



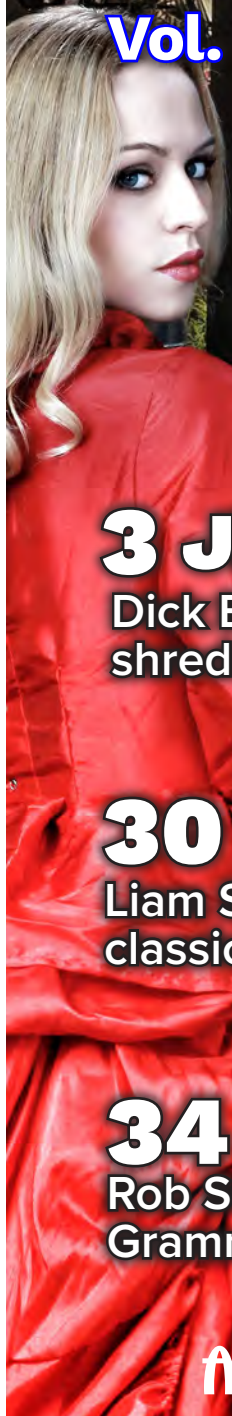
# experience

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October 2024  
Vol. 6, Issue 10



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**J**imi Bell is a left-handed shredder. A Very Tasty shredder. He's a member of Beyond Purple coming to the Cohoes Music Hall on October 26, 2024. Autograph, Beyond Purple, and House of Lords. We talk influence, picking, shredding, and Close Encounters of the Ozzy kind.

**RRX:** So, we're taking some time with Jimi Bell. I know we're really excited to have you coming up at the Cohoes during October. And thank you very much for talking with RadioRadioX.

**JB:** It's my pleasure. I can't thank you enough for having me. It means a lot.

**RRX:** As a kid, in my household, it was a lot of classical. It was a lot of big bands. So, what stuff did you listen to as a kid? What did your parents have on and what about that kind of got you interested in music?

**JB:** Well, my parents brought me up on big band music and I love big band music. I was very much into Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, all those orchestras.

But I used to listen to Benny Goodman more so because I was very much into drums and they had Gene Krupa.

One of my greatest treasures that I have still is I got to meet Gene Krupa before he passed away. He was playing at a Holiday Inn of all places. He came with a Dixieland jazz band and was playing in the lounge. I was sitting right next to him, and I have a photo of me and Gene together, and it's just classic.

**RRX:** There were an awful lot of folks who looked to Clapton on the blues side of things or Jimmy Page or the like. While some people were gravitating to more Jimi Hendrix, there was a big chunk of the world that was still gravitating toward that blues sound as opposed to what now is known as shredding.

**JB:** My influences back in the day were, first, Johnny Winter. Then I discovered Ritchie Blackmore, which really took over my life. Then, the one that really sealed the deal for me was Al Di Meola. There was something about Al Di Meola

that I gravitated towards more because he was extremely precise with his picking hand, very clean. I wanted to be that, but I didn't want to play that style music.

**RRX:** The other day on Facebook, you put something out. And of course, the comment I made to it was, "You is a'pickin' and I is a'grinnin'." There was a whole lot of Roy Clark in that.

**JB:** Yeah. I'm a huge country fan. I love Roy Clark so much. My style has changed throughout. Okay, so I had my foundation with Johnny, Ritchie and Al. Then I discovered Eddie, and then Michael Schenker, and some of these other incredible guitar players. But then I found Albert Lee.

**RRX:** I find that with so many of the younger musicians, they have completely forgotten guys like Chet Atkins. How do you forget Chet Atkins?

**JB:** I know! You know, Chet was one of the first guys doing all this fingerstyle and all this other stuff. Then, some

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people don't even know that Jerry Reed was one of the most amazing guitar players. He had this double-stop stuff that he was doing on guitar. People just think he's an actor from Smokey and the Bandit. I'm going like, no, this guy's an amazing guitarist.

**RRX:** I saw that at one point, you had spoken about one of those missed-it-by-that-much moments with Ozzy.

**JB:** Yes. Yeah, that was a big one for me, you know? The Joan Jett thing, that was a whole, you know, being in that movie and everything with her was a great, great experience and that was a very cool thing. Let me just give you an example on that. I'll just show you.

**RRX:** Sure.

**JB:** Okay. So, I'm in the band Joined Forces and we get hooked up – we're an all-original music band, okay? We just do all original. We get hooked up with somebody in Joan Jett's camp. He's starting his own management company and he has a partner that owns a tour bus company. That was his partner.

So, Joan Jett's doing a tour of the East Coast. We have a three-song set is all we had. They put us out on tour with Joan Jett. We have our own tour bus and everything else. We're out on the road with Joan Jett in our early 20s and we're going, what the heck is going on with this? This is great!

One day, I'm at home and the phone rings about 10:00 in the morning. He (Floyd Rose – developed the tremolo) says, "Jimi, Jake E. Lee is out of Ozzy. We sent your tape to Sharon and she really wants you to come to California. So, we're arranging that." I said, oh my god! He said, "They already have one guy that they picked already," which was Zakk. "They already have this one guy, but she saw your tape and wants you to come out."

Okay. So, there was one other guy that got to audition before me from Sweden. So, he went up on the stage. And they're doing "Flying High Again." It

comes to the solo section that Randy Rhoads had done. This guy was from Sweden. This guy decided to change the iconic tapping section that Randy Rhoads did, he changed it into sweeping. He was trying to get creative with it.

Well, Ozzy's standing behind him, making like he's strangling him to death. So, keep it in mind that I have to go up and play next.

They sat down with me afterward and they said, "Well, it's between you and Zakk." That was what it was. They took me out to dinner afterward, this real expensive restaurant in downtown LA.

**RRX:** Is there any such thing as a cheap restaurant in LA?

**JB:** No. But you got to understand, this is a restaurant that had probably like all doctors and lawyers. I mean, this was a place that – of course, Ozzy could go anywhere because he has more money than all those people, you know?

**RRX:** No joke.

**JB:** We go in there. This was when Ozzy was still a little messed up. I'll never forget, I'm eating. We had our salads. At the time, I didn't eat cherry tomatoes. I said, "Ozzy, you want my tomatoes?" because I'm sitting right next to him. He said, "No, no, no." So, I turned my head and start talking to Randy and the drummer. I see out of the corner of my eye that Ozzy puts his hands in my food and starts eating the cherry tomatoes out of my dish. I'm not making this up. This is real stuff that's going on here.

**RRX:** This is great!

**JB:** So, they get him back, Sharon pulls him out of there. They go back to their chalet or bungalow, whatever you want to call it, right on Sunset Strip. I go over there. We're sitting in the living room. I mean, this is pretty wild because I'm actually sitting in Ozzy's living room with Sharon and with Aimee, the daughter that wasn't in the Ozzy show. She was just a baby.

I'm sitting there and he's got Aimee

*Continued on Page 60...*



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# Singin' Guru

BY JEFF AND CRYSTAL MOORE

**D**ear Singin' Guru,  
*I'll just put it out there – how in the hell do you learn to sing and play guitar at the same time? People make it look so easy, but I'm struggling! Help!*

*Signed,  
 Struggling*

Dear Struggling,

First of all, singing and playing an instrument at the same time is the multitasking equivalent of trying to cook dinner while texting and dodging a rogue dog (or cat for you childless cat peeps)! It's all about two things:

**Coordination:** Managing two different activities (singing and playing) can cause things to fall apart fast.

**Instrument Proficiency:** Smooth transitions—moving between chords or fretboard/keyboard positions—can feel like navigating quicksand while singing.

If you can sing well but fumble with your instrument, or vice versa, focus on each skill separately. To sync playing and singing, you must be comfortable with both. Start by humming along to your playing. This allows your brain to focus on both tasks without lyrics. Research shows that practicing the melody without the lyrics engages different parts of the brain, helping you better manage divided attention.

Once coordination improves, address the next issue: instrument proficiency. Problems arise a whopping 80% of the time when changing chords smoothly. If your fingers lag, your

performance will seem clunky. But don't panic! Even legends like Paul McCartney struggled with this. He said that mastering transitions in songs like "Blackbird" was one of his toughest challenges. So, if Sir Paul had to face this issue and work through it, you're in good company!

To tackle transitions, try these tips:  
**Slow it down:** Practice chord changes at a slower tempo and gradually speed up.

**Isolate trouble spots:** Focus on the tricky chord change until it becomes muscle memory.

**Play with others:** Jamming with other musicians or playing along with tracks can help you lock into the rhythm and keep your transitions clean. The pressure of keeping up can push you to improve faster.

**Struggling, you're not alone.** Separate the tasks, hone those transitions, and soon you'll be singing and playing effortlessly.

Yours Truly,  
 The Singin' Guru

*Dear Singin' Guru,*

*You said I can decide to be a singer, but aren't you born a singer?*

*Sincerely,  
 Ms. Nature vs. Nurture*

Dear Ms. Nature vs. Nurture,

Ah, the proverbial question: "Are we born with greatness or do we hustle

for it?" You absolutely can decide to become a singer. Are some people naturally better at singing? Sure. But comparing yourself to others is a recipe for singing in the shower forever. (Which, let's be honest, does sound great, right?)

Let's say that you're off-pitch and rhythmically confused, like your inner metronome is on vacation. Meanwhile, the high school musical star can belt out a perfect G sharp like she was born with a microphone in hand. Does this mean you should pack it in and call it quits? Not so fast! If we follow this logic, then that high school singer should give up because she's not as good as the local diva at the downtown jazz club. And hey, maybe that local diva should quit because she's not headlining Broadway, right? Ridiculous, isn't it?

This line of thinking is flawed because it's rooted in emotion—the feeling that you want to be great RIGHT NOW. Greatness takes work, not some kind of mystical birthright. Very few are "natural talents" who start perfectly. Most hit a wall and have to work just as hard as anyone else.

Ed Sheeran, who we all know as a global megastar, has been refreshingly honest about his journey. He once said, "I'm not talented, I worked very hard." He even admitted that his early performances were terrible, but he persisted. It's proof that talent is a small part of the equation, and hard work (and some luck along the way) is what gets you to the top.

And let's not forget Taylor Swift's famous take on songwriting: "There's a 1 to 100 scale, and everybody starts at 1." She emphasizes that success in

music is all about the effort you put in. You may not be a natural-born singer, but if you start at 1, you can absolutely make it to YOUR 100 with dedication.

So no, you aren't born a singer—you become one. The real question is: how badly do you want it? With enough practice and perseverance, we've taken people from the bottom 1% to the top of their class. You can do the same.

Forever Yours,  
 The Singin' Guru

Got a question? Contact the Singin' Guru at [jeff@peakmusicstudios.com](mailto:jeff@peakmusicstudios.com). Until next month!

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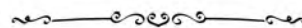
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**JM:** Okay so this is how the Troy Music Mafia began. Art Hilton asked me to open Hilton Music on 3rd Street in Troy in 1968. I was running the store, and all of a sudden all of these younger musicians started gathering. There were five music stores in Troy: Miller's, George's on King Street, Romeo's, the 2nd Drome Sound (the first one was at the Aerodrome), and Hilton's.

Everybody was hanging around when I first got to meet Dave Costa, Gary Tash, Eddie Powers, Gary Sagen-dorf, Joe Montarello, Bobby Etoll, Chris Garabedian, Keith Stenhouse, Craig Ruhtz, Dan O'Brien, Ed Powers, Rick Rourke, Peter Iselin, and Adrian Otero. This is the Troy Music Mafia. All of these guys came in, hung around, became friends, and got bands going, Mystic Haze, Coalition, Sweet Silence, Back Bay Brew. Then all of these guys started interweaving different bands. Nobody lost track of each other. Dave Costa

named it the Troy Music Mafia. So that's what started it.

**RRX:** I love the name, it really reels you in!

**JM:** I wasn't hip to it at first but now I'm just used to it, you know? So, the store was happening and everybody is becoming really good friends. Everybody is joining bands. It kept going and going and within a year's time, kids wanted lessons.

**RRX:** Right.

**JM:** We figure we should open up a music school and we called it Troy Music Academy. Years later when Kenny and Lori of Super 400 opened their music school, they kept that name.

