

ASK SCOTT

Downloaded from the *Loud Family / Music: What Happened?* website and re-ordered into Jan-Dec

1998 (Year 2)

January 5, 1998

Scott, I notice that you haven't really written too many songs about your eating habits, so I'm having a bit of trouble reading between the lines.

When I go to restaurants, I sometimes eat meat. Sometimes I order a veal dish, and other meat eaters at the table get all upset that I like to eat veal. Meanwhile they're eating a steak. Basically, what I'm asking is--if one is going to eat meat anyway, doesn't it seem a bit hypocritical to make some sort of distinction that eating grown-up animals is OK, but eating baby animals is cruel?

Geoff

Scott: I've never worked myself to a Morrisseyan level of sensitivity here. My guess is that in the wild, there's little chance that any given cow won't end up being killed and eaten by something. I doubt they die of old age much, or fling themselves off bridges because they are doomed to be attracted to those who are careless with their feelings.

On the other hand, it disturbs me greatly that to support gross overconsumption we breed races of animals that have shitty lives. I'm convinced that veal calves have so shitty a life that I shouldn't eat them. I eat some red meat, but at such a modest rate that it would take me a long time to mandate the death of one further animal (I figure that chickens and fish don't mind being killed since they don't look up at you with big sad eyes).

Not to judge anybody, but it seems to me the inescapable truth of your effect on cowdom is that whether you in your puny lifetime eat meat or not is probably negligible compared to how many children you have--whether you nudge humanity toward increasing or decreasing voraciousness. My feeling is that ranching just needs to get back to a saner planetary scale of land and animal usage.

--Scott Miller, cowpunk

Scott, your favorites list is so perfectly in synch with mine, it gave me the chills. Really fun reading, nostalgia-o-rama, and great for future shopping lists. But Scott, for 1995 and 96, where is Jack Logan?? Bulk and Mood Elevator are nothing short of amazing. You no like? Me no believe.

Jo Brown

Scott: Jack Logan's BULK is my number 32 of 1994. Never heard Mood Elevator. As we all know, there are several million records released every week nowadays; I'm bound to miss some good ones.

And are your favorites on line somewhere?

nostalgic for nostalgia,

--Scott

January 12, 1998

Scott, this Q&A thing is a wonderful idea! The last time I had the chance to converse with one of my musical heroes was when Elvis Costello sat down in front of me in a bar. Shocked into paralysis, I didn't say a word. I'm feeling less tongue-tied now.

Scott: I have no plans to become a big enough star to cause any apoplexy.

First, thanks for answering these questions. You obviously put a lot of work into this (I was all ready to rebut your defense of Eliot, but upon re-reading your epistle I realized you were right!)

Glad to hear it. And, the sense of his poetry aside, it's hard to believe, if he would refuse all contact with his dear friend Ezra Pound on the sole grounds that Pound wouldn't cease his Jew-baiting, that Eliot the man was unusually hostile or indifferent to Jewish people.

Second, thanks for making such great music. Thanks a lot. I've been listening since '88, and recently came to the realization that *Lolita Nation* is my favorite album ever. Now if I could only convince everyone else...

You're much too kind, but it being the case that these albums are an unbelievable amount of work to make, thanks for reminding me that occasionally someone considers one of them worth the trouble.

Going back to *Real Nighttime*, I've noticed that your albums have created a kind of pattern, alternatingly complex and simple. *Real Nighttime*, *Lolita Nation*, *Plants and Birds and Rocks and Things*, and *Interbabe Concern* are all gloriously complex, dense, recursive, and experimental. On the other hand, *The Big Shot Chronicles*, *Two Steps from the Middle Ages*, and *The Tape of Only Linda* hew more to the traditional "song-pause-song-pause-song" structure which we all know so well. So here are my questions:

As a quick aside, I don't see what's so complex about *Real Nighttime*.

Do you agree with my assessment? If so, do you do this on purpose? Will *Days for Days* be more satisfying to Marcia and Etrusca, or Carol and Alison?

It's more or less accidental that the level of experimentation has alternated like that, and the formula probably doesn't apply nowadays as there's not even any particular tide of pressure to behave myself after doing a more self-indulgent one. To me this new one works on a different plane of decidability of such things (I don't want to be so specific that I spoil people's first listen), though there's a nonzero chance that this is the one where even fans of the *Lolita Nation* type records will think I finally just had too much, as Robert Johnson used to say, ramblin' on my mind.

Where I go back to work and get depressed,

David Seldin

p.s. Please come to Boston in the springtime.

okay, but my #1 fan in Tennessee said it ain't my kind of town...

--"Ramblin' Boy" Miller

Scott, I know that "Chicago and Miss Jovan's Land-o-Mat" was recorded last year during the *Interbabe* sessions, but did you actually write the song in 1989...when you were 29?

Jack Lippold

Scott: No, the fictional person being addressed in the song is 29. I wrote most of the song in 1929, when I was 29.

I'm a boy and I'm a man, I'm 29

--Scott

January 19, 1998

Scott, thanks for giving devotees of intelligent, literate pop hours of listening, not to say deconstructing, pleasure.

Scott: You are most welcome, although the idea of scrutiny makes me as nervous as it would make you. I will imagine that if Jacques Derrida were here he'd remind me that being deconstructed is nothing to worry about, that my obliviousness to certain dimensions might in fact be what leads to them being considered.

Your fondness for Joyce and dislike of Pynchon has been fodder for some interesting discussions.

Oh, how small of me to act as if I could effortlessly find fault in one of the best living writers! Much of the writing in GRAVITY'S RAINBOW is nothing short of dazzling. What's going on is

that because I don't see a large structure I find meaningful, I shoot my mouth off and claim there is none.

But to compare anyone with Joyce or Eliot, oh. The reader is at first baffled by Joyce and Eliot, yet there are enough brilliant lines, single sentences that are worth a year of hard-won experience in life, to know something very important is going on. Then on revisitation, more lines are clear. Then on reading critical analyses, more, and at some point you come to the awesome suspicion that the aspects of Joyce and Eliot you didn't understand correspond exactly to the aspects of life you didn't understand. There is of course an element of having to come up to speed with references they make to other material, but I can only say that if Eliot deems it appropriate to in effect say "go read the entire Divine Comedy, then we can come back to this part," I'll jolly well go read the entire Divine Comedy.

I'm curious to know if you've read new-kid-on-the-block David Foster Wallace, and what you think if you have.

He certainly comes well-recommended, but no, I know nothing about him/it. I should probably read it soon, before absorption of "the story on it" alters the experience.

(and in case that doesn't pan out, here's the small emergency back-up question...)

"Don't Entertain Me Twice" has long been one of my favorites of the Game Theory canon.

[...Don't I remember being fired out of that one!...]

I've wondered for years whether lines like "thin film found on co-ed walls" were ripped from the headlines, a la "Day in the Life" or if there are any other insights you'd like to share about the tune.

Doug Mayo-Wells

I don't remember the "film" line referring to any real thing. Because I can't hear "share insights" and not think "convince people to like it," let's admit that the following are only my thoughts today, not a claim any of it is contained in the song. That was my being-a-grown-up album and in some of the songs I was going through and identifying what in the adult world was just a new way of being childish, and in that song it was the repetition of cheap highs from social and sexual maneuverings. Looking up the word "entertain," I see the derivation is "to hold between," as in to hold the attention, and I think if that's all that ever happens--and it never changes your life, it never transforms you--there's an element of being a prisoner of the minor dramas and chance situations of your life, of you being a sort of nonentity in the face of whatever is vying for your attention.

I don't have the words in front of me...wait, thanks to the web, I do! Ah, okay. Uh-huh. Most definitely.

An evil woman done me wrong.

a ass pocket of whimsy,

--Scott

January 26, 1998

Scott, first of all, I must say that I've been a doting fan of your music for a dozen years or so. Thanks for making it happen.

Scott: Thanks, it's been as much a pleasure as anything so anxiety-ridden can be.

I could ask about your preferences in hair care and underwear, but I am even more curious about the following:

Was the song "Slip" on LN in any way inspired by the Road Runner theme song?

Not consciously, but I think I see what you mean. It has the same beat, and there's that one sound on the Pro-1 synthesizer which more or less screams cartoon. I could well have been unconsciously steering it toward similarity to something like that; it would fit with the motif of juvenile references.

What significant challenges do you face in balancing music and dayjobs?

Mostly just that it all takes so much time. Every time I do an album now I'm convinced it was so exhausting I could never do another one.

These days, a lot of old bands are reforming for reunion tours/albums. Many of them we could surely do without. What artist(s) would you most like to see reformed?

In ten minutes I haven't been able to think of one. Do they ever come back after actually having grown, applied themselves in isolation, honed their craft, pondered what part of their output was just fashion and zeitgeist? The indication is that they don't give the old cow another thought till one day someone says there's more milk in the teat.

Are you a Niners fan?

Joel Maupin

Not except that I find myself rooting for the home team despite having no reason to care. Football is a little like a soap opera, isn't it? They have the same appeal, but mapped to the conventionally conceived male and female psyches respectively. If you asked each why they weren't interested in the other, they'd probably answer that the other is contrived--not a real situation.

--Scott "the Refrigerator Magnet" Miller

February 2, 1998

Scott, are you still compiling, or are you now a full-time musician?

Scott: I work on an object-oriented database. Want to buy one? It's a high-end quasi-infinitely scalable product, used by CERN and other high energy physics labs, big telecom companies, etc. It turns out they're good for organizing your lists of favorite songs and what albums they're on, too.

Did you take a course in "Game Theory" at Davis?

No, it was hard to get enrolled in--offered only fall of even-numbered years or something. Very likely there was no actual course; they just gave you credit for it if you ever managed to devise a class schedule that included it.

From reading the archives, I would have guessed your education was rooted in philosophy or even literature. But EE? What gives?

My intention was to major in art, but I had a vision of myself arrogantly chasing after appreciation for *my artistic talent*, and to counteract that I went into hard science. Where arrogance can hide easily.

Ever been compared to David Lynch? Cryptic is the operative word here.

I'm not aware of ever having been compared to David Lynch (I am flattered it occurs to you, since he is an excellent filmmaker). It's funny that we think of "cryptic" artists as people who create a coded world for us to delight in deciphering. Now that I am someone whose work is thought of as cryptic, I can testify that my effort is just the opposite: that there is *already* a code to the world, to the way things work, and every time I think I see one of the "answers at the back of the book," I just want to give it away to everyone, for free. To say, "the answer is five." The trouble is, you have to first get people to think you set up the right problem--to convince people that you see into their lives without knowing any of the details of their lives. How do you do that?

Favorite bands of the 90s? (Besides Loud Family, of course)

Liz Phair, Guided By Voices, the Posies, Aimee Mann, Veruca Salt, the Loud Family, Elliott Smith, Belle and Sebastian, Nirvana, Teenage Fanclub, My Bloody Valentine, Pavement, did I say the Loud Family? Oh, yeah, you said besides the Loud Family.

Mad Al

--Impotently Peevish Scott

February 16, 1998

My question for Ask Scott...

Scott: Ask Scott is prepared to interface with Tell Steve...

While listening the Beach Boys' PET SOUNDS SESSIONS box set I received as a Christmas gift, I noticed lots of similarities between PET SOUNDS and Game Theory's LOLITA NATION. Both albums deal with the passage of time and the loss of childhood innocence, and other emotions of adulthood. Also, there are a couple of direct quotes from PET SOUNDS lyrics in LOLITA NATION songs, the "God only knows" in "One More For Saint Michael" and the "ugliest trip I've ever been on" (from "Sloop John B") in "The Waist and The Knees"?

The "God Only Knows" one wasn't conscious; the other one was, obviously.

Were the LOLITA NATION album influenced at all by Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys? Or am I way off base?

No, it was certainly influenced *some*. I can narrate precisely the moment PET SOUNDS hit me full force: it was in 1977 and I was watching the movie SHAMPOO for the first time. Warren Beatty plays a hairdresser who has sex with every woman in sight. It opens with "Wouldn't It Be Nice" slightly audible from a radio, and you then learn it's set in 1968. As the film climaxes you get more and more tasty "acid rock" while all Warren Beatty's relationships end up canceling each other out. With the closing credits, "Wouldn't It Be Nice" reprises at full volume, and it's glorious. The director, Hal Ashby, was great with music--he did HAROLD AND MAUDE--and I think his point was that the emotions in "Wouldn't It Be Nice" weathered the storm of things like "Plastic Fantastic Lover." The naivete was more sophisticated than the worldliness that followed.

It wasn't all as straight in my mind as it is now, but by 1986 I had a somewhat clearer sense of wanting to get into the mechanics of that sort of deadly economy of lovelessness, and PET SOUNDS is obviously one of the masterful works along those lines, so I had the little quote of "Sloop John B."

If LOLITA NATION was your PET SOUNDS (creative pinnacle), then what was your SMILE (ambitious concept never fully realized)?

Oh, I don't think there's anything too close to that in my experience. For one thing, the trouble they had making SMILE was probably due to them being a really successful, pressured band. I've never felt more pressure than on LOLITA NATION, and I was often miserable, but as you say, people who bother to consider tend to think that one was better creatively than the others, so I may just have a low Beach Boy correlation.

What surprises could be found on a LOLITA NATION SESSIONS box set in 2017?

Steve Holtebeck

I was thinking if I became a leisurely and powerful star while my singing is no worse than it ever was, I'd like do a kind of director's cut of that record with some different singing and little fixups like recreating some of what we took out for the tighter CD time limit, but I'm guessing that project is not right over the horizon, and of course the few interested people would probably think I ruined it.

Paul McCartney liner notes?

rest in peace Carl,

--Scott

February 23, 1998

Scott, I think we'd all like to see one of your top-whatever lists of fave albums/songs from the annum just past. So how 'bout it?

