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Brian Ritchie

The bassist for the Violent Femmes finds an instrument of peace.

BY RACHAEL SKINNER

Brian Ritchie. Photo by Rachael Skinner

Brian Ritchie is a skilled multi-instrumentalist and founding member/bassist of Milwaukee's iconic punk/folk band, the Violent Femmes. Throughout his career, Ritchie has produced his own solo albums and participated in various musical projects. Among these pursuits is his passion for playing the shakuhachi, a traditional Japanese wooden flute. The shakuhachi serves not only as a musical instrument but also as a means of meditation and is considered to be a spiritual tool within Zen Buddhism.

RRX: What led you to your journey into Buddhism and meditation?

BR: I have been interested in Buddhism and meditation since my teen years. Meeting and marrying Varuni, who is a lifelong Buddhist from Sri

Lanka, brought me closer to daily and cultural contact with it. Then, studying shakuhachi sealed the deal. I'm not religious about Buddhism but the practice is enough in itself.

RRX: You had read about the shakuhachi in a book when you were practicing sitting meditation and that you figured it would be a suitable instrument for you to try out as a musician. How do you feel playing the shakuhachi has contributed to your breathing techniques during meditation? How do you incorporate it into your musical endeavors?

BR: I was not having too much fun with sitting meditation, so flute meditation seemed like a more appropriate practice for me and my restless mind. Some people do calligraphy, archery, flower arrangement, or other forms of

meditation.

RRX: You also met composer James Nyoraku Schlefer at the International Flute Festival, which ultimately led you to receive shakuhachi lessons from him 30 years ago. How long did you take lessons with James, and what was the most valuable insight you received during your time together? How was it to receive lessons, being you are otherwise entirely self-taught?

BR: I studied with James for seven years. Shakuhachi is a very difficult instrument and I never would have learned it without his guidance. But it also seemed natural at the time. Only now do I realize how much was imparted. Then I went on my own and taught myself for about 15 or more years until I started

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Photo by Rachael Skinner.

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studying with Genshin Sensei, who is the Kansu (head teacher) at Myoan-ji in Kyoto, which is like the Vatican for shakuhachi players. I have now completed studying the repertoire for that school and will go to Japan in May 2025 to receive my Kaiden certificate.

RRX: You have become incredibly skilled throughout the years practicing shakuhachi, which ultimately led you to receive a Jun Shihan (shakuhachi teaching license) from James Nyoraku Schlefer in 2003. What was that moment like for you, to receive your Jun Shihan from the very man who gave you lessons and guided you along the beginning of your journey?

BR: Jun Shihan means teaching master and it basically meant I was good enough to teach other people, which I sometimes do. However, I am not a full-time teacher due to my hectic touring schedule.

RRX: Upon receiving your Jun Shihan you also received the name "Tairaku." How did you receive this name and what is its meaning/origins?

BR: Tairaku was a name chosen by James and Yodo Kurahashi, who is another of my teachers. It means big music and they picked it because I am big, make a big sound and play big hunks of bamboo.

RRX: What are your favorite pieces to perform while playing the shakuhachi? What is the most unique song you have played with the shakuhachi?

BR: I use shakuhachi for the traditional meditation pieces, which is still 90% of what I play. That's not even considered music. It's considered as chanting through a bamboo tube. However, I can also use it for music. I recorded the first shakuhachi version of John Cage's "Ryoanji," and perhaps that's the most interesting piece outside the tradition I have played.

RRX: You had played in a jazz trio called the Shakuhachi Club, and the universe aligned the paths of you and

John Sparrow to perform together. Can you tell me how you guys went from jamming together in Shakuhachi Club to ultimately having him play cajon for the Violent Femmes when you decided to expand the line-up for the band?

BR: I had been playing with John on drums with jazz shakuhachi. I decided the Femmes needed some beefing up in the rhythm section. Cajon was an instrument I had been playing a lot of in NYC, so I taught John the basics. He has now gone much further than I could because of his more sophisticated percussion background. Then we brought the cajon into the shakuhachi music from there.

RRX: How did you meet Mike Kasprzak and have him become a part of the Horns of Dilemma?

BR: Mike was part of our crew, and we always break down the barrier between the crew and the band by using them in the Horns of Dilemma, sometimes even if they can't play! But Mike can play. So he's doing some of the cajon stuff John had been doing before he switched back to drums. It's very organic around the VF rhythm section.

RRX: What inspired you to create Brian Ritchie and the Zen Gardeners with Mike and John?

BR: John and Mike are actual Zen gardeners. When they are not playing music, they design and build Zen rock gardens in Milwaukee. So I just called them that as a literal thing. It's funny because people think it's a band name. It describes their other job.

RRX: What is the most profound moment you can recall through practicing meditation?

BR: I was playing a traditional piece from Hiroshima near an artwork from Hiroshima at an art museum. While playing, an adjoining work of art was affected by the vibrations and came apart, crashing to the floor with some violence. That was a surprise to me, the audience, and the museum curators as well. So that was a winner!



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Chris “Gringo Starr” Sprague

*Capital Region
Timekeepers*

BY OP CALLAGHAN

Chris “Gringo Starr” Sprague. Photo provided.

Chris “Gringo Starr” Sprague is a supremely talented musician, with a lifetime of experience that has earned him accolades and praise worldwide. This California man, who seems to have been born to play, is not only an exceptionally talented player but a very down-to-earth and humble guy. He’s the first person I’ve ever met who studied under the tutorial of The Tonight Show, and the only drummer I know who wears a mask. I’ve been waiting a long time to do this interview, so please welcome Chris “Gringo Starr” Sprague.

RRX: Welcome Chris! How did you get your start? How old were you when you started drumming?

CS: I actually got my musical start learning guitar from my older brother Frank at the age of seven. My brother

was a composition major at the University of Washington. His main instrument was guitar. Not only was he teaching me guitar, but I also was learning musical theory and how to read music, which I would learn later would become invaluable.

My interest in drums came at the age of 10.

RRX: Nice! So, you come from a musical family!

CS: Yes, indeed. As aforementioned, my brother Frank was a serious musician. Our oldest brother, Billy, dabbled on guitar but mainly loved the drums. He never played music for a living; he is an aerospace engineer. He always loved the drums and definitely influenced me to take up the drums seriously. My father, Bill, was a working musician as a trumpet player. He was

in the Air Force Band. Once he got out of the service, he played with numerous big bands, most notably Woody Herman’s, for a short stint. Deeper into our family history on our mother’s side, we are third cousins with Buddy Holly.

RRX: Very cool! Tell me about your first drum kit.

CS: My first drum set was a Blue Sparkle vintage Ludwig kit (1966 Ludwig Club Date) that I played and recorded with for many years. I was so excited to get them. I remember my mom taking me down to “The Pro Drum Shop” in Hollywood, CA, and letting me pick out a drum set. I still have them to this day and use them all the time for recording.

RRX: I have a 1966 Club Date in Silver Sparkle. They’re wonderful. Have you taken lessons?

CS: I’ve taken a handful of lessons during my teenage years. A couple with jazz drummer Chuck Flores, Ed Shaughnessy (most known for playing with the Tonight Show starring Johnny Carson), and John Shearer, who was a freelance drummer from England who played with a lot of rock bands back in the day. But, honestly, I studied mostly on my own due to the style of music that I play. I always said, “You can’t teach feel.” Roots rock and roll is something special and requires 99% feel.

RRX: Ed Shaughnessy is great. His triplet rolls are legendary, and he seemed so humble and easygoing whenever Buddy Rich was on the show. How was that?

CS: I took some “brush work” lessons with him. I was learning from a

Louie Belson book, and Ed really got me thinking about approaching fills and dynamics. I was talking dynamics with him, and I was using a set of 5A sticks, and he was playing with 2B, which are enormous!!

RRX: Do you play any other instruments?

CS: Yes, guitar, bass, and classical piano.

RRX: A one-man band! Tell me about your first gig.

CS: It was actually on bass at the age of 13. My brother Frank's band was in need of a bass player after his bass player quit a week before a show. For Christmas the year before, I got a Univox Beatle copy bass. I learned their set of songs (about 15) in a week and hit the stage. We were living in Los Angeles. I got to do about five shows, most famously "The Troubadour" in Hollywood.

My first show on drums did not come until much later. I was 21, in a band that my brother Frank and I formed called the Sprague Brothers.

RRX: Tell me about some of the bands you've played in.

CS: As mentioned before, I started out playing with my brother in a band called the Sprague Brothers. I went on to play with (and continue to play with here and there) Deke Dickerson. I had the opportunity over the years to back up many (what would be considered) "old-timers/legends" such as Duane Eddy, James Burton, Nokie Edwards (of the Ventures), Roy Head, Marshall Crenshaw, the Cadillacs, the Bobbettes, Dale Hawkins, Scotty Moore (guitar player for Elvis), Jimmie Lee Fautheree, Red Simpson, Gary U.S. Bonds, Freddy Cannon, and many many more. I have been the drummer in Los Straitjackets for the past 12 years. We have also been Nick Lowe's band for the past 10 years and just released a new album with Nick called "Indoor Safari"

RRX: What are you playing for a kit now?

CS: For the last couple of years, I became an artist representing Noble & Cooley. They are the kings of boutique drums. They have been around since 1854. Starting with making marching snare drums, bending their own shells, a process they still do to this day! They are the best of the best. I use a 20" kick, 12" rack, and 14" floor tom. I use the Paiste signature series, and a 19" Zildjian beautiful baby ride.

RRX: Beautiful drums. Do you play matched grip or traditional?

CS: I mainly play match grip unless playing brushes, with which I use traditional grip.

RRX: Who were your earliest influences?

CS: As far as drummers go, Gene Krupa, Jerry Allison, Howie Johnson, and Ringo Starr. As far as records that I would listen to and play along to: the Beatles, the Ventures, Buddy Holly, Frank Sinatra.

RRX: Tell me about your new group, the Sound Minds.

CS: When I moved to the Capital Region four years ago, I started doing a project with my favorite local musicians called "Gringo Starr and his All-Star Band" (Gringo Starr is my stage name that I use in Los Straitjackets). Our show consisted of playing 1960s garage and Merseybeat style rock and roll. This band consisted of Graham Tichy, Don Young, Ritz Carlton, Jake Guralnick, and Chris Osborn (who would come up to play drums when I would play guitar during the set.) This is such a great group of musicians! But it is also like herding cats, lol. The Sound Minds is me on drums, Graham Tichy on guitar, and Ian "Ritz" Carlton on bass. The Sound Minds are basically a condensed version of the "Gringo Starr" band that was brought down to being a power trio rather than six members. Much easier to control, but I still find it difficult to play on a regular basis due to my tour schedule and the

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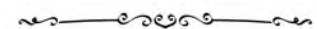
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Bonus

With the beat on the stick in his grip, he lets words prevail.

BY ROB SMITTIX

Bonus. Photo by Sheena Effner.

RRX: I don't know if you know this, but I rap myself, that's actually how I got involved in music.

Bonus: I did not know that.

RRX: Yeah, I grew up in Arbor Hill and the South End. I was the kid in the neighborhood with turntables, and then you know? Just kinda got into all kinds of music.