**RRX:** Yes, that's right.

**JM:** So, when we started Troy Music Academy at the time, Nick Brignola was teaching. Mark Galeo, Gene Garune ... Nick Brignola was upstairs teaching and he was on the cover of Downbeat magazine as he got nominated for best player. You've got these unbelievable

teachers upstairs and we were downstairs being goofy guys on amps playing Beatles songs. That's how it started, with the music store.

**RRX:** Of course.

**JM:** The first Troy Music Mafia lunch was five months ago. Chris Garabedian is the master of messaging people. I hate the interwebs. I had a flip phone until about four months ago. My wife made me get this new phone. I tried to smash it a couple of times, it wouldn't smash. I hate it.

**RRX:** That's a quality product though.

**JM:** So Chrissy, thank God ... he's the most beautiful person. Chrissy is a big reason this is happening. He messages, texts, and emails people. I don't do any of that stuff. He started reaching out to people and the first lunch was basically the Emerald City guys. There were eight of us.

My wife Jenn put it on Facebook and people were commenting, "It's great to

see you getting together, mind if I come?" And I said, "Yeah, that's cool." Then the second lunch we had around 12 people. The third one we had 18 people, and the last one a couple of weeks ago we had 28 people.

**RRX:** It's growing for sure.

**JM:** Yeah, it's a beautiful thing. It's the same as how I feel about my son's memorial concert; we're just doing something positive. I sit there and look at all of our friends. They come in, it's all hugs, "Good to see you," "I haven't seen you in a while." I sit there and go, "This is great!"

Matt Smith is in Austin, Bobby Etoll is in LA, Danny O'Brien is in Florida. They're all seeing this and flipping out. They say "I've been out here for 40 years and I have friends and acquaintances but it's nothing like home." All of these people grew up together. Not just friends, but grew up as musicians, which is a little deeper than just being friends. You grow up as a musician and



you experience so much more than just being a friend.

**RRX:** This I can relate to, being in a band is like family.

**JM:** Exactly!

For our next lunch, Craig Ruhtz is coming in from California and Matt Smith is coming in from Austin a day early because we're recording that week.

**RRX:** That's awesome, where is this next one taking place?

**JM:** At The Ale House again. At the last one I stood up and said, "We're gonna need a bigger boat!"

**RRX:** Like across the street?

**JM:** I've got some ideas. When this thing grows, like I do with my son's memorial concerts, the wheels start spinning. It's kind of overwhelming. I think this time there's going to be another 10 people which would be 38 to 40.

Chrissy is really the catalyst for nailing people down. That's how great Chrissy is ... last time he said "I've got a surprise for you," and Art Hilton walked

in. I haven't seen Art in 40 years. Art came in and everybody freaked out and applauded, laughed, and hugged. So I sat with him and he said, "Oh this is really cool" and everybody came over saying things like "I remember I bought my first guitar," or "Bought my drums and you gave me a really good deal, you let me pay \$10 a month on it!" That's the stuff we were doing back then.

I tried getting through to him with, "Art, this is really because of what we did by opening up the store. This is really how everybody met, became friends and here it is 50 years later, and we're all together because of the store!"

**RRX:** That's true, that's where it all came together.

(Joe takes out his laptop and pulls up a group photo that was taken several years ago at The Dustin Mele Memorial Concert.)

**JM:** These are all of the guys. This is the Troy Music Mafia. There's Jack Daley, he came up from Jersey.

Another major reason why we started this thing is to honor the ones we've lost:

Frank Daley, Dave Costa, Dave Quinnones, Gary Brooks, Chipper Austin, Nick Brignola, Josh Bloomfield, Tom Flynn.

That is why we do this. When we get together at lunch, everyone sits down. Chrissy and I stand up and Chrissy says a prayer and honors the ones we've lost. Then I say to the crowd, "Speak up about anybody in your life," and you'll hear people include others like Charlie Smith and other musicians and friends. That's the core of this. Not to just get together for the lovefest, but to honor the ones that we lost. These losses are happening around us really fast.

**RRX:** Yeah you don't know, it could be totally unexpected. So when is the next Troy Music Mafia Lunch?

**JM:** October 2nd, it's always on a Wednesday. You gotta come down.

**RRX:** I'm totally gonna come.

**JM:** Artie is invited too. He told me he's so honored to be included to hang around all of those old cool guys or something like that.

(both Laugh)

**JM:** You see there's certain people that stick. Artie sticks. He's been supporting music locally forever. So he needs to be there. He's a Troy guy, this is as much him, even though he wasn't around back then.

Like Tess Collins, she's from Troy. She used to sneak out her window to come see us guys play when she was a kid. So she's got that connection too.

**RRX:** Tess is great, I love her. I'll be at the next one for sure.

**JM:** Also, I want to thank Brian Gilchrist, Joe Daley, and the rest of the staff at the Ale House for putting up with the Mafia each month!

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# Of Spirits and Secrets

BY WILL MUKRDECHIAN

*Once again there's a room for all those backroom deals*

“Justin” wants to be called “Justin” because—he asks, with a rhetorical flourish—“What good comes from revealing what’s in a hot dog?” I’m here at the New Scotland Spirits Tasting Room, Center Square’s newest installation at the intersection of Lark and State Streets, to probe how Albany’s sausage is made. To do so, I’m interviewing a friend-of-a-friend-of-a-roommate. He’s a self-described “policy advocate,” whom less charitable circles would call a “lobbyist.”

The sausage at issue is of the political persuasion, and it’s worth noting that Justin ain’t merely a lobbyist in the eyes of those less charitable circles; he’s also a lobbyist per his annually mandated state registration with the Commission on Ethics and Lobbying in Government. Yet he’s adamant that the term “lobbyist” is pejorative and, in any event, irredeemably sullied.

“Yeah, I get paid pretty well for my services,” he says. “But what I do for clients is still in the public interest. I like to say that my second client is the community.” (The cynic in me waits a beat so Justin can laugh at his own outlandishness, but he declines the opportunity.)

This tasting room is the first retail outlet for New Scotland Spirits, a Capital Region-based “farm distillery” named after the founder’s Albany County hometown. It distills the “Helderberg” line of rye, wheat, and bourbon whiskies which have become ubiquitous seemingly overnight. I’ve intercepted Justin at this place so he can help answer a pointed question: how did a venue that launched just three months prior so quickly find itself at the intersection of politics and influence-peddling in New York’s notoriously insular capital city? Or, to borrow social media’s phrasing: how did such a plucky little upstart become “Albany’s newest

smoke-filled backroom” (sans the smoke)?

That distinction first appeared on TikTok. In a since-deleted video captioned “Official Home of Pre-Session Machinations,” three supposed legislative aides say they’re “prepping the battlefield” for the approaching legislative session. “Zoom may be secure,” one of the babyfaces says, “but it’s hard to find common ground without all the cocktails.” Following that initial video, the Reddit commentariat ran with the implication that this strange new venue was expressly designed for booze-fueled dealmaking.

But how did that reputation get so quickly entrenched? Aside from a newly installed restroom, a food preparation area, and a utility closet, the New Scotland Spirits Tasting Room is true to its name as a single room—one barely big enough to contain the bar that for 80 years was situated a few doors down in the historic Larkin Restaurant, which was itself once patronized by the state’s political class.

In short, the Tasting Room’s intimacy doesn’t exactly make for clandestine conversation.

“Unless,” Justin says, “you just rent the room.”

Bingo. Turns out New Scotland Spirits is just dusting off a playbook perfected by the long-ago dispatched Governor’s Inn Motel: if you want to do your dirty in private, you rent a room. Duh.

Among the features that make the Tasting Room different from almost any other bar or lounge in the Capital Region is the fact that it’s practically designed for private parties. Modeled after a Prohibition Era speakeasy, it for sure has a vibe. It’s elegant yet understated, boasting all the accoutrements of a high-end whiskey

lounge. And its walls are tastefully adorned with authentically period-appropriate photos, news articles, and other ephemera. The ambiance is determinedly perfect for smaller and more exclusive events.

Yet there’s something really odd about that entire premise. For example, the website offers would-be reservees a rate structure (fine so far) alongside a notice that Tasting Room staff are obligated to countersign “airtight nondisclosure agreements, available for review and execution upon request.”

Um, what?

Prior to meeting Justin, I asked Tasting Room proprietor Rosamaria Luppino about the purpose of those NDAs. She minimized and deflected, explaining that her “business partner is an attorney, and he just likes covering all the bases. You know how it is with lawyers.”

Actually I don’t, and apparently neither does Ms. Luppino’s business partner, Jesse Sommer, if his unconventional in-your-face social media antics are any indication. Since founding New Scotland Spirits eight years ago while still in the Army, Mr. Sommer has delighted in courting controversy from his perch on the company’s Instagram account. It’s not exactly the “under the radar” approach you’d expect from a venue soliciting the inconspicuous.

But Justin thinks that might be the strategy: “He sucks up all the attention, so people in here are invisible compared to whatever bullshit he’s up to online.”

Ms. Luppino conceded that part of the reservation fee entails a contractual option to turn off the security camera system and maintain guests’ confidentiality. But she insists there’s no nefarious intent.

“Stop being paranoid,” she scolds

when I ask if she’s overheard anything juicy. “We serve cocktails and whiskey flights. Unless there’s a lovers’ quarrel at the bar, I’m not interested in private conversations.”

Whereas venues like the War Room Tavern pay homage to Albany’s “colorful” political legacies, the closing of Jack’s Oyster House has left New York’s capital devoid of an authentic hangout for the political class. Sure, you can likely find insular collusion in area County Clubs or the Fort Orange Club, but these jaunts are for the locals. As that notorious TikTok video made clear, out-of-towners are increasingly making the Tasting Room their “discreet retreat.”

Ms. Luppino disputes even this assessment. “Mostly our patrons are from right here in [the] Center Square [neighborhood] or from just down the road in our native Town of New Scotland,” she says. “We’re seeing more downstate visitors, but that’s probably because our labels are making inroads there. We’re focused on expanding distribution beyond the Hudson Valley and into New York [City].”

New Scotland Spirits may now be the Capital District’s most recognizable distilling outfit. Its whiskies and award-winning vodka have become staples in area bars and liquor stores; expanding awareness of the Tasting Room is reportedly driving interest in the company far beyond its Center Square digs.

Still, I’m curious as to how such an otherwise inauspicious location even ended up on the apparatchiks’ radars.

“You’ll just have to come to one of our private meet-ups [at the Tasting Room] to see why,” Justin tells me. “Go ask the bartender for an extra NDA.”





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**RRX:** This is exciting. I got the press release and it says “Local musicians play murder ballads about the region’s creepy past.” I am all about that!

**ZS:** Love the spooky.

**RRX:** 100%. I mean, I’ve been infatuated with the ghost over at the Cohoes Music Hall for a while now.

**ZS:** Eva (Tanguay), yeah.

**RRX:** Yup. And now we’re actually just a couple doors down from the Music Hall and - I don’t know if I mentioned this to you before - but it’s very haunted here as well.

**ZS:** I mean, Cohoes probably just in general.

**RRX:** I think so. Obviously, for these murder ballads October 18 is perfect timing for the Halloween season. I see this is not the first time that you’ve done this.

**ZS:** No. This is actually inspired by an Albany Public Library show that happened ... I think it was in 2016. I can’t recall the time, but they did this show as part of a library series that they asked me to do. I did that and loved it! Essentially what they did - which is what we’re doing now - is they found all these spooky things; crimes, murders, suicides, and horrific things that have happened in the Capital Region. Found articles and then basically asked musicians to write an original song based off of this, in whatever way they can. There’s a line of respect that comes with that too, that you sort of have to figure out.

It pushed me so much as a songwriter, and I often write from personal experience and this really put me in a totally different element. I was terrified to do this. I loved the song that I

wrote. It was about a man who lured his wife into their bedroom and he kills her by stabbing her to death with a kitchen fork! It was so wild. I wrote my story through the perspective of him, which kind of messed me up for a little bit too because I was trying to be in that perspective. I just enjoyed it so much. And then a few years later I was talking with Michael Gregg who’s my friend and band member. He had gone to that show and he was like, “We should do this again.” I got Albany’s permission to do it. In 2019, we did a Troy version at Little Pecks and it was a sold-out show. It was so wonderful. We had 11 musicians do it and it was the same kind of thing, just everybody really being out of their element and pushing themselves to write in this way. It was so successful, and not just because it was sold out, but everybody

just wrote such incredible songs.

