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California desert city with no government...Utopia?

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Original guitarist for The Misfits talks to Rob Smittix

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Slab City

Freedom, anarchy,
and the law of the
desert.



BY LIAM SWEENEY

Slab City. Photo provided.

The Southern California desert. Sixty miles south of Joshua Tree National Park, there's a city sandwiched in between a bombing range and the south end of the Salton Sea, a body of water so toxic that if the law meant anything, no one would bask on its beaches or walk through its surf. There's no zip code, no city council to vote on one and no mayor to give a rousing speech persuading the residents that they need one. And no cops

will arrest you for stealing someone's mail.

Welcome to Slab City, with a population of a couple hundred or a couple thousand, depending upon the season and who you ask. A place where you can be free and so can everyone else, and you realize that freedom is a fire that can warm your heart or it can burn your bones. It's on Youtube, a Gen Z bucket list, a haunted house challenge, but the truth is very much

alive.

Sira is a dancer. She's self-taught and she moves like no one with a little touch of everyone. She is a docent at Salvation Mountain, a city landmark, a giant labor of God's love built entirely from the vision of one man, Leonard Knight.

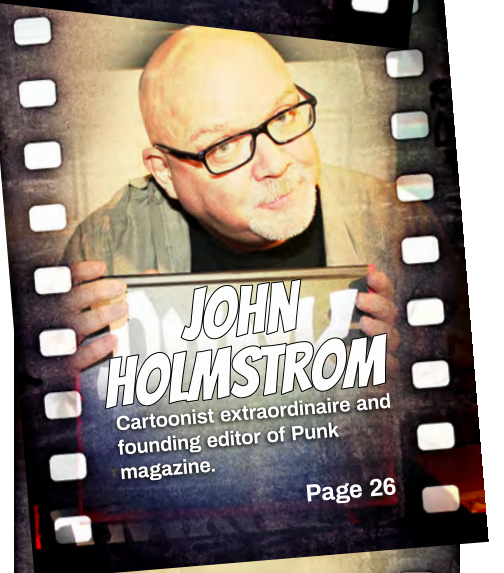
"He came out here and his original intent was to inflate a hot air balloon,"

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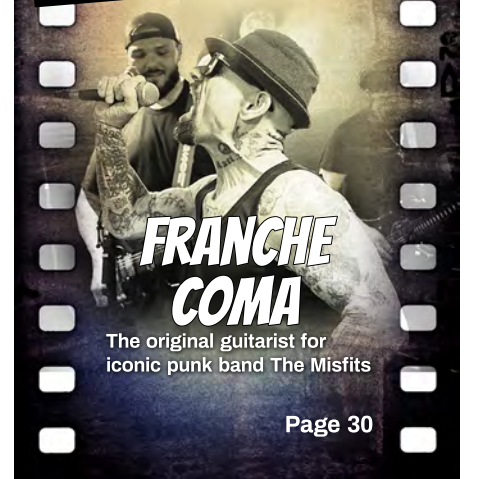
SLAB CITY
No government and no local laws give people a chance to be who they want to be.

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JOHN J. HOLMSTROM
Cartoonist extraordinaire and founding editor of Punk magazine.

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FRANCHE COMA

The original guitarist for iconic punk band The Misfits

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Art Fredette
Publisher

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Liam Sweeny
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Jessie Whitney
Josh Reedy
Sonny Speed

Contact

70 Remsen Street
Cohoes, NY 12047
(518) 729-9060

info@radiatorradio.com

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Sira said. "Like a 200-foot-long hot air balloon out here that said 'God is Love' on it. And he unfortunately didn't get to do that because the environment that the hot air balloon was in didn't really lend itself to that too much. So he made the mountain instead."

"Everything you see on the mountain he did basically by himself. And he only got really donations for it, but he made that whole mountain basically on his own with his initial intent to show you that he loved God, that was his big thing. He loved God. But as the times rolled by and people evolved, he evolved as well and he started to make the mountain for everybody, long as you have love in your heart, you know, nothing can go wrong. Keep that sense."

Sira is at home in Slab City. It is summer, a time that tests the mettle of slabbers, and some might say signifies the truest of them. It was 124 degrees when we spoke. She understands the true draw of such a fierce place.

"I don't care how they are in Babylon," she says. "but when you come out here you have this energy, you know, you feel like you can be yourself and it's so natural and that creates a lot of uniqueness with the people who come out here. Even big artists when they come out here, you get to see them be themselves instead of following the rules if that makes sense. And it's really refreshing to see, especially nowadays because people have such a hard time being real. So you don't have that problem here."

Her name is Simcha. It means "to find the blessing." Her search, and the weather, has found her on the holy mountain of Shasta, her van parked near a drum circle that had been going on for hours, drummers hopping in and out, threading the beat. Her dog is treated to scraps of bone and meat by the drummers and fellow

nomads. She lives her life riding the waves of providence, and the current had once taken her to Slab City.

It is in Simcha's nature to help, to serve, and in the slabs she was quick to find like-minded souls.

"And, um, my campmate Chuck and I both kind of fight death for people who would come to us and nearly die, and then we would bring them back to life. Once I did a drum circle for that because my friend had had a heart attack; it happened five or six times with different people and they would come to us and be like 'I came to the desert thinking I was just gonna come kill myself. And then I found you guys.' And we called ourselves the Pillow Patch, like a safe place to rest. And then we would just play music. We were a sober camp except we would smoke a lot of pot and I would experiment with my journey. But there was no alcohol and there was no meth, none of that harder stuff."

A blended truth is that the slabs are dangerous, and they can be. The desert is rough. And some who come there are escaping Babylon, what they call the outside world. And some come to do meth and hide out from Johnny Law. Simcha found out one night that she was "bad for business."

"They lit my place on fire in the middle of the night, and I heard a voice saying, 'Get up, you're in trouble,' she said. "And I got up when my ceiling was in flames and I grabbed my dog, and I ran out, and I tried running back in there, which I shouldn't have. Thank God I woke up and like screamed for my campmates."

He is called Water Boy. It's a tattoo that spans his back, reining in the darker prison ink that would have him unacceptable in Babylon. He is an outlaw and a vigilante, and a father and the driving force behind Slab City's soup kitchen. If the slabbers have a sheriff, it's Water Boy.

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Greg Cortelyou

BY OP CALLAGHAN

*Capital Region
Timekeepers*

Greg Cortelyou is a 50-plus-year veteran musician, educator, performer, collector, and all-around great guy. I had the good fortune to meet him recently and talk about his extensive career as a drummer in the Capital Region. Greg has a ton of experience, great stories, and some treasured gear. He's a wonderful guy, and I really am glad to have met and talked with him. So please welcome to Capital Region Time Keepers: Mr. Greg Courtelyou!

RRX: How did you get started with drumming?

GC: It was after seeing the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show - I'm not 100% sure. I remember sitting on the living room floor watching the show with my brother when we lived in Princeton, N.J. Playing in a band seemed like simple chemistry to us after seeing that I guess. Something that we could do. Everyone had a part! Later that year, my brother and I formed a band without instruments. We used moving boxes, tape, wire, rubber bands, etc. We set up in a patch of woods behind our house in Glenville, NY. We played along with records that were played on a small 45 rpm record player. Later that year, we began playing musical instruments. We saved our allowances to buy records at the Apex Record Store located on State Street in Schenectady. We would go there after hearing songs on the radio, and check out the songs we wanted to buy by listening to them again at the store on old black plastic headphones. If it sounded good to both of us, we bought the record and then went home and learned it. I still have some of those records in the collection. Our first garage band was called the Survivors. We played for whoever showed up! The

band eventually moved down to the basement, and through the years morphed into the Shades of Darkness, Furnace, and then Amherst Scaffold. These bands were made up of mostly neighborhood guys. We rehearsed in the cellar until my mom blinked the lights: "Smoking Lamp is OUT!" she would say around 11:00. This went on for years at 108 Acorn Drive.

Foxfire and Foxfire II came a bit later during the early '70s. Foxfire was a great rock band that had a big local following, roadies, and even a devoted business manager named Len Mark Block.

Then a few years after that came Titan Strong, a local tri-city dance band that worked five to six nights a week in local clubs for many years. The group was so "tight" there was even a fine system that penalized you if you did not learn the material for weekly practice, were late, or even had the wrong-colored ruffled tuxedo shirt on for the gig! The fines were divided up and dispersed to the ones who kept it together.

The pop cover band Direct Drive was formed in the late '70s and played together for over 20 years doing nightclubs, weddings, parties, and corporate events in upstate New York and New England. It was like family with weekly rehearsals in our living room.

RRX: Did you take lessons or are you self-taught?

GC: I started by taking lessons when I was about 12 years old. My mom took my older brother Geoff and I up to Burnt Hills for weekly music lessons with Mr. Patrick. We both started on guitar. My brother was a natural on guitar but for me it was painful! I eventually switched to drums. That year at Christmas, I got a Remco drum set. The set had blue tinfoil

sparkles, plastic rims, and a plastic foot pedal. Months later, after practicing basic sight-reading lessons and playing basic rudiments on a little wooden practice pad, I ended up buying the brand-new gold sparkle set of Stewart drums Mr. Patrick had set up in the corner of the studio. Very sweet.