Scott: This is one of my least conscientious efforts in years but here goes:

- 1 EITHER/OR - Elliott Smith
- 2 IF YOU'RE FEELING SINISTER - Belle and Sebastian
- 3 BRIGHTEN THE CORNERS - Pavement
- 4 O.K. COMPUTER - Radiohead
- 5 MAG EARWHIG - Guided By Voices
- 6 THIS SOUNDS LIKE GOODBYE - Ken Stringfellow
- 7 LADIES AND GENTLEMEN WE ARE FLOATING IN SPACE - Spiritualized
- 8 I HEAR THE HEART BEATING AS ONE - Yo La Tengo
- 9 RETREAT FROM THE SUN - That Dog
- 10 POST MINSTREL SYNDROME - The Negro Problem

EITHER/OR is the big news here. I haven't heard TONE SOUL EVOLUTION or any number of big-buzz pop records yet. I actually liked STANDING STONE by Paul McCartney a lot but I'm not including it here as the real Paul died in a car crash in 1969 and let's not encourage this sort of passing each other off as someone else when we have perfectly good cloning technology.

A longstanding (when not crouching) fan,

William (not Pete) Ham

--Scott (not Ann) Miller

Scott, THANK YOU for the way you quoted and capped the words NEATLY PUMP AIR in the latest round of "Ask Scott" (Editor's Note: The writer is referring to the 12/29/97 Ask Scott column). I saw those words and heard their cadence in my head and then thought, "Hey, wait, what song is that?" and soon had the answer ("Lady Godiva's Operation" by the Velvet Underpants). At that moment I felt that epiphany of "Oh, so THAT'S what he was saying" all these years and years. So thank you.

Scott: You're most SWEETLY welcome.

Also, didja know that at the end of that song, buried in the mix (and I mean buried), you can hear John Cale hissing, "You're a boy...you're not a boy," or something like that. Very

erie. (This has now devolved into "Tell Scott: The Forum for Know-It-All Record Collectors and Rock Nerds.")

Well, as if my input doesn't count toward the know-it-all record collector and rock nerd factor, but anyway...that's an interesting VU anecdote.

FYI, when I came out of brain surgery a few years ago and came to in the recovery ward, I got a phone call from a fellow college radio DJ, asking me if there was anything he could play for me, as if I could hear it; I said, "Yeah, how 'bout 'Lady Godiva's Operation."

Are you serious? Talk about your full-immersion multimedia rides. I think I speak for our entire readership when I say: your brain sounds terrific; I think they did a hell of a job.

Shoulda requested "The Girls Are Ready to Go."

Ha! Well, thank God you didn't. Serious, serious complications.

-- *Scott Tissue*
KCR (killer college radio)
San Diego CA

curly and demurely,

--S

March 2, 1998

Scott, I have two questions for you concerning production on your records. While I know that you worked with Mitch Easter for many years on your albums, I noticed that he didn't produce *Interbabe Concern*. 1) Was this a conscious decision on your part or his part, or just the way that it worked out? Do you plan to work with him (or another producer) in the future, or simply produce yourself (I know that sounds odd)?

Scott: Through no fault of Mitch's whatsoever, TAPE OF ONLY LINDA was a bit of an exercise in how not to spend your studio dollars very wisely, and to top that off I think it was my worst-selling record ever. The label was justifiably eager to see us become a little more cost-effective and when that happens the first thing to go is the hot-shot outside producer, if someone in the band can produce serviceably.

INTERBABE has sold a lot better, but until Alias calls up needing to shelter the millions they're making off us in a high-dollar hit maker, I'll just keep showing up for work, as they say.

2) How would you assess the impact, if any, that his production had on your music?

I suspect for a long time he was the only thing saving me from sounding unlistenable to anybody.

Thanks for taking the time.

Steve Fontana

now, if we could only afford whoever did the Impatients record...

--Sir Fix-It-In-the-Mix-a-Lot

Scott, some time ago, I asked if the LF would ever do this (great) song, "The Come On," in concert. You said no, because the the bassline required chops that weren't in Rob's repertoire. Time passes, Kenny's on board, and I'm asking again. This is such a great song ...

Jonathan Ostrowsky

Scott: The problem could not have been that it was too hard for Rob; it was one of our simplest bass lines. I'm sure I just meant that he wouldn't have learned it.

I just saw Michael Quercio for the first time in ages at our Poptopia show! Maybe we can play it with him as a guest vocalist some time.

rocking the Cathay de Grand,

--Scott

March 9, 1998

Scott, I am a relatively new fan of Loudmusic (just the last year or so). The front page of the *Washington Post* yesterday carried an article about "geek rock," i.e. music played by bands with members working in the technical/computer fields. According to this arbiter of conventional wisdom, it's just about the most happening form of music on the D.C. scene nowadays.

Would you consider the Loud Family "geek rock" in that sense (part one of a two part question)?

Scott: I'm not a geek in the sense people mean that to be a compliment, which is to say technologically "high-powered," whatever disturbing thing that might happen to mean. Really I am so NOT happening in any sense a Washington Post article might explore, it would scare you; whatever happeningness we have had better come from the other band members.

Do they mean to assert that there is some stylistic thread which links recording artists who have computer day jobs? If I had to find someone likely to have the exact opposite of my opinion on any given musical subject, I would start my search at Silicon Valley computer companies.

And is this an impending sign of information technology-driven apocalypse? (part two)

Michael J. Zwirn

Since John Lydon's appearance before Judge Judy there has been no doubt in my mind that the end is very near.

110 110 110,

--Scott

Scott, I was listening to "A Child's Christmas Saving the Whales" with a friend, and he asked a question to which I said I'd try and get the answer...

Why is the boy named "Denise"? What was the significance of that particular female-sounding name, as opposed to a more male or even androgynous name? He was intensely curious about this.

Lorrie Smith

Scott: Strange as it may seem to us today, the name, like a lot of that tape, was intended to be humorous. I believe it had something to do with the French for Dennis, "Denis," but to tell you more than that I'd have to go back and listen to it, and I think I'd rather be harpooned.

call me Email,

--Scott

March 16, 1998

Scott, I have many a burning question but I will keep it short so as not to take too much time.

I live in the U.K. and reside in Portsmouth, Hampshire. News of Game Theory and the Loud Family was not always easy to come across before the Internet so I apologise if this is a frequently asked (or slightly outdated) question. Why the change of name from GT to LF?

Scott: My rule so far has been that if all the original band members have quit, it's time to change the name, unless I have a record deal at the time; then it's too much trouble to change the name.

Although a somewhat personal question (sorry) what would you cite as being your main source of motivation behind making music? For instance, is fame and success for the Loud Family important?

That's sort of an Ernest Becker DENIAL OF DEATH question. The proper reason to make music should be--duh--for the sake of the people who hear it. You should be asking the question "if I died soon, to be reincarnated as any of the people surviving me, what would I want to pass on to my new other consciousness in this music?" You want to propagate and clarify a listening aesthetic, and, in the lyrics, encapsulate what you can of hard-won insights which are to some degree peculiar to your life, that are otherwise going to be lost.

This gives you a basis for deciding when imitation is more valid than the urge toward wanting to be considered original. If you sacrifice your chance to resonate with a listener merely for the sake of your reputation as an innovator, you've probably lost the game outright--no one may ever listen to you out of genuine love. On the other hand, if you're accessible to everyone but you haven't articulated anything significant that isn't already out there and available, or won't pass quickly with fashion, it's equally pointless.

So a little fame is a good thing. If you're not famous at all you stand no chance of catching the attention of the surviving listener you care about. If fame is all you care about, though, you're just thinking of it as a way of cheating death, and it won't be.

Ever since I first heard the lead break on "Shark Pretty" I've been hooked, amazed and a devoted follower. Thanks for continuing to make great music!

Well, good ear, but I didn't play that lead. It was Earl Slick, who was probably the top session guitarist in the world at the time; he just happened to be around because he was married to the engineer's sister. He had a record deal (remember Phantom, Rocker and Slick?) so we couldn't use his name. He was called "Ernie Smith."

regards,
Charlie (no I don't play drums) Watts

--Scott (no I can't sing) Miller

Scott, hi. For this assignment in my record-engineering program, I'm supposed to pick two songs by an artist, analyze the structure of a song (which I can do myself), and get detailed information about how it was recorded/engineered (everything from equipment details to "Whoa, how did you get that effect?").

The expectation is that I'll choose a deeply minor local band unused to the attention, and just in case, I did, but I'd much rather write a paper on what you did to record "Screwed Over" and "Top Dollar", and why - will you please help?

Scott: Forgive me for a moment of amusement at the word "why" there. "How--and why--were these delightful recordings made?"

I'm sorry if you're sorry that you no longer work with Mitch Easter, but INTERBABE CONCERN rates right up with the Rheostatics' INTRODUCING HAPPINESS and Julian Cope's JEHOVAHKILL as the best-recorded pop album anyone's ever done; c'mon, share the wealth of ideas. Good day!

Brian Block

I haven't heard those albums, but having heard a fair amount of Julian Cope, I assume that's quite a compliment, so thank you very much.

"Screwed Over" was obviously a very different recording situation from "Top Dollar." The most nonstandard thing about "Top Dollar" is that the guitar and vocals were actually recorded to a click track and then the drums and bass were put on later, and as a consequence of this the vocals have the quality that I'm singing them right after I've written the part, which for some reason caused them to have a really weird personality.

"Screwed Over" was me doing everything except the fuzz bass at the end, which was Kenny. It would take too long to tell the story of every sound on that one, but one result I was pretty happy with was recording a little sequence of notes of sampled piano, then sampling *that* and assigning it to the sampler keyboard instead of the sound of one note being played, so that each key stroke actually fired off the series of notes.

when I was a kid all we had was a Studer 24 track and WE LOVED IT

--S

March 23, 1998

Scott, thanks for all the great music. Fast & furious, now:

Scott: Fast and bulbous!

What are your time-tested heuristics for optimal set list construction?

No science there. Just don't let it get into any sort of a rut. Do things that are somewhat unexpected; don't let the middle drag with a lot of slow-to-mid-tempo numbers.

How much does the set change from show to show on a tour?

Not very much. I like to take requests for the encores but the main value of being on tour is you get really good at doing one particular set. If a lot of people are there and reacting enthusiastically, you'll never be bored with the songs, and you can concentrate on the delivery happening then and there rather than just not making mistakes. On the other hand, when there's a sparse crowd, especially if they're not enjoying it much, you tend to want to change the set around, maybe thinking "I'll give them something to cry about."

What's the perfect set length?

Usually I want to keep it short, unless it's definitely *your* crowd, and a big crowd. I'd say forty to 45 minutes, though the club contract usually says you have to play longer than that. Don't leave 'em wantin' less. If people want more they'll give you an encore.

How do you decide what old songs to resurrect, or what songs from the new album are live-worthy?

For new ones, you want to pick those that have some impact on first hearing, and that lets out a fair number of mine. As for old numbers, who can say? If only there were some statistical record of which ones people liked the most.

And how do you feel about the name Scott, anyway?

Dan Schmidt

I don't know. I guess it's kind of like naming someone Italiann or Swedee.

--road worrier

Scott, my favorite Loud Family track is probably Marcia & Etrusca. This song represents quite a stylistic departure from most Loud Family songs. It's...how do you say...epic ("epic" meaning, of course, that you're only a step away from constructing huge art-rock suites in the vein of Genesis and Yes...or maybe not). Regardless, I love the song - makes for great driving music.

Scott: I love Yes. I never got into Genesis much. I don't mean to give anyone a heart attack, but besides other things Yes did really well, Jon Anderson was an excellent lyricist (I'm considering the early 70s output here). But my favorite full-on art rock band was always Pink Floyd. Everything up through THE WALL was surprisingly consistent for being so adventurous.

I have always wondered what your inspiration for the song was. Who are Marcia & Etrusca? Dino & Elijah?

The names are supposed to conjure up both modern and ancient personalities, sometimes both at once. That song was a democratic effort but for my own part I was thinking of eternal verities flickering in and out of focus with trivial, half-ignored details.

My other major curiosity is the spoken sample in the middle of the song. That's you, I assume? what are you saying?

Sorry, but I don't remember. It was a combination of pieces of singing from takes and me talking between takes but I'd have to listen to it again. If I recall, it's not that hard to make out the words.

**In the hundred-year crusade,
*JP Mohan***

in and around Greg Lake, Mountain come out of the sky

--Scott

March 30, 1998

Scott, thanks for communicating with your fans.

Scott: Hi! Thanks for there being fans to communicate with!

I've got a few quickies for you:

Mac or PC?

UNIX. Gnu. Java. Anything that resists being co-opted and locked into sustained mediocrity by one company's iron grip.

Rosewood or maple?

Ginger.

Ford or GM?

Maryann.

Nietzsche or Kierkegaard?

I'm not an expert on either, but they both seem to be first-class minds neither of whom would be the first place I'd send anyone for cultural information today. To paint with broad strokes, I'd say they both shared the conviction that the world marches forward via a process of the weak being defeated by the strong, and Nietzsche was in favor of that whereas Kierkegaard was against it. In short, they both operated squarely in the shadow of Hegel, Kierkegaard working mostly to refute Hegel in favor of an austere, anti-rationalist Christianity, Nietzsche to demolish Christianity so that, unhampered by overdeveloped compassion, *polemos* could make great men.

It's alternately exhilarating and infuriating for me to read either. You could distill either to some truly lovely stuff. Kierkegaard is in many ways the spiritual father of both Rene Girard and Jacques Derrida, who by my guess are the two big thinkers of our time, and Nietzsche is in many ways the spiritual father of...practically everyone else.

And yet, Nietzsche really did hate Jews and Christians, and when he talks about bookish ideologies creating "little dwarf men," you doubt that's any idle metaphor--a man or woman dwarf would be subhuman to him. Kierkegaard was a religious fundamentalist to the point of feverishly opposing women's rights, and arguing in favor of Abraham's intention to kill his son as a sacrifice on the grounds that God's will is a higher authority than reason.

For a modern audience, a book of Flannery O'Connor short stories leaves them both in the dust of their own subjects (not that they didn't help clear her path). Between the two, it seems to be more stylish in the 1990s to name your album with a phrase from Kierkegaard than with a phrase from Nietzsche, so I'll pick Kierkegaard.

Hex Enduction Hour or This Nation's Saving Grace?

I've never heard Hex Enduction Hour. Is that like Entroducing?

Thanks for your time. I look forward to seeing the Loud Family next time you're in Austin.

Kurt Huffman

Thanks, see you in June or July!

