super Eight station wagon when he drove to the beach.

I once told Billy Trenton that he seemed to have the perfect life. “You should have been here before,” he said to me. “Five years ago, man, this place was so special.” I kept hearing this. Everyone said that, after the Manson murders, Laurel Canyon was a shadow of its former self, not like the days when you could pop in on Joni Mitchell, or sit at Mama Cass’s feet while she held court, or wake up to the sound of Ravis Shankar’s early-morning sitar practiceweaving through the trees. “It’s changed, man,” Billy Trenton said. “There’s a darkness in the light.”

I didn’t believe him, nor anyone else who said the California life was anything less than wonderful.



**Coke Chopper & Straw**

**CHOPPER**  
sterling silver \$19.95  
14 K \$98.50

**2" STRAW**  
\$7.95 sterling silver  
\$67.50 14 K

send check or m.o. to:  
LEECO KNIFE & STRAW  
43 Greenwich Ave. Box C  
New York, N.Y. 10014

N.Y.S. residents add 8% tax  
Shipped pre-paid anywhere in U.S.A.

John Mendelsohn, who considered himself the King of LA, at least in the realm of rock criticism, but possibly in all fields of endeavour, told me all about the Buffalo Rock Writers Symposium. John Mendelsohn wrote for *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* in a style seething with braggadocio that reminded me somewhat of Nik Cohn’s work, perhaps because it was, quite substantially, copped from Nik Cohn as he would, decades later, when I bumped into him on Shaftesbury Avenue in London, more or less admit. The John Mendelsohn of 1974 had an abrasive, confrontational manner that won him few friends, especially in combination with his abrasive, confrontational writing. He once told me he was in the business of “destroying other people’s careers.” I divined, correctly, it later emerged, that the abrasiveness came from an attempt to disguise deep-seated

shyness and insecurity, but that didn't make it any less abrasive. Despite that, I got on well enough with him, perhaps because, being skinny, pale, English-accented and eccentrically-clothed, at least by the standards of the Strip, I reminded him somewhat of those British musicians that, he was always quick to point out, were his musical heroes. He credited his own snappy dress-sense to the immaculate Ray Davies, who had so impressed a younger John Mendelsohn when he'd been flown in to New York to meet the head Kink. "I was always fashion-conscious," he told me. "But the fashion at the time was to wear a leather jacket that looked like it had been stolen off a drunk lying in the gutter. I was wearing just such a jacket when I was ushered in to meet Ray, who was immaculately tailored. When I got back to LA, I resolved that I must take steps, to improve matters."

John Mendelsohn was perhaps the only person I ever met who always spoke in complete sentences, with consistent grammar that would delight a high-school English teacher. He was also the only person that I met in the continental United States who shared my views on the ultimate mediocrity of Led Zeppelin.

On Friday 10 May 1974, John Mendelsohn got on an American Airways Boeing 707 in LAX, changed planes at Chicago, and ended up in Buffalo, NY, where Buffalo State College was hosting a Rock Writers Symposium. He was greeted, at just after six in the evening, by a group of East Coast scribes, including Lester Bangs, who'd already had a snootful. Bangs took one look at the bouffant-haired LA critic with his Zapata moustache and bellowed, "You look like a fuckin' Mexican." Mendelsohn was not impressed.

As the evening developed and the scribes moved through downtown Buffalo, Bangs and several of the others kept hitting the booze even harder. Their behaviour spilled more and more into public areas, drawing looks of increasing disgust from bystanders. One writer, Mendelsohn remembered it was Greg Shaw, but couldn't be completely certain, threw up. Patti Smith held his hair back for him while he did so.

Patti Smith and Lenny Kaye, who were due to perform at the symposium the next day, glided through this chaos without, or so John Mendelsohn described things, engaging in it or being affected by it. I knew of Patti as the author of some bizarre stream-of-consciousness reviews in *Creem*, and Lenny as a

writer of more conventional reviews and as the New York correspondent of *Disc*. He'd also compiled a double-album called *Nuggets* a couple of years earlier, an exciting collection of the musical obscurities from the mid-sixties, the kind of music that Bangs, Dave Marsh and the rest of the *Creem* crowd liked to call punk rock. Patti, Mendelsohn told me, had some renown in New York City as a poet, although this was to be her first out-of-town performance. Mendelsohn described Patti as staggeringly aloof, but I'm of the opinion, having met her when I'd moved from LA to New York, and seen her shows perhaps twenty times in the years after Mendelsohn told me the story, that she was just on a different plane to the rest of them, with Lenny acting as her representative on earth when required. Patti Smith, I decided quite quickly, was, although it manifested itself in a very different way than with me, Exempt.

Unlike Patti and me, however, Lester Bangs was clearly not Exempt. He probably sought Exemption and perhaps he even believed that he had achieved it, but the rules still applied to him. He was breaking them, not Exempt from them. To be Exempt is to accept a responsibility. To live outside the law you must be honest, and all that crap. Bangs, I decided, after I'd known him, too, for a while, was not one to step up to that responsibility. Bangs and I spent some time together in the period we overlapped in New York, in 1976, after he blew in from Detroit and before I split the scene, and I came to the conclusion that he was a lovely guy, but only if you caught him sober. To see Bangs loaded up with hooch was to know that Bangs could never be Exempt, because he could not keep control and he would lose his cool.

When the scrimmage of wasted scribes was refused entry to a nightclub in the pouring rain John Mendelsohn decided to split. Bangs and Richard Meltzer wanted to go to the women's dormitories at Buffalo State in search of action, but he didn't fancy getting involved in more drinking, panty raids and trying to seduce co-eds, which appeared to be the agreed agenda, so cut for the room that had been arranged for him at the Lenox Hotel on North Street.

The next day, the Saturday, was spent kicking around Buffalo until it was time for the event that had brought all the writers together. Mendelsohn was there to represent Los Angeles, but he was heavily outnumbered by the East Coast critics' Mafia, who had clearly spent most of the day treating their

hangovers with more booze. Patti Smith read or, rather, shouted her sinuous, free-form poetry with Lenny Kaye providing a rhythmic backing for her on his guitar, a performance that Mendelssohn found fake and pretentious, perhaps because of Patti's quite fey rock 'n' roll moves. When I first saw her show a few months later I considered it to be honest and interesting. I can see, however, that it might be somewhat peculiar in the context of a symposium on rock writing. Then it was time for the critics to rap.

To begin with, there was a semblance of order to the proceedings, but it didn't last long. To get things rolling, the panelists were asked to provide their definition of rock 'n' roll. Most were predictable, while Bangs's hinted at the ultimate futility of rock criticism as a profession.

"Rock 'n' roll is the American art form," Bangs said. "Eric Dolphy once said that music came out of his breath, went through the saxophone, and it was gone. It's true. It's evanescent. It's here and then it's gone, and you can never capture it again."

At this point Richard Meltzer realised that, after repeatedly filling his water cup with whiskey, he needed to urinate. Draining his cup again, he stood up, slid himself behind a curtain to the side of the stage, and began to relieve himself into the cup. Patti Smith, sitting two chairs away from Mendelssohn, was still clearly buzzing from her performance and spoke up in the slightly stentorian tone she had used for some of her poems.

"What's rock 'n' roll?" she said. She pointed to the wings, from where the sounds of Meltzer pissing into a paper cup could clearly be heard. "Rock 'n' roll," she said, with a slight curl to her lip. "Is anything Richard Meltzer does." That pretty much closed off the question as Meltzer emerged from behind the curtain, minus his water cup, and sat down heavily beside Bangs.

Mendelssohn was at the other end of the stage to Bangs and Meltzer, with Lenny Kaye to his left and, to his right, a fairly zombified Rob Tyner, the former lead singer of the Detroit band MC5 and owner of an afro that could rival Mick Farren's. It rapidly became clear that it was the quiet end of the stage. Although there was a moderator, there seemed to be no real agenda or any proposition to debate once the panel got past a couple of initial prepared questions, or if there was, it got hijacked by Bangs and Meltzer, who turned the session into a free-

for-all, with the two of them goading each other on to greater and greater excesses of boozy verbal freestyling. They tore into most of the rock critics who were not present, unloading particular opprobrium on the work and personality of Robert Christgau, whose writing in the *Village Voice* was, I felt, consistently reliable, if a little breezy at times. Then they tore into the editors, Bangs saving his sharpest words for *Rolling Stone's* Jann Wenner. With a grand gesture, Bangs pulled out and read a letter that the manager of Canned Heat had written to *Rolling Stone* after he'd panned one of the group's albums, and which had got him fired from the paper. The other writers on the panel, Greg Shaw and Nick Tosches, for example, had trouble getting a word in, as Bangs kept getting more and more messianic, and more and more self-contradictory. Even John Mendelsohn was silenced.

After thirty or forty minutes the symposium collapsed under its own weight and somebody, Tyner maybe, or it could have been Meltzer, suggested a party in the dorms. Whiskey and co-eds were mentioned. Mendelsohn went back to the Lenox Hotel, to write. Or that's what he told me, anyway.



I continued to hang around the various studios most mornings, gradually getting to know the session players, who were all pulled from a fairly small pool. Whichever studio I'd chosen, the musicians would have come from the same

group of twenty-five or thirty players, who could play every flavour of pop and rock music and, working off chord charts rather than lead lines, generally creating the detail of their own parts in the process. Afternoons were spent performing deliveries, after which I would go home and write for three or four hours, before heading off into the night, hoping to find a good live act at one of the clubs, but happy enough if a band was mediocre, which it generally was. I was starting to learn that there was stuff to be gained by understanding even the music I hated, starting with exactly why I hated it.

I discovered quickly that almost nobody in America wanted to publish negative reviews so I needed to deliver positive write-ups even of the music I didn't like, which turned out to be just about all of it. After a few weeks of simply faking things, it occurred to me that the only honest way I could do that was to understand why somebody else, even if it was just the musicians producing it, might hold a different position to my own. I started listening to music in a new way, which changed the way I wrote about it. I was no longer trying to communicate the transcendental power that a song or an album or a show had over me, rather providing insight into the intent of a musician or a group, their methods of execution, and the audience that might respond to it. And then, before I knew it, I started bringing critical thinking, the sort at which I had sneered when I was at university, into the world of the rock critic. I started treating a song, or an album, or a show as a *text*, and analysing it in isolation, as a thing in itself, worthy of in-depth scrutiny, independent of the reaction any audience, including me, might have, a scrutiny that must be performed with a technical precision and a professionalism far surpassing that of conventional reviewing. I was no fan of the New Critics and their ilk when at University College London, seeing them as bourgeois and reactionary. But, fuelled by Metaxa and Canada Dry, I soon realised that I was becoming the F.R. Leavis of rock 'n' roll scribes.

The editors who received my copy, however, had other ideas. It turned out that the world, or, more specifically, America's subterranean rock 'n' roll press, was not yet ready for the F.R. Leavis of rock 'n' roll scribes. Its editors preferred my Bangsian ranting and raving with, ideally, as much extreme punctuation as I could manage. Six consecutive semicolons, used percussively, would trigger a

nod of approval and a dozen could inspire actual praise. Undaunted, I would still draft and redraft my erudite and scholarly dissection of each disc or show, before placing it carefully in a box file, and then hammering out a first-pass burst of gonzo hootin' and a hollerin' from the perspective of someone who genuinely liked the music in question, using the insight I had gathered in the critical process. And that would set me up nicely for another evening of whatever LA had to throw at me.

Over time, I refined my critical approach, getting more and more traditional, I later realised, with each pass. I had a simple formula. I would identify what the band or artist was trying to do. Then I'd assess how well they were doing it. Then I'd run all that through an analysis of whether what they were trying to do was itself worthwhile or not. When Lester Bangs took me along to the Bunker to meet William Burroughs, on the day after we saw the Police at CBGB in 1979, I talked this through with Burroughs. Burroughs had some strong views about critics, having been on the wrong side of their typewriters often enough. But he gave his approval to my approach, pointing out that my final phase, deciding whether the artist's endeavour was worthwhile, was reminiscent of Matthew Arnold's requirement for *high seriousness*. I tried to read Arnold after that, but was never entirely sure what he meant by *high seriousness*. And in 1974-5, when I formulated my approach, I had never even heard of him.

The second time I shot somebody was, like the first time I shot somebody, a mistake.

The first time I shot somebody I gave my friend Darius Evans a blood blister at the base of his thumb where I shot him point blank with his own air rifle, an air rifle that had once been his father's and then his brother's and that had lost quite a bit of its puff over the years. The second time I shot somebody, well, it was a little more substantial.

One Monday, right at the end of October 1974, I was making my daily delivery of drugs for Sawbuck Lou. Maybe two, two-thirty in the afternoon I pulled up to Billy Trenton's cabin in Laurel Canyon. As I walked up to the door, Billy opened it, and almost dragged me inside. He seemed agitated, and he was sweating. It was a pleasant enough day, but this wasn't the kind of sweat you get

from a hot day. It was the kind of sweat you get from stress or panic. It had that smell to it. I thought I'd caught a hint of this over the previous week or two, but now it was undeniable. His hair, which, unusually, wasn't peeking out of a Stetson with a rattlesnake hatband, was matted, and I noticed that, as with a lot of wispy blonds, it was thinning quite a bit even though Billy Trenton was only five years or so older than me. Which would, I realise, explain the hat.

There were rumours that Overland Trail, for whom Billy Trenton played lead guitar, was having *difficulties* in the studio, with Billy and singer Jonno Filmore not seeing eye-to-eye over the musical direction the band was taking, Billy wanting to push the country aspect of the sound and Jonno favouring a harder, rockier approach. I figured that might be beginning to take its toll.

"Gimme," he said.

I handed him his goodie bag. He rummaged through it. I looked out through the french windows to the pool. There was no slender blonde sunning herself, which was as unusual as Billy Trenton not wearing his Stetson.

"I told Sawbuck I needed more than this," he said. "The asshole."

He looked up and at me, his head at an angle. His eyes darted to the black canvas satchel slung over my shoulder, the satchel that I always used for my deliveries. "You're carrying more than this," he said. "Gimme more. You can square it with Sawbuck. I know you can."

"You're my last delivery," I said. "I'd help you, but I'm cleaned out." I was lying, but I didn't feel like explaining to those up the line that they had to make do with less candy because Billy Trenton was being a greedy sonofabitch. People had tried this approach on me before and I had always responded with the same stonewall, delivered with slightly clipped British authority, the sort of voice that evolved over centuries to keep natives or, in this case, ex-colonials in their place. It always worked.

This time it didn't work.

"You lying fucker," Billy Trenton said, his voice raising in volume and register so that the word fucker rang on for a second or two. "You lying sack of shit. You've got more dope, Nick. Gimme more dope."

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Billy," I said keeping as calm as I could. I would not lose my cool. "You're my last call."

Billy Trenton had been pacing towards me and then away from me, as if he was trying to build up the courage to rush me, but then not quite getting there. I started moving towards the door. Now Billy backed away further, to a long, burgundy leather sofa, where he reached under an embroidered cushion depicting a unicorn looking at its reflection in a mirror and pulled out a revolver that looked pretty much exactly like the one that had sat under my bed, until I lent it to John Lennon. Only, unlike my revolver, this one had bullets in it. I could see them in the chambers.

“Now, just wait a minute, Billy,” I said.

“Don’t you just-a-minute me,” he said. “I’m not joking. You’re gonna gimme more dope. This ain’t close to what I told Sawbuck Lou.”

This time he’d plucked up the courage to come right up to me, blocking my route to the door. We were face to face, the gun, in his right hand, somewhere around my midriff, his left hand pointing a finger in my face. That hand dropped, until it was just in front of my own right hand, clasping the strap of my satchel. I looked down, and saw that the hand holding the gun had drifted outwards, and was pointed nowhere near me. Billy Trenton lunged for my bag and I, completely by reflex, dropped my left shoulder into his gun arm with my elbow moving hard into the area of his solar plexus, a move that Darius Evans had taught me on the school playground nearly ten years earlier. It was a manoeuvre designed to deflect a tackle on the rugby field rather than a strung-out guitarist trying to steal a bag of drugs I was carrying, but proved to be a more versatile manoeuvre than I’d have expected.

Winded, Billy Trenton sagged, and I went for the gun. This seemed to bring him back to life, and he fought back. I had his gun hand almost under control when he brought in his left hand in an attempt to dislodge mine. As we grappled, trying to keep my grip, my index finger caught in the trigger guard and, as Billy tried to pull the revolver away from me by the barrel, it was jerked against the trigger. A gunshot. *Crack.*

Just the one shot. *Crack.*

In the confined space of Billy Trenton’s living room, that shot was one of the loudest things I had ever heard. I felt the heat of the muzzle-blast scorch my stomach, and wondered if I’d shot myself, but before I had a chance to check,

Billy let out a howl, roaring like a Cretan bull, and fell away from me into a ball on the floor, his left hand grabbed in a fist made by his right hand, dark, shiny blood oozing out from between the clenched fingers. Oblivious of me, he opened his fist and looked down at his left hand, which was drizzling blood. The tip of his middle finger, from the last knuckle up, was completely gone. He clamped his left hand in his right again, and started rocking forward and backward, loud moans catching in his throat.

I still had the gun in my hand, so I unloaded it, pocketing the shells, and went straight to the telephone in the hall. I dialled Sawbuck Lou's office number and I was put straight through to him by Helen, at the switchboard. I told him the story as straightforwardly as I could.

"Is it serious, kid?" he said.

"He's a guitar player," I said. "I shot the end off of his damn finger. It's like blinding a painter."

"But he's gonna live?"

"He's gonna live," I said.

"Get outta town, kid," he said. "You got any merchandise left?"

"A little," I said. I listed the deliveries I hadn't made.

"Leave it in Billy's mailbox," he said. "It'll be picked up. Now skedaddle, kid. If you're not around, it's a lot harder for anything to point to you or, worse, me, if things somehow go cockeyed. Call when you get wherever you're going. But get outta town now. And remind Billy that nobody shot him, just in case he's under any misapprehension."

I hung up, and looked through the doorway at Billy, who was curled up on the floor.

"Billy," I said. "Lou says that if anyone wants to know who shot you, tell 'em it was nobody."

Billy sort of whimpered a reply, but I wasn't paying attention. I went through the front door and crunched across the gravel to my car, which I fired up and pointed down Billy Trenton's driveway. At the foot of the driveway I jumped out and shoved my black canvas bag into Billy's mailbox along with his revolver, and headed off, with as much speed as my Buick could muster, to my Hayworth Avenue apartment, slowing only to have my final movie moment

looking across the San Fernando Valley from Mulholland. I stripped off my shirt, which was flecked with blood, and replaced it with a fresh one. I packed, quickly. I crammed everything I owned into the Buick's vast trunk, and headed off into the unknown, alone but for a typewriter, a tape recorder, a guitar and an amplifier, two boxes of *Billboard* magazines, another box with a few dozen old 45 r.p.m. records in it, a comprehensive selection of deluxe drugs, fourteen hundred dollars in cash plus change, and a few hundred pages of typescript that wrestled with the task of redefining rock 'n' roll criticism. On the seat beside me, I had a packet of Gauloises, a six-pack of Red Cap ale and a fifth of Metaxa that was nearly full. I eased the Buick into the afternoon traffic and charted a route that would take me as directly as possible to I-10, and then east.

*It is important just when a generation first sees the light—and by a generation I mean that reaction against the fathers which seems to occur about three times in a century. It is distinguished by a set of ideas, inherited in moderated form from the madmen and the outlaws of the generation before; if it is a real generation it has its own leaders and spokesmen, and it draws into its orbit those born just before it and just after, whose ideas are less clear-cut and defiant.*

—F. Scott Fitzgerald



• **SIX** •





When we were fifteen years old, Darius Evans wanted to emulate Neal Cassady and drive across the United States non-stop, buzzing on benzedrine and clicking his fingers to be-bop on the radio. He said it would be fab. But I didn't feel too fab when I arrived in New York after driving over fourteen hours a day for four straight days, starting at dawn and carrying on until I just couldn't take the full moon any more. To be fair, I was partly feeling frazzled because, in order to drive over fourteen hours a day I'd needed to grab a little Methedrine out of my box of candy from time to time, considering that *pharmaceuticals*, even those that had not been prescribed, constituted a lower-risk option than actual drugs such as cocaine. And, while it did keep me awake, to such an extent that I needed a couple of Quaaludes just to get to sleep at night, the effect was a lot more physical than I'd anticipated, and by the fourth day of driving my back teeth felt as if they were loose in their sockets from all the grinding they'd been doing.

There's a lot of time to think when you're driving fourteen hours a day right across the USA in a 1958 monkey-shit brown Buick Super and you only have AM radio for company. The radio, which was from a newer Buick, and had five preset buttons labelled B, U, I C and K that didn't work, was supposed to receive FM but that didn't work either. AM suited me fine in LA, where I'd rather listen to talk radio than the crappy country rock that filled the FM airwaves. But by the time I'd left California behind there seemed to be nothing on AM but sky-pilots asking me to pledge \$10 in return for eternal salvation, at least until the next show, where they'd tap me for \$10 more. The further I drove, the more LA started to feel like a surreal dream, and the less and less relevant that I had been involved in nobody shooting the end off Billy Trenton's middle finger, thus terminating his career as lead guitarist for Overland Trail, at least temporarily.

While I was passing my fourteen-hour days in thought, I focused quite a lot on 1975, which was just around the corner. I had high hopes for 1975. In my research, as I tried to move through a phase of being the F.R. Leavis of rock 'n' roll scribes, and on to a higher plane of rock criticism, I'd homed in on 1955 and 1965 as *the* two key years in the history of rock 'n' roll music to date. Most critics would say I was wrong, that 1956 was the key year of rock 'n' roll's first

wave, the year when Elvis exploded in to the public's consciousness after RCA bought him from Sam Phillips. Equally, they would say, fooling with the silver cocaine spoon on the silver chain around their neck, 1966 was the year when rock 'n' roll grew up, when it finally became *rock music*, something with a bit of intellectual heft. And I would smile, and sip at my Metaxa, comfortable in the knowledge that they were wrong.

"There's a poem," I'd said to Tiffany Lightning one calm June night, after she had been teaching me how to have sex for an hour or two. "A poem I really like by a cat called Thom Gunn. He wrote it back in the fifties, and it's called 'Elvis Presley.' It's not entirely complimentary. It's like Thom Gunn can't decide whether he likes Elvis or not. But in this poem, in this poem about Elvis Presley written right back in nineteen fifty-seven or so, Thom Gunn says that Elvis, and I quote, turns revolt into a style."

"I'm not sure I'm quite hip to the point of that assertion," Tiffany Lightning said. She lit a Virginia Slim with my Zippo. "Are you laying out, is *he* laying out, that Mister Hips takes revolt, revolution, rebellion, and somehow neutralizes it so that only the superficial aspects of it remain as, kinda, fashion accessories? Turning a tiger into a fur carpet."

"Maybe," I said. "That's how George Melly sees it."

"What's George Melly?" Tiffany Lightning said.

"He's a jazz singer in England," I said. "And an art critic. He wears very, extremely," I couldn't find the word. "Suits," I said. He wears very, *present*, suits. And that's how George Melly sees it, as much I as understand him, but I'm not always sure I do. For me, Elvis, rock 'n' roll, was all about revolt, but it was mainstream society that softened it, toned it down, eunuchised it. Elvis was revolt *with* style, *stylish revolt*, but when RCA got its hands on him only the *superficial aspects*, and thanks, I like that phrase, only the superficial aspects survived.

"And that," I said. "Is why nineteen fifty-five is the key year, because rock 'n' roll was still stylish revolt. After that, it became the style *of* revolt. And nineteen fifty-five was the year where there was equilibrium between rhythm and blues on one side and hillbilly cats on the other. Nineteen fifty-six is when rock 'n' roll really started to become, as you're always reminding me, a white boys club."

Tiffany Lightning nodded her afro and blew a smoke-ring at me.