I started at Berklee College of Music in the fall of 1975. I graduated in 1983 with a Bachelor of Music Degree. At Berklee, I studied privately with Bob Wagner, Bill Norine, Tony Noterfonzo, Pablo Landrum, Tommy Campbell, and many more excellent teachers. After Berklee, I went on to attend graduate school at the College of St. Rose. In 1990, I graduated with a Master of Science in Education. While at St. Rose doing graduate studies, I also worked as a graduate assistant with Paul Evoskevich directing small sectional ensembles. I also recorded and performed with the St. Rose Jazz Ensemble Big Band. I studied drum set privately with David Calarco and orchestral percussion with Mark Foster. The research paper I wrote and submitted to the College of St. Rose was titled "An Investigation of the Relationship Between Rhythm and Selected Jazz Time-Feels".

RRX: Mark Foster is great! Do you come from a musical family?

GC: My grandmother played the piano for silent movies in the Chicago area. My father played the violin in the school orchestra. My mother and her twin sister Julie performed as professional dancers called the Watkins Sisters during their childhood years. As young adults, they joined the USO to entertain injured soldiers around the world. My older brother Geoff played guitar and was an exceptionally talented virtuoso.

RRX: Do you play any other instruments?

GC: Bass, guitar, piano, vibes, ukelele, recorder and various hand percussion instruments.

RRX: Tell us about your first kit?

GC: After the gold Stewart set, it was a set of pink champagne sparkle Ludwigs. The kit consisted of two 20" double bass drums, one 8 x 12 tom, one 10 x 13 tom, and one 16 x 20 floor tom. A 5 x 14-inch chrome Ludwig supra-phonc snare. I had a variety of Paiste, Zildjian, and no-name cymbals. No bottom heads. Very punchy!

RRX: That's awesome. Who were your early influences?

GC: Ringo Starr, Ginger Baker, Charlie Watts, Carmine Appice, John Bonham, Mitch Mitchell, Butch Trucks, Jaimoe, Bill Bruford, Louie Bellson and Buddy Miles to name just a few.

RRX: You have an extensive musical history! Tell me some more about some of your experiences.

GC: My early experiences began as a dance band drummer. My brother Geoff and I played together in bands all through middle and high school. After high school, we continued to play as the band called Foxfire and did gigs in nightclubs across upstate New York and New England. The band broke up in 1974 and we all went off to attend college. It was at Berklee College of Music in the fall of '75 that I met my roommate Tommy Campbell. That was an incredibly beautiful and humbling experience. We shed and studied together for an entire year at the Berklee dorm. We remain friends and connect with each other frequently. Tommy is a professional drummer who has performed with John McLaughlin, Sonny Rollins, Dizzy Gillespie,

Manhattan Transfer, Richie Cole, the Ray Anderson Alligatory Big Band, as well as his own original group Vocal Eyes, and remains active today internationally.

RRX: Wow! Who else have you played with?

GC: After Berklee, I returned to the Capital District area and worked with many bands in the upstate New York area in both the rock, pop, and jazz genres including: the St. Rose Big Band, Titan Strong, Direct Drive, Body & Soul, the New York Players, Jill Hughes Band, Ray Alexander Trio, Carl Landa Quartet, Cole Broderick Trio, Joey Thomas Big Band, Colleen Pratt and Friends, Destry Rides Again, Electric City, Capri, Marlowe & Company, Marcus Benoit Quartet, John Leroy, Sonny and Perley Daye, Karen Lawrence Band, Peg Delaney Trio, Mike Purcell and Company, Don Nikolski Band, Pangea, Paul Supple & Jazz Factor, Rob Lindquist Trio, The Tony Vacca Project, Josh Greenburg & the Mother

Goose Jazz Band. The gigs consisted of a mix of studio sessions, club dates, weddings, parties, and other corporate functions.

RRX: Are you a career drummer?

GC: Yes. I performed professionally after graduating high school. Playing weekly gigs was not only a way of providing income for my family but an opportunity to perform with so many different and talented musicians in so many different musical settings.

RRX: Are you a drum collector?

GC: I have always collected cymbals and drums. I currently only own a few drum sets now.

Sadly, a few years ago, my drummer friend Joseph Merli passed away. He left me some exceedingly rare 1940-50's Slingerland drum sets, Zildjian cymbals, and a collection of original vintage hardware. It was an honor to be given the drums and also to keep Joe's memory alive. It has also been interesting and fun restoring many of them. I also was

given some vintage 1920s Ludwig drums from one of my wife's aunt's neighbors whose husband passed away. He was a professional drummer living and working in the Schenectady area. The most interesting thing is that it came with a little date book with his gig earnings from 1924 through 1930. The gigs he had listed were places such as the Edison Club, Woolfert's Roost, Mohawk Golf Club, etc. He made between \$4.50 and \$12 a gig! It is amazing that those are some of the same gigs I played over the years in various wedding and party bands. Also included was an original receipt for the set from Baker Music House in Albany. In 1924 he paid \$25 for the set.

RRX: Put together your dream band, with you on drums.

GC: My son Jacques on keyboards, my son Graig on guitar, my good friend Mike Lawrence on both acoustic and electric bass. My wife Rochelle (mother of both of my sons) would be our cover art designer, business manager, and

quality control manager! Beyond that band, who knows!

RRX: Anything else?

GC: Music is so beautiful. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to play it with so many of my friends throughout the past 50+ years!

I owe such a great deal to my wife Rochelle for her understanding and continued support! I would never have been able to succeed without her!

Sadly, some of my closest friends and brother Geoff are not here to "play the last set," but their influences and memories will never be forgotten.

Thank you for asking me to do the interview OP! I appreciate the awesome work you do. Thank you also for providing "us," the community, with such great and timely information!

RRX: It's my pleasure, Greg. Thank you!



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Barbie Barker

Thanks for Asking!

BY LIAM SWEENEY

We connected with Caitlin Barker, a.k.a. “Barbie Barker,” and asked her the news of the world. This was her report.

RRX: Every artist’s first song is a milestone. But so is the latest song. Describe the first song/album you recorded, and also the latest song/album you recorded; what are the differences?

BB: That’s a perfect starter question, given my first recording was done with my first band, Candy Ambulance, and my most recent EP was me branching out into solo work as Barbie Barker. When CA started, we did all our recordings in a haunted cabin at the bottom of West Mountain, GF. It was our first house together. We didn’t have any money so everything was very diy. I think at one point I held a mic on an amp because the other stand was being used. Plus, I was a VERY new musician, scared and nervous, but my mates got me through. The solo EP, C., was recorded with Tummy Rub Records in Albany. I have way more experience and confidence now. The Tummy Rub crew contributed to performing, mixing and producing the record. They are monster musicians, all! Of course, I couldn’t have a project without Jesse (of CA fame) contributing by mastering it beautifully. It was a different experience, but I’d say I love them equally. (note * I had a band called PapSmear when I was 14 with my best friend, Meagan)

RRX: Like songs, every artist has a unique feeling about their first show. What was your first show like? Was it your best show? If not, what was your best show like?

BB: I gave myself rugburn nervously twisting on my arm, threw up,

disassociated. I am just now, 10 years later, starting to not do these things. I can’t really pick a best. Playing this huge festival to 2000 people is rad, but so is playing on a lifted stage in the middle of a bowling alley in Minneapolis. Performing is the only time I feel correct.

RRX: What do you think is the most poorly understood thing about music, or the music you play?

BB: I’d like to answer this question in the scope of people who want to learn an instrument or to perform. It’s just 12 notes, you don’t have to be good at it immediately. Just set your intention and follow your heart. Prepare for where you’re at and commit. You’ll always get better that way. I’m rooting for ya! HA I don’t even wanna know all the poor perceptions of my music out there. And I don’t care, not everyone’s gonna like what you do.

RRX: In the universe of music, anything can happen. Bizarro doppelgangers can walk down the street in feather boas. Who would be your musical opposite and why? What do you think the “anti-you” band would sound like?

BB: What an odd question! In a good way. CA was friends with a band from Grand Rapids that were a doppelganger in looks but our genres were similar. Like heights, features and band structure. Anti-Barbie, I don’t know, I just landed on her presence and style recently. Maybe they’d have a similar command playing solo, but they’d know how to dress themselves better? Screaming playing an Omnichord?

RRX: Part of learning to be a musician is to fall in love with a song, an album, and hammer away at your instrument until you can play that whole



Barbie Barker. Photo provided.

thing. What was that song for you? Was there a hardest part?

BB: Cobain and Alan Jackson, any 90’s country. Grew up on a dairy farm and didn’t know much other music than country and radio pop, then I got my hands on a friend’s older brothers Nevermind record. I didn’t even know he was dead until a classmate was like “you look like you have a crush whats going on?”. And that was my first heart break, 6 years after the man died. I’d go to the library and print black and white pictures of him and the members of the 27 club and keep them in a folder that said Cait Kobain (my full name is Caitlin Barbara Barker). But that’s how I found Cohen, Pixies, Breeders etc. Formative stuff when you’re young. I think I structure lyrics like country songs though.