--the Anti-Grizelda

Scott, just discovered your stuff this month for the first time. I've purchased all available LF/GT product and I'm swimming through it all with a big smile on my face.

Scott: That's so good to hear. Thank you.

Anyway, I do computer programming for a living in Princeton NJ, and I read on the web site that you program as well. If you don't mind my asking, could you talk a bit about what kinds of work have been involved in, languages, platforms, etc.? It doesn't appear that anyone's asked about it.

Mostly C++ programming on UNIX platforms. I have a Sun Ultrasparc on my desk. I used to work on Lisp and C++ compilers; now I work on an object-oriented database product.

Thanks a lot, hope to see you on tour this spring.

Mick

...my pal foot foot, foot foot, always likes to roam...

do not taunt foot foot

do not play with foot foot when drowsy

do not look directly at foot foot

--Scott

April 6, 1998

Scott, first off, please allow me to gush away by saying that I have been a big fan of your body

Scott: I try to keep in shape

of work ever since a friend loaned me his copy of *Lolita Nation* back in 1988 (yes, I did return it, than I bought the cassette, than I bought the CD...). Having just discovered the LF website, I am giddy at the chance to finally get the opportunity to talk to (at) you after ten years. I especially enjoyed reading your top 20 lists and finding many similar interests (although I did not find one of my guilty pleasures from the 70's -- *The Sweet*).

DESOLATION BOULEVARD is my number 27 of 1976. I guess I only posted them out to 20. Mind you, if the early records with "Little Willy" and what have you are brilliant, I just wouldn't know.

Made special note of the fact that you also recognized GBV's *Bee Thousand* as such an accomplishment. Robert Pollard is one of the few songwriters I have found whose ability approaches your own.

What lavish honor you do me! I feel like I've drunk a case of beer and been hit by a swinging microphone.

One of the things that I have always admired about you is your innate ability to drop obscure references at the drop of a hat. Be it a triple play by the 1906 Chicago Cubs (but what, no "three fingers") or squeezing five Stanley Kubrick film references into one song (?) title. Having taken a class back in my college days which examined the work of Kubrick ("Films as Literature"), I gained an appreciation of his film making technique. I've read your take on some of your favorite books, and was hoping that you might share your feelings on the films of Stanley Kubrick and/or films in general.

Kubrick is the best filmmaker, I think. Not only does he do high art, which is to say revelatory art, but he builds a ladder down from his Olympus that most of us can climb onto; he's not just for critical theorists and filmmaking aficionados. He tells good stories about how culture works and what part violence plays in culture. We see both the reality of violence in all its outrageous brutality, and the romanticizing going on in the mind of the victimizer.

This makes for a bumpy ride--true of anything revelatory. We're used to filmmaking where the brutalizer and the victim see the act as occurring in the same economy: power changes hands unfairly, but the loss for one equals the gain for the other. Kubrick shows the disparity. To the writer and his wife who are brutalized in *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE*, the event reads as sheer sadism; to the gang, it is a powerful generator of glamour and camaraderie.

Hal the computer and Jack in *THE SHINING* are protectors who adopt a sacrality which leads them to recast those being protected as the threat itself. In all these cases, I think a good lesson to take away is that systems of morality are beholden to the dynamics of violence, and not the other way around. People are not "basically good" until something like TV

teaches them to be violent; what must be taught is how not to revert to our natural state of expedient and rationalized hostility.

I was curious as to whether or not you shared my feelings regarding the Star Trek television series? That is that the new series are all pale imitations of the original, lacking their flair, high drama, and social consciousness, and substituting stale, cold technology and regurgitated plot lines (or am I just stuck in the '60's).

Anything would be *pale* compared to the original Star Trek, wouldn't it? It was nothing if not...flushed. I'm a big fan. I thought it often had an almost Shakespearian structural genius to it, and I thought the acting was just right. The "Next Generation" had some excellent, memorable episodes, I thought, but you're right about it not quite having the same flair. None of the other spinoffs have held my interest at all.

While we're on the subject, if, for some unknown reason, William Shatner decided to cover one of your songs, would you be delighted, offended or indifferent, and which song would you want him to cover?

I had a song called "One More For Saint Michael" which actually refers to Captain Kirk directly so I'd have to pick that one. I suppose I'd be completely delighted.

Thanks for your time. I must finish with one shameless plug. Spokane, Washington lies directly on the highway between Seattle and Missoula (or vice versa, depending on which way you are traveling) and we would love to see you here sometime (or maybe I should just get off my ass and travel to one of the two aforementioned cities myself).

Dave Starry

Do you get the feeling that we could draw a number of people in Spokane? Sometimes we'll book a show just on the strength of there being a small number of people who seem enthusiastic about setting up and helping promote a show in their town. If you're serious we could discuss it with our booking agent. In any case, I'm grateful for the interest.

--Captain Quirk

Scott, my wonderful Camaro drove over a cliff near Dover and the waves could give a damn, they all just came back again. What gives?

Scott: As Hoover said hovering over Dover, "waves be dammed."

Please, they told me you would know. Was it the fire drill, or is the sun that bright now?

Ken Simmons

That "bright now" is a would-burning Firestone theoeater, and though the sun's in the driver's eyes, it's the one behind the wheels who gets tired.

--Mag Earwicker

April 13, 1998

Scott, since Simon Reynolds' essay in the *Village Voice* not too long ago, the rubric "post-rock" has been on the lips and tongues of savvy critics. I'm curious if this term means anything to you -- do you surmise a discontinuity in the writing and playing of music sufficiently radical to bid farewell to the rock epoch? (I notice that you have Gastr del Sol on your list of renown for '96 -- so you must have some familiarity and affinity towards this phenomenon, if it is such).

Paul Murphy

Scott: I haven't read the article so I may stray from your exact subject—but we can probably agree there are too many post-designations nowadays. Personally speaking, when I say "post-structuralist" or "post-modernist," I don't have much in mind, I just mean to refer as conveniently as possible to people or works commonly tagged as such.

It's a little cheap to say those terms are meaningless, but I suspect they call attention to a problem (or unwittingly reveal it, depending on who's slinging the term): we ground ourselves culturally in the very process of smashing foregoing epistemologies. How do we know anything? Well, if we're aware of any old way and new way of looking at something, we *know* to look at it the new way. Better that than the other way around no doubt, but when we start building intellectual world orders on *lack of arbitrarily-determined fault*, look out. Does this airplane fly right? Absolutely. How do you know? Because it's not identical to the previous model, which crashed.

If what was happening was that we were running out of room to say things in rock, I'd think we'd see increasingly many records which are mostly conventional rock except for one or two cuts on which the artist had to depart. In fact, what we see—I should say, what tend to be written about—are records which suddenly and ostentatiously refuse to touch certain rock trappings with a ten foot pole.

To cause us to "bid farewell to the rock epoch," post-rock would need to be not radically different enough, but radically *similar* enough. It would have to do what rock does structurally, but have some veneer of newness, like "psychedelia" or "new wave." And Gastr are I think genuinely different from rock. I'd place them in the academic tradition of Cage and Stockhausen, who I would say sought a music un beholden to mediating culture. As a candidate for the new mainstream itself, it would naturally have the problem of-to paraphrase Andrew McKenna on "deconstruction"—keeping its hands so clean that it couldn't grasp anything.

--il PostEno

Scott, I was wondering if "Not Expecting Both Contempo and Classique" was influenced by the work of designers Charles and Ray Eames. Specifically, the line "There may not seem

like much creative latitude, but that's the challenge of design" reminds me of Charles Eames' statement from *Design Q&A*: "I don't believe in compromise, but I willingly accept constraints" (I paraphrase loosely from memory). Is there any connection here?

Tim Walters

Scott: My God, questions from people who have worked on the albums now. What's next, Bob Ludwig asking me if I've read Deleuze and Guattari? Hey Tim.

No, I can only assume it's my pipe dream of doing office furniture consultation shining through the mundane necessities of turning out indie rock.

a statement from Ray Charles' design Q & A,

--Scott

April 20, 1998

Scott, I'm in a band called In Clover from Richmond, VA (been a fan since I saw Game Theory at William & Mary in 1988 - and I must say - very glad for the rerelease of *Big Shot Chronicles* and *Real Nighttime* since my cassettes are so worn out they just screech now).

Scott: Hey, some of us call it singing.

We've been at it for around 7 years (keep losing drummers) - what's your advice to upcoming bands who are looking for a record deal? We play frats, give away our tapes, just finished a CD - but have no clue how to get people to come to our shows at clubs, and we don't just "know" somebody -- maybe it's just Virginia. I know we don't suck, because people that aren't our friends tell us all the time how great we are -- we just can't get people out on a regular basis. What should we do oh wise-one?

Yes, as you know I've never put my hand to a project that hasn't caught fire in the marketplace, so listen up.

You need to give people a reason to get out there; would *you* honestly call a bunch of your friends and say "you gotta see this band" if you were the band? You need to be a news item on some level, it doesn't matter what level. Really good, sensitive, insightful songwriting isn't going to help that much here, because people just don't say "you gotta see this band, they resonate with the ineffable verities of the human condition." If that's you, I'd say concentrate on mailings to national college radio and fanzines and don't even sweat the local club thing.

If your set is supposed to work on its high energy, take a good honest look at whether that's a slack area. Stop losing drummers, they're crucial! Drums and bass usually determine the energy level all by themselves. Have your drummer and bass player play a typical song from your set and stand outside the room. You are now hearing what the club's walk-up clientele hear when they're deciding if you're going to be worth it. Does it scream "*hot band*, get in

here immediately?" If the energy isn't the thing, ask "what is the thing?" and make sure it's firing on all cylinders. Does the front person knock the audience dead with showpersonship? Or do you dress like toreadors? Or do you nail the hell out of harmonies (a hard one)? Or are you absolutely perfectly timed to ride to prominence on a trend (an extremely hard one that requires rigorous study)?

That's sort of the club scene economy. If you aren't making a proper spectacle of yourself, there's not much reason to place you in front of a mob of drunken onlookers. It doesn't hurt to make yourself a local pest by postering and trying to get articles in local rags, but if you're not fascinating in some drearily obvious way, it's going to be a miracle if you break big from your home base outward. And I hope it's clear from my tone that whatever makes your music essential is worth doing even if it doesn't happen to turn the wheels of success.

Best of luck with Loud Family - Oh - and I've always liked your voice even though you joke about it - it's different and very emotive - it sounds sincere, and I really like that. Hate these vocalists that just pretend to feel what they're singing about.

Tara Lane
In Clover

Thanks, I'm very glad to hear that, because it's proving to be practically impossible to get me to stop.

so worn out I just screech now,

--Scott

Scott, my eighth grade art students are doing a unit on video storyboarding. Any Loud Family or Game Theory songs you'd like them to attempt?

Working on creating a new generation of Loud Family fans,

Gregg Davis

Scott: Gregg, hi! I still love your picture of me schlepping the packages to the post office.

For some reason "Don't Respond, She Can Tell" and "I No Longer Fear the Headless" come to mind. Boy, I don't think of myself as that sinister a writer until I get asked a question like this. I mean, certainly not "Sodium," certainly not "N. San Bruno Dishonor Trip"...

--Scott "Not At All In Favor of Slitting Wrists" Miller

April 27, 1998

Scott, when I listen to your many records (usually only one at a time, though), I always come away impressed by the attention you pay to sound. I don't mean the clarity and definition of the musical instruments, I mean your interest in sound for its own sake--tape loops, found noises, words that seem chosen as much as for their resonance as what they say, noise bursts and low hums pitched at strange and wonderful timbres, you know the drill.

Scott: Thanks, Miles. I've always had a passion for the way sound goes onto tape, ever since Joe Becker and I made recordings in high school. It's almost to the point of my being more of a sound effects buff than a record producer type, because record production is such a morass of fashion-dependent considerations. The sound-texture aesthetic is very *in* nowadays, and in a way that's a noble cause -- to deliver back to people's ears what's been turned into industry semiotics (heard of "the language of flowers"? I give you: "the language of effects on the drum kit").

But beyond a certain point, the happy freedom to explore the possibilities of sound can become the unhappy fear that it will cost you prestige if the dreaded middlebrow ever have an ecstatic reaction to your music. My favorite composers don't key *against* the mainstream; they reject freely, but aren't afraid to swipe from it what's useful.

Do you experiment endlessly to recreate the sounds you hear in your head? Or do you stumble on a great sound when you're messin' around with the amps and effect boxes, and that sound inspires you to come up with a song or a loop built around it?

An idea for a sound in your head can go pretty far wrong, as it can be an arbitrarily hard -- or expensive -- sound to make in the real world. My head had better not hear pricey session singers breaking into "Every Breath You Take," if you know what I mean. So I do a fair amount of trying to make existing equipment work in different ways by using it wrong. For instance, on "Don't Respond, She Can Tell" I got an unusual guitar sound by using the cheapest amp I could find and trying to torture it into producing a hi-fi sound using compression and a ridiculously extreme "loudness-curve" EQ. Synthesizers were put on earth to use in some way the manufacturer didn't intend.

Sometimes you do have no choice but to try to bring off an imagined sound, but an hour of that is typically a lot less productive than an hour of fairly undirected messing around.

A couple of other favorites, Wire and R. Stevie Moore, share with you a very pure interest in (and understanding of) sound that only sometimes encompasses music. However, their experimentation, as documented in the myriad Wire spinoff projects and Stevie's 230+ available cassettes, has been much more public than yours. Are you able to achieve your intended results without committing hours of pings and buzzes to tape, or are you sitting on a vast treasure trove of MILLER MACHINE MUSIC?

Miles Goosens

Nothing I'd want to release. To me, actual experimentation is completely different from what's referred to as "experimental" but which is still intended for an audience. Those

artists' experimentations are "much more public" than mine, but I wonder if, percentagewise, the slew of Wire spinoffs did as much to bring their more difficult material to their audience as the more integrated approach of something like LOLITA NATION did to my audience--profoundly silly of me as it is to draw that comparison, especially considering Wire were a big influence on me.

pushing the pillow, stuffing the envelope

--Scott

Scott, the debut album from the band The Wannadies sports a track three called "Friends". It's the one that I find myself hitting the repeat button for. I believe I'm doing this because the sound (to me) is pleasingly reminiscent of Game Theory. Still, I have not ruled out Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Hang on for a second while I turn the oven off.