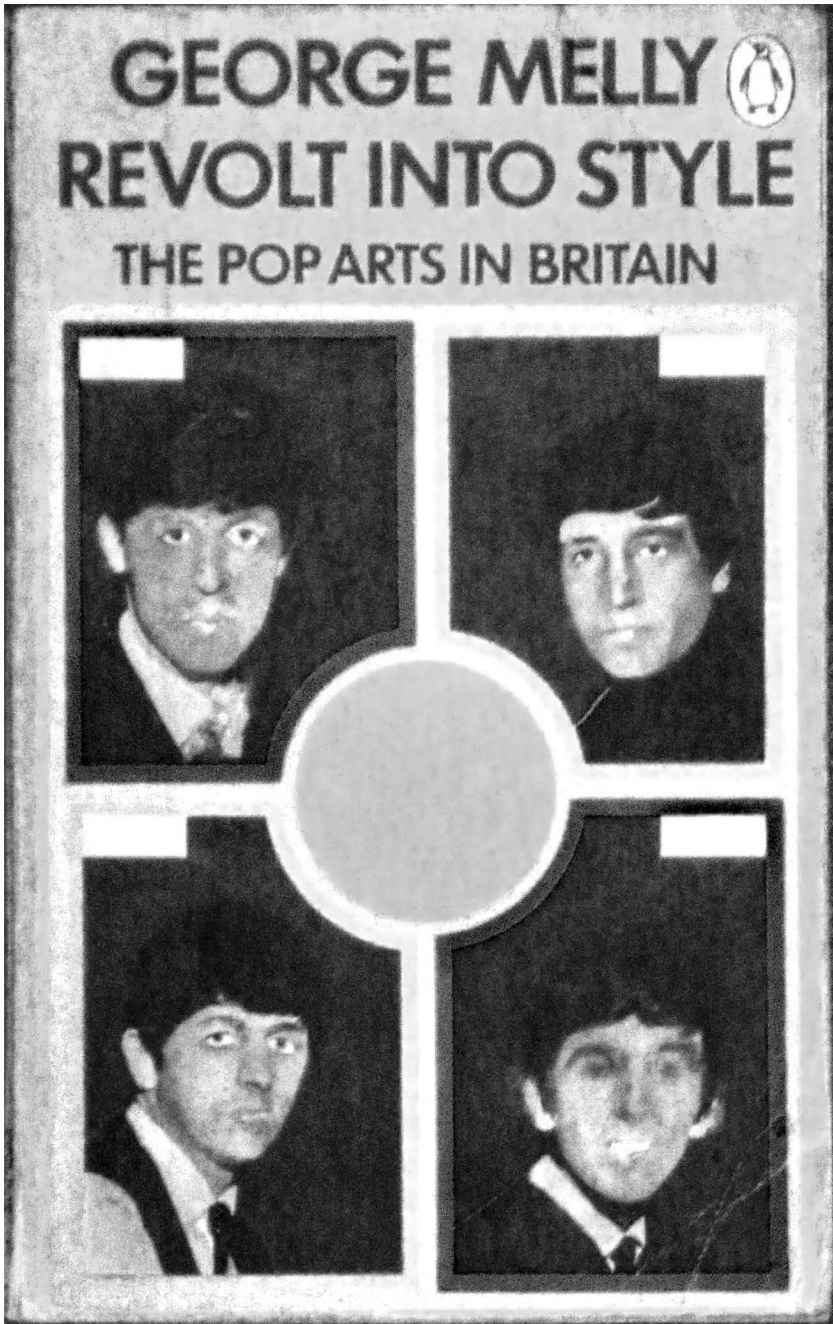
“Again,” I said, on a roll “Nineteen sixty-five was the year rock music emerged. By the next year, it had been co-opted by the mainstream. *Revolver’s* a great album,” I said. “But *Rubber Soul* is much more important. By *Revolver* the Beatles knew what they were doing. In *Rubber Soul* you can hear them *inventing* it. And we’re due another great year. Rock ‘n’ roll music has been getting steadily worse for the best part of a decade,” I said. “The spirit of sixty-five, that glorious moonshine white lightning, has been diluted again and again, watered down so much might as well be near-beer by now. I mean,” I said. “How does rock ‘n’ roll end up producing something like the fuckin’ Eagles?”

“I love the Eagles,” Tiffany Lightning said. “Adore them,” she said, dragging the word *adore* out. “With a capital O.” She tried another smoke ring, but the smoke went up her nose and she coughed. “I just don’t dig how a cat can be a music critic, how they can be a scribe like you, without loving the music you write about. There’s groovy music all around us and you don’t love it, you don’t really dig it, you just don’t.”

“Well, no, I often don’t. But you see,” I said. I took a moment to marshal my thoughts. “I do love what it’s *supposed* to be, and I love what it *can* be,” I said. “*That* love keeps me going.”

“You don’t even like Led Zeppelin,” Tiffany Lightning said. I had been told that Tiffany Lightning had slept with three-quarters of Led Zeppelin, but she chose not to dig into the details of her years as one of LA’s supergroupies while she was with me and I was quite happy with that.

As I drove, for mile after mile, I replayed this conversation and many others like it, trying to dig holes in my argument, but just coming up with more evidence to support my position. I resolved, with a level of confidence that, I was convinced, was unaffected by the methamphetamine in my bloodstream, that I would write a book on exactly how and why 1955 and 1965 were the two *anni mirabiles* of rock ‘n’ roll, monitoring 1975 as it unfurled itself, in the hope that it would prove to be a third.



I'd been meaning to come to New York for months, just not in so hasty a fashion. And if 1975 was going to deliver what I hoped it was, New York was going to be the centre of the action. Rumours had drifted out to LA of a new kind of stripped-down street rock that was coalescing around a few grimy bars, mostly on the Lower East Side, music that ignored the main streams of the early seventies but picked up on those sixties punk rock bands that *Creem's* Bangs and Marsh loved so much, along with the Velvet Underground and other outliers such as the Stooges and the MC5. It was, several characters told me at the bar of the Whisky, their eyes shiny with booze and Quaaludes, a rock 'n' roll renaissance, a fuckin' rebirth, man. The demo tapes I'd heard were uniformly dreadful, but everyone insisted that I simply had to see the bands live. Lenny Kaye had proselytised John Mendelsohn in Buffalo at the Rock Writers Symposium, way back in May. John Mendelsohn told me this at the bar of the Plato Pit, where he was wearing a striking tailored jacket that was based around a full-body Union Jack design, with red lapels, and long blue tassels running from wrist to armpit on each sleeve, inspired, so he told me, by both Roger Daltrey of the Who and by Sly Stone. He was fond of the Who's music at the time, he said, and while Sly Stone's music spoke to him less, he really liked his tassels.

"And I was sitting at the bar of the Whisky A Go-Go one night when Jimmy Hendrix walked past and he, he said, 'Nice coat,'" John Mendelsohn said. "And I, I said, 'Thank you.'"

"It's a fine jacket," I said.

"Anyway, Lenny Kaye." His accent shifted. "You gotta get to New York City, man," John Mendelsohn said. "Go to CBGB on the Bowery, down at Bleecker, man. There's a band called Television plays there, man. You'll dig it, man. Not *perfect*, man, but *interesting*." I got to know Lenny, not long after I arrived in New York, and I quickly saw just how bad John Mendelsohn's impression of his drawl was, but at the time, drinking a late-night Horse's Ass at the Plato Pit Lounge on Sunset Boulevard, it was amusing enough.

And suddenly, there I was in New York, settled into a dismal room in the upper reaches of the Hotel Chelsea that a Manhattan contact of Sawbuck Lou Morrow had arranged for me, and finally in a position to visit the notorious CBGB, a bar that, as far as I understood, had simultaneously spawned and been

taken over by this new form of street rock. I got into New York on Saturday, and the very next night I made my way down to the Bowery, not to watch Television play, but to see another band whose praises had been sung by New Yorkers passing through Hollywood, the Ramones.

I wasn't impressed with CBGB the first time I visited, and my view of it only got worse over time, partly because the venue did. There was none of LA's sophistication here, however tackily that might present itself. CB's was like a bikers' bar that most of the bikers had left behind for somewhere better. It smelled vaguely of dogshit, which turned out to be because the owner, Hilly Krystal, had a dog that would take a shit in it from time to time. I thought it was a toilet, at least until I went to the lavatory, or, rather, started the initial procedure of going to the lavatory before bailing out, having discovered just how unpleasant a lavatory could be, and I'd been through more than my share of Ladbroke Grove squats. It turned out my initial assessment was wrong, as CB's washroom deteriorated over the years, getting incrementally worse each time I recalibrated my definition of how bad an actual toilet could be. In all the years I went to CBGB I never used the men's bathroom. I was Exempt, but not crazy. If I had absolutely no choice, I'd cut into the the girls' room, which was cleaner, but that tended to be the club's preferred rendezvous for drugs and sex, so it could get a little crowded.

The beer and the brandy were cheap enough, though, and the PA looked to be better than I'd have expected in such a dive. I'd arrived in the middle of a set by a band called the Savage Voodoo Nuns, which appeared to be some kind of comedy drag-cum-glam act singing a mixture of old pop songs and parodies of new pop songs. I let their set finish without being in any way engaged, sucked on a longneck and waited for the Ramones to start.

On to the stage traipsed four skinny young men, all with Prince Valiant hairstyles and wearing drainpipe jeans, all ripped out at the knees, and carrying pawnshop instruments. They seemed to be in the middle of a fight over something. The fight died down, although the tension, the air of menace remained. Someone shouted onetwothreefour over a microphone and the sound of the Ramones hit me for the first time. It was remarkable, and unlike anything I'd ever experienced before, a sort of strange blend of bubblegum pop, the chanting

on a football terrace and the landing approach of a Vickers VC10 coming into Heathrow. Each song lasted, it seemed, only a few seconds, two minutes at most, was preceded by an ever faster onetwothreefour with no other dialogue or stagecraft, and was almost indistinguishable from the one before. In twenty minutes or so it was all over, and the Ramones left the stage, apparently continuing the fight in which they had been engaged on their arrival. I reached up to my head, suspecting I may need to flatten my hair from the blast of noise that had hit it. I'd been at shows that were louder than this, far louder, but this was by far the *noisiest*.

I didn't get to see Television, the band that Lenny Kaye had found so *interesting*, until nearly three weeks later, when they played a midnight show at the Truck and Warehouse Theatre on E. 4th Street. I knew enough editors and enough musicians and enough industry types for doors to open reasonably easily for me as soon I'd arrived in New York, and I was soon being comped into any show I wanted to see, although it took a while before I stopped having to pay for my own drinks. A few bars even started stocking Metaxa. I started picking up the word on the street and the word on the street was that Television had been in purdah, rehearsing, with the aim of getting seriously tight, an ambition that the various people I met over those weeks regarded with either respect or contempt, depending on their view of the unfolding New York scene.

I saw the Ramones again two weeks later, hoping to refine my view of the band but responding in exactly the same way as I had the first time, blown back by the noise and barely taking notice of the elements that I, as a trained and experienced rock critic, should have been noting down.

At the Truck and Warehouse Theatre the band was listed as Television's support, but they were replaced at the last minute by another band, the singer of which introduced herself by saying, "We're not the Ramones." Someone in the audience yelled "Blondie!" which tuned out to be the name of the band that wasn't the Ramones. Blondie were due to play after the Ramones the first time I saw them at CBGB, but I was feeling pretty wasted after the driving and the methamphetamine and the Quaaludes and being beaten up by the Ramones' wall of noise, so I'd left before they came on. At the Truck and Warehouse Theatre, Blondie struck me as a band that wasn't quite ready to be playing in

public. Good enough musicians, and the singer, under sunglasses and a sliver construction helmet, seemed to have model looks, but they were sloppy, and not funhouse-sloppy like the Ramones, just sloppy-sloppy.

After the pause, Television came on stage, looking less like a rock 'n' roll band than any rock 'n' roll band I'd ever seen. They weren't dressed like rock 'n' rollers, but in street clothes, only street clothes you wouldn't find on any street. The bass player, who I knew was called Richard Hell, despite film-star-looks and being well over six feet tall, managed to look like an urchin who'd just escaped from a reformatory, with jagged, spiked hair that looked like it had been cut with a lawnmower, and a thrift-store suit over a white shirt that made the Ramones' ripped jeans seem smart. He dwarfed his pale blue short-scale Fender Mustang bass. The drummer, Billy Ficca, had tight curls for hair, an Italian beak of a nose, and a tank top over his tee-shirt. One guitarist, Tom Verlaine, wearing a Jazzmaster guitar, was tall and thin, a dirty blond scarecrow with a black Ban-Lon knit shirt and googly eyes, and a set of tics that appeared to suggest extreme introversion was just about to somehow explode into, possibly sexual, violence. The other guitarist, Richard Lloyd, who stood between the bassist and the first guitarist, looked like a hustler, a pretty boy, almost simpering under his bleached bowl-cut fringe, and sporting an old Telecaster, like mine, and a ripped black tee-shirt with the sleeves cut off. The guitarist on the right mumbled into the microphone.

"We're gonna start off with a little ride," he said. The drummer counted the band in by clicking his sticks against each other, and they climbed into a demented take on "Fire Engine," the 13th Floor Elevators song. This was noise, but it was musical noise, noise that blended free jazz with the psychedelic punk rock of the original, that added an element of Dada or surrealism to it, but that had more of the early Velvet Underground's hard amphetamine paranoia to it than the wackier acid-trip playfulness of the 13th Floor Elevators.

The pretty-boy guitarist seemed like a decent player, who'd served his time in the woodshed learning from Clapton, Hendrix and Beck. The tall guitarist was trying to play the guitar like Coltrane or Eric Dolphy or Albert Ayler would play a saxophone, ignoring conventional scales and harmony, yet somehow making a sound that had a coherence and coalesced with the rest of the band. I was struck

by the fact that he couldn't even play very well. He had no actual technique to protect him when he went out on the edge, which was where he spent most of the time. He was, I saw, simply putting his fingers on the neck in places that he hoped would make an appropriate note, and getting it right more often than not. The rhythm section didn't show any virtuoso tendencies either, the street-urchin bass player seeming more interested in pulling shapes on the stage than playing his instrument, and the drummer being one of those busy players who, when things go wrong, which they all too commonly do, sounds like he's tipping a kit of drums down a fire escape. And they spent too long tuning up between songs, and their amps kept cutting out and there was plenty else wrong. And yet.

And yet somehow it kinda worked. The sloppiness somehow had a different quality to Blondie's. There was some of the same energy that I'd experienced seeing the Rolling Stones in 1965, or the Jimi Hendrix Experience early in 1967, before Jimi was famous, or the Who, in 1968, when Keith Moon was playing the "Pictures of Lily" kit, in its last days as an apocalyptically violent, pure pop group, before Pete Townsend destroyed the band with his mysticism and musical hubris. Half an hour into the set I was starting to believe that Television, along with the Ramones, and even Blondie, if they could tighten up their set and get some repertoire, could well be the harbingers of that Sound of 1975 for which I was hoping.

There was also the sense that these people were stealthily, hidden away in the no-go zones of the Lower East Side, taking back rock 'n' roll from the technocrats who had been running and ruining it ever since *Sgt. Pepper* taught the bands to play. *We don't need your culture*, they were saying. *We've got our own culture, man. We just take it.* Everybody was Exempt.

I had come home.

MICHAEL HARDAKER

# TELEVISION



Bob Orshon

plus **THE RAMONES** at  
**The Truck & Warehouse Theatre**

79 East 4th St. between 2nd and 3rd Avenues

**Midnight Fri. Nov. 22nd**

\$3.00 at the door

The gutters of New York's Lower East Side called out to me. *It's rock 'n' roll*, they sang. *It rocks and it rolls*, they said. *Anyone can do it*.

Thanks to the unusual working hours of the rock 'n' roll lifestyle, I had made the acquaintance of more than a few pimps, dope-dealers and the other rapscallions and ne'er-do-wells, who had, as I sat and listened to them at some after-hours joint or another, in London and then in LA, imparted much wisdom to me. While Dylan's notion that to live outside the law you must be honest might be overstating matters, there did seem to be some aspects of the nighthawks' codes that made a lot of sense. Both pimps and dope-dealers were agreed, for example, that you must *never touch the merchandise*. It happened, sure, and more often than it should, but that way, all agreed, madness lay. Rock 'n' roll critics are equally in agreement that the one unforgivable act of a scribe is to believe you can do the stuff you write about, and then join or, worse, *form* a rock 'n' roll band. It is the Golden Rule.

The Golden Rule gets broken more often than it should, and the results are never pretty. John Mendelsohn had an act in LA called Christopher Milk which he took far more seriously than his writing. He once showed me a 1972 postcard from Lester Bangs, which had a photograph of the Guess Who on the front and, on the back, Lester saying that Christopher Milk played the Velvet Underground songs "White Light/White Heat" and "I'm Waiting for the Man" better than David Bowie did, although he put the postcard back in his pocket when I suggested that Bangs might be damning him with faint praise. Bowie's versions of those songs, which I'd heard at the Rainbow in August 1972, having been sent by *IT* to watch him ponce about as Ziggy Stardust, probably as a punishment for something, were, I told John Mendelsohn, unlistenably bombastic. Lester Bangs himself also transgressed from time to time, and I have memories of Nick Kent swaying over me, crane-like, at the Hope, in Islington, a few months after I got back to London, which would make it early 1977, going on about the time he was in the Sex Pistols, as well as some other outfit with Chrissie Hynde that never quite got off the ground.

It's all right for a scribe to play the guitar or mess around on a drumkit in the privacy of their own room, but that's where it has to stop. I'd received a guitar, a secondhand Eko Ranger, as a Christmas present in 1966, after discover-

ing that girls were far more interested in boys who played guitar than boys who played cricket. Along with my schoolfriend Darius Evans I learned the chords necessary to play some old blues songs and hollers, reasoning that two practitioners of authentic Delta blues would be irresistible to the fourteen-year-old girls of West London, a premise that proved to be incorrect. I pretty much stopped playing after Darius Evans's family moved to Düsseldorf, or Glasgow, or Singapore, and eventually sold the guitar in 1970 to a pal of Mick Farren's to fund a Philips compact cassette recorder, which I needed to record interviews at the Isle of Wight Festival. In LA I started to think that having a guitar lying around the walk-up efficiency apartment I rented on Hayworth Avenue might be an interesting idea, that fooling around on it might help me better understand some of the music I was critiquing. I brought the matter up with Lori Beauregard, one of the top session musicians in town. Tiffany Lightning wasn't quite my girlfriend at the time and Lori Beauregard was her mother. I'd watched Lori Beauregard from the control rooms of quite a few studios and come to the conclusion that what she didn't know about guitars wasn't worth knowing. She could also cook up a storm and Tiffany Lightning, who was convinced that I didn't eat enough, had dragged me to her mother's to be filled up with soul food.

"How much you want to spend?" Lori Beauregard said. We were on the stoop of the small house where she and Clarence Beauregard, Lori's second husband, Tiffany Lightning's stepfather, lived along with a bunch of musical instruments. Clarence Beauregard had much the same standing as a reed player as Lori had as a guitarist, able to play anything from a clarinet to a contrabass saxophone, an example of which, on a stand, dominated the Beauregards' hallway. Lori Beauregard didn't look like most people's vision of a rock 'n' roll session musician, not that most session musicians did. She was a short woman, five feet tall at most, and quite rounded off at the edges, but put a guitar in her hands and she could perform magic, whether with a flatpick, a thumbpick or just her fingers. I realised I had no idea how much a decent guitar should cost. I looked across at Lori Beauregard, in her rocking chair, then down to Tiffany Lightning and Clarence Beauregard playing checkers at the other end of the stoop, and back to Lori Beauregard.

“Five hundred bucks?” I said. Lori Beauregard’s eyes didn’t seem to register that I’d spoken. “Six hundred bucks?” I said, and then, more purposefully. “Six hundred dollars.”

“Six hundred dollar,” she said. She levered herself to her feet. “Come with me, young feller,” she said.

We walked through the house and to a room out back that had one wall lined with heavy-duty shelves, on which were racked guitar cases, with amplifiers on the ground beneath. On the opposite wall, another set of shelves was crammed with horn cases. Lori Beauregard slid out a scruffy brown guitar case, laid it on the table that stood in the middle of the room, and unclipped the clasps that held it closed. Inside was a Fender Telecaster guitar. It looked old. I’d told Lori Beauregard that I was looking for an old guitar, because I’d been informed they were better than the new ones, at which she had curled her lip slightly.

“Let me tell you the story of this guitar,” Lori Beauregard said. “I bought this guitar off of Errol Washington back at the end of nineteen fiddy-five, beginning of fiddy-six, maybe. He needed the money to buy a Fender bass, and I’d just been signed up to sing for Columbia Records. I only had a little Silver-tone acoustic guitar, and I figured I needed an electric guitar if I was going to be recording with a big old label like Columbia Records. Anyhow,” Lori Beauregard said. “It transpired that Columbia Records didn’t want me to play no guitar at all, neither acoustic nor electric, and that I was just to sing, so I put this guitar back in its case and I sang the songs that Columbia Records wanted me to sing.

“And then,” Lori Beauregard said. “We did a show at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. There were maybe seven or eight acts, all of us on the Columbia roster, and we were touring all the military bases along the Eastern seaboard, and we ended up, June of fiddy-six, at Andrew Air Force Base and I met this handsome *devil* of a fellow named Montgomery Jones, and he just stole my heart. And we were wed two months later, just two weeks before baby Taylor popped out.”

Lori Beauregard always referred to her daughter as Taylor. “She says it’s my middle name,” Tiffany Lightning said to me, “But that’s horsefeathers. I’ve seen my birth certificate and there’s no middle name on the dang thing. She likes to

tell tales, my mommy.”

“It was no matter to Montgomery that I was with child. He said that, though it’s not his baby, he’d raise him up as if he was his own son. And even when Taylor turned out to be a girl,” Lori Beauregard’s eyes were twinkling. “He did just that. You wouldn’t believe to look at her now, but she was *quite* the tomboy until, well, it’d be after Montgomery passed in the fall of nineteen sixty-nine.

“And I tried to carry on with the singing for a while but I was more happier about being with my husband and my little daughter so that kinda wound down. Then in sixty-four the Air Force moved us here to Los Angeles,” Lori Beauregard pronounced the city name with a hard G. “Montgomery getting a posting to Los Angeles Air Force Station over on Aviation and El Segundo. Taylor being at school all day long and Montgomery working long hours, I didn’t know *what* to do with my time, so I got this old guitar out of the garage and I started remembering how it worked. Just to pass the time, you understand.

“Then one day,” Lori Beauregard said. “It must have been March of sixty-five, I’d taken myself into the city to go to the library and I walked past a music store and I saw this beautiful, beautiful bright red Fender Stratocaster in the window and it occurred to me that they’d kinda knocked the corners off of that compared to this old thing. So, I don’t know what I was thinking, but I walked into the music store, and I asked if I could try it out, because I figured that it looked a whole lot more comfortable to play. I don’t know what the assistants thought of this little colored lady coming into the store wanting to play this beautiful rock and roll guitar, but they gave me a seat and a place to put my purse and they plugged the guitar into a great big Vox amplifier and all sorta stood around in a semicircle. And I started playing this beautiful red guitar and it just felt so comfortable, and I just carried on playing, and I carried on playing and I wasn’t paying no notice to nothing but how sweet this beautiful guitar felt in my little hands. But while I wasn’t paying no notice this gentleman sat himself down opposite me and listened. I finally look up from the guitar and there he is, dressed like he is on his way to the track, pork-pie hat, bright crimson open-neck shirt and all.

“And he takes off his pork-pie hat,” Lori Beauregard said. “And he nods at me and he says his name is Tommy Tedesco, like I should maybe know it. And I say pleased to meet you and he says he’s loused something up, although he didn’t quite use *loused up*, and he’s double-booked at eleven of the a.m. tomorrow and would I care to take the gig in his place. And a royal confusion ensues because neither of us understands what the other is saying but the long and the short of it is that I end up going to the Local 47 office on Vine that afternoon to get a shiny new union card, and never making it to the library, and I played the session at eleven of the a.m. the next day, laying down some parts for the soundtrack of *The Cincinnati Kid*. I’d never been nowhere, in no room like that studio. Nobody cared if I was black, white or sky-blue-pink. Or if I was a male or a female or one of them in-betweeners. And then they asked me to come back and play some more. And I’ve been going back ever since.

“And since then,” Lori Beauregard said. “The only solid-body guitars I’ve played are Fender Stratocasters, *new* Fender Stratocasters. And sometimes Gibson SGs, because they also got the corners knocked off of them. They suit the shorter,” she paused. “And the *fuller-figured* guitar-player. You,” Lori Beauregard said. “Are built like a stick insect and you have long fingers like a scarecrow. This old box should work well for you. You can have it and the amplifier I bought with it for six hundred dollar cash.”

“If you catch me trying to join a band,” I said to Tiffany Lightning on the drive back to my efficiency apartment in my 1958 Buick Super. “Take the guitar away from me. Worse,” I said. “If I show signs, even the merest hint, of wanting of start a band and play my own original material...” I said.

“I will take it away and I will burn it,” Tiffany Lightning said. “And then,” she said. “I will do the same to you, sweetcheeks.”

*It’s rock ’n’ roll*, the gutters of the Bowery sang. *It rocks and it rolls*, they sang. *Anyone can do it*.

So, two months after I arrived in New York, I decided to start a band.

**Support Your Fave Band!**

**MILK 'N COOKIES**

**\$2.50 each**

**\$10.00 a pitcher**

An old-fashioned brandy-milk punch, tall,  
with a cookie.

**MINK DEVILLE \$2.50**

A high-powered blast of orange-rum  
flavored coke.

**PATTI SMITH \$20.00**

Champagne and Stout. Its been making poets  
horny for years.

**THE RAMONES \$2.50**

Your favorite local beer, molested by a straight  
shot of whiskey.