Bonus: Kinda came natural. That's how things happened with me too. Growing up in Schenectady, and everybody in between classes were free-flowing and battle-rapping. You had to come up with the best verse or the best diss on somebody.

RRX: So, Schenectady? I was curious as to where you grew up, and not that people can't rap from rural areas as well, but when you really get that urban aspect, that's where hip-hop came from.

Bonus: Yeah, I came to Schenectady probably at like 14 or 15. Before that I was in Worcester, New York, which is out by Oneonta, the Cooperstown area.

RRX: Oh, so it might have been a little bit of a culture shock.

Bonus: Oh yeah, totally.

RRX: Especially being a teenager coming to a new school in the inner city.

Bonus: I didn't even go to Schenectady High. I went to Washington Irving. It was like a relocation actually for me, because I was kind of a bad kid at the school where I was at. They were like, okay, we're gonna send you to this behavioral school. I lived with people that weren't my family or friends.

RRX: I'm sure it was probably all for the best, but I mean, that's a lot to go through as a kid. I mean, that's the upbringing of a rapper. And being a white rapper, I don't know if you follow this, but I kind of made up my own rule. And

I know a lot of white rappers don't abide by this, but I always do. Never, ever rap about being white.

Bonus: Yeah, I don't rap about being white, or about money, drugs, or b****s. There's the three things that I stay away from.

RRX: Well, I salute that because there's way too much of that.

Bonus: I try and tell stories and that's about it.

RRX: No, that's good, man. I don't know how old you are ...

Bonus: I'm 41.

RRX: Yeah. So we're in the same ballpark. We grew up in an era when hip-hop was at its peak.

Bonus: Probably the best it was gonna be ever! I grew up listening to so much different stuff, man. I was born in Texas. We moved from Texas when I was five up to New York. My dad was big ... I don't wanna say he's a hillbilly, but

he was definitely raised on country music and classic rock and that kind of stuff. My mom was into the Beatles, that era. So, I got all that pumped into me and a lot of country music, and then when I was in the 6th or 7th grade, it was R&B, hip-hop, a lot of '80s metal, too, and hardcore; I was into everything. Metallica and Anthrax and stuff like that, I started playing drums as well.

RRX: Oh, no kidding.

Bonus: Yup, drums has always been my go-to. I was in a band up here actually for a couple of years recently before COVID hit called Born Dying. A bunch of local members that I met up with, just mutual friends, and they were looking for a drummer, and I was like ... hell yeah, I can do this. I went back to my roots and played drums for a while.

Once they started shutting down all the venues because of the pandemic, we

lost all our upcoming shows that were booked. So all that got put on the back burner, and I started doing sound engineering courses. In one of the classes, the assignment was to build a beat. I know how to do this. I can go back to my other roots and start rapping again.

RRX: Yeah. So, that's cool.

Bonus: Came back out of the woodwork, up from the grave. I should say, he was risen again and resurrected. He's back! That persona, and doing the Bonus thing, and I haven't played in a band since.

RRX: Sweet!

Bonus: I have my drum set and still rocking out in my leisure time.

RRX: I remember, last year, I think it was The Listen Up Awards, that you ended up being one of the nominees for that. Right?

Bonus: Yeah, last year and the year before that.

RRX: Nice! I was really surprised, some of the names that I thought should

have been nominated in hip-hop weren't there. But it's a people's choice thing man. You gotta work it.

Bonus: What sucks is that a lot of people don't really give themselves the credit they deserve and don't go out there to get the exposure that they need to get that credit. You could put out some of the dopest tracks ever, but nobody's gonna hear them unless you let them know about it, and you can't put it on Soundcloud or on streaming platforms and expect people to hear it without self-promoting. Unless you got a team behind you, management or a promotional team that's doing that, it's not gonna go anywhere. You don't go on tour, you're not doing local shows, you're not handing out flyers, you're not going to meet the people and shake their hands. A lot of people don't put that work in.

RRX: No, you really gotta put that work in. I'm hoping this year the hip-hop community really does show up but

I can't twist anybody's arm.

Bonus: I also do a bunch of booking, too, and I have a small basement/private venue that I have and own. We do a bunch of private shows, and I try not to list the address for that because it's zoned as residential. And Rotterdam police have come here a couple of times and told me that I have to get permits if we're charging at the door. Mike Valente has also taught me how to manage myself; I appreciate everything he does for me.

RRX: He's a good guy to have on your side.

Bonus: I have my own record label. I'm not looking for anybody to sign me right now. Although I just got a sync deal with iHeart Media for distribution of one of my latest singles. So everything's going good. I'm just trying to figure out my level, too, like where I wanna be as far as status and do I wanna be mainstream. Or am I gonna stick with underground?

RRX: Yeah, that's a tough line to figure out. I mean, sometimes it comes down to ... do I wanna make money? Or do I wanna do what's really in my heart?

Bonus: I've organized, booked, and performed on four different cross-country tours in the US. All of them have gone off pretty well, and we got to the point where we were making money, but it's really just enough for us to get to the next city, book our next hotel, pay for gas and food, and we're relying on merch sales to have extra money after that. We're breaking even; you know what I mean?

RRX: But that's a win.

Bonus: It's a win. I'm getting my name out there and I'm now networked with people in just about every state in the country. I could go anywhere and have a show somewhere. It's pretty amazing, that's happened over the last four years.



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Eric Beetner

A Hollywood film writer questions the future of the industry... and his own.

BY LIAM SWEENEY

Eric Beetner. Photo provided.

Eric Beetner, known to me first as a crime writer, but known more to others as an 8-time Emmy-nominated writer and editor behind some of your favorite shows. He has something to say about the winds now blowing in Tinseltown.

RRX: Today, I saw a Facebook post you wrote where you spoke about being terrified to go looking for a job in your field now, and you're an eight-time Emmy-nominated film editor, writer, and producer, with 30 years under your belt. How can you be afraid to try to find work now?

EB: It's a complicated answer, but I'll try to summarize it like this: I've worked freelance my whole career, going from show to show working for a few months at a time, hoping a show will get picked up for another season. That lifestyle is fraught with anxiety and uncertainty in the best years, but I've managed to work consistently for over two decades because I have a good track record, have

been on some hit shows that went multiple seasons, and generally made good contacts by being good at my job. And it's my choice, so I need to suffer the repercussions.

Since the takeover of the entertainment industry by streaming services (which are owned by tech companies, not traditional studios), there has been a seismic shift in how the business is run. Silicon Valley is all about "disrupting" business models (see what ride shares did to the taxi industry) so they bring a different mentality to TV and home entertainment.

With so much programming out there, all available at your fingertips, the pressure to create new shows isn't as high. They also aren't beholden to advertisers wanting to get their products in front of people, so the traditional Fall TV season is a relic of the past. But with that, went the certainty of when the work would be there. I've cut shows that have sat on the shelf at a streamer for more

than a year. There's little incentive to release them in a timely fashion.

They also only focus on the bottom line, so shows aren't given a chance to grow an audience. They typically kill anything, even successful shows, after three seasons because it's cheaper to develop something new, rather than pay people higher rates for a hit show.

Couple that with the strikes that slowed or shut everything down, plus the fact that streamers have been around long enough now that they can no longer function in the red (like so many tech companies do at the start), and they are all in a conservative spending mode.

For some reason, a big victim of that has been unscripted programming, which is where I mostly work.

After the strike of 2008, reality shows picked up because they didn't have to pay writers and actors. That didn't happen this time. The drop-off in production has been over 50%, which is unprecedented. You'll have a bad year where there are

15-20% fewer jobs, but never anything like this.

Plus, everyone has noticed that episode orders are getting shorter. A TV season used to be 22 or 24 episodes long. Now if you get eight, you're lucky. It means jobs are shorter and we're out of work much quicker, on the hunt for the next gig.

Also, with eyes only on the bottom line, many productions are moving overseas. I know several game shows with American contestants and an American host that shoot in Ireland or Australia. It's cheaper for them to fly people over than to shoot in L.A. We've lost a lot of production to Canada over the years, but most of those came back to L.A. to edit. No longer. The shows that shoot in other countries are also editing there.

2025 has a new slate of tax incentives to keep production stateside, but it might be too little too late. And it will take at least a year to ramp up productions to take advantage of those new incentives. A

time frame most of us can't wait out.

I know that's a lot, but it all combines to a perfect storm of the simple fact that there are almost no jobs to be had out there. I compared it to Detroit in the 1970s when the auto industry packed up and left town. That city has never recovered.

RRX: A lot has happened in the past decade, let's say. The dominance of streaming services, COVID, the SAG-AFTRA strike, and the rise of AI. What kind of looking glass has Hollywood gone through?

EB: I think Hollywood's talent for putting on a good show hides these growing pains from the audience. They still get new shows and movies all the time so nobody outside the industry sees the struggles going on. And with streaming, everything you missed the first time is still sitting there so nobody is crying out for more content. We have far more than we could ever watch. So, it won't be solved by consumer demand.

I think the thing the streamers have realized is that the business model they disrupted is one that worked for a myriad of reasons. It's why we're seeing the slow creep back to an ad-based model. That worked for 75 years. It won't work to pay under \$20 a month for a service anymore. They can't sustain it. They have been slowly adding short ads, but soon we will be back to ad breaks in the middle of shows, and everything the streamers came to destroy and the reason we all loved it, will revert to the old model because that's what makes this business run.

In the name of saving money, they will keep pushing AI, and the unions will keep fighting for protections against it. I'm sure we will end up with some hybrid in the end because that is a freight train coming down the track that you can't avoid. There is too much Silicon Valley money behind AI for everyone to stop and say "Well, okay, we tried but nobody wants this."

RRX: Editors, writers, and

producers are the unsung heroes in Hollywood. And like most unsung heroes, people might not think it would matter if a machine replaced them. If you, and everyone in the guts of Hollywood, were downgraded or outright replaced by AI, how would people eventually notice? How would it downgrade their experience?

EB: All your favorite movies or shows or music or novels all have a certain intangible quality that makes them connect with an audience. Sometimes it is a niche audience, sometimes it goes wide, but there is a human connection or a shared experience behind it. AI lacks that, and it always will.

Now, much of what is produced by humans is also derivative, unoriginal, and trite. Making something fresh and new and unique is incredibly hard and most times it's a chance combination of alchemy between cast, writers, and directors that can only happen once. It's why every band isn't the Beatles. You only get that combo by total chance and it only happens one time.

So, for the content that sits in the middle and isn't great, but might still satisfy a nostalgic itch or just be simple comfort food to put on in the background, AI might go unnoticed by most consumers. Writing, anyway. I don't think we'll get to a point of AI-generated actors on any large scale. There will be stuff out there, but it won't be the mainstream.

Once the promise of home-generated AI comes to fruition, I can see that taking off. If you can plug in your own wish list of what movie you want to see and it can spit out an AI-generated version of that for your eyes only, I can see that being popular. The trouble is, if you want to see your favorite actor in that part and they haven't given permission for their likeness to be used, then you're out of luck and it all falls apart. That's a big fight happening now.

