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December 2025
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for The Ramones

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doom brass
band.

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RRX: So how's today treating you?
Marky Ramone: All right. I'm in my place in Italy, a little different than New York, but yeah, it's okay, having a good time here.

RRX: Oh, excellent. We're very excited that you're coming to kinda our neck of the woods, to the Bearsville Theater in Woodstock, on December 6th for the Holiday Blitzkrieg. What are we to expect from a Holiday Blitzkrieg?

MR: Well, 36 classic Ramones songs, a lot of energy, and a lot of fun. Like last year ... I've been doing this for about five years already, but I included the Bearsville Theater last year, and it went really well, so I wanted to do it again. It's gonna be a jolly good time.

RRX: It definitely will be. One of my fondest Ramones memories was back in 1996 in Albany, New York. I was working for a radio station called The Edge back then, and I'm just driving home from my shift, and I see something going on in Lincoln Park. So I get out of my car and as I'm approaching the park, I'm like ... oh it's a Ramones cover band, but when I

got closer to the stage I realized it actually was the Ramones. I was like ... how did I not catch wind of this? But that was amazing to surprisingly walk up on you guys.

MR: That was probably one of the last shows we did, if it was 1996. It might have been the end of '95.

RRX: Well, Google says it was '96.
MR: Okay, well then, we probably stopped a couple of months later.

RRX: Yeah, it wasn't too much longer after that, so I'm really thankful that I have that experience and those memories.

MR: Oh, thank you.

RRX: I know a while back you had your very own "Brooklyn's Own Pasta Sauce." That's not a thing anymore, or do you just make it at home for yourself now?

MR: No, it was just like a pop-up thing. I mainly did it because my grandfather was a chef at the Copacabana and the 21 Club in New York, and I used to watch him cook. Then somebody approached me and asked me if I would

make my own sauce, which I did, and I gave part of it away to charity; that was the best part of it. We made ... I don't know, I guess a few hundred thousand bottles and sold out. What happened was I had to employ so many people, and I didn't really know how to deal with that side of the business. I didn't wanna get into that because I knew that it could end up being a headache or some kind of hassle. So I said, Let me just stick to the music. And that was it. Yeah, I had a food truck that went all around and made meatball heroes with the sauce and pasta. But it was really out of my league because I didn't have the experience to take it that far.

RRX: Oh yeah, that's quite the undertaking, but now that you're over there in Italy, have you ever broken out your Brooklyn's Owns Pasta Sauce over there?

MR: I tried that once, and the bottles broke, went all over my clothes, went all over everything, and I learned my lesson, you know? Transporting glass like that is not a good idea.

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RRX: Well, that makes sense. Obviously, you've got the Sirius XM radio show ... that's how I got started in all this, I've been a DJ since way back when. But when I played music, I wasn't necessarily playing music from my peers, which is a little bit different for you because when you're playing songs from many of those bands, they are your friends and musical peers whom you've created actual memories with. What is it that you enjoy most about being a DJ?

MR: I like playing the songs that I like. Mainly punk songs, what I consider punk, one-hit wonders from the '60s and the '70s. A lot of these bands from England and the States really weren't played when they came out because a lot of the radio was playing disco and stadium rock, and they really didn't give it an equal chance. So, now that I have the two stations, I can play whatever I want, that's in the contract. I play bands that I feel deserve more attention than they did when they came out, you know?

RRX: Yeah, that makes sense. It's definitely one of the greatest radio programs out there, especially for punk rock fans like myself.

MR: Thank you.

RRX: It's kind of like a breath of fresh air because regular terrestrial radio had never really given punk rock the love that it deserved.

MR: I know, but I think there are a few reasons for that. I think it's the term punk, and I think it was also the way the English punk bands physically wore certain paraphernalia that was negativity in the United States. So, a lot of DJs were turned off by that; I think that could be the reason. Again, a lot of stations were programmed to play the disco and stadium rock music that was being pushed by the record companies at the time.

RRX: Well, it certainly was risky for radio, I imagine.

MR: Oh yeah.

RRX: But I'm glad the music was

made, and you know what? If it did become mainstream, it probably would have been less punk anyway.

MR: Yeah, but now it's more mainstream than ever. If something goes mainstream and it's good, why not? If something goes mainstream and it's mediocre, then that's not good, you know? But better late than never.

RRX: Exactly. Well, just curious, I mean ... with all of your years in the music business and all of your memories, are there any that stick out that make you think this was all worthwhile?

MR: Oh, let me see ... let me toot my horn here. I guess ... the Hall of Fame, the Grammy Award, being on The Simpsons, doing Rock and Roll High School, and being produced by Phil Spector. I did 1700 shows with the Ramones, and it continues. But the main thing is the fans, they come and enjoy it, and I see it on their faces and in reality that's what matters to me.

RRX: Definitely glad that I got you on the line today. It's been an honor, being a punk rock fan my entire life

MR: Thank You

RRX: If there was anything that you could say to fans to encourage them to tune into your show and come out to your shows, what would you say to them?

MR: Well, if you are a Sirius XM subscriber, listen to my station, it's four times a month. Then there's the other station, where it's 24/7; all my shows that I've done in the last 20 years thrown together. If you can't get enough of what I do each week, then you can go to that station. You just gotta type in my name on the Sirius XM app, Marky Ramone, and it'll give you all the information. It's as much punk as you can get!

RRX: That it definitely is. I appreciate your time and look forward to seeing you at the Bearsville Theater, December 6th. Any last words of wisdom that you'd like to put out there to the world?

MR: Yeah, "Hey ho, let's go!"



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Christmas

BY OP CALLAGHAN

I started playing drums before I had drums.

At the age of 7, I knew that I wanted to be a drummer, and began playing with a pair of mismatched sticks, procured from a concert at a neighbor's graduation party. I beat the hell out of a couple of pillows, playing along to Deep Purple and David Bowie, as well as choice selections playing on PYX 106 and Q104. The following year, for Christmas, I got a snare drum. It was a Montgomery Ward "steel snare drum and stand", which I immediately took to abusing while learning how to play "Wipe Out" from a "Music Minus One" record, which verbally taught a drum lesson by dropping out the drum part, allowing the student to fill in the blanks. My neighbor had given me an old cymbal, which I precariously perched upon a music stand, and was able to use my foot to throw off the snares for the tom-tom part. I would practice this and other songs daily, which certainly drove my family crazy. In my downtime, I would peruse the Montgomery Ward Catalog, looking at the drum sets and dreaming of rock stardom.

I grew up in a nice, affluent community, but my family was humble. My dad was a mechanic, my mother worked in a grocery store, and every year at Christmas, my folks would warn us that "It's gonna be tight this year," but somehow we always seemed to make out like bandits. I spent the previous year begging, pleading, and swearing that I would get straight A's in school if I could simply have a drum set. My snare drum and cymbal setup was augmented with a couple of frisbees attached with duct tape, and an

old bass drum without a foot pedal that I would literally kick with my right foot. To say that I was desperate and pathetic is an understatement.

Despite my pleas, my parents warned me that my wishes were too expensive. After all, we had just moved to a bigger house from our cramped bungalow, my mom had been laid off from the grocery store, and I had two younger brothers. Money was tight, and drums were expensive. I was beyond defeated. Christmas Eve, I hung my stocking over the back of the couch next to my brothers' stockings, as we didn't have a fireplace. I kissed my parents good night and raced up the stairs with my brothers, and eventually fell asleep. I dreamed of hockey skates, a distant second on my wish list. In the morning, I woke up, looked at my patchwork snare drum frisbee combo, and resisted the temptation to play a bit before breakfast and Christmas morning. My brothers had somehow awakened before me and were doing their best to contain their excitement on Christmas morning, while patiently waiting for me to wake up, by standing over my bed. After some good-natured ribbing, we rolled down the stairs to tear into our gifts.

Now, my parents had already warned us that "Christmas is not going to be huge this year," which they did every year. But unbeknownst to me, they had conspired with my brothers weeks earlier. My two younger brothers had expressed to my folks that they thought that a drum set would be a good present for me, and they would be willing to get fewer presents if it meant that their older brother could get drums! Now, truth be told, I was

not the sweet older brother. In fact, my younger brothers were already both bigger than me by the time I turned 9, and we spent the majority of our time beating the sh** out of each other, with yours truly getting the majority of the beatings. Despite our hooligan-like behavior leading up to Christmas, my parents were touched by my brothers' presentation, and managed to scrape together enough to get me a second-hand Gretsch drum set. As I turned the corner after descending the stairs, my brothers began to jump and shout, "Lookit that! You got drums!"