**SUICIDE \$3.00**

Green Chartreuse and 151 proof rum...on fire.  
Only attempt it at the bar.

**TUFF DARTS \$2.50**

A tall cool vodka-licorice combination, that will  
leave you seeing double...and in black & white.

**WAYNE COUNTY PUNCH**

**\$2.50 a glass**

**\$10.00 a pitcher**

A nice fruit punch, with a heavy dose of  
Southern Comfort.

Each concoction has been designed especially for Max's by David Smith.



**Try a Max's Kansas City New York Rock Drink!**

**BLONDIE \$2.50**

A silky smooth bombshell, with Galliano,  
Cacao and a good head.

**CHERRY VANILLA \$2.50**

A hot-pink cherry tasting cream dream.

**PENNY DREADFUL \$2.50**

Don't ask. Just drink it!

**THE FAST \$2.50**

Tequila, gone bananas. Drink it FAST!

**THE HEARTBREAKERS \$2.50**

A bitter-sweet affair between icy vodka,  
sloe gin and juicy cranberries.

**JOHN COLLINS \$2.00**

What else?

**DAYBREAK BOYS \$2.50**

Greek brandy of course, with ginger and orange.

**JUST WATER \$2.50**

A serious amount of gin, cointreau & 7-up.  
Hardly innocent.

**MARBLES \$2.50**

Blue. Yellow. Green. An 'aggie' guaranteed  
to scatter yours.



Back in Ladbroke Grove, some of the wilder characters that hung around with Mick Farren and the Social Deviants crowd would get together at the Mountain Grill Café on Portobello Road to play a game they called *plink, plink, fizz*. The idea was simple enough, just get a table beside one of the old dossers that used the Mountain Grill, making a mug of tea last several hours as an excuse to be sitting somewhere warm and, while the old gent's attention was distracted by something or another, drop a couple of French blues into his tea. Once the speed had kicked in, the dosser, normally lost in his own little world, would get suddenly garrulous, happy to talk at great length on many subjects, spinning complex yarns from his many past lives.

This inspired me to experiment in interviews where the subject, for whatever reason, was less than forthcoming. Many rock stars have a tendency to clam up when faced by a reporter's microphone. Some do this because they are introverts by nature, something that is a lot more common than most civilians realise, as fundamentally inward-looking people can also be site-specific extroverts when pushed on to a stage, under lights, before a baying audience. Others may simply be exhausted by life on the road, long nights in the studio, several days of wall-to-wall pressers, or just too many goofballs. Whatever the cause, it was sometime in New York City, inspired by the Portobello Road jokers, that I discovered a little methamphetamine, in its highly soluble, crystal form, slipped into whatever an interviewee might be drinking, provided an almost foolproof way to salvage an otherwise unsatisfactory interview.

It was this simple trick of the trade that, over the next years, especially after I went on the road, established and then consolidated Nick Numbers' reputation as an interviewer who got the stories that other scribes missed.

*Being a rock and roll musician was like being a pimp. It was about making young girls want to pay money to be near you.*

—Richard Hell



• **SEVEN** •





CBGB was haunted. Not many people got to see the CBGB ghost, but I was one of them. It was in the middle of November 1974, just after I arrived in New York, and I was at the bar trying to ignore a free jazz act called New Cat's Pajamas that was blundering through some improvised nonsense on stage, when I noticed a weird, slow doppler effect on the guitar, like I'd never heard before in a live show, although Hendrix did something vaguely similar in the studio on some of the *Electric Ladyland* tracks. I looked over at the stage and there was a little kid up on the stage, maybe seven or eight years old, with a great froth of hair like a miniature Mick Farren, turning the guitar amp's volume knob left and right, left and right. I saw the guitarist look down at his guitar, looking at the pickups as if they were somehow misbehaving, and still the kid spun the knob to the left, to the right, and back again. Then a big biker-type guy walked across in front of me, blowing out a cloud of cigar smoke as he went, blocking my view and making me look down and blink, and when I looked up again, the kid had gone and the guitar sounded like normal. I didn't think anything of it until, a week or so later, I heard Fred Smith, who was playing bass for Blondie, tell Hilly Crystal that something weird had happened with his volume when he'd last played there and maybe Hilly should have the electrics checked out.

Over the months that followed, I caught hints that a few other characters had seen a little kid with a striped shirt and a big mess of hair, which had some kind of odd skullcap in the centre of it. What I'd seen started to nag at me, although I never mentioned it to anybody. I tried to research the history of 315 Bowery, to find out what it was before CBGB filled the ground floor and the Palace Hotel, New York's biggest, and probably nastiest, flophouse, the floors above. I'd head over to 5th Avenue and delve into the bowels of the New York Public Library's collections. I never found much. I worked out that the building had originally been filled with tenements, with liquor stores on the ground floor, but not a lot else. Until one day, I was reading the *New York Times* for 18 May 1895 when I read a story that nearly made me tear the paper. BURGLAR OR AN ASTRAL BODY, the headline read, followed by the gnomish strapline, *Eight Bowery Policemen Surround Something with a Cup in Its Hair, but the Something Proves Nothing*. I read about a *seven-year-old boy with a big shock of hair* turning the lock of a safe, and knew I'd found my ghost.

**BURGLAR OR AN ASTRAL BODY**

**Eight Bowery Policemen Surround Something  
with a Cup in Its Hair, but the  
Something Proves Nothing.**

Some one who knows all about astral bodies might explain about a mysterious burglar, or the astral body of a burglar, that threw the Bowery into a state of excitement yesterday morning before daylight.

Eight policemen surrounded the burglar and closed in on him, only to find that he had vanished.

The Bowery had gone to sleep when Policeman Timothy Keyes saw a shadow on the window of the wholesale liquor store 315 Bowery. He went on tiptoe to the window and looked in. A dim light came from a gas burner turned low. He could see, he says, a seven-year-old boy, with a big shock of hair, reaching up and turning the combination of the safe. The policeman said that in the centre of the shock of hair was a little round cup, and that the boy wore a striped shirt and brown trousers.

Keyes called for help. Eight policemen came. "Whist!" said Policeman Keyes; "if we are careful we will capture a burglar. He is at work. I saw him."

Then the policemen surrounded the store and guarded every means of exit from cellar to roof. They finally broke in the door with an axe and searched the place. Henry Steinhardt, one of the owners of the store, arrived just then, accompanied by two salesmen. He had been summoned from his home, 312 West One Hundred and Fifteenth Street, by a Police Sergeant, who told him a burglar was in his store.

There was a large crowd of persons waiting on the street when the policemen and Mr. Steinhardt searched the store. They looked everywhere, but they found no boy of any description, nor could Mr. Steinhardt, when daylight came, find any trace of a burglar.

It was easy to get distracted reading about the Bowery's past. I read a lot about the gangs who terrorised the city in the middle years of the nineteenth century, such as The Bowery Boys, who were all volunteer firemen, and the Roach Guards, who the media preferred to call the Dead Rabbits, and the frighteningly young Daybreak Boys, teenagers before there were teenagers, killing, stealing and generally terrorising the waterfront. I first encountered the Daybreak Boys in *The Nether Side of New York; or the Vice, Crime and Poverty of the Great Metropolis* by Edward Crapsey, and the first thought I had was, *what an insanely great name for a band.*

The Daybreak Boys, I read in George W. Walling's *Recollections of a New York Chief of Police*, seated at a table in the New York Public Library, were "mere boys in years, but were patriarchs in villainy."

It was in New York that I diversified my writing. Since editors weren't interested in the kind of writing I actually wanted to do, the deep critical analysis of the music I was hearing, I would perform that analysis anyway, for the book that was slowly developing in my mind, and then write the review that the editor actually wanted in what started as a rough pastiche of Lester Bangs's style and evolved into a carefully-honed homage. This approach had kept me in work throughout my stay in LA. But, at my typewriter, in my shithole New York apartment, I began to spread my wings. As an experiment, I started writing articles in the manner of other writers, not just Lester Bangs. I started with Robert Christgau, but quickly moved on to the likes of Paul Nelson, Greil Marcus, Richard Meltzer, Nick Tosches, Dave Marsh and even *The New Yorker's* Ellen Willis. Work started to flood in. My red telephone would ring and an editor would say that they'd been thinking of Robert Christgau, or Jon Landau, or Nick Tosches, or some other writer for the piece, but had decided I would be the better choice. And I knew exactly what they meant. They needed a piece that was in the *style* of the writer in question, but articulating different *opinions*. Most frequently, this meant praising something that the writer might be expected to pan. I was always happy to oblige. I wrote exactly what I wanted to write for my own archive, so it didn't really matter what I wrote for money, or if my byline appeared, or any of the stuff that seemed to bother most other scribes.

Because I was so obliging, the red telephone rang more and more often, although the coded requests to write in the style of another scribe got fewer and fewer until they petered out completely. I had accidentally discovered the secret of success as a freelance hack, and I've had this confirmed by several editors when I raised the matter with them, over several years. Genius is all very well, but if you can deliver clean copy, on time, to length and to brief you will never want for work. Nobody cares how brilliant your writing is if it arrives ten minutes after the publication's print slot has expired, written in eyebrow pencil on the back of a Kellogg's Corn Flakes box.

In the period when I was still the Scribe With A Thousand Voices, Lester Bangs took me to one side in the back room of Max's Kansas City. Fortunately, Lester Bangs was firmly of the view that imitation, at least when it was Lester Bangs that was being imitated, was the sincerest form of flattery. His position was that his was the *right way* of doing things, and that his various protégés and disciples had learned this from his work, so were just trying to do things the right way. Indeed, he might turn quite sniffy if a scribe moved on from the Bangsian approach, having found their own voice. Anyway, Lester Bangs, and I suppose that this would be in around March 1976, had noticed that I was ripping off his style with greater precision than the other thirty or so mini-Lesters out there at the time, although he hadn't noticed that I was also ripping off everyone else too.

"You're like one of them Las Vegas hookers," he said, his moustache, tipped with foam from his beer, almost tickling my ear. "The ones that look like famous people. You pay your five hundred dollars or whatever and you get to fuck Marilyn Monroe for a night."

Penny Dreadful and the Yellowbacks were fresh in from the West Coast and were opening for Marbles at CBGB. I didn't feel a need to see Marbles again, but Lenny Kaye had caught Penny Dreadful and the Yellowbacks having a shake-out earlier in the almost empty club and reported that they were *interesting*, when I dropped by to have a chat with him and whoever else was there at Village Oldies on Bleecker Street, so I went along for, at least, the early part of the evening. I didn't know quite what to expect from Penny Dreadful and the Yellowbacks but I certainly didn't expect to see Tiffany Lightning, who was not quite my girlfriend right up until I quit the LA scene a year earlier, on lead guitar, torturing strange sounds from a single-pickup Les Paul Junior. Tiffany Lightning had essentially taught me how to play after I bought my guitar from her mother, so I knew she was plenty good enough. But rock 'n' roll, she'd told me often enough, was a white boys' club. She said that didn't trouble her noodle unduly, but it was how it was. And yet, here she was, spanking the hell out of an old guitar, her head shaved smooth and her pre-war dresses and Bette Davis slacks replaced by utilitarian Levis, a pair of work boots and an MC5 T-shirt

with the sleeves cut off. The other Yellowbacks were dressed in much the same casually androgynous manner, apart from the singer. The singer was pure sex, but not of the sex-kitten variety. This was more the slit-your-throat and steal-your-drugs kind of sex. I thought she looked familiar and then I realised that I knew Penny Dreadful, who had been an LA groupie called Penny Red. It had been a while, though, and Penny Red's trademark long scarlet hair was now a raven Louise Brooks bob. Her fishnets, fake fur, veil and Ingrid Bergman felt hat had evolved into a strapless black rubber tube, with a black satin opera glove on her left arm, but it was definitely the same person, who I had last seen trying to give a semi-catatonic Iggy Pop an under-table blowjob in the VIP booth at Rodney Bingenheimer's English Disco while I tried to interview him for *Rock Scene*, neither of us having much success.

"We had to get out of LA," Tiffany Lightning said, once the band's set was over and I'd bought her a Horse's Ass for old times' sake. "All the club bookers want are cowpokes in faded jeans who sound like the Overland Trail or the fuckin' Eagles."

"But you *adore* the Eagles," I said. "With a capital O."

"I hate the fuckin' Eagles," Tiffany Lightning said. "Look here, kid, it's like this. You never, ever reveal your taste in music to a scribe. They chump will *always* spend the next ten minutes telling you *exactly* why you're wrong, and you're no different, no sirree. Here," Tiffany Lightning grabbed the group's singer by the arm as she tried to squeeze past us. "You haven't met Penny Dreadful." If Tiffany Lightning said I hadn't met Penny Dreadful, I hadn't met her. "This is Nick Numbers," Tiffany Lightning said. "He's a scribe."

I held out a hand. Penny Dreadful looked at me with dead eyes. "I'm Dreadful," she said. She shook her left arm free from Tiffany Lightning's grip, straightened the black opera glove that slunk up the arm past her elbow, and carried on towards the appalling CBGB toilets.

"Junkie?" I said.

"Buck fever," Tiffany Lightning said. "She needs to get a little hopped up before shows, is all. Calms her down."

"We all have our weaknesses," I said. And then I told her all about how I had broken the Golden Rule, with the Daybreak Boys.



Guy de Maupassant, it is said, used to lunch regularly at the restaurant in the Eiffel Tower, not because he particularly liked it, but because it was *le seul endroit de Paris où je ne la vois pas*, the only place in Paris where he couldn't see it.

I don't know whether the Maupassant story is true. He certainly loathed Eiffel's structure. Even before it was built he signed, along with forty-six other writers, artists and architects, including Gounod, Dumas *filis* and Zola, a letter addressed to Jean-Charles Alphand, *commissaire* of the Exposition Universelle that spawned it, a letter published in *Le Temps* that described the proposed tower as *inutile et monstrueuse*, useless and monstrous. After much of the rest of Paris

had learned to love, or at least tolerate, the tower, his antipathy remained. He claimed, in *La Vie errante*, to have ultimately left Paris and France itself because of it. He noted that the Eiffel Tower *finissait par m'ennuyer trop*, a phrase that was skipped in the English translation, perhaps because the exquisite blend of boredom and irritation carried in the word *ennuyer* cannot be communicated but in French, and possibly even only by the French. Anyway, in the end he was sick of it.

But that doesn't mean he regularly lunched at the Eiffel Tower to avoid looking at it. As far as I can tell, the idea that he did first appears in an essay on the tower by Roland Barthes that was published in 1964. Perhaps Barthes was repeating a true story that had been passed around Paris for over seventy years. Maybe it was an old joke that Barthes took at face value. It's possible Barthes simply made it up. However, the story has spread in recent years, and appears as solid fact, usually gussied up to have Maupassant eating his lunch there every single day, in respectable architectural and historical studies, often with another respectable or architectural study cited as the source, which, in turn, cites another impeccably sound source, and so on, until, as you follow the links of the chain, you inevitably end up with a reference to Barthes's essay, *La Tour Eiffel*. So a minor anecdote, probably apocryphal, maybe even pure fiction, that was casually tossed off in 1964, has somehow become gospel. For this reason, I consider the story of Guy de Maupassant avoiding the sight of the Eiffel Tower by lunching at its restaurant to be, perhaps, as rock 'n' roll a story as you can get.



It didn't take long after her arrival in New York for me to find that Tiffany Lightning was, once again, not quite my girlfriend, as she had previously been in Los Angeles, although it was slightly more complicated because she was also not quite Penny Dreadful's girlfriend at the same time. Some nights Tiffany Lightning would go home with Penny Dreadful and I'd go home with somebody else, or I'd go home alone and wonder if Tiffany Lightning was teaching Penny Dreadful how to have sex, the way she had taught me, and was still teaching me. On other occasions Tiffany Lightning would go home with me, and Penny Dreadful would go home with somebody else, quite possibly the same person that I had gone home with, the last time Tiffany Lightning went home with Penny Dreadful, the Lower East Side scene centred on CBGB being a relatively closed and contained ecosystem, with a limited pool of people to go home with. I had the sense that Tiffany Lightning might have found it amusing to go home with both me and Penny Dreadful at the same time, but that was never on the cards. Penny Dreadful had made it pretty clear that she didn't much like me, certainly not in that way, and I didn't trust her any more than I trusted any other junkies, which was not at all.

Tiffany Lightning assured me that Penny Dreadful just used dope to knock the edge off her stage fright, her *buck fever*, and maybe to help the party along once a week or so, but I knew, whatever she told Tiffany Lightning, that Penny Dreadful had a five bag per day chippie habit. I knew this because I was selling her the heroin she used.

I'd arrived in New York with nearly thirteen hundred dollars in cash and a few hundred more in my checking account, but that soon started to dwindle. The tiny rent-controlled shithole I'd managed to sublet on East 3rd Street wasn't costing me much more than my LA efficiency apartment had, although everything else seemed more expensive, but maybe that's just because I was earning less. I was having to establish new writing contacts, competing with the established East Coast mafia scribes. Plus, I was no longer earning the three hundred dollars a week that Sawbuck Lou Moretti had paid me for making sure that his clients and other associates had a trustworthy supply of high-quality drugs. And, at least initially, I was having to pay for my own drinks in most places. Still, money wasn't an actual problem until I decided to form the Daybreak Boys at

the beginning of 1975. Although Terry Ork let us use his loft a couple of times he decided he didn't want to get too involved with another band alongside Television, or that's what he told me, anyway, so I had to find, and pay for, a rehearsal space. Then I needed to buy amplifiers, and microphones, and microphone stands. I had a little stash of drugs, leftovers from my deliveries for Sawbuck Lou, and while all the pharmaceuticals, the amphetamines and the downers. were long gone, I still had, I reasoned, enough cocaine, heroin and sundries to pay for some of the equipment that the band needed. I spread the word as discretely as I could and was impressed to unload everything within a day. I was, it turned out, surrounded by drug addicts. And that gave me an idea.

I wondered if Sawbuck Lou's notion of a simple and safe drug delivery service might work in Lower East and West Sides of New York as well as it did in the Hollywood Hills. So, instead of immediately spending the money on a couple of used Fender Super Reverbs and an Acoustic 115 bass combo from Manny's on West 48th Street as I had planned, I decided to spend it on more drugs. I found a source of premium-quality white heroin deep in suburban New Jersey, on a street where kids shot hoops against the garage wall in their front yards and their fathers polished their Chevrolet station wagons on Sunday morning before church, and I arranged a reliable supply of medical cocaine from a pharmacist at the Columbia Presbyterian Hospital who liked to play the horses a little too keenly for someone on a hospital pharmacist's pay. Within three or four weeks I had a couple of dozen clients, mostly in the business side of the music world, as mine was a premium service that few musicians living in cold-water lofts and working places such as CBGB, Trude Heller's or the 82 Club were willing to pay for. There were a few musicians, however, and when Penny Dreadful and the Yellowbacks blew into town, Penny Dreadful quickly joined them. Between gigs, she was making good money as a go-go dancer and, if the scuttlebutt was solid, turning a few tricks, and she was quite happy to pony up a little extra for access to a superior product and to avoid the uptown shooting galleries or the juvie drug runners who hung at 10th Street and Avenue A.

In the Daybreak Boys I had established a firm anti-drug policy. Personally, I considered methamphetamine to be an essential productivity tool, since I had to buy, cut and deliver dope and snow around a fair chunk of Manhattan, go to

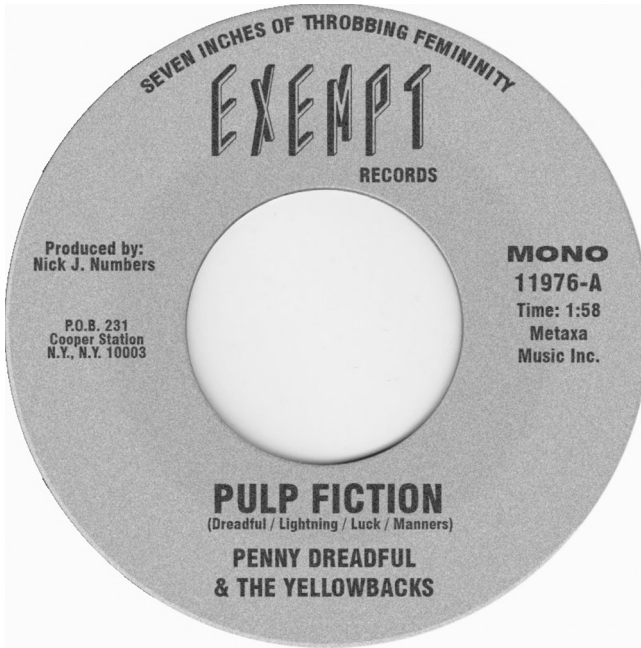
gigs, attend press launches and write an average of eight to ten thousand words per week, while running a band, writing songs for it and rehearsing every two days, and keeping all these various activities separate from one another, as much as possible. The amount of methamphetamine needed to be that productive requires something to ease the landing at the end of the day, so I'd switch between Quaaludes, Tuinal, Seconal, straight Amytal, Demerol and, if nothing else was available, Valium. Quaaludes were always my first choice as they played nicely with brandy, while the others could be a little more unpredictable. But here I made a distinction between non-prescribed pharmaceuticals and actual drugs. The band rules were clear, and anyone caught doing drugs could expect their marching orders. It was tacitly understood that I'd look the other way in the case of minor indiscretions, but only after a rehearsal session or a show, not before. I knew I'd have had trouble keeping band-members if I set rules that were too draconian.

In the end, it didn't matter what rules I set. Two of the Daybreak Boys turned out to be full-house dope-fiends, which I discovered after I wandered into a pawnshop on Clinton Street and found two Super Reverb amplifiers that I'd bought at Manny's the previous month. They even had DAYBREAK BOYS stencilled on them. After I'd fired those two, I auditioned a few more musicians, including a few faces that would later become big stars, or what passes as such in the New York underground, but I soon realised that my heart wasn't in it.

When scribes break the Golden Rule the music we make always sounds like shit because we know what it's *supposed* to sound like. We think there's something missing in the music world and we set out to fill that gap. We should leave the making of music to those who *don't have a choice* about it. Not that we're alone in doing that respect, which is why 1975 was such a let-down for me. The Ramones were as contrived as the Daybreak Boys. Equally Television, Talking Heads, Blondie, and pretty much all the rest. They all represented, to a greater or lesser degree, an *intellectual* response to the perceived failings of rock 'n' roll music since 1966, or 1968, or 1972, or whatever year someone felt it all went south, for we all agreed that it had gone south. Patti Smith was maybe different, an accidental rock 'n' roller who came up with something genuinely new, who ended up in much the same place as Dylan had with "Like a Rolling Stone" but

from her own starting-point, not sitting piggy-back on Dylan's shoulders. But then the Patti Smith Group turned into just another rock 'n' roll combo and that little spark of magic was gone, too. Compared to them, Overland Trail and even the fuckin' Eagles had an honesty, a *sincerity* that I could see in only a few of the CBGB acts, although Penny Dreadful and the Yellowbacks certainly had it, kids who had grown up surrounded by so much rock 'n' roll that they just *had* to have a go at making a noise themselves, even though girls weren't supposed to, and especially not black girls, which two of them were, Tiffany, and the drummer, Miss Manners. Like the fuckin' Eagles, Penny Dreadful and the Yellowbacks didn't intellectualise anything they did, they just did it. Maybe *they* were the future of rock 'n' roll, young women, leaving the deliberately decadent, mannered white boys behind in the dust as, lacking the weight of history, they surged forward.

We were no better, if maybe not much worse, than the rest of the New York acts that year, but the Daybreak Boys did help me to understand why the Golden Rule is inviolable, why rock critics should *never* become rock 'n' roll practitioners. It is essential for rock critics, for *all* critics, to be on the outside, looking in. We are not the story, we *write* the story. Whether or not I love or hate the Eiffel Tower, I can only understand why I respond to it in the way that I do by looking at it from *outside*. With the Daybreak Boys I may not have exactly *moved into* the rock 'n' roll world, but I was certainly eating my lunch there every single day, and they were longer and longer lunches.



Ask ten different regular citizens how Jim Morrison died and you're likely to get ten different answers. He died in his bathtub, somebody might say, or maybe he popped his clogs in a toilet stall in a nightclub, the Rock 'n' Roll Circus at 57 Rue de Seine, and the corpse had to be smuggled across Paris, still with a spike in its arm. The French authorities said it was a heart attack, and made certain that he was planted in the Père Lachaise cemetery with the minimum delay. There are even those who say he's still alive, that he walked out of his old life, went to Orly Airport and climbed on a flight to no-one knows where.

Ask ten junkies how Jim Morrison died and you'll get exactly the same answer, and it goes like this.