I'll go on record saying that I'm no fan of AI and I think the "learning" process

Continued on Page 52...



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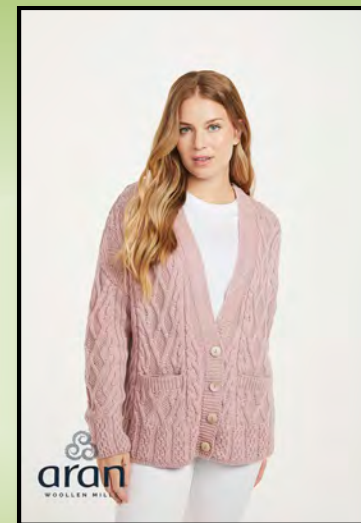
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BY CHRIS BUSONE

In the grand scheme of things, the life of a local artist isn't flush with rewards, be they monetary or otherwise. Nights can be long, attendance can at times be spotty at best, and gigs harder to find than a hairy ape-man in the Himalayas.

So why do we do it? It's a valid question. Let's talk about it.

To be fair, I don't think anyone starts out to be a "local" artist. I know I didn't. No one exclaims from the back seat of the family Pontiac at seven years old, "Dad, someday I'm gonna rock the house over at Ginger's Ten-Ten Lounge!!" I have to believe we all began our artistic sojourns with loftier goals. And even though the percentages are against us, and in the face of sometimes surly club owners, cramped stages erected on milk crates, and "ONLY DOMESTIC DRAFT BEERS ARE FREE FOR THE BAND" ... we soldier on.

I personally have been at this since the early '80s, straight outta high school, and set out for parts unknown with a band comprised of my best friends in the world. We went to places like Portland, Potsdam, Presque Isle, and Walla Walla, Washington. We located these entertainment meccas like savages, without the aid of GPS and smartphones. Just Rand McNally maps lit by cigarette lighters, in a dark, unregistered van, on those unfamiliar highways and byways.

But just as Roderick Thorp tells us (and John McClane's dirty T-shirt serves up a reminder), "Nothing Lasts Forever." By the end of the '90s, the gigs became fewer and further between, the money less, and the crowds easier to circumnavigate when heading to the bar between sets. Fate, it seemed, was writing on the

barroom walls with its indelible Marky Sharper that the end of this version of our existence was nigh.

Which brings us back to our original question: why, oh why, do we do it?

As with anyone, I can only speak for myself. But I have a sense that this may ring true for some of you as well.

I continue to do it because it's who I am. It's so much a part of me I'm not quite sure who I'd be without it, and I have zero interest in finding out. Moreover, it's the only thing anyone ever told me I was good at. And when I'm doing it, I feel like I'm good at it, like I'm good at everything. And that feeling sustains and revitalizes me. It's lifted me to heights I never thought I could reach and always leaves me hungering for more.

So, I don't want to come off as maudlin and lamenting my tragic existence as a misunderstood, underappreciated artist here. The fact is ... I love it. I love everything about it. There are still great clubs and their owners who are still plugging away and hanging in there because they love it, too. I love the incredible collaborations with other musicians and bands. And ya, maybe the crowds are a bit smaller these days, but those people out there are the ones who actually came out tonight, so goddamn it, they get every single ounce of what I have to give every single time I go up on a stage - even if it IS propped up on milk crates.

So, in the spirit of "sometimes the answer is right in front of you," I guess the answer to our query is a simple one. Why do we do it? Because we love it. And we'll take it any way we can get it.

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Chris Busone. Photo by Sara Busone.

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Take his food picks to the bank, and get out some money for dinner.

Famous Fat Dave

BY DICK BEACH

Dave Freedenberg. Photo provided.

Going to NYC? Looking for a place, or places, to eat? Just look up Famous Fat Dave. He'll give you a customized food tour, a little history and a great time. Oh - did I mention there is a Checker Cab involved?

RRX: So, we're driving around in a white Checker Cab in beautiful Manhattan with Dave Freedenberg, who is better known as –

DF: Famous Fat Dave.

RRX: Famous Fat Dave.

DF: I appreciate that you know my real last name, which is not my trade name. My trade name is Famous Fat Dave. Just like Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs, Famous Ray's Pizza.

RRX: The objective here is to wander around New York getting to know some of the lesser-known places to have a bite to eat, having great food, great conversation. And as it turns out, Famous Fat Dave is not a native New Yorker.

DF: No. I'm a Marylander by birth, a Chicagoan by blood. My mom and dad are from Chicago. But I've been New York-ified. I moved here when I was 18 years old; I'm 45 now. I became a pickle man, a cheesemonger, a hot dog vendor, a bread truck driver, and a Yellow Cab driver. And I'm driving around in this old Checker Cab, this '82 Checker Cab. So, it's

respect.

RRX: A Checker Cab is – was - a brand of vehicle that was the iconic taxi-cab in the city of New York forever, until they decided they were going to make them small. Then, there were the Impalas that were riding around. Now, it's all Toyotas, and these little Fords, and these things, and yuck.

DF: Yeah. I have the brochure that came with this car, and the first line (because cars were already small by 1982; this is a 1961 frame that they made every year until '82) of the brochure says, "Enter through our doors without folding yourself in half." So, it's spacious.

RRX: Famous Fat Dave does food tours of New York City. You can either do a Manhattan walking tour, or you can do a ride around in the Outer Boroughs tour. For those of you who don't know what the outer boroughs are, that would be Queens and Brooklyn and...

DF: And Bronx and Staten Island.

RRX: So, let's talk a little bit about how you became Famous Fat Dave and how that all started.

DF: So actually, it was a name I applied to myself. Like all famous things in New York, you name yourself Famous. I was living in Italy, doing study abroad, and I couldn't help but be a good chef.

The ingredients in Italy are so much better. I fried salami and mixed it in the pasta sauce, and put it over penne and it was so good. So, as a joke, I called it Famous Fat Dave's Super Salami Surprise Sauce with Penne.

And Famous Fat Dave's Super Salami Surprise Sauce with Penne morphed into Famous Fat Dave's Five Borough Eating Tour on the Wheels of Steel, where I take people to places where people can cook.

RRX: And in the case of this particular reporter, I first came across you on a program with Anthony Bourdain.

DF: Yes, Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations on the Travel Channel. I was on that show three times. I was on the New York episode, the disappearing Manhattan episode, which was about things that used to be very common in Manhattan and are now rare.

My name is Freedenberg and I went to Eisenberg's and Heidelberg's with him. I was like, what is this? What are you, like, being racist against me with the Berg? And then I also did the Outer Boroughs episode. I took him to the Bronx. So, that was a good 10 to 15 years ago, those three episodes. It's been a while now.

RRX: And it has turned out to make you a living, which is good.

DF: I thought at the time that – I was

like, oh, I'm in business now. What happened was, like, you have stored it away, you know? You heard about it 10, 15 years ago, and I'm only meeting you now. So, I found that it gave me the street cred to be on his show. But it didn't launch me so much as it was 5 years, 10 years, 15 years down the road. People are like oh, I remember him on that show. And if they're looking for what tour to take, they're like, "Famous Fat Dave - that guy, he's legit, Bourdain's down with him."

RRX: I know a lot of people in upstate who don't want to go to The City. They think that people aren't nice. I have not found that. By and large, would you say that New Yorkers are nicer than everyone gives them credit for?

DF: So, yeah. I mean, just don't waste a New Yorker's time. If you need directions, don't go up to them and be like, "So, how about this weather we're having?" Just say, "Which way to Carnegie Hall?" and they'll tell you.

RRX: Practice.

DF: There we go. Thank you. I set you up, you knocked it down. They're not afraid to tell you their opinion literally shoulder-to-shoulder on the subway. And they're not necessarily gonna be your best friend.

Everybody is a character. Everybody's

fun to talk to, to hang out with. I've been New York-ified, I feel like. It's in my blood.

Now, we're going for pierogies probably, and then an egg cream for dessert.

RRX: Describe for the uneducated what an egg cream is and isn't.

DF: So, it's neither egg nor cream. An egg cream is three ingredients: usually Fox's brand U-bet chocolate syrup, but a chocolate syrup, a seltzer, and a cold whole milk. But where it comes from is what's not in the textbook.

Second Avenue used to be Yiddish Broadway. There was a Yiddish Broadway star who went to Paris in the early part of the 1900s, when Paris was very en vogue.

And in Paris, there was a very popular drink that was chocolate and cream. In French, chocolate and cream translates to chocolat et crème. And chocolat et crème translates in New York-ese to chocolate egg cream. So, they think that that's it; the French "and" became the egg. Because there's no egg in it. That's not one of the ingredients.

RRX: I have to ask the proverbial question because you go everywhere, all these different restaurants, all these different places. If someone came to you and said, "What is your absolute favorite place to have a meal in New York City," what would it be?

DF: Okay. I'm a lover, not a fighter. So, I can't answer that, honestly. But I've thought about it a lot. Can I give you, like, one in each borough? I can't narrow it down to one.

RRX: Yeah, one in each borough, there you go.

DF: So, okay. I named my son Reuben after the Reuben sandwich at Katz's Delicatessen. You should tip the guy and ask him for a first cut. You get a first cut, meaning he takes it right out of the steam tray and butchers it right there in front of you. That's gonna change your life. That's my Manhattan answer.

Brooklyn, if I had to pick one, I'll take people to a spot in Brooklyn called Brennan & Carr. It's not the roast beef that I love so much, it's the burger. It's just the

burger, cooked onions, American cheese, and that broth all over it. Then, you just unhinge your jaw and swallow it whole, like a snake.

Staten Island's a tough one. I love Lee's Tavern there. They have a unique style of pizza. Not unique; it's more like a bar pie, different from New York, from the rest of the city. They do a clam pie there that's really nice.

Then, I'll take the pizza for the Bronx, Louie & Ernie's Pizza in the Bronx. You go into a guy's house basically, into the basement, and they're cooking pizza. I was just there today. You can sit in their backyard, eating the really particularly good sausage slice.

If I had to narrow it down in Queens, there's this guy name Oda who is like a mad scientist of Japanese home cooking. Like today, we had a fried softshell crab in rice and seaweed with lettuce and a little—there's a slice of cheese on there. It's cheese on a rice softshell crab seaweed sandwich.

As I say, I'm a lover. I just love it all. I've basically turned into my mother. Like, I just want to feed everybody.

RRX: I'm going to bring this to a close the way I normally do. I always ask people if there's anything that you want people to remember you have said that is important to you. It doesn't have to be anything life-changing, but something that you'd like to live by or like people to remember you for.

DF: Just taste it. I was a picky kid and I think I missed out on a lot of life experiences by being picky when I was little, and I regret it. I have this feeling when I taste something for the first time that's really good, I get angry because I've spent my whole life up to this moment not eating that thing.

I don't think that's so profound but yeah, taste everything. Try everything. And you can apply that to other stuff, too, if you want. But I'm literally talking about food. I mean, you could apply that to love, and sex, and you name it. But about food, try everything.



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Jason Bonham

Beyond the fame and the talent lies a good and caring soul.

