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January 2025

Vol. 7, Issue 1

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Hans Gruber & the Die Hards



BY ROB SMITTIX

Hans Gruber & the Die Hards.
Photo credit Christopher Ebbs.

RRX: Hey, alright. So we are on a speaker phone with Hans Gruber and the Die Hards from their tour van. Who do I got on the line here?

KA: A little bit of everybody. We have Kurt Armstrong (vocals, trombone), we have ...

RA: Rosey Armstrong (tenor saxophone, vocals) ...

CT: Chris Thompson (drums) here.

Mike: Mike! (guitar)

KA: And then we got our driver who's not gonna respond.

RRX: Got you. Just so you know, you are one of my most favorite live bands to see. You're once again on the road, you're in the van and you're on your way to Memphis.

RA: Yup!

RRX: You guys always seem to be touring. I was so happy that, before my band stopped really doing things, we actually had a chance to play a show with you. I think it was back in 2019. It was right before the pandemic hit.

RA: Yes, I think it was that fall tour of 2019.

RRX: You guys played, I think right before us, and then we're like, "Holy sh**". How are we supposed to follow that?" Because you guys put on a hell of a show.

CT: We were just propping you up, we wanted you to get crazy!

RRX: Oh yeah, I mean, I think we did pretty good, but you guys, hands down, crushed that night. When you played in Troy, I was talking to Onion from Escape from the Zoo, and he said the same thing. He's like, what a tough act to follow. So how do you guys respond to that?

KA: Well, we love doing that to bands all over because there's nothing better than watching a band realize that they got to step up. We have the advantage, and we've got a tour with a lot of friends, and play a lot of shows with bands that we respect, and there's nothing greater than seeing them sweat a

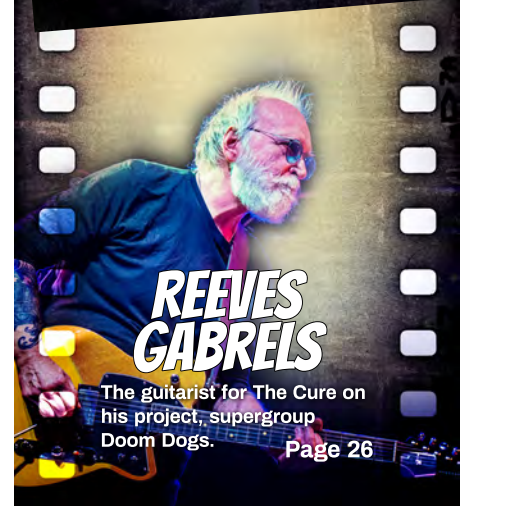
little bit and then show up and bring it up. One of my favorite times was when we played right before Tsunami Bomb at a festival. We had never met them, and we watched all of them on the side of the stage, stand in amazement, and actively be like ... oh no, this is not gonna be good. Then the next thing you know, they put on one of the best performances I've actually seen in a long time. So it's real cool to see that happen.

RRX: So you guys are basically just raising the bar for the rest of us. I appreciate that.

RA: This year in particular has been really, really crazy. We've done a lot, maybe a little too much. But you know? It is what it is.

RRX: Definitely. So is there anything about the band or any individual member in the band that might surprise us?

KA: Mike's a professional poker player.



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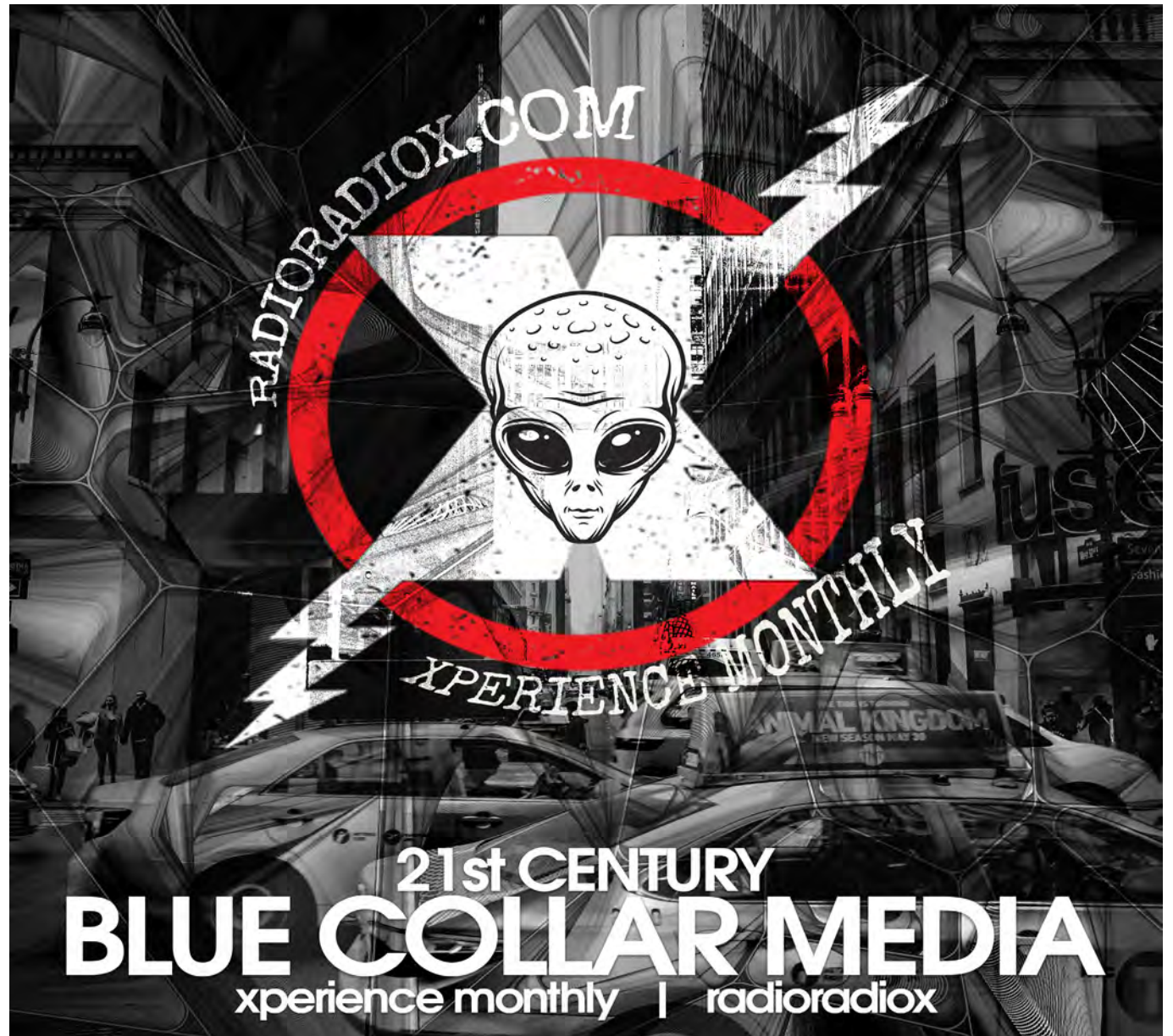
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RRX: Really?

Mike: Yep. That's what I do at home to make money when we're not on the road.

RRX: That's cool. Yeah, I am pretty good at poker myself, but I could never really afford too much. I'd go out to the casino, and I'd stay low stakes and that thing where they can't put in too much money in before the flop. I forgot what they call that, but they set the limits. I got on the wrong table one time, and I was like ... I can't even f**king play because before I even see the flop, people are putting in thousands of dollars, and I got like \$50.

Mike: Yeah. So, bankroll is sadly a very important part of playing poker at a professional level. It can sometimes be tough with the touring because I come back a little more broke than I wanna be. I have to have a healthy enough payroll to make sure I can withstand the ups and downs of the game because even when you're playing really well, you're still gonna have big losing streaks at times.

RRX: Well, at least you admit that. I know a lot of gamblers that haven't gotten that message yet. That's cool, though. I'm afraid, you know? I got my family and stuff. Last thing I want to do is be like, "Oh, I'm sorry, hon, but I didn't get the rent money." So that's a little rough. Where are you guys at with that? Does anyone in the band have kids that they know of?

RA: No. Oh yeah **** does.

KA: Yeah, ***** has a kid in Austin.

CT: I have a cat!

RRX: Same thing (Laughs).

KA: I have a cat. Our roadie Splatt has two or three kids.

RRX: I'm sure at times being crammed into the van probably sucks. But I'm sure, at other times, it's some of the greatest experiences that you could probably ever have.