It's the small hours, but Jim Morrison can't sleep. Pamela Courson, who is not quite his wife, is sleeping peacefully but Jim, despite having a pint or more of brandy in his system, or perhaps *because* he has a pint or more of brandy in his system and he has the seasoned drinker's second wind, well, anyhow, Jim can't sleep. So he pours himself another few fingers of Rémy Martin or Jack, or whatever the hell he's drinking, and decides to have a little line of the coke that Pamela has told him she has in her purse. Only the coke isn't coke, it's dope,

pure Thai heroin, and Pamela isn't sleeping peacefully but nodding out. She has told Jim that it's coke because Jim is mildly disapproving of dope.

The dope has come from Jean de Breteuil, also known as the *junkie aristocrat* or Johnny Braces, dealer to the stars and associate of Keith Richards, who is in Paris with Marianne Faithful, formerly paramour to Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones. Perhaps Johnny Braces is in town specifically to supply Pamela with dope. Maybe Jim doesn't even notice it's dope, he's got so much booze numbing his senses and the dope is so pure. Maybe Jim thinks it's just pretty crappy coke that hasn't given him the fizz he was expecting and cuts himself another line. Maybe he knows it's dope and doesn't give a damn. Either way, considering the amount of booze that's in his system, it's just too much toot for Jim and he starts to overdose. Maybe Pamela's awake for this, or maybe she wakes up when he's already pretty far gone, but as soon as she sees something's awry, she gets on the blower to Johnny Braces, who's asleep in bed with Marianne Faithful. Johnny tells Pamela to run a bath and then hot-foots it to the Morrison abode, where he and Pamela start by getting Jim into the bath, which is standard operating procedure in such circumstances, before Johnny tries slapping him hard in the face and all the other usual moves, including, at the end, punching his chest in an attempt get his heart going. But it's all too little, too late. Johnny Braces tells Pamela to flush everything, make sure the place is as clean as a whistle, and, being no mug, he splits the scene. A business-as-usual OD, same as happened to whatsisname last year.

All the little details that came out, that Jim had bruises on his chest, that there was dried blood around his nose, that he was even in the bath in the first place, make complete sense if Jim turned blue, and *then someone tried to bring him back*, and, any junkie will tell you, that's the only scenario in which they do make sense. For confirmation, I tried asking Marianne about it a couple of times, once at the Hope, and again at the Speakeasy, but either she couldn't remember or she didn't want to, because she gave me two totally different stories, neither of which jived with the facts as I knew them.

Johnny Thunders once suggested to me that this story highlights a key difference between American and European dope culture. In Europe, if you find yourself in that kind of trouble, everyone is rallying around, running baths,

trying mouth-to-mouth, pounding on chests and so forth. In America, Johnny said, get yourself in that kind of trouble and everyone is elbowing everyone else out of the way to get to your wallet.



I learned a lot of things, browsing through the local history books in the New York Public Library, but perhaps the most valuable thing I learned didn't come from a book or an old newspaper. I learned never to use the washrooms in a big city's public library. That's because junkies use them to shoot up. A lockable cubicle in a warm, dry building with unfettered public access, where interaction with other people is actively discouraged is a junkie's idea of heaven, and few are as pleasant or as well-equipped as the washrooms in a central library. Scuttlebutt doing the rounds had it that one smack cat was in a cubicle for three days after he had turned blue, or maybe five days, depending on who's telling the story, before the maintenance staff discovered his body.

John Clellon Holmes's *Go*, the very first Beat novel, was originally titled *The Daybreak Boys*, although I only discovered this at the end of 1976. "I felt that it was an appropriate title," Holmes wrote. "For a book about a new underground of young people, pioneering the search for what lay 'at the end of the night.'"

By then I knew what lay at the end of the night.

From the dying weeks of 1975, from the night we tore a bunch of flyers saying *WATCH OUT! PUNK IS COMING!!* off street poles all along the Bowery, figuring we could paper a wall of my shithole apartment with them, Tiffany Lightning was, as she had been in LA, not quite my girlfriend again, a situation that suited me just fine, as it meant I could still have sex with other people. Tiffany Lightning had pretty much taught me how to have sex after we first hooked up in LA, and one of the things she taught me was that different people were good at different aspects of sex, so having sex with different people was pretty much essential to a fully three-dimensional sexual existence. Tiffany Lightning was also not quite Penny Dreadful's girlfriend, and she also occasionally went home with somebody else, too, so I had evenings free for pursuing a three-dimensional sexual existence, evenings when Tiffany Lightning didn't come home with me.

The best evenings, however, were those when Tiffany Lightning did come home with me and our two libidos, fuelled by brandy and methaqualone, would bounce off each other well into the next day. And while the sex was fun, the after-sex was fun, too, and so was the before-sex, not least because Tiffany Lightning took great pleasure in keeping up with me at the bar, something that few people were brave enough to attempt. I knew, in fact, that Tiffany Lightning could drink me under the table, as she had proved this one night at a booth in the Plato Pit Lounge on Sunset Boulevard by matching me Horse's Ass for Horse's Ass until I literally slid off the buttoned naugahyde into a pile on the floor beneath the table, collecting a sharp crack on the forehead as I went. Because I knew Tiffany Lightning could out-drink me, I would, as the evening developed, watch her for any hint of unsteadiness, something I would take as a clear sign that it was time for me, and preferably us, to split the scene. It occurred to me that life might be even more fun if Tiffany Lightning actually was my girlfriend, with all that entailed, but I knew she would just laugh at me if I suggested it, so I kept the thought to myself.

Because a previous resident had been running a little under-the-radar sports betting operation from it, there were two telephone lines running into the shithole apartment I was renting on East 3rd Street. It turned out to be most

convenient. I had two telephones, one red, and one black. I gave the number of the red one out to editors and the number of black one to my drug customers. If a call came in, I could easily decide, depending on the time of day or night, and on the line that was ringing, whether to accept it or not. At just after five thirty on the morning, Sunday 25 April 1976, just as dawn was tickling the rooftops of the Lower East Side, the black phone, the drug phone, rang. I'd spent the Saturday evening at CBGB, with half of New York, or, at least, the New York that counted, catching a show by the Heartbreakers and the first public showing of a very dull movie about CB. It was called *The Blank Generation* after the Richard Hell song. Ivan Krall had shot it on Super 8, and each audience member's primary interest lay in seeing if they could spot themselves. I counted myself six times, with a possible seventh. Tiffany Lighting had gone somewhere uptown for the evening with Penny Dreadful, and I'd brought home a go-go dancer who called herself Tanita and wanted to tie me up and spank me with a small leather whip she kept folded up in her purse. She settled, after a period of negotiation, for being tied up herself while I did the spanking, which she wanted me to do with more enthusiasm than I felt was necessary or even entirely safe. I'd probably only been asleep for an hour or so when the phone rang, so I wasn't impressed. My mouth tasted of brandy and stale Gauloises and Tanita's strawberry ChapStick, but I was too bushed to get up and get a glass of water. I was certainly too bushed to answer the telephone. So I just left it to ring itself quiet and buried my head in my pillow. The phone did eventually stop ringing but then, after thirty seconds or so, it started ringing again.

"Are you going to answer the fucking telephone?" Tanita said.

"No," I said.

"Can't you take it off the fucking hook?"

"I'd have to answer it to do that," I said. "I'll wait until it stops ringing again."

Eventually, the room was silent again. I tried to get out of bed, but caught my foot in the sheet and tumbled on to the floor. With the sheet still hooked around my foot, I crawled on my hands and knees over to the black phone and uncradled the handset. I must have got there just before it started ringing for a third time because I heard a voice, a quiet, tinny voice, say, "Nick?"

I just paused a moment. “Yeah,” I said, into the blower. I hoped that the word conveyed every ounce of irritation I was feeling.

“It’s Tiffany,” Penny Dreadful’s voice said. “Something’s wrong. I... I don’t think she’s...”

“What?” I said.

“Breathing,” Penny Dreadful said. “I don’t think she’s breathing.”

**CBGB**  
and  
**OMFUG**  
315 BOWERY (212) 982-4052  
(at Bleecker)  
Shows 9:30 and Midnight  
RESERVATIONS HELD TILL 9:15

SPECIAL SHOW WED APRIL 14  
**CAMILLE O'GRADY**  
BAND  
**Laughing Dogs**

THURS, FRI, SAT, SUN  
April 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th  
**TELEVISION**  
THURS ONLY **THE MUMPS**  
FRI, SAT, SUN **MONG**

MON. APRIL 19 AUDITION SHOWCASE

TUES. APRIL 20  
**AIRBORNE**  
**ALIENS**

WED. APRIL 21  
**METTEYYAS VOICE**

THURS, FRI, SAT, APRIL 22, 23, 24  
**HEART**  
**BREAKERS**

with  
Premiere Showing: (Rock Film) 1 hr  
AMOS POE & IVAN KRAL present  
**THE BLANK GENERATION**  
Including Television, Patti Smith Group, Talking Heads,  
Shirts, Harry Toledo, Ramones, Heartbreakers, Marbles,  
Miami, Wayne County, Tuff Darts, Blondie.

“You shoulda called Lori Beauregard,” Errol Washington said, as he handed me a bottle of beer out of the tour bus’s refrigerator. “When Tiffany passed. I thought you had more...” he paused. “More *respect* for her than that.”

“Man, I did,” I said. “I do. I would’ve done,” I said. I prized the cap off the

beer with ashtray on the seatback in front of me. "But I was out of town. I was in Dallas. I left town the day before," I said. "Had enough of the big city. The Lower East Side especially. Decided I had to get out, and get out fast. See more of the country. I called up some editors. Said I wanted to go on tour. Proper, *inserted*, reporter stuff. Same day I was on a plane to Dallas to watch Paul McCartney and Wings rehearse, before they kicked off their tour at the Tarrant County Convention Hall in Fort Worth. Everything had been delayed a couple weeks because Jimmy McCulloch broke his finger getting out of the bath in Paris, so it was a lucky break for me," I said. "That was the day before Tiffany died," I said. "I didn't even know until, until maybe four weeks later, when we hit the East Coast. I think it was Boston," I said. "It was before we got to the Garden. Maybe Boston or, no, no, it wasn't Boston, it was Uniondale. The day after my birthday. I'd just turned twenty-four the day before, travelling up from Atlanta, and then I heard that Tiffany had died. Somebody told me backstage at Uniondale, while Wings were soundchecking. I was on tour," I said. "Been on tour ever since. Four months solid. Off to England next, with Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow," I said. "They're paying me to go home."

"You want to be taking care," Errol Washington said. "I just do a few weeks a year to keep sharp, but them cats that *live* on the road end up exhibiting some mighty strange behaviours, haw haw. Maybe it's the drugs," Errol Washington said. "You wanna watch out for the drugs," he said.

"I'm really not very good at taking drugs," I said. I raised my bottle in salute.

"Yeah, stick to beer. And the, what is it again?" Errol Washington said. "The Horse's Ass, haw haw." His laughter stopped and he looked across at me. "She wasn't yet twenty years old," he said. "You can still call Lori up, you know," he said.

"I know," I said. "I should," I said. "I will," I said.



*Paul McCartney was one of the most competitive people I've ever met. Lennon wasn't. He just thought everyone else was shit.*

—Ray Davies



• **EIGHT** •





“So then Spud says he needs some white wine to sober up.”

Johnny Reptile is flying on speed and post-performance adrenaline. I'm grounded in Mandrax mellowness, enjoying the first deluxe non-prescribed pharmaceuticals I've had in days, since the first night in Paris. We're backstage at the Colston Hall in Bristol while Iggy Pop does his thing up front. I should be watching Iggy but I'm feeling a little too deluxe to get up from the armchair that embraced me about half an hour ago after I slipped a little plink, plink, fizz into Johnny Reptile's waiting beer, just to see what happened, while he and his band were out there finishing up their support set.

“By this stage,” Johnny Reptile says. “Spud's been at the wheel for about six hours, and it's just starting to get light, and we're passing Daventry at a steady seventy. I'll give him this, our Spud is a proper good driver if perhaps not, as he purports to be, the best driver in all of England. That'll be James Hunt, I reckon.” Johnny Reptile looks to me for affirmation. I nod. James Hunt, deffo.

“More salient is that he's a driver who loves to drive and loves to keep on driving. Not many bands can think of following a gig at the Astoria in Edinburgh with one supporting Iggy Pop in Bristol the next night, but not many bands have a Spud eager to drive the bandwagon all through the night and then all through the day and, if necessary, all through the night again too. Did you know,” Johnny Reptile says. “Spud once drove us, back when we were Forbidden Planet, from Gibraltar to Bradford-on-Avon non-stop, not counting the ferry trip across the Channel, where, despite the entreaties of the Townsend Thoresen people, he stayed in the cab the whole way, smoking roll-ups, thrumming his fingers on the steering-wheel.

“Obviously,” Johnny Reptile says. “If you're going to drive a Bedford van for twelve, sixteen, twenty-four or more hours on the bounce, you're going to need a quantity of amphetamines, and it's equally obvious that you're going to need something to buffer the jitteriness that a quantity of amphetamines inevitably brings and which can be detrimental to a smooth, safe driving experience. But I reckon there's enough evidence that a couple of black bombers each time we fill up with petrol, plus a tin of Carlsberg cooking lager per hour, keeps Spud in peak motoring condition and that he doesn't need to fuck with that formula. Certainly not with a long half of the bottle of Rémy Martin VSOP cognac that

Leon lifted while we were stocking up at Victoria Wine yesterday afternoon.

“But Spud,” Johnny Reptile says. “Is Spud, and he’s been driving me and sundry other band-members around for nearly six years, since we first played the Great Western Express Festival in May seventy-two, and, apart from the time he rolled a rented Transit after a long slide on some black ice outside of Rhyl in January seventy-five, we haven’t had any significant mishaps. So I don’t say anything, but I just open my Swiss Army knife, uncork a bottle of Muscadet, and hand it to him.

“I reckon, at this stage, that we’re perhaps an hour and a half from the North Circular, so I bang a little shave-and-a-haircut on the plywood bulkhead with my knuckles to wake up Leon in the back and give him a chance for another round of rudery with the Fugly Twins before we drop them off. He’s had a good two hours’ sleep so he’ll be ready to rock ’n’ roll again.

“The who?” I say.

“The Fugly Twins. You must’ve seen them. Spud and me used to call them the Ever Readies behind their backs until they showed up at Rafters in Manchester both wearing tee-shirts with the Ever Ready battery logo on them, which proper killed that joke. So now they’re the Fugly Twins, because they’re individually among the least fugly birds either of us has ever seen, with both of them together, Spud and me agree, being far too rich for a normal bloke’s blood. But Leon is not a normal bloke.”

“He’s stupidly tall,” I say. “For a start.”

“And a Yank, and he doesn’t drink or smoke, and he doesn’t indulge in any drugs, not even spliff, and he’s only interested in drumming and sex. Although I sometimes ponder how interested in drumming he actually is, mind. Or if drumming’s just a way to get more, or more various, sex.”

“Or possibly even,” I say. “A way of keeping fit, for the purposes of having sex.”

“That is, indeed, a possibility,” Johnny Reptile says. “So, having woken up Leon, I pop this Pistols tape that Nick Kent gave Spud into the cassette player and wind the volume right up so we don’t need to listen to Leon and the Fugly Twins’ second-round shenanigans. A sheet of half-inch ply really doesn’t offer that much soundproofing, but Johnny Rotten coming out of a pair of five-by-

sevens mounted in it directly behind our heads and using it as a resonator does help. Although we can still hear a certain amount tyre squeal when Leon and the Fuglies are in the trickier corners.

“It’s just not right, Spud says, and then he lets out this magnificent white wine and brandy burp that completely fills the cab. He’s only the bloody drummer, Spud says. Spud’s said that before, too. And he’ll say it again. And he’s got a point.

“There is,” Johnny Reptile says. “A clearly accepted hierarchy in bands. In all the bands Spud and me have been in since we first gigged together in Country Rhodes.”

“I don’t remember that one,” I say.

“Country rock outfit,” Leon says. “We never played outside of Somerset and Gloucestershire as I recall. The one show in Lincolnshire.”

“Bristol’s very own Eagles,” I say.

“None of that coked-up Laurel Canyon shite,” Johnny Reptile says. “Proper *English* country rock. *West* Country rock. Loud folk songs with fucken interminable noodly bits. Bit like the Grateful Dead, only with the blotters washed down by rough cider. But that didn’t last long after we brought in Jimmy Keys and I bought an SG and eventually we turned into Forbidden Planet.”

“I remember Forbidden Planet,” I say. “You came up to town with Magic Muscle, yeah? With Rustic Rod and JP. Played with, um.” I try to click my fingers, but the bones in them feel quite soft, and they don’t seem to want to make a noise.

“With Hawkwind, a couple of times” Johnny Reptile says. “And the Pink Fairies, once or twice. Some side-project of Larry Wallis’s too. Anyway,” Johnny Reptile says. “The rules of the road are these, as I’m sure you know. Any action that might be hanging around backstage goes first to the singer, with the lead guitarist next in line, followed by keys, horns and the bass-player, and then the drummer gets the fuglies if there are any left by the time he’s finished packing up his drums, something that takes drummers nearly as long as setting their bloody drums up in the first place.”

I nod. It seems like a reasonable summary.

“On the whole,” Johnny Reptile says. “My theory is that singers and gui-

tarists get into rock 'n' roll because they want a shag, and keyboard and horn players because they're proper musical. Drummers do it because they want to hang out with the blokes in the band. It's an old joke with a lot of truth in it."

"What do you call a guy who hangs around with musicians?" I say.

"But Leon," Johnny Reptile says. "Doesn't really hang out with Spud and me or with any other blokes, because it takes up time that could otherwise be used for sex.

"I'm proper serious when I say that Leon is only interested in sex and drumming, mind. And every bird he meets just *gets* this. When he looks at a bird, she understands that Leon has no interest in her intelligence, personality, character, mood, interests, talents, skills or anything else. He is purely contemplating what sex with her would be like. Among civilians, that would probably repel nine out of ten females and result in a lot of face-slaps and knees to the bollocks and so forth, especially with the way the whole women's liberation palaver has been turning out recently. But we're not," Johnny Reptile says. "Among civilians. We do not have wine and cheese parties, or company cars, or Silver Jubilee street parties or whatnot. And birds that find themselves backstage at gigs are not, as a general rule, visibly concerned with matters that trouble Rosie Boycott and that *Spare Rib* crowd, however important they may be to those in the outside world.

"What might cause consternation around civilians somehow becomes proper compelling when Leon does it in our very specific theatres of operation, especially now that they're full of fiery little punkettes trying their very hardest to shock the bejabbers out of everyone, including each other."

"And," I say. "As often as not, themselves." I'm not sure what I mean by this.

"Probably," Leon says. "But we hadn't fully comprehended this aspect of Leon's personality until the Fugly Twins turned up at the Hope one night and pogoed around in front of us with some enthusiasm. Spud and me, as befits our status as co-frontmen, were pulling into them quite nicely after the gig when Leon arrived and, before we knew it, had headed off to a cubicle in the Ladies with the pair of them.

"To your unconsummated bewilderment," I say.

"Spud says it's all because of Leon's misspent youth," Johnny Reptile says.

“Spud’s old man worked for the Co-Op, and mine was a bookkeeper, but Leon’s parents were Pranksters. When Spud and me were worrying about things like logarithms and être verbs and trying to keep a straight bat, Leon was living in teepees and driving around Yank-land on a bus with Ken Kesey and a bunch of freaks and buckets of Kool-Aid laced with weaponised LSD, and Neal fucken Cassady at the wheel, driving through the day and the night like a dozen Spuds. We were trying to find ways to break the rules when he never had any rules to break. Anyway, ever since they realised that we had a Spud to drive us through the night, the Fugly Twins have been hitch-hiking to out-of-town gigs so they can spend a few hours in the darkness in the back of the bandwagon with Leon, in the space between the guitars and the amps and the drums where Jimmy Keys’s sawed-off B3 and Leslie speaker used to sit, engaging in whatever amusements their febrile minds can conjure up on the drive back to The Smoke. And here we are.

“He is not, I like to remind Spud, a *tame* drummer.”

“Narnia,” I say.

“What?”

“That’s a Narnia reference,” I say.

“I know it is,” Johnny Reptile says. “So anyway, these Pistols demos that we’re playing to cover up Leon’s how’s-yer-father are proper good. For months we’ve been saying that, yeah, the Sex Pistols are fun live, and all very exciting, and that Rotten’s a magnetic frontman and blah, blah, blah but, really, when you get down to it, their sloppy musicianship is going to let them down in the final analysis.”

“I don’t think anyone really gives a shit about that,” I say.

“And I beg to differ, Nick. In the end, musicianship always counts. But, anyway, Nick Kent gave Spud this cassette of rough-mixed demos and it is, like I say, proper good, and with a mix where there’s nowhere to hide, unlike those produced-to-all-buggery, wall-of-sound singles of theirs that Pete Thomas done. Spud, he said he’d heard that Chris Spedding had been brought in as a stunt guitarist to cover for Steve Jones but I’ve known Spedding for years, and I know his playing, and that’s not him. Jones has got something going there,” Johnny Reptile says. “He’s not going to be playing too many jazz chords any time soon,

mind, but he's come up with some nice parts and he's playing them well enough."

"They were quite tight when I saw them in July," I say. "At the *Studentersamfundet*," I say, taking my time over *Studentersamfundet*. "In Trondheim. Odd gig," I say. "Except Sid," I say. "Sid played the bass and the bass won. But you couldn't really hear him."

"Spud and me saw the Pistols at the 100 Club in May last year and they were dreadful. Unmusical, untogether, almost no repertoire. But I will say this. However sloppy they were, they had a clear message for us, and for everyone else in the room, and it was this. Whatever you've been doing belongs to *then*, this is *now*. I don't know how many of the people there heard that message, but Spud and me certainly did. It took a few weeks. But we changed the band name, wrote new songs, ditched the stand-in drummer we'd been using and said ta-ta to old Jimmy Keys."

"Why ditch Jimmy?" I say.

"Jimmy a really tasty Hammond player, but he refused to shave off his beard. If he shaves off his beard, he says, he looks like a kiddy-fiddler. And we'd found Leon by then, who is probably the only flashy-technical drummer in England willing to wear short hair and a '60s three-button tonic mohair suit. We needed Leon. And Leon fucken *hated* Jimmy Keys.

"So, back in the van, we begin the lengthy entry procedure for Scratchwood Services, which is on the other side of the motorway, and I rap on the bulkhead again, to give Leon and the Fugly Twins their five minute warning. Spud hands me the Muscadet for safekeeping, so I squeak the cork back in to the neck and stow it in the bag at my feet, and Spud thumbs a few Polo Mints out of the foil and on to his tongue, just in case there's any rozzers nosing around. Since we cut our hair off and started wearing shirts and ties, the fuzz have shown a lot less interest in our van than they used to, mind. I turn the music down and we roll towards the petrol pumps.

"When we finally pull up, Leon and the Fugly Twins let themselves out of the back of the bandwagon and head for the khazis. Spud stays at the wheel, which is his right as driver, and sets to rolling enough ciggies to get him through to Bristol. I take care of the filling up, cleaning the windscreen, emptying the

ashtray and whatnot. And after paying for the petrol, along with a fresh packet of Winstons and three Mars bars, I lock step with Leon as he comes out of the Gents, drying his hands with a wad of toilet paper and leaving a gentle cloud of Aramis in his trail.

“Leon tells me that the birds, the *chicks*, he always calls them chicks, are gonna thumb it from now on. Scratchwood’s a decent spot for picking up a lift to London, probably better than Brent Cross, which is where we’d drop them otherwise, because too much of the traffic is going left or right around the North Circular. Birds who look like the Fugly Twins will never have to wait long for a lift.

“I tell Leon that they’ll probably be home in time for school. That always gets him. What are they, I say, fifteen? He says sixteen. At least, Probably older. Unquestionably older. I don’t say anything.

“I slide into the cab first,” Johnny Reptile says. “Because there’s far too much of Leon to fit in the middle seat. He swings himself in after me and folds his legs into the footwell. Maaaan, Leon says. They are both so... and he really makes a meal of the next word. *Competitive*. And then he gives me his goofy Donald Sutherland smile and does that drummer thing of playing a quick roll across his knees with his index fingers, ending with a splash on an imaginary cymbal. There are birds, *chicks*, sorry, who love sex, Leon informed me, quite solemnly, this one time, back when we were first rehearsing the band at Manno’s on the King’s Road, after he’d turned up one afternoon, late, wearing yesterday’s clothes and smelling pretty funky even by the standards of a rehearsal room. And then there are chicks that love being *good* at sex. And, Leon said, let me tell ya...”

Johnny Reptile mimes a drum roll with his index fingers, ending with a cymbal splash.

“So Spud eats his way through his Mars bar and we just sit there,” Johnny Reptile says. “Spud holds strong views on eating while driving, considering it dangerous and irresponsible. Finished, he starts the Bedford, ready for the rigmarole that will eventually get us back to the southbound carriageway. You know Scratchwood. Around the periphery of the car park, a slow trudge alongside the railway line before the access road swings right, then over the bridge across the M1, and another swing right on to the slip road that finally

gets us back on the motorway.