I was paralyzed and speechless. They were beautiful. Champagne sparkle, Gretsch jazz kit, in all of its sparkling glory, resting nicely in front of the Christmas tree. The tree lights and tinsel, reflecting off the sparkling metal flake of the drum shells and the chrome snare drum, were a stunning vision in my young eyes. I didn't cry, but came real close as I sat down on the throne, to behold this majestic mountain of mahogany and maple ... but my sticks were upstairs. I made a break and was quickly dragged back to the table for a glass of milk and a slice of my grandmother's treacherous fruit roll (she made it every year, with that awful candied fruit and raisins. Nobody should ever eat that stuff.) I scarfed it down, ran upstairs to get my sticks, and began to play. My family put up with about three minutes of my foolishness before sternly requesting that we get to the rest of the gifts. I begrudgingly agreed and patiently waited for my brothers to open their football helmets, electronic football games, pajamas, socks, board games, and obligatory winter wear, while every few

minutes, looking at me with a satisfied grin.

I had finally gotten my drums, but was unaware of the conspiracy until just a few years ago, when my Dad shared the story with me. My brothers had long forgotten, but my father had shared this story with me shortly before he passed away from lung cancer. He had taken ill a few months before, and we had increased the frequency of our phone calls. We would glaze over current events and instead spend more time talking about memories and family history. He loved to hear what was going on in my life and was thrilled that I still made time to play the drums. I'm still in awe of my brothers' generosity, between kicking my ass and offering to sacrifice their Christmas for me. I had traded in those Gretsch drums for a set of Tamas when I was about 16, and had purchased a few other kits before nostalgia had gotten to me, and I began to try to find my old Gretsch kit. I was telling my Dad that I had called Drome Sound to try to track them down (nearly 25 years later, a futile effort), but had found a similar kit in the Midwest. Dad thought I was crazy to try to find that old kit, and even crazier to pay what I did for the replacement kit. But hey, my brothers thought it was cool, and all these years later, I still feel like the luckiest 10-year-old in the world. Thanks, Dad, Mom, Ollie, and Bruce.

I wish all of you, drummers and the rest, a very happy holiday season. See you next year.

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THE CRANBERRIES CEMENT THEIR LEGACY; ASHES AND DIAMONDS DEBUT

BY TONY MASTRIANNI

The Cranberries “No Need To Argue” 30th Anniversary (2-LP) Deluxe Edition on Island Records:

Celebrating 30 years of their unforgettable, culture-changing second album, comes The Cranberries’ worldwide multi-platinum beloved masterpiece. This amazing artifact is now transformed and includes newly-mixed remastered audio from the original album’s renowned producer, Stephen Street, two brand new remixes from Chvrches’ Iain Cook, unreleased live music from Woodstock ’94, and the unearthed demo of fan favorite “Zombie,” in addition to the original recording—one of the band’s greatest video hits of the 1990s, simply seminal. They first played this celebrated song live in 1993 on their first European tour with Hothouse Flowers.

By all accounts, and evidenced by this package, the Cranberries, with the late Dolores O’Riordan at the vocal helm, were as good as any band in combining the elements of old classic rock, pre-new wave, seminal pop, and alternative rock, all so effortlessly, and with such great grace and precision. Defying categorization, this is one of the most intriguing collections from this era. Kudos to the band and the masterful playing throughout, especially by guitarist Noel Hogan, and the never-ending vocals by Dolores.

And that’s not all. The official release of their 1995 performance for MTV’s epochal, intimate performance series, “Unplugged,” is out now. The Cranberries’ songwriting was on full display, firmly underscoring the band’s top-of-the-class status in the annals of rock history. Never before available as a standalone release.

The setlist for “The Cranberries MTV Unplugged” includes selections from “No Need To Argue,” including “Dreaming My Dreams,” “Ode To My Family,” “Empty,” “Zombie,” and the title track. The other tracks performed include the smash “Linger” (from their debut, “Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can’t We?”), and “Free to Decide” and “I’m Still Remembering,” both of which were unreleased at the time but would subsequently appear the following year on their album “To the Faithful Departed.” Originally recorded on February 14, 1995, the special nine-song performance made its broadcast debut on April 18th that year. Filmed at the Howard Gilman Opera House in Brooklyn, the episode aired during the sixth season of the acclaimed series that highlighted a stripped-down and acoustic setting by

some of the most popular artists and musicians of the era. MTV was doing a series of recordings in this beautiful old theatre with curved seating. It was a perfectly relaxed atmosphere with the audience sitting on the floor! They were accompanied by Electra Strings, the string quartet that had accompanied the band on the UK program “Later with Jools Holland” in 1994.

If all of this is not enough, Island Records has recently announced that the label will be reissuing more of the band’s out-of-print albums on vinyl in the coming months.

“Ashes and Diamonds Are Forever” (Cleopatra Records)

From the creative minds of Daniel Ash (Bauhaus/Love & Rockets/Tones On Tail), Bruce Smith (Public Image Ltd/The


Pop Group), and Paul Spencer Denman (Sade/Sweetback) comes a darkly glittering new musical project that marks a huge evolutionary step in these storied musicians’ incredible careers! The album, recorded over the course of six years, contains sonically compelling, powerfully melodic music with mixing and engineering duties held by Robert Adam Stevenson (Queens of the Stone Age, Jane’s Addiction, The Kills)!

“ON,” the fourth single to be released from this groundbreaking debut, “Ashes And Diamonds Are Forever” moves the band into a darker, more ambitious direction, demonstrating not only how diverse the band is genre-wise, but also how musically masterful and accomplished they are. With Smith and Denman as the solid rhythm section, the song allows Ash to have his guitar tones ringing loudly as his stirring and hushed vocals whisper superbly.

This new vinyl LP has been introduced in phases thanks to a digital marketing strategy built around several pre-release singles and full pro-shot videos, including the video for “On A Rocka,” directed by Jake Scott, son of legendary director Ridley Scott, who has directed videos for U2, Oasis, Radiohead, the Rolling Stones, and more! Ashes and Diamonds are ascending right from the start. “The reaction to this album has been very strong thanks to the videos and FM airplay of a string of singles. It’s one of the most auspicious debut albums in some time, with members having such accomplished backgrounds. Portions of the album sound Bowie-esque.”

Till next time ...





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- 12/13: 518 Burton St 7pm
- 12/14: Second Sunday Bluegrass Jam 5:30pm
- 12/18: Open Mic Night featuring Vinyl Vault 6pm
- 12/19: Brian Kane and The Beginning 8pm
- 12/20: Matty Deez Nutcracker Spectacular 7pm
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Millstone Rounders

BY LIAM SWEENEY

Millstone Rounders.

When you're listening to live music, there's something about the proximity between listener and player that has real meaning. The Millstone Rounders use their music and their proximity to amaze.

RRX: You sing and play acoustically around a single mic, for simplicity. But I'm curious if you all feel any difference in your sound or how you play when you have that mic in place. Does the single mic make a difference when you're using it?

James Gascoyne: Yes, definitely. Playing around a single mic keeps us focused on the essence of the music, the blending of our instruments and voices. In addition to providing a very natural sound, it forces us to interact with each other by physically moving around on stage. We believe that this makes for the most compelling presentation for the audience, both visually and sonically.

Oona Grady: Exactly - I love saying that the audience listens with their eyes. So when one of us steps up to the center of the mic to play a solo, the audience gets a visual cue to help them follow what they are hearing. So I think it makes for a special experience for the audience. And it is so fun for us - really acting out our arrangements.

RRX: I'm thinking that a single mic, being as important as it is, is probably a mic with a history, or more than one mic that's special for different types of performances. Tell us about that one mic(s).

JG: Oh, it's not a specific microphone or brand that we use. Technically speaking, the type of microphone we use is a large diaphragm condenser, which, in the right conditions, can capture the sound of the entire group. There are many high-quality microphones out there. We've had great results with an Ear Trumpet Labs Delphina or an AKG 414. In our experience,

the sound quality depends on the space we're playing in and the setup of the PA system rather than the brand or model of microphone. It's an ongoing experiment!

RRX: One of the sacred mysteries of music is how a number of people can come together with their ideas and just become one. Playing acoustic, you don't have distortion and tricks; the unity has to be tight. How did you guys reach that level of unity? Was it on sight, or in fits and starts?

OG: I think it's been really organic, a gradual process. James and I have been playing together in our duo Drank The Gold for over ten years - and in that band, we often perform on a single mic as well. I guess performing unplugged is really my comfort zone, having grown up playing acoustic music. The best time is when we crowd in close and can really hear each other and respond in real time.

JG: When Oona and I started

playing with Matt Griffin (guitar /vocals), it felt right from the get-go. Our voices just seemed to fit together in three-part harmony without too much effort. Then getting Scott Hopkins (banjo/vocals) involved in the group was a game-changer- he's a truly virtuosic player in the modern sense in addition to having a complete command of traditional bluegrass styles. Dylan Perrillo (upright bass/vocals), one of the most highly regarded players in the Capital Region, brings a deep swing, huge sound, and undeniable musicality to the band.

RRX: Tell us a little bit about Millstone Rounders. Where did you come up with the name? Where's your "turf"?