KA: Yeah, it kind of sums it up more than anything. Overall, it's

enjoyable and it's always gonna have its moments. Being in a tight spot with five other people, you're always gonna get frustrated but then you're also gonna have an absolute blast too.

RRX: Exactly, and nothing can replace that. Anything else that any of you would like to say to people to intrigue them to check you out online and go to shows when you're in their town?

RA: Our most recent release was in September ... a 7-inch split with a Japanese band called the Sensations, and they're insane live! Just go to their Instagram and watch some of their shows. They're just jumping off the stage onto the crowd all the time. So check that out. It's on Ska Punk International Records. Their whole roster is pretty incredible with up-and-coming ska people.

CT: Make sure you're following our socials. We have been recording a lot; we have a lot of stuff in the works that we're not gonna announce yet, but ... a bunch of small to big releases possibly coming out. So you're only gonna find out that way. Also, bring your socks to shows. We love socks. We love when people make their own sock puppets, but we always have socks for them. And on a personal note, I still will always accept milk and cheese at shows. My band benefits from it, so I don't mind sharing.

RRX: (Laughs) Yeah, I totally forgot about the socks. I was not about to take my shoe off and disturb everyone with that, but glad you did supply some of your own socks for people.

RA: Yeah. Usually, we have more but they dwindle sometimes on tour.

CT: We actually have a sock budget.

RRX: Yeah, I bet! I appreciate your time.

RA: Okay, sounds good. Thanks, Rob. We'll talk to you. Thanks for having us.

RRX: You got it. Now, when you start rating food and beer, let me know.



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Jason Bittner

Capital Region Timekeepers

BY OP CALLAGHAN

Jason Bittner is no ordinary timekeeper. The internationally well-known and respected drumming phenomenon behind such artists as Overkill, Shadows Fall, and supergroup Category 7, Bittner is a two-time Grammy-nominated drummer who, when not on tour, calls the Capital region home. I first saw Jason with local hardcore band Stigmata, and later with China White and Burning Human. The man is a powerhouse behind the kit; a master at his craft, and a charismatic performer. Jason has an exceptional memory, and I really enjoyed talking with him. He has great stories, a keen eye for detail, and (despite his incredible success) is a really down-to-earth and humble guy. Listen to any of his work with any of his multiple bands, recordings, or live performances, and you'll see a level of devotion and ability that is simply staggering. On January 11, Jason will be hosting the 2nd annual Extreme Music Awards, which will include a performance from the Jason Bittner Birthday Bash All-Star Jam featuring members of Exodus, Slayer, Shadows Fall, Megadeth, Anthrax, Hatebreed, and Sick Of It All. Jason will be the master of ceremonies again this year, and has gathered a collection of some of the finest extreme performers, both national and local. The man is a powerhouse, and eats, sleeps, and breathes music. I'm proud to welcome him to the Capital Region Timekeepers!

RRX: Jason, thank you for doing this. I realize that you are extremely busy this time of the year. You have the Bubba Bash (Neil Peart Tribute Concert) coming up, it's the 20th Anniversary of the Shadows Fall album "The War Within," it's the holidays, and you're putting together an amazing show called the Extreme Music Awards! I can't thank you enough. As one of the greatest drummers of our generation, tell us how you got started playing drums.

JB: I was 3! My grandparents have pictures of me with tree branches, beating on garbage cans. There was no other influence at that time, but my dad was always listening to music, so I was already exposed to some of the greats. My parents were not musicians, but they were music fans, so they just kept encouraging and supporting my interests. My interest in music was not initially drums. I wanted to be Gene Simmons from Kiss! But I continued to hit things, and I finally started lessons in 3rd grade with the regular band/chorus teacher at school. Once I got to 6th grade, I started working with the band teacher, Mr. Charles Stancampiano. He was my middle school band teacher. Eric Baumes (bass player in Big Sky Country and the Decadent Royals) was playing trumpet, and we used to f**k around all the time and get kicked out of class. But Charles really got me focused and learning to read music. Later on, I broke my wrist racing BMX, right after

making the marching and jazz band. I was out for nearly a year recuperating and wound up changing schools to Niskayuna. I started working with the teacher there, Mr. Tabano, whose wife also taught music at my previous school. In my senior year, I got really serious about honing my skills, including reading and focusing on music theory. I knew that I wanted to go to Berklee School of Music in Boston, and I started working with Don Bush, who was Vic Firth's college roommate.

RRX: Who were some of your early influences?

JB: The first guy that made me take notice of the drummer was Keith Moon. I was fixated on the cover of "Who's Next" because they were peeing, hahaha! I was listening to the Who, Jimi Hendrix, Cream, and all that stuff because that's what my parents were listening to. I heard "Won't Get Fooled Again" and fell in love with the drumming. But after that, Stewart Copeland of the Police changed everything. Everything he did was incredible, especially "Ghost In The Machine." Later on, I got turned on to Iron Maiden and eventually Rush. A high school friend turned me on to "Exit Stage Left." The first time I heard Neil Peart, I was completely blown away. Peart was it. You'll never get "greats" in drumming like that again. Those guys have left a legacy that may never happen again. Obviously, as I got into thrash, the big four: Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer, and Anthrax

became significant influences.

RRX: Tell me about your first kit.

JB: A red sparkle Del Ray. My dad got it for me in 5th grade. It was incredible, and then I added Rogers concert toms, and a 16" Rogers floor tom. The next year I added Tama concert toms. My first real kit was a Tama Imperialstar kit I purchased in 1983; then I endorsed Tama from 2001-2013.

RRX: You've had a career that most would admire, as well as some truly incredible performances and experiences. Tell me about some of your favorites.

JB: There have been countless highlights. I'm really, really lucky. Ozzfest in 2005 was one of the best times and experiences of my life. Touring with the final Damage Plan show where Dime was killed, sitting in and subbing for Charlie Benante in Anthrax, the list goes on. The biggest achievement was meeting and becoming friends with Neil Peart. It was 35 years of hero worship, and then to meet and become friends. That is an incredible gift. Nico McBrain from Iron Maiden has also become a wonderful friend. I love the guy, he's a f**king treasure.

RRX: As a drummer, to call those iconic players friends and coworkers, must be a dream come true. Do you play any other instruments?

JB: I play guitar and bass. I just dabble a bit. I use them for writing

RRX: Tell me about your most recent work with Category 7. How did that materialize?

JB: We had all worked together in other bands. Phil and I were in Overkill and started talking with Mike Orlando. So we put together some ideas, started writing songs, and making a list of guys that we wanted to work with, and the first two guys on the list accepted! It was really easy, as the chemistry was there. It just came together very organically. Once the song train started, it didn't stop!

RRX: What are you playing for a kit now?

JB: I am playing Pearl Masterworks Birch. It's really f**king nice, 4-ply shells and 4-ply reinforcement rings in Jeff Porcaro grey.

RRX: You're hosting the 2nd Annual Extreme Music Awards again this year. Tell me about the EMAs and what we can look forward to this year?

JB: This year is full of surprise guests from some of the best bands ever. Former and current band members of mine, as well as some really close

friends. I was lucky enough to get a bunch of guys out of their nice, warm environments to fly out and celebrate with us in the freezing cold! It's going to be insane. This year we're looking at 24 songs in the setlist. I'm really looking forward to it, and it's going to be great!

RRX: Last year's show was incredible and full of exceptional performances. It was great to see you hosting and directing!

JB: It's always evolving, even in the days leading up. Last year, there were travel issues, sickness. Blitz (Bobby Ellsworth from Overkill) had a tree fall on his house last year, so there are always variables that you can't plan for, hahahaha!

RRX: What do you like to do when you're not drumming?

JB: My leisure time is spent in the gym, doing yoga, and taking care of sh** around the house. But this business is a 24-hour business, so there are very few breaks. I'm literally at it all day, even

when I'm not on tour or in the studio.

RRX: And it sounds like a wonderful life!

The Second Annual Extreme Music Awards will be held on January 11, 2025, at Empire in downtown Albany. Featuring members of Exodus, Slayer, Anthrax, Shadows Fall, Flotsam and Jetsam, Smoke AD, Category 7, Adrenaline Mob, Sick of It All, Brand New Sin, Hatebreed, the Erotics, Faded Line, and Brick By Brick, this year's show will surely be a not-to-be-missed event.