“Leon,” Johnny Reptile says. “Sorta *pinches* the Pistols tape out of the cassette player with his fingertips, and just lets it drop to the floor. He pulls out another cassette from the pocket of his gunmetal blue ex-RAF greatcoat and clicks it in to the machine, dialling in just enough volume for Booker T. and the M.G.’s to fill the cab.

“Al Jackson’s a real drummer, he says. Paul Cook, he says, sounds like he’s throwing a set of drums down the back stair. He takes his aviator shades out of another pocket, puts them on and then, after checking the passenger door is locked, curls up against it as best he can, nestled down in the collar of his greatcoat, his long arms folded across his chest.

Spud dry-necks a couple of black bombers and, comfortable that tickover is stable and his other pre-flight checks have been completed, slips the van into first gear and gently releases the clutch. I figure he needs a beer.

“White wine, Spud says. I’m still chasing out the brandy, Spud says. So, as the Bedford grumbles forward, I lean over and down, reaching through several yards of Leon’s legs, pick up the Pistols tape from the floor-mat and slip it into the outside pocket of my bag, then get the Muscadet from the main section of the bag, along with a Carlsberg for me, pulling out the cork from the bottle and handing the wine to Spud, who takes a sip and then puts it down on his seat, clamping the bottle between his thighs. I crack open my breakfast beer, put the ring-pull tab in the ashtray, light up a Winston and, since Booker T is on the tape deck, settle back to excavate Steve Cropper’s guitar playing once again, to see what new treasures I can uncover.”

“Stevie Winwood,” I say. “Once told me that musicians don’t listen to other people’s music the way that civilians do. They don’t do it for enjoyment, he said, but for what they can cop from it.”

“I wouldn’t put it *quite* like that,” Johnny Reptile says. “But it’s close enough. I can’t listen to any music at all, not even jazz nor classical, without having a bit of a *wonder*, like.

“Of course,” Johnny Reptile says. “We’re all stealing, copping stuff, re-using it. Always, We’re doing it all the time, even when we don’t know it. The Pistols are the bastard child of Alice Cooper and Mott the Hoople, with perhaps some

New York Dolls or Iggy Pop, more in the attitude than the sound. That's wrapped up in comedy ragamuffin clothes, like *Oliver* on angel dust, and you've got to admit there's more than a dash of a rapsallion Fagin in Rotten's persona, now I think of it, unless it really is his personality. Perhaps the Pistols know this, perhaps they don't. I reckon that they probably do. And that's their version of *new*. Our version of *new* is mostly Brian Jones-era Stones and the good bits of The Who, everything before Tommy, in other words, with a little bit of the Box Tops' blue-eyed soul, but a little bit faster and a little bit angrier and a little bit cocknier, despite Spud and me coming from Bristol. We, at least, damn well do know it because we sat down in the kitchen of Spud's squat in Islington with his Dansette and my record collection and proper planned it out. The Clash? I wanna riot? Give me a break. I remember when Joe Strummer was a middle-class lad with a folk guitar who called himself Woody Mellor.

"So Spud wants to know how long I think we got left for this punk rock thing, as he starts driving the long way around the outside of the car park. He obeys all the signs, however irrational they might seem. He always obeys all the signs. He says that's how he's never been nicked by the rozzers.

"I say I dunno. I say perhaps it's already peaked. Or maybe this is the new normal and we'll have years of being fucken gobbed on."

"I reckon it was all over when Rotten said *shit* to Bill Grundy," I say. "Revolt into style. You should be working out what's next."

"Well, we'll carry on doing this for a while," Johnny Reptile says. "Then whatever the next version of this is, perhaps we'll hook into that. And then the next. Perhaps we'll grow beards again. Shave all our hair off. Buy new suits. Dress as space-aliens. We've got another ten years in us, I reckon. Until we're like thirty-five or something. Then we'll be fat and bald," Johnny Reptile says. "And we can do the weddings-funerals-and-bar-mitzvahs circuit. Cover-songs. Topsy divorcees making passes at us between sets."

"Or you could become pop stars and sell a million records," I say.

"That'd be lush," Johnny Reptile says.



“Lou Reed,” Lester Bangs said to me, out front of CBGB in what would have been early April 1979, the night I’d been flown in by A&M to see The Police, a night mild enough for me to have just a tee-shirt on under a leather jacket. “Lou Reed,” Lester Bangs said. “Is a fuckin’ thief.” Under his own leather jacket, which was a size too small, Lester was wearing a tee-shirt made up at one of those store-front places where they iron on velvet letters of your choice. It read FREEDOM OR DEATH, which represented a great improvement over the one he favoured in 1975 or so, which had LAST OF THE WHITE NIGGERS on it. I knew he was trying to do a Norman Mailer thing, but it still made me uncomfortable.

“I thought Lou Reed was a genius,” I said.

“He *is* a fuckin’ genius,” Lester Bangs said. “The genius *di tutti genii*. But he’s also a fuckin’ thief. And he’s a fuckin’ genius thief. Have you read Burroughs?” I nodded. “William Burroughs?” I nodded again. “*Junkie*?” he said.

“Yeah,” I said.

“Then you can’t have missed it, too! Lou fuckin’ Reed stole *Junkie* from William fuckin’ Burroughs.”

“I read it when I was fourteen,” I said. “All I can remember,” I said. “Was

that it made me not want to take drugs very much indeed, but that it also made me want to take drugs very much indeed, both at the same time.”

“Well I also read it when I was a kid, but I read it again today, for the first time,” Lester Bangs said. “*Naked Lunch*, yes. *The Wild Boys*, obviously. Pretty much everything else. Fuckin’ love Burroughs, but I never re-read *Junkie*. Dunno why. So I read it today and I can tell you, sure as eggs is eggs, that Lou Reed is a fuckin’ thief. Grand fuckin’ larceny,” he said. “Go and read *Junkie* again, then go and listen to ‘Heroin’ and ‘Waiting for my Man’ and see how Lou Reed stole fuckin’ everything from Burroughs. He’s using dope slang that’s fuckin’ fifteen years out of date. Fuckin’ eye droppers. Who the fuck was using eye droppers to shoot up in the sixties? And he fuckin’ hides it in plain sight, the fucker. It’s like, like the fuckin’ problem of the perfect crime.”

“I’m probably going to regret this,” I said. “But...”

“The problem of the perfect fuckin’ crime,” Lester Bangs said. “Is that the perfect criminal can never get any credit for committing it, because it’s *perfect*. People will only know *how* perfect if he gets caught. So the perfect criminal can’t help himself. He gives out little hints, just fuckin’ tiny little nudges here and there, until sooner or later someone puts two and two together and he gets busted. Only, because he’s been busted, it’s no longer the perfect crime, yeah? And that’s what Lou fuckin’ Reed has been doing for ten fuckin’ years. What are your influences, Lou? Oh, you know, Delmore Schwartz,” Lester Bangs was shouting by this stage. I saw Dee Dee Ramone look over to see what the commotion was, then look away when he saw that it was only Lester going off. “My influences are, y’know, Delmore Schwartz,” Lester said. “And WILLIAM FUCKIN’ BURROUGHS. He’s just fuckin’ lays it out there and waits for someone to call him on it, and no one fuckin’ has.”

“But everyone steals,” I said. “Half the rock scribes in America have stolen from you. Except maybe John Mendelsohn,” I said. “Because he stole from Nik Cohn.”

“Nobody can steal that which I have freely given,” Lester Bangs said, a smooth open-hand gesture stressing his munificence.

“Maybe Burroughs gives freely, too,” I said.

“Have you fuckin’ *met* William Burroughs?” Lester Bangs said. “I love the

cat, fuckin' *worship* him, but when you shake his hand you count your fingers afterwards to check they're all still there."

When I interviewed Sinclair Beiles in 1997, he mentioned that Burroughs was a regular visitor, staying with Beiles and his wife when he passed through Johannesburg on his way to Madagascar.

"Burroughs has a need to visit Madagascar often," Sinclair Beiles said. "For he owns several colonies of lemurs there."

*The music business*, Hunter S. Thompson once wrote, *is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free, and good men die like dogs. There's also a negative side.*

It's one of the much-quoted Hunter S. Thompson's more quoted lines. Only he never wrote it. In November 1985 Thompson produced a column, "Full-time Scrambling," about equipping himself with a satellite television installation, which opened, "The TV business is uglier than most things. It is normally perceived as some kind of cruel and shallow money trench through the heart of the journalism industry, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free and good men die like dogs, for no good reason. Which is more or less true." Quite how this was modified and then applied to the music business is, and will probably remain, a mystery. But it's pure rock 'n' roll.

PLAY'IN IN THE BAND...FIRST AND LAST IN A SERIES.....



THIS IS A CHORD



THIS IS ANOTHER



THIS IS A THIRD

NOW FORM A BAND

“You were taping me last night,” Johnny Reptile says as we pick over what’s left of the breakfast buffet at the Holiday Inn in the minutes before it closes. His eyes suggest he’s slept less than he should have. If at all. Thanks to the Mandrax I’m well-rested. Johnny Reptile’s not asking a question so much as making an accusation.

“You’d better not fucken print nothing about us planning the band on Spud’s kitchen table,” he says. “This is year zero, remember. And Joe Strummer was never Woody fucken Mellor. Sprang, fully-formed, from Bernie Rhodes’s thigh. Remember that,” Johnny Reptile says.

“Reptile, I won’t even say where you half-inched the name from.”

“The name’s all ours,” Johnny Reptile says. He looks affronted. Perplexed, maybe. I don’t care.

“Cats Like Plain Crisps?” I say. “Graffiti in Richmond. I used to drive past it. I think there was another one in Saint Margarets or somewhere. And there was one in Cheam, I think it was, that said *cats like salt and vinegar crisps too*. I consider that improvisation on a theme,” I say. “To be bordering on jazz.”

“Well that’s where you’re fucken wrong,” Johnny Reptile says. “It was Spud and a geezer called Weed in the kitchen of the Grosvenor Road squat in Twickenham, back in seventy-three. Maybe end of seventy-two. We were crashing there after a gig at the Greyhound. A bit of spliff may have been ingested, and Weed is keeping the munchies at bay with a bag of Ready Salted. There’s a cat. Someone, Spud says it was him, but it might’ve been Weed, wonders if cats eat crisps. Weed says they don’t, or it might have been Spud. So Spud, or maybe Weed, decides a little market research is required. Turns out that cats, or this cat anyway, are mad for plain crisps. This seems important and Spud wants to remember to share it with me when I wake up, coz I’m crashed out upstairs with a lady friend, so Spud grabs a biro and writes *cats like plain crisps* on the kitchen wall. We’ve been waiting five years to use it. When I heard some cunt decided to paint it all over south-east London I was fucken livid. I was sure someone else would pinch it, it’s such a fucken brilliant band name. Cats Like Plain Crisps. Cats. Like. Plain. Crisps. Come on, man, you can fucken *smell* the gold records. Actually,” Johnny Reptile says. “You’re right, we nicked it, because none of us fucken *existed* five years ago, did we?”

*No Elvis, Beatles, or the Rolling Stones / In 1977*

—Joe Strummer & Mick Jones



• **NINE** •





In 1967, Fender Musical Instruments, then owned by CBS, attempted to add lightness to its solid-body Telecaster guitar by hollowing out cavities in the body's wood, cavities that would be hidden beneath the finished instrument's plastic pickguard. To collectors, these are known as *smugglers' Teles*, the notion being that the pickguard, only held in place by eight Phillips screws, might be temporarily removed by the player and the cavities used for contraband of one form or another.

A decade later, the tale goes, John Perry, lead guitarist for the Only Ones, similarly routed out the space beneath the pickguard of his white 1962 Fender Stratocaster specifically to carry narcotics across national borders. The modification had the side-effect of making the Strat slightly more resonant so, when asked by interviewers how drugs had affected his guitar sound, he would take a deep breath and begin, "Well..."

Or that's the story, anyway, as I heard it from maybe a dozen people, all told. I can't remember reading an interview where JP said anything along those lines, and I've never asked him about it even though, if I'm in London, which is less and less likely to be the case, I am prone to having a pint of beer or perhaps a cup of tea with JP, one of a handful of characters who still think of me as Nick Numbers. We mostly talk about cricket.

Peter Perrett was never a person to accept others' rules. He didn't follow the rules at Bancroft's, the upmarket boarding school to which, thanks to his intelligence, he'd been sent on a scholarship. He was expelled at fifteen, moving to the even more upmarket Haberdashers' Aske's school, where one of his friends was Steve Harley, later to be the frontman of the Cockney Rebel, the two drawn to each other as the only boys in the school who liked Bob Dylan, even though Harley was a skinhead and Perrett a longhair.

Long hair and increasingly nonconformist views combined to make Perrett essentially unemployable after he left school, and he pretty much drifted around the tail end of the sixties until he found a way of making money that suited his need to ignore, to live outside, the rules. He started selling, and later importing, drugs.

The rules of others imposed themselves on one occasion, however. Peter

Perrett was forced into a shotgun marriage after his Greek girlfriend Xena Kakoulli fell pregnant. Xena embraced the Perrett world-view, and would prove to be a powerful ally. Together, the two built a way of living that depended as little as possible on the mores of the society outside their walls. Sexual and pharmaceutical conventions were completely rejected, and also such inconveniences as taxation or any form of social responsibility, even the hegemony of the 24-hour day. Keith Richards was building a similarly private world in London and later at Villa Nellcôte on the French Riviera for himself and his coterie at much the same time, but as a Rolling Stone he had a wad of cash with which to do it. The Perretts' was pretty much built through force of will.

Then Peter Perrett decided to be a singer-songwriter. Having made such a choice, most aspiring musicians, such as his former school-friend Steve Harley, would work the pubs and the folk clubs of London, slowly building confidence and an audience, perhaps meeting like-minded fellow musicians with whom to form a band, and eventually impressing a record company A&R man enough to be offered a contract. Perrett stayed home, where he was always most comfortable, and built a band around himself called England's Glory, with the aim of going straight for a recording contract. Funded by Perrett's drug deals, England's Glory started rehearsing and refining Peter Perrett's songs at Underhill Studios in Greenwich over 1972, in the same venue and at the same time as Lou Reed rehearsing his band the Tots for his first UK performances, Iggy Pop was rehearsing a band for *his* first London shows, and David Bowie was preparing the Spiders of Mars for their first tour.

In 1973, England's Glory went into the studio, recorded, and then pressed, in a very short run, a complete album. The concept was simple, to use this completed vinyl LP as a calling card and secure a record deal. The execution of the concept was flawed, the songs sounding like outtakes from Lou Reed's first post-Velvet Underground album, only made worse by Perrett affecting a mid-Atlantic accent. A couple of years later, with no record deal and after only one live performance, the England's Glory project had sputtered to a halt.

I never met Peter Perrett at this time, although I'm sure we were at a few of the same shows, and so forth. But his world was based on the cusp of genteel Surrey and Sarf London, while I mainly lurked in the area north and west of the

Circle Line and I was in the States, anyway, for most of 1974 and 1975. I only met Peter Perrett after my base of operations had started moving back to London from New York, and he had formed the Only Ones. I guess it must have been right at the end of seventy-six that JP, who had been recruited to Peter Perrett's new band, first introduced us, a few weeks before the Only Ones first played live. JP was someone I had known for years, via the Ladbroke Grove scene, although he was just an occasional visitor from his base in the West Country until the Only Ones brought him to London full-time.

"I always felt that Somerset was a death sentence," JP told me. "No chance to develop, or good enough players. Should have got away sooner."

His playing finally had a context. Music scenes thrive in only a handful of metropolitan centres, because they need critical mass. There may be the odd flurry of activity in Manchester, say, or Athens, Georgia, perhaps, but the focus quickly returns to London, Los Angeles and New York, the cities where music is a business.



Since Spooky Tooth, of which he was a founder member, had split up in 1974, drummer Mike Kellie had toured France with Johnny Halliday, but he was looking for a more substantial gig. He stored his drums at Manno's rehearsal studios above the Furniture Cave on New King's Road, which was also where Peter Perrett and John Perry were working through Perrett's songs, along with Glen Tilbrook, a deft young guitarist. The rehearsal rooms' owner, Manolo "Manno" Ventura, brought Perrett and Kellie together. Tilbrook was soon out of the picture. Alan Mair, formerly of the Beatstalkers, known in their day as the

*Scottish Beatles*, was recruited on bass and the Only Ones had taken shape.

Peter Perrett handed over complete control of the family business to Xena, who shifted enough cocaine and hashish, supplemented by some income from her legitimate business designing clothes, and Peter's poker winnings, to funnel a hefty £40,000 into the band as it evolved over the next year or so, Xena increasingly operating as the band's manager as much as its backer. The four musicians camped out the rehearsal studio and practiced, five days a week, for six months. To support that kind of dedication you need to sell a lot of drugs

Like most scribes on the scene at the time I made a little extra money from time to time by writing, under a variety of names, authorised biographies of artists and bands whose career trajectory had reached the critical point where their young fans would shell out a pound for a one-shot at their local newsagent or even a couple of quid for an actual book at a bookshop. Such hack work often required a degree of finessing when it came to the early funding of the performers in question. I think it was Richard Hell who once told me that there were only three ways for a rock 'n' roll musician to get by, that they either had to sell drugs, sell their body, or find somebody else to pay for them. His preferred approach was the third, although the lines get blurred, he said, when you consider that the women paying for him often got their money from selling their bodies, drugs, or both. The scribe must use all sorts of writerly legerdemain to conceal this sort of thing, without, if possible, directly lying. The difference with the Only Ones was that nobody even tried to hide that they were funded by drug dealing. Mike Kellie once told me a story involving Fairport Convention's Sandy Denny.

"So I get Sandy to come to one of our gigs," Kellie told me. "And then she comes to a couple more. I think she likes Peter, because it's clear that Peter can be a very naughty boy, and Sandy likes naughty boys. Anyway, one night, she brings along her coke dealer thinking that Peter might be interested in the guy's merchandise, 'cause he's got really good gear. Turns out, ha ha, it's Peter who's supplying the dealer with the gear in the first place."

The Only Ones probably started out, at least in Peter Perrett's mind, as a second take on the England's Glory idea, to *get some musicians in, rehearse and record*

*some tracks, get a deal*, only with better musicians. But by the time I saw the Only Ones at their rehearsal room at the end of 1976 it was clear that something else had happened, and the four members had turned into a proper band, not just a singer-songwriter with some backing musicians. And the songs they sang were great, too, with smart lyrics and great pop melodies. I wanted to write about the Only Ones straight away, but JP asked me to hold off until they had a couple of gigs under their belt, and I agreed. I did spread the word around the scene a little bit in the week before the second gig on 21 January, which helped to pack the Speakeasy with some of the leading faces in town when the band got up to play. Although, considering so many key players were enthusiastic consumers of the Perretts' Columbian marching-powder, that probably helped bring more in.

It was the height of that silly season, the couple of months after the Sex Pistols had sworn at Bill Grundy on the early-evening *Today* programme, sending out a crystal-clear message that whatever had already happened in music was now ineluctably *old*. The problem was, while it was easy to walk briskly away from the old, nobody quite knew what shape *new* would take. I knew it wasn't Sex Pistols-shaped, although I happily rode that bandwagon while the going was good. Punk rock, in its British incarnation, was style disguised as revolt. It was very *well*-styled, by Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, Bernie and Zandra Rhodes, and a few others, but it was always a musical cul-de-sac. Everything, Einstein is supposed to have said, should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler. Yet, at the very heart of the punk rock conceit was over-simplicity.

"Hey, Johnny, what are *you* rebelling against?"

"Whaddaya got?"

It's a fine way to set a fire, to trigger a youthquake, and to sell a lot of trousers in the process, but too inchoate for a *musical* revolution. "We don't want your culture," Mick Farren had announced, six years before. And then Felix Dennis added, "We've got our own culture, man." But punk rock hadn't bothered with the second part of the equation. DESTROY, its tee shirts screamed. Punk rock's flame was, at heart, reactionary, not revolutionary. It was anti-rock, anti-*music*, even. *This is a chord, now form a band*. It burned brightly

and it was exciting, and it was necessary, but by the end of 1976 its work was done. With no fuel, there was nothing left for it to do but burn out. But could its impact, its screeching rejection of the *old*, open the door for a *new* rock 'n' roll that had a future? After attending a couple of Only Ones rehearsals and a try-out gig at the Greyhound, I was beginning to think that *new* might be shaped quite a lot like the Only Ones. And after that first night at the Speak, quite a few other scribes felt the same way.

I was mesmerised by Peter Perrett, struck by how close to the finished article he was, prowling the stage with all the swagger of a malevolent Marc Bolan despite having only performed in public perhaps twice before. I once asked JP what he and the rhythm section had done in rehearsals to get Perrett so gig-ready and he just shrugged. "Peter is Peter," he said. "Always has been, always will be." Peter Perrett's songs oozed sexual and chemical promiscuity and there was something about the man that suggested he was drawing from life. There were still some refinements needed, of course. While the songs were great and the Only Ones' sound just oozed *now*, I did see one proto-punk curl his lip and say, to the proto-punkette by his side, *flared trousers*. Within a couple of months the band's clothes would be cut and shut to better suit the times, and when the weeklies gave their Record of the Week gong to the band's self-produced, cocaine-financed debut single, "Lovers of Today," it seemed nothing could stop the Only Ones juggernaut from crushing all in its path. But despite the critical ravings, despite the musicianship, despite the lyrics and the melodies, despite signing to CBS, the Only Ones never sold that many records nor filled bigger venues.

Punk rock burned out as quickly as I expected, although nobody told the increasingly uniform punks who clustered each Saturday on the King's Road, Chelsea, and on squares in market towns throughout the country for the next year or two. We saluted the New Wave that rose from its ashes, spawning hit band after hit band, each with a fraction of the talent, musicianship or stagecraft that the Only Ones had. But the band kept plugging away on the fringes of success and we kept writing pieces that praised it until, one day, it just wasn't there any more.

Ask anyone why and they're pretty much sure to give you the same answer,

that it was all the fault of the drugs, specifically the dope that three of the band members had been snorting and smoking sporadically up until the 1980 tour of the United States, where they started shooting up.

Peter Perrett contracted Hepatitis B from his first experience injecting heroin during the Only Ones' 1980 tour of the United States, which sidelined him for six months after the band returned home to the United Kingdom. That tour itself had started badly, with an ill-conceived decision to book the band as the Who's support act. It just kept getting worse, as Brian Setzer told me at the Rainbow, backstage at an Elvis Costello show where Setzer's band Stray Cats was playing support. He'd heard, from a roadie, that Perrett's stated intention to stay clean for the tour barely lasted the transatlantic flight. A police escort was needed to get the band out of Birmingham, Alabama when their gig annoyed the customers of a neighbouring pool hall. Perry, in particular, had a dope habit that was spiralling out of control, and then his girlfriend was busted and imprisoned in Los Angeles. And it ended very badly indeed. Peter Perrett was hassled by a belligerent car park attendant, described by Brian Setzer as a *six feet four inch man-mountain*, and responded by running the guy over in his hire car. A warrant for attempted murder pursuing him, he had to flee California and then, after a stopover to back up Johnny Thunders at Max's Kansas City in New York, the country.

The band had effectively broken up by the time its leader put up the shutters at Perrett Towers in Forest Hill, waiting out his jaundice. This was partly because three of the band members were quite advanced dope fiends, only Alan Mair staying clean. But it was also because the musicians were getting sick and tired of writing, recording and releasing great records, and traipsing around the world playing great shows, all for no real reward. In a sense, me and my peers were to blame for that. We were constantly writing *I have seen the future of rock 'n' roll*... articles about the Only Ones, insisting that the band was *criminally underrated*, that "Another Girl, Another Planet" was *the best pop song of the 1970s* and so on, without seeming to pause for breath. But all the things we loved about the Only Ones, the wit, the easy musicality that somehow managed to avoid pomposity, the sophistication of the lyrics and the adult themes they explored, all of these

were things that actively prevented the band from being a success. Pop records are bought by thirteen-year-old girls, and thirteen-year-old girls were scared shitless of the Only Ones. Rightly so. But we, the massed ranks of scribes, kept writing that Beatlesque success lay just around the corner, and that must have been a factor in keeping the band going. I know for certain that a sequence of pieces I wrote for *Rock Scene* played a part in getting venues booked for that final 1980 tour of the States, for shows that were not, in the end, played, thanks to Peter Perrett's attempted murder rap.