I can do a fairly good job of spotting and understanding what accounts for influence and the appearance of influence in literature. But as a non-musician, I lack the language and technical knowledge to verbalize why one band's work should sound similar to another's.

If you've heard this song and can agree in any way that this song echoes your work in G.T., would you mind giving me an explanation (for dummies) of what they're doing to sound like you?

Scott: I haven't heard the song and I may or may not have heard the band. The name is extremely familiar.

For what it's worth, I usually don't hear it when someone says another band, or singer, or songwriter sounds like me.

Well, I've got to go turn off the oven. Thanks,

Geoff Woolf

got to go make some records,

--Scott

May 4, 1998

Scott, fortunately, my job has me in town for the Terrascope concert. Unfortunately, it's sold out.

Scott: It was fun. It turns out KFJC did a live broadcast of it.

Do you have any travel tips? Are there any must see Game Theory/Loud Family historical sights in SF/Davis? Thanks in advance.

Byph Whaley

Oops. The perils of answering these in the order received: I'm always a month behind so nothing current applies. Well, as far as Game Theory or Loud Family theme parks, in-costume historic re-enactments, any of that sort of thing goes, San Francisco has dropped the ball. Capturing any sort of feel is hard--a field trip to any SF Recording studio, for instance, is guaranteed to be as exciting as visiting a closed H & R Block office; most of our experience of external San Francisco involved, oh, looking for parking. One good locale would have been Big Shot Photo Enlarging in Berkeley, where GT practiced. You could have dropped in and taken Photo Robert out to lunch in exchange for humiliating stories about us. But it's closed now.

Despite the utter lack of history involving my bands except that I've had many a tasty meal there, here are my most-frequented SF restaurants: Oritalia, Neecha Thai Cuisine (as I believe Zach Smith said, "that food which does not kill us makes us stronger"), Tanuki, and for breakfast the Curbside Cafe.

I'm going to assume that every standing structure from when I was in Davis will have been turned into a juice bar at least once.

coming soon: "Tow-Away Mountain"

--Scott

Scott, my friends all tell me I'm too other-directed. What do you think?

John Sharples

Scott: Is that a set-up? That is, if your friends can call your "directedness" into question, is the issue decided? Or, the pronouncement may say more about your friends than about you.

I assume that's some psychological term about which I don't know the particulars. Here's my take on the subject in general (probably drawing extensively on Sartre and Martin Buber): no one has an isolatable personality. One's personality is the sum of one's relation to others. If you ask if someone is too other-directed, I say everyone is 100% other-directed 100% of the time. The concept of self-actualization is yet another artifact of our concern to be *regarded* a certain way by others. In short, we all change our stripes according to what we think people are looking for, and when, as will inevitably occur, we find out someone disapproves of us changing our stripes, we change our stripe-changing stripe to accommodate that person, too.

What "too other-directed" probably means is that certain others who constitute one's personality do so in ways that become discordant. If you ever listen to what schizophrenic people on the street are saying, they're--in my experience--going over and over an unresolved conflict with someone. I believe I could quote Gil Bailie here and say that this

gets to the heart of what demon possession meant in classical and biblical texts. The feedback regulating their constituting-otherness is broken.

Then again, maybe each of your friends just wants you to listen to him or her, not those other friends.

too self-produced,

--Scott

May 11, 1998

Scott, because of your joking reference to Guided by Voices in the liner notes to the most recent Loud Family album, and because I remember reading somewhere that you marveled at the contrasts between your approach to recording and Bob Pollard's, I was wondering: what is your critical appraisal of Guided by Voices/Bob Pollard?

Scott: Extremely high. His voice is one of the very best, and their stuff always sounds good to me, which is incredible considering the volume of material they put out. I don't remember what I thought was a big difference, unless maybe it's that--since I only write about six or eight songs a year. And I thought it was about the best thing for music ever that they had a hit mastered on Realistic cassette, but I just couldn't have gone that route myself without it being a contrivance.

I ask because, after my many years as a Game Theory/Loud Family fan, the first time that I was exposed to Guided by Voices, I was struck by the band's similarities to your music. Even a friend of mine who ardently dislikes both the Loud Family and GBV has commented to me that my taste for GBV must arise from my taste for Miller music.

Not to put words in anyone's mouth, but is there any chance they just meant one of us must have used the other as a model for how to be so horrendous?

In particular, I believe that you and Bob share an unalloyed sense of guitar pop and its history, from Prog-Rock, to Folk Rock, to Big Star/Beatles, to Psychedelia, and that you are two of the few pop songwriters working who manage to conspicuously incorporate the entire range of your influences into your songwriting without sounding derivative. Additionally, although your songs tend to vary in length more than Bob's, you both seem to understand that, at times, the most poignant pop songs are less than two minutes long. Also, you both utilize, shall we say, affected yet endearing vocal styles. Finally, although your lyrics simply make more sense (at least to me) than Pollard's Jabberwocky talk, you both manage to come up with truly evocative, albeit warped, song titles, many of which are rather long.

Truth be known, I don't know what Pollard is talking about too much of the time, so I'm not going to presume to guess how much we think alike. It may be that we appear to have long titles by sheer contrast with everyone else. We like to get a lot of info in anything if we can,

and not many artists do, and this was especially true in the early 90s when it was all the rage to have your band be called "Lint" and your songs be called "Rug" and "Blink."

On the other hand, I am aware of the differences, sometimes notable, between the Guided by Voices aesthetic and yours. Aside from the fact that you rarely release anything with such a "tossed-off" feeling as much of GBV's work has, Pollard clearly revels in mid-70's "Rawk," while I just can't see the Loud Family doing stage kicks and twirling the microphones in giant circles, although you are welcome to try. (Incidentally, I suspect that it is only Pollard's "Rawk" pieces that have afforded him more commercial success than the Loud Family and/or Game Theory.) However, in GBV's more "contemplative" works (which is to say that Bob "contemplated" the songs for the hour or so that he spent recording them), including the newly released *Tonics and Twisted Chasers* (which, if you haven't heard, is truly worth ordering from Rockathon Records) and *Under the Bushes, Under the Stars*, I can almost imagine the two of you singing harmony. In fact, there are times when, while listening to GBV, I find it impossible to believe that Pollard, after having spent the 80's singing other people's songs to himself in the bedroom mirror, never listened to and was influenced by *Lolita Nation* (although I have never heard him mention you as an influence).

Thanks. I'd personally rather he listen to *Interbabe* than *Lolita* if that's the first thing he's going to hear. The singing on *Lolita* just really sounds like a drugged 12-year-old or something, and you wonder who's going to find that fascinating and who's just going to be irritated.

How about it? Am I only imagining the similarities between your music and Pollard's? If not, have you ever met the man and/or heard whether he knows and appreciates your music?

Terence D. Friedman

Never met him but I saw them live with the Tobin Sprout lineup and they stomped me concave.

my name is legion for we be thousand,

--Scott

Scott, any chance of doing an enhanced CD? I would think it would be a natural for you given your interest in computing.

Scott: I'd love to, but I'm not all that savvy in the area of expertise that would be relevant to this, and to take on that big a project I'd have to have a lot more and different resources at my disposal than my tiny little career as a recording artist affords me now.

How about making the ultimate fragmented cut and paste CD ... like the finer points on *Lolita Nation* and *Plants* ... something almost like a collage ...

Maybe I could do such a thing as a joint project with a pool of people on the web or something.

Do you practice any religion, would you say you are a religious/spiritual person?

I don't practice Christianity with regularity; I'm still in the process of figuring out what religion is all about. I feel safe in saying religion is profoundly misunderstood by most people.

It's probably true that we all walk around practicing the same amount of religion. Our only choices are to correctly identify our religious behavior as religious or to misidentify it as always reasoned, and the latter is dangerous in exactly the way we think fanatical religions are dangerous.

Great to hear you are a fan of GBV's as they slay me.

I too am dead at their hands.

Thanks for your time.

Ray

guided by guide vocals,

--S

May 18, 1998

Scott, I noticed that you list My Bloody Valentine as a band that you enjoy. I've been addicted to their stuff for a long time, always looking for something like that. *Interbabe Concern* has a similar attention to sound and noise, really great job, and great lyrics.

Scott: Thanks!

What's the new album like? What are your new frontiers musically?

I'd say the new album tries to find some coherence in feelings about music and about life in general that seem to contradict each other. A good example would be the feeling that music is stagnating, that to reach a wide audience you have to rehash the same old cliches in the thinnest of disguises, and a contrary feeling that the whole idea of thinking music has "frontiers" is faulty--that any attempt at radical innovation necessarily leads to music designed to be talked about and not listened to.

And I really do believe those two statements have hard-to-resolve truths to them, and not only as a personal conundrum, but as one showing signs of heading for some sort of spectacular public collision. For one thing, people are more and more hyper-aware of the workings of nostalgia. Everyone jokes about how musical trends are recycled with ever-

shorter lag times, and the new challenge might be dealing with the fact that belief in the notion of lasting musical revolutions is going away, period, and if so, I think there's going to be a crisis of music's claim to being a connection to deeper things.

One great thing about My Bloody Valentine is that while their overwhelming concern is obviously texture, they keep their melodies prominent, too. They're not trying to say "see, we've evolved past melody," the battle-cry of duddiness if there ever was one.

By the way, your last show in Seattle was great. Sadie is sexy! The ultimate live rock lineup, g,b,p,d, with vocals sensuously spread round.

Justin McReynolds

Thanks much. We hope to sensuously spread for the whole country this summer.

evolved past tree shrews,

--Scott

Scott, which is your favorite Spice Girl?

J. Hogard

Scott: The red one with the circular antenna who rides a scooter.

May 25, 1998

Scott, driving around the other day listening to *Lolita Nation*, "What was it we were always wanting...", I burst into tears. Driving around, weeping, on a nice sunny day. I blame you.

Scott: Thanks for writing; that's nice of you to say. And you did the right thing. We nihilists hate sunshine. It makes the pavement too hot to walk our ferrets.

Anyways. I'm curious about something and want to milk your extensive insider knowledge of the music biz. Hypothetical questions follow. Suppose you were you, except really wealthy and really ambitious. Given that you already have talent, would it then be possible to *buy* fame? If so, how would you go about it?

Of course you can buy a certain amount of fame. I guess I'd hire an expensive producer and spend a lot of time recording in an expensive studio, then I'd make an expensive video or two, hire expensive press and radio promotion people, take out a bunch of expensive magazine--even TV--ads and tour with an expensive stage show.

Or, taking it from another angle: say your favorite underappreciated, label-less young rock songwriter just inherited an absurdly large amount of money, and wanted to use that money to expose as many people as possible to their music. Not seeking Michael Jacksonesque fame, just "success". Just "not slipping through the cracks". Could he or she somehow buy the attentions of their favored label?

Big labels are probably used to turning down artists with a lot of money fairly routinely; maybe this artist could pay a regular producer on the label to come up with a demo tape specifically designed to win the heart of a certain A & R person. And this tape should be in a gold cassette shell. A demo tape actually made of gold.

Could they buy a successful tour? Could they buy their favorite producer's services? What advice would you give them, what order would you recommend doing things? Agent, PR firm, producer, studio time....?

love,

Scott

(and that's an order)

I believe one hires a personal manager and they do all that for you.

Oh--if the sky is really the limit I would also hire someone to dance next to me on stage with a big mirror like the Time in *Purple Rain*.

TCB

--"Colonel" Scott

Scott, I recall at one point seeing a copy of *Lolita Nation* that was abridged. I want to say it was a single record, but that could be my imagination. Maybe it was just a shorter CD. Either way, it existed somewhere. Why was it, at one point, abridged, and what was left out of this version?

Chris Perry

Scott: As I remember it, Enigma Records were licensing to Europe rather than exporting, and as it was told to me, the European manufacturer insisted that no one in Europe would ever buy a double album. Yes, this seems a little broad; the original utterance was probably more like "lose half of this crap and we'll talk."

So they made it into a single not too likable vinyl record. The song "Waist and the Knees" and most of the unconventionally structured songs got jettisoned at the horse latitudes.

still furiously pumping my stiff green gallop,

--Scott

June 1, 1998

Scott, quickly, to get it out of the way; thanks for many years of wonderful music.

Scott: Thanks, that's very nice. I had a lot of help.

Songwriting Questions: I have noticed in trying to play some of your songs on guitar that they tend to not follow the "proper" (I ii iii IV V vi vii) pattern, and when I try to force them into that pattern, they don't sound right. When writing music, do you go more by the feel of a good riff, or try to plug it into a certain key? Feel free to discuss music theory at length.

I gravitate toward fairly routine chord progressions with one particular odd thing about them. Anything that involves doing some one thing differently from how I'd ordinarily do it. Just as an example, one of my favorite tricks is to have a progression that involves a major of some chord wander around till it comes back to a minor of that chord--or the other way around. If you know my song "Idiot Son," that's one that does that in one part--it plays a D major against an F and then a D minor against a G.

To me the tastiest changes are always a high wire act. They're always one step away from total cliché or from not making sense at all. But that's only one way to like to listen to music, and clearly it's pretty different from what most people like or I'd be selling a lot more records.

Kurt Cobain once said that once he got the hang of songwriting, it quickly became formulaic for him. Thoughts?

My impression is that he was pretty ill at ease with the fact that the more he stuck to formula, the better the response. That's just how large audience success works, though. However many of them want to share the knottiness of your worldview, the majority just want you for an ornament, like an earring, and for that they want simple elegance; they don't want a big complicated thing hanging off of their earlobe.

As a celebrity (very minor), how do you feel about your public coming up to you and chatting you up before shows?

I feel great about it.

Best shoulda-been-a-band-name you've come up with?

The English Einsturzende Neubauten.

Thanks for your thoughts

Chris Prew

knotty by nature

--Scott

Scott, P & B & R & T is one of my DID's (please excuse the acronyms)

Scott: thank you kindly

and after browsing your music lists, your favorite records share approximately 90% homology (please excuse the molecular biology reference) with mine.

That's pretty amazing, and good correlations like that support my faith that's there's something like a language-correctness layer of musical taste. Languages use arbitrary signs, but they have very knowable systems of consistencies, and I think the musical ear is a lot like that, only the fact that the system is in a certain amount of flux leads to a world of confusion about what those consistencies are.