"From musicians, for musicians, by musicians," according to another local celebrity musician, Mike Valente. Valente's band, Brick by Brick, will also be on the pre-party event, featuring Smoke AD, Dysentery, Hope for Now, Against the Reign, and headliner Concrete, who will be celebrating an album release the same night. Valente has been a staple on the local music scene and is currently working in the studio on new Brick by Brick material. His

tireless support of the local and national extreme music scene is simply unparalleled. His devotion, support, and hard work help make the scene a success. We are lucky to have him on the side of extreme music, as well as a nurturing force for local and national musicians alike.

"Extreme music is, and forever will be, neglected by the mainstream. So be it. We do just fine admiring our own. We do not need corporate justification to know true talent."

Don't miss the second annual Extreme Music Awards on January 11, or the pre-party on January 10, both at Empire on Pearl Street in Albany. Both shows are sure to be legendary. See you there! Many thanks to Jason Bittner and Mike Valente for their devotion to local music.



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Cesar Soto

BY RACHAEL SKINNER

Internationally acclaimed and exceptionally skilled guitarist and musician Cesar Soto, hailing from Los Angeles, CA, has collaborated with a diverse array of remarkable bands over the course of his musical career. Some of his notable collaborations include Ministry, Pissing Razors, The Sixth, Years of Cold, Tides of Titan and is actively performing and creating music with his eccentric metal/grunge band Man the Mute.

RRX: What is your earliest memory of realizing your passion for wanting to play guitar?

CS: My brother gave me my first guitar when I was 9 yrs old and it inspired me to play.

RRX: Who/what are your influences on your eclectic guitar technique and creative processes?

CS: Having no boundaries and whatever comes naturally, even if it means not a traditional technique. Freedom is my technique.

RRX: What were some of the first projects you were a part of and how did that shape your style today?

CS: In the late 90s I joined Pissing Razors and it taught me comradery and about adapting to all situations that arise on the road and in the studio.

RRX: How did you end up becoming a part of Ministry?

CS: I was asked to audition in late 2014, learned multiple sets, and started touring February of 2015. Felt meant to be.

RRX: Describe the feeling of having the opportunity to be a part of

Ministry?

CS: It was an amazing opportunity and goal that I worked hard to be a part of. Playing some of my favorite songs I grew up listening to. And even more mind-blowing to be part of Ministry for over ten years now!

RRX: What is your most cherished moments with Ministry - whether it be in the studio or on tour?

CS: My most memorable moment was playing my first show with the band in Australia in front of 40,000 people. The only request Al had was to not freak out, and thank God I didn't.

RRX: I read that Ministry will be performing at the 2025 Sick New World Tour in Las Vegas- what are you most anticipating about this tour? Are there any bands in particular that you are eager/excited to perform with?

CS: It's always nice to play a festival with some of your favorite bands. I'm particularly excited to watch Metallica and Gojira on the same night. It's also great to see and reconnect with friends in some of those bands.

RRX: Can you elaborate on your decision to merge forces with Jackson Guitars?

CS: After offers from multiple guitar companies, I just felt that Jackson was my home to begin with. Their guitars are beyond solid and beautiful. Not to mention the best artist relations out there thanks to Mike Tempesta.

RRX: Can you describe your experience of meeting the legendary guitarist Dimebag Darrell Abbott? What

is your favorite memory from that evening?

CS: So many experiences to mention but the one thing that always stood out was how good and equal he treated everyone. He did once tell me, "you're a great guitar player, play more solos! You got it in you" I have so many stories from years of run ins and shows that ended up in epic hangs.

RRX: Describe to me what lead you to establish your band Man the Mute and how is this musical endeavor is meaningful to you?

CS: I started compiling years of ideas that I had on my phone of random riffs that were not intended for Ministry and when the pandemic hit, it gave me the time and opportunity to start putting songs together that I felt represented who I am as a musician. It was also a challenge that I was willing to take by writing, recording and performing everything on my album. It was a great sense of accomplishment.

RRX: What was your inspiration behind creating your single "Willow"?

CS: That is a long story but in a nutshell, Willow is about a message that I received from someone who had passed for one of their loved ones that was a stranger to me at the time. It was based on that entire experience and I believe it was meant to help that person heal.

RRX: What was the creative process like creating your full length album "Songs For Peace, Songs for War."? Do you have any behind-the-scenes details you would like to share with us?

CS: Every single song came to me with absolutely no effort, almost as I was guided by a higher power. The album was recorded in my home studio and had a lot to do with stages of my life at the time.

RRX: Do you have anything you wish to share pertaining to Man the Mute? Any plans for a tour or album?

CS: There are no plans for tour as of yet but I plan to bring Man The Mute to life in a live setting and I am actually working on a second album.

RRX: Do you have any other musical or artistic endeavors or projects that you wish you share?

CS: I try to stay busy mixing and helping others bring their musical projects to life.

RRX: What is your personal definition of success and what does it mean to you?

CS: My personal definition of success is being happy doing what you're doing at whatever level you are at. As long as you are at peace doing what you are doing, that's really all that matters.

RRX: Life constantly carves out new routes for us to explore, and on these journeys, we encounter chances to learn and grow. What is the most significant lesson you have discovered throughout your personal life journey?

CS: Adapt. Just adapt to everything that comes to you in life. Make the best of it.

Records? *Yeah, I've bought a few...*

BY ROB SKANE

Jerry Lee Lewis, “Live at the Star Club, Hamburg.” This record could possibly leave you speechless because it’s phenomenal. I was visiting my pal Jim Barrett at his record shop one Saturday afternoon, and we were just shooting the sh*t, as they say in the biz. Our good friend Johnny Mystery showed up, and Jim mentioned that a record he had ordered had arrived. It was Jerry Lee Live in Hamburg from 1964. Johnny suggested that we listen to it since it was just the three of us in the shop. Jim cranked up Side One and I mean it was L-O-U-D. We were mesmerized by the performance and the swagger that came across on the recording. Jerry Lee’s voice was otherworldly, and the piano playing was aggressive and perfect for the tunes. Some customers showed up and immediately left due to the fact (1) we kinda ignored them and (2) it was loud, really loud – kinda like how we used to listen to records when our parents left the house.

Full disclosure, I knew nothing of this LP until we devoured it on that beautiful spring afternoon. The sound quality is pristine, and there’s an energy to the performance that gives the impression that “The Killer” was very comfortable that night. He was backed by the Nashville Teens, and it was clear they knew his music inside out. My only greedy wish was that this was a double album. I’m selfish in that way, I know. But back then, it seems most headliners were doing 35 minutes and that was it. I’d never tell you what to do, but ... you might want to track this record down. My friend Johnny passed away not too long ago and the

afternoon that we listened to this record is my favorite memory of spending time with him.

The Mooney Suzuki, “Electric Sweat.” A friend of mine sent this to me because he knew I’d dig it. Maybe you will too? I can smell the inside of a guitar case when I listen to this record. It sounds like white-hot tube amplifier, Beatle boot, New York City rocknroll - with sunglasses. I have only ever listened to this one when I am alone because I can’t bear the thought of anyone saying a word while I’m absorbing all of the two guitar, bass and drums loveliness contained within this fine, fine music. This record is also about 35 minutes, which is about all us mere mortals can take. The guitars swirl in such a fierce way, it’s too much to process – at least for me. I will always love this one.

The Neighborhoods, “Reptile Men.” Good luck finding this one. But if you do ... well, you’re welcome. I bought this at a record store in North Station right before a Bruins game. And I couldn’t listen to it until I got home, but it was worth the wait. The legendary and often incendiary Neighborhoods - often referred to in Boston as the “fah-kin hoods!” This album floored me. I loved the songs and the spirit that came through in the playing and singing. They sounded like they wanted to change the world one gig at a time. They certainly changed mine to some degree. There’s a song on this LP called “Pure and Easy” that blew my mind; everything about it was perfect. The singing is fantastic, great guitar riff intro, and the passion the entire band brings to the table on this one is



Photo provided

electric. I expected my record player to levitate or something ... it was nuts.

We’re all still floored by music on occasion and it’s a great feeling to lose your mind listening to something new, even though it might actually be old.

There’s awesome stuff out there, dudes and dudettes. We just gotta keep on digging it and digging for it.

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BY CHRIS BUSONE

The bands that I was in during the '80s to '90s were created, dedicated, and (in actual fact) singularly infatuated with the search and seizure of the elusive record deal.