My favorite aspect of it was seeing what perspective people would take. Was it from the crime doer, was it from the victim, or ... ? You know? Basically, I didn’t give them any requirements. The only requirement is they have to choose a story and write something based off of it. No other requirement. The goal was to keep doing shows like this, and then a few months later COVID hit. We’ve been talking about this for a while; it’s been five years, which is absurd, but we’re doing it again.

**RRX:** This is cool and honestly, when you were telling me about the song that you wrote with the guy who stabbed his wife with a fork, I was getting the creeps just hearing about that. Also, as someone who writes songs



myself, I could see how challenging that would be. I don't know about you, but when it comes to songwriting, I hate assignments, you know? You kind of just wanna do whatever comes naturally. You've got a lot of the area's great musicians involved in this one as well.

**ZS:** Yeah, I just reached out to Capital Region musicians who I know would wanna try this if they haven't already. Girl Blue and Jimi; they did do the first one but everyone else is new. But I'm with you, it's really hard. It's like, man, don't give me an assignment. But it really pushes you to think outside of your element and the challenge is worth it. I know there's a couple of musicians from the last time - I think Blue Ranger who did the last one - they ended up recording their song and putting it out and it's just so cool. I didn't know that was gonna happen.

**RRX:** Absolutely. So, every song that's involved in this is based on real events that happened in the dark past of the area.

**ZS:** Correct. Michael works at the Troy Public Library. He spent the last couple of months sorting through the archives and finding our articles. So essentially we gave these musicians a bunch of articles to choose from, and have them sort through and pick a couple. It was sort of first come, first serve. They're just doing one song and they'll have about 10 minutes on stage. They'll talk about their song, maybe about their songwriting process, and maybe a little about the article, then play the song.

Not everybody, but a good amount of them, are gonna have accompaniment. We're not gonna have a full drum set.

Brule County Bad Boys will have like their light version. I think Josh will be singing, there's gonna be fiddle and maybe lap steel with that.

And then Dylan Perrillo is gonna be doing upright bass and we'll have guitar ... we're gonna try to have one to

three musicians on stage for each song. It's gonna be an eclectic sound which is also what I'm looking for and not just have a person with guitar over and over, you know?

It's gonna be different, it's gonna sound as varied as possible.

**RRX:** I definitely wanna go to this and I think it might be wise to bring Eva extra gifts this time.

**ZS:** Yeah, we will. We're gonna have the Cohoes Historical Society come in and talk about Eva, honor her, and give information. That's gonna be a small portion of this as well. I'm a little scared myself. I get spooked out by ghosts. I totally believe in them. I'm gonna do this in the most respectful way possible. I think that's what's interesting about this too. How do you write this song from the perspective of the victim in a respectful way of honoring the dead? Halloween is so kitschy, spooky, and fun but this is an eerie way to look at the local history while trying to make it respectful. Somehow it works. It has worked.

**RRX:** I'm pretty intrigued by this.

**ZS:** My overall goal - obviously with the musicians, I want them to be challenged - but I want the audience to walk away and be like, "Oh my God that was so cool," then go home and listen to these musicians, buy their music, and go see them perform live. And I want that for all of them. That's sort of the goal.

**RRX:** I 100% agree with that. And ... also they'll go home that night, and maybe leave the nightlight on!

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# McMurdo Station Antarctica

*So what do you do for fun?*

**W**e reached out to Joe Pettit, Program Manager, Earth-Scope Polar Operations in McMurdo Station.

**RRX:** Extremely important work goes on in Antarctica. I could write several interview questions just about that. But people are working there, and the saying “all work and no play ...” Let me start by asking about free time. From a (let’s say) average perspective, do scientists in Antarctic stations have free time, or is it too busy for free time? Is free time generally steady, or is it sporadic?

**JP:** The typical Antarctic field season occurs during the austral summer – a period bounded on either end by notoriously unsettled weather. The window of opportunity for achieving field-work goals is a short four months and is often hampered by blizzards, equipment failures, etc. So quite often, science field teams are driven by an ever-dwindling window in which to fit their entire planned field effort. Most scientists in Antarctica work very long hours, often seven days a week. That said, not valuing downtime can be counterproductive and most teams recognize this. So, while the work at hand can involve long hours over the course of days and weeks, rest and recreation are also kept on the radar. The Antarctic summer provides a continuous 24-hour sweep of sunlight; nighttime doesn’t interrupt the sun’s flight across the sky. This availability of daylight, even at midnight, means that one can safely hike outdoors any time an opportunity becomes available. People take advantage of this as best

they can, often going hiking or skiing into the early morning hours. Recreation and downtime are neither forgotten nor deprioritized. So while the work can be grueling and lengthy, scientists and other Antarctic staff are careful to build in time for relaxation and recovery, while living with the fact that it can be sporadic and often unpredictable.

**RRX:** Assuming that scientists and workers have free time, do they engage in anything that would be considered group entertainment? Is there anything close to a movie theater? Do any of the scientists and staff play music? Better yet, are there any ad hoc “bands?”

**JP:** There are a great number of recreational outlets available to those who work and live in Antarctica. The research stations are generally stocked with musical instruments, skis, and even mountain bikes. There are arts and crafts centers, book libraries, video libraries, workout rooms, and gyms. And the depth of musical talent in Antarctica is sometimes astonishing. McMurdo Station has held an annual Icestock event, featuring a day-long lineup of revolving bands and entertainment. Holidays also provide great opportunities at the research stations and in the field camps for people to come together and reflect on the community of friends they have made during the most challenging times.

**RRX:** Any group of people in the same place develop a culture of sorts. Buzzwords that everybody says, favorite genres of film, music, etc. What’s one cool thing that you would consider

to be “Antarctic Research culture?”

**JP:** A delightful part of working in Antarctica is the long history of Antarctic phrases and slang. Words like “skua” (informal system of rehousing of clothing, food, and household items), “freshies” (fruits and vegetables), “Herbies” (powerful storms that rip through the McMurdo Station area), “MacTown” (informal for ‘McMurdo’), “bag drag” (the act of physically hauling your ridiculously heavy luggage up to the passenger terminal), and “The Ice” (one of best terms of endearment \_ever\_ for Antarctica). And then there are sayings like, “Is that weird, or just Antarctic weird?” “If you see a plane, get on it!” and “Way off the flagged route” (risky or nonsensical behavior).

**RRX:** With everything that goes on in Antarctic research stations, what are the creature comforts? Is the food good? Is the shower pressure wonderful? How much from home are people allowed to bring to the stations, like comfy blankets, stuff like that? How are researchers able to make the place like a home for the time they’re there?

**JP:** Life in an Antarctic research station is a simple one, and that’s not a bad thing. The din of the outside world grows louder by the day, and Antarctica impresses a degree of quiet and predictability into the days there. Station life is comfortable, and while you may have multiple roommates, buildings are warm and the showers are hot. Food is central to everyone’s mood in Antarctica, and the central dining areas provide a great venue for meeting new and interesting people. As one moves further afield, creature

comforts become more spare. Science that takes place in the deep field, hundreds of miles or more from a fully staffed research station, often happens out of tents, placed directly on the frozen rock or snow. Friendships forged in Antarctica often last a lifetime. There is an invisible bond that connects everyone living in Antarctica. There is an extraordinary sense of kinship that reaches across the vast expanses of ice and snow, and that bond runs deep.

**RRX:** Obviously, things are being researched in Antarctica that can’t be mentioned here, nor do we want them mentioned here. But some things you are researching you probably want people to know. What’s one very cool, non-classified thing you’re researching?

**JP:** Believe it or not, there is no classified research being funded in Antarctica. This is all hardcore science – cutting-edge polar research that has implications for interconnected processes across the globe. And scientists LOVE to talk about their work. The U.S. National Science Foundation and other agencies funding polar research strongly value open and freely accessible datasets that are available to anyone who has an interest in viewing them. Climate research is one of the most fascinating, relevant, and dynamic areas of impactful science that I have been able to contribute to. It has been deeply rewarding to me to have been given even a small window into the incredible work researchers are doing in this tremendously relevant area of research.



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# Lori Friday

## BY LIAM SWEENEY

*Live from Troy,  
NY*

**RRX:** Your newest album as of this interview is called “Live from Troy, NY.” When I saw you last, I grabbed a different album, “Blast the Message,” by accident. I’m going to go out on a limb and say the new one is live. Was it all one show, or cuts from different shows? And what challenges did you face doing a live album that you wouldn’t face doing a studio album?

**LF:** Your instincts are right on. “Live from Troy, NY” is a live recording from January 19, 2024, at the Hangar on the Hudson (get it at [bandcamp.com](http://bandcamp.com)!). We didn’t record the show with any plan to cultivate an album release. We were just looking to grab some audio clips for the videographer we hired that evening. We’ve been making an effort to populate our Instagram and Facebook lately, even though the three of us take to social media like a duck to a desert!

The front-of-house engineer at the Hangar, Troy Pohl, suggested we ditch the plan to use our little recording setup and offered to make a multitrack of the show. We sat on the recording for a while, because for us, putting some distance between the performance and the listen gives us a chance to dissolve our memories of it. When we finally hit play, we all agreed that we wanted to release it to our fans. We had been slowly working on a full-length studio album, but this live set was in our hands and only needed to be mixed and mastered.

I had a health scare the week before and had a biopsy performed. My doctor said I would not get the results until January 22 (the show was the 19th). I have a history of health issues, so the band was on edge leading up to this

show. Lots of tension. Five minutes before we went on stage, I got a notification saying my results were in (modern technology...). I looked at Kenny, who said “You gotta check it!” Results were negative. The rest of the night was fueled by an almost uncontrollable amount of endorphins and adrenaline. When I listen to this recording, I hear it. We’re at the top of our powers.

**RRX:** The bio on your website is great. I love it when bands care about that. Good stuff, because now I know that when you came into the band in 1996, you had just gotten a degree in vertebrate paleontology. What was the mental, or maybe “life,” transition between the world of fossilized rock to the world of butt-shaking rock?

**LF:** Superfriend and longtime fan Jim Meaney wrote that bio! Shoutout to Jim! I came from a family of academics, and it was expected that I would complete college-level education. I knew I would make my livelihood in music or art, so I decided to have fun in college and study something interesting. I dug up dinosaurs in the black hills of North Dakota.

I planned to continue for post-grad, but I walked into Pauly’s Hotel one night and saw Kenny and Joe playing onstage with some friends. That was it for me; fate allowed me entry into their world, and the transition was very natural. Not so much for my family, though. It took them about 10 years to accept it and gain confidence that I had a secure future.

**RRX:** Cacophone Records, in helping put together your debut album, maxed out their credit cards. Island



Records signed you to a five-record deal after just hearing you; no quarterly projects, no ledger sheets, just believing. It must have been a lot to live up to. Was it?

**LF:** We didn’t truly appreciate the expectation of being a major label artist. Maybe that was a good thing. We only knew how to be us. We recorded a completely honest record. Geoff Travis and Chris Blackwell believed in us because we had a sincere sound, and they wanted us to help bring rock music back to the masses. In 1998, our record had barely come out when Seagram Company purchased Polygram. We parted ways. Then people wanted us to sound like whatever was popular at the time, in order to continue on the major league level. That didn’t interest us, so we went our own way and have stayed largely in-

dependent since.

**RRX:** So when I saw you, I didn’t know which album was your current, so I ended up with “Blast the Message,” your sophomore album. Wildly popular. Can you tell us a little bit about it, and how you feel you’ve transitioned from that album, which is now going back decades?

**LF:** “Blast the Message” was an album we made after several huge life changes. The major label deal ended, our manager quit, and we were told our new demo wasn’t mainstream enough to be picked up by another label.

It could have been a soul-crushing ordeal, but it never occurred to us that we needed to change anything. We had an incredible lawyer who had written a play-or-pay clause into our Island contract, so we had enough money to pay



our bills while we regrouped to write the "Blast the Message" album.