When a rock 'n' roll band is in the position of the Only Ones, however, it can't simply break up. Although its continued existence may seem pointless to everyone connected with it, it has obligations going forward, to bookers, to theatre owners and, above all, to its record company. Breaking the Only Ones' contract with CBS would have meant paying back £160,000 of advance payments, money that had already been spent, on touring, equipment, recording sessions, dope, and just living from day to day. So the band, like so many others, entered its zombie period. The four members got together to record a few desultory cover tunes for an album that was never going to see the light of day. A few fairly desultory shows were played, to perpetuate the illusion that the band was a still living, breathing thing. The press gave no hint that the band was just as much an animated corpse as its individual members often seemed to be, although it was an open secret in the industry. Finally, in 1981, the Only Ones were released from the CBS contract and the band could genuinely shut down operations. Peter Perrett, one of the more talented songwriters I met in my years around the music business, climbed into his habit and disappeared for over a decade. When he re-emerged with a new band in 1994 I was so far away from that world, I didn't hear about it for two and a half years. I was having a mug of hot chocolate at Café Mozart in Cape Town, when I overheard an Englishman sitting at the next table say that he had seen Peter Perrett's The One's first ever show at the Melkweg in Amsterdam.

Presented by Paul Loasby, Nightingale Music, Strutworth Ltd & Levi Strauss.

**FOR LEVI'S IT'S ANOTHER CHANCE  
TO ROCK ON.**

**FOR ELVIS COSTELLO IT'S A FIRST  
IN LONDON THIS YEAR.**

**FOR THE RAINBOW IT'S A  
HAPPY BIRTHDAY.**

**FOR YOU IT'S A MUST.**

**MONDAY  
29th SEPTEMBER 8-00 PM**

**ELVIS  
COSTELLO**

**AND THE  
ATTRACTIONS**

**WITH SPECIAL GUESTS**

**THE STRAY CATS**

Tickets on sale £4-00 and £4-50  
at the Rainbow Theatre,  
Finsbury Park, London N4.  
Telephone: 01-263 3146/9  
Postal applications enclosing  
SAE and postal orders only.



On the morning of 8 September 1979 I was raising a few eyebrows at Lord's while waiting for the Gillette Cup final to start. I wasn't dressed like the typical cricket spectator, for a start, still in the clothes, including black leather trousers, that I'd put on to watch Bauhaus at the Marquee the night before, although that's a whole other story. And I was reading the *NME*, which had a photograph on the cover, taken by Pennie Smith, of the Slits, clowning around topless, and covered in mud. The headline was *Happiness Is A Muddy Slit*. This was unorthodox literature for the bleachers at Lord's but I ignored the sideways glances and the *tut-tutting* as befits a man who is Exempt, who does not lose his cool, who is in control, with the icy, deluxe calm that can only come from buffering the comedown, after a night of speed, with a couple of Mandrax, washed down by a tall, cool tin of Carlsberg Special Brew. An empty seat beside me was waiting for JP, who never showed up to see his team Somerset beat Northants by 45 runs and raise the silverware. I found out eventually that JP had had his collar felt by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's finest, and spent the day cooling his heels in the Kensington clink. As it was told to me, the local Plod had turned up at The Furniture Cave, right by JP's flat, early on Saturday morning to collect its weekly bung for turning a blind eye to the stolen antiques. One of the Cave's stallholders pleaded poverty but offered up the *coke dealer* living opposite as a sweetener. JP got out on Sunday just in time to hammer up the M1 to Leeds, where the Only Ones were playing the second day of Futurama 1979.

While he was pacing to and fro with no shoelaces in his shoes or belt in his trousers, JP was also missing an overdub session organised by CBS. While my colleagues in the press, even those on the weekly comics, were almost unanimous in their love of the Only Ones, that acclaim had never translated into sales. Everyone who heard it had agreed that the first CBS single was as close to pop perfection as one could hope to find, yet it didn't even chart. Subsequent single and album sales were also disappointing. CBS had drafted in producer Colin Thurston to manage the recording of the band's third album in the hope of adding a more commercial veneer, an experiment that worked to the degree that the record would sell marginally more than its predecessors at the expense of some critical media. Now the label was having another shot at crafting a hit single, with the song "Trouble in the World." Nicky Graham, CBS's A&R man,

who fancied his chances at the controls, was brought in to work some magic in the mix room at Utopia Studios in Primrose Hill. He used the small overdub booth to add some gospel-style vocals and a string synthesiser part, and remixed the track using all the favoured tricks of the time, thanks partly to the room's computer-assisted desk, despite the hardware's tendency to crash. The end result is comfortably the worst track ever released by the Only Ones. Sales were poor.

3 September 1979 U.S. \$1.00 (by air)/Canada 80c 20p

**NEW**  
**NME**  
**MUSICAL**  
**EXPRESS**

*Meat Loaf, Selector,*  
*Cheap Trick verbals*  
*Buzzcocks, Numan wax*



ALL UP & DOWN BY PHOTOFEST/STOCK

**Happily A Muddy Slit**

Frolic with NME's Page One girls inside

*If you do happen to be stronger / It only means you gonna take longer to go under /  
That's the trouble in this world.*

—Peter Perrett



• **TEN** •





I always, even when I was a kid, hated London in late May, June and the start of July, the eight weeks after my birthday. The city is simply, by any civilised standard, too far north. At that time of year, it never quite gets dark, even in the middle of the night, yet it's not quite summer, which doesn't kick in till July or August, if at all. For five years, no, *six* years of constant touring, during which my base had shifted, almost without my noticing, from New York back to London, I'd been able to arrange that I spent this period on the road somewhere in mainland Europe or in the States, with better weather and night falling at a sensible time. But then *Rock Scene* magazine went tits-up at the beginning of 1982, when I was firmly rooted in London, and as *Rock Scene* was my ticket on to the Rolling Stones tour of Europe that year, it took my early summer plans with it, leaving me marooned in Town.

On 9 June 1982, when I *should* have been on a deluxe tour bus somewhere in Germany, I was being propped up by the bar at The Venue in Victoria Street, avoiding the support act at a Tom Verlaine gig, a band called China Syndrome or something. The Venue was a deconsecrated cinema, the Metropole Kinema, the cinema that David Lean used in *Brief Encounter*, where Irene Handle plays the Wurlitzer, and it had a long bar designed to handle a thousand people or more at once, all wanting a gin and tonic or a lager and lime during intermission. You could see that it was built to allow a dozen or so barmen to all work at once, but on this particular Wednesday there was just one guy keeping bar and he was down the other end, polishing beer glasses or whatever it is that bartenders do when there are only two customers and they're both quite scary scribes. I was smoking Gauloises and, although I barely boozed any more, downing pints of not-very-good beer with Barney Hoskyns, one of those hip young gunslingers that the *NME* seemed to produce like baby rabbits. And while Barney wasn't a particularly scary character in general, I had the feeling that he'd maybe drunk his way through the afternoon and that he'd probably balanced out the beer with a snootfull of cheap sulphate, and there are few things that barmen at theatres find scarier than a hip young gunslinger crammed full of booze and cheap sulphate. If a civilian is crammed full of booze and cheap sulphate you can get security to sling him out the back door and give him a few to the ribs with the old fourteen-hole, oxblood, steel-cap Doc Martens,

before returning to business as usual. But try that with a scribe and there will be repercussions. As Lester Bangs once pointed out to me in the back room at Max's Kansas City, picking on a scribe, especially a scribe who is beloved of his editors such as Lester, for all his foibles, generally was, can be a career-defining move. Barney was in the house representing the *NME*, and that meant he had juice.

If there's one thing that barmen at theatres find scarier than a hip young gunslinger crammed full of booze and cheap sulphate, it's a battle-hardened scribe who's been shooting coke. Johnny Thunders once told me that the only surefire way of breaking a habit, a chippie habit, anyway, maybe not full-blown addiction, was to shoot coke. There's a certain logic to that, a junkie logic, anyway, as it kinda makes sense that the cocaine will have a numbing effect to help make the heebie-jeebies go away, and get you through the vital transitional period, but it doesn't actually work, as the cocaine just *intensifies* everything except for those ecstatic few seconds after you've tapped the vein and pushed down the plunger and triggered the rush. I should have known better than to trust Johnnie Thunders on this matter, not least because he was keeping his own habit under control at the time with methadone while shooting up fifty quid a day's worth of coke for shits and giggles, but it was a year or so back and, when I found myself nursing a little chippie, I remembered his words out of context, and figured it might be worth a try. I was on the third day and already starting to feel that it was maybe not such a good idea after all, not least because shooting coke is very, very moreish, and can therefore become ruinously expensive, very quickly indeed. And the frequent trips to the bathroom to shoot up will play havoc with any attempt at a structured existence. I don't know quite how I looked, but the barman treated me as if I might be Mr. Jekyll limbering up for a serious night of mayhem.

But while a bartender might find me scary, Barney Hoskyns did not. Maybe twenty-one, twenty-two years old, utterly bulletproof, he'd spent a year or so swaggering across the pages of *Melody Maker* and the *NME*, calling everything as he saw it. And at The Venue, on Wednesday 9 June 1982, the high-summer evening London sunlight pushing its way through tobacco-yellowed window glass and heavy curtains, my shoes imprisoned by the sticky carpets, he was

telling me, or this was how I interpreted it, just what my generation of writers had got wrong and how his generation of writers was going to save rock 'n' roll from us. He was probably right. He was certainly right to be saying this. Each new generation needs to distance itself from the previous, so it can make the same mistakes all over again. But beer and cheap sulphate can make a fellow pretty self-confident, while beer and intravenous cocaine can make him assertive to the point of no return, and scratchy, to boot. And I wasn't in the mood for Barney Hoskyns to tell me all the ways in which I, alongside everyone with whom I had ever associated, including all my American employers, was fundamentally shit.

I lost my cool. Words were exchanged, there was shoving, bar stools were raised and then lowered, as two highly unsteady scribes realised, despite the heightened atmosphere, how preposterous it would be to start jousting with the furniture. More words were exchanged, along with gestures. Barney drained his beer and tottered unsteadily towards the doorway that fed into the left-hand side of the auditorium. I drained mine and lumbered in the direction of the door that led to the right-hand side.

I don't remember much of the gig. I'd enjoyed Television's shows less and less each time I saw them, and Tom Verlaine's solo gigs were even more dispiriting. The Verlaine of late 1974, while he may not have had the imperious lunacy of Richard Hell on the other side of the stage, moved as if he was standing on electric eels. After Hell left, and Fred Smith came in from Blondie, the music kept getting better and better, and the shows kept getting worse and worse. Throughout the Television years, at least, Verlaine seemed still to be involved in some form of righteous battle to release whatever it was that was trapped within him. After the band split up, it was more as if he was trying to keep it bottled in. He stood on the big stage at The Venue, stock still except for a light rhythmic flex of his knees, and worked painstakingly through his songs as if he were Jerry Garcia, or a horn player in a smoky be-bop club someplace back in 1955. The new-boy guitarist, Jimmy Ripp, was trying to be flamboyant over on his side of the stage, but nobody was looking at him. They were all watching Verlaine stand still. For a little Television nostalgia, you could always shift your gaze to watch Fred Smith stand still with his bass, too. The main thing I remember is that

Lene Lovich appeared at one point, dressed as a Christmas ornament, to stand on the riser next to Jay-Dee Daugherty's drums and sing inaudible backing vocals on a number.

But I wasn't paying attention, anyway. One thought gnawed at me. I had lost my cool. Was I no longer Exempt? I needed another shot of cocaine to think straight, but then I started to worry about that. Verlaine appeared to have got lost a few minutes into the main solo of "Marquee Moon" and was taking the long way home, so I had time to consider matters. I had always been immoderately proud of only ever using pharmaceuticals and, occasionally, drugs for professional purposes, and not in any pathetic attempt to alter my consciousness or escape from reality, yet here I was thinking that I needed another pop of intravenous cocaine to think straight, cocaine that I was only shooting to help me get rid of a heroin chippie that was, if I was being honest with myself, starting to interfere with day-to-day existence, travel plans and so forth, a chippie that had got itself settled in after Lester Bangs, who was only a little over three years older than me, accidentally overdid the Darvon and Valium at the end of April and stepped into another dimension to critique the choir invisible, a chippie that was, I had to concede, evidence that I had lost control.

"Shit," I said. I said it out loud, but nobody could have heard me over the music.

"Shit," I said to myself. "Shit, shit, shit."

I don't know how I'd missed it, but I had fallen in again. I had become part of the rock 'n' roll world, and not an observer of it. I was on the inside looking out, and a critic, at least a critic who takes their business seriously, needs to be on the outside looking in. I was like Maupassant in the restaurant at the Eiffel Tower, supping on glorious fare while oblivious of the ugliness that surrounded me.

And yet, suddenly, instantly, I was outside again, looking in. But I wasn't looking in at rock 'n' roll, I was looking in at *me*. And I had lost my cool. I had, I realised, been losing my cool for five or six years, maybe even more, I just hadn't noticed it. And now I had lost my cool. Completely. Not just with Barney Hoskyns, but in every way. I was no longer Exempt. Perhaps I had not been Exempt for years. I tried to work back to where it all started to unravel,

where I began to lose my cool, to lose control, to when the walls of my Exemption began to crack, but I couldn't see through the murk of the past. And where did that leave Nick Numbers?

"Nick Numbers is dead," I said. And then, much louder, because it just made so much sense, "Nick Numbers is *dead*."

A relic from the New Romantic craze, a handsome woman with tall hair, in a puffy-sleeved blouse with red eyeshadow, purple lipstick and too much rouge, turned around and, yelling over the music, said, "What?"

The song ended to polite applause. One person whistled. I cupped my hands. "Nick Numbers is dead," I said into her ear.

"Who's Nick Numbers?" she said.

"Nobody," I said.

I worked my way through the audience and out into the warm summer night, and hailed a cab.

THE  
*Venue*

160-162  
Victoria Street,  
London  
SW1E 5LB  
Tel 828 9441

Doors Open  
8.00 pm  
Main band  
on at  
9.30 pm

**THIS WEEK**

<p>Thursday 27th May <span style="float: right;">£2.50</span></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE RAINCOATS</b> + The Three Corvettes + The Go-Betweens</p> <hr/> <p>Friday 28th May <span style="float: right;">£3.00</span></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>BELLE STARS</b> + FLYing Pickets</p> <hr/> <p>Saturday 29th May <span style="float: right;">£3.00</span></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>SECOND IMAGE</b></p>	<p>Monday 31st May Closed for Bank Holiday</p> <hr/> <p>Tuesday 1st June <span style="float: right;">£3.00</span></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>ALAN VEGA</b></p> <hr/> <p>Wednesday 2nd June <span style="float: right;">£2.50</span></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE FIXX</b> + The Sinatra's</p> <hr/> <p>Thursday 3rd June <span style="float: right;">£3.00</span></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>HUEY LEWIS AND THE NEWS</b></p>
---	---

**COMING SOON**

Friday 4th June	<b>MOOD SIX</b>	£3.00
Saturday 5th June	<b>LINDISFARNE</b>	£3.50
Monday 7th June	<b>NICO</b>	£3.00
Tuesday 8th June	<b>CABARET VOLTAIRE</b>	£3.00
Wednesday 9th June	<b>TOM VERLAINE</b>	£4.00
Thursday 10th June	Midnight Show <b>TOM VERLAINE</b>	£4.00
Friday 11th June	<b>INMATES</b>	£3.00
Saturday 12th June	<b>SECRET AFFAIR</b>	£3.00

I flushed everything down the lavatory, all of it, not just the dope and the coke, but the reefer and the speed and the Mandrax, and even lightweight non-prescribed pharmaceuticals such as Valium and Dalmane. I thought of having a drink, but decided that should probably wait. I packed a bag, and a couple of boxes of papers, and loaded these and my typewriter, my tape-recorder, my guitar and my amplifier into the boot and on to the back seat of LHO 112 T, my white 1978 Fiat 127, stuck four packs of Gauloises on to the shelf that served for a glovebox, and drove straight to the all-night Boots chemist off Piccadilly Circus, where I bought everything that I could find that might help me get through the next few days.

Bill Burroughs had shown me how to handle this situation in Brussels, when I was over there covering that weird Plan K show he did with Joy Division and Cabaret Voltaire at the back end of 1979, and both of us wanted to cop, me because I'd learned that nothing neutralises jet-lag like morphine, Burroughs because he had a habit, but there was no gear to be found. So Burroughs led a small delegation to the nearest Belgian pharmacy, where he gave a short master-class. But the brands were all different in England so it took me the best part of an hour's traipsing around Boots to track down the over-the-counter stuff I needed.

I was looking for Tagamet, or cimetidine, for stomach acid, Dramamine, for nausea, Imodium, or loperamide, for diarrhoea, Night Nurse, because it's the nearest to NyQuil you can get in London, anything with doxylamine succinate, to aid relaxation and potential sleep, and any other over-the-counter antihistamines that are available, because they just might help too, and melatonin too, to aid relaxation and potential sleep, valerian root, to ease anxiety and aid relaxation and potential sleep, aspirin, ibuprofen and paracetamol, for aches, pains and sweats, and Sanatogen vitamin tablets, for, well, vitamins. Burroughs would have added half a dozen bottles of codeine-rich cough linctus but that's mostly for keeping the opiate-receptors in the body ticking over while waiting for the next fix of the real thing. In my specific situation, I regarded all opiates, even codeine, to be contra-indicated.

With a plastic bag full of completely legal over-the-counter pharmaceuticals I got back in the car and began to weave my way out of London, planning a

route on the fly that would have me hit the top of the A2, and then down the A20 and M20 into Dover. JP once told me that the only place he'd ever been where he couldn't track down any deluxe drugs at all was Greece, specifically on the Greek islands. I figured I'd drive through France and Italy, hop across from Brindisi to Igoumenitsa, probably aim for Athens and the Piraeus, and see where the boats were going, or maybe just stay on the Adriatic coast and hit the Ionian islands, not Corfu, obviously, but maybe Cephalonia or even Ithaca. I couldn't think of any reason why anyone would want to go to Ithaca, which meant it might be ideal for me. If I could keep myself awake, which my body would probably take care of all by itself, and just drive and drive and drive, I'd keep myself out of trouble until I got there. Some editors would be wondering where Nick Numbers' copy had got to but that was their problem. Nick Numbers was dead but I was back, if not quite in control, at least on the road.

Ε/Γ - Ο/Γ ΑΓ. ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΣ Ν. Π. 2043 ΑΚ. ΤΖΕΛΕΠΗ 4 - ΠΕΙΡΑΙΕΥΣ ΤΗΛ. 426-709	Ε/Γ-Ο/Γ ΑΓ. ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΣ Ν. Π. 2043 Τελεψη 4 - Πειραιεύς Τηλεφ. 426-709
№ 08153	№ 08153
Αδξων Αριθ. Επιβάτου..... <b>ΘΕΣΙΣ Γ Α) ΠΕΙΡΑΙΑ</b> Ημερ. ..... Ημερ. ..... Ναυλος Αρχ. 58 Ο.Α.Π. » 2,50 Α.Τ.Ν. » 41 <u>41.50</u>	Αδξ. Αριθ. επιβάτου..... Ημερ. ..... Ημερ. ..... Αριθ Θέρους 375 » Χειμ. 209
Βεβαιούται ότι τό παρόν ενοτάριο εκδίδεται εντός τών ορίων του επι- τροπούμένου αριθ, επιβατών, βάσει του Πρωτ. Γ. Έπιθεωρήσεως. Έν Πειραιεί. Ό υπεύθ. Πράκτωρ, Άρ. 10 Ν.447(365)	<b>ΔΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΑΙΜΕΝΙΚΗΝ ΑΡΧΗΝ</b> Πειρ..... Ό Πράκτωρ Ν. 4473(65)

Miles first told me about Allen Ginsberg's thirty-ninth birthday party one afternoon, at the *IT* offices, after we'd spent the best part of an hour listening to Sinclair Beiles, who had enjoyed a very good lunch with one of his female acolytes, tell immaculately-crafted stories about working for Maurice Girondias at the Olympia Press in Paris, stories that climaxed with his tale of tricking the manuscript of *The Naked Lunch* out of William Burroughs's hands. Beiles took a deep bow, flourishing his broad-brimmed hat like one of the Three Musketeers,

and headed off into the West End, hoping to find someone who would buy him a drink. I don't know what got Miles started on Ginsberg, but he was soon on to the birthday party.

Ginsberg, Miles explained, was in London for a couple of weeks, giving readings, and organising get-togethers with other poets at galleries and other spaces, culminating in a huge reading at the Albert Hall on a Friday afternoon, that Miles recalled as perhaps the first gathering of the tribes, the beginning of the counterculture, the bridge that joined the beatnik, duffel-coated Aldermaston marchers with the nascent hippie scene. Anyway, Miles said, Ginsberg was staying with Miles, and his thirty-ninth birthday was coming up and he wanted to throw a party, and he wanted to have the Beatles there. Miles, at that stage, didn't know any of the Beatles personally, but he did know the address of NEMS Enterprises, the Beatles' manager Brian Epstein's company. So some people drew up some invites and they were sent off to NEMS.

The party was at David Larcher's basement flat in Chester Square, and Ginsberg slowly but steadily got very drunk, after which, Miles told me, he started taking off his clothes. By the time John Lennon and George Harrison arrived, shortly before midnight, accompanied by John's wife Cynthia and George's girlfriend Patti Boyd, Ginsberg was completely naked except for his baggy underpants, which he was wearing as a hat, and a hotel's Do Not Disturb sign hanging from his penis. Ginsberg greeted John with a kiss on the cheek that John seemed to accept stoically. The Fab Two quickly scoped the place for the presence of any photographers, which could have been a disaster, and, seeing there were none, stayed for a quick drink before hastily quitting the scene. As they were leaving, Miles told me, John hissed at him that *you don't do that in front of the birds*. Miles's accent was spot on.

I didn't know whether to believe the story or not. I didn't see Miles as the type to bullshit me, but I was the new kid on the paper and he might have been having a little fun. Then, three years later, when I'd been roped in to help John Lennon negotiate the release of the master tapes of his *Rock 'n' Roll* album, tapes that Phil Spector had locked up in his private vault, John told me his own version of the story. It was pretty much the same until the end, when he denied saying anything to Miles.

“It wasn’t that,” he said. “No. Look, I love Allen to bits, but he gets too close. He’s right *there*, shouting in your ear, and at the same time he’s wiping his cock on your jacket pocket. He doesn’t mean to, but it comes to the same thing whether he means it or not.”

On another occasion, after I was back in the UK, maybe in 1980 or 1981, someone, and I don’t think it was Mick Farren although he was certainly there, threw a party for the *IT* survivors. Hoppy Hopkins showed me a picture he’d taken of Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg was naked, with underpants on his head, what looks like a paper cup of wine being held aloft in his right hand, and a small sign reading PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB being, it seems, handed to him. So I guess, given two independent sources and photographic evidence, Allen Ginsberg’s thirty-ninth birthday party probably happened more or less as both Miles and John Lennon told me. But you can never be too careful about these things.

**Laura's voice:** *It was a terribly bad picture. We crept out before the end, rather furtively, as though we were committing a crime. The usherette at the door looked at us with stony contempt. It was a lovely afternoon. It was a relief to be in the fresh air. We decided we'd go to the Botanical Gardens. Do you know, I believe we should all behave quite differently if we lived in a warm, sunny climate all the time.*

—*Brief Encounter*





## Notes, references and found objects

• ONE •

*...that night, the night of the Six Gallery reading...* 7 October 1955.

*...steps back out wearing just a tee-shirt...* A vision from a sketch of Natalie Jackson drawn by Robert LaVigne. See <http://culturecountermag.com/robert-lavigne-naked-artist/>.

*...laying back against the headboard with his hornrim glasses on...* Another sketch of Robert LaVigne's, published on page 123 of Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems 1947-1997* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

*Harper's Guide* Scan of the frontispiece of *Harper's Guide to Paris and the Exposition of 1900* (London and New York: Harper and Bros, 1900).

*On that first evening, the Sunday...* 25 September 1977.

*Self-service Latin Cluny* Scan of sugar packet.

*...the photograph ...* It was on the Ginsberg Estate's website. The website has been redesigned, and the image seems to have been removed.

*...he moved into the Beat Hotel...* For an overview, see Barry Miles, *The Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs & Corso in Paris, 1957-1963* (London: Atlantic, 2000).

*...Knee-Walking Jackson, who was not related to Natalie in any way...* And yet... A July 2016 comment to Jonah Raskin's essay for *Culture Counter Magazine*, "Wild Ones: Natalie Jackson (1931-1955) & The Usual Suspects: Neal Cassady, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky & Robert LaVigne" by Pierce Carlson, who says he was Natalie Jackson's last boyfriend before Neal Cassady, relates that, "Her father hung around horse tracks. Nat

claimed that he had an infallible system for betting.” More at <http://culturecountermag.com/wild-ones-natalie-jackson-1931-1955-the-usual-suspects-neal-cassady-jack-kerouac-allen-ginsberg-peter-orlovsky-robert-lavigne/>.

*The next morning...* 30 November 1955.

...*identifying the body at the Coroner's office...* The San Francisco Coroner's Register for 1955 confirms this. Cassady's (and Jackson's) address is given as 1051 Franklin Street, although almost all Beat historians have it as 1041 Franklin...