It was a time when record labels actually came to showcase gigs and looked for bands to sign and record, thereby granting them entre to a world that we all aspired to, but could barely imagine in our wildest of wild. A time prior to when you could record your own record on your laptop (primarily because there was no such thing as a laptop), so you needed serious financial backing to pay for expensive studio time to commit the next million-dollar seller to tape. Yes, tape, people. It was two inches wide and sounded amazing.

The lucky ones got the attention of someone at a record label, who would offer you a "spec" deal and then you'd quickly burn off a few demos on their dime. Then the shopping and showcasing and shmoozing commenced, complete with fingers crossed and hopes high.

Writer's disclaimer: I made a promise to myself that if I were given the opportunity to write a column for Xperience Monthly, I would not make it all about me; a wise old veteran offering sage advice to all you fledgling artists. Truth is, no one's ever accused me of being either wise or sage, and I'm not all that old goddamn it. But unfortunately, the only point of reference I have to pull from for these quippy ponderings is what has happened to me during my own career. So, you'll have to sit through brief, periodic, meandering down memory lane. Buckle up.

When it comes to the business of trying to score a record deal, I ran that

particular gauntlet countless times in those years. In three different instances with major labels, the deals all took the same shape and form. They'd start with, "We love what you do, we love the band, we love the songs, we can't wait to work with you." They would then culminate inevitably with, "We still can't wait to work with you, but we want to change the band, change the songs, and also and most importantly, we still love what you do, but we really want to change the way you do it, and every other conceivable thing about you."

I was in my early to mid twenties, so I turned all those deals down flat. I felt confident that the band and I would be offered about a dozen more deals to choose from. I overestimated that number by about a dozen. But I have no regrets about not traveling that cookie-cutter road. It wasn't me, and it would never have worked. And even if an unfortunate alignment of the musical stars had resulted in their alteration of my very being, catapulting me to glory and riches, I would have ultimately become one of those whining rockstars. The ones who are sooo disillusioned by fame and who (through dewy blue, soul-bearing tears) exclaim, "I just want a normal life again Oprah!" You know, those guys we all wanna to slap. It's like, "Hey brah, wanna switch gigs tonight? You play the bowling alley, and I'll play Wembley Stadium."

But here's why this story is worth the telling. It's not because I -not so subtly- slipped in there that I got three record deal offers from major labels (and I mean, like, biggies you guys, no kidding), or to forewarn you, dear reader, of the perils and pitfalls of the record industry. No. It's about what I

learned along the way. You know, like how we learn everything worth knowing in life.

I learned that making music, and the people I was making it with and for, meant more to me than glory and riches and record deals. Crazy right? I learned that working a job so I could play only the gigs I wanted to play, with the people I wanted to play them with was more satisfying to me than playing five nights a week simply for the dough, all the while wishing the night would end so I could get my \$75 and eat something. I learned that every time we - all of us - get up on a stage, it is important. And we should be thankful that we get

to do it. Because not everybody does.

But the biggest lesson learned here was that even if your initial musical hopes and dreams don't come to fruition, you can still have a fulfilling, meaningful career with incredibly talented people in an extremely cool music community. And that maybe, that was the dream all along.

And maybe, just maybe, if you're lucky, you get to write about it in a really cool magazine that's part of that music community, and remind people that you had three record deal offers from major labels in your twenties. I'm just saying. But enough about me.

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BY ROB SMITIX

Olivia Clemente. Photo provided.

RRX: I've got Olivia Clemente of the Troy BID (Business Improvement District) on the line. Olivia, what's your actual title there?

OC: Executive Director.

RRX: Oh, that's got a ring to it, doesn't it? I don't think I've ever had "executive" in any of my titles before. If I did, it was nonsense.

(Both Laugh)

OC: Yeah, right. But sometimes I feel that way, it's fine.

RRX: I know that most people (including myself), when we look at what the BID does, we're always just wondering what events are happening in Troy. Is there more to it than just events? What does the BID do on a daily basis?

OC: There are way more than just events. We handle the beautification needs of the city, and when I say beautification, it ranges. The BID is in charge

of the hanging flower baskets throughout the entire district. We hang 150 of those every year. We pay for that, and then we also are in charge of cleaning the streets. We have two beautification staff members who are out from 8 a.m. until about 6 p.m. They pick the garbage up, and they also water all of the plants in downtown. We also are in charge of the holiday decor. So, all the holiday decor you see in downtown right now. We worked with the city of Troy since our budget just wasn't able to reach it. So, working with them, they helped bring the decor back and do way more. We put a proposal together, picked what we were gonna do, picked the areas, and the city helped us fund that. So those are things that the BID does aside from events. We also plant trees in downtown. We have a raised plant grow program, and people sponsor that, where we have either

individuals who live downtown or some businesses or corporations donate money to plant a tree. We planted 12 this year, and we're planting 12 next year.

RRX: That's awesome. See, inquiring minds wanna know. I didn't know everything that you did. So there's a lot to it, and right now, I think Troy is doing really well when it comes to what's going on downtown and with people coming out.

OC: Yeah, I think our tourism has increased a ton in terms of like ... the Troy Glow Festival that just happened at the Art Center. We teamed up with them for Troy Glow, where we put all of the artists and musicians inside retail shops to be able to make everyone go into the stores and realize these retail shops are here. We had over - oh my God - I think over 2000 people that night that came out just for that event alone.

RRX: That's a clever event, you know? People gotta start getting clever with things and thinking outside of the box, and I think that event definitely was one of them. We're looking forward to the New Year 2025 ... looking ahead to the future. What do you think is gonna be different in 2025 for Troy?

OC: I think that in terms of it being different is just that people are actually coming back out. We've had slow years since COVID, and this past year proved to us that people are going out again. We saw increases at every event. Even in terms of our vendors, we saw an increase. I started in 2022 and I only had maybe 60 vendors at that River Fest. And this is, again, coming right out of COVID. This past year in 2024, we had 85 vendors. So the numbers are going back up. So that's a big tell of what the nexus of 2025 is gonna look like. I think we're gonna see an increase of people

coming out and an increase in vendors that wanna get back into being in Troy and participating. We're doing all of our classic events, from our Troy River Fest, our Rocking on the River, Pig Out, Chowderfest, our Taste of Downtown, which is a restaurant week, and then we end the year with Shop Small, Shop Troy. We also start the year with the Hot Chocolate Stroll, which is something new that we added in 2022. We are increasing again because last year we did 350 mugs, and we sold out. When we first originally started Hot Chocolate Stroll, we were at 200 mugs flat, and we sold out as people kept coming in. They're like, "We want mugs," and I'm like, holy crap. I didn't know how many people would come out for this. So this year we're gonna go to 500 mugs and see what happens.

RRX: Yeah, I think you'd have to. When does that take place?

OC: The last Friday in February.

RRX: Okay, I'll have to mark it on

my calendar and make sure I get a mug.

OC: Upstate of Mind makes the mugs for us, and they're like collectible items.

RRX: These mugs could be the next Hess truck. I think back to Albany when they had First Night. In my opinion, I think First Night Albany was amazing for a very long time until it wasn't. But those buttons they had are collector items. We gotta steal First Night back and bring it to Troy.

OC: Yeah, I mean, we do the Troy Night Out which I mean ... we have to find a formula for it. We haven't been able to crack the code completely on Troy Night Out. A lot of people come out, I will say, in the summer months. You'll see the streets are packed, everyone's out and about, and the stores are full. But we haven't been able to figure out how to get them here from January to April. That's the tough part. Those winter months are when we see that decline of people coming in and out

because it's so cold, rainy, snow, et cetera. So that's kind of the thought process when we do the Hot Chocolate Stroll in February when no one's doing anything. March has Saint Patrick's Day. So we see the influx of Saint Patrick's Day - Ryan's Wake, Bootleggers, and the Ruck. They all do a bar crawl for Saint Patrick's Day - and McAddy's - they all do that.

RRX: Man, Troy is hopping right now, and I'm very happy about that. Actually, my heart breaks for Albany. That's where I grew up, and just to see so many things gone and for the reasons that they're gone. We gotta put a bubble around Troy, so none of that happens here. I'm actually praying for Lark Street right now with a passion. The whole terrain has changed, and I think Troy is winning.

OC: Yeah, I mean ... it used to be that you would go to Albany to see awesome bands, et cetera. And now you can go to Troy for all of that, which

when I was growing up, it wasn't like that. It wasn't like ... "Oh I'm gonna go to Troy," it was ... "I'm gonna go to Albany."

RRX: I'm gonna get me an Enjoy Troy T-shirt.