JG: In the early days of our duo, Drank The Gold, Oona and I had a regular Monday night gig at a wonderful family-owned, farm-to-table restaurant in Saratoga Springs called Mouzon House. Our friend Chris Carey

would often come sit in at the end of the night. These late-night jam sessions skewed more in the bluegrass and American roots music direction. The name came about from recording at Chris's studio (Millstone Studios) ... but it also evoked images of the old-time millstone, grinding wheat, card-playing gambling rounders, and the idea of songs and tunes coming "around" again. It really seemed to fit what we are trying to achieve musically.

OG: We're a NYS Capital Region band - everyone lives in the area and we perform regionally (so far!).

RRX: When you look at country and bluegrass, you have to pick songs to play and sing that are going to resonate with an audience that might not be rooted in rural or mountain areas. What do you look for in the songs you play? Any originals?

OG: Well, one of the secrets of the Rounders is that we don't really stick to

playing just bluegrass and country. We love that stuff, and we have sort of a bluegrass presentation with our instrumentation, using the single mic, and our vocal harmonies. But we're inspired by so many kinds of music that we keep pushing the boundaries for what material could work for the group. I try to trust, with all the music that I make, that if I like it, it will probably resonate with someone else, too. All the songs we sing, wherever they are from and the specific settings and details, are about human experiences that transcend your or my life - songs of missing home, of love lost and/or found, of going on an adventure ... And yes - we've started incorporating originals. Last spring, we started performing our friend Dan Berggren's song "The Whippoorwill Blues" - we actually got to perform it for him at the Eddie's Hall of Fame ceremony when he was inducted! For next week's show, we'll be showing off some of the band's

originals. I won't spill the beans on the details, but come to the show and you'll hear 'em. I think they're really good!

RRX: You're very involved in the Caffe Lena scene. What is the "Lena scene"?

OG: I think the Lena scene is probably different for each person who gets involved, whether by attending a show, playing at open mic, attending a class, or volunteering. While I had attended various shows and performed at Lena's in a couple capacities, I got involved in my corner of the Lena scene in 2020 when Sarah Craig invited James and I to help with a variety of educational efforts the Caffe was launching as they developed their School of Music. James and I work with Dan Berggren to produce a free weekly show for preschoolers, plus James and I teach after-school youth ensemble classes to kids aged 7-14. Matt has worked with us as a youth

teacher, and now is our boss as the director of the music school. But just looking at the schedule of the main-stage shows, there are so many concerts I'd love to go to. There is a whole crew of volunteers who help serve the food and drink at shows, design posters, and send out mailings. If you're craving community and love music, it's a great place to get involved and carve out your corner of the Lena scene.



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12/13: Matty Finn 7pm

12/4: Meet Santa & The Grinch
10am-1pm & 2pm 5pm

12/19: Ruby Rose 7pm

12/20: John Eisenheart 7pm

Ace Frehley: That 70s Sound

BY ROB SKANE

Ace Frehley was my first guitar hero. When I heard him play the guitar, I was transported to places that I didn't even know existed. Maybe you can relate? I can't quite describe the feeling, but his guitar solos resonated with my entire being. The phrasing, the note choices, the vibrato ... it all just floored me – especially the flashy minor thirds. It was ballsy, Jimmy Page-y, and a whole lotta loud. It freaked me out then, and it still does now.

From 1975 until 1979 or so, KISS was blowing up just about every hockey rink in the world. This is when Ace was at his peak, I'd say. Check out bootlegs from back then, especially the 1977 tours - he was absolutely blazing. There was something magical about the sloppy, rocknroll swagger in his playing that blew minds. And speakers. He left it all out there every damn night. KISS never mailed it in back then - they couldn't afford to. I think they knew that a lot of us were relying on them to offer us an escape. In many ways, they really were the Kings of our Night Time World.

Ace's playing inspired countless guitar players. It had attitude, lots of DiMarzio PAF treble pickup bite, and the solos were so memorable, you could sing along with them. Gene Simmons sometimes referred to Ace making "dinosaur noises," and that's evident in "God of Thunder" and also in "Dr. Love." But most of all, the music was FUN – with a capital FU. Big Rock, Arena Rock ... call it whatever you want. KISS made people happy at a time when music actually brought

people together to have a good time, all the time. They polarized people too, but good rocknroll will do that, lads. Never forget that part of the equation. The equation being $E=MC^5$, but I digress.

The first fan letter I ever sent was to Ace, at his house in Connecticut. Creem Magazine had a thing called Stars Cars, and they featured Ace. So, I wrote down the license plate number, and when your dad's a cop – things can happen, if you catch my drift. And while I cannot comment on rumor and speculation, let's just say - where there's a will, there's always a way, kids. My letter went unanswered, but man ... I would check the mail every day for months and months. I am not kidding. Not to get all Tom Petty on you, but the waiting really is the hardest part. And years later, when I saw KISS from the fifth row, on Ace's side of the stage, I might have screamed "You never wrote me back!!!" a few times ... Don't judge.

KISS was a true American Band in their heyday. The songs were very "knees/please and fire/desire," but so what? Ace's guitar smoked, Gene breathed fire, drooled blood, and probably did the books after each gig – who knows, right? The sound of Ace Frehley's guitar meant everything to me at one point in my life, and that will never happen again. It seems those inspirational figures only come around once in a lifetime. Like I said before, there were a lot of people whose minds were blown when they heard Ace play the electric guitar, and I was one of them.



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Music Notes

BY PEAK MUSIC STUDIOS

Ho Ho Ho! 'Tis the season of cookies, chaos, and if we're honest, questionable office-party caroling. Every December, I'm asked: "Jeff, why does every group version of Jingle Bells sound like a trio of confused cats?" Or, "Why does Happy Birthday instantly transform into a tonal crime scene unless Pentatonix is present?" The answer?

It's human nature.

Why We Go Off Key (The Science)

Humans are wired to match other humans. Daniel Levitin (author of "This Is Your Brain on Music") notes that pitch-matching is both empathic and socially cohesive. It signals that we're safe with one another. Johan Sundberg's research on acoustics shows that when a group sings without an agreed-upon pitch, the brain attempts to lock in with *any* dominant frequency. This creates what I lovingly call "frequency drift." Everyone tries to move to everyone else's frequency, and then you just give up and either quit singing or try to drown everyone else out.

In plain language: Everybody chooses a key that feels comfortable for *them*, not for everyone else. Thus, the holiday warbling begins.

The Practical Fix (Technique Meets Neuroscience)

If you want your crowd, classroom, or family to sound like they intended to sing together:

Pick a note on a piano app—start with middle C (C4).

Tell the lower-voice folks (altos and bassy uncles) to simply octave down.

Have everyone *hum* the pitch first. Humming locks in the frequency better than singing.

If middle C feels low or dull, try

A3—a golden pitch most kids, teens, and adults can match.

Then sing away, proud and unified.

This little "pitch ceremony" will instantly eliminate 90% of the chaos. As I've said in past classes: Humans sing better when the brain knows where home base is.

Technique: The Christmas Survival Guide

Technique is half the battle, but it's also the part most people get tangled up in. So, here's the reminder straight from Peak's teaching hierarchy:

THE SINGING HIERARCHY

Pitch – Hit the note

Rhythm – Place the note

Vowel – Shape the note

Tension – Don't kill the note

Tension, especially tongue tension, creates harsh, icy frequencies that crackle like a broken ornament. A lowered, relaxed tongue frees the resonating chamber and smooths tone production. (Titze's research points directly to this.)

Holiday Tip: If your tongue is stuck to the roof of your mouth like a candy cane in January, the sound will reflect that.

Sing Within Your Technical Range

Here's where the art meets the honesty:

If you can't nail the opening riff of "All I Want for Christmas is You," don't force it. Choose a song that serves you, not one that showcases your limitations.

As I remind students all year, technical capability in voice is earned, not wished for. There's a reason Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, Beyonce, Ariana Grande, and many others bring their voice coaches on tour--the myth of "I was born with talent" is just that, mostly a myth.

Performance Is the Other Half

Every month, I say some version of this: Technique is the engine. Performance is the soul.

And look, if Joe Cocker, Lemmy Kilmister, and Bob Dylan can deliver iconic, world-moving performances without "perfect voices," then so can you.

The heart matters more than the flawless scale. The story matters more than the shine.

As Bruce Lee said (and a mantra we often call back to at Peak): "Absorb what is useful. Discard what is not. Add what is uniquely your own." That is the essence of holiday singing.

The Holiday Singing Mindset

Smile.

Get your hands out of your pockets. Take a breath that actually reaches your ribs.

And remember: The holidays belong to joy, not judgment.

When you choose the right pitch, honor the hierarchy, keep tension low, and embrace the imperfect humanity of your voice, holiday music becomes what it was always meant to be, a shared, communal ritual of warmth.

Now get out there and sing a few carols. Loud, proud, and in tune—mostly. And if all else fails, bring cookies or a pocket flask of cheer.