I also believe there are other ways of getting the same set of tastes that are more suspect, but of course that would apply to other people, not people who agree with *my* tastes!

I did notice, however, the glaring omission of any Marshall Crenshaw records on your list. What gives?

Jeffrey Rose

The thing is, I have no doubt I've left off a lot of great records just because unless a person is actually a professional rock critic his or her access is going to be limited. A quick check of the database shows that I have his debut at #27 for '82, FIELD DAY #24 for '83, LIFE'S TOO SHORT #31 for '91 and MIRACLE OF SCIENCE #36 '96. Which is certainly not bad. I haven't heard his other records.

your favorite waste of type,

--Scott

June 8, 1998

Scott fills out an icebreaker questionnaire, a list of questions designed to help you get to know someone better, sent to him by Andrew Hamlin...

Answer 'yes' if you (the person taking the quiz):

1. Knows pi to seven (or more) significant digits

Scott: I know it to six. You are wrong about the one I don't know. It is not significant at all.

2. Knows e to seven (or more) significant digits

Can they be digits of my own choosing?

3. Knows c to the nearest whole number

Ha. A trick question. C is a letter, not a number.

4. Knows what C8H10N4O2 is

That is what they're saying after certain lines in "Re-Make/Re-Model"

5. Knows at least six programming languages

Not unless you do some fudging at least as bad as counting C++ as a programming language.

6. Has been shot

No.

7. Has been shot at

No. I'm telling you, they're dead before they can reach.

8. Does not have email

Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Aw, this is another trick question!

9. Has a rotary dial telephone

Yeah, right. Try calling phone sex with one of those!

10. Has never downloaded pornography at work

I once downloaded the cover page from these people who will make you a life-size simulated woman for five thousand dollars. Hell, in two years the price will come way down and then everyone who bought one now is going to feel SO STUPID.

11. Has been to Las Vegas or Reno and not gambled

Last time I was in Las Vegas I ate at the Circus Circus buffet.

12. Has been to four or more continents

No, but at ages four or more I have been continent.

13. Has never eaten at McDonald's

No. That is, I have not *never*. It is not the case that never have I.

14. Can speak three or more languages

I have spoken French and Spanish but was shot at.

15. Has been mistaken for someone of the opposite gender

Not after I show them my penis.

16. Has bitten or been bitten by a human to the point of drawing blood

You have been listening to the townsfolk. Such foolish stories they tell.

17. Has won more than \$50 in a lottery

No. Wait, you mean you win money? I thought they were selecting people to die according to obscure small-town customs.

18. Has seen a ghost

No, there's no such thing as a ghost. BOO! Ha ha, only kidding. Ha ha ha ha.

19. Has been arrested for something that shouldn't have been a crime

They go around entrapping people, is what they do.

20. Can name more than nine Muppets

Are you kidding? I watched Sesame Street my whole life. Miss Piggy, Kermit the Frog, Fozzie Bear, Bert, Ernie, Elmo. That's nine.

21. Has never flown in an airplane

I have always remained in my seat while in an airplane.

22. Is packing heat

Packing heat RIGHT HERE.

Well, I have a lot of other icebreaker questionnaires to get to today.

--Scott

June 15, 1998

Scott, we will surely head to Cleveland if the Loud Family plays up there again this spring. Or Pittsburgh, or somewhere. You just do your tour, play great music and try to have fun in between as well. I'm not surprised (disappointed, of course) about the probable lack of a Columbus gig, though you do now have a substantial fan base here among people who find themselves humming "We've Only Just Begun" from time to time and only just begin to question why.

Scott: Janet, because you're you, we're bringing the love to Cleveland on Monday, July 13th at the fabulous (one just knows) Grog Shop.

Today we had a little incident on the loud-fans mailing list. One of our august party wrote, in reference to Nicholson Baker, "...his gadfly activities with regard to the SF Main Library" and another misread it as being in reference to *you* instead. So why not - how do you feel about the SFPL's sweeping embrace of technology at the apparent expense of good old books? Apparently a large, clandestine discarding of books took place last year as the new library *doesn't have space* for 'em. The voters were, I understand, told that they'd be getting more books in return for funding their metropolitan library. That's what I'm told.

My gadfly activities with regard to the SF Main Library haven't including going there, I'm a little ashamed to admit. Having no organizational skills when it comes to reading, it doesn't work for me to borrow books, but only to buy them and strew them around me for years of varying amounts of attention. And for someone like Joyce, I need to mark the margins up silly. When I go to a library, it's for easy access to nonspecific critical material; I don't want to have to check anything out and, heaven forbid, return it, which would mean parking in San Francisco a second time.

Of course, I don't want them throwing books out; it being San Francisco, there's every chance they'd throw out exactly the wrong ones. Allow me to guess that they would throw out five books I consider indispensable to the wellness of culture before they would throw out *The SCUM Manifesto* by Valerie Solanis.

More importantly, a learned guy like you - have you any amusing library stories to share?

I'm ready to declare myself half of the way to being learned--a dramatically pleasing race with senility, I think.

I wouldn't call it "amusing," but it's interesting what you learn when you pursue a subject beyond what makes the newspapers. In college I did a research paper on nuclear weaponry, and I found out that during the Carter presidency there were all sorts of close calls--seven-minute-alert situations and so forth (that is, where the system thinks you have seven minutes to launch a counterstrike or be disabled). I'd probably mangle any actual details I tried to recount now, but I kept finding out about these events and thinking "Jesus, how come we never heard about *this*?"

Also, if the American Library Association successfully solicited you to model for one of their promotional "READ" celebrity posters (and wow, can I see it now!), which book would you brandish for the photo-shoot?

It would probably have to be something not too obscure, so maybe one of the usual things I stump for like *Ulysses*. Although, a pile of books from the LIFE Science Library would be a nice in-joke in a way--*Sound*, and *The Mind*, and so forth. They obsessed me when I was a kid, especially *The Mind*, which has that amazing "symbols inside a skull" painting that I must have spent anywhere from ten to fifty hours staring at and thinking about.

What a difference between something like that and what grade school libraries offered: the same story of a young man's heroism or a young woman's navigation of society, told over and over again, life presented to adolescents as if it were a nursing home for sick and dying systems of validation.

Clearly, I'm trying to decide whether I really do want to go back to being an active librarian someday, or whether being a passive librarian is plenty. Any wisdom you can send my way would surely prove illuminating, as always.

Um, okay here is my wisdom. Being a librarian is good cause they are smart and cause they read a lot.

152.41,

Janet Ingraham Dwyer

and 25 or 6 to 4 to you, too,

--Scott

June 22, 1998

Scott, I've never heard the Loud Family before, but I just picked up *Interbabe Concern* about a month ago, on a fluke (can I say that here?) so regard this as the question of a Loud Family neophyte.

Scott: I'll suspend my curiosity about what sort of fluke causes someone to buy that record; mistook it for a virtual-igloo-building CD-ROM?

First, let me say you guys/gals are on the wings of something truly great. References to L. Ron Hubbard? Drunk on Civil Rights? Velvet melodies backed by gruffly guitars and touchstones to Smile-era Brian Wilson? AAARRRRHGHHGGH!!! (and I mean that as high compliment).

ThAAARRRRHGHHGGHnk you.

Two quick questions. First, what would it mean if I were to find out that my wife "has sodium laureth sulfate"? Should I call someone? Join a support group?

You will need 20 gallons of tomato juice, a copy of the Bible Code, and an arc welder's apron...

And lastly, having learned that you are a C++ programmer, what is your take on multiple inheritance? Are the payoffs worth the possible pitfalls (i.e., jinxing the name-space)?

Since the payoff is job security for C++ programmers, you bet it's worth it.

Your obt. svvt.,

Trent D.

P.S. You all ever play in Ohio?

We can't do it too often, since as those who've seen us there know there's the constant threat of it turning into a bacchanalian frenzy, but we may be routed through Cleveland on 7-13.

Your obsolete sportvest,

--Scott

Scott, me, Dave and Joe are listening to 'Idiot Son' and we've just been to a series of cosmology lectures. Joe was too shy to ask this to anyone actually lecturing so it's up to you. Given that heavy elements are formed during supernova explosions, and this material is then dispersed into the interstellar medium, what effect does this have on future star formation? Dave says do you still remember the Mark E. Smith version of the R.E.M. song that he inflicted on you, and are you ever going to come and see us in Calne, Wiltshire, UK, again. (The question is serious, by the way)

Lots of love,

Pat Moore, Dave, Joe

P.S. We're coming to SF in August.

Scott: Wow, great to hear from you! How is Paul Ricketts? I should be back from touring August 1 so definitely drop a line and let's get together.

I had the impression that star deaths and star births were more or less independent--that stars formed due to conditions apparently determined by the big bang, not that stars formed and ended, formed and ended, again and again out of the same material. You remind me that to all the accumulated dark and heavy matter is now added Mark E. Smith, which may mean the fate of the universe is to get into a drunken brawl and decide to stop touring.

--Scott M., prof. of Cosmetological Physics

June 29, 1998

Scott, please shed some light on your songwriting processes for the Loud Family. Is it stream of consciousness, jam into a boombox and painstakingly edit later, or stare at a blank page for awhile and then go check the fridge again? Caffeine, booze, pot, other? Morning or evening?

Scott: Sometimes booze or coffee helps when I want to finish something, but I seldom do more than two drinks or two cups of coffee per day for normal health reasons. If I did like pot, I wouldn't feel free to talk about it in the current truly ugly political climate. Persecution of pot clubs for the terminally ill after a popular vote legalizing them? Are the people carrying this out not ashamed?

The songwriting process is no more or less interesting than something like accounting work, by which I mean the process isn't that closely related to the results. Whether an accountant likes to work methodically or furiously probably says more about deadlines than about how inspired the deductions are.

To me the key is a love for getting an inspiration across, and to keep that going far into adulthood requires that I keep a certain amount of background up. If I ever stop feeling like I have a firm handle on what pop music can convey to an audience, and in turn a firm handle on what there is to convey and what has proven in the forums of the world to be worth conveying, I start feeling as if I shouldn't be doing it, I should be using that energy to alert people to what others have done. The most important *process* is tuning my efforts to what I learn has gone before in history, staying one step ahead of learning of my own inadequacy.

Solo acoustic on the edge of the bed or full-on-electric with band on hand? I suspect your answer will come back something like "it depends...," but is there anything tried and true that gets your creative juices flowing? Just wondering. I'd like to write some Loud Family songs too. Thanks!

Rich Burns

What a nice thing to say! Here are some fairly tried and true things to do: (1) Listen to a lot of the music you think your audience listens to, (2) Notate or record musical or lyrical ideas scrupulously, (3) Try out a lot of ideas on a solo acoustic guitar--so many that after awhile it's statistically impossible for them all to be bad.

People were asking me about Bob Pollard. He said one of the best things I've heard on the subject: he considers four random people from something like a high school yearbook and asks himself what kind of a record he'd be excited about them making, then he makes that record.

furiously accounting,

--Scott

Scott, I was wondering if you are much of a cook, and if so, if you have a recipe which is your specialty that you could share with the Ask Scott readers.

Erin Amar

Scott: Take a swordfish steak, some butter, fresh green onions, oregano, chicken stock, salt, white wine, and a medium sized bottle of saffron.

Sell these for twenty dollars and buy yourself a nice grilled swordfish.

--Cuisinartrocker

July 6, 1998

Scott, what action would you take if a close friend were on the downward spiral of self-corrosion? Someone very dear to me is haplessly falling into a dismal pool of alcohol abuse. When he is disappointed in himself, for instance, because of [...] he utilizes alcohol to numb his emotions. In turn, due to the alcohol, he [...], which then leads to further consumption of alcohol--a vicious cycle. I've pointed out his abuse to him, but he fails to recognize the problem.

[editor's note: descriptions deleted to preserve anonymity]

Scott, I am aware that the subject matter of this e-mail is rather personal, but as I do not know anyone else, I am asking you to help me help him. I'm uncertain as to whether or not you realize who I am speaking of, but nevertheless, I want your intellectual advice. Is this an intellectual matter? Not really, but I've used other strategies, and I have made a prominent crease in failure. In an effort to save him, I fear that I will lose him. (I'm fairly insouciant about his turning away from me; it's not that that which I am concerned with, yet the possible loss of his life that worries me.)

By witnessing his gradual--almost subtle--deterioration, I've competed with the anti-altruistic desire to be ignorant and negligent, but I lose. My question remains on the top portion of this letter; please.

Dissuade

Scott: This is certainly disturbing; I wish I could be of more use than I'm going to be. Of the people I've known with substance abuse problems, about a third have turned things completely around for themselves, about a third hover in some grey area, and about a third have died.

By most accounts what turns people around is the realization that drinking is a serious problem, and it's always clear to those around drinkers long before it's clear to drinkers. Drinking seems always to invent a new way of looking at the world in which however much drinking they're doing is okay, and so it's sometimes the case that not until they've hit absolute rock bottom is the logic of drinking even disturbed (let alone broken).

I'd just keep gently suggesting, over time, that they watch it, and that from your point of view it's getting close to time to seek help. There are going to be people who won't go the AA route because they're not Christians and AA is overtly Christian (or I should say has struck me as such; I invite correction), but I think it's well worth noting that the religious dimension is no accident. However they come to that point, Christians feel justified in Christ, and I think that, at a level we're not used to considering, an alcoholic is using alcohol to stave off an encounter with absolute justification. He or she may even have come to be clearer-thinking than the rest of us on this point: justification in the social order--"I'm okay because I'm doing as well as person B, at least in person C's eyes"--is going to fail, and when it does, we're going to know desperation, and the distractions from this inevitability which work to pacify the rest of us don't work for him or her.

hair o' the God that bit ya,

--Scott

July 13, 1998

Scott, have you ever noticed that from time to time a band decides that it would be cute to record a song written by Charles Manson, and then they actually do it?

Discounting the quality of the songs and the suspicion that people sometimes do this just for attention, what do you feel are the ethical ramifications of recording music written by such a person? Are there any? I mean, If "Back of a Car" had been written by Charles Manson, would you still have covered it?