*As edited and abbreviated in Caroline Cassady...* This has become the “official” version on the *Chronicle* text, and is copied, word for word, in many books about the Beat generation. But it is a heavy edit of the actual text, a photograph of which precedes (courtesy of Jonah Raskin). For example, Cassady has the article opening with, “An unidentified woman about 35 years old” while the article actually reads, “An unidentified *blonde* woman about 30 years old.” And so on. A readable scan including the bulk of the story appears in Bill Morgan, *The Beat Generation in San Francisco: A Literary Tour* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2003).

...*with a particularly cantankerous Sinclair Beiles...* Beiles would die in Johannesburg on 3 November 2000 See Gary Cummiskey and Eva Kowalska (Eds.), *Who was Sinclair Beiles? revised and expanded edition* (Johannesburg: Dye Hard Press, 2014), also the Sinclair Beiles Papers at the University of South Africa, <http://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/5432>.

*The Naked Lunch* Photograph of the Olympia Press catalogue for 1959. The same catalogue includes a spread devoted to *The Houses of Joy*, an erotic novel (Maurice Girondias liked to call such items in his inventory DBs, for *dirty books*) written pseudonymously by Sinclair Beiles, as Wu Wu Meng.

...*Helen Weaver...* Helen Weaver mentions her fondness for rock 'n' roll in *The Awakener: A Memoir of Kerouac and the Fifties* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009).

*A dream letter from John Holmes...* Allen Ginsberg (Gordon Ball, Ed.), *Journals: Early Fifties, Early Sixties*, (New York: Grove Press, 1977).

• TWO •

...*John Edrich's 310 not out...* 8-9 July 1965. Edrich would not have made the team had Geoffrey Boycott been fit.

...*the Pollock brothers' memorable performances for South Africa...* 5-9 August 1965. Graham Pollock scored 125 and 59, while Peter Pollock took 5/53 and 5/34.

*Rolling Stones ticket stub* From the Regal, Edmonton, 5 March 1965.

...*Keith Richard...* The Rolling Stones' manager at the time, Andrew Loog Oldham, got Keith Richards to drop the "s" from his surname in 1963, believing "Richard" to be *more pop*. He was only to reinstate it later in the 1970s.

...*Spanish Tony sez...* "Spanish" Tony Sanchez was Keith Richards' assistant for eight years. His memories are collected in Tony Sanchez, *Up and Down with the Rolling Stones: My Rollercoaster Ride with Keith Richards* (New York: W. Morrow, 1979).

...*a merchant banker called Prince Rupert Loewenstein...* See Prince Rupert Loewenstein, *A Prince Among Stones: That Business with the Rolling Stones and Other Adventures* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

...*the new Barbra Streisand album...* The album was *Barbra Joan Streisand*, released in August 1971.

*Trident* Scanned cover of BEA's in-flight magazine, Summer 1971.

...*Camden Town's Compendium...* I first met Nick Kent at the Compendium, which was the only place, or at least the only place I ever found, where you could buy *Creem*, as he mentions in Nick Kent, *Apathy for the Devil: A Seventies Memoir* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010).

...*in the back room at Max's Kansas City...* Early in December 1974. On 18

December, Con Edison cut off the power and the first incarnation of Max's closed its doors, although it would re-open in 1975 under different management.

*Like a Rolling Stone* Scan of label for Bob Dylan, "Like a Rolling Stone" b/w "Gates of Eden" (CBS, 1965). Author's collection.

...*nothing got close*... A leading Dylanologist has written an entire book on just this one song: Greil Marcus, *Like a Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads* (New York: Perseus Books, 1995).

*Royal Albert Hall* Scan of ticket stub from Dylan's second night at the Albert Hall, 27 May 1966.

*I'm not saying it's better than anything else*... Bob Dylan, interviewed by Martin Bronstein for CCBC, Montreal, 20 February 1966.

• THREE •

*Some of us at OZ*... Clipping from *OZ* 26, February 1970 (London: OZ Publications Ink Limited, 1970) .

...*I was able to use my expert grasp of the network*... A quicker route, if one knew the actual geography as well as the tube map, would have been to hop off at Hammersmith, walk across the Broadway to the Metropolitan Line station and then travel two stops to Shepherd's Bush, or even to walk the whole distance, which wouldn't have taken much more than 30 minutes.

*Apology to IT readers*... Scanned clipping from *The International Times* No 18, 21 August–13 September 1967 (London: no publisher information, 1967).

...*pretty much everybody associated with the counterculture*... An excellent oral history of this time and place is Jonathon Green, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971* (London: Heinemann, 1988).

*Minutes to Go* Cover scan of Sinclair Beiles, William Burroughs, Gregory Corso and Brion Gysin, *Minutes to Go* (Paris: Two Cities Editions, 1960).

...*the Isle of Wight Festival*... 28–30 August 1970.

...*Jimi Hendrix, who would be dead*... Jimi Hendrix died on 18 September 1970.

...*I went along to the Wembley studios*... 7 November 1970.

...*who understood what it meant to be Exempt*... “Rather than repeat the tired cliché that rules are made to be broken, I should explain my theory of exemption [...] I didn’t so much break rules as simply decide they didn’t apply to me.” Mick Farren, *Give the Anarchist a Cigarette* (London: Pimlico, 2002).

*Before repressive tolerance became a tactic of the past*... Germaine Greer, “Oz Trial Post-Mortem,” *The Madwoman’s Underclothes* (London: Picador, 1986).

• FOUR •

*Record reviews*... Clipping from *The Billboard*, 7 April 1945 (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Billboard Publishing Company, 1945).

*Delinquency-fighting Singer*... Clipping from *Jet* XXIII/28 18 April 1963 (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co. Inc., 1963).

...*I hung out at Louis Moretti Management’s offices*... For more on Lewis “Saw-buck Lou” Moretti and the world he inhabited, see Frederic Dannen, *Hit Men: Power Brokers and Fast Money in The Music Business* (New York: Times Books, 1990) and, for an earlier take, David Dachs, *Anything Goes* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).

...*the two nights of Alan Freed’s first New York Rock ’n’ Roll Ball*... 14–15 January 1955.

*My Man Stands Out* Scan of label for The Twistelettes, “My Man Stands Out” b/w “Don’t Come Too Soon” (Rocketstar, 1955). Author’s collection.

*Off-color phonograph records*... Clipping from *Changing Times: The Kiplinger Magazine*, May 1955 (Washington, D.C.: The Kiplinger Washington

Agency, 1955).

...*Maybe one day you'll write something...* I tried to sell a story on the Twistelettes to a few editors, but none were interested. After Patti Smith namechecked the group in the song "Land" on her debut album *Horses* (Arista, 1975), I made an extra effort, but still with no success.

*The Twistelettes*, Rocketstar promotional card, c.1955. Author's collection.

*Popular music stirred up controversy...* *The World Book Encyclopedia 1957, annual supplement: reviewing important events and developments of 1956* (Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corp., 1957).

• FIVE •

*This could be you...* BSA air rifle advertisement, c.1950s, unknown source.

...*when I got roped in to help with the negotiations...* Lennon did get his masters back and, after some additional recording at Record Plant Studios in October 1975, *Rock 'n' Roll* was released by Apple in February 1975.

*Gauloises packet* c.1975.

...*after the Manson murders...* July–August 1969. An excellent overview of these shifting times is Harvey Kubernik, *Canyon of Dreams* (New York: Sterling, 2009).

*Coke chopper and straw...* Cocaine paraphernalia advertisement from 1970s, unknown source.

...*reminded me somewhat of Nik Cohn's work...* Nik Cohn, *Awopbopaloobop Alopbamboom: Pop from the Beginning* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) had a great impact at the time.

"*You look like a fuckin' Mexican.*" On another occasion, John Mendelsohn told me it was probably at a party thrown by A&M Records in Hollywood when Lester Bangs said this.

...*I knew of Patti...* I had actually seen Patti Smith read in London, on 30

January 1972, with Gerard Malanga, Andrew Wylie and Victor Bockris, an event arranged by the publisher John Calder in a Soho pornographic cinema, although I completely forgot about this until many years later. I only remembered it because Lisa Robinson, in her memoir *There Goes Gravity: A Life in Rock and Roll* (New York: Riverhead, 2014), mistakenly placed the reading at the Better Books bookshop on Charing Cross Road and that triggered something. Maybe I was chatting to Nick Kent and not really paying attention to the poetry, or maybe the news from Northern Ireland, the massacre that became known as Bloody Sunday, made me forget the rest of the day. I must have also seen the 1970 issue of *Time Out* that featured a grainy cover photograph of a topless, hammer-welding Patti, taken by Judy Linn, an image often falsely credited as a production still from *Robert Having His Nipple Pierced* (Sandy Daley, 1971). But again, I didn't make the connection until years had passed.

*North street looking west...* Postcard, c.1930s.

*When Lester Bangs took me along to the Bunker...* 9 April 1979. That evening, Bangs and I watched Jane Fonda and Jon Voigt win the Oscars for Best Actress and Best Actor, both for *Coming Home*, with *The Deer Hunter* catching the Best Picture nod. I had hoped *Midnight Express* would have fared better, but it did get the Best Adapted Screenplay award.

*...reminiscent of Matthew Arnold's requirement for high seriousness...* In "A Review of the Reviewers" in *The Adding Machine: Selected Essays* (London: John Calder, 1985) Burroughs writes: "Matthew Arnold set up three criteria for criticism: 1. What is the writer trying to do? 2. How well does he succeed in doing it? Certainly no one can be justly condemned for not doing what he does not intend to do. 3. Does the work exhibit "high seriousness"? That is, does it touch on basic issues of good and evil, life and death and the human condition." He compares literary critics with Michelin inspectors, suggesting that if the latter behaved like the former, one might, "Close a restaurant because he disapproves of the chef's private life or the political opinions of the proprietor, or complains that the chicken on his plate is not roast beef."

*It is important just when a generation first sees the light...* F. Scott Fitzgerald, "My Generation," *Esquire*, 70 (October 1968).

• SIX •

*...revolt into a style...* Thom Gunn, "Elvis Presley," *The Sense of Movement* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957).

*Revolt Into Style* Cover of George Melly, *Revolt Into Style: The Pop Arts in Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

*...those sixties punk rock bands...* Although punk has evolved into a very specific style, or set of styles, that really happened after the Sex Pistols exploded onto the British scene in 1976–7. The term *punk rock* originally described music played by 1960s garage bands, and the term *punk* had various derogatory meanings. In Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: the Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove Press, 1996) Burroughs is quoted as saying, "I always thought a punk was someone who took it in the ass."

*...CBGB on the Bowery...* Full name: CBGB & OMFUG, for *Country, Blue Grass, Blues and Other Music For Uplifting Gormandizers*.

*...because the owner, Hilly Krystal, had a dog...* The dog was called Jonathon, a saluki. The double live album *Live at CBGB's: The Home of Underground Rock* (CBGB & OMFUG Records, 1976) was dedicated to Jonathon for "fertilizing the stage," hand-etched into the run-out on the matrix of side 4.

*I got into New York on Saturday...* 2 November 1974—The Ramones played CBGB 1, 2 and 3 November, with Savage Voodoo Nuns and Blondie.

*Television* Poster from 22 November 1974 show, probably designed by Richard Hell, photo by Bob Gruen.

*...an act in LA called Christopher Milk...* Christopher Milk released one album, and faded away to be replaced by the Pits and ultimately, after many twists and turns, and an extra S in his surname, John Mendelssohn's current,

London-based band, the Freudian Sluts.

...*Bangs himself also transgressed from time to time...* He recorded a solo single in 1977 that was mixed by John Cale and released in 1979, and then an album with the Delinquents (as Lester Bangs and the Delinquents), *Jook Savages on the Brazos* (Live Wire, 1981).

...*memories of Nick Kent...* Kent did play with the nascent Sex Pistols for a week or two, although an earlier attempt by the Sex Pistols' manager, Malcolm McLaren, to put him together with Chrissie Hynde, later of the Pretenders, never got off the ground.

*Support Your Fave Band!*... Max's Kansas City cocktail menu, late 1975.

...*plink, plink, fizz...* This name comes from the advertising slogan for Alka Seltzer, a popular effervescent over-the-counter pain reliever.

*Being a rock and roll musician was like being a pimp...* Richard Hell, *I Dreamed I was A Very Clean Tramp: An Autobiography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013).

• SEVEN •

...*Fred Smith, who was playing bass for Blondie...* Within weeks, Richard Hell would leave Television and Tom Verlaine would poach Fred Smith from Blondie to replace Hell.

*I first encountered the Daybreak Boys...* Edward Crapey, *The Nether Side of New York; or the Vice, Crime and Poverty of the Great Metropolis* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1872).

*BURGLAR OR AN ASTRAL BODY* Scan of *New York Times*, 18 May 1895.

...*mere boys in years, but were patriarchs in villainy...* George W. Walling, *Recollections of a New York chief of police: an official record of thirty-eight years as patrolman, detective, captain, inspector and chief of the New York Police* (New York: Caxton Book Concern, 1888).

...*on the back of a Kellogg's Corn Flakes box...* Nick Kent was notorious for filing

copy that was handwritten on cereal packets, as described in Mark Ellen, *Rock Stars Stole my Life! A Big Bad Love Affair with Music* (London: Coronet, 2014) and elsewhere.

...*he might turn quite sniffy*... “When I developed my own abilities, and my own style away from Lester, he became a lot colder towards me. Just cold. I was mentioning it to [Bang’s biographer, Jim DeRogatis] and he said, ‘I just spoke to Cameron Crowe, and the same thing happened to him.’” Nick Kent, interviewed in Mark Spitz, “Q&A: Nick Kent on the 1970s, Keith Richards, and the Current State of Music Journalism” *vanityfair.com*, 31 August 2010.

...*opening for Marbles at CBGB*... 25 September 1975.

*Guy de Maupassant* Photograph taken in 1888 by Félix Nadar, Public Domain.

*Guy de Maupassant, it is said*... Roland Barthes, *La Tour Eiffel* (Paris: Delpire, 1964), etc..

...*inutile et monstrueuse*... A copy of the letter can be found at [https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Protestation\\_des\\_artistes\\_contre\\_la\\_tour\\_de\\_M.\\_Eiffel\\_du\\_14\\_f%C3%A9vrier\\_1887](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Protestation_des_artistes_contre_la_tour_de_M._Eiffel_du_14_f%C3%A9vrier_1887).

...*the Eiffel Tower* finissait par m’ennuyer trop... Guy de Maupassant, *La Vie Errante* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1890), translated as *La Vie Errante And Other Stories* (New York, Leslie Judge: 1911).

PARIS—*La Tour Eiffel* Scan of postcard, c.1900.

...*Manny’s on West 48th Street*... Manny’s closed in June 2009 after 74 years in business.

*Pulp Fiction* Scan of label for Penny Dreadful & the Yellowbacks, “Pulp Fiction” b/w “Bedtime Stories” (Exempt, 1976, unreleased). Author’s collection.

*Ask ten different regular citizens how Jim Morrison died*... Jim Morrison (8 December 1943–3 July 1971), lead singer of the Doors, died in Paris, officially of heart failure.

*Pamela Courson*... Pamela Courson was to die in Los Angeles of a heroin

overdose, on 24 April 1975.

...*Jean de Breteuil*... Jean de Breteuil (or *de Breiteuil*) was to die in Tangier in 1972 (or, perhaps, at the end of 1971) of a presumed heroin overdose.

*Jim Morrison's grave* Photograph taken by Jim Linwood, CC-BY-2.0, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/brighton/648894825>, cropped and adjusted.

...*Johnny Thunders once suggested to me*... Or it might have been John Perry.

"*I felt*," Holmes wrote... Introduction to the reissue of John Clellon Holmes *Go: A Novel* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1976); the book was originally published in the UK as *The Beat Boys*.

...*a bunch of flyers saying WATCH OUT! PUNK IS COMING!!*... *Punk* magazine announced itself with these flyers in the weeks before its launch in January 1976. Most people had no idea the flyers were related to a magazine. "We thought, here comes another shitty group with an even shittier name." (Blondie's Debbie Harry, quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me*).

...*a very dull movie about CBGB*... Richard Krall and Amos Poe, *The Blank Generation* (United States, 1976).

*CBGB*... Scanned ad from the *Village Voice*, 19 April 1976.

...*to watch Paul McCartney and Wings rehearse*... The tour opened on 3 May 1976, after rehearsals that began on 26 April.

...*the day before Tiffany died*... Rehearsals actually started on 26 April 1976, the day after John Lennon and Paul McCartney had their final ever face-to-face meeting in New York.

...*backstage at Uniondale*... 21 May 1976.

*Photo of Paul and Linda McCartney with Bhaskar Menon, president of Capitol Records. The photo was taken at the Los Angeles Forum Club during the 1976 Wings Over America tour.* 1976 Capitol Records publicity photograph, Public Domain: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

File:Paul\_and\_Linda\_McCartney\_Wings\_Over\_America\_1976.jpg.

*Paul McCartney was one of the most competitive...* Ray Davies, quoted in “The Kinks Kronikled,” Mike Hammer, *RockBill*, May 1988.

• EIGHT •

*We're backstage at the Colston Hall in Bristol while Iggy Pop does his thing...* 28 September 1977.

*...Great Western Express Festival in May seventy-two...* Bardney, Lincolnshire, 26-29 May 1972.

*...this Pistols tape that Nick Kent gave Spud...* The demo tapes, recorded during 1976 and early 1977, were released as a bootleg album, *Spunk*, in October 1977.

*With Rustic Rod and JP...* This would probably have been the second incarnation of Magic Muscle, which existed through the first half of 1973. ‘Rustic’ Rod Goodway keeps an archive of his, and others’, mostly musical adventures at <http://www.achingcellar.co.uk/>.

*...Leon's parents were Pranksters...* They receive a couple of passing mentions in Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968).

*At the Studentersamfundet in Trondheim...* 21 July 1977.

*...the Pistols at the 100 Club in May last year...* The Sex Pistols had a short residency at the 100 Club, beginning 11, 18 and 25 May 1976, and continuing into June; it could be any of the three dates.

*...Scratchwood Services...* now London Gateway services.

*...flown in by A&M to see The Police...* 8 April 1979.

*...a Norman Mailer thing...* Norman Mailer, “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster,” *Dissent*, Fall 1957.

...*Dee Dee Ramone*... Douglas Glenn Colvin, better known as Dee Dee Ramone, died of a heroin overdose, on 5 June 2002.

...*he owns several colonies of lemurs*... William S. Burroughs's fascination with lemurs is widely documented, although it seems improbable that he could own any in Madagascar, and I know of no other evidence that he ever visited Johannesburg, although he namechecked it once in *Naked Lunch*. A similar claim appears in Earle Holmes, "The Beat goes on" in Cummiskey and Kowalska (Eds.), *Who was Sinclair Beiles?*

...*In November 1985 Thompson produced a column*... Hunter S. Thompson, "Full-time Scrambling," *San Francisco Examiner*, 4 November 1985.

*This is a chord*... *Sideburns*, 1, January 1977 (London: Tony Moon), often miscredited to another fanzine, *Sniffin' Glue*.

*Graffiti in Richmond*... A photograph appears in Roger Perry, *The writing on the wall: The graffiti of London* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1976).

...*the kitchen of the Grosvenor Road squat in Twickenham*... There is an entire web archive devoted to this squat at <http://www.wussu.com/squatting/grosroad.htm>.

*No Elvis*... Joe Strummer & Mick Jones, "1977," B-side of the Clash, "White Riot" (Columbia 1977).

• NINE •

...*Steve Harley*... Harley was going as Steve Nice at the time.

...*his Greek girlfriend Xena Kakoulli*... Also styled "Zena."

...*after only one live performance*... Or possibly none at all.

*England's Glory* Scan of matchbox, c.1975.

...*formerly of the Beatstalkers*... The best overview of the British beat music scene is probably Alan Clayson, *Beat Merchants: the Origins, History, Impact and Rock Legacy of the 1960s British Pop Groups* (London: Blandford, 1995)

although, inexplicably, it doesn't mention the Beatstalkers once.

*I think it was Richard Hell...* Similar thinking appears in Hell, *Very Clean Tramp*.

*Tilbrook was soon...* Sparks flew between him and Perry, but Glen Tilbrook went off to focus on his band Squeeze, and a songwriting partnership with Chris Difford that would see them hailed as the "new Lennon/McCartney."

*Mike Kellie once told me a story...* A version of this story appears in Clinton Heylin, *Sandy Denny: No More Sad Refrains: The Life and Times of Sandy Denny* (London: Omnibus Press, 2011).

*...helped to sell a lot of trousers...* According to Malcolm McLaren in *Q* magazine, August 1989 (London: EMAP), "Punk was just a way to sell trousers."

*Pop records are bought by thirteen-year-old girls...* The Only Ones tried to produce superior, adult pop, succeeded brilliantly, certainly exhibited *high seriousness* but did so for an almost imaginary market, a textbook definition of a critical, but not commercial, success.

*...Peter Perrett's The One's first ever show...* Perrett welcomed the audience by saying, "I was going to call the band 'Peter Perrett All Cleaned Up And On His Best Behaviour...'"

*For Levi's it's another chance...* Scanned ad from *Sounds*, 27 September 1980. UB40 featured on the cover that week.

*...Somerset beat Northants by 45 runs...* Viv Richards scored 119, there was an entertaining batting cameo by Ian Botham, then Joel Garner took 6/29 in the Northamptonshire innings.

*NME...* Cover scan of *NME*, 8 September 1979. Pennie Smith's muddy photoshoot had provided the cover of the Slits' debut album *Cut* (Island, 1979).

*If you do happen to be stronger...* Peter Perrett, "Trouble in the World," A-side of The Only Ones, "Trouble in the World" b/w "Your Chosen Life"(CBS,

1979).

• TEN •

...*a band called China Syndrome or something...* China Crisis, in fact.

...*shooting coke is very, very moreish...* In a 1985 paper, researchers compared the behaviour of laboratory rats given unlimited access to intravenous heroin and intravenous cocaine. The heroin rats gradually increased the dose they self-administered over the first two weeks but then it stabilised. These rats continued grooming, maintaining their pre-test bodyweight and a general state of good health. The cocaine rats took the drug episodically, with periods of excessive self-administration broken by brief periods of abstinence. They tended to cease grooming, lost up to 47 percent of their body weight and generally deteriorated in health. After 30 days, 90 percent of them had died. See M.A. Bozarth and R.A. Wise, "Toxicity associated with long-term intravenous heroin and cocaine self-administration in the rat." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 254.

...*Lene Lovich appeared at one point...* Lovich sang backing vocals on the track "Postcard from Waterloo" and played saxophone on "Days on the Mountain," on Tom Verlaine, *Words from the Front* (Virgin, 1982), the album Verlaine was nominally promoting at The Venue.

...*Lester Bangs, who was only a little over three years older than me...* Lester Bangs, (14 December 1948–30 April 1982) died in New York City of an accidental overdose of dextropropoxyphene, diazepam, and NyQuil.

*The Venue* Scanned advertisement from *NME*, 29 May 1982. The cover story was a Charles Shaar Murray interview of Joe Strummer, in which he explained why he had spent a month AWOL from the Clash. There was also a piece by Mick Farren on robots. Mick Farren regarded robots with much the same fascination as William S. Burroughs regarded lemurs.

...*when I was over there covering that weird Plan K show...* Joy Division's first overseas show, at an old sugar refinery on the outskirts of Brussels, featured

Cabaret Voltaire, Brion Gysin and headliner William S. Burroughs. A probably apocryphal story has Joy Division frontman Ian Curtis asking Burroughs for a free book and being told to *fuck off*; which left him devastated. It didn't happen in my earshot; Burroughs was entirely civil to me and anyone else I saw him with.

ΠΕΙΡΕΙΑ Scanned ferry ticket.

*Miles first told me...* Miles, now reunited with his first name, has told the story several times in print and online including the most commonly-cited, Barry Miles, *In the Sixties* (London: Cape, 2002).

*...Hoppy Hopkins showed me a picture...* A signed print is available, at the time of writing, for £350 at The Archivist's Gallery (<https://www.the-archivistsgallery.com/collections/john-hoppy-hopkins/products/ginsberg-party-john-hoppy-hopkins-signed>).

*Laura's voice: It was a terribly bad picture...* Noël Coward, Anthony Havelock-Allan, David Lean, Ronald Neame, *Brief Encounter* (United Kingdom: Rank, 1945).

• ... •

*C.P. Cavafy* Portrait c.1889–90. Public domain.