This Month in Music History

December 4, 1956 — The "Million Dollar Quartet" (Elvis, Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins) recorded gospel & Christmas tunes during their legendary Sun Studios session.

December 5, 1791 — Mozart dies while working on the "Requiem."

December 7, 1964 — "A Charlie Brown Christmas" soundtrack by Vince Guaraldi is released.

December 10, 1942 — Nat King Cole Trio records "The Christmas Song" for the first time.

December 15, 1965 — "A Charlie Brown Christmas" TV special premieres, cementing Guaraldi's music as seasonal canon.

December 18, 1892 — Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker" premieres in St. Petersburg.

December 22, 1808 — Beethoven's mega-concert premieres his Symphony No. 5, Symphony No. 6 (Pastoral), Piano Concerto No. 4, and Choral Fantasy, all in one winter night.

December 24, 1818 — "Silent Night" is performed for the first time in Oberndorf, Austria.

December 26, 1960 — Elvis Presley releases "It's Now or Never"—not a Christmas song, but its December release marks the rise of winter pop singles as a marketing strategy.

December 30, 1944 — Frank Sinatra records "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas."

Weird But True

"Silent Night" was first performed because the church organ broke.

On Christmas Eve 1818, mice disabled the church organ in Oberndorf, Austria.

With no instrument available, Franz Gruber grabbed a guitar, rewrote the accompaniment on the spot, and "Silent Night" was born as an emergency guitar carol. Thank God for guitars!!!



Cinderklous

A Christmas Story

BY LIAM SWEENEY

What a handful of explorers know, upon placing foot and flag on the ephemeral vortex of the North Pole, is that there is absolutely no way to tell that one is at the North Pole. The air is as cold there as it is in the town of Longyearbyen in Norwegian Svalbad, and through 20/20 vision, both are, on average, formless and white. If there were a factory led by a jolly regent in red velvet and fox fur cuffs, no human had ever laid eyes on it.

He gripped the iron shovel and hoisted it, arms raised, hanging for a moment before they slammed it into the ice. He evacuated mere chips from the frozen ground, and after the day's work, he had a sharp, ragged hole into which he could've buried a dog. But reindeer are much bigger than dogs. And the one lying bound and stiff two yards away was well fed and of good stock. And old; very old and very dear to the man, and would need a burial plot not for its size but for its stature.

"Pater," Bastjian put his hand on the man's shoulder. "Let me help."

"Go inside, Bastjin. Mother needs help with recipes."

"She doesn't want help."

"Neither do I," the man said as he rested the shovel, tip to ground. "Did you raise this beast from its seed? No, you didn't. A man's foal is his burden."

"We've never had this burden before."

"No," the man said. "And we won't speak of it to mother. She is not like us. She is of them and she will worry about the future, for hers runs out to a point.

She is not us." The man raised the shovel and forced it through the ice again and again, grunts like primer caps, his exhausted breath their recoil.

"Pater," Bastjian said. The man wiped his brow and picked up the shovel.

"Pater," he repeated. "Santa." The man, Santa, turned around.

"You know you're not to call me that," he said. "You're my baern, you are not an elf born of the loins. You are my son. They are offspring." Santa hunched over and balanced his upper body on the shovel handle.

Bastjian stood by his father and they peered into the hole he had dug. "Why are you in pain, pater? Why does your swing barely bite into the ice?"

"It is a long story," Santa said. "But it is your birthright. It is as much your birthright as the sleigh, and in very much the same way."

"The sleigh is off-powered, to speak of it," Bastjian said. "We tested it yesterday. You didn't seem to care when I told you."

"The difference between not caring and not showing it." Santa handed Bastjin the shovel. "If you wrap yourself in heavy enough clothes, it keeps the world outside as much as it does inside."

"Mother is fraught. I think she's angry with you. She always shuffles her recipes when she's fraught with you."

Santa sighed and with his index finger directed Bastjian to dig while he pulled his pipe from his pocket and tapped it with his index finger to light it. He took a drag and coughed.

"She knows about the muscle aches, the pain in my joints," he said. "She's looking in the old papers for soup recipes." Santa puffed, the glow of tobacco embers painting the contours of his face. "She won't find anything. Half of those recipes are from the Dark Ages. The ingredients are extinct."

"Would soup work?" Bastjian took a strike at the earth and pulled up more than his father had all morning.

"I am not ill, baern." Santa said. His second puff brought another fit of coughing.

Bastjin descended into the hole to judge its depth. "It's Christmas spirit, isn't it? The elves are talking. It's fading." He hopped back out and pitched the shovel into the growing crevasse. Santa walked over to the reindeer and knelt beside it, stroking its stiff fur with a bare hand liberated from its glove.

It was dark by the time they finished the grave and buried the reindeer. It was dark when they started, and with the exception of the auroras, it would be dark until March. Santa put his hand gently on Bastjian's shoulder.

"We'll walk through the workshop," he said. "There's something you must know."

In the New World, in a Victorian city in New Amsterdam called Troy, a poem would be printed that would fracture Santa's domain more than the Inquisition or the crusades. That poem was titled "The Night Before Christmas," and it created in the North Pole a time before it, and one after it.

Before the poem, Santa, while flying his sleigh on Christmas Eve, delivered gifts to the children of the world by bouncing through time to and fro over the previous year, minutes here, minutes there, using magic to change fate in ways that would benefit the children. After the poem, expectations changed.

Santa and Bastjin hugged the center column and climbed a row of granite stairs scuffed raw of age, finding their

way to a room with walls of windows, from where the entire workshop was in view.

Santa pointed down to Line Three. "We didn't need tools back then. I know you don't remember that."

Bastjian rubbed the window clear of dust and grime and put his eyes to it. "I only remember the sound of the machinery," he said. "And the tool-working before that. It's been so long."

"You left for an age, Bastjian."

"I stayed for an age before I left," Bastjian said. "And you never called for me."

Santa leaned back against the seat that served the front desk. "You've not seen an age, Bastjin, not a true one," he said. "I wanted you to have a life in this new world, baern. I wasn't a father before you were born, in the ages that came before; just ugliness wrapped in crimson, soaked in bitter tears. Not a father. By the time you drew your first breath I knew the roads and the forests would have to care for you."

A shriek came up from the floor. A whisper of iridescent blue vapor burst into a glittering cloud.

"There is so much you don't know, Bastjian. All of the tinkling of the bottles on the center floor by the aged elves, and the smell of mint and brimstone... have you yet gathered what it's for?"

"Mother-," he said. "Claudette, she said they make Christmas spirit."

Santa laughed as he removed his thick coat, revealing fading rings of sweat around his neck and down his chest.

"Christmas spirit," he said. "There isn't any. There's never been. Parents speak those words to their children like gloss, covering over the fact that they don't see the tricks we play behind their backs."

Bastjian moved to hold his father's arm and found it stiff. "Pater, something's wrong."

"It's potions," Santa said. "Petty

Continued on Page 40..



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THAT FUZZING ROCK SHOW



Eight Foot Manchild

BY ROB SMITTIX

Eight Foot Manchild. Photo Credit: Josh Ferrao

R**RX:** We got Dylan Foley on the line. Dylan is an eight-foot manchild, apparently.

DF: That is correct.

RRX: What do you guys eat?

DF: What do we eat?

(Both Laugh)

RRX: I figured I'd give you a call ... a friend of mine, Mike from Jupiter Queen ... he's a great salesman for you because he really pushes how awesome your band is. But I've been familiar with the band for a little while, and I agree.

DF: Oh, that's awesome.

RRX: So you guys are a Boston band?

DF: We are based out of the Greater Boston area, yeah. Some of us in Boston, some of us on the other side of the river, kind of scattered to the four winds, but yeah, we're generally Boston-based.

RRX: There are a lot of really cool bands that have come out of Boston. Who do you think is, like, the most Boston of all the bands?

DF: Oh, jeez! I mean, is Dropkick

Murphys too obvious a choice?

RRX: It's a choice that makes a lot of sense, though.

DF: Yeah, sure. I mean, there's also the band that has the name of the city.

RRX: I know, but if they didn't do it, somebody else was gonna. I was actually talking to Rick Barton of the original Dropkick Murphys lineup. And he told me a story about ... if it wasn't for the Bosstones, the Dropkick Murphys never would have been what they became. The Bosstones took them under their wing. They paid for them to go on a European tour and everything.

DF: That's awesome.

RRX: But the Bosstones are no more, right?

DF: I believe that they had their final show either last New Year's or maybe two years ago. I don't remember.

RRX: So that means there's a vacancy, huh?

DF: We're ready to step up and take up the mantle and represent Medford at least.

RRX: Exactly. So how long have you guys been around?

DF: Well, that's a complicated question. The short answer is, this version of this band got together just before the pandemic started. But there has been a band called Eight Foot Manchild in existence off and on for various stretches of time, with long breaks in between, since about 2005.

RRX: Oh, wow.