OC: I say Troy is looking positive. I think a big thing is an understanding of supporting the Business Improvement District.

We do all of this. It's not the city that's doing these events; it's the BID that does all of this for downtown. In order to get this done, the BID needs to have good funding, and we need to have good people supporting us. If we can't get that community support, if we can't get that funding, we're gonna lose these events.

RRX: And that would make me sad, so yeah, let's keep that funding going. Olivia, I appreciate your time and look forward to working with you more next year.

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BY ROB SMITTIX

Reeves Gabrels & Doom Dogs. Photo by Henry Leutwyler

R **RX:** How are you doing this morning?

RG: Good. I'm up early because we've got a cat we got over a year ago after the first gig we did with Doom Dogs, and I think it was July of '23 ... with the current lineup of the band. Anyway, Susan (Mrs. Gabrels) was looking at this cat online, and I could see she kept going back to this cat, and I said "Is that cat calling your name?" Because we had cats, and all of them had passed away over time. They just aged out. It was working for us with traveling because we didn't have to worry about taking care of the cat. You know? Just lock the door and go. Anyway, the reason why I bring the cat up is, he wakes one of us up every morning between four and five to eat. Then we feed him, and then he gets in bed

between us and falls asleep for a little while. Then he gets up again at eight and wants to get fed again. So I've been up a while, and he's probably thinking, yeah I can get another meal out of him.

RRX: (Laughs) I hear that, I've got a knucklehead of a cat myself. Yeah, I heard you tried to text me from your iPhone and I didn't get any of those texts. But I'm thinking the iPhone sometimes has those features on it where they don't like us Android users. I'm Team Android all the way, though. I like to pay less and still get the same features.

RG: Well, I always liked the little green man.

RRX: Right.

RG: That was really what sold it for me. But then everybody I work with ... there's so much file transferring going

on ... I'm of the generation, when I was in high school, there was one computer in the computer room.

RRX: Oh yeah.

RG: And that was it. Between just squeaking by, taking typing, which I was a great source of embarrassment to my Mom because she was a legal typist. She worked for the clerk of courts and stuff, and when she was in her late teens, she was a competitive typist. I guess they had a competition. I could barely type 20 words a minute, but I managed, and I had already gotten accepted at the college I wanted. I just needed to get this one credit; I think they just took mercy on me and let me squeak by. It's funny, I could not watch the screen, I had to watch my fingers when I typed, it's one of the big crimes in the typing world. The point

being that everybody I work with is better with computers than I am, and they all use Apple. So I just thought, oh well, f*** it, I'll get an iPhone. And I like the fact that if I get music on my laptop, I can also listen to it on my phone, just the little convenience of that.

RRX: Definitely. They never offered me a typing class, which sucks because, with my job, I could have really used it.

RG: Yeah, well, they offered it to me and it hasn't helped.

(Both Laugh)

RRX: One of the greatest moments in my music life would be hanging out with you and Buck Dharma at the Hilton Bar after Blue Öyster Cult played at the Egg. We're all just talking, and I felt like we were all on the same level

for a minute. But then you guys started talking about these major rock stars that you both worked with and now I'm wondering how do I get back into this conversation? In my head, I was thinking, "Should I ask these guys if they ever played Valentine's?" But then I asked, "Do you guys remember the band Jeebus?" And that brought me back into the conversation because you played guitar with Jeebus, and my band Smitix did a show with you once, years back.

RG: Yes, that show felt like it had to have been a bank or something in downtown Albany, and I seem to remember angled parking.

RRX: Yes. The venue was Savannah's, and that building definitely was a bank at some point, and I think it is again.

RG: You could bring your gear in through this marble hallway. It's funny the things I remember. I don't remember street names but I'll remember the tree that was on the corner.

RRX: (Laughs) I was talking to you outside while I was having a smoke and you said a few things that I never forgot. I'm thinking, "Here's a guy that was out there just playing with (David) Bowie not that long ago. I'm sure he's played arenas and stadiums." But you said to me that this is what it's all about. You told me that you missed this ... that you missed playing in this intimate setting and the smaller clubs. And that really stuck with me.

RG: Yeah, I mean ... obviously, it's still true. Especially now being with the Cure. We played big places with Bowie and Tin Machine. But Tin Machine was an idea so David could play small places (for him) and not play any old Bowie songs. Once we made it clear that we weren't playing any of the hits, the crowds got smaller. So we could play 2,500, 3,000 capacity places. I mean ... at the same time, we did play Paradiso in Amsterdam, which is like an 1,800-capacity place if I remember

correctly. But there were 25,000 people outside!

RRX: Damn!

RG: The city had to erect what were called jumbotrons back in the day, just to take the heat off from the people trying to get in. At least that's the way I remember it. And then we left through a back door, down a stairway into a boat. We kind of escaped down a canal back to our hotel.

RRX: That's wild.

RG: Yeah, it was kind of like a James Bond movie or something. But ... his idea of playing small was playing for 3,000. The Fillmore East, I think, was 2,600 people, and there are lots of great live albums that came out of that. I would say for a big rock band, that's a good size place to play and record. For me ... I guess I still have some sort of overly romanticized vision of the occupation. I can't say I enjoy carrying gear, but I like the idea of walking in with a guitar case, a bag with some pedals over my shoulder, and the amp in my other hand. You know?

RRX: Right. Well, brings it back.

RG: All of the formative experiences happened at an early age. I'm originally from Staten Island and there was a circuit every weekend of high school dances, and there were bunches of small - like 100 capacity - clubs, and they were old man bars. On the weekends, they'd have bands in to play, and we were always working and were often underage. Or playing at the Hawk's Nest, I think it was called at Wagner College, at 16. We were playing at these beer-blast kind of things. That's where I learned what it felt like to be slowly electrocuted.

RRX: Oh, there you go.

RG: Somebody knocked over a pitcher of beer, which would be a saline solution. I was playing my first guitar, which was a Telecaster, probably through an old Fender that someone had pulled the grounding pin out of. I felt like every time I touched the

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strings, I was touching pins. Like a little stabbing. And then I noticed that the hair on my arms was standing up straight! I looked down, and I realized I'm standing next to the mic stand, which was the venue's equipment. The rubber feet on the mic stand had long since worn off. It's a metal mic stand, and it's surrounded by beer, and I'm standing in that same beer that some drunk college student had knocked off the table. I was just slowly completing the circuit. But those smaller venues are where you learn the craft, I guess, or trade of it.

RRX: Exactly.

RG: You learn how to survive it.

RRX: Now, the Doom Dogs are going to be playing January 8 at Troy Savings Bank Music Hall. And that's not necessarily a small venue. You're playing a series called The LIFT Series, which I've been to a couple of those, and they are really cool because we get to join the band on stage, that's where the audience sits. But I know that if there's an overflow, they'll start seating people in the regular seats. Well, I'm team overflow. I'm pushing for that.

RG: It is funny because, for Doom Dogs, it's a little bit larger than usual but it isn't so large that we'll lose that sense of intimacy. For me personally, it's why I do it. I like being in a close, sweaty nightclub. Especially during COVID, it was like where you didn't want to be. An over-packed place where you can see the humidity in the air, which means you can see the bacteria and the germs floating. Between that and playing at Mojo's (Troy), which I think has an indoor capacity of like 40 or 50 people, and if they open the back, it goes up to like 120. You can't see the band if you're in the back but you can hear it. The drummer, Jonathan from Doom Dogs, and I, do this [different] thing with Ross Rice, who I've known for years now. I'm not sure what his actual title is at RPI but he runs the music production department

and teaches music there.

RRX: No kidding.

RG: He's like Steve Winwood. He's playing bass with one hand. He's got one synth set up to sound like a precision bass. He runs that through a bass amp. Then he's got his regular keyboard that is set up more or less for, like, organ-type stuff. Ross and I both sing, and we call it the Blues Episode. Despite the name, we do some Blind Faith, we do some old Taj Mahal stuff, we do some Steely Dan, and a couple of originals of mine. It depends on whether we've had time to rehearse and the mood we're in. They're all solid songs that people recognize, so we can take liberties with them and they're durable, you know? It's hard to break "Can't Find My Way Home."

For a certain generation, it's a really solid song. Or just the blues form in general ... you can mess with that in so many different ways. It's fun, and to go back to what I said to you, this is why I do it, this is how it should be. I mean,



Reeves Gabrels. Photo by Chris Cardi.

you can actually have a literal conversation while you're playing with people that are there to see you play. If you can get together with a couple of people who you enjoy traveling in a van with, chances are that conversation will continue on, in a more abstract way, onto the stage.