RRX: We let it out differently when

we play music. The happy, sad, good and back; it can all be put out musically. Overall, do you feel better when you sing about the better times, or the worser times? Is there a difference you can describe?


BB: I am vulnerable to a compulsion. One time when someone did me dirty, my dear, fiery friend reacted, “It’s like slaughtering a baby lamb!”. I cry all the time, then laugh myself out. It’s what babies do; they experience emotion and can turn it around for the next one that comes. I write exactly what I’m feeling, usually, hyperbolically. If we’ve ever made eye contact there could be what sounds like a “love song” about you floating around my discography. But I do mean it, I love MOMENTS. Nectar of life. Sometimes, I find my lyrics so corny. But they are real, so they stay.

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Singin' Guru

BY JEFF AND CRYSTAL MOORE



Dear Singin' Guru,
Over the weekend, I went to a couple of shows and saw my favorite players making sweet music, being awesome, and having fun. That's my dream! How do I really become a musician like that?

Signed,

Ms. Dreamer

Dear Ms. Dreamer,

Becoming a musician like the stars is not just about learning to play an instrument or singing well, it's about transforming into the musician you aspire to be. Continuous learning is key. You don't just "learn" music - you live it every day. Every experience, practice session, and performance is a learning opportunity. Embrace this growth mindset. And take heart that it's a myth you need to practice for hours and hours a day. Quality trumps quantity. Focus on effective, efficient practice that targets your weak areas and builds your strengths. Visualize the musician you want to become and let every action you take be a step towards that vision. This involves making conscious choices about your practice, performances, and daily life.

Being a great musician requires balance. Integrate your musical journey with your personal life, health, and other responsibilities. Becoming a musician is a transformative experience; developing confidence, creativity, kindness, and competence. It's not just about playing notes, it's about

expressing your soul through music. We see this transformation in students of all ages and backgrounds. From a 12-year-old vocalist/guitarist whose hobby is music--she never says "This is hard," she seeks the most difficult exercises so that she can become the musician she visualizes. This kid inspires my own practice with her dedication. Or a woman balancing two jobs who still makes time for her lessons despite a hectic schedule--in fact, she came to her lesson straight from the hospital recently rather than going home first... Becoming "that" musician means that you develop a hunger for improvement and are willing to work for it. Over time, this snowballs, and your desire drives you on as you transform.

Find a mentor or a coach. The best musicians often have great teachers who guide them. Don't just look at the cost of lessons; consider the value they bring to your lifelong musical journey. Celebrate your victories and those of others. Don't let jealousy cloud your journey. Every step forward, no matter how small, is progress. To become a musician like the stars, you must embody music in every aspect of your life. Start today and take deliberate steps toward your musical goals. Find out what is required to be the musician that you want to be; this is the first transformative step. The second step is to develop a plan based on what you learn. If the two of those sound like too much work, you can always do what most people do, and surf YouTube... But I think you're probably different if you've read all the way to the end of this reply. Make a change. Don't look at anyone else, look at yourself, decide what you want to be, and revisit that

vision every day. Be that musician.

Signed,

The Singin' Guru

Dear Singin' Guru,

I feel stuck technique-wise. I like my playing for the most part, but it seems like I just can't get past where I'm at. Help!

Yours Truly,

Stuck in the Mud

Dear Mr. Mud,

If you feel like your musical technique is stuck in the mud, it's probably because you're not doing the exercises you need to do. Here's the hard truth for most musicians: if you've been using the same workout for longer than two or three weeks, it's as effective as using a chocolate teapot. Sure, it feels like you're making progress because you're doing something, but that's the trick your brain loves to play. It's why so many musicians find themselves stuck at the same level for years.

I get folks all the time telling me they've been singing or playing guitar for decades, yet they're still at a beginner or intermediate level. How does that happen? Typically, it's because they rely on the internet for solutions. They find a shiny new workout on YouTube, feel great for a few months, and then realize they haven't made any real progress. Rinse and repeat this cycle for 20 years, and there you have it.

You don't need tricks, and you don't need tips. What you need is a plan tailored to your current level and your goals. Adjust that plan every couple of weeks. Yes, it sounds a lot like finding a teacher or mentor, doesn't it? As Bruce Lee famously said, "I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times." It's all about consistent, focused practice.

Think of it like this: the do-it-yourself model means you need the ability to correctly judge your playing level, identify the technical factors holding you back, and optimally challenge yourself over time. But guess what? We don't know what we don't know. Working with a teacher, particularly until you are an advanced player, is an easier path. But hey, as musicians, we love taking the most difficult path, don't we? Just like Arnold Schwarzenegger said, "The resistance that you fight physically in the gym and the resistance that you fight in life can only build a strong character."

So, either put in the work yourself or find someone who can guide you. Your future rockstar self will thank you.

Signed,

The Singin' Guru

Got a question? Contact the Singin' Guru at jeff@peakmusicstudios.com. Until next month!



Review: “What, Me Worry? The Art and Humor of MAD Magazine” Exhibit at the Norman Rockwell Museum (9 Glendale Rd, Stockbridge, MA 01262)

As a youngster growing up in the Port Schuyler section of Watervliet during the 1960s, few things brought me such intense, unbridled joy as perusing the multitude of treasures filling every nook and cranny of Diamond’s Newsroom. Comic books, baseball cards, model cars, and airplane kits – this place was a literal dream come true, especially for this kid. However, the crown jewel of this remarkable fan-tasyland was this: they were also the

only place on my side of the city that carried MAD Magazine! It took tremendous effort and craftiness to ensure you were able to get your hands on one of the few copies they stocked. The mere thought of getting shut out produced a high level of panicked motivation - knowing if you failed, your world would quickly dissolve into a mind-numbing, month-and-a-half-long dreary disaster!

But, oh the exhilaration that ensued upon successfully securing that newest copy of MAD; ecstatic with the knowledge you were about to embark on a uniquely delirious and euphoric adventure! With iconic MAD mascot Alfred

E. Neuman on the cover, they poked fun at anything and everything going on around the world. Absolutely nothing escaped the laser-like focus of MAD! Once inside that cover - where to go first? Spy vs. Spy? The Lighter Side of...? Or should I just make a beeline to nearly every MAD fan’s favorite – the MAD Fold-In on the inside back cover?

Upon first hearing that the Norman Rockwell Museum would be playing host to a 4 ½ month-long exhibition titled, “What, Me Worry? The Art & Humor of MAD Magazine,” I admittedly wasn’t quite sure what to think.

A Mad Magazine exhibit at The Norman Rockwell Museum? Really??

I could hardly wait to experience this unique juxtaposition for myself!

Entering the exhibit, visitors are greeted with a playful display of MAD Magazine covers, spanning their decades of publication. Each cover a testament to their ability to mock social convention, political figures, and popular trends with their razor-sharp wit. Overall, there is a selection of more than 250 original illustrations, artwork, and cartoons gathered from artists and collectors that are on display in this show.

As you explore the museum, you are taken on a chronological journey through the magazine’s evolution from

its humble origins in 1952 as a comic book (*Tales Calculated to Drive You MAD! – Humor in a Jugular Vein*), to its transformation to the more commonly known full-fledged magazine format which began with issue # 24, in 1955.

However, the most impactful difference MAD's conversion to the larger-sized magazine brought was the introduction of Alfred E. Neuman - the "legendary face" of MAD, with his ever-present, defiantly nonchalant motto, "What, Me Worry?"

Displayed at the show is everything from Alfred E. Neuman dolls (modeled after and resembling the once-famous Howdy Doody); hand puppets; Halloween masks; board games; record albums; plastic model kits; MAD prize punch-cards; Spy vs. Spy Action Figures; "Vote MAD" bumper stickers, posters and pins, alongside a diverse selection of other items.

Placed throughout the museum are

a few short documentary-style displays engaging visitors of all ages. Lasting approximately 10-20 minutes each, playing on a continuous loop, they feature stories and commentary from many of the MAD creative forces (aka "The Usual Gang of Idiots"); the geniuses behind this cultural phenomenon. Make sure you take time to view them as they are incredibly informative, as well as being quite humorous.

The most popular interactive display was the one featuring MAD Fold-Ins, which were laid out on a large interactive touch screen allowing you to peruse an abundance of options. The screen displays full-sized replications of the unfolded "fold-ins." Then, at the push of a button, it magically resolves to the fold-in's solution. I could have stayed and played with this for hours, but it was one item where there always seemed to be a line behind me. Honestly, it was as much fun to watch others while they played and marveled at the

outcome of each fold-in.

As a special treat, on Saturdays from 11 a.m. – 4 p.m., the museum offers visitors the opportunity to make their own art with a feature titled, "Totally MAD! Artmaking Activities." This once-a-week program encourages participants to "make your own art," inspired by the creations and antics of MAD Magazine.

The Norman Rockwell Museum store contains a vast array of MAD-related items for you to bring home and enjoy (including an excellent MAD Magazine-styled exhibit program).

In hindsight, regarding my initial thoughts on the mash-up on Norman Rockwell and MAD Magazine, I was incredibly mistaken. The two meld together perfectly!