Ethical firmly suspended, tee-hee,

Geoffrey Woolf

Scott: The short answer is I'd probably go ahead with it if the song really were "Back of Car," and you placed me at the moment of having to make the decision to release, ignoring the unlikelihood of the situation ever arising; but no, nothing like this would happen with things being as they are in the real world.

There's no community of listeners that I know of who would, after 25 years to form an opinion, reassess the wrongness of the murders for which Manson was convicted because I did a song of his, were it a brilliant composition with lyrics about being a teenager in love; their reaction would be "how odd that a convicted killer could write so well and so sensitively," which seems to me a worthwhile thing to ponder if it were the case. If the cover of the song were presented as trading in vicarious danger, or we were talking about one of his real songs, such as "Look At Your Game, Girl," I would have serious qualms.

Here is how I see the issues breaking down: on one hand, none of us is fundamentally incapable of doing anything Charles Manson or his "family" did, we simply lucked into unpbriings and circumstances which didn't lead us to involvement in such things, and it would be bad to reinforce a hunch that what maintains the disparity is our becoming in

some sense ceremonially cleansed of any association with certified pariahs. On the other hand, a gratuitous show of solidarity with the particulars of wrongdoing starts down the path of generating social energy at the expense of others--those who could be labeled prudes and sheep for not being so broad-minded as to, as you say, find such a move "cute." That is, it would be a low-grade recapitulation of the victimization machinery that brought the "family" together in the first place.

And then, if this does pose an ethical problem, where should one draw the line? Would it be wrong to cover a Lou Reed song since has been confirmed that he is often not very nice or since it has been alleged that he is sometimes downright abusive?

It's every artist's own call, obviously, but this reminds me of a quote which I believe was from Virginia Woolf. Someone asked her if she thought higher education suppressed the creativity of young writers, and she said something like "it obviously hasn't suppressed the creativity of nearly enough of them." We are in very little danger of excessive ethics stanching the flow of indie rock.

squeaky clean,

--Scott

July 20, 1998

Scott, why "where"?

princess, in this context *i'm* a freak,

ana m.

Scott: Well, Ana, I assume you mean to ask why the last four songs on INTERBABE CONCERN all start with the word "where."

It's very loosely modeled after chapter titling in some piece of classic literature I skimmed long ago--I think it's CANDIDE by Voltaire but I don't have a copy to check that.

I had put on my Jungian psychologist's hat and tried to convey the core idea behind four dreams I'd had--what seemed to me to be my four most enduringly significant dreams. One of them is a flooding river or ocean. Of the dreams I wake up remembering, several of the most vivid and resonant have been about rising waters.

Maybe I had to pee.

where a train goes through a tunnel

--Scott

Scott, do you think that consciousness is a manifestation of the years of intense stimulation that sentient creatures are exposed to in their early years? If a computer were programmed to receive and compare equivalent stimulus, do you feel that it could achieve self-awareness? What type of moral structure would such an artificial life form have? Would you consider it to be a life form?

Velvetmonster

Scott: Since early in this century, we've thought "now that we have calculating devices, it should be fairly straightforward to create consciousness--we just have to make a machine that can store as much binary data as a brain and mimic all the fetching and comparing processes in the brain." Putting aside my hunch that this not far from expecting that if you build an exact replica of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and place any 25 people on the stage, they will spontaneously perform *Hamlet*, I think we've shown disrespect for the issue by thinking of it as a solvable problem.

As one can only speak with authority about one's *own* self, the only test I'd ever believe of whether a machine had self-awareness would be that it had *my* self-awareness. That is, the verifier must be given the experience of being alive in a machine, and even then in order to get it to work you might well have to fool the verifier into thinking he or she was still in a human body, so even with the thing working, we probably have as tricky a problem in ontology as we've ever had to deal with just to yield a verifying community of one.

Here's another conundrum: as we can replay programs exactly, would an event of machine consciousness in the cosmos occur twice if you played it back twice? My answer would be no; because uncertainty of outcome maps to a unique set of world events (in this case the parameterization of the program), though you'd convinced yourself you set things in motion nondeterministically, machine-consciousness time would not be in any sort of synch with natural consciousness time, but with a haphazard calendar of changes to the machine's nature which were for its own purposes significant, and none of which we'd have any basis for thinking is a change to consciousness which still qualifies as consciousness. That is, any moment we know it works, it had better change to something else--which might not work--or it is really just dead silicon after all.

To me, the idea that consciousness didn't need the cosmos to happen, that a freestanding instance of it could be accomplished on a simulator independent of bodies, relationships, desires, and uncertainties, is arguably to presume the cosmos acted less than economically in a way that offends Darwinian logic if nothing else.

we can't wager for anything as trivial as quatloos,

--Scott

August 3, 1998

Scott, I'll keep this brief--don't want to babble on for too long. Just finished looking through your "list of ages" and went "Geesh!"

Scott: Do you mean to say that some part of you exploded?

I could easily pick over 3/4 of my #1 picks since 1965 (which, ironically, has always been the date I've started my year by year list) right from your encyclopaedic effort.

Before then, the best music didn't resolve to albums very well. Often there were multiple encapsulations of jazz pieces, Broadway shows, singles collections, etc., that were hard to pin down to a particular release in a particular year. After 1965 it was much easier to correlate as there was global emulation of the Beatles.

Which, weirdly enough, brings me around to all things Joycean. I've always enjoyed reading your thoughts about literature, especially Joyce (Loud Family isn't going to be performing "Finnegan's Wake" in concert anytime soon, are they? the trad. folk song as opposed to the prog. rave-up). As for a random thought, what do you think of this sentence? "To restore silence is the role of objects." Courtesy of Beckett, first couple pages of *Molloy*.

I haven't read any of Beckett except WAITING FOR GODOT (which was terrific), so this is uninformed freewheeling at its filthiest: I'm thinking by "silence" he means cessation of discourse. A lot of our reality is discourse--haggling over significance, putting spins on things, indoctrination into systems of mediation. When anything is acknowledged by all concerned to be an "object," some aspect of the world reads as a shared reality and will admit no *new* mythological reality to be overlaid; silence on a particular subject is accomplished.

Just a quick question. Oh! Thanks so much for your great songs!

Tony Stanfa

Thanks. We got some kinda little show here, you betcha.

waiting for El Goodot,

--Scott

August 10, 1998

Scott, why do you hate New York? Last time I saw you was at the old Knitting Factory back in Nov '94 when I requested you play "Re-make/Re-model." Thanks, by the way.

Scott: Hate New York? It's probably tied with Chicago for my favorite place to play. They're not as familiar with me as San Francisco is and so don't have as much contempt. There was a 1996 Loud Family show in New York; I can't imagine how the saturation coverage of the event escaped your notice. (Editor's note: There was a show in July 1998 as well.)

Steve Wynn told me you had an even earlier band called Alternate Learning that that y'all did an album together. That sounds like something amazing and impossible to find.

Thanks,

Scott

We didn't do anything like a whole album's worth of split-down-the-middle collaboration. It was more like we helped each other out with resources--he had access to the college radio station and I had a home studio. Plus I just really liked him and his material. I remember having pretty serious plans to produce an album of his at the time he moved back to L.A., but he broke into the industry for real with the Dream Syndicate, which precluded the need for a homemade job.

But, yes, I had a band at that time called Alternate Learning which released an E.P. and an album--none too obviously worth the effort of checking out if you want an opinion on that subject--but with no Steve Wynn, who undoubtedly would have done them a world of good.

"Ain't that some kind of answer? Yeah, but no question was posed"

--Scott

Scott, I used to pride myself on being a fairly knowledgeable fan of music, with tastes ranging from The Turtles to Todd Rundgren to Tommy Keene, but somehow the realm of your musical influence has always escaped me. That is to say, I did not even become aware of the existence of Game Theory (and subsequently, The Loud Family) until I came across a rather concise review that appeared in the innocuously entitled *Rock -- The Essential Album Guide*. For what it's worth, the editors decided that your collective body of work merited ratings ranging from 3 and 1/2 "bones" for *Two Steps*, to 4 and 1/2 bones for virtually everything else in your catalog.

Scott: I'll go against my first couple of romantic intuitions and assume it's better to get more bones.

I began to purchase these items, commencing with *Plants and Birds*, and I was quickly hooked. I subsequently went on to acquire every other item in the catalog, with an exception that leads to my next, rather obvious question. I have desperately sought out used CD copies of *Lolita Nation*, but to no avail. I'm guessing you get this question all the time, but I'm curious. I want to complete my collection, and hence, quench my increasing thirst for your music. My search thus far has only revealed LP versions of the record. Unfortunately, I made the grave mistake of failing to replace my Gerard Turntable years ago. Any thoughts would be appreciated.

S. Berns

Thanks for the kind words!

A person named Dennis Sacks (misprinted as "Stacks" on the recent album) owns an e-mail discussion list called loud-fans, which I'm told has become somewhat more a social

phenomenon than a distribution of band facts, and I've been known to direct people to this as a resource for people who would notice copies of my CDs in used bins.

I have exactly one *Lolita Nation* CD and I can't give it to you, as whenever I'm at home, I listen to nothing but that, over and over and over.

methinks he did call him "Bones"

--Scott

August 17, 1998

Scott, just a few more days before *Days for Days*...the anticipation would be too much to bear if I hadn't bought, like, ten other CDs this week to occupy my time.

Scott: Okay, I'm a little behind in answering these. For all I know you found *Days For Days* to be a big letdown and have hated me for months.

This question has a longish lead-in. I first heard of your band in an interview with the near-perfect songwriter Aimee Mann, who waxed quite enthusiastic about *Plants and Birds and Rocks and Things*. I trusted her taste, so I went and bought it soon after. I must admit, I liked it fairly well, but I wasn't overwhelmed. Still, I was intrigued enough to pick up *Interbabe Concern*, and the upshot is that eventually all your albums grew on me in a big way. It's the sort of thing that happens when a CD's on, you're half-listening to it while doing the dishes, say, and suddenly a musical moment goes by, and you stop and think, "What was *that?*", and run over to rewind the CD. Ever had a similar experience with a band you like?

Francis Heaney

These days I make a decision quickly and tend to stick to it--I think because I'm older than most new artists, and have a certain predictive capability about how their minds are going to work. If they in five songs haven't written any true-ringing lyrics, for instance, it's almost a dead certainty they don't have musical subtleties that are going to grab me unawares down the road.

Of albums I've liked a lot in the 90s, *Submarine Bells* by the Chills is the only one I can think of that took a few listens to click; other than that I've tended to know something's coming at me from the first listen.

For what it's worth, I knew I liked both of Aimee Mann's records immediately.

a couple of drinks and he was a fortune teller,

--Scott

P.S. Several people wrote and said AA is not overtly Christian in any way they found off-putting (I invited correction that this aspect might give certain people pause). Nothing at all against Christians, by the way; [see original message](#).

August 24, 1998

Scott, I had a question about what goes on during the rest of your day while on tour. Obviously there is the "showtime" part of the day and the "drivetime" part of the day, but what goes on when you folks have five or six hours to kill? Sightseeing? General mayhem?

Scott: Sometimes there are official duties like radio or record store visits, but yeah, mostly mayhem--we'll get to a town and see what we can do to bring about an outbreak of crazed bloodshed.

There are not that many stretches of five or six hours to kill. Typically travel and meals take up the entire pre-sound-check day. If we do have a day off and we're staying at someone's house it's nice to have an outing and socialize with them because they usually know the good food and fun places in their area. If we're just in a motel, it takes on the feel of a window of sanctuary from unknown factors and obligations, and often you'll just feel like sleeping or generally doing as little as possible besides at some point dragging your ass over to Denny's.

Also...do you ever schedule days off on the tour, or do they just happen when the next coolest place to play is about 26 hours away?

Both. It's a complex formula better explained by booking agents than by me, but my observation is that they often give us Sundays off, and sometimes one more day some time during the week if it coincides with a long drive.

Good luck and congratulations on the new release,

Tom Schettino

Thanks!

No wasted days,

--Fretty Fender

August 31, 1998

Scott, "Gerontion" by T.S. Eliot--what do you think the title means?

Donna Meyers

Scott: It's well established that "Gerontion" is the diminutive of "old man" in Greek. I think Eliot feels the need to treat the collision of the Greek mind with the Hebrew mind in the early Christian era as the big bang of our intellectual cosmos, and I get the sense of a stern caution against allowing the Greek mind to dominate as much as it has.

The old man in Gerontion is spiritually barren in old age, as was J. Alfred Prufrock; he's Nietzschean in that his impulse is to lay the failure of his philosophically-based individualism at the doorstep of Christ, and by extension, the Judaic tradition.

If you want to get at the crux of this matter, you get drawn inexorably to the prologue to the Gospel of John and the "Word," especially because Eliot makes a direct reference. "Word" here describes divine incarnation of course, but the Greek and Hebrew words translated as "Word" are telling (and of course well known). The Greek is *logos*--system of discourse, way of the cosmos in which things are intelligible (interpretation mine). The Hebrew is *dabar*--commandment, divine utterance which creates material reality. The crucifixion transcends discourse, if only in that at the heart of discourse is success through ouster in debate; if you take away the ousted party with his ousted idea, you have nothing, no basis for knowledge--a tautology: "all utterances are true." The crucifixion says analogically, structurally--you can't build what it says syllogistically--that there is always a victim against whom worldly culture, e.g. either dialectic, or protection of the Temple from heretics or the Empire from enemies of the citizenry, convenes to define its own rightness by comparison.

The Hebrew mind can at least conceive of divine reality outside *logos*; the Greek mind figures to be vulnerable to the problem of trying to consider transcendence of discourse using discursive methods.