DF: Yeah, but the band that started way back then has no resemblance to the band today except that I am the one consistent member. I originally started as a free improv trio, just playing like weird ambient soundscape music, and then evolved into a band that did a lot of weird cover songs of like mashups of TV theme songs and things. That was off-and-on for a number of years, and then this version, the doom brass version, is, I think, the final form. We emerged in early 2020, and of course, the pandemic hit right after that, so we were doing things long-distance for a while there, and then started doing practices and shows in earnest in late 2021.

RRX: Yeah, a lot happened for

people making music during the pandemic. Either it was like my band that ended up doing nothing because of it ...

DF: A lot of bands broke up during that time.

RRX: ... or the opposite, and you got some stuff accomplished.

DF: Yeah, it was a very productive time for me, music-wise. I spent a long time writing music, putting things together, and making plans. It was sort of a blessing in disguise, I guess, on that front.

RRX: You mentioned doom brass, and I didn't know that term even existed or if you guys invented it. I was trying to figure out what genre you were, and that makes sense.

DF: Yeah, we invented the term; we like to call ourselves the world's first and therefore best doom brass band. Obviously, we're aware that we're not the first band to use horns in the context of heavy music; that's been around since before there was such a thing as heavy metal. If you go all the way back to King Crimson, "21st Century Schizoid Man," then you know that goes

back even before Black Sabbath. So the concept has been around since before there was even such a term as heavy metal. But we like to think that we're forging a new path in that, and in a few years from now, all bands will have horns regardless of genre.

RRX: Right? It's a breath of fresh air sometimes when you've got a horn section up there and you're not just doing straight-up ska music.

DF: We still get mistaken for a ska band from a distance, not just because of the horns but because of the way we dress and the way we carry ourselves. I don't think anyone would be surprised if we got up there and just went like ... pick it up, pick it up, pick it up, pick it up! But we like to pleasantly surprise people. Not that we're opposed to playing with a ska band. We actually just did our first show on a bill with some ska bands, and it was an absolute blast.

One of the dreams that this band was founded on was ... I really wanted to be able to play a huge variety of different shows. I wanted this project to feel at home playing on a whole bunch of different types of bills. And so far, it's been successful. We've shared bills with everything from full-on, just nasty, grimy-ass sludge metal bands, screaming with shrieking harsh vocals and walls of feedback type bands, all the way through ska, folk punk, and street brass, like New Orleans-style street brass bands. We felt at home during all of it; we're never quite too out of place. Surf rock bands we played with, prog, and funk bands. We kind of have our hands in a lot of different pots, and I really like it. I think it's great.

RRX: I think so, too. As a part of the job, I don't pay to get into concerts. I do spend a lot of money at the bar and buy merch, but ... I think about the concertgoers' experience because these people paid money to get in here. There are definitely some concerts where I'm like ... why couldn't they just break it up and throw a band in there

that's a little bit different? But then you guys come out on stage and they're like, Oh, thank God, something different.

DF: Yeah, once you see the sousaphone get on stage, you know that some wild sh** is about to go down!

RRX: Eight Foot Manchild reminds me of two things. One is our editor, Liam, here at Xperience, who is actually just about 8 ft tall and could be considered a manchild (but aren't we all?).

DF: Really?

RRX: Yeah. It also reminds me of Sasquatch. Have you met an 8-foot-tall person, and do you believe in Sasquatch?

DF: No, and sure, why not?

RRX: Right? I've very much been into the UFO thing. I've actually videotaped one, so I know they're real. But the Bigfoot thing, I was kind of like ... I don't know. But then ... what's his name from Blink 182? The UFO guy, Tom DeLonge, recently came out and was talking about the fact that the government has files on Bigfoot, and I mean ... he was right the last time. Well, we'll see.

DF: Yes, if that does happen, I'll go ahead and write a song about it because why not?

RRX: Well, maybe start writing it now! Get ahead of the curve.

DF: Exactly, put it out like the next day, like holy sh**, that was quick!

RRX: Was there anything that you'd like to say to people out there to entice them to check your band out and to go to shows when you're in town?

DF: Yeah, if you've never heard horns and heavy riffs together in one place, you're gonna realize something that a lot of people have told us, which is: Oh wow, this is something that I never knew I needed, and now I need more of it.

RRX: So yeah, if you're horny, check out Eight Foot Manchild!

DF: We'll take care of you.



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YOUR Unpopular Musical Opinions, Vol. 1

BY JASON IRWIN

Unpopular opinions. We all have them. Do we share them? Well, that depends on whether we are prepared for the reaction. My question is ...what is an unpopular musical opinion you have, and how can you back it up? I asked local musicians and music fans to chime in. At least it's just music ... which in today's divisive world is a fairly harmless topic. As for me, I said what I said: Hole was a better band than Nirvana. Fight me! While you're lacing up your gloves, here are a few more you probably won't agree with (and that's ok).

Rob Forman (Upstate NY/Capital Region recording and performing artist)

Music pet peeve: the tablet! We get paid nicely to perform, but it bothers me to see folks stop mid song to scroll down to the next page of tab/lyrics. My follow-up question: Is it just the noticeable scrolling that irritates you – or is it a bigger issue?

Rob: Tablets used to be used for the occasional lyrics or a set list. Now, it seems like a lot of people can't play without them! As I get more experience playing, I feel less like we get paid to play – and more for all the prep work. Time off from jobs. Travel. Rehearsing. So first, I thought it was just uncool. Now I see it as kind of lazy. (Author note: I use a tablet for solo acoustic cover shows -with a Bluetooth scroller foot pedal, though!)

Robert Millis (398 Group)

Cover/Tribute Acts Are Killing the Live Music Industry. Classic economics says that ecosystems—whether they be businesses, towns, or societies—die if/when they rely primarily on nostalgia. Any legitimate analysis of today's

music industry results in a “and here we are” conclusion, given the utter dominance of cover and tribute acts in across-the-board (tiny to huge) live performance tallies. Economies grow based on innovation. For the music industry, that is new music. New music drives the supply chain, financially supporting not only the artists (as do cover acts) but also a variety of allied professions (publishers, agents, management, writers, techs, labels, etc.). The missing ingredient today is new music discovery. Zero Sum: A show by a cover act is a non-show by an original act. Yes, it is a consumer/demand issue. Yes, it is a demographic issue. Yes, it is a media issue. But somehow, the whole formula needs to change for the industry to become sustainable or even survive. Money talks, so the solution is wrapped somewhere around incentivization strategies. But that's another discussion.

Asa Morris (Upstate NY/Capital Region recording and performing artist)

Unpopular Opinion: Playing it safe is f***** boring. When it comes to music or art in general, in attitude, lifestyle, or creation, safety is poison. F*** up. Take stupid chances. Make people uncomfortable. Make yourself uncomfortable. No one remembers how tame you were in any noteworthy way. You might as well be a neatly organized pile of folded laundry left in a hamper for no longer than 11 and a half minutes. I can think of dozens of local (and national) musicians with songs I couldn't even hum after seeing them. That isn't to say that they aren't talented or capable, only that even soaked in virtuoso solos and \$300 effects pedals, they are f***** B O R I N G. Threaten me with a good time.

My Follow-up question: Can you name a local and/or national act that “takes stupid chances” and isn't “f***** B O R I N G?”

Asa: Sure, I mean, as far as Glens Falls, the classic William Hale always feels like it's teetering on coming off the rails. In a wonderful way. Luc's insane bellows, hollers, and crooning (sorry, Luc) all wrapped up in nightmare imagery with what essentially is a traveling barbarian poet society of a band. It's always wonderful and dangerous. Nationally, I couldn't say. My image is always the punk and HC scenes I grew up in, or perhaps early Nine Inch Nails when things were quite literally dangerous. Currently, though, I couldn't tell you.

Jason La Juene (Raven Events)

My Unpopular Opinion: Why do bands and fans still keep going to bad-looking and bad-sounding shows and not have the b**** to say, “That was not the best sounding show” or “I couldn't even see you guys on the stage because it's so dark”? Not for nothing, but not every band and every venue is great. For example, I recently saw a video from a band that only had one light, and it was making so much strobing that I couldn't watch the whole video, let alone be there. I also saw another video from a local show, and the band sounded like they were in a tunnel. The vocals (which you could barely hear, let alone mute vocals or effects between songs) were almost nonexistent. Bands and venues are settling for substandard shows, and the audience just takes it and is being nice. Step up, people, and bring back amazing-looking and sounding shows. No names will be given to protect the “innocent.” Being

in live audio production for over a decade, all I see is what was half-a**** is now quarter-a**** in efforts—and you want top \$\$\$ for shows?

Lisa Irwin (518Rock.com – and Jason's Wife)

I like to listen to live music LIVE. If I'm not at a live show, I don't like to listen to music that was recorded and previously performed live. Sometimes during live performances, musicians take creative liberties, which are often amazing when seeing this live. These liberties capture the moment and the energy of the musicians, the venue, and the crowd. However, when I'm in the car or at home, I want to hear the song exactly as I know it. I don't want to be interrupted by conversation or cheers.