As the press release from the Norman Rockwell Museum regarding this exhibit aptly states, "The scope of this contribution is equivalent, if different in tone and emphasis, to the role of

Norman Rockwell and other artists across decades of illustrations for *The Saturday Evening Post* and other mainstream publications. If MAD's subversive shake-'em-up values and viewpoints diverged from Rockwell's warm and gently humorous illustrations – as they almost always did – the impact of the magazine's visual comedy was no less profound. In its sly and seditious art and spirit, MAD was a counter-cultural magazine that became ironically yet irrevocably, a cultural powerhouse".

It is my view that this exhibit explores and clearly displays how the magazine influenced public discourse by challenging conventional narratives, while encouraging critical thinking.

"What, Me Worry? The Art and Humor of MAD Magazine" – Exhibit on display through October 27, 2024 - For Museum hours, please visit their website at: NRM.org

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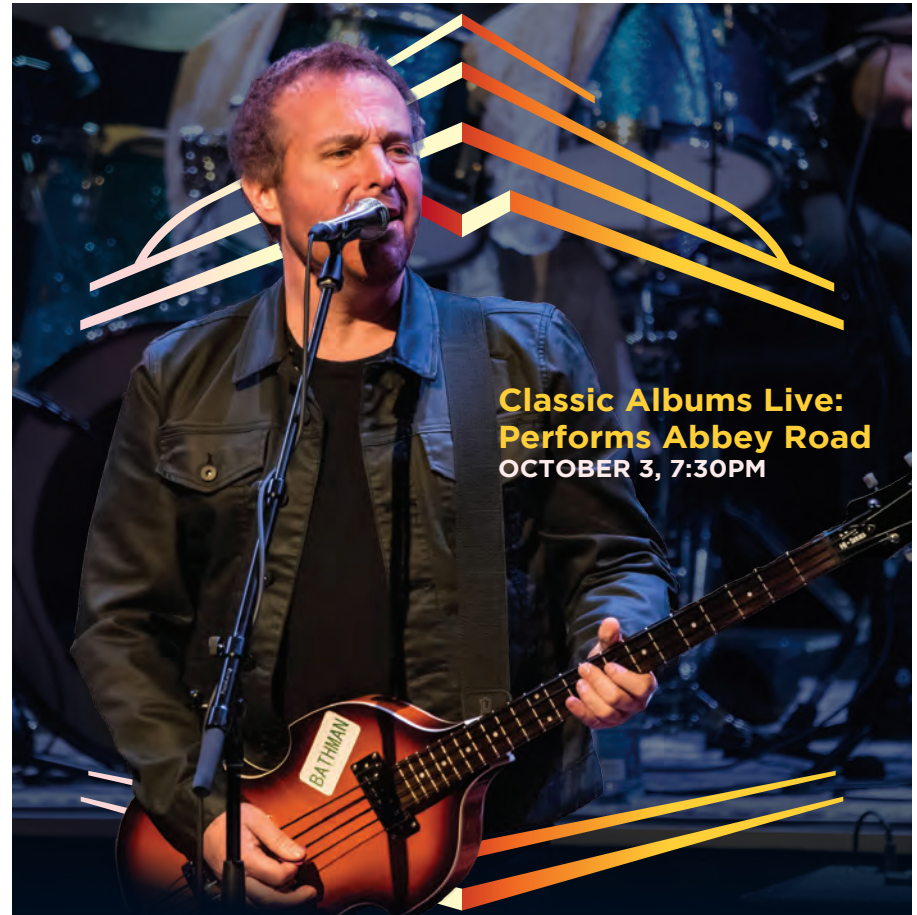
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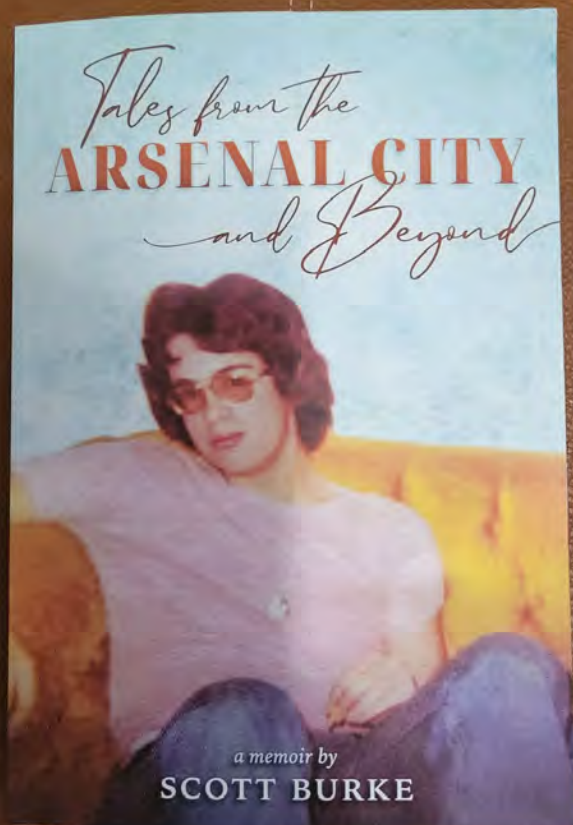
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Prog Digest

BY KLYDE KADIDDLEHUMPER

Inspiration is a funny thing. It hits you when you least expect it – and usually with interesting results.

Today – well, it is the hot tub. Yup – Klyde and Constant Companion have a hot tub. No, no time travel. And yes – outside. Just enough Scandinavian blood in my veins that a hot tub session in the middle of a snowy winter's evening is a wonderful thing. While this was a nice, cool, sunny afternoon, these old bones always enjoy a little respite from time to time.

Funny thing about hot tubs. A dear, departed friend of mine – one might say my brother from another mother – would always go on about folks like me having a hot tub outside. As he would put it, there are plenty of folks with whom he grew up, or were from the same general neighborhood, who had hot tubs. Just NOT outdoors. He'd always say that people like me were nuts to go outdoors in the middle of winter, in the cold and the snow, to get in a hot tub. And then, get out.

The completely inappropriate nature of the comments we would say to each other is the stuff of legend.

Anyway.

It is said that inspiration is the mother of invention.

Genius – 50 percent inspiration and 50 percent perspiration.

Inspiration guides the hands of a sculptor who will insist that the stone upon which his hands currently chisel is simply a statue waiting to be released from the stone.

I would like to posit here that not just the “accepted” “great” works are the result of inspiration. Crafting a

truly fantastic, memorable pop song seems, to me, to be as much inspired as inspirational. Being able to do both, well, that is a gift.

The duo of Hall and Oates wrote, produced, and performed some of the great pop songs of all time. Entertaining as hell, crafted to within an inch of their lives – but I would not call them inspired. “She’s Gone,” “Rich Girl,” “Sara Smile” – great pop songs, they tell a story – but groundbreaking? Perhaps not so much.

Jimmy Webb, on the other hand, well – that’s another story. For the younger folks out there – Jimmy Webb has written EVERYTHING (almost). “Up, Up, and Away” – the Fifth Dimension made it a hit (and yes, it was actually about balloons people, and there is a story about his father the preacher, a radio station GM, and a gun), “By the Time I Get to Phoenix,” “Where’s The Playground Susie,” “Honey Come Back,” “Wichita Lineman” (all Glen Campbell), “MacArthur Park” (twice, 10 years apart, with Richard Harris (1968) and Donna Summer (1978)). Indeed, his autobiography is titled “The Cake and the Rain.” As he puts it: “Ya leave one cake in the rain ...” Linda Ronstadt’s rendition of “The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress” off “Get Closer” will make you cry your eyes out.

The kicker: “Galveston.” Glen Campbell’s 1969 version was, indeed, a hit. However, its upbeat nature belies a much more important message. Meant not to be an upbeat ditty; it was about a soldier who was wishing he was anywhere except where he was. Dreaming of romantic encounters of his past to

get over his fear of dying.