From then 'til now is a long time - we've lived a few lifetimes and picked up several emotional and physical bruises and gifts. No different than anyone else who lives a span of 20 years. Marriage, a daughter, love, loss, unbelievable adventures.

**RRX:** Interestingly, you got booted from a Hell's Kitchen show, and your fans got out the pitchforks, getting you back on the bill. This show of support isn't exactly the starter kit for any band. You get that for more than just playing, more than just being good. Can you tell us more about your fans?

**LF:** We were originally slated to open for an incredible NYC all-star group, Peaceful Knivel. These guys are the cream of the crop. Mike Farris on vocals, Andy Hess on bass, Audley Freed on guitar, George Laks on keys, and Charlie Drayton on the drums. Every one of these guys is a legend and the very best in the business. Not just NYC royalty, but truly world-class players. And yes, we were bumped from the bill - something about the door guy's band wanting to open the show, I think.

This was in the days of message boards. For those who don't know, fans of a band would congregate in a chat room of sorts, sharing their thoughts, ideas, photos, etc. Super 400 fans had a strong presence on a Black Crowes message board. A big crew of them found out about the lineup situation and called the club to ask for their money back. Next thing I knew, the owner of the club - a tough biker sort - called us on the phone and said we were back on the bill, but we'd "better be good, or I'll kick your ass personally."

So, as you imagine, our drive to NYC was uneasy and we didn't have much to say during load-in and soundcheck. The night's outcome was yet to be determined and it could make or break us in that part of the city. Well, our fans turned up to support us and we had a

great set. Afterward, the Peaceful Knivel guys embraced us fully and we hung backstage well into the night, trading stories and laughs.

Our fans have always been like family. When we regularly toured the states, some would travel to several shows, which was a morale boost and great fun. We were touring Spain and the same thing would happen - some fans appeared in several different cities, and their dedication profoundly touched us.

We aren't rock stars; we have never put on any airs, and our fans know it. We play our music for each other, every time, but a big piece of our heart is with the fans when we perform. It's like playing for a big extended family. They become part of the lifeblood of the band.

**RRX:** You and Kenny (Hohman) were married in 2011, and you had your daughter Ellie in 2013. Now, you and Kenny had already been in a band relationship for over a decade, so maybe not much changed. But did you have to carve out the "music relationship" from the "married relationship?"

**LF:** When I joined the band in 1996, there was an agreement that no one would get romantically involved. The three of us became very fast friends and shared everything, all aspects of our lives. Kenny and I had a natural attraction that grew to a point where it became uncomfortable to hide it. Joe gave his blessing. We knew we were risking the life of the band by taking a chance on one another. We had spent several years sharing band life: planes, trains, and automobiles; cheap hotels, bad food, unsavory situations, etc. We were friends before we were a couple, so we never put on an act. And we still truly liked one another. I will like him when he is 95.

Musically, we are continuing the same conversation we started at our first jam session all those years ago. Every day is a thrill.

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# Fabio Frizzi

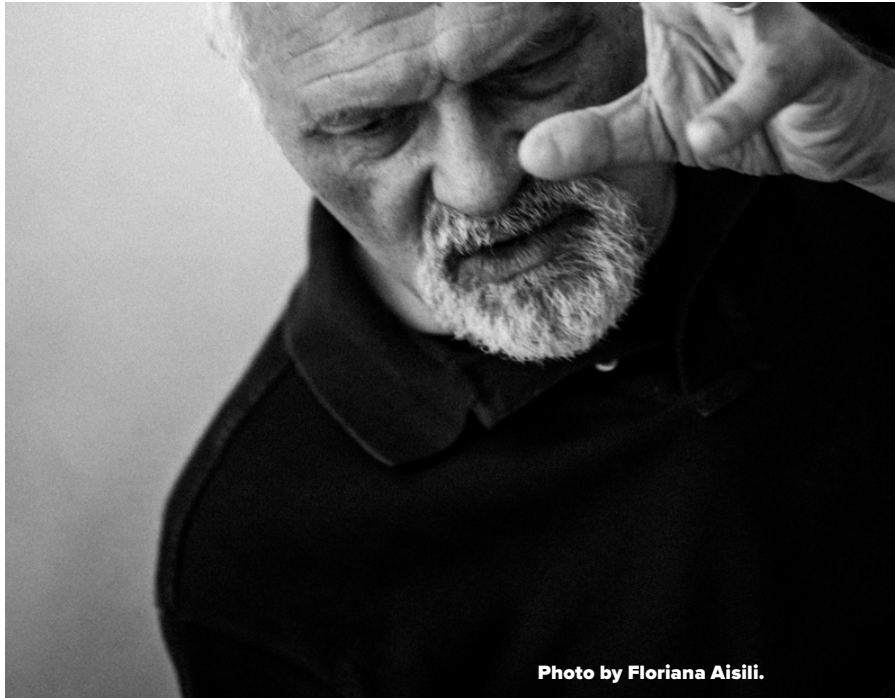


Photo by Floriana Aisili.

## *The man who scored Fulci's 'Zombie'*

**BY LIAM SWEENEY**

you find yourself on a piece of music paper with a note of a thin line of melodies and harmonies that are definitely compatible with the scene you have to comment on, at that point experience and technique help you to package the ideal piece. As if it were a dress that the scene will wear.

**RRX:** You're coming to Proctors to put on the score for "Zombie: The Composer's Cut." Lucio Fulci directed *Zombie* in 1979, and you did the original score. Can you tell us a little bit about the film, and what went into composing the score? Were there any musical or logistical challenges? Any breakthroughs when you were doing it?

**FF:** *Zombie* was Fulci's first horror film, although I believe a similar style was already present in many of his productions. First horror for Fulci, first horror for me. That time, I entered the game after everything had already been shot, and my first contact with the film was in the editing room. I found it a beautiful film, with a strong story and some extraordinary actors. It was certainly a big gamble for me; a genre that I had never tackled, a trust reconfirmed in me by Fulci, after we had worked so hard at the time of my trio Bixio/Frizzi/Tempera. I surrounded myself with some good musicians and the adventure began. Those were years in which sounds were rapidly renewed in step with instrumental innovations, especially keyboards.

Maurizio Guarini had recently discovered the Yamaha CS 80, a revolutionary synthesizer that we exploited to the fullest. Then lots of percussion when the scenes spoke of voodoo. Lucio, as always, made the most of all the musical elements I had provided in the editing. And from that moment on, I proudly linked myself to some of his most beautiful projects.

**RRX:** The landscape for music is changing. Films are coming out to streaming services like Netflix with lower budgets, and I feel that scores will suffer from this. Are there any resources that you know of, or any advice for an independent filmmaker who wants the power of a good score, but operates on a smaller budget?

**FF:** You can try calling me :) Jokes aside, it has become increasingly difficult to manage to build film music that has the pompous sounds of the symphony orchestra with stellar music production budgets. I believe that today we must seriously rely on a new craftsmanship, which combines in the best possible way the digital realities of virtual instruments with small orchestral groups and high-quality soloists who add humanity and emotion to the project. It is unimaginable what can be achieved with this mix of sound sources. After all, Hollywood composers like Hans Zimmer have been embracing this system for many years.

**RRX:** I once read that certain low frequencies produce feelings of dread

**RRX:** When I watch a movie, I don't always turn my ear to the score, but obviously, it affects me deeply. It's one of those things where you take it for granted; you would notice it a lot more if it wasn't there. So I imagine there's a bit of "clandestine service" that you go through. How do you create something beautiful or engaging that's not supposed to be obvious in that sense?

**FF:** What you say is very true, in fact we easily remember which are the films without music or the directors who have in their style a sparing use of music. Mine is a fascinating job, but it is never easy. First of all because the music written for a film, for a story, can never be judged, at least a priori, for its objective beauty. The most important evaluation is that of compatibility with the cinematographic product, with the requests and ideas of the entire production and direction group. And then, although the stylistic

elements are normal in the game, you also have to avoid the obvious. In short - a demanding profession, which however remains for me the most beautiful that could have happened to me.

**RRX:** Scoring seems like a whole universe. A sitcom score is vastly different than a horror score. And before this interview, I started just listening to the scores of the shows I was watching, and it felt like a lot of improvisation went on because of how the elements moved. Is there any improvisation when you're developing a score, or is it all planning?

**FF:** The creative part of composing is, in my opinion, a constant invention. You have to let yourself be carried away by what happens in front of you, by loves, by hates, by feelings and sensations. That you must inevitably make your own to tell them through music. Instead, the development and creation of the final soundtrack, of the scores, that part is definitely planned. When



specifically, and from my own years of watching television and film, and being a musician, I know how tightly bound to emotion music is. Just looking at the major and minor scale shows that just changing a third note turns something happy into something sad. Can you give us one trick of turning emotions, something that isn't necessarily music theory?

**FF:** I'm going back to what I told you before and I'll expand on it a little.

My personal credo could be conjugated in two simple words: total immersion and personality. I see the project to be commented with music as a large pool, in which you have to have the courage to dive, deep down. It's not a real comfort zone, but it's the only way to fully understand which direction to take, which sounds we'll need, and which emotional levers we should use. Personality, then, is a central element in the career of every artist; it makes your way of communicating in a

certain sense unique and understandable for those who know you and appreciate you. Once again, there are no pre-established rules; before getting to the end of a new score you'll have to cut, file, plane, as if you were a carpenter, a cabinetmaker. In the end, a low frequency or a super high one will help you find the right balance.

**RRX:** Where do you see your own work going from here on out? I know that everything about the creative arts seems to be on a precipice, but I also know that creative people don't stop being creative in adverse conditions. Maybe I should ask, what do you see as a challenge happening now, and what's your plan for it?

**FF:** I have been making music for over fifty years now. And we have faced many challenges and changes. Of course, the challenges that are currently facing all of us seem insurmountable, definitive. I am obviously thinking in particular of Artificial

Intelligence, which is calling into question every form of art. But I sincerely believe that this revolution can give, as a rebound, a new meaning to the other type of intelligence, that of the human being, which remains and will remain the only one completely free. I recently held a Master dedicated specifically to young composers. In the new generations, there is extraordinary energy, some of my students have amazed me with the quality of their music, of their ideas. And then, with regard to cinema, there is a new army of enthusiasts all over the world who will not give up. I am sure that none of these new producers and directors will ever think of entrusting the emotional musical baggage of their story to a machine. It will be hard, of course, but film music will continue to live through its composers.

**RRX:** This is where you get to answer the question I didn't ask. Comments? Remarks? Educate, enlighten, emote – the floor is yours.

**F:** I consider myself a lucky person because I have had the opportunity to live my great passion as a profession. I consider music as a good virus that everyone can enjoy in one way or another. In my Roman school, the Octopus Music Factory, I see people of all ages who approach music. Children directed by their parents, young people who find in the rock and jazz laboratories beautiful complications and the possibility of overcoming their shyness, elderly people who have always dreamed of playing the most beloved songs, who live this new and mature challenge as the achievement of an intimate, profound goal. I believe that making music and living music is a privilege for me; meeting friends and enthusiasts around the world is an aspect that gives great value to my life. For this, I must be grateful to all those who have accompanied me in this career. One for all - my dear friend Lucio Fulci.



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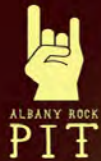


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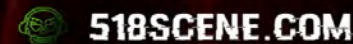


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# Zakir Hussain

*Five-time  
Grammy winner  
on tour.*

**BY ROB SMITTIX**

Zakir Hussain. Photo provided.

**ZH:** Rob, thanks again for calling. **RRX:** I'm excited to be talking to you. You're coming to our area on October 18 to the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall.

**ZH:** It's a great place to play by the way!

**RRX:** Oh, you've been there before?

**ZH:** I've been there with Béla Fleck and Edgar Meyer not too long ago, I think, maybe a year or so.

**RRX:** Oh, no kidding. Yeah, it's a really cool, nice historical building.

**ZH:** Yeah, it's a great-sounding room. I'm looking forward to coming back there.

**RRX:** It was interesting. I just watched a little documentary piece on it, and apparently the chairs have built-in holders for your top hats but nobody's

wearing top hats these days.