BY LIAM SWEENEY

Jason Bonham. Photo by Rachael Skinner.

Our special Thanksgiving edition was printed as an insert in the Times Union. In it was the first of a two-part interview with rock drummer Jason Bonham, who will be appearing at the Palace Theater on December 4th with the Jason Bonham Led Zeppelin Evening. This is the second

part.

RRX: One thing I noticed when I was watching the show itself is that you do specific renditions of the live music, too. It's not just stuff that's strictly off the catalog. Are there any kind of live-version songs that you feel are like "go-to" songs? If so, why?

JB: Without a shadow of a doubt. I think we're all very familiar with "The Song Remains the Same" versions of Led Zeppelin from the movie. A lot of those arrangements, specifically for me, it's a "go-to" every time we do it. The '73 version, which I found out (later on) was an edited version. They actually

never played it that way. The fact that I'd known it that way and so I'd made every guitar player I ever played with, or when we do it with Mr. Jimmy, he - and we - have to do that version. It's iconic, what I remember, like the "Dazed and Confused" version, like the "No Quarter" jam. I think that was the

most played live version from '73, which we all really remember because it was made iconic. It was a live album, and it was also a movie. There are arrangements we do of the version of "Immigrant Song" from "How the West was Won" from '72. Everyone, I think, has a go-to. I mean, that's the fundamental outline of the show. We'll choose that. But we also like to remember what Zep-pelin liked to do, which was they liked to expand, they never played the same twice. So, um, that was always my thing about it, was to make it interesting, and to jam and be open, and to just be in the music and not having to play everything exactly the same.

RRX: I lost my dad a few years ago. I'm still kind of dealing with it, and we were really close. There's one song that brings me very close to him when I hear it. It's "4am" by Our Lady Peace. I just hear it, and he's right there in the room with me, and, you know, it's hard to get through sometimes. Is there any song that you play that's in or out of the catalog of Led Zeppelin that when you play it, it's like you feel you're right in the room with your father?

JB: There has been. I mean that there is more than one occasion when I have those moments. Sometimes, even in the show, I'll be telling a story of something, of a memory that reminds me of something else. And I'll suddenly kind of lose track of where I was and start telling a completely different story as if he's there to remind me. I had one incident where it kind of freaked me out, where I remembered what my dad's cologne was. And suddenly, I had this overwhelming – like as if somebody just walked past me with the cologne on while I was on stage. And it really got me, it really took me, you know? It was like holy, you know? It was really too much to have that just bring him straight into my mind, the smell of the whole thing. And it was like he was there just walking, just walking through me, just there next to me. And that took

a lot to get past that song. I had to take a moment on stage and say, "Can you just give me a second?" It was, uh, yeah, very special.

RRX: Yeah, I guess I've had feelings like that. It's tough sometimes. You just never know what one little thing is going to hit you.

JB: I'll say to you this. It's now 40, was it 44, years on? And yeah, you deal with it but you never get over it, you know. How old were you when your dad passed away?

RRX: It was five years ago, so I was 43.

JB: You had a lot of time with him. So enjoy; just look back and just remember. I think anybody that loses somebody - you know, I just recently almost lost my mom 10 weeks ago, and I've been going backward and forwards to England with her in hospital and finally got her out of hospital. And that was, that was a real scary moment for me because at first I thought, "That's it, I'll be parentless." And that was tough. That was really tough. But I'm glad to say she's doing great, and she's gonna pull through, and she's got plenty more fight now.

RRX: Yeah, I read that and I wanted to say something but I was hesitant. My mom just got out of the hospital, um, about a month ago for pulmonary embolism.

JB: My mom had an aneurysm in the brain. And yeah, it's tough. It's real tough. For my mom, it's a long recovery. I know. I'm trying to get her out of bed every day. My mom is, you know - literally from 10 weeks ago they said it's, you know, it's done - to them telling me she's making an amazing recovery. But she's still not walking on her own yet. She's got a frame. And that's just the craziest thing because two months ago, my daughter was with her, and my mom's a very young 75. So she was really active and still, you know, doing ten transatlantic flights a year and was traveling, doing everything and, and like, to see

her suddenly now, she looks like a grandma. You know, now it's like with the walker and that. But, uh, she's a fighter. She got really emotional when I left yesterday and said, "Will I ever be normal again?" And I went, "Mum, that's a tall order. You were never f**king normal before."

RRX: Yeah, my mom, all she does all day is tell jokes. It's tough because I'm trying to do serious stuff. Like she's not eating as much, she's not drinking as much. And I'm trying to say, "Mom, you need to eat, you need to do this, you need to do that. You need that." She's, like, just sitting there telling me jokes.

JB: Yeah, that's ... yeah, I know. I feel like I'm trying to be sensible and going, "You know, Mum, you've gotta make sure that you let the carers in to get you dressed in the morning and to take you to the shower, because you can't do any of this," and she goes, "Listen, people have been bathing in rivers before we had things like this, you know, I'll be fine, you know," and I'm like, "Yeah, but Mom honestly, you need to put the heat on, you know." It's just stupid stuff, you know. She's "No, we don't need to waste any money on the heat. We got a fire in here," and I can keep saying stuff until I'm blue in the face.

RRX: I know what that's like. I know what it's like to have someone in recovery so close to you.

RRX: Your drumming is high energy, high focus, high octane. And I say octane because you're passionate about racing too. More high energy, super high focus stuff. Would you consider yourself an adrenaline junkie?

JB: Oh, I don't know if I'm an adrenaline junkie. Yeah, cause I'm fearful of some things. But the things I love - I loved racing dirt bikes from a very young age. After I got my first dirt bike, it wasn't enough just to go around the field. I wanted to go race. And then we did the racing, and I got very good at it in a short time in England. So from the very young age of 11, I was one of the top

junior racers in the UK, sponsored (in the end) by Kawasaki. And then when my dad passed away, I carried on for another, I think, year, two years, and I suddenly made a decision. I went, "You know what, I'm gonna choose another path. I'm gonna follow my father's footsteps." And I suddenly wanted to go into drumming and started that. But I always had the bikes in the background and would always ride for fun. I still kept racing every now and again, whenever I wasn't touring, and I raced an average of, say, 40 times a year, right up until 2005. When I moved to the States, I was still actively racing every weekend. Then, when I got here, and it was only because we were so busy with Foreigner, that I had a gap and I didn't ride for a while. Then I started riding again, and literally before I knew it, I was now in my mid-forties and riding in Florida in the heat. I don't ride as much anymore, but I still love it. I'm actually just about to get another dirt bike again because my blood is a Triumph. I'm gonna get me the new 450. I love car stuff. I went to a track event in 2018 for the first time and became hooked. So I love doing track events and, literally to the point where I take a trailer, put the car on the trailer with the flicks on it. And yeah, I give it the best chance that I can to get a good lap.

JB: The things I love to do in life I'm passionate about. So that's what I try to do, you know? I'm passionate about my dirt bikes, my cars, my drumming, you know? I'm a grandpa now; I'm passionate about my granddaughter. I'm passionate about my son's music; Jager Henry, who's on tour right now, he's gonna be joining me for some shows. He's doing amazingly well. So, you know, everyone who supports me, go and check out my son's new EP if you have an open mind; it's for the younger audience. A little heavy. But it's very, very cool.

RRX: Nice. Awesome! So that is the last question I had. Thank you so much. I mean, it's made my day.

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Jonathan Kane

What does it mean to be invited to a supergroup?

BY ROB SMITTIX

Jonathan Kane. Photo by Chris Cardì.

Interview: Jonathan Kane (Doom Dogs)

RRX: Well, glad to have you on the line. I'm very excited about Doom Dogs. I just spoke with Jair-Rohm (Parker Wells) the other day and he was telling me some of the background story about the band. From what I remember you showed up at a gig. You never rehearsed, you never played with the guys before. Jair-Rohm said he was just a big fan of yours and that's why he wanted you to come join the group. I was just thinking about ... the look on your face or what your reaction was when you asked about the game plan.

JK: It's a couple of things. First of all, I was contacted by Jair-Rohm, as he told you, and I was like ... wow, yeah, I would love to play with those guys. They're both great musicians. I know both of their work but haven't worked

with or even met either of them. So, that was a big yes! The fact that Jair-Rohm reached out to me in the first place and then when we had that conversation, I mean ... it's not the first time I've done improv. I've done improv before lots of times. So it wasn't a complete surprise, but I love that with Jair-Rohm, we don't even really need to talk about it.

RRX: Yeah.

JK: Let alone we had no time to rehearse. I mean, literally, I walked into the club and met both Reeves and Jair-Rohm for the very first time with about an hour and a half before we were gonna be playing, which also included the time that we were supposed to be setting up and sound checking. After a certain point is when I asked the question, do you have any notes for me? Like what do you guys want? For me, that could have been anything from like ... make it

rock, or make it atmospheric, but I loved his response. He had been listening to my playing in various contexts over the years and just wanted me to "do my thing" or whatever that meant to me at the time. I think that's the thing about Doom Dogs: everybody is doing what is speaking to them and through them at that exact moment. With these improvisers, with these three particular people, everybody's really tuned into each other all the time. So it's never the kind of improv where people are just kind of lost in their own world. I've never improvised with people where everyone in the group was so tuned in to everything that the other two were doing. So that's pretty exciting.

RRX: Improvising a full set, man, that's incredible.

JK: Yeah, every set is a brand-new set. We each have certain modes of

playing through our thought processes that kind of pop out here and there. But it's never like a set thing at a set time. We all have our stylistic patterns and impressions. Reeves, Jair-Rohm, and I suppose I can put myself in that camp also ... are all just good at improvising. I think part of that is because we're also good at listening.

RRX: Right.

JK: And reading the room. I'll very often play as quietly as I can while I'm studying the audience, waiting for that moment where I think they look like they're beginning to think that this is about some nice quiet music, and then ... that's the moment when I will bash my drums as hard as I possibly can to just sort of throw a giant rock into the pond!

RRX: Nobody saw that coming. I love that.

JK: Reading each other is part of it

and reading the room is part of it.

RRX: Definitely. With all the experience that you guys have, to me, it's a supergroup. You all come from different backgrounds and stuff that you've done before. I mean, do you find it any more or less enjoyable, or is it just different?

JK: It's different and more enjoyable. I mean, I guess I can say that they're both such great players. To get to work with people who are that good, it's pretty fun, it's gratifying. It's like anything else you do in this world; when you do it with better people, you get better, they get better around you.

RRX: I actually had an opportunity years ago to play with one of Reeves' side projects. A band called Jeebus.

JK: Oh, wow.

RRX: At first, we were really just excited to play with Reeves, being big fans. But it ended up ... of course, we were supposed to be the opening band but ... Reeves spoke to me and said "We're gonna watch as much of your

band as possible, but we do have to hit the road soon. So you guys actually have to play after us." My guitarist is phenomenal, but he was like, how do I follow that?

JK: Yeah. That's a lot to get sprung on you at the last minute.

RRX: I was looking over like, this dude doesn't even have that many pedals. How is he making that noise?

JK: He's a magician. He really is.

