

ASK SCOTT

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

2003 (Year 7)

January 6, 2003

Scott, I came across your site while looking for Uriah Heep mentions. What's with the reference to Mick Box of Uriah Heep?

Kevin J. Julie

Scott: Some sort of mistake. I've never heard any Uriah Heep and couldn't name any members -- although I enthusiastically support the name Mick Box.

Scott, I had only ever bought & heard *The Tape of Only Linda*, *Interbabe Concern* and *Days for Days*. I had heard somewhere (in this forum maybe?) that every other release by the Loud Family was hands down brilliant, but not the reverse.

Oddly, very very oddly, I find this to be true. If you don't mind a bit of critical wankery, *The Tape of Only Linda* seemed a bit too Roxy Music-drenched for me and somewhat scattershot (though "Soul Drain" is on heavy rotation in my car stereo & is on the short list of best Loud Family songs I can quickly name).

Scott: There is such a thing as being too Roxy Music-drenched?

In contrast: *Interbabe Concern* is an album that people will still be writing about decades from now. And *Days for Days* seemed ambitious as anything, but a little weak in places. I give it high marks but, frankly, I don't return to it much.

Last month I just found *Plants and Birds* at a Local Large Retail Chain Conglomerate (only 11 beans!). I bought it (because I've learned to buy anything you do, basically) and took the shrinkwrap off and played it....

It is one incredible disc. It is a disc for all ages.

Thank you very much.

What do I like about it? It is hard to pin down, but I think in some ways it shows very clearly how you are rock's answer to -- forgive this comparison -- Orson Welles. You deftly juggle any mood or style around by merely flexing your fingertips, and your flair for orchestration, multi-layering, is untouchable. You are a perfectionist at the service of real emotion. Hats off.

I have not bought *Attractive Nuisance* yet, but clearly (based on the formula) it should be good.

Not a bet I would make, although it's hard for me to predict the ongoing likability of those Loud Family albums if only because I think of them all as so utterly synonymous with audience disappointment. To speak only of college radio, once my strong area, I think *Plants and Birds* and *Interbabe Concern* peaked at numbers 60 and 95 on CMJ respectively, compared to even a not-very-well-loved Game Theory album like *Two Steps* which was still top ten. And it's not that Alias Records couldn't do college radio, either -- I think Archers of Loaf were number two when *Interbabe* was number 95. So maybe my honest impression is that *Plants and Birds* was just the right album for about a hundred people in the universe including you, *Interbabe* for about fifty people, and *Attractive Nuisance* for about seven people. So while I don't think you will actually like *AN*, I will say for the record that despite a mixing/mastering regret or two, it's still what I want the lyrics to be saying and how I want the music to be sounding (probably ditto for what you consider the weak aspects of *Days For Days*, unless you're thinking things like "he should have sung that word without a rasp" or "the EQ and reverb in the middle section of 'Sister Sleep' aren't very good").

Having said all that, my question is: do you like any Lilys albums? For some reason I tend to put you and Kurt Heasley on the same velvet-draped pedestal (i.e., perfectionists at the service of real emotion).

trent d. (creates diversion, then lobs in real question)

I've only heard *The 3-Way*, and I think it's a terrific album. The song "Socs Hip" is a classic.

now in Lee Abrams's service,

--Scott

January 13, 2003

Scott, this isn't really a question -- just a couple of comments:

1. In your July 8, 2002 "Ask Scott" you state, "What is most fragile about it is that when our intellectual mainstream puts its rational, philosophical hat on, it comes to the conclusion that our moral bases are arbitrary. If I were to write a book, it would be on something like the proper basis for a viable modern Western morality." A book has already been written on this, namely *After Virtue* by Alastair McIntyre. I'd send it to you if I had your address, but I haven't and I suspect there should be bookstores in your neck of the woods which could get it. If not, send me your address by return e-mail, and I'll send you my copy.

Scott: Thanks for the tip -- but do I take it you mean you think McIntyre did a good job? I'm aware that there have been attempts, but none that I have read or been told about that seem to focus enough of the scholarly resources I know to be available in taking a systematic crack at the task.

2. In your most recent "Ask Scott" you refer to yourself as "Whiny the Elder," in what you think is a reference to Pliny the Elder (I think); but Pliny rhymes with "whinny". With "Whiny"? Neigh... enough for the horselaugh here.

Actually, I knew that. Not that I've read Pliny, or that ever since prep school I've naturally anglicized my classical references in perfect Oxford manner. Like all pseudointellectuals, it's my fate to get laughed at more than I get laughed with, but because of the frequent opportunities for embarrassment, if there's anything my sorry ilk do right, it's accrue preferred pronunciations. If your short-lived forte were erring primers on Pepys and Dvorak, you would weep at the beauty of my saying this out loud. Maybe it's just me, but it won't detract from a Van Gogh pun (in the unlikely event that there's something to distract from) that I know half the room is ready to slap the offending hand and say "f'n *gucch!*"

I've enjoyed your bands over the years, and have kept my CDs and cassettes. As soon as I can, I'm going to make archival copies of the cassettes -- until then, they aren't getting played. Oh well.

Enough for now.

Hudson Luce

Thanks very much for writing.

It stands for "urban haute bourgeoisie"...