**ZH:** (Laughs) Yeah. The way they built this hall, it's amazing. There's a whole passageway behind the stage. I guess that was used by people who had to go from one end of the stage to the other for one act, and then turn around and go back to the other side. And then the underneath-the-stage thing, it's really cool. That's amazing that they've preserved this heritage building so well.

**RRX:** They really have and glad you're gonna be there again. This will be my first time seeing you there. Tell us about the tour that you have going on and what it's all about.

**ZH:** Well, I guess in some ways it's about reliving or ... how should I say ... resolving a relationship that has existed for almost 50 years. I'm not talking

about Rahul Sharma who I'm playing with, but I'm talking about his dad, Shivkumar, who I grew up playing with in my formative years. We spent quite a lot of time with him, traveling all over India, playing lots of concerts with him, and then eventually expanding the touring to Europe and then to America. I must have played over 500 concerts with him. He was responsible in many ways to help shape the way I have finally turned out as a musician. There are four people that I call my mentors, who have helped me in various ways apart from my teacher who was my father. One of them is John McLaughlin, the jazz guitar maestro. The other one is Mickey Hart, drummer of the Grateful Dead. Another is Shivkumar, Rahul's father. And finally, Ali Akbar Khan, the

great Instrumentalist musician of India; who gave me a job here in California to teach at his music school and sort of mentored me to the point where I was able to figure out how to perform my music, my interpretation of what I've learned from my father, in these parts of the world. It is very important for me to tie this relationship as a send-off to Rahul's father because his father just recently passed away. It was a big blow to Indian classical music as well as to me. It was a heart-wrenching event that took place.

Rahul is of course a worthy successor to his father. So to bring him here, and then with the audiences who saw Shivkumar and I play many concerts all over America. There is a big following that existed for him and me playing



concerts. So to relive those moments with not just his son, who's an incredible player himself, but also with the audiences to have a big send-off to Shivkumar. So that basically was the idea behind putting this together. But having said that, it's also important that Shivkumar's legacy carries on with his son who's such an incredible musician. He deserves to be seen and heard on the world stage ... everywhere. I guess, I'm just repaying Shivkumar for taking me along with him and showing me off to the world in India and other places and just doing the same for his son, Rahul.

**RRX:** Well, that's a tremendous way to honor him. That's fantastic. So it's not just a remembrance tour, this is a tour to honor someone who has been so impactful in your music and life in general.

**ZH:** Yeah, absolutely, and it includes not just me and Rahul but the fans all across the USA who have seen Shivkumar and I perform over the past 25

years. I know that they're gonna show up and they're gonna give a nod and say goodbye. When we play the music that was brought to us by him, the audience as well will recognize a lot of the stuff. We'll see how his son has blossomed into being almost equally as great as his father.

**RRX:** I love that. That's a really nice way to put it. Now, you mentioned that you went out to California to do a little teaching.

**ZH:** I used to teach. I started off my American stay way back in 1971. Well, actually I started when I was called to America to replace my father as the accompanist to the great Ravi Shankar. My father was not feeling well, he was in India while I was in Europe playing some concerts. Ravi Shankar called me and said your father is not feeling well, so you have to get on a flight and get to New York and play these five concerts with me. That's how I ended up in America and I played my first few

concerts in America with Ravi Shankar. Then Ravi Shankar arranged for me to go to University of Washington in Seattle and teach in their music department; Indian percussion. That's how I ended up on the West Coast. And having heard that I was on the West Coast, the Great Ali Akbar Khan (who was actually the brother-in-law of Ravi Shankar and teacher's son) called me and said, "Why don't you come down to San Francisco and teach at my school?" That's how I ended up here. And within a year of having arrived here, I met my wife and here we are, 50 years down the road, living in the same town and having an incredible life. Two daughters, I'm a grandfather now and it goes on.

**RRX:** Congratulations. And you know what? You mentioned earlier about your mentors in music, but it comes full circle and you actually got to mentor some as well.

**ZH:** Yeah, I do and I did and what's great about having these mentors, these

great musicians who helped me along is that I'm still connected to them. I'm working with John McLaughlin 50 years down the road. We just finished a tour last year and our album "This Moment" won the Grammy this year for the best global music album. And Mickey Hart and I released the "Planet Drum" album 32 years ago. So we're still working together. And then this year, Béla Fleck, Edgar Meyer, and I also received a Grammy for the best contemporary global album of the year. And that was the group that came and performed in Troy a year ago.

**RRX:** Oh, no. way.

**ZH:** So, it's great that all of years later, the connections haven't been broken. In fact, they've strengthened.

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# Charlie Clifford

## Capital Region Timekeepers

BY OP CALLAGHAN

**B**eing a drummer is not an easy job. Drummers have more gear to lug around, require bigger vehicles to transport, and need more time to set up than the rest of the band. We're the butt of more jokes, are usually the first to arrive and the last to leave, and typically have to sit in the back. And if that were not enough, imagine being the drummer for Troy's most dangerous band - the Lawn Sausages. Known as a band of degenerate musicians whose sole purpose in life was to pollute the ears of the unknowing, and steal some hearts along the way, the Lawn Sausages are set to wrap up a 30-plus-year career of offensive behavior and schlock rock on October 6 at the Cohoes Music Hall. Touted as Iggy and the Stooges meet the Three Stooges, the Lawn Sausages are celebrating the end of an era with one final show. I thought it was the perfect opportunity to sit down with Charlie Clifford, who has been drumming and babysitting for the Lawn Sausages since their first gig in 1990.

Art Fredette says, "Charlie Clifford is a singer's drummer; locked into the beat, and not afraid to kick you in the ass with a cue!" Jimmy Barrett, vocalist extraordinaire, says, "Charlie is a pure power drummer. He plays hard and fast, and lets the fur fly!" One of Charlie's longest collaborations is with Soul Sky's Mark Emanatian, who says, "I met Charlie when we were teenagers. As kids we played in a punk blues-based band called the Slugs. He was a great straight-ahead punk drummer, with energy and attitude. He can also kill on a ballad, is an amazing percussionist, and an excellent singer." High praise from one of the Capital Region's finest

musicians.

So, let's welcome the Lawn Sausages' Charlie Clifford!

**RRX:** Hey Charlie! Welcome to Capital Region Time Keepers. Tell us how you got started on drums.

**CC:** I got started at an early age, actually in a marching band. St. Peter's marching band, with Father Flannagan. It was a lot of work for me. I had bad arches and the drum was half my size. The parades were fun but work!!

**RRX:** Do you come from a musical family?

**CC:** There was a lot of music in my family. Grampa Frank Depasquale came off the boat from Sicily and played a mean clarinet. My parents met in drama class in high school in Rutland, VT. My father actually cut a record, a 78rpm cover of Nat King Cole's "Nature Boy."

**RRX:** Was your family supportive of you being a drummer?

**CC:** My mother was especially supportive of my playing, and got me my first kit: an old champagne-colored Ludwig Jazz kit. I somehow let it go. I'd give anything to get it back!

**RRX:** I don't blame you! Who influenced you early on?

**CC:** Growing up, Buddy Rich was king! I actually saw him once with a band full of 20-something kids. I will never forget that!

**RRX:** Did you take lessons? What was your first gig?

**CC:** My first combo was a foursome of guys from the marching band. Eighth-grade kids trying to cover "Band On The Run." It was doomed. The cool part was the sax player took lessons from Nick Brignola. I was lucky enough to work with Ralph Perfucato. What a



Charlie Clifford. Photo provided.

player! My parents couldn't afford the lessons for very long, but I got my flams and paradiddles down!

**RRX:** Important stuff! What are you playing now? Are you a collector?

**CC:** I still play Ludwigs. I have a Pearl kit and a very old Slingerland set that I'm still planning on bringing back to life. I wouldn't say I'm a collector.

**RRX:** You're being modest! You've got some green Vistalites, which are killer and rare! Tell us more about your playing experience.

**CC:** I have to say I've been lucky. Been in a few original bands. So not a lot of wedding bands. Played for a long time off and on (still do occasionally) with Mark Emanatian and Tom Dolan. Known those guys for more than 40 years.

What can I say about my time with the lads in the sausages??

**RRX:** Do you have a favorite gig?

**CC:** The memories and talk are endless. I have to say my favorite has to be

the first show at Billy's on Broadway. We let people in for free, sold earplugs, played "Louie Louie" for four hours, and charged five dollars to get out!!

**RRX:** That's great! Who are some of your current influences?

**CC:** My drum heroes haven't changed much. Buddy Rich is still great to watch and listen to. Keith Moon, and John Bonham. A lot of great stuff to watch with Phil Collins and Chester Thompson together.

**RRX:** Buddy's the best. Anything else that you'd like to add?

**CC:** Overall, I'd have to say I've been pretty lucky. Been playing a long time with people I love and consider like family. And I hope to keep on doing so!!!

**RRX:** Us too, Charlie!

Be sure to catch the Lawn Sausages farewell show on Sunday, October 6 at Cohoes Music Hall at 2 PM. It's gonna be something!



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# Leon Feingold



# MENSA®

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## American Mensa

BY LIAM SWEENEY

Photo from search.

**L**eon Feingold is a former president of American MENSA. He agreed to open his world up to us.

**RRX:** Mensa is an international organization composed of people with IQs in the top 2% of the population – the smartest people in the world. But Mensa exists in a world of the other 98%. And they're not always eager to engage with Mensa. A lot of people think that Mensa is a way for very smart people to feel superior. Can you tell me the truth of this, and the lie?

**LF:** It's been my experience that Mensa members join for different reasons. Some to challenge themselves, some to find compatible minds and personalities, some to work towards the betterment of the world, some because they enjoy some niche aspect of the organization such as game playing or attending gatherings, and others took the test simply to see whether or not they could get in. Mensa offers many different avenues of experience, and most have nothing to do with comparing ourselves to non-Mensans.

I imagine most smart people recognize they are smarter than nearly everyone else in any non-Mensa grouping, but

very few use that as an excuse to lord themselves over or look down upon others. Being exemplary in one category, after all, doesn't translate into being exemplary in others - and I know plenty of people who are brilliant but absolutely suck at life in other ways. Besides, these days in particular, anything that helps people feel good about themselves can be useful for self-confidence purposes. People who treat other people poorly for any reason are assholes, and they'd likely do that regardless of relative intelligence level.

**RRX:** I first failed the admissions test when I took it, only to find out I qualified from a test I took in grade school. I was having a shitty day when I took the Mensa test. Which brings an interesting question: can a good day or a bad day affect your IQ? Is there any fluidity to IQ, or does the environment you're in just affect your ability to take a test?

**LF:** It depends who you ask. (You asked me, so you get my response.) ☐

I think tests that fluctuate with mood and exterior influence are perfectly valid. After all, we are effectively different people when we are cranky, hangry,

self-confident, or insecure. It makes sense an accurate test of our abilities in each of those situations might vary somewhat. One obvious example is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test, which directly translates the test subject's responses across four different axes to describe personality types - and as an ENTP I found my results extremely accurate. Many professionals discount MBTI, as they've noticed some people's results can fluctuate - but that is exactly why I think it's extremely accurate. Some days some people are more extroverted, while other days they may be more introverted. It makes sense an accurate test would reflect these results.

Testing IQ isn't an exact science. A numerical value resulting from a test is highly correlated with intelligence, but somebody who scored a 168 isn't necessarily "smarter" than somebody who scored a 158. It begs the question, what is intelligence? What types of questions can accurately determine and rank intelligence? Expecting to be able to reduce all the factors of all the types of intelligence down to a single number is a fool's errand.

At best you'll have groupings which are generally useful, but it's very likely that people within a standard deviation of each other might very well be equally intelligent regardless of what their numerical results say. Besides, it doesn't matter how fast your computer's processor works, if you don't install good programs and know how to use them.

**RRX:** One thing I get as a common response when people find out that I'm in Mensa is that IQ is only one measure of intelligence. I believe this, but in a way, it weakens the role of IQ in intelligence. Why is IQ different than other measures of intelligence? And are the other measurements really about intelligence or is it personality?