RRX: Here's a guy who, at that point, had played stadiums and arenas with Bowie, and he now was here with us playing this little club. And he told me that this is what he missed and this is what it's all about. I mean, just like you with Swans and other projects, playing these bigger gigs. But when you're playing back at a little club or at a coffee shop, how's that feel getting back to the roots of the whole thing?

JK: I mean, I agree with Reeves that there's an immediacy in a small room that can't be replicated in a huge room.

Which isn't to say (for me) that a larger venue isn't exciting too, because of course it is. Something intimate about a small room. I guess it depends a lot on the kind of music. I mean, rock lends itself to the arena much more than, say, jazz, blues, or experimental music. Reeves must've missed it because he's playing in arenas all the time. I wouldn't mind trading in a few of the small rooms for a couple of arenas.

RRX: That's right.

JK: One step at a time.

RRX: Absolutely. Doom Dogs are gonna be playing on January 8th at Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, and that's not necessarily a small venue. It's a pretty decent size.

JK: It's a special show. There will be seating on the stage, but if there is an overflow crowd, then they will also fill up the rest of the house as much as needed.

RRX: That's what I'm going for. I'm hoping to put that overflow surge out

there for you guys.

JK: Troy Savings Bank Music Hall sounds fantastic. I can't wait to get in there. You'll be there. We'll get to meet in person, I hope.

RRX: I don't see why we wouldn't. I'm very much looking forward to it. But I heard there's an album in the works.

JK: We've got a bunch of stuff in the can that we recorded, maybe a year ago, maybe a little less. There's something in the works with a couple of interested parties, but nothing I can make a pitch about right at the moment. But it's definitely in the works.

RRX: Yeah, I just can't wait to get some Doom Dogs on our radio station here. That'd be great.

JK: Oh, fantastic, Rob. When we got it, you'll be the first one to get it!

RRX: I'm gonna hold you to it.

Please visit <https://www.jairohmx.com/doom-dogs/>

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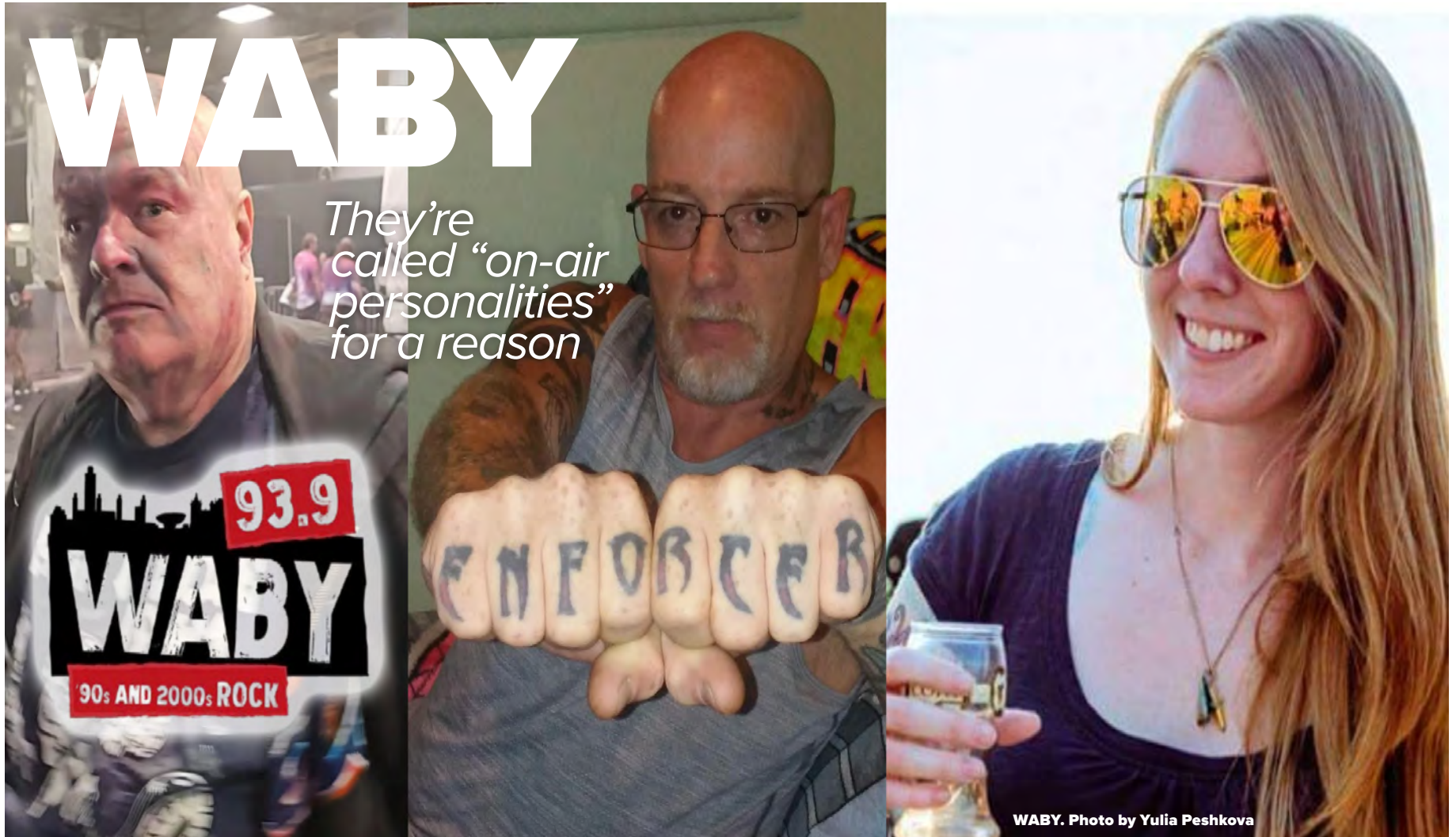
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WABY. Photo by Yulia Peshkova

Interview: (WABY) Mike The Enforcer, Kim Neaton and Chris Lynch

RRX: Mike The Enforcer, I hear that you're home.

ME: Yeah, I got back home at the beginning of October and immediately went back to work full-time at the body shop. I was already doing WABY 93.9FM while I was down there, and now I'm doing full-time Monday through Friday, 7 pm to midnight, and then I'm doing Monday through Friday, 7 pm to midnight down in Knoxville, Tennessee, as well on 93.7FM WVLZ.

RRX: That's cool, man. How do you feel to be back? Not just at home but back on the airwaves where you belong.

ME: It feels great. They say it's like

riding a bike, and it actually kinda is. The listeners that we have up here make it that much easier because they're so accepting whether you come, whether you go, whether you still suck, whether you're still good. You know what I mean? It's overwhelming to be back into it. When Ralph first called me, I was like apprehensive. I'm like 750 miles away. We made it work, and now I'm back in New York, and now I get to get out amongst the Bastard Nation, so to speak, and go to events and shake babies and kiss hands, and you know?

RRX: Being a radio guy myself and doing it for 30-something years now, I always wanted to be at a place where I fit. So, during the long hiatus that I had when I wasn't on the radio, I got offers

from FLY 92 and WGNA, and I didn't fit there, so I said hell no. And I feel like you are where you belong. WABY is where Mike The Enforcer should be. That's exactly the right fit.

ME: Well, thank you, I appreciate that, Rob. The thing to me was, like you said, if you get into that mold and you become accustomed to becoming someone that somebody likes to listen to, you can't carry that over. I couldn't do country music as Mike The Enforcer; it just wouldn't work. And at the time that I got out of it, that's all that was predominant. There were no rock stations like this anymore. You had classic rock stations, and that was it. As far as the '90s and 2000s go, those were forgotten decades. And now I'm glad to be back as a part of something

that fits me like a glove.

RRX: 100% I'm happy to have you back.

ME: I'm in the best state of mind that I've been in a long time. I'm a happy guy. I'm a single guy. It's just me and Loki living in Mechanicville now. I'm glad to be back. I'm around my family again and I'm once again around the Bastard Nation in more than one state.

RRX: That's correct. Well, I hope the ladies are listening. I heard he's single, there's nothing sexier than a freaking radio DJ. So Kim Neaton is here with us as well. Kim, I was actually really happy to see you be a part of this. How's it feel for you to be back on the airwaves?

KN: This is my first time back on the air in about seven years and I'm on

Monday through Friday 10 am – 3 pm. I'll definitely say the first day, turning on the microphone and realizing I'm talking to tons of people out there was a little scary because it had been so long. But I would say after doing two or three breaks, it just kind of naturally came back, and I felt back in the zone. It's like being on the radio is just, you know, being a good host showing people music that you like, you know, that they're a fan of too. So it's easy, you know, it comes naturally. If I'm excited about sharing good music with people, then, you know, it's something I like talking about anyway.

RRX: And then you come back and you and your peers are also syndicated in Tennessee.

KN: Yep. The guy that owns WABY up here is based down in Knoxville, Tennessee, and he has one station that's very similar down there, but then just about a month ago, he launched a station called Atomic 106,

which is an alternative station. It's a really good mix of alternative music from when it first started in the late '70s/early '80s, like the Cure and Talking Heads and everything, all the way up to new stuff that's coming out today. So that only started a month ago, and just two weeks ago, I started being on the air there from 3 pm to 7 pm Monday through Friday. And that I'm having a lot of fun with because that's really a lot of similar music to what was playing when I was on EQX. The only challenge is that I'm not in Knoxville. I gotta get familiar with the different venues down there and when shows are coming through. But it's really exciting to be able to have my voice and share good music with people that far away.

The thing I'm most excited about is, I started my own specialty show. It's a new music show called Generator, and that airs at 7 pm on Sunday nights on WABY and on the station in Knoxville.

Not the alternative station I'm on, but the rock one that is similar to WABY. It's an hour of new music I found, like hard rock, punk, metal; just stuff I think is cool that I wanna share with people. So it's all new music that came out in the last month or two.

RRX: That's really cool. I love that. I also want to talk with Chris Lynch as well, host of High Voltage, which airs Sundays from 9 pm-11 pm. It seems like everyone is an old veteran radio DJ that I'm speaking with today. What was it like when Ralph Renna made you this offer to come to WABY?

CL: For years Ralph said to me, "I'm gonna get you your metal show back." We always laughed about it, like, "Yeah, someday you'll get me my metal show back." And three months ago, he calls me and he says, "Do you want your metal show back?" I'm about to say, what the f*** are you talking about? And he hangs up. What the f*** is he doing? So I call him right back,

like, "Dude, why the f*** are you hanging up with me?" He says, "Because I'm just trying to build a little suspense."

RRX: That's hilarious.

CL: Do I wanna do this show? I said damn right, I wanna do this show. I'm given the freedom to add what music I think is gonna go over well. Whether it's some grindcore band like Escuela Grind, or a new hardcore band called Zulu. They've been out a couple of years, but ... I have the choice to add these bands, play them, and no one bats an eye. I wanna be a show where - a band you're not gonna hear every day on the radio or nearly at all on the radio - I wanna be able to give that band a platform and have kids someday be able to say I love the sound of that band. I wonder who they are, and maybe that'll propel another generation of kids that like music and rock music!