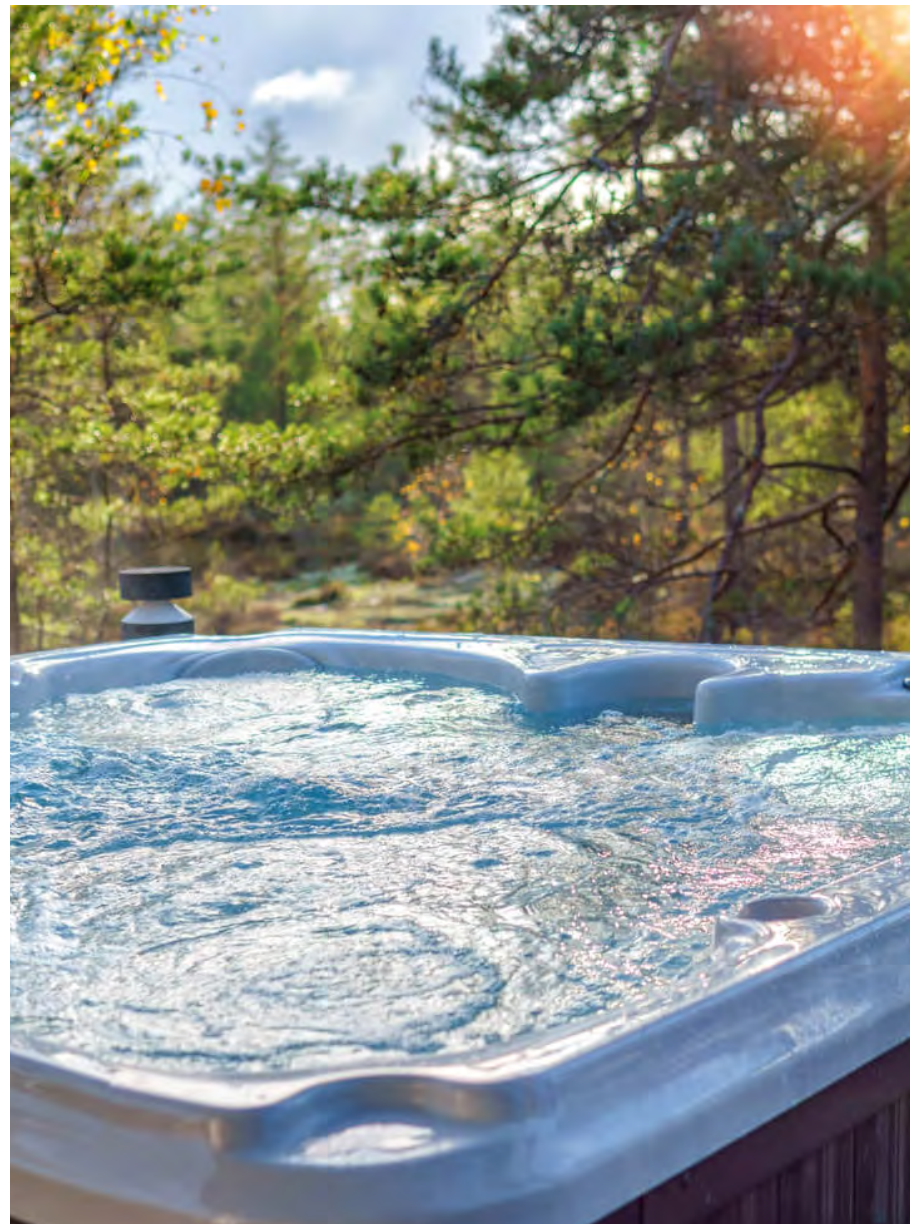
That, dear friends, is inspiration. Are they pop hits and great pop songs? You bet. Yet, So. Much. More.

Yeah – hot tubs are a great place to relax and let your mind wander. In this

case, to take a walk through your past – perhaps, once more across MacArthur Park.

Until next time.

Klyde





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John Holmstrom

Cartoonist and Founding Editor of Punk Magazine

BY LIAM SWEENEY

RRX: Punk. You were the founding editor, and it ran for three years, not counting specials and relaunches. It was influential beyond its time. So I'm thinking there was a degree of the experience maybe aging you a little. Did you come off the mountain in '79 with white hair and tablets? Did it change you, or was it three racy miles on life's cross-country highway?

JH: Oh yeah, did it ever! Lou Reed said on "Metal Machine Music": "My week beats your year." Back then? My week beat almost anyone's year. Those three to four years were packed with action, comedy, tragedy, and insanity. You know, I went from being homeless in January 1976 to running the most important music publication in the world one year later. It was a constant roller coaster. By the time the magazine went under for the last time in 1979, I was beaten down. It was like "The Old Man and the Sea," where the guy makes the catch of a lifetime, but by the time he sails home, the sharks devoured it.

RRX: The New York scene in the '70s is celebrated to this day. We definitely find a spiritual center with what Punk was doing. But we have our own scene here, and I wonder how one lucky twist could make the Albany scene celebrated fifty years from now. Did you feel the pressure of a looming posterity back then, or just the love of a local scene?

JH: There was always this weird feeling around the CBGB scene back in the day that we were involved in a

scene that would become important someday, and that it would be like early 1960s Swinging London or the San Francisco psychedelic scene. Bands we liked in 1975 and 1976 suddenly started getting signed to recording deals and attracted larger and larger audiences. And the media was swarming the club in 1976: TV crews were shooting bands, the music press and even a few mainstream outlets sent reporters to cover this "new punk rock scene." Reporters were constantly asking me: "What is punk rock?"

A lot of media people who came of age during the hippie counterculture were bored with the cultural stagnation taking place in the mid-1970s and loved the idea that we were troublemaking, having fun, and starting a new scene! But although we generated a lot of press in 1976, it paled in comparison to the London punk rock scene a year later. That became a mainstream phenomenon! Which is why so many people back then thought "the punk rock movement" was created in England.

Since there hasn't been a significant rock music scene since the grunge thing in Seattle in the 1990s, I doubt that Albany (or any city) can develop another important scene. But you never know, right? You gotta keep trying. It's like Albert Camus' "The Myth of Sisyphus": The glory is in the struggle, and the attempt to put that boulder over the mountain, not the outcome.

RRX: You're a cartoonist. A great cartoonist. Your work is all over, and in my case, on my coffee table when I was

a kid (High Times). I always liked the fact that cartoonists can pretty much get away with whatever they want. Is that really true, though? Are there bounds? If so, how do you draw your way around them?

JH: Thanks so much for the compliment! Being a lowbrow art form that many people look down on, cartooning is definitely something that gets away with a lot of stuff. Like, that kid who noticed that the Emperor wasn't wearing any clothes and said it out loud was probably a cartoonist. A good cartoonist doesn't give a shit if you don't like their artwork and will draw the ugliest caricature of you that anyone ever saw... And if you can't take a joke? Fuck off.

But good humor always draws from the truth, so a good cartoonist is always trying to read between the lines and figure out what's really going on. Which can get us in a lot of trouble, since you don't get censored when you lie—you end up in prison for telling the truth.

Back in the 1970s, we had publications like National Lampoon, Screw, Hustler, underground comic books, and so many publications all pushing boundaries and trying to be more outrageous and provocative, which was another key to our popularity. The scene back then wasn't at all like today, where people try so hard to NOT be offensive that it becomes offensive with cancel culture and the stifling of free expression. Political correctness is the death of true art, as anyone who studies history can tell you.

It's a shame that comedy and

humor are dying at this time, since everyone needs a good laugh. A hundred years ago comedy was king: movie stars like the Marx Brothers, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin, etc.; wonderful newspaper comic strips and movie cartoons like Felix the Cat and Koko the Clown... America's ability to laugh during hard times was a huge part of our national character.

RRX: So punk has evolved to have a much wider acceptance and a bit of gatekeeping. There's a meme that Avril Lavigne started punk in 2000 with "Sk8r Boi." Obviously funny, but there are kids that think punk started with Green Day. I will ask you this: throughout the years, decades, of every shade of what is called punk, what's the current that runs through it all?

JH: Well, I have a theory on all this. Punk was an essential part of rock 'n' roll. In the 1950s, rock and rollers like Elvis, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Link Wray, etc. inspired rebellious teenagers. It was dangerous and unpredictable. By the time the late 1960s were changing rock 'n' roll into "progressive" or "classic" rock, it lost the rebellious edge that the British Invasion and US garage rock bands revived. Simon and Garfunkel, Carole King, Madonna, and so many others are not rock 'n' roll in my opinion, and do not belong in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame—they should just change the name to the Pop Music Hall of Fame. Words need to have a meaning or else our language becomes gibberish.

So, I (and many others) in the early 1970s picked up on the concept that

bands like the Stooges, MC5, Alice Cooper, and the New York Dolls were punk! These bands were also labeled “shock rock,” but they had that “punk attitude.” And sadly, a lot of the West Coast “pop punk” bands like Green Day and Avril Lavigne don’t have a lot of that attitude. They play it safe, which is probably why they’ve become successful. Real punks are screw-ups and losers. We’re self-destructive and do crazy stuff! We take irrational risks in the name of our chosen art form and pay the price for making mistakes. We do not play it safe!

Anyhow, my theory is that whatever the rock critics tag as “proto-punk” should be renamed “punk rock ‘n’ roll.” After all, punk is just an essential element to rock ‘n’ roll culture: the need to feel free, to be independent, to have fun and celebrate life! Punk rock ‘n’ roll unites 1950s rock and roll music, 1960s garage rock, 1970s punk rock, 1970s hair metal (and a lot of heavy

metal), 1990s grunge, and on and on into eternity. “PUNK IS FOREVER!”

RRX: Right now, we are in a new age of platforms. It is weird to think that one of our biggest draws is that we actually put something out on paper. Everybody is media now. Everybody is a journalist covering their own lives. How do we survive in “formal” media? How do we offer what an influencer on Instagram or a TikTok challenge can’t?

JH: I’ve seen an amazing increase in the appeal and popularity of print media lately, and I discuss this with young kids all the time. They get it. The limits of digital technology are becoming apparent: digital decay, the short lives of many websites, and all the scams on the internet are encouraging people to use other forms of expression. Yeah, social media is necessary for promoting your work (and that’s hitting a saturation point—too many people pushing stuff and not enough people who respond or react.)