My follow-up question: What about a song like “I Want You to Want Me” by Cheap Trick? This is one of your favorite songs I know this.) However, you really only ever hear the live version on the radio. Think about it – when is the last time you heard the studio version? How do you feel about songs like this – where their live version is the “standard” or more popular one?

Lisa: Ok. So, you just ruined that song for me. After re-listening, I heard at the beginning that there are cheers, then I thought it was over. Now I feel like I hear high-pitched squeals throughout the song at times that pierce my ears. Thank you for that. (Author note: Sorry, darling!)

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R**RX:** Hello, so it's just Sarah that I have on the line?

Sarah Snediker: No, it's me and Dave.

Dave Snediker: How's it going?

RRX: Good. How are you?

DS: Good.

RRX: So, yeah, things are going pretty good. So, Elephant Back ... I have Elephant Back on the line. I never ask about band names because it's silly, but I assume you chose Elephant Back because Elephant P**** was already taken?

(brief moment of awkwardness, then laughter)

DS: Exactly.

RRX: I gotta work on my jokes or maybe my execution.

(all laugh)

SS: Yeah, it was a name Dave had in his back pocket, so ...

RRX: That works. Actually, I got familiar with your band when I saw that you were nominated for a Listen Up Award. I can't remember if that was last year or the year before.

SS: Yup. I can't remember either, but I think it was the year before.

RRX: Yeah, well, nominations will be opening up soon, so maybe this will be your year.

DS: You never know, hopefully.

SS: You never know.

RRX: Absolutely. So, let's start with Dave. What do you do in the band?

DS: I play guitar and other instruments when we record, but when we play live, I play the guitar and lead vocals.

RRX: Well, I am loving your vocals. I was just listening to the album before you called, and I'm digging the delivery and the style. The song "Oh What a Life" really gave some great vibes, but I love how you cut into that song with the vocals. That was one that definitely stood out for me.

DS: Yeah, that one was a fun one. The vocals during the verse are a little delicate, and then you got the catchy chorus. The bass part that I came up with is just a cool little melody, kind of a hooky thing.

RRX: Yeah, I was digging it all the

way. And Sarah, what's your role in the group?

SS: I play drums, I do backing vocals, and I do a lot of the behind-the-scenes production kind of stuff. I am the one yelling at Dave in the studio, like ... hey, try to do this or go higher on your voice here or do something else here. So, I kind of mess around with production as well.

RRX: Well, you need that person in every band. It's good to have a Sarah in every band!

DS: That's true.

RRX: Where are you guys based out of? That's what I was trying to remember.

SS: We're kind of close to Syracuse. We're in the middle of like ... Syracuse and Utica.

RRX: Oh, okay. So you're a little further out than I thought. Next time you do come to town, hit me up, and maybe we can get you in the studio and do a little radio. It's always fun.

DS: That would be awesome.

SS: Yeah, that'd be great.

RRX: So yeah, the album "Evolution"

was just released recently?

SS: The 27th of October, yeah.

RRX: With that being the case, are there any particular songs that you want to put out as singles? For me as a DJ, is there a certain song I should be playing right now?

DS: Well, the first video is gonna be from the song "Mine," so I guess that's gonna be the first single.

RRX: Well, there you go.

SS: Yeah, that's in the works. I mean, the first three songs were the ones we really are pushing for radio, just because they seem the most relatable and kind of catchy.

DS: And the song "Sound Bite" too.

RRX: Well, excellent. Do I have permission to play them now?

SS: Oh yeah, go ahead.

RRX: Cool, I'll get them into rotation tomorrow.

DS: What we did prior to this, in the last three albums, was ... we've released singles and pushed those singles. We're taking a new approach this time by

releasing the album and just releasing everything and pushing everything. Just trying some stuff out this time.

SS: We talked to Alan down at West Side Music.

We talked a lot about the waterfall theory, where you release singles and then you re-release, and he's like ... it really doesn't matter. He's like, at the end of the day, put the album out, put it on Apple Music, that's where it's at really, he said. But that's our guy in New York City. West Side Music.

DS: Yeah, he's done some big bands, pretty cool.

RRX: Well, now he's gonna be doing Elephant Back, so there you go.

DS: That's right!

RRX: Yeah, the whole thing is weird with what's gonna catch on and what's not. Algorithms are strange. It doesn't make sense all of the time. I've tried to test the waters with different approaches, and it doesn't seem like there's any science to it. It's just what happens.

SS: I've driven myself nuts, you know? Because I do all the social media stuff, and it's too much. To have a job, have a band, and a studio that we run, it's just too much to try to figure out the whole algorithm and what they're gonna want next. I'm just resigned to the fact that this is what I'm gonna do, and if the algorithm likes it, cool, and if it doesn't like it ... it is what it is.

RRX: Yeah, you can only do what you can do. I hate the internet, but it's a necessary evil when you've got something to promote. That's the name of the game, but it is very DIY now, and that's where the internet really helps out. These major record labels really don't matter as much as they used to.

DS: Right. If you can get distribution and if you can book a good tour ... really, the live shows are where it's at and you gotta push the CD through the live shows. I'm all about that, getting the fans to the live shows, pushing the CDs, and all your merch through the live shows.

RRX: So, anything about this new album that you think is important for people to know?

SS: For me ... when we'd written our first album, it was kind of like a conglomerate of different genres and each song was different. Then, when we went into the second two albums, that we split. There was a rock album and then there was an acoustic songwriter-y album. And on this new one, it's like we elevated everything and tried to keep it all within an

alternative vibe. As a whole, everything about it just came together really nicely. That's why it's called "Evolution," because we've really elevated everything. We try to do that with every album, obviously, but this one ... I was really proud of everything that we put out.

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Cinderklous (cont.)

Continued from Page 23.

spells that make poor mothers find hundred-dollar bills on the street. Put cheer in a CEO's check writing hand. A grimoire of lucky pennies, cool rocks that might be fossils and well-timed snow days."

"Why do you say such a thing to me?" Bastjin said. "Are you testing my faith?"

"I haven't been in an actual house or down a red brick chimney in my life."

They left the control room and descended the granite steps on the other side, emptying out onto the outer edge of the workshop. Santa pointed at an elf peering at a dusty book two ounces beyond his weight.

"He's dying," he said. "That book isn't for bringing cheer."

Bastjian walked over to the elf, flipped the book cover to read the Ogham title before quickly returning the book to the reader. He walked back to his father's side, wide eyed and crestfallen.

"Father, you know what is happening. I want to know. As your heir, I demand it."

"You say that with the conviction of a wind-up toy," Santa said. "I said I needed to tell you something. We'll walk, and you'll not rush me."

"Okay Pater." Bastjian's eyes grew wide and he wrapped himself in his arms.

"And don't ever demand anything of me," Santa said.

They walked miles, through square footage that would've been impossible if the building was planted in Pittsburgh or Detroit. No one knew how big the workshop was, not even Santa. But he knew where the basement was, and eventually he and Bastjian found the door.

Santa grabbed a torch and gripped

the greased canvas bulb, causing it to catch fire. The basement was ancient and never updated. It smelled of rust and oil and the air was balmy and thick. Bastjian covered his mouth as they walked down the stairs but soon stopped as it was a pointless gesture.

"Father, what's in here? No one is allowed down here."

Santa grunted as they neared the bottom. "The truth is down here, baern," he said. "I've buried it metaphorically and physically."

When they got down the stairs, Bastjin shielded his eyes from the glow of the basement's seeming showcase content. It was another pointless gesture once the glow subsided, and Bastjian walked over to it to feel it. Santa grabbed his hand.

"You don't want to do that," he said.

"What is it?" Bastjian said.

"It's a harness."

"Who is it for?" Santa was silent.

"Pater, who is it for?" Still silence. Santa was transfixed by the harness.

"Pater..."

"It was for me," Santa said. "At one time, it was for me."

Santa took Bastjian deeper into the basement. It was a treasure trove of fine dishes, candlesticks, iron swords, meticulously engraved silver shields and sacks filled to the brim with coins, nothing newer than Medieval. Santa sat Bastjian down on one of the sacks, he on another. He lit his pipe and held his forehead with his free hand. If Bastjian could've seen clearly down there, he would've seen a deflated version of the Santa that decorated lawns and soda bottles.

"I came into being at the end of the fourth century," Santa said. "I had to look that up. In my time, everything was seasons. There was no need for me

to count years, as I was alone."

Santa picked up a gold coin that only looked brand new.

"I was called Cinderklous. A pagan demigod of the forest. The learned men said I was a minor demigod, as my forest was small. My name is similar to that of a Catholic Saint, so my story has always been entwined."

He coughed and gripped Bastjian's shoulder.

"I had a good existence for many years," he said. "The nearby villagers brought me gifts, what they could, and I would fly up and talk to the sky to plead their case for rain, wrestle the earth to release their harvests. It was good, Baern, I was happy."