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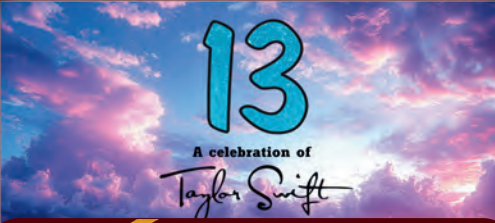
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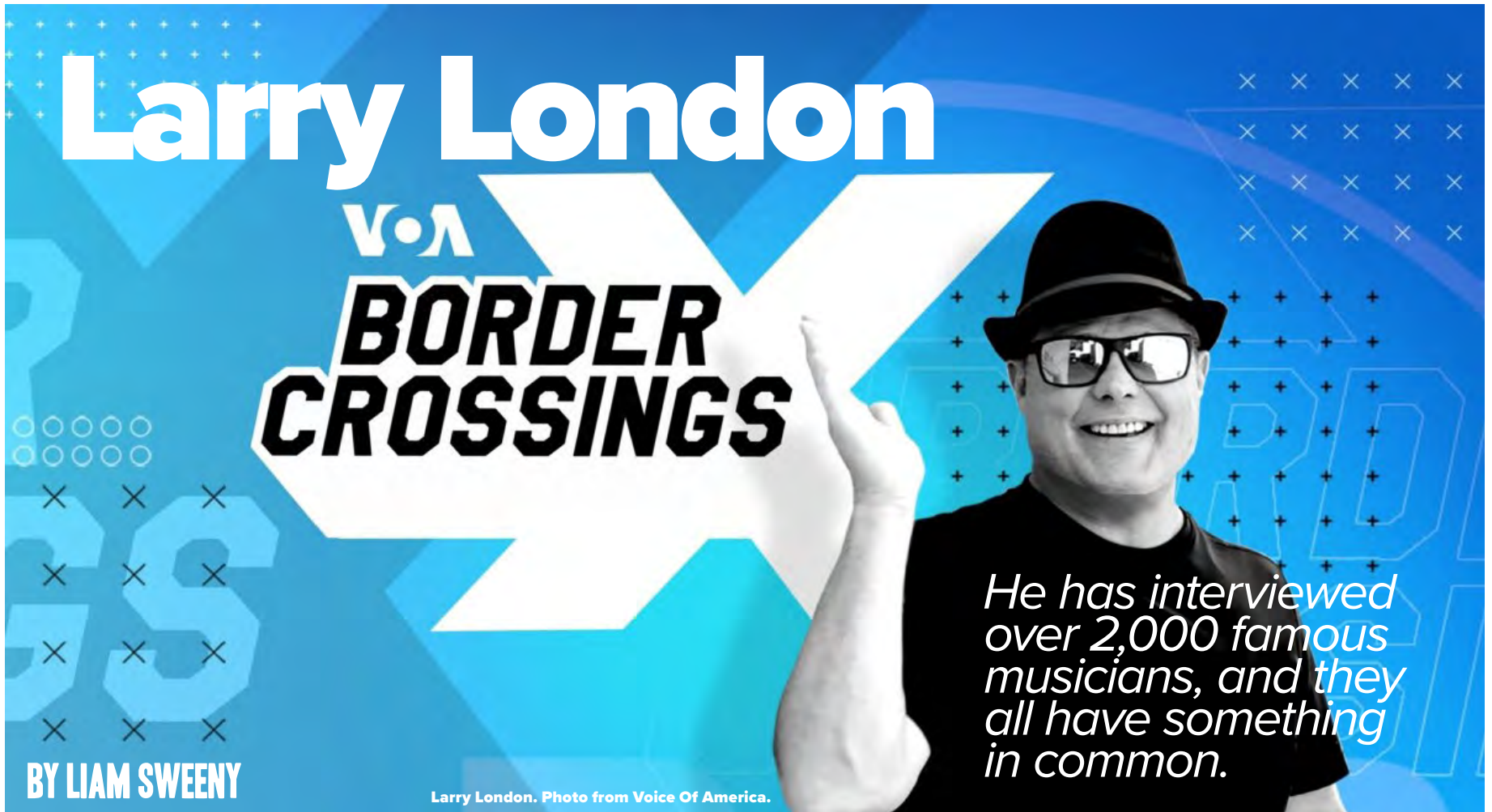

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Voice of America is a little-known broadcasting entity. It's not a company but an agency of the U.S. government charged with telling America's story abroad. Larry London, host of the popular show "Border Crossings," has been telling that story through music. I connected with Larry, and we had a pleasant conversation.

RRX: Let's talk about "Border Crossings." What's the premise? And why is it called "Border Crossings?"

LL: Great question. The show was started in 1996 by Judy Massa, who passed away a few months ago. She was the music director at Voice of America at that time, and she coined the name "Border Crossings." The only assumption I can make as to why it's called "Border Crossings" is because the show plays request music from the

audience, and we aren't limited to any particular genre or era. We can go from Drake or Travis Scott to Dolly Parton, and you won't find that in any Top 40 radio station in America. Plus, we're playing requests. It's all programmed by the audience. I have a TV show that also airs on the radio every Tuesday, the audio does. It's interviewing celebrities, interviewing stars. And in the 23 years I've been here at VOA, from 2001 until now, I've interviewed over two thousand artists, quite a big list of artists. Tom Hanks was on the show. He's, of course, an American icon. He's not a singer, but he made a musical movie. He produced "This is Us." I know it was about a band. He's an icon and he gets it. One of the things he said during the interview was that VOA is the window to the world. I thought that was wonderful. I've also

had Beyonce on, Quincy Jones, Aretha Franklin, Smokey Robinson. The list goes on and on: Katy Perry, Taylor Swift, Adele. I've had them all on for over 23 years at various stages of their careers. So here we are, that's kind of what I do, and that's why it's called "Border Crossings."

RRX: The people you've interviewed are idolized but they're people. Have you ever seen, like, a common thread in who they are in their personalities? Something that's unique to that level of success?

LL: Everybody loves adoration. Everybody in the show business industry, they all play. It may get excessive when the paparazzi and the fans are in your face all the time, and you can't have a meal without being interrupted ten times to sign an autograph, take a photo, or whatever. But all the singers that

I know, from Paul Anka and Chubby Checker on, they're still doing it. They don't have to, they got millions of dollars, but they love the thrill, the high, the adrenaline rush of being out on stage and having 20,000 people screaming at you, adoring you. That's very infectious, that's hard to give up. I always say that music has become more of a business and less of an art because there are artists out there who do it on their own terms, their own way. They struggle, you know, they are struggling. They busk with a guitar case open at Santa Monica Beach or wherever, play their songs in the subway station and they don't get discovered but they're doing it their way, they're doing what they want to do. Now we got TikTok and Instagram and people are getting exposed and getting attention, people are getting hit songs

on the charts because of being successful virally. So I would say that everybody in the business has that same love of positive reinforcement, which is why you see many of them say, "I'm leaving Twitter. Close my account with Instagram because of haters, because of the negative noise." They don't want to hear that negativity, and it's so easy now with social media where people can hide behind, you know, "Big John," which isn't even his real name, and he'll say you suck and get off the stage, and you're terrible. That's horrible to say that. That's not what it was meant for, but that's what it gets used for. Everybody wants to be liked; that's a common thing. Nobody wants to be disliked. In show business especially, you get the spotlight and the glamour, and you get the limos and the interviews and all that stuff. That's what I see is common throughout the industry.

RRX: How was your interview

with Taylor Swift? She's so big, what was it like?

LL: It was at the early part of her career. I interviewed her at a place called Merriweather Post Pavilion, which is a long way out in Virginia, Bristol, Virginia. A lot of acts come there; they still tour there. A lot of country acts play there often, and she (at that time) was transitioning from country to pop. She was young when I had her on; she doesn't do many interviews these days. In a post-COVID era, a lot of the stars are on quote-unquote "vocal rest," where they're not doing interviews. So says the publicist or the record company, people whose job it is to protect them. But some do interviews. It's not the easiest thing in the world to get an interview. And Taylor was a pleasure to talk to. She's sweet. She was less polished then because she was not new. I mean, she'd had like two or three albums, but now she's got what, 12 albums? It's a long way down

the road. So she's much better and more polished and professional watching her dance and her choreographed moves and everything. She's come a long way from being, I don't know, 19, 20, to being 30, what she is now, 30-something. But yeah, I loved talking to her, and she answered the questions, she was down to earth. She answered everything. She didn't have a problem. We had a nice conversation.

RRX: She gives to food banks at the places she goes, I heard.

LL: She's paid college tuition for her fans. She paid for cancer treatments for her fans. She understands how it works. She understands, you know, never losing sight of where you came from.

RRX: She never really did.

LL: Yeah. She knows that she was one of those kids who was bullied growing up. She was ostracized. She was not popular in school. That's why the family moved from wherever they

were living. I don't remember where from Tennessee to wherever they ended up, but she was not a popular girl in school. So, you know, that's one of her early stories that she got; she, her family, upped and moved and things turned around for her.

RRX: You had a cool moment with Smokey Robinson. Can you tell us about it?

LL: I was interviewing Smokey Robinson when he came here to DC for some event. I was in his hotel room with him. I was given 15 minutes. We were talking, it was already 38 minutes into the interview. His manager knocks on the door and says, "Smokey, you gotta catch a flight," and he said, "Reschedule the flight, I'm doing an interview." So, to me, to have a music icon - I'm from Detroit, I was born and raised there - to have Smokey Robinson change his travel plans to accommodate me was like, "What?"




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Singin' Guru

BY JEFF AND CRYSTAL MOORE

Photo from Pixabay

Dear Singin' Guru,
I've just finished an album and want to release it, but I'm confused by the legal mumbo jumbo. How do I protect my music and get paid royalties?

Sincerely,

So Happy My Album is Done

Congratulations, So Happy! You've poured your heart, soul, and probably your caffeine levels into writing songs. Now you're thinking, "How do I protect this masterpiece from being stolen?" Good question. Here's my answer: focus on the fundamentals of copyright and royalty collections, but don't stress so much about theft that it stops you from sharing your music. This is an important topic that stumps many artists, so this month, we're devoting the entire column to it.

How Do I Copyright My Music and Collect Royalties?

Step 1: Copyright – The "Mine!"

Stamp on Your Song

As soon as you write your song, it's automatically copyrighted to you—like an invisible stamp saying, "This song is MINE!" To solidify this claim, register it with the U.S. Copyright Office at copyright.gov. This makes it much easier to take legal action if someone tries to steal your music. Trust me, your lawyer will thank you.

Step 2: Join a PRO and Get Paid When Your Song is Played

Next, sign up with a Performing Rights Organization (PRO). These organizations collect royalties whenever your song is performed publicly—on the radio, at live shows, or streamed online. If others are performing your song, a PRO ensures you're getting paid. Think of them as watchdogs for your wallet.

Main options in the U.S.:

ASCAP: Costs \$50 to join, one-year contract.

BMI: Free to join, two-year contract.

SESAC: Free to join (by invitation),

three-year contract.