Eliot's direct reference to John's prologue is: "The word within a word, unable to speak a word,/Swaddled with darkness. In the juvescence of the year/Came Christ the tiger" (what a line!). What Christ the tiger attacks is the viability of a primitive or classical hero system in which the Gerontion character feels he might have thrived, hence the bemoaning of his absence from any battle scene ("heaving a cutlass," etc.). Whether it is ouster in combat or ouster in debate, Christ the glorified victim has thrown light on the victimization--the necessity by definition for there to be an ousted party--inherent in any such quest for one's authentication.

and try boosting the lows before the fuzz pedal,

--Scott

September 7, 1998

Scott, as a parenthetical note to the discussion of May 11th which touched upon monosyllabic band names, I feel compelled to mention that there was in fact a Boston supergroup which went by the name of "Lint." They're noteworthy for two reasons: one, they featured several members of the Swirlies (a Boston based group who'd be of interest to anyone who likes My Bloody Valentine) including Seanna Carmody who has gone on to

form Syrup USA. Two, it was the first CD (to my knowledge) which you could also play on your turntable: a small flexidisk was attached to the top of the CD containing a (very short) bonus track.

Scott: What a great packaging idea! I love stuff like that. They could issue a vinyl release that when you take it out of the sleeve is already covered with lint.

Still curious...why sodium laureth sulfate and not sodium lauryl sulfate?

Dana

I think if Marcel Duchamp were here he would back me up on this: sodium *laureth* sulfate can be proven with modern chemical analytical techniques to be the shampoo ingredient conferring a more classic beauty--hence the "eth" chemical suffix, as in, were Shakespeare examining a bottle, "it bestoweth beauty."

--Stratocaster on Avon

Scott, what if you came across a book that was about an openly lesbian rock band that had taken the Loud Family as a major influence (other influences include Aimee Mann), and was part of the first openly gay/lesbian rock scene?

Scott: I'd think it was very thoughtful of this band to cite us as an influence, and I suppose having our name in it might convince me to buy it if I were already interested enough to be checking it out in a book store. Citing a few thousand bands as influences in this book might be a way to move quite a few copies.

And this scene sought to get rid of the more commercial forms of alternative rock and bring more underground artists to bear on the mainstream, like LF, and Aimee, and Ani DiFranco. I have written a book like this and would like to hear your thoughts. Are you bemused, flattered, hate it, etc.?

Feeling guilty, I guess, for being the weak flank in this takeover. Even with our new army of gay and lesbian fans there may never be such thing as a coup where we could emerge triumphant. How would it work? Nirvana didn't sell a hundred times as many records as someone like Teenage Fanclub because they were a hundred times as good, they sold a hundred times more because they were that much better a story in the minds of casual observers. You could divide the world up into the corporate, image-conscious, closed-minded phonies on the one hand, and on the other hand the Kurt Cobains who came off like loser kids but had this spark of incisive sincerity, and say "hey, I belong in that second category; that's me all over."

How you'd ever do that with us or our music I couldn't imagine. Also, we're pretty happy to indulge in guilty pleasures; a deal-breaking cover of "Story In Your Eyes" by the Moody Blues could pop up at any moment.

I know this is a rather wild question but I just thought I'd ask it anyway.

Andrea Weiss

The Loud Family are a wild band full of wild people ready for wild questions.

--son of Sappho

September 14, 1998

Scott, how many copies of ALRN, *Painted Windows* and *Blaze of Glory* were produced? How were they distributed? I have read that all copies of *Blaze of Glory* were used as "promotional" copies, yet members of the loud-fans list have reported that they purchased the record "new" in record stores, thus implying that some copies were made available to the public through normal distribution channels.

Scott: There was no physical distinction between promo and for-sale copies. At the time we could afford only disks, not cardboard jackets, but we decided to put them out even with unsellable packaging to get our personality somewhere on the map--i.e. send them to press and college radio. Thus, Bagism: our drummer Mike Irwin (who was an artist), Photo Robert, and I came up with that white trash bag design. We thought it might be an interesting enough novelty that distributors would actually take a few of the 1000 copies, and in fact they did; we ended up selling about half of them, though, as we feared, a lot of them warped.

We also did a thousand ALRNS and a thousand PAINTED WINDOWS. For all the releases, the procedure was the same--we'd put boxes of them in the trunk of a car, drive to Berkeley and San Francisco from distributor to distributor, Rough Trade, etc., begging them to take some copies. We'd also liberally distribute free copies to record stores. My first receptive audience turned out to be scenester record store proprietors. Though none of those records you mention was reviewed very well (the buzzy synths alone were a hanging offense at the time), record collecting lunatics appreciated the diversity.

Who owns the rights to the Game Theory material, and who has possession of the multi-tracks?

Douglas

Scott Vanderbilt owns everything with the name Game Theory on it forever. When I become a big star in these my golden years, he will get rich and it will all have been worth it for him.

--Scott

September 21, 1998

Scott, I read of your interest in Rene Girard's work. I have a passing interest in his work and often read Prof. Eric Gans' publication "Chronicles of Love and Resentment" online. A

friend tells me that the rejection or downplaying of Freud and other psychiatric/social theories in Girard's work is a major stumbling block. What do you think?

Scott: It's strange to me that a lot of top scholars--Gans, who I guess is at U.C.L.A., is a notable exception--don't really take to Girard. I don't understand a criticism such as "he downplays Freud." Is it true that we all know at a gut level that Freud is so correct in all things, that if a cultural anthropologist downplays him, we lose our link to reality?

For one thing, last I remember it was all the rage to dismiss Freud as a sexist or something but here Girard calls the Oedipal complex into question and he might as well be burning the flag. Do we men think "of course it is true that we desire our mothers sexually in early childhood, but have learned to repress the urge; without this core of our being the universe is chaotic"? I interpret Girard's reaction to be that if some psychiatric patients do have such repressed desires for their mothers, it's not because desire for one's mother is a force of nature, but that the child observed the father desiring the mother, unconsciously acquired the desire himself (Girard's main thesis is that specifically human desires are "mimetic"), and thus in his own mind entered into a rivalry with the father. This, to me, is like a knot loosening, the unintelligible becoming intelligible. If someone were to say "this is too reductive," I could only reply that my personal taste runs toward what reduces complexity rather than what increases it; if they say "this is disrespectful of Freud," I'd say *Totem and Taboo* was appealingly modest about what psychoanalysis could offer anthropology, but that doesn't mean that anthropologists forever owe Freud reciprocal modesty by the rules of sportsmanship. A modest and careful contribution from a great mind can still be wrong. Girard isn't short on general praise of Freud as a thinker and observer.

That Eric Gans title is great, but I haven't read him yet. My fear is that he gets into a certain area of discipline I'm not so good at, identifiable by sly, urbane uses of the word "signifier."

2) Paul Virilio (*Dromologies* etc.) has a book out called *Open Skies* which I think is interesting in its diagnosis of our current information-age dilemmas.

I'll keep an ear open for this.

My third question is, are we doomed to relive every musical period at least twice? There's that expression, "history...first time as tragedy and then as farce", what happens if it was farce to begin with? Do we then have glam as tragedy?

Colin Freebury

More and more the truth of nostalgia is right in front of everyone's nose. It's too much yarn to spin here, but I think the best outcome would be that we lose faith in the tragic aspect the first time around, but, failing that, we could set rigid moral limits: any weak and impure nostalgia from the era of nostalgia itself, for instance, the early 70s, is considered hopelessly gauche; strong and pure nostalgia is felt only for jerky silent film footage, Charlie Chaplin impersonators, Art Deco lettering, Scott Joplin music.

O O O O that Shakespeherian rag,

--Scott

September 28, 1998

Scott, I saw a reference to record ratings. Me, my brother and best friend create tapes every year that feature our top 20 songs and albums in countdown style. How do you go about rating and ranking records? How long have you been doing it? Do you have lists of your top albums and or songs? Thanks for being a Ron's top 20 mainstay!

Ron Schorr

Scott: I keep swearing I'm going to make road tapes of my top songs, and I also keep swearing I'm going to compile a list of the best music for each year of the century, not just the rock album era. Can you believe there's no money in either of these worthy endeavors?

Yes, I do the songs, too, and I consider that list more important than the album list, except that it's less interesting to other people; the critical world focuses on the unit appropriate to a buyer's guide.

I rely on suggestions and free records from friends at labels, and I would say that Sue Trowbridge and Greg Dwinell usually influence me due to their informedness and similarity of tastes to my own. There's no system I adhere to; I just write down the names of albums that excite me so much I want to share the news. At the end of the year there's usually a publication or two wanting to publish the opinions of music biz nobodies like myself, so I pull the whole thing into a top ten commitment which I then start painfully regretting in about a month.

--Franz List

Scott, how come *Lolita Nation*, *Two Steps* and *Tinker* were never re-issued by Alias?

Scott: The voice of temptation, the siren song of millions to be made from those titles, cried to Alias, but they stood firm, a rock. "To an ugly enough public tendency, we will not pander," they were heard to say.

You were also labelmates with the Smithereens back then. Did you ever tour with or do anything with them?

Game Theory opened two shows for them: one in SF and one in Santa Clara. I was pretty much a fan, and I remember them being very good and very loud, and old school rock as the day is long: their road crew had Bill Graham level contempt for the idea of any of the Smithereens' equipment being touched or scooted to make room for the other bands-- which seemed kind of a lost dispositional art in the fussy Camper Van world of 1987. (For the record, I remember the band themselves being congenial.)

Just wondering, hope everything is well,

Ant

Thank you. I think I can report that nothing is *that* bad.

guns 'n' blood 'n' roses 'n' butter 'n' bread 'n' chocolate,

--Scott

October 12, 1998

Scott, I love the new album (though I confess I usually just program out the odd-numbered tracks--is that wrong?). Already have the wife singing "Why we all moved to Ca-li-for-ni-a" around the house.

Scott: Thanks. You mean you routinely arrange for her to walk around singing that? Kinda weird, but--great!

I had a question about "Cortex the Killer," in which you name-check your hometown for the first time (as far as I can tell) since the Game Theory days: "Sacramento...I have let your people down." This is so ineffably *sad* that there must be a story behind it. Is it a reference to something specific? I mean, I personally don't feel let down. Does it have anything to do with your 20-year Rio Americano reunion? (this year? next?) Do you plan to attend? What will you wear?

If there is one, it's this year, but nobody's contacted me--and my parents haven't moved; maybe there's some preference that I not show up. I would have to wear one of my foxy nylon disco shirts by Nik Nik. I was actually a Roxy/Bowie boy in those days but leopard jackets and oversize kabuki space suits weren't widely available.

There's a combination of straightforwardness and sarcasm in that line, I'd say. If, for instance, I think now about not letting Sacramento down, that might have meant something like becoming a famous musician playing music Sacramento perennially likes--which I couldn't do if I tried at any rate, but is even a tricky concept in that what a modern community (and I use the terms loosely) might think it will always like it of course doesn't continue to like ten years running. Kansas? Tears For Fears? Bush?

Obligatory favorite-album-list question: You place the first three Steely Dan records high, but the next four don't make your top 20 at all. Surely *Katy Lied* is better than *Red Octopus*!

"If only you'd believe in miracles, so would I" seems a good deal more pithy and sophisticated than anything I can think of on *Katy Lied*. "Who's coming on, is it you or me?/Coming on, while it's still soft and warm" is fairly grabby stuff, and the Jeffersons' music did a lot more movin'-on-up than Steely Dan's at that point, say these ears. Though neither one of these records is exactly Mr. Toad's wild ride from start to finish.

Maybe if I played them all the way through, which I haven't done in years (what can I say? I'm underfunded), I'd see this your way, but at the time of release I thought they were starting to sound a little, as they say, paid for.

Not that this is subjective or anything. I won't ask about Joni Mitchell until next time.

I wouldn't call Joni neglected on my lists by any means. But, you know, last I checked (1976?) there were people better than Joni Mitchell. She struck me as stuck forever in the psychological that gropes for the spiritual, but a spirituality that's always too self-conscious--as if the right way could be known by its glorious and subtle objectification of everyone who'd ever made her feel bad. This is unfair of course because I don't know her mature work at all.

Looking forward to seeing you in New York, where they jazz the rock.

Matthew Budman

glad you got to see me blow, cat!

--Scott

October 19, 1998

Scott, when I was a teacher trainee I used the very amusing Game Theory Christmas Tape as a listening comprehension in a class. They were delighted. The sound effects were met with lots of laughter. Anyway, as one bright young thing remarked, the story is not fully consistent. It ends like this:

"And so Denis did attend Unhand the Whales that Christmas Day, having learnt an important question. He vowed on that day, that before voicing disapproval of any cause, he should always take the time to verify that the cause did not in any way benefit him."

The problem is that the cause did not really benefit him. Or do you mean that if he had run away immediately he wouldn't have got his Christmas presents?

Daniel the Swede

Scott: How a release of 300 copies can haunt one.

Not wanting to keep the youth of Sweden in ethical limbo, the point was that dreaming he was a whale and that the people on a boat with Sting saved him from being harpooned should have inclined him to appreciate charitable natures, but--are you ready to bust your sides laughing?--he ended up being just as uncharitable but with new resolve to scan the world for charities which could help him, and from now on hate only the others.

Gotta stop, I'm out of breath. I should really be doing stand-up.

P.S. Rumour has it that The Posies are coming to Europe. Don't you know them?! Perhaps you could join them on "the Loud Posies tour" or possibly "the Posie Family tour." Think about it. It's about time that you conquer our part of the world!

Of course--everyone should know the Posies, occasionally the best band in America! 'Cept now they've broken up. But with solo albums there'll just be more to love.

--Rupert Popkin

Scott, I'm currently listening to the new album. I'm really enjoying it. The odd number tracks are quite bizarre and original. Thanks for letting us in on your not so standard musical excursions. I notice thanks to Chris Xefos. King Missile is one of my favorites ever!! Why the thanks, and what is Chris up to?? Thanks for all the great tunes!!

Ron Schorr

Scott: Chris is a huge talent. He's currently playing in various SF bands, writing songs, and producing records. I would suggest a web search under Xefos to turn up juicier rumors than I can fabricate off the top of my head.

Glad you're enjoying our album which ain't so incomprehensible once you figure out that dogs, pigs and sheep really symbolize people.

--rock and roll Animal

October 26, 1998

Scott, I had to write to tell you how much I enjoy your music. I have *Interbabe Concern* and just got *Days for Days*. I'll soon be getting your other stuff.

Scott: I love you.

A friend turned me on to you, and I'm turning others on to you. I'm probably not your usual demographic--age 40, but still listening to new music. My similarly aged friends--the few who still listen to new music--also really, really like you.