"Then the Romans found me," he said. "And they filled my forest with the most lavish gifts. Gold and silver, copper and brass, fine cloth, rare spices, dishes and candlesticks. I didn't own a house, Baern, and I hoarded these things. And they lured me into the villages of their enemies, told me their children were being raised to cut down the forests, my forest and every forest. They wanted me to get in their homes and..." Santa dragged his pipe through never-spoken words

"Did you kill them, pater?"

"I did," Santa said. "And I put them in my sleigh and I drove it through those villages to terrify the enemies of Rome."

Bastjian didn't speak, which, for a young man of endless questions, drew up a panic in Santa. He'd never told anyone of this, Baern or not. He knew he had to continue.

"It went on for twelve seasons. Until I was sent to a village near my home, to a village that was one of my villages. I wish I could say I came to my senses, but I had not. I had every intention of

murdering their children. Until I was confronted by a group of Druid monks." Santa spit. "Powerful Druid monks."

"They laid a curse on me," he tapped a spark from his fingertip to his pipe to relight it. "They made me immortal, forced me to live the farthest north a thing could live. And once a year I would be compelled to fly my sleigh over the entire world in an act of penance, giving a gift to every child, just like the gifts the Romans gave to me."

Santa knew he had to wait for Bastjian to speak. There was no more to say, no redeeming arc, there was simply acceptance or rejection – of his story, of his life. Bastjian had to come to terms with his own origin story being a fabrication three days before Christmas.

Bastjian wandered the corridor, picking up items of treasure and dropping them as if he were told they were coated in plague. Santa could hear his breath, shallow and ragged in between the rapid-fire clearing of his throat. He was a child, a baern, even at two-hundred and thirty-four years old he had the look and the mind of seven years, his ears barely tipped to a point, easily passing for full human.

"Is this why you're falling apart?" he said. "Is it the curse?"

"It is. It's lifting. The curse is lifting."

Bastjian touched the harness and it shocked him, making him withdraw his finger. "Is that not a good thing?" he said. "Curses lift, is that good?"

Santa sat up from the bag of coins and pocketed his pipe. "Some curses are meant," he said. "And some curses take on a life of her own."

Santa snapped his fingers. He and Bastjian were in the sleigh, hundreds of feet above the North Pole. From above, and to anyone who could see it, Santa's workshop looked much like the Krem-

lin with its colorful, ornate cathedrals.

"This curse of penance," he said, "my curse; it's grown. It encompasses the entire world now. It has become the hope of a promise to the children, from parents who murder them every day with processed food and deforestation and whatever degenerate lech they vote for. Without that hope, without the umbrella of that curse and the compulsion to atone, we'll quickly return to the Dark Ages."

Bastjian gripped the front edge of the sleigh, stooped forward and looked down. "Pater," he said. "Will we die?"

"Me, yes, though I don't know what it means to die when you're a demigod." He tugged the reins as if to steer a sleigh driven by no reindeer. "I don't know if you will live, Bastjian. I wish I could tell you better."

They floated above the arctic, neither a word between them. Santa smoked pipe after pipe, Bastjian scanned the skies and played with a

coin he found in the basement.

"Can you use your magic to fix it?" Bastjian said. "Re-curse yourself?"

Santa stayed silent. Bastjian studied his father's face.

"Pater? Did you hear me?"

"I did."

"Can you?"

Santa turned away, into the wind.

"You would let the world go dark?"

"The cost is great," Santa said.

Bastjian snapped his fingers, the coin in between them, and it zipped before the sleigh before being quickly overtaken.

"So you know how to cure it."

"I do," Santa said. "The same way I brought it on."

"You need to kill children," Bastjian said, not a question.

"I need to kill one."

Santa dipped the sleigh and it banked on Bastjian's side. The aurora slithered in faded indigo and vibrant green, punctuated by stars that had

seen it all before.

Bastjian picked at a frayed hole in his tan corduroys. "Pater, why are you telling me all of this?"

"Bastjian, you must understand that I am in a position of no choice."

"Pater..."

"You are my thirtieth child. Children, not offspring. And without deceit I can say that you are the first I've had the capacity to love. I believe you are more than a boy. You are the very lifting of the curse." Santa sighed. "But, again, this is bigger than me. Bigger than us."

Bastjian had little room to move away from his father, but he claimed every inch.

"I'd like to go back to the workshop now, please."

"..Humans go to war with bombs that fill the skies with death, all for the sake of ground it is impossible to truly own. They claim that they are making the world safe. Would they put their bombs away if the generals could sacri-

fice their own sons and save millions?"

"Pater, I'm scared. I don't know what to say right now. Please tell me what to say."

Santa glanced over, his face hard, wrinkles like canyons, tears of a desert rain descending from eyes that didn't want to look over at his child, but knew he must.

"Say you understand, baern," he said. "Or speak no more."

Santa twirled the sleigh suddenly, swiftly, pulling enough gravitational force to be withstood only by the grip of adult hands. Bastjian's scream trailed as Santa guided the sleigh out of earshot.

He felt the moss-green glow of the Druidic sigils once again burning into his ancient skin. He felt the primordial urge to atone, for a new sin, the murder of his own heart. He knew he would need the harness once more.

Christmas was saved.

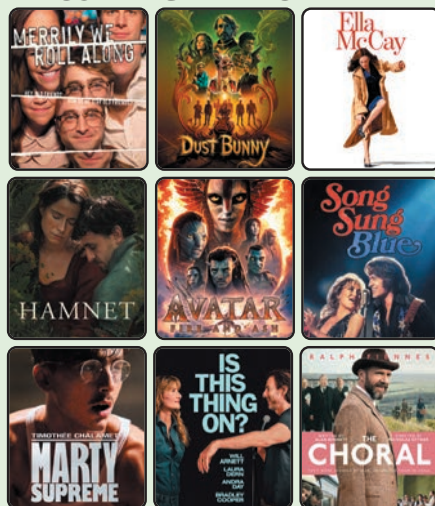


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What the Hell is Going On in New York Cannabis?

BY RI TOKES

High all, and welcome to another edition of what the hell is going on in New York cannabis?!

This week is going to be about the arts and crafts side of weed. This is the world I love most.

Are you ready?

First and foremost, we stoners are also creatives. Think back to the late '90s and early '00s. Ever smoke out of a soda can, watermelon, or apple? Ever hollow out the dash of your car to turn it into a hookah? Nah? Just my crew, ok fine. But you're catching my drift.

Was it ever too cold to smoke outside, so you opted for your parents' wrath? But created a smoke tube out of a toilet paper tube and some of your parents' dryer sheets? That's the creative sh** I'm talking about, but let's spin it.

But like, what can I turn my products into?!

So many things!

I have some injury-induced arthritis, and when it's cold, dispensary topicals aren't strong enough. But I have shea butter, coconut oil, and olive oil at home... Sounds like I need to pick up a few jars of resin or rosin and infuse those into oil. Add a few drops of warming and cooling essential oils like peppermint and camphor to really make it hit. There are a

million ways you can make right in your own kitchen.

This goes for edibles as well. With the Holidaze here, have you considered the foods you can infused with flower, oil, or concentrates from your local dispensary? One of my favorite things to do is infuse my dinner and dessert sauces. Everyone gets to choose their own adventure this way.

I truly believe you can take any product and make it into something that works for you. I get sample products all the time. I can't use them all, it's simply not possible. This means I can make custom products for myself, or I can gift friends and family. Aged 21+, of course.

How do you know you've infused it properly? There are a few ways. You can buy a tester like the T-Check, or you can follow some infusion instructions online. There are also some really great calculators to help guide you based on the legal products you have on hand. For topicals, no testing needed. For edibles, please test and consume responsibly. I don't want to hear about you greening out on the news.

So, now that you know there are new possibilities, what are you going to make?

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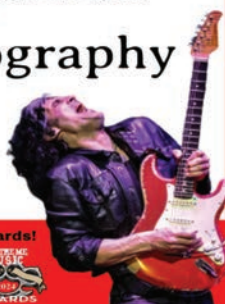
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BY CHRIS BUSONE

I wasn't much of a talker in my early youth. I am the youngest of six, and with my brothers and sisters and parents in the house, I was more of a happy observer. And I loved it. There was always lots of action and talking, and sometimes loud talking, and even louder sometimes, and it was all great fun and entertainment.

But my silence made some people uncomfortable because apparently, we are meant to be babbling nonstop as a species, even if we have absolutely nothing of consequence to say. So inevitably, someone would ask, "Are you ok? You haven't said anything in a while." And while I was touched by their concern, I really disliked that question. Still do. A lot.

When I was very young and silent, while other children were perpetrating merriment around me, the occasional crude adult would ask one of my parents, "Is he ok?" Or worse. "Is he backward?" That's the word they used back then. Can you imagine grown adults saying that about a child? And to their parent?