Which one is better? If you're just starting out, BMI's free membership is a nice perk. ASCAP is also solid with a one-year contract for a small fee. SESAC is by invitation only, so it's generally for more established songwriters. All of them split royalties 50/50 between you (the songwriter) and your publisher (if you have one).

You can only pick one PRO as a songwriter, so choose carefully—it's a pain to switch! If you want to switch later, you'll need to formally end your current contract and sign up with a new one.

Step 3: Do You Need a Publisher?

Publishers manage your song's copyright, handle distribution, and collect royalties—but they'll take a 50% cut. As a new songwriter, you likely don't need a publisher unless you're making serious money from your songs. Publishers are usually interested in established artists, so focus on building an audience and a solid catalog before worrying about publishers. In the early days, your time is

better spent writing more songs.

Step 4: Join a Mechanical Rights Organization for Reproductions

Mechanical rights organizations, like The Mechanical Licensing Collective (MLC) or Harry Fox Agency (HFA), collect royalties when your song is reproduced—on CDs, vinyl, digital downloads, and streaming. They ensure you're getting paid when someone buys or streams your song.

To simplify things, you can join a publishing administration service like CD Baby or Songtrust. These companies handle both mechanical and performance royalties, helping you collect more of what's yours from around the world. They do collect a percentage (around 15%), but they don't have any rights to your song like a publisher does.

Step 5: Don't Sweat It – Focus on Writing!

Yes, collecting royalties is essential, and these organizations are there to make sure you get paid fairly. But remember, when you're starting out, the

most important thing is getting your music out there. Obsessing over protection won't help if no one hears your song. If you're earning real money from your music, then go all-in on PROs, publishing administration, and mechanical rights organizations. Until then, let your creativity lead the way.

So get writing, keep creating, and remember—if people don't hear it, they can't steal it. Who knows? Your next song might be the one that has people knocking on your door.

What If Someone Tries to Steal My Music?

Alright, let's get real. You're worried about someone swiping your song—but here's a truth that might surprise you. From what I've seen, no one is lining up to steal your music. In fact, one of the biggest challenges for musicians isn't theft; it's getting people to listen. Unless you've already got an audience buzzing about your songs, the chances of your music being stolen are slim.

Now, I'm not saying it's impossible, and yes, there are horror stories of music being ripped off. But almost every high-profile copyright case involves established artists, not unknown ones. Legal battles usually happen over songs that are already hits, not those waiting to be discovered. If you're just starting out, focus less on stopping theft and more on getting people excited to hear what you've made. Once you have an audience, then you can worry about people "borrowing" your tunes.

Here are six strategies to help you build an audience—and get people to actually listen to your music:

Strategy 1: Start Performing Locally

Go old-school and play for live audiences. Whether it's an open mic or a local gig, getting out there helps you find fans and fine-tune your sound. Plus, nothing beats live feedback.

Strategy 2: Develop and Cultivate an Online Presence

Social media, streaming platforms,

and music forums are your new best friends. Start a YouTube channel, put your music on Spotify, share behind-the-scenes stories, or talk about your process. The more people know you, the more they'll want to hear what you've got.

Strategy 3: Listen to the Feedback, Even the Tough Stuff

When people give feedback—especially constructive criticism—take note. If listeners consistently say, "The mix makes it hard to hear," or "Your guitar playing could use some work," consider it. Don't brush it off with, "They don't get it." Instead, think, "Maybe I need a pro to mix my tracks," or "Time for some extra guitar lessons."

Strategy 4: Be Patient—Hits Don't Happen Overnight

Your first song might not be a chart-topper, and that's okay. If you're serious about songwriting, you're in it for the long haul. Taylor Swift herself has said that out of every 100 songs she writes, maybe one is a hit. So keep

writing; the magic usually happens along the way.

Strategy 5: Write Music You Love

If you're not passionate about what you're writing, no one else will be either. Write the songs you want to hear, and you'll find others who connect with your vision. Plus, you'll enjoy the process a lot more.

Strategy 6: Appreciate Your Fans—Even If There Are Only Two of Them

Fans are gold. If someone loves your music enough to listen and stick around, show them some love right back. No fan is "too small"—and if you treat them well, they'll bring friends to your next show or share your next track.

The Bottom Line

Keep creating, put yourself out there, and build your audience. As your following grows, that's when you'll really need to think about protecting your music.



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Anthill Annihilator

BY LIAM SWEENEY

Thanks for Asking!

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

Taran: Well, I've been working on recording Anthill Annihilator stuff for nearly ten years now, and those real early drafts ended up being more like practice for me than anything else. Some of the demos I made during AA version Alpha did end up going on to be the templates when we recorded Bic Dolls (our first LP release), but it's such a night-and-day contrast that I really can't even begin.

The biggest difference now would be that AA is currently in version Epsilon (the 5th iteration) and recording with the lineup we have now as compared to just me building tracks from nothing but metronome is worlds easier. I'm fortunate to have a group of the most creative, talented people I could ever work with that take the slogging doldrums out of composing.

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?

Taran: I've been playing shows since I was 12 or 13. Being raised in part by my grandmother, Deb Cavanaugh, I never really stood a chance of not performing from the very first moment I asked her to teach me guitar.

Anthill Annihilator Epsilon played our first show back in early 2023, and it was kind of clunky trying to figure out

arrangements around everyone's schedules. Since then, each show we have played has been the best show ever, and I pride myself for managing to keep my bandmates feeling like shows are for fun more than they are work.

RRX: It's a lot of fun living in the present, but we all collect memories and give birth to dreams. We're talking dreams here. Where do you see yourself next year? In the next five years?

Taran: Anthill is just a vessel to get the sounds out of my head. I have about 8 unrecorded finished albums that I've been cooking since high school (16+ years) just knocking around my brain. I used to joke that I'd dissolve the band once the work was done and they were all released, but at this rate we just keep writing new ones and having a blast doing it. I think I'll start pushing record labels to help with release costs in 2025, maybe it'll take off from there. Or maybe society will collapse in the next 4 years and all our unwritten songs can become folklore. Either way, I'm happy with how far we've come and the fun we're currently having

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?

Taran: First of all, I really think Troy NY is experiencing a cultural renaissance right now. Super Dark Collective, Jive Hive Live, Tummy Rub Records; all of those people have given us wonderful opportunities that I would be remiss not to mention. Gabe Stallman of Ampevene

has been Doing The Dang Thing for as long as I've been playing music and has been an awesome supporter and friend the whole time. Zeke from CZR is a lovely human whom I see at every show. I'm pretty sure she doesn't stop moving ever. She really took us under her wing when we lost our good friend Ben Rowe.

Ian from Mayheaven, Seth from Headless Relatives and Matt & Kiefer from Sunbloc are all fantastic people who deserve love and recognition as well. There are truly too many to list.

RRX: Our style comes from the extension of our influences. It's like an evolution. We're influenced, and it inspires us to influence. What can you say about your influences, and what you feel you've done with their influence as a musician or band? Have you extended their work?

Taran: When I was in high school. I always wrote with a sub-text of "what if all my favorite bands were one band?"

Now, I have a personalized style and I write with a sub-text of "Okay, don't be derivative of yourself.", kind of removing me from my influences, but expanding on the melting pot where it all started. This is why I like collaborations so much. That separation from influences tends to make something very interesting.

RRX: In the musical world, there are many supporting players. Recording engineers, sound techs, cover art designers. Who are three people that support the craft that you would like to shine a spotlight on?

Taran: Conor Grocki recorded, mixed and mastered Bic Dolls all by himself in exchange for some speakers and a

few bags of coffee. He's a local audio producer making films with 518 Film Network. He's going to be our engineer when we record our new EP at Tummy Rub Records in January 2025.

Lakota Ruby-Eck is a friend of mine since high school, he is also a local film person. His cinematography work is absolutely stunning, you can see this in the music video he did for our song An Endless Room Of Infinite Watching Eyeballs and everything else he does as Tomb Pictures.

I also have to shout out Sage, he's the person I started the band with, who helped me move from AA-alpha to AA-beta. He's currently living in the outskirts of town. Watching. Waiting. He doesn't want you looking at him. Look away!

RRX: Every band has a song that they really thought was going to be popular, but it wasn't. What was that song for you? Did you have a song become popular that you didn't expect?

Taran: When we play our song The Monotony Of It All and I say the line "does anybody mind if I take my shirt off?", people always cheer. Which is funny to me, because the next written line in the song is "f**k you, I'm doing it anyway".

I did not expect the rambling song with the lyrics written from the perspective of a creepy exhibitionist-type person was going to be so popular, but people always tell me they like it. That one isn't recorded either, we only play it live.

RRX: We let it out differently when we play music. The happy, sad, good and

bad; it can all be put out musically. Overall, do you feel better when you sing about the better times, or the worse times? Is there a difference you can describe?

Taran: Singing is absolutely my #1 therapy technique. I find no matter what I'm singing, singing it loud and meaning it always helps me work through stuff. In my AA-alpha era of writing, a lot of feedback I got was that my writing felt very negative. I believe it's important to embody your writing, or at least acknowledge that it will always reflect some part of you. Nowadays I try to be honest, optimistic or silly with my lyrics. It feels better than writing AA-alpha felt.

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?

Taran: Oh, I have plans. The next iteration of AA, zeta, is going to be Anthill Orchestralnator. I had a dream about it recently. I am already in the process of

writing an opera for a wide array of instruments.

AA also has a long a rich history of using clever instruments. 420 Is The New 69 from Bic Dolls features Legos rolling around in a tin cup. Gargles Barbecue, also from Bic Dolls features a cup of silverware, coins and marbles being thrown down the stairs. In January, I have designs to include a theremin among other instruments into the mix. I think my ideal band size would be an octet. I would love to work with a horn section.

RRX: Is there a song you wrote that really died on the vine? Something you all like but somehow just couldn't make it work. You swear never to play it live, that sort of thing?

Taran: I always hated doing that with my old band in High School. We'd spend countless hours writing something that I thought was really cool, only for someone else to give up on it. All of my unused riffs go into "The Pile". I record everything we practice on my phone

and painstakingly edit it into a size that fits the memory space. It is all duplicated and stored in my Google drive. I believe that everything can be recycled. So if we're trying to shoehorn a riff into a place that it doesn't fit, we store it and come back to it later. I've donated riffs from The Pile to mine and other friends other projects (my other band is Galene). It's a good way to write. There are also jams we'll come back to and relearn to turn into new songs. Nothing is lost, no waste. Endless resource to draw from.

RRX: Let's talk about your next project, your next few. Just not the ones you're working on now. The ones you have your eyes on for the future. What's coming to us?

Taran: Well, I hate business but we should probably do a tour. Recording in January, so hitting the ground running playing shows is probably a good idea for us until we have the means to work on the next record. Making records is what I'm most excited for, I genuinely have

over 8 rattling in my brain and Google Drive just waiting to go.

RRX: How does practice go? Is the road practice enough, or do you have a practice shack? If so, how does it look? What's on the walls? What cool sh*t is in there?