Thanks. A lot of over-40 people (well, five or six) like my material, and I can only conclude that to appreciate my music it helps to be at least as senile as I am.

In searching through your "Ask Scott" archives I was happy to find your discussion about "the one odd thing" you put in regular chord progressions. Your songs seem to have an interesting quirk, but I couldn't put my finger on what it was--thought it had something to do with major/minor relations. Would you care to expound a bit more on this quality?

It's hard to expound analytically on music; nobody likes music because of sensible thinking, they like it because of cultural black magic--yet it just so happens you're talking to Mr.

Expound On Anything, so here goes. Most unsuccessful songwriters probably love to suppose there's some terrible pathology at work keeping people from liking them, and here's a little bit of mine.

I believe music uses the language part of the brain, only music is different from language in that there is no clear distinction between what is being said and what language is being used to say it. Really successful pop music often arrives at some sort of gaudy alignment of the two: surf music which talks about how good surfing is, for instance. It sounds like a simple case of accessibility, but it's not. When, on PET SOUNDS, the Beach Boys shifted from beach-bum/hot-rodder shop talk--something 1% of their audience probably involved themselves in for real--to subjects universally felt and cared about (and did it brilliantly), there was widespread confusion and sales plummeted.

At another extreme is someone like John Cage, who I think profoundly distrusts the basis of appreciation of a piece of music being nothing more nor less than the sum total of other music the listener has heard in his or her life. It seems shaky: arbitrary and co-optable. But I don't go to his extremes to counteract it, I go to what I consider a mild extreme. What I'm "saying" has no de facto congruity with the style I'm using, but I want the style to stay enough in the background for the statement--"the one odd thing"--to be in sharp relief, not vice versa. People who expend energy deciding what is trip-hop, what is noise-pop, ambient-this or retro-that will wonder why I waste my time. Well, almost everyone wonders why I'm wasting my time, but, hey, I'm making a point here.

Why do you think it is that your little quirky things *work* rather than just sounding quirky??

Trial and error, I guess. I try a lot of phrases before I get one that works for me. I can only ponder after the fact why it was good; there's no strategy for actually generating them, that I know of.

And why no Pittsburgh concerts? PLEASE come here. Or let me have a tape of a show or something.

Jeremiah McAuliffe

I am all for arranging a Pittsburgh show. If I send a demo tape to the Pittsburgh chamber of commerce, can they be counted on to do the rest?

4:33, good buddy,

--Scott

November 2, 1998

Scott, since I saw Game Theory open for the Cucumbers in Athens, GA in 1985, I've been a constant listener to your records ("fan" sounds so pathetic). It is with huge disappointment that I found out that neither Tower, Virgin nor HMV in London is carrying

Days for Days. I'll order it of course and wait six weeks. I realise that this may be as pointless as complaining to Robert Rauschenberg about the wrong placement of the stuffed goat, but I'm annoyed that I'm denied access to perfect pop in such a large city. Because this page is not called "Tell Scott" I'll cut to the question: Could you perhaps have a word with Alias or their distributors, or should I kick some ass locally?

Johnny Mundane (London, England)

Scott: T.S. Eliot did write "The Waste Land" specifically about London so if you felt like doing some bemoaning in that area you might have classier grounds than most. And, yes, then and now the problem has been that there aren't many Loud Family records there.

All I personally can feel when I'm in London is that it's exciting and different, but undoubtedly I have that luxury for one reason--I already have Loud Family records.

But I digress from the subject, ass kicking. Don't kick Alias's ass; they're more or less our only friends in the music industry. So, I guess HMV, Tower, and Virgin. Just take every man woman and child connected with those stores out back and kick their ass, then say "and let that be a lesson to you for not carrying the Loud Family." Their fear of further violence will lead to us being promoted enthusiastically.

yours in fog,

--Scott

November 9, 1998

Scott, you've been a big influence on me. I think it's great that you have this forum for interaction with your fans. It's hard to imagine, for instance, Michael Jackson doing the same thing. Of course, considering his audience, the caliber of questions here would surely be superior. At the risk of contradicting myself, here's some for you.

Scott: Thanks for being influenced by me! As far as I know it's not a terrible mistake, but I'll let you know immediately if I find out otherwise.

We know you're not really a Spring. Are you an Autumn?

I don't know, I don't know. April is the cruelest month...September girls do so much...Tuesday's gone with the wind...what does it all mean?

Do you often use names from "real life" in your songs?

Kristine, my fiancée's name, is in a song from the last album. That's about the most daring level of verisimilitude I've resorted to. Hopefully the issue is behind me now, but I've observed over many years that having women you've been involved with think you're referring to them in retrospect is a strangely lose-lose proposition. Either they think you shouldn't have pined over some past attachment or if they think *they're* the past

attachment, you shouldn't have been making them the object of a grievance. Let me state right now that all conjecture was wrong; everything I wrote before 1996 was the result of being spurned by my one true love, Maureen McCormick.

Have you ever upset friends or acquaintances by writing, um, pointed accounts of them?

No, but good idea. Apparently the guy who draws Dilbert had his company superiors terrified that he would poke some sort of grisly fun at them. How I could put that into effect given the diffuseness of the audience for my music is a tougher problem. I guess if the need ever arose I could make real trouble for, oh, Anton Barbeau. You reading this! I could be at work roasting you with satiric balladry as we speak!

Did you do anything special for Bloomsday this year?

Nothing I can remember specifically. Shaved, worked at my job, walked home, went to the toilet, took a bath, rode in a car, read a newspaper, ate lunch. Just that sort of thing.

Cheery today,

James Hogard

U.P.:Up and away,

--Scott

November 16, 1998

Scott, which generally comes first: the lyrics or the music?

Roger Winston

Scott: It boggles my mind that writers like Elton John can get handed sets of lyrics, some of them real disasters, and make reasonable songs out of them; it feels so against nature. (To our younger readers: Elton John had about one and a half good albums before you were born). I mean, sometimes I'll really get in the mood to craft some fine art and write out a few lines, but I can't use that as-is in a pop song, I have to do surgery on it so it sounds less like it's enjoying the sound of itself.

So, hardly ever lyrics first by themselves; usually a short melody line with some words appear together. It's tempting to invent stories about the process that make it sound more like architecture than it really is--one moment a melody idea isn't there, and the next it is, and you didn't really do anything to make it be there. You know? Anything that feels like the thing people will like about a song feels like it just fell down from God. You didn't make it, and you feel completely unqualified to finish it. Like: shit, now I have to write some lines *on my own* that people will think are as good as that one God wrote.

But a song with a rhyme scheme is incredibly restrictive, and that helps keep things going in the right direction. In normal speech, we tend to cloud the subject with implications that we have good personalities. We don't want to transmit our precise level of informedness and humility, for instance, we want to transmit a gross exaggeration whenever possible. But in a song there isn't room to do that. You can write an arrogant song, but you can't really disguise it as anything else, whereas you can disguise, say, an arrogant speech as a nationalistic speech. I would say it feels like there's only room to say one true thing in a song, and you have to let it find its own direction. Making the scansion work is such a full time job in itself that if you try unconsciously to introduce self-serving commentary, you just run out of room to still embody the subject: the subject goes away, and you're commenting stylishly on nothing, which might be great, but in a completely different way from what you intended. Your words and the way you sing them simply have to make their own case.

November 30, 1998

Scott, I was glad to hear the name Priapus in a song (he's quite a character, that bawdy little imp),

Scott: A song from the wood as it were.

and overall I think that *Days for Days* is a great album.

Thank you! I find it's great driving music, both away from it and at it.

My question(s) tho, goes back a ways: Was "He Do the Police in Different Voices" a tip of the cap to T.S. Eliot (or, consequently Dickens?) or were you using that phrase in its more general sense?

I am willing to believe I have a funny way of talking but I would not go so far as to say I know of a general sense in which to say "he do the police in different voices." My answer is therefore that, yes, my cap was off to Mr. Eliot, as it always is--off my head, on the ground, ready to catch any change he might fling. I haven't read OUR MUTUAL FRIEND, which is apparently where he got it, and although I've read THE WASTE LAND many, many times, that phrase was actually cut (it might have only ever been the working title) so I can't say I know a damn thing about what Eliot thought about it.

There's a literal sense in which it's meaningful to me--the siren sound is there, you know--but I was thinking a lot at that time about what it means to "do a voice," to adopt a mode of expression, so I pinched the phrase. This was all years ago, but let's say it amuses me now to say that one thing I was trying to express in this and in "Sword Swallower" was that you can't succeed in speaking the truth by putting on what you expect your audience to take to be the voice of honesty. You end up not saying the truth, but saying the thing which you expect people are looking for in an honest statement. The job of acquiring credibility saps energy from the job of deserving credibility. So to get myself at least within range of the truth, the first thing I was going to do was remind listeners that I am an aspiring entertainer and stealer of lines.

Also, the "Here Comes Everybody" on "Ballad of How You Can All Shut Up" sounded like a sly Finnegans Wake reference.

One might as well claim to be sly in one's Finnegans Wake references because crass or sublime, virtually no one is going to give a rat's ass.

Maybe I just suffer from an acute case of self-reference: any act of interpretation says more about the interpreter, I suppose.

I don't know if it says *more* about the interpreter. I'm of the somewhat out-of-fashion school that says meaning is in at least one sense more or less absolute and unambiguous given enough information about a subject and a mind broad enough for it. But it's good to remember that we don't often operate under very ideal conditions.

Then, if we cannot transcend our subjectivity, and all Love is Narcissism, is there any hope for selflessness or humility?

Jerry Ascierto

I have to take baby steps toward that one. Transcending subjectivity is, I think, only possible in the following sense: if you figure out how your subjectivity was wrong in the past, you can potentially correct for it that much but no more.

Love which is called Narcissistic is a difficult concept for me, because loving yourself, enthusiastically encountering yourself as you are, seems to lead to happiness and good behavior. It's self-loathing which leads to disastrous compensation, though the self-loather is paradoxically the one most compelled to appear at ease. Rene Girard points out (or so I take it) that our perception of others as self-satisfied--and this is often a social front the person puts on, as in an act of coquettishness--leads to our own inappropriate behaviour in reaction, though we'd prefer to think it was the original fault of someone else's apparent smugness.

So I think the hope for humility and selflessness is that a certain aspect of transcending subjectivity involves overturning notions of how self-love is perceived in one's self and others, and how it is earned. To think it can be earned as if at a job is to perpetually suspect you haven't done enough lately to earn it--it has to be a matter of grace, a matter outside causality; this is why the great religions talk about faith and forgiveness. You can't earn personal forgiveness except by the grace of the person you've offended, and you can't earn cosmic, ontological forgiveness--a feeling of self-love--but by the grace of whatever you call God. I think the movie UNFORGIVEN addresses this stuff really well.

we *all* got it comin', kid

--S

December 7, 1998

Scott, how seriously should I be taking this year 2000 computer problem?

I'm a nerd for a living and I keep hearing about how many computers systems that we take for granted, or don't even know we depend on, might be affected by their inability to count past 99 in a predictable manner.

Airlines aren't taking reservations for anything after New Years, the chair of the senate's Y2K special committee follows the president's non-statements with suggestions of printing out all your important financial info and stocking up on food and water and mentions the possibility of power brown-outs.

I'm beginning wonder whether, after January 1, banging rocks together will be the new state of the art.

So, what about you? Where are you on the scale between trustful ignorance equaling bliss and going all out Branch Davidian? A couple of extra cans of beans-n-weenies on the shelf just in case? A lease on camouflaged bunker in Utah with it's own well and solar power? Any newly acquired personal armaments? Or is this all just a Chicken Little EMAIL VIRUS WARNING!!! with a numerological twist?

Scott: I haven't heard a convincing description of how all such doom is going to come about. I can envision monetary transactions getting messed up because suddenly programs can't figure out what event happened before or after what other event, but it's not intuitively obvious to me why computers would say "oh no, it's the year 1900, we'd better shut down water and power to the city." I'll probably take the minimal precautions of getting my finances in writing shortly before Y2K.

"What if neighbors come to steal my food?" you wonder. Ha! The food on my shelves is *poisoned*. The real food is hidden.

Also, what are your thoughts on the morality of programmers heading for the hills to protect their selves and families from feared economic collapse vs. sticking to their cubicles and working fixes for it?

Andy Ingraham Dwyer

Programmers choosing to survive in the wilderness is a funny thought.

It wasn't programmers working today who caused the Y2K problem, so their obligation on moral grounds alone to fix it could be questioned, but you may well ask what would happen if we found ourselves dependent on programmers' morality. I think programmers typically believe by mid-adolescence that since without half trying they have themselves steered clear of committing any monstrous crimes, while the morality of others proves a drab nuisance at best, it follows that they themselves must possess a truly sterling morality, one in need of no further work of any kind.

tonight I'm gonna party like it's 1899,

--Scott

December 21, 1998

Scott, imagine you didn't have the gumption to start your own band, the talent to write truly original songs and the ability to hold down a day job and still manage the other rigors of an original act. Do you think it would be fulfilling enough to, say, play covers in a wedding band once a month, or would you simply be a music fan at that point, spending more time listening and abandon playing altogether?

Tony Shepps

Scott: The cover band. As little aptitude as I have for singing, I've always known that I love to sing and the quest has been to make that tolerable to those nearby. And I just plain get excited when I have a guitar in my hand pounding chords. It feels like I'm taking control of my little world in some way, and it can really cheer me up.

Hour for hour, playing covers is far more enjoyable than playing my own songs. Strumming a new song for the band is always excruciating; it's unfinished and everyone in the room gets this look like "wow, Scott sure isn't coming up with much this time." Then when a song is done yet still new and exciting for the band, audiences don't know it and sit there wishing you'd play something from the days before you lost it. By the time the first human actually wants to hear it, you've probably played it a hundred times and are plenty ready to move on. With covers, everyone on and off stage is more or less happy.

I've wanted since junior high school to be in a cover band that actually did good songs. When I was 16 in 1976 we used to do Roxy, Bowie, Iggy, Syd Barrett--all to zero takers, naturally, but the world's dialectic has advanced since then. (Now the flavor of stupidity is that no one could possibly listen to anything like Yes or Cat Stevens, but I'll take that over 1976 any day.)

--Scott