RRX: That's a cool way to look at it.

RG: We have that going on with Doom Dogs, and we have that going on with Blues Episode. My solo thing is probably really the template for me on what I look for in a group of people to play with.

RRX: Oh yeah.

RG: You don't have to agree on everything. You just don't kill each other.

RRX: (laughs) Exactly.

RG: You laugh at each other rather than kill each other.

RRX: Well, it really does come down to having the best people with you. I've been in a band for about 18 years. My bassist moved out to Montana and everybody's like, why aren't

you guys playing? Just get a new bassist. I don't wanna look at anybody else on the stage. I'd rather start a new band, you know?

RG: Yeah, it's almost a loyalty, but it's like a familial kind of thing too. It's like family after a while.

RRX: Exactly.

RG: The thing about the smaller venues too, is ... when you're playing for over 10,000 people ... that makes me sound like a real ass****, but with 10,000 people, you're screwed. What I mean is, I have to start making considerations in my head. Like I have to play fewer notes. I have to make sure that the song communicates a room with more echo. I have to carve a little more space for the singer. If you take that up to like 100,000 people, then you're basically in a position where you have to paint the song in broader strokes; so that it's recognizable, it speaks, and it still lives up to what the fans of whatever band it is wants to hear. Whereas in a small place, you've seen me play out, I love playing lots of notes.

RRX: Yes, you know all of them!

RG: I guess a lot of my feelings towards smaller places go back to when I was in New York. I remember seeing Dexter Gordon at the Village Vanguard and seeing him walk off the stage and walk into the kitchen to get something to eat. Then, he'd walk back out on the stage when the piano player was done with his solo. Another story I think about the Vanguard ... Miles Davis doing the same thing except going over to the bar after his trumpet solo and getting a drink at the bar, then walking back to the bandstand.

RRX: How cool is that?

RG: That's been in my head, but then there was a place in Boston when I moved there called Michael's Pub. That was like two blocks from where I was staying in a rooming house for \$18 a week. So you can imagine, it was the lap of luxury.

Continued on Page 31...



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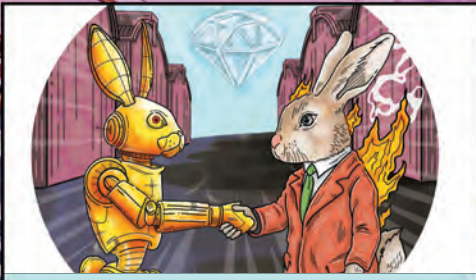
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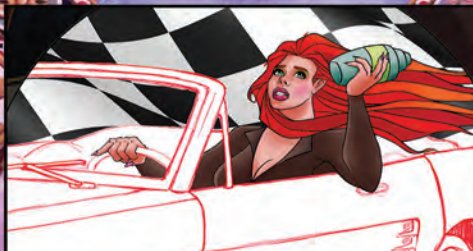
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Continued from Page 28.

RRX: (Laughs) Yes it was.

RG: All the roaches I could kill for free. The guy that worked the door took pity on me, and instead of charging me the \$2 to get in, he would let me in for free. One night, I walked in, and it was Mike Stern playing guitar with a guy named Randy Rouse, who's another famous Boston fusion guitar player, with Jeff Berlin on bass. Jeff Berlin ended up playing with Bill Bruford and a bunch of other people. Steve Smith was the drummer that night, and Steve Smith was the drummer in Journey during their prime, their most commercial years. I think Steve Smith was actually playing with Journey at that point. He definitely was, because when I think back to the time, I remember thinking myself, what the f*** is he doing here?

RRX: Right?

RG: It was just one of those bars ... it was the bar equivalent of a shotgun shack. It was just a straight rectangle, the bar went down about half the length of the venue, and the rest were some tables and chairs. There was no stage, the band just set up in the corner. Mike Stern was already playing with Miles Davis at that point. I just thought, so it's about the love of it! It's about your craft, and it's about keeping your knives sharp. And it's about the conversation. I always use the word conversation which sometimes confuses people, but it's like the thing that happens in an abstract manner when you're improvising with other people. In my mind, it's almost like the thought balloons you see in comic books; you can see everybody's thought balloons when you're playing with them.

RRX: I could imagine, with Doom Dogs being so improvisational ... your instruments really are doing the talking for you.

RG: Jair-Rôhm, the bass player, and I started doing Doom Dogs while I was doing the "Outside" record with

Bowie. I had a couple of weeks off in the middle, and he was living in Copenhagen. He just booked a little run of gigs for him and I, and a drummer that he knew. That first Doom Dogs record, "Personal Nuclear Device" (which is the actual name, it's been posted a couple of different ways). The idea behind the "Personal Nuclear Device" was, if you reach the point where you can't argue with a liar ... If you reach the point where you are just so exasperated with someone, you just hug them and you hit the red button on your chest!

(Both Laugh)

RG: And it's worth it to take both of you out.

RRX: Exactly. I always wanted to go out as spontaneous human combustion. I think that's the way to go.

RG: But to go back to your thing about letting the instruments do the talking. We showed up at this first gig in Brooklyn a year and a half ago, and Jair-Rôhm had found Jonathan. I had seen Jonathan play with Swans, but I had not met him then. I figured, well, sure, it'll be fun. We haven't played in a couple of years because Jair-Rôhm and I would get together maybe once every year or two and play someplace with somebody. The thing that happened that night was we introduced each other while we're setting our gear up, and Jonathan says to Jair-Rôhm, so what are we going to play? And Jair-Rôhm says, just play! Jonathan kind of went, "Oh, okay, it's gonna be like that then."

We were so surprised by what happened that we've been doing it ever since. I go back to Cream and Hendrix, and that kind of got filtered through, you know? Miles and more jazz improv stuff. I used to have an 11-piece horn band when I was at Berklee College of Music in Boston. So there's all this stuff kicking around in my head. When you get together, and you improvise freely ... I remember ... I think it was Jack Bruce that said to me, some nights

we really sucked.

RRX: Yeah, sure.

RG: You're just trusting the muse. It's an interesting thing. A couple of times, I think we may have done a three-in-a-row at one point, or we did two days on and a day off and then another show. To do something that's improv-based that close together with guys that you're traveling with ... it's almost like a little bit of distance is nice because you get to have an experience that the other guys don't, so you can bring that into the equation. Bowie and I used to talk about that all the time because when we used to write together, if we had not had a break between the writing or the tour and the writing and the recording ... it was harder to do just because - I know what your next move is gonna be. I was standing next to you when you saw that red car down the street that you're writing about.

RRX: Ahh, that makes sense.

RG: So the challenge is to dig up stuff that's fresh for yourself but also the responsibility you have to the other two members of the trio. I like trios because it's like the concept of the tripod, either all three legs are working or the thing falls over.

RRX: Well, I've been calling it a supergroup trilogy. That's the way I put it.

RG: Susan came up with genre free improvisation, I think was the description of what we did.

RRX: It makes sense.

RG: We really don't know who's gonna start. We really don't know what we're gonna play. We're starting over time to define our own internal vocabulary. Ego aside, we're all distinctive players, we do bring that to the party. But it's still surprising to us, which is really what makes it work. It's that moment where you feel like Wile E. Coyote and you're not sure whether you've gone over the edge or the cliff and if you're gonna make it back just by treading air. Whether it's gonna go ping (sound effect voice) and just be a puff of dust down in the valley. We have fun when we do it, but we take it seriously. Nobody's gonna be quoting the Mickey Mouse Club theme. The music is serious, the conversations you have with us in between, not so much.

RRX: Any last thoughts on Doom Dogs to get people to come out and become the overflow?

RG: Yeah, we're gonna play exactly what you expect!

(Both Laugh)

RRX: Hey man, it's been a pleasure, I'm glad we finally got to do this.

RG: It's been great talking to you.

For More on Doom Dogs:
jairrohm.wixsite.com/doom-dogs

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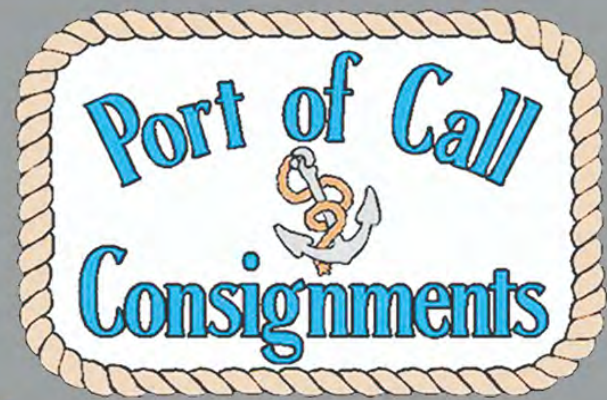
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DJ Parsons

BY ROB SMITTIX

RRX: How are you doing today?