**LF:** It's a good follow-up conversation to have. There are some people who are extremely good with numerical equations, some are savants with physical manipulation (think Rubik's Cube), some have amazing powers of recall, and others have a knack for wordplay. These are each held up as evidence of intelligence, and someone who masters them all would probably ace an IQ exam. But



reducing brain power to a simple number doesn't clearly indicate what specific skills or abilities a person might have or be able to develop. Most IQ testing happens at the age of 10 in the United States and is usually delivered along with verbal and math percentiles in order to give parents and teachers an idea as to where the kid stands in relation to their peers, allowing them to recognize whether different schooling, training, assistance, or activities would help maximize the child's development. A number like IQ is only as useful as it provides useful information, and as I said earlier - while even a loose grouping is helpful in determining whether (and to what extent) somebody is likely highly intelligent, it doesn't describe where their strengths lie and how that intelligence could best be tapped. That's where some of these other tests are useful.

**RRX:** Mensa works with gifted children. But this can't be easy. Classrooms are bulging out of the walls and teachers are so overburdened that a gifted child may not hit your radar. How do you deal with this? And what can the parents of gifted children do to reach out and get not only tested but guided?

**LF:** As a gifted child growing up in suburban Long Island, New York, I really appreciated the fact that my school had a program, called Project Extra, which allowed me to interact with other highly intelligent kids and solve puzzles and engage in creative activities that weren't available in regular school. These programs helped refine my thinking processes and gave me skills that I was able to eventually translate into other areas of my life in which I hadn't shown much aptitude, including sociability and self-confidence.

I would encourage any parents who believe their child is highly intelligent (and have some evidence to back it up) to enroll their kid in such a program if one exists. If one doesn't exist, advocate for it. Intelligence doesn't go away if it's not appreciated and trained, but like any

superpower, it's a responsibility that could eventually be used for evil instead of good. If nothing else, it would be a missed opportunity and a shame for ability and talent to be wasted simply because nobody took an interest in the child.

**RRX:** I know that I'm smarter than some people. I say this even though, by the numbers, I'm one of the world's smartest people. It's bad to talk about being smart in our society. So you hide it, or you become the embodiment of a flaw so that people will see you as balanced enough that the "smart" isn't a problem. How do other Mensans cope with that difficulty?

**LF:** There's a difference between being proud of your intelligence, and rubbing it in people's faces. Sure, people will naturally compare themselves to you, and if they're the kind of people who would be intimidated by a person far more intelligent than they are, they may try to bring you down in other ways - especially if you're the kind of person who is obnoxious about it. But that is more often a sign of their insecurity, rather than an indication you should hide your glow.

I've learned that I value my authenticity, including my intelligence. So rather than try to make everybody happy with me, I seek out and surround myself with people who appreciate me for who I am: strengths, flaws, and all, without having to protect them from my authentic self. This simple calculus has made my life immeasurably happier.

**RRX:** Mensa has the mental firepower to probably save the world. But with very smart people, it's like herding cats, and Mensans are as diverse in belief and opinion as anyone else. How can Mensa swoop in and bust out some power move to save the world? Is this ever talked about?

**LF:** Officially, the mission of Mensa is three-fold. It brings together highly intelligent people for three purposes: exploring the nature of intelligence; using our powers to help the world; and socializing among peers.



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# Capital City Crook\$



BY LIAM SWEENEY

Capital City Crook\$. Photo provided.

**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?

**JS:** Our first show was an unforgettable experience. It was our sister Lily's first curated art show, and she gave us the opportunity to perform. Well, it wasn't our best, it was a confidence booster, and got our foot in the door. Our next show we met our very good friend Shane, and he has been the biggest reason we are able to do what we do. His support with booking and collaborations means the world to us. As for our best show, they just keep getting better, so make sure not to miss the next one!

**RRX:** We all get a little support from those around us. And we also can be impressed by our fellow performers. Who do you admire in your community, and why?

**JS:** We admire anyone who is inspired to create, whether it is music, art, photography, etc. A huge shout out to Shane (SuperDark) for constantly giving us opportunities to perform and

collaborate. We would also like to shout out Rhakim Ali and Speig for pushing us and to be better rappers and producers. The same goes for Soo Do Koo, Aila, Ricky, KD3UCE, etc. There is so much talent in this community, and we are inspired by everyone. Thank you to all of you, even those not mentioned. You know who you are!

**RRX:** Artists, musicians, we immortalize. We set it in stone. Is there anyone who has passed that you feel you have immortalized in your work? If so, can you tell us a little about them?"

**JS:** We have two we would like to mention. When it comes to the art of lyricism, the one rapper who comes to mind is Big L. To this day nobody is touching his pen game, and he's often referred to as, "the punchline king." He's a master at keeping you on the edge of your seat, and that is something we incorporate in every song. Set it up, and then knock it down. When it comes to the art of producing, J Dilla is who we take inspiration from the most. His beats don't need words to tell a story, they speak for themselves. When

we sit down to make a beat, it's hard not to ask ourselves, "is this what Dilla would do?" But there is only one J Dilla.

**RRX:** With the exception of singing, everyone has an instrument, an inanimate object that has the distinction of being a lifelong friend. Smooth or temperamental, these objects have a character. So pick someone to answer, can you tell us something special about what you play, your technique, your instrument?

**JS:** Our weapon of choice is the iconic MPC (Music Production Center). While it is not your traditional "instrument," it allows the user to play it like one. Its ability to manipulate sound and samples is unparalleled. It is a sketch pad for ideas, and because of its intuitive workflow, it can turn sketches into fully realized ones. But it is never the machine, it is the person behind it.

**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?

**JS:** It is easy to talk about the easy times. That being said, when you are able to take the past, especially the hard times, and turn it into a song, it makes it a much more rewarding experience. It is our own version of therapy. To be able to take hard times and look through it with lense of music.

**RRX:** What instrument would you add to the band if you could? Is there anything you are trying to do musically that would be helped with one or more additional players?

**JS:** We are performers and entertainers at heart. We don't just want to rap and leave, we want to give fans an experience. Our beats are played off an SP-404 while we perform, which allows us to DJ and do a bunch of effects live with our instrumentals. But to be able to have a live band to cover our songs would be incredible, and would lead to a crazy live experience. To bring rap and live instrumentation together is a dream of ours!





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# The Night We Saved Rock n' Roll

BY ROB SKANE

**T**hree friends, none of us known for our decision-making skills, tried to save rock n' roll. While the mission wasn't completed, we got our point across, pretty sure... Are you sitting down?

There may or may not have been a band that sang something along the lines of "... you can still rock in America ..." and we all agree that was noble sentiment in 1983 or whenever that tripe was infecting our precious FM radio waves.

My friends and I were still living aurally large off of the fat of the new wave/punk rock/power pop land. We loved it loud, for damn sure. And then it all stopped, for us anyway. One afternoon, this absolute poison came spewing out of the Radio Shack car stereo speakers that I had painstakingly installed in the 1975 Oldsmobile Delta 88. We were mortified. We were livid. And we were afraid. Me, Fang, and Paul almost shed tears the first time we heard the band that may or may not have been called Night Ranger. It was appalling and we had to make a stand.

I mean, we were listening to Nick Lowe, Cheap Trick, Marshall Crenshaw, Graham Parker, and all of those lovely one-hit, 867-5309 wonders. Even the Stones were still tolerable ... sorta.

Then, out of the blue, opportunity knocked. One of the guitar yabbos

from the band that may or may not have been called Night Ranger was coming to our town to do a guitar clinic. I was like, "I dunno, Chuck Berry records and 'KISS Alive 1' were MY guitar clinic," but who am I to judge?

The guitar clinic took place at a local music store that specialized in ripping off unsuspecting teenage dudes who wanted the shiniest and the pointiest guitars ever (very poorly) made. But I digress - or do I?

We found out that after the guitar clinic, Plastic Soul Brother number 1 would be brought to a local watering hole to mix and mingle. And of course, we planned to be there. He seemed pretty cool, to be honest. But he was the enemy.

As luck would have it, it started to snow and snow. Fueled by jealousy, spite, Molson Golden, and misguided testicular fortitude, we came up with a plan. Snowballs. I know ... but it made sense at the time. Really.

It was cold, dark, and snowing like it ain't no thang. So, we put on our coats and headed outside. Making snowball after snowball and laughing our asses off as we hid behind cars and waited. Our beer muscles and black beauty reflexes were poised and ready for maximum rock n' roll vindication. And when we noticed our person of interest exit the building with his three or four local jock-sniffing pretend pals,

we unloaded. It was glorious. Direct hit after direct hit. There were some spectacular near misses too. All the better to startle you with, I guess.

Best part was, the dudes ran! They didn't even attempt to engage with us. We were stealthy though. It was too dark for us to be seen. We pelted these dudes left, right, and sideways and they ran away. Johnny Thunders would

have chased us!! Rory Gallagher would have fought us!! But the Knights In Satan's Spandex ran. Typical.

The band that may or may not have been called Night Ranger sold about 11 zillion records, I think. Clearly, me, Fang, and Paul failed. But we tried. We really did try.





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# Prog Digest

BY KLYDE KADIDDLEHUMPER

Once Upon a Time – in a Galaxy Far, Far Away ...

Well, OK – it was Downtown Troy at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall and it was 2007.

Klyde does travel down memory lane from time to time, and will wax poetic about artists, or shows, or whatever.

Rarely does this author find himself in a position where the topic strikes so closely to home and to a stage near you. Let's start at the very beginning and hop into the old Way Back Machine.

The Hall saw many great acts during the 2007-2008 season. Leo Kottke, Ricky Skaggs and Bruce Hornsby, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, the Pat Metheny Trio, and Queen Lati-fah to name a few.

And then, there was The Voice.

James Earl Jones in "Poetry I Love To Read" – a tour undertaken to support the school where he was encouraged and ultimately learned how to overcome his profound stutter.

This was not to be an award-winning performance. Not "The Great White Hope," for which he received a Tony award for Lead Actor in a Play in 1969 and an Oscar nomination in 1970. Not "Star Wars." Not being the first guest star on "Sesame Street." Not a turn on "The Big Bang Theory." Just a little poetry reading and question and answer. And a very nice, rather shy, lovely, yet physically intimidating gentleman.

As Constant Companion would say – these were the days of woo. You know,

that period where the relationship is new and shiny and all that jazz. I wanted to go. CC wanted to go. Mother wanted to go (writing on wall much?) Well, we get three tickets. Then, as a board member at the time, my director Laura calls: "We need a moderator for the Q and A, as Mr. Jones is quite hard of hearing and needs someone who can enunciate." So ...

We go to the show. I miss the bulk of the reading to sort through audience-submitted questions with his manager (yes – I still have them). No phone book reading – Verizon restriction. No Darth Vader questions. No, he is not going to say "This is CNN."

So, all is going well. I read questions, always facing Mr. Jones so he can hear what he can and read my lips some. All is going swimmingly.

Then, one of the questions prompts Mr. Jones to tell a story about filming "Coming to America" in Africa. He was joined by his wife. Well, at the time she was not his wife. You know, she was more than just his girlfriend, but they weren't married ... and he looks at me. We both blank.

Ultimately, an audience member yells out the word – fiancée.

Mr. Jones looks at me – I repeat the word. And still looking at me – there is a pause. You know, that little beat where it is expected someone is going to deliver the next line.

And from my mouth comes the following: "A subject about which I know nothing."

The audience laughs.

Mr. Jones laughs.

CC laughs.

Mother – not so much.

James Earl Jones passed at his home of 50-plus years in Pawling, NY on September 9, 2024.

We all have the times when we remember our brushes with greatness. Or where we were when someone died. Or our first kiss. Or whatever the important things in life are which are indelibly tattooed on our souls.

Among mine is the day I got to

share the stage with a man who overcame. A man who was actually larger than life. With a voice so thunderous that one might imagine it was granted him by Odin himself. Whose laugh was not simply infectious, but made your senses tingle.

I will mix my metaphors here.

Godspeed, James Earl Jones. Live long and prosper.

Until next time.

Klyde



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# Moochie the Dumpster Kat



BY ROB SMITTIX

Photo provided.

**RRX:** I (Rob Smittix) appreciate Peggy of Troy and yourself (Niki Kaos) asking me to be involved with Moochie The Dumpster Kat Musical.