"He's fine," my father would say emphatically, while fixing a steely gaze on this dolt. "He'll talk when he has something to say. You should try it." Then he'd put his arm around my shoulder and call them a curse word under his breath, but just loud enough for them to hear. (Thanks for that, by the way, Dad.)

The simple fact was that I was excruciatingly shy and had trouble talking to anyone I didn't really know. And being a kid, outside of my immediate family, I didn't know a whole hell of a lot of people. I mean, at four years old, the nightlife is pretty much

nonexistent, so I wasn't out clubbing and working the room, gladhanding. But as I grew a little older, even I recognized it was starting to be a problem. So, I began to develop this idea that I needed a conduit. Something that could help me convey the thoughts I had swirling around inside of me that I just couldn't seem to express in a conventional manner. Then, as luck usually has it, I found it.

The guitar.

The guitar was perfect. It could stand in front of me. And I could stand behind it, while it helped me get on top of my thoughts. It could speak when I couldn't. And it could accompany me when I could. It was the perfect conversational partner, and it never asked me if I was ok. It just played along. It's always given me pleasure, passion, and strangely, a sense of worth. It's just always ...been.

Plus, it looks really cool.

I hear from time to time musicians being asked why they initially picked up an instrument or joined a band in the first place, and the answer is always the same old tired dribble ... "To get girls!" they proudly proclaim.

Let me be clear; I do not believe that horsesh!t for one second. You don't devote your time, effort, sweat, heart, your very being to something just so your 12-year-old crush will notice you. You do that sh!t because you are compelled to do it. It's not a choice, at least not in my case. I couldn't have stopped if I wanted to.

People have asked me what it is about guitar that I love so much. It's hard to quantify, but I can say this: when I first looked at a guitar neck, age nine, it just made sense to me.

And as a kid, not many things make sense ...e.g., "Why do I have to be in the house by the time the streetlights are on? Why is 'Because I said so,' an acceptable answer to every inquiry? And what in the actual f*** is up with brussels sprouts?!" But the guitar always gave me a logical answer whenever I strummed it, never sent me to bed when Mannix was coming on the TV, and never, ever, made me eat my goddamn vegetables. (Seriously, you want me to eat these little green balls, but I get yelled at for putting marbles in my mouth??)

But as I was teaching my fingers to teach my guitar to make the sounds my ear was after, my guitar was teaching me things I desperately needed outside the musical realm. It was teaching me self-confidence and that, ultimately, I didn't need it. In an incredible act of selflessness, my guitar was showing me that I didn't need it to speak for me. I only needed it for what it was originally intended. Music. To make the music that, at first, I thought made me worthwhile. But my worth, it turns out, was not dependent on the guitar or the music. The guitar was showing me that I'm worth something with and without it. That I could have it in front of me, but I didn't have to hide behind it. That I could come out from behind my guitar and be the person I knew I was inside, but could never find the words to express. That I didn't need to play second fiddle to my guitar. (Cheesy, I know, but once you write that line, it stays in.)

Yes, my guitar is responsible for introducing me to almost everyone in my life who is most dear to me, including the most important person,

my amazing wife. Were it not for my guitar, I would have never been in a band, and simply never have met the people who are my closest friends today, and never have met the love of my life. I can trace back, person by person, when I was first in close proximity to each of them simply because I was in the band, with my guitar. It put me in the places I needed to be, to meet the people I needed to know, who made my life what it came to be.

So, I never regret the days of my youth when my friends would call to me from outside to shoot hoop or whatever, but I instead remained in my room studiously fingering the pentatonic scale until it became second nature.

And again, there's that thing where it looks really cool. So that's nice.

But lest we make this too touching and Dickensian a tale (I mean, I wasn't playing my guitar on street corners, mute and malnourished, begging for another helping of porridge), playing guitar has been one of the most enjoyable aspects of my life, and it has taken me places I never would have had access to without it.

I was, in fact, just recently talking to my good friend and former bandmate Jim Lazzaro about the places we went and the people we met when we were traveling in the band together. How we would have never seen those sites or met those folks were we not musicians. It's truly been the Best of Times. And this time, now, is the best yet.

And still, today, people who knew me in my early silent years - childhood friends, cousins - when they see me on stage, say to me, "It's crazy that

that's you up there. You were always so quiet." Yea, I guess I was, and sort of still am

Because every once in a quiet while I'll lapse into a silent, stoic, solace in a club or at a show, prompting someone to interrupt my repose by uttering my favorite quizzical phrase, "Are you ok?" But thanks to my extensive work with 6-string therapy, I can truthfully answer, "Yea, I'm great." And as a result of years of immense growth, I can also add, in an exaggerated, overly concerned tone, "Are you???" After which, I revel in the look of confusion on their face.

But by spinning this yarn of woe, I am not in any way proposing that I have the answer for every kid who feels emotionally disconnected from their surroundings. I don't have any of the answers, and I'm absolutely certain I am no one's role model. I can, however, say that when I found myself in that place, there was a lifeline that I

reached for that gave me hope and got me through. And maybe they're out there for everyone if you look for them.

But I can't stress this enough: what the hell do I know? I'm just a guitar player.

So, in summation, this, for lack of a better term (because I can't come up with one), is my love letter to the guitar. I've had and have many, and they all make me happy. I never leave home without one because you never know when things might turn musical, or the opportunity may arise when I can jump up on a stage, with a guitar strapped to my back, securely hanging in front of me, but not fronting for me, and count it off...2...3...4.





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Prog Digest

BY KLYDE KADIDDLEHUMPER

Gather 'round, chillens, it's Christmas Story time with your Old Unkle Klyde. Nope, not Prog related (although my super deluxe remastered "War of the Worlds" shipped today) – but fun.

After last year's incident – it really was an honest mistake ... really – there will be no sitting on kind ol' Unk's knee ...

Anyway – at heart, at RadioRadioX and Xperience Monthly, we are storytellers. Whether interviews, or profiles, or articles – we like to tell stories. While not perfect, our goal is to get it right, or kinda right, or at least let you know when it's what we think, not what we know. While Constant Companion spent years killing off Rob Schneider, likely 'cause he played a Bob Fosse-like character and Fosse died in '87 – I don't believe we have killed off anyone (of consequence at least) in these pages. Told a tall tale or two – sure. But homicide – nope.

Perpetrating a good-natured hoax is, however, in our wheelhouse. Sometimes, take what Klyde says with a grain of salt. Unless he is telling a story – not a tale.

I was reminded of a time when CC and I were first dating and having dinner with a couple who are amongst my best friends. Klyde's friend knows a bunch of trivia and will tell you so. Let's call him Not Silent Bob. Well, the tall tale goes like this.

During dinner, CC had listened attentively to a number of stories. And decided to get in on the fun.

"Well, you know, the Little Rascals was filmed in Troy," she starts.

Having no idea where this is going, and not wanting to kill the vibe, Klyde nods in agreement.

And it continued. About the fact that there was a pretty thriving film business,

way back when, well north of Battery Park City.

Not Silent Bob is enthralled. All that was needed was setting the hook.

Going on, CC goes all in. "You know that famous scene, on the ladder truck ... the one going down the steep hill – no idea how they didn't get killed. You know the street, Klyde." I am implored to back this up.

Not missing a beat, I go, "Yeah – that's Hoosick Street."

Hook, line, and sinker.

CC can't contain herself.

"You know, Not Silent Bob, I'm lying." NSB's wife did a spit take and began laughing uncontrollably.

Just enough truth to be plausible. Just stupid enough to be true. And a (mostly) complete fabrication.

The fact is that there was a thriving movie industry in Upstate – just not in Troy. High above Cayuga's waters in Ithaca, N.Y. The Little Rascals were, indeed, filmed there. And that scene is memorable.

Don't try to find the films – a certain disgraced star bought them up, never to be seen again, as he deemed them insensitive. Oh, and don't try to find the WW2 Warner Brothers cartoon either.

A couple things brought all this to mind. Yet another case of a famous person being killed off in print, and a question a friend posted on LinkedIn.

To all his contacts, Steve asked that we provide one or two examples of things we *know* to be "true." Define as you wish – physical or existential – truth.

Given the state of the many things – a

much tougher task than one might imagine.

Perhaps there are some things we need to believe that simply cannot be true. The Tooth Fairy. The Easter Bunny. Krampus.

And then, we look at a house for sale with a young non-believer. He's just a nice old man.

And there, leaning against the fireplace, is a well-worn, recognizable cane, and a swing set in the backyard.

A Merry, Happy, Peaceful holiday season, all. Do something nice, be someone nice. Be the person you always wanted to be when you still believed.

Until next time.

Klyde



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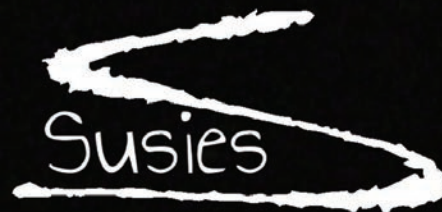


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