When I look back and think how I produced PUNK magazine almost 50 years ago, and the content is still available for viewing and enjoying, and if I take good care of it—it still looks like new? Hey, this gives print media an edge over content posted on the Internet. You know how Instagram hosts these “reels” on their platform that only last 24 hours? WTF? Meanwhile, stuff I did 50 years ago is still a thing. And how many websites last for 50 years? And how much would it cost to host that content over a 50-year period? (Unless you use a website like Facebook or Instagram that claims copyright on the material!) The permanence of print is becoming an attractive element for creative people beginning their careers...

The print medium has been around for over 500 years. Clay tablets? Thousands of years. If you want to preserve your work for future generations, what platform or medium will you want to

use? A lot of people are turning to print since the Internet is failing on many levels. Who knows, maybe we will return to clay tablets at this rate?

RRX: Another modern kink in the armor of all that is good and holy is artificial intelligence. I’m talking about generative AI like ChatGPT-4, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion. Also music AI. Pretend you’re the one tasked to speak for humanity. How would that go? Are you more John Connor or more T-1000?

JH: John Connor, for sure. Looking back, and rereading my “Death to Discshit” editorial in PUNK #1 (which was just one more thing in that issue that touched a lot of nerves), I realized that my objections to that music mostly had to do with hating the lack of soul in that music. There was a growing use of synthesizers in music in the early 1970s, and disco was this new music where the producers used computers

Continued on Page 43...

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Franche Coma

Original guitarist for the Misfits

RRX: Thanks for talking to me.

FC: No problem. You're welcome anytime.

RRX: My boss here, Art Fredette, sent me some of your new tunes and I'm really liking what I'm hearing so far. Looks like you just released "Science Craze" on August 2. We've got that in rotation here at RadioRadioX. We're all loving that one!

FC: Yeah, "Science Craze," like you said, came out already. "Monsters and the Mob" will come out on August 30. "Never Enough" will come out on October 4. Then after that, hopefully, you'll see an EP or an LP. We'll see.

RRX: Yeah, I was gonna ask. I'm really loving the sound. It really stays true to punk rock. I don't know what you call

it but it stays true to that sound that I love. I'm glad it still exists and that you're still doing it.

FC: Oh, that's great. Good to hear.

RRX: Obviously, you played guitar many moons ago with the Misfits and now you got your band FC Inc. I was curious, what did you do in between all that time?

FC: Raise four kids.

You know? I have four kids, three of them a year apart. My wife and I ... our parents are older, put it that way. So I didn't have the luxury of people watching my kids. I worked days and when I got home, she went to work at night and I watched the kids. So that's what took place, until the kids who were at that age ... I guess middle school or high school,

and then I had my daughter. Was it the right thing to do? I don't know, but it was the right thing to raise my kids. Was it the right thing to put the guitar down? Probably not. But there was only so much time in the day, you know what I mean? And here I am. What could I do? I now can do what I should have done.

RRX: Yeah, I hear that, man. I'm actually a grandfather myself now, I'm a young grandfather. I'm only 46 years old. So, unlike you, our parents were around to help babysit and now that's us.

FC: I have five grandkids now. In fact, one of them is having a birthday and will turn seven today. It's all good now, I can do whatever I want because it's just my wife and I here. When the guys ask about practice, I have a studio here in the

house and that's where we rehearse. I'm available seven days a week, 24 hours a day whenever the guys can do it. I'm here.

RRX: Well, happy birthday to your grandkid.

FC: Thank you.

RRX: With your band FC Inc. are you going on tour to support the music when it's all out and ready?

FC: Here's the deal. We were ready to start playing roughly around June, give or take. Pretty much everyone I'm speaking to is giving me carte blanche if you will ... the people in New York, the people in New Jersey, everybody I've been speaking with they said, "You put the lineup together." That was the hard part. So I'm going out and seeing bands

because I don't wanna put a band on, just to put a band there. Some of the stuff I've seen didn't exactly fit with us. It was a little bit tough, but I think we're working that out now. To answer your question, yes. I didn't wanna have to reach out right away to a booking agent but that's gonna take a lot of the burden off my back if I do.

RRX: Absolutely.

FC: How much can you do in the course of the day? I'm not tooting my own horn because everybody plays their part. But it's just another world ... booking agents, that's what they do. They're in contact with the right people and they know who to put you with.

It's probably gonna get to that point because we need to be out there and our goal was to be out there in June. So it looks like by the end of September, we gotta start being out there. That's 110%. No two ways about it.

RRX: Well, when you do get out there, definitely consider the Capital Region.

FC: People like yourself that I've ran into that are willing to help and recommend the best places for us to play ... after this interview, if we could chat a minute ...

RRX: That would be cool for sure. So just getting back to the new music, what's driving you to do the project that you're doing now?

FC: The biggest problem was finding the right musicians. Just in the past couple of years I finally got together with the right bunch of guys. There's five of us in the band and we all click. It all works together and that's half the battle. We're not ones to argue.

If there's something we think can be different, okay, let's try it that way. Instead of making a big debate and getting into arguments. That's the biggest thing. The stuff that happens when you were in high school or as I call it elementary school, still goes on with grown men in bands, believe me. It's unbelievable. So right now, everything's good. We're all

on the same page and if there's any disagreements, it's not a big deal. We just figure it out and work through it.

RRX: I do. It sounds like you got yourself a good band. Tell us about the guys that you got.

FC: The other guitar player, Patrick, happens to be one of my sons. We tease him and call him Mitch Miller because he's like the band leader. He's a very talented musician and has played a lot of different instruments throughout his life. We don't wanna let his head get too big, but we run everything by him because he's good with it, and not that we're not. But ... sometimes the younger generation has better ideas.

RRX: Sometimes they do.

FC: The bassist's name is Mike, we call him Moni. He's been around a long time, a real good bass player. I gotta hit him on the back of the head and make sure everybody hears me saying that he's a real good bass player because he said one time I just said he was OK, which I deny saying. I don't remember saying that. And then the singer Tony ... the lyrics right now have all been his, he's like a real good poet. He's real good with it. Our drummer right now is John Steele, he was playing with Voice of Doom. He's a really good drummer, real good drummer.

RRX: So the name FC Inc. says it all, your AKA initials Franché Coma.

FC: But you know what happened? I didn't even think of the name. I told everybody it's a joint decision. I really don't wanna go out there as Franché or whatever because you already got Danzig and Doyle. I'm friends with these people. I've been friends with Doyle our whole lives. I said now I'm gonna be the third Misfit. I don't know if that's a good thing. I'm like, "Why don't you guys just pick a name?" I didn't even come up with the name, they did. I said, "I don't really care. I care about the music." If it works, it works. If the music is good people are coming!



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Slab City

Continued from Page 5.

Law and justice exist in Slab City, but it's stripped down. With two girls, Water Boy makes sure that no one on any sex offender registry is welcome. And not being welcome is known to the State of California to cause ill health outcomes.

Water Boy is tough and human, two necessities of living in an inhospitable autonomous zone. But things get to him. When a 67-year-old drunk was burned alive and the murderer came into coffee hour to brag about it, Water Boy rallied the community to encourage the murderer to turn himself in. How that happened was not within the purview of our conversation.

But one of Water Boy's biggest battles is misconceptions about the city on social media.

He explains. "We have a really bad reputation online and I'll tell you why. I've been here for about 17 years, right? Give or take. I might be a year or two off because time starts to fluctuate out here a little bit, a little different. But so for years and years and years, like when I first came here, it wasn't on Youtube. Youtube wasn't even a thing.

"So now Youtube started to blow up, the internet started to blow up in Babylon. We didn't have reception out here. You guys have cell phones. We did not, we still have shit reception here. So you would come here and be like, 'Oh, one night in the lawless town of Slab City, come live in the lawless town. Or, you know, I spent a night in a lawless town.' It's not lawless dude. We live in California."

The real story is far more nuanced, and in some ways, Slab City follows more ancient laws that the "civilized" world has tossed by the wayside.

"I guarantee you right now if my car breaks down or my minibike, whatever I'm riding breaks down, and I need a tire, I can go to my neighbor and be like, 'Hey, we got an extra tire laying around, we're gonna find a tire inside Slab City,'" he said. "Even if you're not from here. Slap it on your car and get you back on the road because we don't want you stranded here. You're gonna die if you're stranded here. If you come here and you tell me, 'Hey homie, I'm hungry,' I'm gonna go. You can't do that in your neighborhood. Probably very rarely. I can go to my neighbor and be like, 'Hey, homeboy, I'm hungry as fuck. I don't have nothing in my house.' My homie's gonna give me something to eat and it's not even my home. I can walk at any random house, but I mean random, any random house and ask for help and then we're gonna help each other because we're desert dwellers and we're a small community and we know we're the only thing we got."

Slab City is built on liberty and survival. Doing what you want, being your true self; maybe it can't truly be done from the cubicles in skyscrapers or the chem-lawns in suburbia. But in Slab City, you only have to survive a desert that wants to dessicate you. And for the 200 to 2,000 residents (Water Boy puts it at about 450 steady) it's a welcome crucible.