**NK:** We're excited to have you on board.

**RRX:** So my particular character is the shopping kart man and your character is the shopping bag lady.

**NK:** That's correct.

**RRX:** You wanna explain a little bit about your character and who you'll be portraying in this.

**NK:** Sure. All the characters are based on people that Peggy has encountered while living near Hoosick Street and Peggy has a very compassionate heart for people who are maybe down on their luck or outside of the norms of society. Shopping bag lady is a woman who had some mental health issues and she had a very intense desire to keep cats even though she was homeless. So she would have a large cart with cat carriers

on her cart and would bring her cats around with her on the streets. She kind of collected and took care of stray cats while being homeless herself. It's kind of a unique story. Definitely from what I've learned from Peggy's stories is she had a lot of struggles and she was just getting by.

**RRX:** Yeah, and shopping kart man, my character is also based on a real person as well. And... right after I accepted the role, unfortunately, I heard that the real shopping kart man, who is a real friend of Peggy's actually just recently passed away.

**NK:** That's true. Actually it makes the telling of the story all the more poignant and I think in some ways more important because people who don't have a lot in life are still worthy of being loved and seen in this world. In some ways, what inspires me about the stories that Peggy tells with her comics that we're turning into this musical is to see those people and acknowledge that they exist

amongst us. They're surviving right alongside us. He definitely had a hard life but he was loved and cared for by Peggy and I've met him before too, a nice guy. He actually was in an apartment when I knew him. So he managed to get off the streets. That was a good thing. He definitely had some struggles in his life and he was a good friend of Peggy's. We're sorry, he's gone.

**RRX:** Absolutely, and then the star of the show, the character Moochie the Kat also is a real. I've seen an actual picture of the cat.

**NK:** Well, Peggy definitely has an affinity for felines. If you've seen her out and about, you might recognize the pink cat ears that she sometimes will wear. I have a pair myself.

**RRX:** I'm working on getting a pair too.

(Both Laugh)

**NK:** We'll have to get you one. We're gonna hook it up!

**RRX:** Thank you.

**NK:** But Peggy was taking care of Moochie and I think that's part of what drew her into this world with these other people in her neighborhood. Because Peggy likes to look out for the homeless people and the homeless cats around her neighborhood. Moochie and Peggy formed a bond. Moochie then became the star of the comics and now the star of the musical.

**RRX:** That's awesome. I would say... 95% of the songs were written lyrically by Peggy. You've been working for a while on the music behind it but for the actual musical, who's gonna be playing the music?

**NK:** I've tapped my crew from Curious Comet. Fred and Bob are gonna be in the pit crew on piano and bass. We're grateful to have them because they're just exceptional musicians. A lot of the songs are told from the perspective of the narrator in this case, performed by Mr. X, which will be Peggy. So when you see the musical, many of the songs will be in a narration format and the actors will be



acting out the scenes while the songs are happening. It's mostly music and not a lot of dialogue and a lot of action. So I'm excited about that. But we started writing these songs... gosh, almost three years ago. And after we got up to like eight songs, I go, hey, I think we have a musical here. We gotta get this done. And so here we are, we're doing it!

**RRX:** Yes, we are and the place that we're doing it at is a pretty cool spot. Definitely a historic place. I've looked it up and also saw that they have some ghostly things happening up there. I didn't know if you knew that.

**NK:** Maybe the aliens will come visit our performance too. We can have an interdimensional experience!

**RRX:** You know, I'm all about that.

**NK:** I know that's why I mentioned it. Mount Ida Preservation Hall is a church that has not been used as a church for a long time and there's a very dedicated group of local citizens who have been working to restore it and turn it into a

performance and community space. They currently operate a food kitchen as a community service but they also host a variety of events. In addition to our musical, they have a lot of other really cool events coming up. Like Miss Kitty's jazz event not that long ago. I'm also helping them plan another rock and electric music event for November 2nd. I'm just really excited for how much they want to do. They've created a space that welcomes the community and supports the arts. So I've been grateful to be connected with them and having them help us put the show on.

**RRX:** One of the other factors is that a portion of the ticket sales are gonna be going towards a good cause.

**NK:** Definitely, we felt that it was important to give back to homeless people as they were the inspiration to the story. We are going to be donating a portion of the proceeds from ticket sales to the Street Soldiers of Troy, which does incredible work feeding people who are

food insecure and helping homeless people with needed essential items so that people can survive. That's something Peggy and I have always shared in common. As part of our friendship, we really like to help take care of other people. That organization does an incredible job taking care of other people and we're honored to help out. They don't even know it yet but they'll be surprised when hopefully they get the big check from everybody showing up. Lots of ticket sales equals a bigger donation.

**RRX:** That's right. I was just thinking about this, how do I compare Moochie the Dumpster Kat to anything else that's out there? There's not really a lot of musicals that are similar, but I was trying to make some kind of correlation. This is what I came up with... it's like Ironweed meets Sid and Nancy, meets Garfield. You know what I mean?

**NK:** I do and I'm happy that we are a bit unique because I think it's cool to try something different. We are blending a

story that on its face sounds pretty depressing, homeless people and homeless cats. But... there's good humor, there's camaraderie and there's the spirit of cooperation without giving any spoilers. I would like to think that it will be a very emotionally satisfying show because we're gonna draw you in and really get you invested in the characters. You'll get to see what the end is, if you're there,

**RRX:** You may laugh, you may cry and you also may leave there feeling like you did a good thing. You saw something that was entertaining but you also gave back to the community while doing it.

**NK:** That would be the ultimate for me. I can't ask for more than that.

Moochie the Dumpster Kat Musical  
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In contemporary America, it may seem that the chief export of the Amish is furniture or apple cider, but it's probably a misconception. When the members of the Amish Outlaws celebrated their coming of age, Rumspringa, they decided to stay in our world.

And when they put the band together and started playing, they decided to stay in our hearts.

We had a chance to talk to band member Ezekiel.

**RRX:** When I first heard of the Amish Outlaws being a band, I thought it would be folk or country; it had to be. Then I see the video for your funktastic cover of Bell Biv DeVoe's "Poison." And then other hip-hop covers. And then Black Sabbath. So two questions: why did you decide to do covers, and why did you decide to cover so wide a range of genres?

**Ezekiel:** When the band first started, we were playing some originals and

covers, but covers did win out and the answers to both questions go hand in hand. Speaking for myself, having been raised Amish, I hadn't really heard much music until my teenage years and then when I left on Rumspringa. I became obsessed pretty quickly and dove into everything - rock, classical, jazz, old country, bluegrass, hip hop, you name it. So when we started to play music, I wanted to do it all. The first two covers we played were "Insane in the Brain" by Cypress Hill and "Coming to America" by Neil Diamond. That is how all over our tastes were. Of course, the non-Amish guys in the band thought we were nuts at first and were probably right. Just playing those songs was and still is as much of an expression of what I love as playing original music has ever been, and I have done both over the years. The joy for me has always been live performances and seeing the reactions of people, especially when we are throwing so many

curve balls at them.

**RRX:** You are former Amish, four of you, born and raised. And when you went through the Amish "coming of age" of Rumspringa, you decided, upon spending time in the world of technology, not to return. And you decided on music with your transition. Were you all always interested in music, even before Rumspringa, or did it come about after?

**Ezekiel:** It very much came after. I had heard bits here and there and was always intrigued but it wasn't until my first real English (non-Amish) friend played "The Wall" and "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" for me on his father's vinyl copies, and I was able to look through the layouts and lyrics that it hit me how much of a deeper meaning music had than just a distraction or just for entertainment. It sounds pretentious, but it was suddenly "art" and as much as we take music and performance seriously, we always

keep in mind that you can't spell "fart" without "art," and as such never take ourselves too seriously.

**RRX:** In the Amish community, you are not allowed to own musical instruments. Does that mean music itself isn't allowed? Or is it contained, say to a church choir? Is music something you can live without, or is it a human need that transcends the notion of frivolity?

**Ezekiel:** The only music among the Amish is singing from the *Ausbund*, a book of hymns that doesn't contain notes or melodies. Just the words. How to sing it is passed down from generation to generation and, like the "we don't have a telephone" game, changes often. Music is something I love more than anything besides people. Not to be lazy and use an answer I gave elsewhere, but an interviewer recently asked me what music means to me, and I think I nailed it - "Everything. Besides my family, it is the most



important thing to me. I guess air, water, shelter, and food have to also be on that list but I'd die without music too."

**RRX:** I read that your parents, if they don't approve, at least are glad you're happy. There is a misconception about the Amish and shunning. Can you speak on that a little?

**Ezekiel:** Most people that I have met assume that if you break the rules or leave the Amish lifestyle you are automatically shunned, but the way it works, or at least worked for me, is the Amish don't believe in baptism as a child and until you're baptized you aren't bound by the church's laws. When you turn 16 you go on Rumspringa and then make the choice whether or not to join church. If I had joined church and then left, I would be shunned. As mean as it may sound, though, the shunning is tantamount to an act of love, it is done to hopefully bring the person back to the Amish faith and back in the graces of God.

**RRX:** You guys leave it all on the stage. I was amped after watching you guys play. I definitely hear funkiness. When you were putting your sound together, did that level of bounce and energy just come out? Or was it a slog to put it together?

**Ezekiel:** It just came out. We love doing this. People often say our job must be the best and I can say it is. It isn't easy, but it is fun. We travel so much; there are times we've done seven shows in a row, with the last three in one 24-hour period after driving three or four hours from show to show with just 40 minutes or so at a hotel or a Wawa bathroom to get cleaned up and changed. So it isn't always easy to get on stage and be excited and full of energy, but the way we see it is a person at our show probably worked a job all week, drove back and forth to work, took out the garbage, took care of their kids and dogs and fish, and are spending a few bucks and one of their nights off to come see us. So we don't have the

right to not give 100% every time we step on a stage, no matter how small, hot, or close to a stinky dumpster it may be.

**RRX:** Since you weren't allowed to have musical instruments in Amish life, what was it like picking out your instruments? Did you luck out and just find good stuff? Did you find any old thing and adjust? Any friends help?

**Ezekiel:** I always loved the low end for some reason. I wanted to play upright bass at first, but it was too big and expensive. I got a \$50 bass from Sears as a teenager that our drummer's son, Sammy, now has that I played in my first band. I didn't touch the bass for many years until this band started and it's now been over 21 years and I haven't put it down for more than a week or two of vacation once a year.

**RRX:** This is where you answer the question I didn't ask. Comments? Remarks? Enlighten, educate, emote – the floor is yours.

**Ezekiel:** My favorite pizza topping is all of them. I once ate a triple-decker sandwich for lunch and then an entire family-style size serving of spaghetti and meatballs for dinner three hours later, went to the bathroom to throw up because I was so stuffed, then came back, finished my spaghetti and meatballs and had tiramisu for dessert. I also eat a lot of salads and run a lot to try and make up for all the eating. The guys I am in this band with and the guys in our crew are the greatest people I have ever had the joy to work with and they make almost every moment a true joy. And I can speak for all of the Amish Outlaws and our crew that we owe everything to our loved ones and families for their patience while we chase this crazy dream. And we owe the fulfillment of that dream to every person that loves and supports this ridiculous band we are in, including people like you, Liam.



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# Curveball

*Not the Phish thing.  
Maybe better...?*

**BY SKETCHY HUBRIS**

“Never lose the groove in order to find a note.”

— Victor L. Wooten

Curveball, the band, is comprised of James Hart on guitar, William Reinke on drums, and Liam Murtagh on bass.

**RRX:** How did the band come about?

**JH:** Originally, we were a four-piece band, with Jay Thorsey of Otobo also on guitar.

**WR:** I met Jay first and we had a band called Mr. Sunshine that lasted a bit. Jay had seen me posting on Instagram a bunch of funk drum riffs and said “Hey, we need to start a funk band.”

**LM:** That may have happened, but for me, I remember getting my bass set up by Jay at Guitar Center and asking him if he knew of any bands I could play with. I was practicing but hadn’t played with a band before. So Jay just

took me along to practice with Will, and we meshed. Otobo started evolving from a sound experiment into a band. James Hart had joined the band and Jay left to concentrate on Otobo.