Κι αν πτωχική, C.P. Cavafy, “Ithaca” in C.P. Cavafy, Evangelos Sachperoglou (Trans.), Anthony Hirst (Ed.), *The Collected Poems: includes parallel Greek text* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

## Acknowledgements

*My thanks go to Imraan Coovadia, Etienne Van Heerden and Hedley Twidle, who taught and supervised my writing at the University of Cape Town; to Sam Beckbessinger, Adheesh Budree, Olivia M. Coetzee, Dela Gwala, Emma Hathorn, Bongani Kona and Roshila Nair, who wrote, read and critiqued alongside me; to Gloria Beauregard, Lauren Beukes, Joe Danger, Mark Dezzani, Daniel Zachariah Franks, Athol Fugard, the Fugly Twins, Searn Geer, Elton Goslett, Michiel Heyns, Duncan Larkin, Pete Le Gry, Elizabeth Lewis, John Mendelssohn, John Perry, Johnny Reptile, Joe Ramsey, Gérard Rudolf, Tim Rundall, Pieter-Dirk Uys, Errol Washington and many others who provided inspiration and ideas, often unwittingly; to, above all, Wendy Wilson. And, of course, to all the people who made all the rock 'n' roll records and played all the rock 'n' roll shows that I have enjoyed over the years, along with the ones I've detested or have simply bored me, too.*



*Κι αν πτωχική την βρεις, η Ιθάκη δεν σε γέλασε.  
Έτσι σοφός που έγινες, με τόση πείρα,  
ήδη θα το κατάλαβες η Ιθάκες τι σημαίνουν.*

—Κωνσταντίνος Καβάφης





## Why I Write What I Write: a reflexive essay

**June, 2015:**

“Did you hear what Imraan said?” Adheesh says. “He said *focus on the weird*. I like that.”

We’re huddled just outside the southern entrance to the University of Cape Town’s Arts Building, like smokers who’d been denied their nicotine for the two hours of the Creative Writing Workshop and are sucking down a cigarette at the first opportunity.

“I like it too,” says Roshila

“Yeah,” I say, but actually I’m not sure. A lot of what I’ve been reading lately, and it’s good writing, writing of which Imraan would approve, writing that in many cases Imraan has set me to read, much of this writing focuses on the mundane. But then I suppose it draws weirdness out of the everyday, so maybe that’s what Imraan meant when he said to focus on the weird. Or maybe he was just being gnostic. Maybe he was just saying something to be provocative that has no deeper meaning. Is it the old Coleridge and Wordsworth natural/supernatural business? Or maybe it has a deeper meaning that has eluded me.

For two hours we’ve been talking about writing, Adheesh, Roshila and me, along with our classmates Emma, Olivia and Sam, Bongani and Dela. Talking about *our* writing

I’ve never talked about writing the way we’ve talked about writing since starting this course. I’ve done a lot of writing, as a journalist, as a post-adolescent wannabe novelist and playwright, and even as a hired-gun screenwriter. I’ve done a lot of reading about writing, most of which was completely unhelpful to me as a writer. But I’ve never really talked about writing. When I was a magazine editor I hired plenty of people to write things but I didn’t talk to them about writing. What I sought in a journalistic writer was the ability to deliver copy that was to brief, to length and on time. The actual quality of what they delivered was secondary to those three essentials. A journalist that can deliver to brief, to length and on time will never want for work, even if their writing is abominable. I had previously been a journalist who could deliver to brief, to length and on time. No editor talked to me about my writing either. The only

yardstick I had for the quality of my writing was the extent to which sub-editors and copy-editors changed it, which usually wasn't that much, so I always assumed it was all right.

For three months, two hours each Monday, we've been meeting with Imraan Coovadia in the Herzog Room at four in the afternoon to workshop our writing.

For the first workshop, only a week after the introductory class, I hammered out 3,500 words of solidly-researched nonfiction in three 16-hour days, words of which I was immoderately proud. And in that first workshop, my writing style was taken unmercifully apart. I had tried to break free from a journalistic style by writing *up* from it. I wrote long sentences with rolling subordinate clauses. I wrote long sentences with nested subordinate clauses. I wrote long sentences that didn't have any subordinate clauses but did have stacked adjectives, packed adverbs and portentous, pretentious language.

I had made what I now see is a very common, perhaps the most common mistake among journalists attempting literary writing. I had assumed that my journalistic writing was spare and stripped down because, after all, it was *only journalism*.

Listening to the comments in class made me read a lot of good journalism side-by-side with literary writers I admire, both novelists and nonfiction authors. And something became clear that I had missed in over a decade of writing professionally: most journalistic writing is very far from spare and sparse. Print journalists often only have a few hundred words to communicate something, so they tend to add punch and zip wherever possible. Print journalism's default language delivers invisible exclamation marks and underlines. It's a technique that is very effective over six hundred words. It usually needs to be broken up at around two thousand (sidebars and box-outs are not just page layout tricks, they carve the text into palatable chunks). Go much beyond that and it's exhausting.

This was my first big lesson from the workshop, and it remains the biggest, although there have been many more.

For three months, two hours each Tuesday, we've been meeting with Hedley

Twiddle in Arts 116 at two in the afternoon for a seminar on Land, Space and Place in Contemporary South African Literary Nonfiction. For the first time, I have been exposed to post-structuralist, post-modernist critical theory. When I was last a student, in the early 1980s, Marxists and Structuralists were still slugging it out in the hallways, while many in the English Department still believed that the thinking of F.R. Leavis was unsurpassable. Most of the academics I've known since then have been theoretical physicists, mathematicians and the like, people who are unlikely to mention Lacan or Derrida in polite conversation. Foucault may get a nod, but they're talking about Léon Foucault, the pendulum guy.

Of the texts we have addressed, I found Ivan Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys: Joburg & What-What* the most fascinating. The more I return to it, the less I feel comfortable describing it as nonfiction (a term the author seems to have been very careful not to attach to it). But then, although it does have invented scenes, it doesn't feel right to call it fiction, either—perhaps because the experience of reading it is somehow “nonfictional.” I originally thought that it was simply on the cusp of fiction and nonfiction, but I'm beginning to wonder if there's actually a gap between the two, some form of cordon sanitaire or demilitarised zone that has historically kept them far enough part for us to feel comfortable. If so, is Vladislavić working in that space in *Portrait with Keys*? I don't want to write in Vladislavić's style, but maybe I want to know more about this space, which I see as being *between* fiction and nonfiction rather than trying to *combine* them. To steal from mathematical logic: are fiction and nonfiction possibly sets that never intersect, but that also do not describe all possible prose?

For three months, two hours each Wednesday, we've been meeting with Imraan Coovadia in Arts 116 at eleven in the morning for a seminar on Directed Reading in English: Contemporary Fiction. As much as possible I try to address the books and short stories we are presented as a writer, rather than a reader. I'm looking to see what I can learn from them that I can apply to my own writing.

There are many short stories. I have never genuinely liked the form (with exceptions—Damon Runyon and Hemingway come to mind) and I still don't, but having to address it again and again helps me to understand why. I believe

there are two reasons for this.

The first is music. I find it hard to separate music from writing because there's really not that much difference between writing and music as far as I'm concerned. I feel they're co-extensive, occupying the same space in my life at the same time. They're both central to it, central to me-being-me. If I'm writing, I find I don't pick up a guitar. If I'm reading, I can't listen to music. However, listening to the comments around the seminar table as we work through the short stories I understand that the pleasure other people are getting from the short stories is the same that I get from music. A piece of music triggers the same receptors in me as a short story does in others. The short story probably triggers the same receptors in me too, when I think about it—just not with such vigour. So I respond to most short stories the way I respond to slightly dull music—by putting on some good music.

The second factor is a sense almost of *déjà vu*. David Shields, promoting his book *Reality Hunger* and commenting on the “well-wrought” literary novel, shared a polemical version of this in 2010:

“I read these books and my overwhelming feeling is, you've got to be kidding,” he told the *Observer* recently. “They strike me as antediluvian texts that are essentially still working in the Flaubertian novel mode. In no way do they convey what it feels like to live in the 21st century. Like most novels, they are essentially works of nostalgic entertainment.”

I find this common thread of “nostalgic entertainment” is woven in to the form of the classic, Chekhovian short story. It can add to a sense that I've *read this all before*. Even the more “experimental” writing can often feel like a school-teacher repeating a well-known experiment to a class, rather than the writer actually trying something genuinely new. There are exceptions, of course: I climb right into Raymond Carver's stories, for example, but even then I'd probably rather hear Tom Waits tilling similar ground. And, moving off-syllabus, if I could consistently write short stories such as Paul Auster's “Auggie Wren's Christmas Story” I would probably do nothing else. And yet, still, a nagging voice is asking: But wasn't that story even better when folded into

Auster's movie script for *Smoke*?

I may not like the form much, but there's still plenty to be learned from reading it. I have been exposed to some exquisite writing, deft characterisations and impeccable descriptions that I would never otherwise have read. And even a negative has a positive: I know beyond reasonable doubt that the conventional short story is not the medium for me to express myself. I do genuinely understand why others find pieces that bored me to be jewel-like, and why they'd love to do something similar, but it's not for me.

The longer-form works we have read, on the other hand, engaged me in ways that even the best of the short stories couldn't. I'm considering Denis Jonson's *Jesus' Son* to be a fragmentary novel here rather than a collection of short stories and, while I found its ending bland, the quicksilver prose that took me there was inspirational. Teddy Wayne's *Kapitoil* was flawed in many ways, but showed how a magnificent command of voice could transcend all the problems and still provide an engaging experience. Ben Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station* had me thinking a great deal about the craft of writing and the manipulation of voice, even though I never found the experience of reading it entirely satisfying. Adrian Nicole LeBlanc's *Random Family* is one of the most impressive feats of literary journalism that I have read in a long time—I don't aspire to the "embedded" existence, but she made it work superbly for her and then knitted it all together with another example of a very clever quite risky, but always coherent writerly voice. It's not the sort of subject I feel like tackling, but abstracted by one level, it could be the sort of book I'd like to write.

Except, out of the entire reading list, I know that the sort of book that I'd most like to write is Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sepharad*. I doubt that I can and it may be foolhardy even to attempt, but the storytelling, the structural engineering of this book made me think deeply about how books can be constructed. The writing, of course, is beautiful, and beautifully rendered into English (I have no idea how faithfully, and don't really care). However, this book served above all as a masterclass in constructing the long-form work. I also, as I think more about it, wonder if it—like Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys*—is located in some unknown space *between* fiction and nonfiction.

Whatever I write, the mechanics of storytelling—the sub-plots and arcs, the

relationships between characters and the use of subsidiary characters—these are things that matter a great deal to me. And they are things that are difficult to practice when writing short pieces for a writing class. In many cases, I feel they need to be divined from the work of others. *Sepharad* is the book that has inspired me the most in this area over the past three months.

I've been thinking about the reading we haven't talked about in class. Maybe my unofficial, off-the-books reading can help tell me what I should write and how I should write it.

I'd like to think of my reading as wonderfully eclectic, befitting a 21st century renaissance man. However, much of it—if I remove technical guides such as Kernaghan & Ritchie's classic *The C Programming Language* and a lot of cookbooks—falls into just three genres.

The first falls under the banner of contemporary literary fiction, but is a subset of it. It includes a lot of writing that might be described as magical realism, and it includes a lot of writing that might be considered on the lighter, wittier side of literary fiction. So I've enjoyed Rushdie, Louis de Bernières, Vikram Chandra, Marquez (hugely readable, if not exactly light), Arturo Pérez-Reverte, among others. Once upon a time I loved Lawrence Durrell, but my initial instinct is that, as a writer, he probably represents a blind alley today, an anachronistic High Modernist in a post-modern world. Other possible anachronisms include Henry Miller, the Beats and other older literary heroes of mine—even Joyce, and how I loved Joyce—but are they really anachronistic? Or have they simply fallen out of fashion, the approach they represent still unfinished?

But then, if I put the *Alexandria Quartet* beside, say, *Midnight's Children*, I can see that they're both aggressively experimental. It's easy to forget this because their experiments, at least at the time, worked—I suspect we tend to describe fiction as experimental when the experiment overwhelms the fiction. Durrell's work may be considered ponderous, over-written and dated in the third millennium (often by people who haven't read it). It's easy to forget that he was shortlisted for the Nobel Prize in 1962. The *Quartet's* relativistic structure was astonishingly bold, its characters—especially the female characters—are complex and credible, even its language was considered supple and muscular at the time.

That doesn't mean I should consider *writing* like Durrell, or Rushdie, or Joyce, or Burroughs, or Kathy Acker or any other experimental novelist. But maybe I should consider *experimenting* like them? Maybe it's not magical realism that I like in my literary fiction, but a certain form of experimentation? I would never have considered the writing of experimental fiction to be an ambition but it seems that it's something I should consider. Have I unlocked what I find most exciting about the fiction I like, and what fails to inspire me in that which I don't? If I go back over my official reading I can also see experimentation, a high level of risk-taking, in those books that have most engaged me.

Next is the mystery genre. I was steeped in the canon from an early age, from Wilkie Collins and then Sherlock Holmes, on through the Golden Age of Detective Writing with its country houses and Lagondas, and its American penthouse equivalent in the Ellery Queen stories. I picked up on hard-boiled writing, including pulp by Mickey Spillane and better, much better pulp by Dashiell Hammett, and then pulp that Raymond Chandler worked into papier maché sculptures that Rodin would have considered just dandy. I ambled the courtyards of G.K. Chesterton's Father Brown and the cosmopolitan milieu of Leslie Charteris's Saint books with their surprisingly fluent polysyllabic prose, cool sadism and slightly naughty catch-phrases. I revelled in the noir offshoots and then took my pick of the writers who resuscitated the genre a decade or two after the Buick that was carrying its first incarnation took a long drive off a short pier in about 1960—Lawrence Sanders, Sally Kellerman and Michael Connolly, say. And I liked when there was a little knowing humour in there too, heavy stories told with a light hand—Sanders's nimble Bernie Rhodenbarr books, Robert B. Parker's featherlight yet hard-punching Spenser novels, even the peculiar Country & Western-tinged mysteries of Kinky Friedman.

But is this something that I actually want to write? I've enjoyed reading it very much, but it's my literary light entertainment. I know that writing mysteries, good ones, anyway, requires a sophisticated technique along with a deep knowledge of the expectations of the genre's readership, and how and when it's possible to subvert those expectations (although I wonder if the genre can take any more postmodern subversions). But the same is true of most light entertainment. And I'm not sure that I want to spend my working life crafting light

entertainment. There's satisfaction in simply doing something well that brings pleasure to others, sure. But I think I'm motivated by a desire to write books that have a bit more substance.

Which brings me to the genre, or maybe it's a sub-genre, that sent me into the Creative Writing MA course in the first place: a certain school of creative nonfiction that, at its most fundamental, tells true stories well. Most of these stories are historical, some deal with science or technology, all are interdisciplinary. Giles Milton is, I suppose, the best-respected writer of the style that most attracts me, and I've enjoyed and admired every one of his books that I have read since *Nathaniel's Nutmeg*. However Simon Winchester's *The Surgeon of Crowthorne* and *A Crack in the Edge of the World* both also left their mark, along with books by the likes of Tom Holland, Philip Mansel, Antony Beevor (*Stalingrad* is monumental), Leslie and Roy Adkins, Mark Mazower and the magnificent Thomas Pakenham, who can almost be seen as the godfather of this whole school of writers. And I haven't even reached the end of one shelf in my bookcase, a bookcase crammed with books in this category.

Something that intrigues me is that most of the very best people in the field are former journalists, not academics or writers with a reputation for fiction or verse trying their hand at something new. The books are not written in a conventionally journalistic style nor with a journalistic structure but I suspect there's something in the discipline of journalism, in the approach taken to research, in the way in which concepts such as *truth* are assessed, that sets one up nicely for writing these books. As a former journalist, the idea that I may be well equipped to write a genre of books that I adore reading is highly attractive.

It's also interesting to read the examples of this third genre that don't work. I've bought a bunch of them in recent years, all claiming to be "like" *Nathaniel's Nutmeg* (more often than not) or one of the other bestsellers of its kind, such as Tom Holland's *Persian Fire*. Many have been written by academics, although they may equally be the work of amateurs who have obsessed over a subject for decades. Most make an attempt at conversational, or perhaps literary prose. All fail at just about every level to tell a decent, and decently-paced story. Professor Mary Beard should have enough media experience and the academic credentials to deliver a decent popular ancient history book. But her attempt to do so with

*Pompeii* manages to be too insubstantial for the specialist while not particularly readable. So I go back to *The Scramble for Africa* or *Big Chief Elizabeth* and I look for models I can use, techniques I can learn.

I'm quite happy to leave the "I" out of my nonfiction writing. There are those who argue the ever-present author is an essential element of making nonfiction "creative" or literary, but I disagree. I've enjoyed such writing—the crazed-but-crafted Hunter S. Thompson, Hofstadter's cool *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, Jacob Dlamini's very personal *Native Nostalgia*, and so on—but I feel there are many other ways of being creative or literary while remaining in the world of nonfiction. Tom Wolfe didn't feel the need for the narrative "I" in *The Right Stuff*, which I consider a giant of the genre—a bridge between the excesses that could overwhelm the New Journalism and more contemporary styles of writing.

(I find it interesting that much of the writing trying to set the *boundaries* of what creative nonfiction is or isn't, and what it should or shouldn't be, comes from the United States—where it seems to evolve from the similarly firm rules that the country's Journalism Schools like to preach, rules that have relevance to a certain school of hard news reporting but not to journalism as a whole. Most of the writers I admire in the field do *not* come from the States, have not been bludgeoned by Creative Nonfiction MFA tutors, and are free to be creative or literary in all manner of unsanctioned ways.)

But do I actually want to write this sort of book?

Yes, I do. I enjoy rigorous research, I am comfortable with and experienced at interviewing people, I have what Hemingway described as a "built-in automatic crap detector" that works like a dream and I'm as dogged as Doghouse O'Reilly in *The Big Sleep*. I love the syncretic process of pulling the various elements of a story together. And I believe I have—or can develop—the technical skills to deliver compelling book-length narratives. I would very much like to write true stories well.

But first I need to find the stories.

A theme or a general subject area is emphatically not a story, something that many authors of books that are "like" *Nathaniel's Nutmeg* have failed to spot (it's one of the problems with Beard's *Pompeii*). It's possible to draw a story out of a theme—Stephen Fenichell's *Plastic* pulled this off, as did Mark Kurlansky's *Cod*,

but it's critical for me to understand that I need to draw one out if I do start with an overarching theme.

Better still is a genuine story that can be used to illuminate the darker corners of a theme.

I find Tom Wolfe's introduction to *The New Journalism*, despite its egotism, one of the most useful technical pieces of writing about writing that I've read. Wolfe identifies "just four devices" that a certain type of journalist discovered "by trial and error, by 'instinct' rather than theory" from the late 1950s on. And these devices are, Wolfe says, the same as those that give the realistic novel—he mentions Fielding, Smollett, Balzac, Dickens, Gogol—its power. They are:

1. Scene-by-scene construction: "telling the story by moving from scene to scene and resorting as little as possible to sheer historical narrative"
2. Realistic dialogue: "realistic dialogue involves the reader more completely than any other device"
3. Third-person point of view: "the technique of presenting every scene to the reader through the eyes of a particular character, giving the reader the feeling of being inside the character's mind and experiencing the emotional reality of the scene as he experiences it"
4. The "recording of everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing, decoration, styles of traveling, eating, keeping house, modes of behaving towards children, servants, superiors, inferiors, peers, plus the various looks, glances, poses, styles of walking and other symbolic details that might exist within a scene"

I think this is a set of guidelines by which anything that I write can be wisely judged, if only by me. I say guidelines rather than rules because it's certainly possible to write well in a way that doesn't use all four devices. However, I suspect that much of the writing that I might want to do, either fiction or nonfiction, will benefit from being tested against them. And if I'm doing

something differently then I need to have a very good reason for it, and one that I'm comfortable a reader will accept and understand.

Raymond Chandler is another writer who has managed to write about writing in a way that I find helpful. And not just in *The Simple Art of Murder*. He partly echoes Wolfe (technically Wolfe, writing later, echoes him) in his introduction to *Trouble is my Business*:

The emotional basis of the standard detective story was and had always been that murder will out and justice will be done. Its technical basis was the relative insignificance of everything except the final denouement. What led up to that was more or less passage work. The denouement would justify everything. The technical basis of the *Black Mask* type of story on the other hand was that the scene out-ranked the plot, in the sense that a good plot was one which made good scenes. The ideal mystery was one you would read if the end was missing. We who tried to write it had the same point of view as the film makers. When I first went to Hollywood a very intelligent producer told me that you couldn't make a successful motion picture from a mystery story, because the whole point was a disclosure that took a few seconds of screen time while the audience was reaching for its hat. He was wrong, but only because he was thinking of the wrong kind of mystery.

Re-reading Chandler's fiction with an awareness of this I'm struck by how robustly he does follow the scene-by-scene model. Also his dialogue, while having a heightened realism, crackles, his point of view is rock-solid and his attention to detail is magnificent. That he writes, as Ross McDonald said, "like a slumming angel" helps too. The same introduction carries a warning:

Everything a writer learns about the craft or art of fiction takes just a little away from his need to write at all. In the end he knows all the tricks and has nothing to say.

But then this hits home, as well:

A writer who is afraid to overreach himself is as useless as a general

who is afraid to be wrong.

I think one approach that might work for me is to find a way of *writing*, actually getting the words down, with no fear of overreaching, with no fear of anything. If I can somehow manage this, and then apply Wolfe's guidelines in the edit process, I may be on to something. Alternatively, maybe I need to risk overreaching *before* I start the serious writing, then plot and plan, building the perfect frame on which to hang language? I'll try both approaches, see how they feel, see how they work, see how they *scale*.

Perhaps I can recast the double negative implicit in "no fear of overreaching" as "a powerful urge to be experimental." Perhaps my love of and fascination with experimental fiction and literary nonfiction can meet somewhere in the middle, or somewhere in-between. Perhaps I should be exploring the space between the two, the same space where I've imagined *Sepharad* and *Portrait with Keys* to be (assuming they are in the same space—there may be many spaces between fiction and nonfiction). I have a nagging sense, at this point in my writing, that this strange, relatively uncharted territory may not be where I end up, but is somewhere I should spend some time. It is very possibly the weird, *my* weird, on which I should focus.

### **Postscript, February 2017:**

I wrote this self-reflective essay less than half a year into my MA course specialising in creative writing. In the period after I finished it I continued to grapple with many of the questions that sit at its heart. On the whole, the positions that I was developing at the time simply consolidated, as I thought them through more deeply. A key shift was a decision to put "pure" nonfiction to one side, for a variety of reasons. Key among these was my becoming increasingly fascinated by modes of storytelling.

I wonder how narration can be subverted. I am intrigued by notions of non-linear story-telling, where *b* doesn't necessarily follow *a*. I wonder about the use of misdirection, where something that seems important turns out not to be, where details you learn about a character are not those you expect, where something that isn't, in the global scheme of things, particularly important gets explored in minute detail while something of great import may be glossed over

in a few words (a feature of mystery writing, but not so common is “straight” fiction). I wonder about using prose in a different way, to present its information in a more *natural* manner. What happens if I—lover of em dashes, parentheses and semicolons—limit myself to commas and full stops (and question marks, for clarity). What happens if I *use* my old journalistic tics and turn them back on themselves, as well as repressing them? What happens if accent can be communicated by dialogue spoken by Americans using American spelling, while British speech uses British? Can the use of images provide additional, if spurious, authority, or, equally, undermine it?

I’m interested in the relationship between storyteller and story, not just the ever-popular *unreliable narrator*, but the many ways in which a story, its teller and the recipient (reader, audience...) interact. It’s fascinating to look at a text as a thing entirely unto and of itself, but it’s equally fascinating to ask who’s telling the story and why. Many years ago, I read a definition of myth that said a myth was *a traditional tale, applied* (and thus distinct from a legend, which is merely a traditional tale, told). But is this a hard binary or are they points on a continuum? And, as I wondered in my original essay, are fact and fiction similar?

Stephen Colbert satirised the notions of *truthiness* and *wikiality*. Harry Frankfurt, despite having his tongue firmly in his cheek, turned the study of *bullshit* into a respectable academic pursuit. Now it’s almost commonplace to accept that we live in a *post-factual world*. Barefaced lying that would have startled Colbert when he started out, notions of a fluid truth that would have Richard Rorty scratching his head in disbelief—these are now part of everyday discourse, they inform everyday life. How does fiction respond when the real world is a cascade of fairy tales?

Perhaps by being honestly dishonest. Perhaps by avoiding any attempt to create a seamless experience of reading, something that characterises even most experimental writing.

How do you hold the mirror up to nature when nature has itself become a hall of mirrors?

My aim has been to write a novel that is readable in the conventional sense—and entertaining, and enjoyable—while exploring some of these questions. It has plotlines, but they don’t necessarily resolve. It has characters, but some are

deliberately sketchy. It raises questions, but doesn't necessarily provide answers. I have been writing to provoke thought, to make the reader question both themselves and the world around them, to make the *status quo* seem not quite as inevitable as it often can.

I set it in and around the world of rock 'n' roll, partly because it's a world that has been inventing its own facts and forming its own truths for decades (just as a Hollywood studio system did before it). Colbert's truthiness is standard operating practice here.