DJ: I'm good. How are you?

RRX: Keeping busy, that's for sure.

DJ: That's always a good thing.

RRX: Yeah, I thought it would be cool to just chat with you a little bit. Um, so you are a master luthier?

DJ: I am.

RRX: I don't know if I pronounced that right. Hopefully - I went to Albany High so I pronounce things wrong.

DJ: I've had people ask me if it's a new religion and I say, no, it's not Lutheran, it's luthier.

RRX: That's funny. Tell us a little bit about what you do, how you got started, and the services that you offer.

DJ: Well, I went to Galloup School of Lutherie in Michigan. I came out of there in like '08, and I started my guitar tech business in Boston. It was a very successful shop, and one day, one of my customers came to me and said, "You really should teach people to do what you do." The main reason that I started the school was that there was a lot of work going on out there that was not very good. So, I wanted to teach people to do the work the way that I do it, the right way.

I'd been running the school for like 15 years and had a very successful school in Massachusetts. It pretty much got shut down during the pandemic. My wife and I were living in Massachusetts, and we have two sons who live in this area, one in Niskayuna and one in Glenville. We said, if we don't move out there, we're never gonna see anybody. So we came out here, and now we have four grandchildren, and it's really been great. I didn't know if I could reboot the school in this area or not. The first place I looked at was in the Frog

Island Schoolhouse. I figured, what better place for a school than a schoolhouse? It's worked out very well. I've been doing it for three or four years in that location. Overall, I've graduated probably 70 or 80 students. Now there are 70 to 80 luthier guitar techs out there that weren't there before that I trained. And that's my mission. You know? I'm 71 this year, and my mission is to put as many good luthiers out on the market as I can.

RRX: Oh, absolutely. I know just from being in the music scene and being in a band myself ... I know a lot of guitarists who don't know how to do their own setups, and they always depend on other people to do it.

DJ: And again, the reason I started the school was most guitar players spend their whole life looking for a decent setup. When a person brings a guitar to me to be set up, I have them play it for me. The way they play informs the way to do a setup. Unfortunately, most guitar techs set up guitars the way that they play, and that's not good. What good is that?

RRX: Correct. That makes sense because everyone has their own signature sound, their own signature style. It's just like when people try to backline amplifiers at a show; you're not gonna get the sound that you're looking for from somebody else's amp.

DJ: Right.

RRX: That's something that I know you are very adamant about is getting people set up on the sound that they want. Set up the way that they want it, not the other guy.

DJ: That's right. My students have been a mixture of people that wanna do this part-time or full-time themselves. Probably a third of the people that I train



just wanna do their own setup. My standard course, the students come once a week for an hour. It takes about six months to train them to where I give them a certificate as a luthier.

But what's taken on a lot of speed in the last couple of years is people coming in from out of state. People come in to take my course from all over the place. When they do that, I do a two-week accelerated course where they come and meet with me two hours a day for two weeks. I mean, it's like a fire hose, but it works out well because there are very few people in the country that do what I do.

RRX: Yeah, that's awesome. So - people who are traveling in - obviously, their time is limited, so you accelerate the program, and you're squeezing in a bunch of knowledge into a very short period of time.

DJ: Yeah. And there's a pretty good network of Airbnbs in the area. So they

tend to stay there. Now, on that training, the weeks don't need to be consecutive. I had a guy come in May, and then he came back in August to finish it up. In fact, I prefer that. I mean ... if we go back-to-back, it's just a lot of work for me, you know?

RRX: No, it makes sense.

DJ: As I say, it's constant, it's nonstop. Typically, I have about a dozen students at a time. I like to keep it at about that number because then I can be flexible. As I say, my students come for an hour a week, but it's not always the same day, and it's not always the same hour. They have that flexibility to mix it up a little bit. I teach seven days a week, usually until about noon or one o'clock, and then the rest of the time it's with the grandchildren. So that's what I do

RRX: How young should a guitarist start learning how to do their own setup?

DJ: I'm about to take on my youngest student ever at 13 years old. I'm also now teaching only my second woman student ever. Which just seems kind of weird to me. It just seems to me that women are more detail-oriented than guys are, but I guess I have to admit that it's a male-dominated discipline.

RRX: Well - for all of the women guitarists reading this - definitely hit DJ up!

DJ: The thing I wanna emphasize about the school, though, is it's a lot of fun. I still do repairs on guitars. And one of the cool things about having people learn from me is that I've got a very structured way of teaching. It took me a long time to put the curriculum together, and it's a progressive thing. But every once in a while, something cool will come through the shop, and we'll do what I call a side-track, ie: a broken neck, lifting, bridge, that type of thing, and they're able to see that. I mean, your value as a guitar tech or a luthier has a lot to do with what you've been exposed to. And probably the

number one thing about that discipline is troubleshooting. If somebody walks in the door, they've got a situation. You basically just say to them, "I'm on it," and you take care of it. If it's nothing you've seen before, you pick up the phone and call DJ and say, "DJ, what am I gonna do? I haven't seen this before." So my graduates are calling me all the time.

RRX: That's awesome. I have two guitarists in my band, and my one guitarist literally only owns one guitar. It's an amazing Les Paul from the '70s, but I've seen it when his headstock broke off, and he had to send it out to get repaired. My other guitarist, on the other hand, had nearly 70 guitars at one point.

DJ: Oh my God. You know, the old T-shirt? You can never have too many guitars.

RRX: Yeah, exactly, but I mean ... when you are a guy that only has that one guitar, I think it's really important to be able to adapt these skills. And then, if you're on the flip side of that, and you

have a whole bunch of guitars ... I imagine each guitar might have a different kind of setup because that's the reason you have different guitars for different sounds.

DJ: Yes, they all do.

RRX: I think you're providing a great service. Like you said, it's a rare service. Not a lot of people are doing this, but the more you get in there, the more they will.

DJ: The Guitar Center in Albany reached out to me a couple of years ago and had me train a couple of their people to work in their stores. A couple of the guys that I've graduated have gone on to be the lead guitar techs for Guitar Center. So, that's kind of gratifying.

RRX: Absolutely. Is there anything that you would wanna stress to people out there if they have someone in their family that plays guitar or they play guitar themselves ... what would you say to encourage them to come on in and see what you're all about?

DJ: It's probably one of the coolest things you could ever wanna do. As a

guitarist, I'm sure you know it. One of the guys that I've known for a long time is the roadie for the Rolling Stones for God's sake.

RRX: Wow.

DJ: Yeah. I mean ... there's nothing cooler that you could ever want to do, and it's a great way to change careers if that's what you're looking to do.

You could work in your home, you control how you meet with the public, and there's no better way to make a living. And you can make a living doing this. You gotta put the work in, and you gotta be well-trained but you can do it! So I would say, just give a call, drop a line, and we can discuss the school.

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Singin' Guru

BY JEFF AND CRYSTAL MOORE

Dear Singin' Guru,
I'm busting my hump singing at bars for next to nothing. I absolutely love making my music, but how do I become an artist when it's so hard to make a living as a musician?

Broke as a Joke

Dear Broke,

Ah, the recurring and often repeated question: how do you become an artist when the world seems to have the financial equivalent of T-Rex arms when it comes to supporting musicians?

Becoming an artist doesn't necessarily mean quitting your day job nor does it require you to chase a Spotify chart. Here's the thing: being an artist doesn't have to equal making a living off your music. Art is about expression, not necessarily profession. But if you're aiming to do both—create and pay your bills—then let's unpack what that journey looks like.

The Fame Trap: What They Don't Tell You

Let's talk about fame. While it's tempting to picture yourself headlining Coachella or playing to packed arenas, fame has its own trap. Do you think Jimmy Buffett really wanted to play "Maragaritaville" for the 10,000th time? Or

that Def Leppard is thrilled to crank out "Rock of Ages" on yet another reunion tour instead of playing something fresh? Probably not.

Rob Halford of Judas Priest could decide to tackle opera, but do you think fans screaming for "Painkiller" would stay quiet for an aria? Doubtful. Fame locks you into what fans expect. As an artist, you'll need to decide if you want your work to define you—or if you're okay with being defined by what your fans latch onto.