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New Monarchy

BY SKETCHY HUBRIS

“Thinking of the thoughts that I’m used to sharing / But wait, no one’s caring ...”

“The Machine” / New Monarchy

Alternative rock band New Monarchy named themselves after growing up in a constantly changing environment, which influenced their worldviews:

- In 2017, members Dan Shapiro and Patrick Nyman started creating their own sound out of their home in Upstate New York, which was greatly influenced by early 2000s indie-rock.

- By 2020, member John Pailley joined the band as the band’s core drummer. Pailley strengthened the band’s overall roots and view on rhythm.

- New Monarchy currently works with many local artists, engaging in music video production as well as social presence.

- Their 2023 debut single, “Feel,” gained them an entryway in today’s music society.

Now playing live as a full group, joined by bassist Logan Will, they will be saturating the local music scene with live appearances. They will open for the band Curveball and Otobo at a show on Thursday, September 26 at the Avalon Lounge in Catskill.

SH: How did the name New Monarchy come about?

DS: Patrick and I started to play together in Vermont and at first, we were going by Orchard View, and John said

that name sounded like a retirement home.

So there was this video game we used to play that had a faction or group of characters in the game called the New Monarchy, and we agreed that sounded cool and would work.

SH: What is your intended audience or demographic?

JP: I would say 20 to 40; a bigish range. I definitely don’t see my grandparents listening to us.

DS: Skinny little artistic boys who wear cardigans and also like harder stuff. (laughs)

SH: I am going to see the Violent Femmes. Why I am mentioning this is because I find your song “The Machine” sort of an anthem for your generation, like the Femmes did for ‘80s youth. Your thoughts?

DS: “The Machine” was written about myself and dealing with the positives and negatives I was feeling in my growth. Most of the song is shit-talking to yourself - there is a verse that seems to point to hope and then goes back to no hope, no resolution.

SH: Well, I am a grandpa and I dig that song.

SH: Logan, as the newest addition to New Monarchy on bass, what made you join this band?

LW: I worked with John at Guitar Center and immediately loved John; I tried to get him involved on drums in some of my projects. He had me check

out what New Monarchy was doing. I started listening and it stayed in my rotation. They needed a bass player to play live; I finally met Dan and it clicked.

SH: Patrick, what is your favorite song to play keyboard on?

PN: I would say “Nothing New.” It’s the one I’m most active on and I have a nice polyrhythmic line. Also “Part Time,” in the second verse, I play a nice Rhodes kind of sound.

SH: The show at the Avalon in Catskill on September 26 is a bill of Guitar Center-originated band members - Otobo, Curveball, and you guys. Why so many quality bands from there?

JP: It’s a place where musicians gather and share ideas. It’s a store of musicians, so it’s natural progression.



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John Holmstrom (Cont.)

Continued from Page 27.

instead of humans to make the “music.”

The band Chic would be a great example. I like a lot of their music, like “Good Times,” which became the music track that put hip-hop on the map after the Sugar Hill Gang used that song for rap music’s first hit record. Even though it sounds like guitar, bass, and drums I believe they used a lot of synthesizers on the record, and on most disco music. And that was why so many rock ‘n’ roll fans hated disco. We weren’t racists, homophobes, or anti-human—we were, in fact, pro-human and against computerized robots taking over our culture!

So the fight to keep our culture human (music, art, and performance) is essential. We have to fight the robot revolution. I keep telling people: do not buy from Amazon! Support your local small businesses. Support people and not huge, global corporations! Don’t go to EDM raves, where they play mindless, anti-human zombie music! Support your local band scene. Hang out with human musicians—do not pay money to hang out in a club where they play digital crap!

RRX: This is where you answer the questions I didn’t ask. Remarks? Comments? Educate, enlighten, emote – the floor is yours.

JH: I just want to promote the fact that PUNK Magazine is celebrating our 50th Anniversary in late 2025/early 2026. To me, when we went to CBGB and interviewed the Ramones, and then Danny Fields said that Lou Reed was there and would I like to interview him? That was the moment the punk rock movement began. Yeah, a bunch of bands were making the music, but when the first issue of PUNK came

out? We defined it. I always say that Lou Reed’s “Metal Machine Music” album kicked off the movement. It was a double album of guitar feedback and tape hisses, unlistenable for most people. Brilliantly, Lou had Side Four loop, so the track time was Infinity! This was such a “Fuck You!” statement! He put out the album to get out of his contract with his managers, who sued Lou, and I am proud to say that our coverage of the album helped Lou win the lawsuit.

Getting Lou Reed on the cover of our first issue, at the exact time that he was being called a “washed-up has-been” after MMM bombed big time, definitely put PUNK magazine on the map. And our heralding of the Ramones as the New York City punk rock band that mattered, the “Death to Disco” editorial, and the article calling Marlon Brando “The Original Punk” for his role in “The Wild One” all contributed to our initial success. We defined punk rock in a way no one else had: visually and literally. Our later issues featuring Patti Smith, Iggy Pop, Richard Hell, the Sex Pistols, Blondie, and the Talking Heads created the blueprint for later punk fanzines to follow.

PUNK magazine wasn’t perfect. We made a lot of mistakes. We screwed up big time. But the whole world hated us back then, and it wasn’t easy to succeed when the world loved disco music. Like H. L. Mencken wrote: “No one ever went broke under-estimating the intelligence of the American people”... So yeah, I went broke. And I’m back for more!



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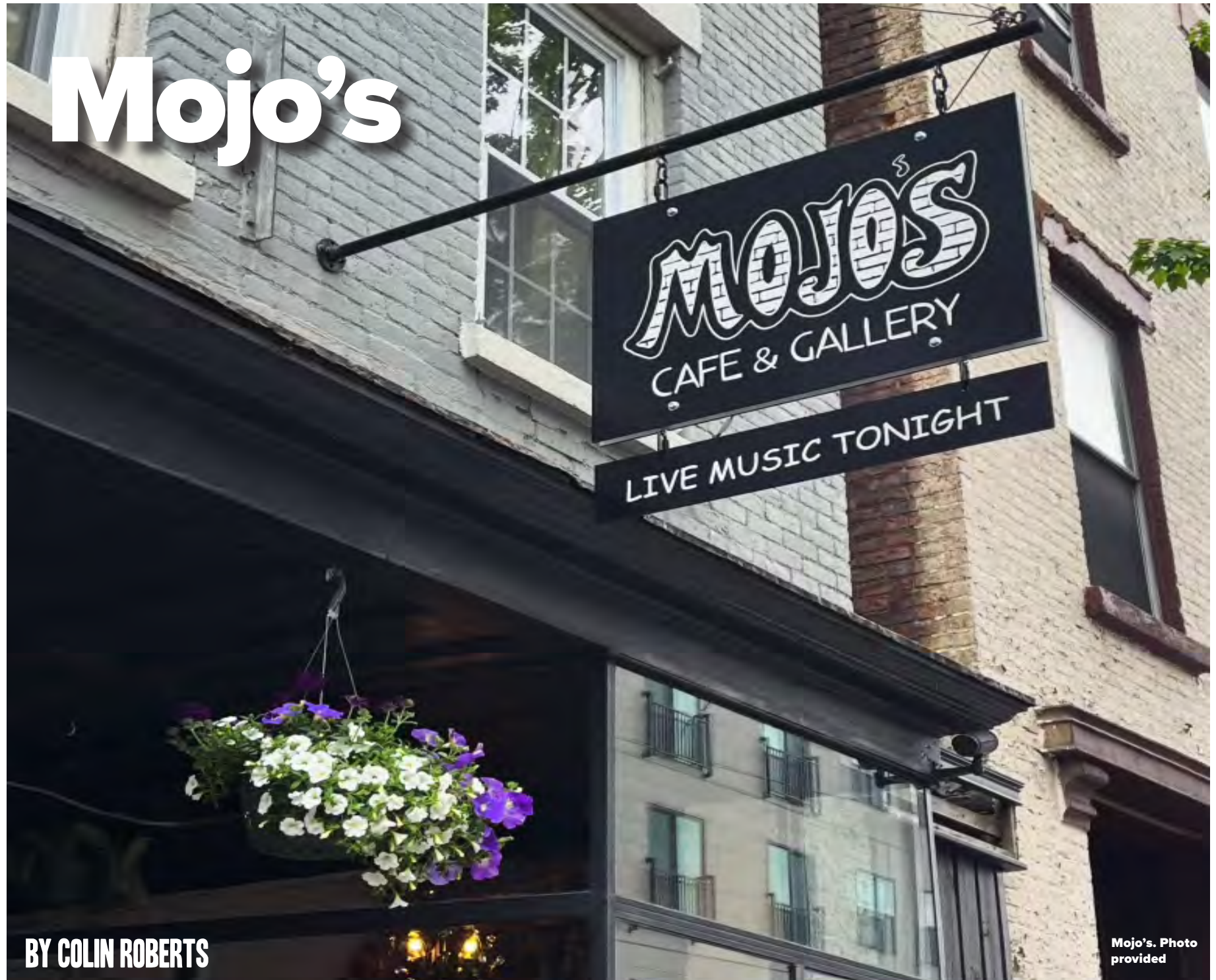
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BY COLIN ROBERTS

Mojo's. Photo provided

“Look at this space as an open canvas for other people to paint on.”