**RRX:** Why the name Curveball?

**WR:** Well, my roommate and band cheerleader at the time, Connor, would be around for rehearsals while we went off on tangent jams, with no plan, whatever vibe came to us. So one time he drew open the door and said, “You guys should be called Curveball because I never know what direction you will take next.”

**JH:** The name is not Phish-related, though Phish had a festival named Curveball. Not related.

**WR:** The only one in the band that listens to Phish is James.

**RRX:** So not Phish related. What do you find yourselves listening to?

**WR:** A whole mishmash: classic rock, techno, Latin salsa, jazz, punk, sometimes even classical. I guess

everything except for jam band and country. I will make an exception for Hank Williams Sr.

**LM:** My foundation in music is rooted in what my dad played in the house: all the classic rock. Most of the time super heavy.

As I branched out from that, I got into rap and hip hop, particularly Madlib and MF Doom. I think that is why we sound like we do - we pull from a rich musical DNA. We all kind of search for the weird stuff.

**RRX:** James played a more recent piece for me the other day; what was that called? I do like your titles for songs. Where do they come from?

**JH:** “Double O Funk.” I first wanted to call it “Funk 01,” but that sounded like Funko, and Will said, “Let’s put it on the other side, like 007.”

I try not to be too precious about song names.

**WR:** I have a habit of spewing hot garbage out of my mouth. Sometimes it

works, and it made me think of James Bond. It sounded like a song you could seduce someone too.

**RRX:** I know going forward you are planning more songs with lyrics?

**JH:** That’s been the big project the last couple months.

**WR:** Yes, we have taken great strides and have two complete originals with lyrics and four covers of songs with vocals.

**RRX:** The issue this appears in will be the October issue, but they tend to be out early, so the show at the Avalon Lounge on September 26 with New Monarchy and Otobo might have passed. Will you be doing vocals for this show?

**WR:** Yes, it’s been our only criticism. After shows, people come up to compliment the band and ask where our singer is.

James is bearing that torch.





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# Liam Sweeney

*Obligatory book schlep*



## BY HUGH MANATEE

**RRX:** You just had a new book published called “Troy Love Story.” Can you tell us a little bit about it?

**LS:** First off, “Troy Love Story” isn’t a romance. There are romantic elements between some of the characters, but overall, it’s a love story to the city of Troy itself. It’s an anthem to Troy or any north-eastern Rust Belt city that’s going through change. It follows a group of people who used to rule the city and its music scene as they lose one of the patri-archs to an opioid overdose. It brings them together for one last shot of glory while changes in the city are tearing them apart.

**RRX:** Gentrification weighs heavily in the story. What does it mean in the story, and in real life?

**LS:** In the city, the biggest effect of gentrification is the closure of a nascent venue run by one of the group, Jordan, who’d gone to New York City but hadn’t forgotten her Troy roots. She had the misfortune of her venue not fitting the city’s new aesthetic.

In life, it means people coming into a city, falling in love, improving it and/or simply investing in it, and changing the character of the city, ideally for the better. Sounds great, but the rents get jacked, and people who called the place home for decades suddenly can’t afford to live there. Not only that but populations get shifted, so neighborhoods with historically low crime end up with more crime and lower home values. So where the center of the city gets a boost, it’s at the expense of the outskirt neighborhoods.

**RRX:** You’ve been a writer for many

years. You’re also a writer and artist for Xperience Monthly. How hard was this book to put together?

**LS:** Mostly I do the covers and layout of the paper here. It’s not much. Some interviews, and I write content for the web-site. As far as being a writer, the physical work is just labor intensive, but keeping an idea developing throughout the writing process is very difficult. And if you want to get published, you have more rules to follow.

**RRX:** Are your books in bookstores? Can I get it at Barnes and Noble?

**LS:** Yes and no. My book is in the Market Block Bookstore in Troy, and the Book Barn in Stuyvesant Plaza, and you can get it on the Barnes and Noble and Amazon sites. But it’s very difficult to get books published by an independent press into a Barnes and Noble brick-and-mor-tar store, even if you’re a local author. But like I said, it is on their website.

**RRX:** What would you say to people starting to write?

**LS:** Do it. But start out doing it for yourself. If you go out and get books on how to get published, you either end up frustrating yourself, or writing stuff that’s publishable but feels like a dead fish to you. Write wild sh\*t your friends would want to read, that you would want to read. **Build your chops that way.**

**RRX:** Any final words?

**LS:** I’d like to thank you, Hugh, for doing the interview, and Xperience Monthly for giving me the space to talk about the book. This book has been in the pipe for three years, and I’m glad to be getting it out and in the wild. I’m having a book signing at Market Block Books on Saturday, October 26 from noon – 2 p.m.





# Jimi Bell (cont)

*Continued from Page 5.*

on his lap, and he's bouncing her and the TV's playing. All of a sudden, Black Sabbath's "Paranoid" comes on the TV. Ozzy's going, "Look, Aimee! There's Daddy! There's Daddy!" You know, going nuts because, you know, he's showing his little girl that her father's on TV. It was just a great moment.

**RRX:** No one thinks of Ozzy as a dotting parent.

**JB:** No! I mean, you see how he treats his kids on – of course, that's all part of the show. But Aimee's the one that did not want to be in the show, so that's why that whole thing, that never happened. She stayed clear of it. That was a great situation.

So, I go home. Then, all of a sudden, I heard that they had decided to stay with Zakk.

Somebody had said something as far-fetched as, "You know, Jimi, you might not have gotten it because you're left-handed, like Tony Iommi." I go, "Well, I never thought of that, but weirder things have happened." I said, "I don't really think that that was it."

**RRX:** You're still out there. You're still producing. You're still having what I have to gather is a reasonably good time doing what you're doing.

**JB:** Yes!

**RRX:** The one thing you never know is, if this had happened, would I be the same guy I am today?

**JB:** Well, here's the other problem. Back in the '80s, I was not the most well-behaved person. I was always very polite. I was always this person that you're talking to like this, but I had some – I had a few bad habits that I was doing.

**RRX:** Yeah, there was a time for that.

**JB:** I got an opportunity to go out on tour with a heavy metal band out of Germany in 1999. I had let my hair go all grey

already. So, I had to die my hair jet black again and I head over to Germany. I went on a tour with this band, Thunderhead, that was kind of big in Germany.

We were opening up for Metal Church. From there, I met the original singer, David Wayne. He brings me aside and says, "Listen, this is the only tour I'm doing. I was only doing this one record." He says, "I'm doing a solo record. Do you want to be my guitar player?" I said, "Absolutely." So, when that tour ended, I got together with my buddy B.J., who plays drums. You know; you met him. He was there.

**RRX:** I met him. And he's next on my hit parade.

**JB:** Yeah, yeah. And so, him and I got together and started doing all these tracks for David Wayne, and we wrote the whole record. And then, that's kind of like how our working relationship started. It started with Thunderhead because we wrote songs for that. And then finally, then David Wayne's Metal Church was the whole record.

Then, we worked with this singer, Mike Vescera. Mike was a Connecticut person as well locally for a while. At that point, that's when I ended up getting in House of Lords. I got a call from James Christian in about 2005.

**RRX:** Yeah – when I mentioned the name to a couple of the guys at the magazine, they were like, "Wait a minute. I know that name." They go, "Oh god, yeah! I know them." You guys just released a new single.

**JB:** Right, and it's our tenth record since I joined the band. This album coming out in about a month and a half will be my tenth album with House of Lords.

**RRX:** When is that gonna hit?

**JB:** I believe the very beginning of October, actually.

This record, it just worked out so well. For some reason, I mean, I think it's a

great record. Frontiers, our label, is saying it's the best record that we've ever done.

**RRX:** "Crowded Room" (the first single) has got some serious freaking legs on it.

**JB:** Yeah, thank you. I had a good time doing that. I wanted to make some of the solos more interesting. So, I actually wrote quirks in. Because I usually just solo over whatever, maybe a verse section, and just call it a day with that.

I'm all about the singing. Guitar playing to me is not gonna sell the song. The song is all about the chorus, the hook, everything else. All these unbelievable guitar players that put out these instrumental albums, I'll listen to them for about two seconds and I go, I want to hear AC/DC. I want to hear the vocals. I want to hear the 2/4 beat. That's what I want to hear.

**RRX:** So, we've also got Beyond Purple coming up (October 26 at the Cohoes Music Hall). You're gonna be here for that. Is there a plan for a House of Lords tour coming up in the future or –

**JB:** Yeah. Well, I was actually talking to James about that today. We usually go to Europe, but he wants to go out this time. We were talking about it because he said the response on the record, we're getting so much good stuff, I really want to go out this time. So, we're gonna work on that. I'm still doing my stuff with Autograph.

**RRX:** Right. Yeah, I was gonna say, you've got a lot going on.

**JB:** Yeah, I joined them in 2019, when the guitar player had quit the band. And I had a great run with them for three years, almost three. And then unfortunately, the bass player, who was the last member, original member of the band, passed away - Randy. So, we continued on with another bass player. But then Steve, the guitar player that I took his place, decided that he wanted ownership of the name. So, there was all this big battle with

everything.

Basically, what we decided is – we had come out with an album on Frontiers called "Beyond." Randy played on that, and he loved all the songs on it. As a matter of fact, he turned in all the masters to the record company one week before he died, which was really crazy.

So, we got the record out and we figured after this stuff, why don't we just call the new band Autograph Beyond? And everybody agreed that we could do it.

**RRX:** So, I'm gonna do what I traditionally do as I end an interview. I always ask the folks I'm speaking with, if there's one thing that you could say, I don't know, to your neighbor or the world at large, what's the one thing that you would like people to take away and what's the one thing that you would like people to hear from you that you think's really important?

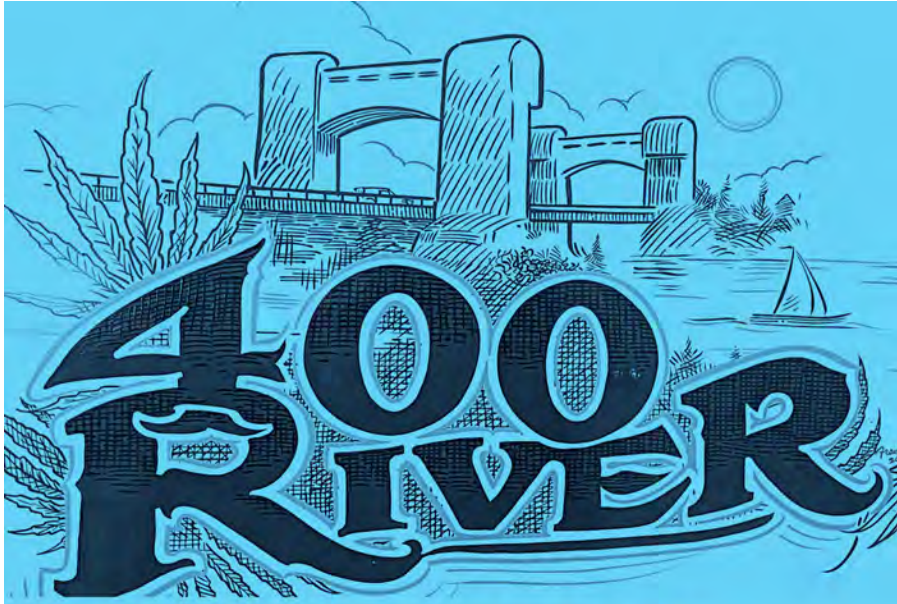
**JB:** Oh man. Well, to me, that means just be good to each other. Treat someone the way you want to be treated. I've learned that kindness goes an extremely long way as opposed to, like we were talking about earlier, all the fighting you see back and forth. People losing friendships and everything on social media and stuff. Basically, that's my thing.

I practice that every day, just being extra kind. Going the extra distance to everybody. And I do that with all my fans. I will always shake somebody's hand. I will always come out and say hi to somebody, if they want. I'll always take pictures. I'll always do this. And I have no problem doing it at all. I'm always right there to show an act of kindness.

**RRX:** Thus endeth the official interview. Thank you so very much.

**JB:** Oh, you're very welcome. As a matter of fact, my wife was just calling me again –





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