Here's seven things you can do to balance art and making a living:

Stick to What You Love: Don't chase trends. If you're into experimental

jazz but TikTok says K-pop is in, stick to jazz. Chasing trends is like trying to catch smoke—it disappears before you can grab it. As jazz legend Miles Davis said, "Do not fear mistakes. There are none." Create what feels right to you.

Master Your Craft: Whether it's metal, folk, or EDM, you need solid technique. A lot of musicians get stuck at "good enough," but in competitive fields, mastery is what sets you apart. Yo-Yo Ma once noted, "Passion is one great force that unleashes creativity, because if you're passionate about something, then you're more willing to take risks." Hone your technique so you can take those creative risks.

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Embrace Creativity in Your Genre: Be unique within the space you love. Listeners may not always notice your technical prowess, but they'll remember a song that stands out. Push boundaries, but don't forget to stay true to your core sound.

Grow Your Fans Organically: One fan at a time. Be kind, be grateful, and connect. If 10 people are listening to your music, treat them like they're the most important people in the world—because they are. David Bowie put it beautifully: "Don't play to the gallery... if you feel safe in the area you're working in, you're not working in the right area." Be authentic, and fans will come.

Know That Not Everyone Will Follow You: Switching genres? Some fans will come along; others won't. That's okay. You're evolving as an artist, and your fans are evolving, too. Focus on the ones who stick around and welcome new ones who appreciate your latest journey.

Separate Passion from Profession: Ask yourself: is music your calling or career—or both? If it's a passion, you don't need to monetize every note. If it's a profession, get ready for some hustle. The two paths overlap but aren't the same.

Get Business Savvy: Marketing your music isn't selling out; it's ensuring that your art reaches ears. The saddest song is the one no one hears. Treat your music career like a small business—learn about branding, distribution, and revenue streams. Remember what Taylor Swift said: "In this industry, you have to adapt or perish." Marketing and networking are part of the gig.

Art, Heart, and the Balancing Act: Yes, becoming an artist is hard work. Balancing your creativity with the realities of the music business can feel overwhelming, but the rewards are worth it. As musicians, we're here to add light to the world—and let's be honest, the world could use all the light it can get.

So, here's my advice: follow your art, listen to your heart, and learn the

business ropes as you go. Whether you're performing at open mics, uploading tracks to SoundCloud, or headlining a show, you're doing something beautiful: you're creating music. And the world needs that. Keep going, and don't forget to enjoy the ride. After all, as the legendary Prince said, "A strong spirit transcends rules."

Dear Singin' Guru,

The winters here are so dry, half the time I feel like a shrunken head which really affects my voice. How do I sing through winter dryness, allergies, and illnesses without giving up when I feel this way?

Dried Up in the 518

Dear Dried Up,

Don't you love winter? The season of dry air, relentless allergies, and those dreaded colds that keep knocking at your door. If you've found yourself wondering, "Should I just pack it in and stop singing until spring?" the answer is a resounding NO!

Now, before you go all Elsa and let it go, let me offer some guidance – and just to cover myself: I'm not a doctor, nor do I play one on TV, so always consult your physician before following any advice here. But as a voice coach who's practically seen it all, I can confidently say that with the right approach, winter doesn't have to silence your voice. From my perspective, singing through illness isn't always a bad idea.

Here's a fun thought experiment: when you injure your leg, do doctors tell you to stay in bed indefinitely? Nope. They patch you up, then send you off to physical therapy where you move that leg as soon as it's safe. The same logic applies to your voice.

If you're dealing with a cold or mild respiratory symptoms, gentle vocal exercises can improve your condition.

Singing increases oxygen uptake, improves circulation, and helps your vocal apparatus stay limber. However, if you're experiencing serious symptoms—like pneumonia, a severe cough, or strep throat—sit this one out and consult your doctor.

Lip trills and straw exercises are your best friends when you're feeling off. They allow you to exercise your vocal folds gently and with less pressure, which helps prevent strain. Search these up on YouTube for demonstrations. Warm up by doing these exercises, too. Research backs this up: semi-occluded vocal tract exercises (like straw phonation) reduce tension and improve vocal fold closure, even for those with vocal fatigue.

Singers must learn to listen to their bodies. If you feel pain, discomfort, or start coughing uncontrollably, stop immediately. But if you notice you're feeling better after a warm-up, that's a good sign! Try adding a simple exercise to your routine. Build up gradually, and before

you know it, you'll be back to belting those high notes.

Being hydrated can also help you combat your voice's mortal enemy of dry, cold air. Keep a humidifier running in your practice space and drink plenty of water throughout the day. Tea and honey are fine if you like them, but water is your vocal cords' true BFF. And steer clear of alcohol and caffeine, which can dehydrate you further.

If you decide to sit out every time you get the sniffles, you could lose 2–3 weeks of practice, multiple times a year. That adds up! Instead, focus on safe vocal exercises to maintain your strength and technique. Even light practice will keep your voice in shape and shorten your recovery time.

Yours Truly,

The Singin' Guru



Prog Digest

BY KLYDE KADIDDLEHUMPER

Happy New Year, Louis!
 Happy New Year, Billy Ray!
 And who won the One Dollar?

Well, who really cares – Louis not only had the champagne, lobster, and cracked crab, but Ophelia to boot.

The new year is always filled with hope and all that jazz – and, inevitably, comes up a little short of our expectations. Mind you, most of us have high expectations for the new year. And we also usually find ourselves going, “Don’t let the door hit your ass on the way out!” to the old year.

Well, not this year, people! The streak ends here! We will not be fooled again! You won’t find me bowing to the porcelain god at the end of the year! No siree, Bob. Not this guy. Nope.

But Klyde, just how do you plan to avoid this end-of-year case of phooey?

This year, it’s a two-pronged attack.

Yes – I know. Fighting a war on two fronts is a strategy with failure just waiting to happen (just ask the Germans ... well, ok, part of it DID have to do with the weather on the Eastern Front). This, however, is not a war.

This is a strategy guaranteed to make things ok.

Front number one - concerts. Now, I am going to be looking at progressive stuff right now. Some may or may not come anywhere near. However, there will be some that are available online or somewhere later on. In all, live music is the start of a solid approach.

But Klyde, who are you looking to see?

Here is a list, just to start:

Kraftwerk
 Steven Wilson
 The Musical Box

Dream Theater
 Steve Hackett
 Umphrey’s McGee
 Tesseract
 Haken
 Jeff Lynne’s ELO
 The Alan Parsons Live Project
 Psychedelic Porn Crumpets (I have no idea, but am going to find out)

That should do to start. There are certainly more, but these are all the ones of which the news has come to Harvard. There may be many others, but they haven’t been discovered.

On to front number two.

More music I’ve never heard of. Or, more than likely, you – even if you are

a massive proghead – have likely not heard of. Sorry for the lousy grammar.

For anyone who has been a faithful reader (not that I think there are any – this is really just a completely self-absorbed monthly form of therapy), you will have heard me speak of Prog Magazine. It really is the necessary go-to reference for all things old and new in the world of Prog. Once upon a time, there was a real CD enclosed with each issue (I have a pretty good number of them).

Now, it’s a download link in the magazine.

Here are some things that have been around over the last few years.

Currently on the playlist is a sampler of music from the band Twelfth Night. Originating in England in the ‘80s, they reformed in 2007 and 2014. Really fun stuff.

Pallas – another 1980s “neo-prog” band – and they are still around. 2023’s “The Messenger” is full of all the pomp and bombast you’d expect. Just plain cool.

The Fierce and the Dead’s 2023 album “News from the Invisible World” was runner-up as Prog Magazine’s Album of the Year. Steven Wilson was Number One. Wonderfully complex and still lyrical. Yeah – no wasted time here.

Some of the links are for label samplers. For example, Bird’s Robe Records showcased 18 bands and tracks. Bands like clayhands, Tangled Thoughts of Leaving, Arcane, Kodiak Empire, and many more.

My sanity already being in question, this is just going to be the manner in which I cope and refine the art of being a functioning lunatic.

If I can do it, so can you. Get out of the damned house and see a show where you have no idea what is going on. Listen to music you buy the way we all used to do it: walk into a record store (when you travel, seek them out) and buy something where the album cover looks cool or maybe disturbing.

Now – get off your fat a\$\$ and start something that we all know you will not regret.

Happy Freakin’ New Year.

Until next time.

Klyde



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