Niek Velvis speaks thoughtfully, taking the time to contemplate the question he's been asked before giving a detailed, enthusiastic answer. It's the same pattern of consideration and

enjoyment that goes into every aspect of Mojo's Café and Gallery, a multi-purpose music venue and café in downtown Troy that Velvis and his wife, Alana, own and operate together.

“When we saw this space we couldn't help but to listen to it,” says Velvis. “The space was connecting with us and

we were connecting with the space, and we saw the potential for a small music and art venue.”

“I don't think the intent was to start any of this,” he says with a laugh. The couple moved to Troy in August of 2023, packing up their Denver-based recording studio and bringing it along

with them. In their search to find a place where they would want to raise their child—and also to perhaps continue their studio work—they kept being drawn back to the Collar City. It was a combination of the food, the music, the community, and the overall vibe that Troy had to offer that led

them to the building located at 147 4th Street.

“I think being in a tight-knit community as well as close to some family members was important to us,” he recalls. “There was some time where we thought we might be moving to Miami—I actually took a job there for seven months. I’m glad we found this space.”

Work on the site—the former home to Superior Merchandise—began in August of 2023, with structural reinforcement and a redesign for Mojo’s. They opened their doors in February and have continued to add new aspects since.

The café serves coffee and baked goods as well as beer, wine, cider, and soft drinks. In the back sits Mojo’s stage and performance space, and their outdoor courtyard, which is perfect for outdoor shows and events.

The music side of the business came innately to Niek and Alana, who were able to embrace their roots and pack their own knowledge and experiences into the venue. The space has hosted an array of shows from open mic nights and jazz jams to hip-hop emcees and rock bands. One monthly mainstay is a residency by the Blues Episode, which boasts a lineup that has done time with The Cure, David Bowie, Isaac Hayes, and Swans. Every style of music is welcome at Mojo’s.

“I’d really like to work to a point where everybody can look at our calendar and find a point of relatability,” Velvis says. “I really have a keen eye on scheduling a vast diversity of events so that anyone can be comfortable here.”

This includes not just the music, but also a wide variety of other happenings. Mojo’s has already hosted events, including a New Orleans food pop-up, a burlesque show, and an independent zine festival, with many more ideas on the horizon.

The other side of Mojo’s—the

café—is something that didn’t come as naturally to the couple, but they found their footing with the help of those around them. There are carefully curated beer and cider options that are great to sip on during a show, as well as soft drinks. Teas and baked goods are sourced locally, as is their coffee, which is roasted by Gipfel Coffee Company in Averill Park. And at its core, it’s all about coffee at Mojo’s—and in a city with a wealth of great coffee, they knew they had to deliver a quality product, but in a way that maintained their own identity.

“We had to find a point that was not only unique, but also authentic to us,” Velvis says. “We took ourselves down to New York City with folks who have a lot of experience in the coffee world so that we could find that point.”

Accompanying the coffee is a New Orleans-themed vibe accented by the vibrant art of the Velvis’ friend, Frenchy. His paintings, often done live in front of the musical performers they depict, are expressive and full of motion. The plan is to incorporate other artists onto the walls as well, creating an ever-changing view for the audience.

For Velvis, while every day is a step forward for his business, what Mojo’s really is at its foundation is a confluence of music, art, and coffee; a space that can be enjoyed by anyone at any given time. It’s all about community, something that continues to grow in the venue every day.

“The more we’re in this space, the more we’re learning this space has its own mojo,” Velvis says with a smile. “We opened a place that does have that open canvas for other people to paint on, and when people feel authentic in this space to express themselves in their craft, then there’s no telling what’s going to happen and who comes in and what kind of shows we can have. There’s no limit, and I’m really excited about that.”



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BY JOHNNY MYSTERY

All matter is merely energy condensed to a slow vibration. We are all one consciousness experiencing itself subjectively. There is no such thing as death, life is only a dream, and we are the imagination of ourselves. We're living in a yellow submarine and our friends are all aboard. The ultimate party has already been held for the lunatics. Did you bring a yardstick? It was four guys from a seaside town in the North of England that made us all want to live next door ...

Join us now in the avant-garde as we explore a tragical history tour. Somebody said we'll be listening to them (well, not us) three hundred years from now, just like classical music centuries after the fact.

I'm sure through the magic of robotics and DNA reconstruction, the citizens of Earth, the serious future music lovers, will one day enjoy three-dimensional versions of the lads that will tour the world and beyond. Holograms? Ha - mere kids play in the year 2324!

You might think enough has been written about these guys. Why do you have to read more here? Seriously, you open up these pages hoping to find something new, something interesting, something fresh, yet here is another collection of dribble about the "Fab Four." This issue must be addressed. Every time I walk into a bookstore, there they are. When I'm standing in the checkout line, there they are. When I log on to social media, there they are. And I see new pictures all the time. I mean these cats broke up in 1970 and we're still finding photos that have never been published. How the hell is that even possible?? Perhaps Winston

really did sell his soul. Why not? I'm pretty sure Yoko cast some kind of spell on him.

Sir McCharmley is not dead. He still tours. He brings grown men to tears when the show opens with "All My Loving." Damn, that don't sound like Bleepmania. Back in '64 it was the girls crying for you Paulie. And while we're at it, I think we can blame said Bleepmania for the glut of tribute bands and shows clogging up the concert venues these days. You know what happens in the "biz" right? Once a trend takes off, the promoters do it to death, every stinking time. There is no shame. Did you ever hear of "Mini Kiss?" Yes, it's just what you think. It's true and they exist, at least they used to. I don't keep up on such things.

A lot of people know (or at least I think) that Bob Dylan is the one who turned "the lads" on to the devil's weed. Yes, Bob was the serpent in the garden, and he held out the apple to our lovable moptops, didn't he? This was right around the time they started recording "Help!" So, in all reality, Bob helped make "Help!" They were under the influence through the entire recording session as well as the film production. Look in their eyes, you'll see. Check out a vid of Bob and Winston sharing a London taxi during the Judas Tour in '65. Bob is completely out of it and Winston hurls insults that go right over Mr. Zimmerman's head. Bobby D laments over all the booing he gets on stage and the good Dr. Winston O' Boogie snickers in his face. You know he just wants to tell him he should have never ever strapped on a Strat at the Newport Folk Fest.

How many chances do you need to

get it right? Number 9-Number 9-Number 9. Seven-Up only did six before they hit lemon-lime. #9-#9-#9 ... how much trendy chemical amusement aid did Winston and Georgie have to consume before they got the idea to just randomly flip through a shortwave over sound effects records from the EMI sound vault. It's pure genius I tell ya ... GENIUS!!!! "Take this brother, may it serve you well." "Turn me on dead man." Just because it worked on the walrus, won't mean it's going to work on #9,#9,#9.

Why, oh, why did we need another five hours of those dreadful sessions at Twickenham Studios back in the bleak British Winter of '69? Just let it be, let it be. Not even George Martin wanted any part of that train wreck. They got Phil Spector to fill in. Thankfully he didn't bring his warm gun ... bang, bang, shoot, shoot. Poor Georgie got reamed by Sir McCharmly for not using his whammy bar correctly. Poor Georgie ran out with his Telecaster between his legs. Will Georgie come back? Will he retire and never leave his stately gardens? Will he buy a new star? Tune in next episode. Shout it from the rooftop of Blabby Road. Not even Lord Krishna can help you now poor Georgie!

And who really was the fifth? Billy Preston? George Martin (my pick by the way)? Murray the K (not with that hat)? Jimmie Nicol? ... Wait, what? Who the hell is Jimmie Nicol? Jimmie is the guy who filled in for Ringo when he got the mumps (or was that the flu? No, that was Georgie before the Ed Sullivan Show) and toured Australia while Ringo recovered. Jimmie said it was the worst thing that ever happened

to him. Why? Most of you never heard of him till you read it here. Have you got it yet? He did receive 400 pounds and an engraved watch, though. Ahhh ... the rewards of Bleepmania!!!!

Call me a "snozberry" if you wish, but the bloom came off the rose after '66 when they stopped shaking their heads and screaming WOOOOO! in a vain attempt to sound like Little Richard (or is that Esquerita?). They should have cut it off right after they recorded "Rubber Biscuit" and "Revolving Door." And don't get me started on "Private Pepper," the most overrated album in the history of plastic waffles. I will admit to liking the song "Mr. Kite" though. Anybody smart enough and lazy enough to get the lyrics to a song from a 19th-century circus poster is truly a genius, and Winston O' Boogie would be the first one to point it out to us.

So, what was the point of all this? It was to talk as little as possible about Richard Starkweather, aka Ringo, aka Mr. Peace and Love on his birthday. He is perhaps the luckiest man on the face of the Earth. From the looks of Sir McCharmly these days, Ringo may also be the last man standing. He was brought in to play drums at the eleventh hour because he was uglier than the other three. By the way, that's purely objective, my perspective. He got to ride on the fame train with the rest of them. Last but not least, he got to marry a Bond Girl. Damn, how British can you get!

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