Taran: If we aren't actively putting our heads down working on a project, then practice is more like a hang in the jam room than anything else. We have a shared space at Gabe's house with all the equipment and the painting of a sailor that I bought at a garage sale back in high school. I like to invite different friends and guests to practice if we're not working on something in particular. I have a lot of really wacky and fun instruments so it's fun to have different groups meeting up to have fun and see what happens. I'm convinced we actually have been able to consistently do Thursdays because of the fun factor.

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Prog Digest

BY KLYDE KADIDDLEHUMPER

Wow – how did another year manage to get away from us? Seriously, seems like only yesterday we were getting ready for outdoor shows and festivals and sitting on the deck somewhere enjoying a cold adult beverage.

Well – it is time to say Merry Christmas Holiday, Happy Chanukah Festival, and greetings to those who celebrate the Festivus For The Restofus. This month, just call me Santa Klyde! You know, old, white hair, beard, and still believing reindeer using magic dust can fly!

This year, let's make a big old wish list for filling our holiday booty. I said booty – not bootay ... geez, you people.

Now, when Klyde says wish list, he's going way back – to the days when Sears used to send out this giant Christmas catalog of all the cool stuff. There were, of course, pages of robes and comfy clothes and all that. But the giant toy section was what every kid went straight for. For those of you reading this who are too young – you missed out on the coolest way to get the stuff you asked for. Cut the picture out, tape it somewhere - or leave the catalog strategically opened to the right page somewhere discreet. Like on your father's pillow.

So – Klyde's Big Wish List suggestions for 2024.

Music magazine subscriptions. When your better half (known as Constant Companion in my case) is into music, find a magazine that fits their likes. Here, it's Prog Magazine. Not only does it keep you up on the bands you have known and loved all these years, it also intro's you to the new bands out and about. Plus, Prog Mag has a link every month to a free download of new music.

Real physical music. If you hear a track streaming you like – BUY THE BLOODY ALBUM! Support artists and expand your mind – after all – Dr. Timothy Leary is no longer with us. Most artists these days have to tour to death to make any coin. Supporting them with the purchase of a CD or, better yet, a vinyl album. There are even places where, when you buy the album, it is pre-ripped for you to download.

Tickets! Tickets! Tickets! Start getting ready now for all the shows you want to see. Start getting ready for the shows you don't know you want to see. Visit a small venue; they have some of the coolest stuff playing, and odds are, you'll see

something about it in these pages. Be the first on your block. Avoid future regret. Now how much would you pay? Seriously. Local musicians deserve the love. These are folks working their butts off, being paid very little to provide so much. Buy their merch, really like 'em – buy a round. The big shows are what they are, and we all like to go as well. Heck – Klyde will be looking to catch the 2025 AC/DC tour – if possible.

Finally, and perhaps most important. For those of us who are reasonably healthy, both physically and financially, please take the time to consider folks less fortunate than we. If you can, adopt a family in need for the season, 'cause

every little kid deserves something under the tree – a toy or two, a coat, socks to keep warm. Make a donation to the Regional Food Bank – and, yes, the dollars go much further than foodstuffs – they can leverage the dollars into far more.

These ought be things we do every day – be nice, be kind, be thoughtful.

A comment was made once regarding a person who was about to have heart surgery. The conversation went something like this: "Shirley is having heart surgery." Response: "Exploratory?"

Don't be that person.

Until next time.

Klyde



Photo from Pixabay

www.extrememusicawards.com - Nominations are open for voting now!



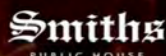
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Chris “Gringo Starr” Sprague (cont.)

Continued from Page 9.

other guys being working musicians as well. We do take full advantage of our time together, though. Live shows in the area, plus one international gig is already on the book for this young band (Little Steven’s Underground Garage Cruise!) We also will have a 45 coming out soon on the Go-Time label, as well as working on a full LP that will be released on vinyl at a later date.

RRX: What band would you like to play with? Put together a supergroup with you hitting.

CS: Well, I have to say, being the drummer for Nick Lowe and Los Straitjackets with fellow local musician Eddie Angel is pretty amazing!

Now, if you’re talking about a dream band, I would have loved to play drums with Paul McCartney and the Beatles. (Who wouldn’t? LOL), Also the Ventures. As far as putting together a supergroup, that’s tough to answer. I don’t believe in supergroups; there’s no chemistry there.

RRX: Anything else you would like to add?

CS: I consider myself to be very lucky to live the life of a touring musician. I’ve met so many great people and built up so many great friendships around the world that I wouldn’t trade it for anything! I have also been very blessed to have played with so many legends and great musicians worldwide, but most notably the musicians I get to play with in the town I live in.



Eric Beetner (cont.)

Continued from Page 17.

by scraping writing from real humans without giving them credit or compensation is evil and wrong and will end up in courts for the next 50 years if they keep pushing it.

But then you get AI Michaels who greenlit his voice being AI-generated for the last Olympics and it went barely noticed, so who knows? Some people might grab the payday and contribute to the slow acceptance of it all.

With the way music has been devalued by streaming it is likely that most consumers will opt for the cheaper option, regardless of how much of the art is removed from it. It’ll be good enough. That’s what depresses me. I worry there won’t be enough consumer backlash against it and they will invite the vampires inside the house because it’s cheaper and easier.

RRX: Is the struggle to keep art “human” more than just AI? Aren’t we also giving the presentation of our art and entertainment to algorithms? Can we ever get away from this kind of automation?

EB: Most people don’t know how much is being fed to them via algorithms. All recommendations for what to watch next on Netflix or any other streamer, let alone Instagram feeds and the like, is all a computer choosing for you.

The pernicious side of this is that you miss out on great discoveries if all you take is what you are given. I’ve always been a music nerd and never liked radio telling me what to listen to. I go find it. I hunt around. Same for TV. I’ll dig deep beyond the algorithm into any streamer and find the hidden stuff they didn’t suggest for me. But I’m not the norm. And it takes time and effort most people don’t have.

And it’s not invaluable. They very often get it right. Spotify can do a good job showing me a new artist, but I also have to take a lot of time to train that

algorithm on what I might like. And more often than not they play it safe or get it wrong. I’d say the success rate is 15-20%. It’s a lot of weeding out on any entertainment platform.

But, sadly, gone are the days of that record store employee who you vibe with and always has something new for you to check out.

Word of mouth is still a highly effective tool, maybe the most effective, with any entertainment. Someone you know and trust – a real human – saying “Check this out” is always going to have more influence than a computer.

RRX: People always benefit from putting a face on things. Can you put a face on, or describe a moment of this issue that would drive home to people the real stakes of all this?

EB: Well, I am far from alone, but I know my experience best. Being freelance, I don’t have benefits like a 401k or paid vacation. When I work a union show, which not all of them are, I get those protections and if I keep up hours, I get health insurance. I’d say I’ve spent under half my career under union health coverage though. So I’ve spent a nearly 30-year career mostly buying my own insurance for a family of four, trying to save on my own, having two college accounts for my daughters, living in one of the most expensive cities in America, and living in uncertainty about when the next job is coming as just my day-to-day world.

Because of all that, I have very little safety net to be able to wait out being out of work for months at a time. After the strikes and the pandemic crushed the business, any safety net I have is gone, and the same is true for most of my contemporaries. So as I face down unemployment in two weeks as my current show ends, I am looking at a bleak landscape of no work and no prospects likely for several months. (Even in a good year,

no productions start up near the end of the year around the holidays. It just never happens.)

So after building a career and providing thousands of hours of entertainment, I have nothing to show for it. If I go three to four months without work, I’ll have to sell the house and maybe leave L.A., which I don’t want to do with one daughter still in high school. I’ll try like hell to make sure I can still afford to keep the one in college that we have and still send the younger one wherever she wants to go, but choices will have to be made.

I’m not unique by any stretch. I don’t need any more sympathy than someone who lost their job at the factory, or the corporation. It’s incredibly frustrating though, that this industry has been taken over by people who broke it, willingly, with no thought to what comes next. All the top execs are still getting millions a year, even when their companies are all bleeding money. L.A. is a company town, too, and when entertainment industry workers are hurting, this whole city hurts. It could lead to a housing crash; restaurants and retail will suffer because people don’t have disposable income anymore. All the things that happen when an industry abandons its workers by sending jobs overseas, cutting the bottom line workers to make up for reckless spending on the top 1%, and all the cliché bad business practices we’ve seen in other industries.



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“Radios of the world are tuning in tonight,

Are you on the dial, are you tuned in right?

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Around the Dial- The Kinks

As I was sitting at the offices of Radioradiox.com, this song came across the station and, in light of the current state of radio, it couldn't be more apropos. WTF has happened to this beloved medium?

Being on the high side of 50, I grew up with radio, fell in love with radio, and even went as far as to start my own station. Radio was a constant. It was where you got your music, it was your news connection, and above all, the DJs were not just announcers, they were your friends, your guides, a voice in the wilderness that understood music was a haven. Somewhere along the way, it all went to sh*t.

Times change, and change is difficult. Old things tend to fade, but what happened to radio was/is unnecessary and self-inflicted. After the FM heyday of the '60s and the '70s, the consultants in their suits descended on the industry with tight playlists, genre-specific formats, and an eye on the bottom line above everything else. Please understand that making money is not a sin and business is business, but money isn't what killed radio, programming did. Programming - think about that word - is all about control. These consultants controlled what you heard; they controlled the depth of exposure you had to any artist or any artist's catalog. Here are your six approved songs by [insert artist here], and you will

hear one of them at five after every hour. Really? And yet, this is where the industry went. College radio held out for a while, but in the end, any broadcast major had to get in line if they wanted to work in the field after graduation.

Even with the lifeline thrown to the industry by the creation of the web, apps, and streaming radio, its overlords blew it. Just keep doing the same thing, the public won't care. They are programmed. Let's reduce our on-air staff and have announcers cover multiple markets. Nothing saves money like cutting staff, as they throw huge music festivals with overpaid and under-talented acts. Remove the local aspect and keep bilking the public. They won't mind, they're programmed.

The big streamers (you know who I mean) are really no different. It starts out good, a chestnut here and there, and then repetition seeps in. Make sure all the hits get played, make sure every other song is "recognizable." It's OK, they're programmed!! Same suits, different platform.

"I've been around the dial so many times,

But you're not there.

Somebody tells me that you've been taken off the air.

Well, you were my favorite DJ,

Since I can't remember when.

You always played the best records,

You never followed any trend.

F.M., A.M. where are you?

You gotta be out there somewhere on the dial.

On the dial. Somebody tells me that you've been taken off the air.



Photo from Pixabay.

Well, you were my favorite DJ,

Since I can't remember when.

You always played the best records,

You never followed any trend.

F.M., A.M. where are you?

You gotta be out there somewhere on the dial.

On the dial."

I thank the lords of the airwaves for the few independent stations left, the crazies broadcasting on the web from their basements; you are the final line

of defense. You are the people who really "heart" radio, and just maybe you can save this once venerable platform. And in doing so, save us from programming. I will be looking for you "around the dial," and around the web. Viva! Quality Radio. Long live real live local DJs. And consultants ... well, off with their heads!!! Figuratively, of course, wink ...wink.



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14th - JOE MANSMAN - Underground

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