--Scott

February 3, 2003

Scott, first of all, thanks for putting out *From Ritual to Romance*. Having seen you guys live just once as Loud Family (and a few times as Game Theory), it's awesome to have a CD to keep those great evenings fresh. Must say, to this day I think your work is the most overlooked, underappreciated collection of ground-breaking music ever. When asked to list my all-time favorite bands I respond with 1) Husker Du, 2) The Pixies, 3) Game Theory/Loud Family. To which I invariably get a "What theory?" It used to piss me off, but now I immediately use the open door to lend the uninformed cohort a tape or CD and in a matter of days they're off scouring for CDs for their own collection.

Scott: How generous of you, all around! I certainly appreciate it, and I'm glad to hear the material gets a positive reaction. I have moods where I feel pretty good about what we've put out and think my bands deserved more success, and other moods where I think I'm one of the most inept people ever to get fairly widespread attention doing music.

Again, thanks for writing such amazing music. Just wondering, are there any Game Theory live recordings, and are you currently working on any projects I might be able to find?

Norb

There are some live recordings of Game Theory floating around out there. My friend Dan Vallor did a pretty good mix of what I believe is the second to last Game Theory show in Vancouver, B.C. There seem to always be nebulous plans to release or re-release certain things, but it's rare that they pan out. Alias were going to do a Game Theory box set and I know they had some live recording or other that they were going to add to it, but they ended up only releasing three of the albums. I'm still amazed that *From Ritual to Romance* actually made it out.

One project I'm fervently hoping gets finished is an album of quasi-acoustic versions of my songs with Aimee Mann and her guitarist/ producer Michael Lockwood (who's an incredible talent in his own right). It's about half recorded, but of course she's a pretty big star these days and we need to find some time to finish it that works within her touring and recording schedule.

Oh, another one of these things that *may* come out is a DVD of footage shot by indie film whiz Danny Plotnick of the last Loud Family tour in 2000.

thanks for writing!

--Frumpton comes alive

February 17, 2003

Scott, with artists like Joan Jett and Joe Jackson making their material available by selling albums in MP3 format on their websites, perhaps the out-of-print Game Theory recordings could generate more profit for you (or someone you know) by being sold in this manner too. Would you consider this an option that could be achieved in the not-as-of-yet-but-maybe-next-Thursday future?

Scott: I don't own the Game Theory masters, so, no. There might be a higher than usual probability of some out-of-print Game Theory stuff getting another run in the near future, but there's still thicker uncertainty than I can see through at the moment.

(And now for the free psychological counseling portion...) Secondly, is it unhealthy for me to be so fixated on these matters in the first place? Does the research suggest that albums which held enormous importance for me in 1987 or 88 still having personal relevance today indicate I've failed to grow as a person and get beyond the experiences I underwent at that time to become a more fully developed human being?

I like to think not, and I appreciate someone being concerned about it; it's the kind of important question people don't generally seem to feel the need to expend much work answering.

Being a "fully developed human being" too often just takes the form of getting older, and gravitating toward sympathies and philosophies which are advantageous to older people. Developing as a human being should always mean being less anxious to achieve personal success and happiness relative to what others achieve. That can go against the grain of

human nature, but it's amazing how much less absurd the universe becomes as such an outlook becomes internalized; true development beyond youth can't (slightly paradoxically) involve disowning youth.

Let's say I used to like "Anarchy In the U.K." by the Sex Pistols, but now I'm old and, with any luck, more unhappy with spiteful lyrics like "I want to destroy passersby." I don't think it's effort well spent to mentally distance myself from my previous enthusiasm for the song. I think it's good to preserve the ability to enjoy the visceral power of the song (with maybe a bit of social prudence when it comes to handling such power with care), and to appreciate that art can be good because it expresses how people feel as well as for higher achievements like adding perspective which will change how we feel. Denying youthful, embarrassing tastes too much in a misguided attempt to falsify to ourselves what we were in the past has unfortunate consequences: we exaggerate our current immunity to bad impulses; we distort the standards of taste and behavior to which we expect young people to adhere naturally, without anyone's help.

So while I wouldn't recommend cultivating the attitude that how you fit into the past is worth dwelling on yet how you fit into the present is not, I applaud continued openness to the reality of past passions -- the willingness to be that passionate person plus some perspective, not that person minus the passion. It leads to civility. We can see passions in others which we might consider misguided, and more reflexively realize they have a place in the world, and might be treated with gentleness rather than suppression.

Finally, could you record a version of "Walk Away, Renee," place it in an airtight bottle, and set it adrift in the Pacific Ocean in the hope that it may travel around the world to be discovered purely by coincidence on a beach on the east coast of Canada where I just happen to be walking along?

I will try to play a version of "Walk Away, Renee" in San Francisco on the 29th of March, and if it's recorded and bottled, let Canada beware.

Peace,

Kevin Wakelin

Thanks much for writing, Kevin.

this is your war, this is your war on drugs; any questions?

--Scott

February 24, 2003

Scott, here's what I've been wondering: Until very recently, you wrote songs on a pretty regular basis for all of your adult life and then some. I get the impression that you write the way Randy Newman does -- namely, that you sit down and will yourself to come up with songs whenever there's an album to be made or a deadline to be met (instead of

being like, say, Robert Pollard and writing entire albums while stuck in traffic). Still, I'm guessing that it's also become somewhat second nature -- that whenever something moves you either emotionally or intellectually, you'd naturally channel that into a lyric or a melody. So now that you're (temporarily, we all hope) retired, what do you do with the energy that used to go to songwriting?

Scott: Brett -- it is always a great pleasure to hear from you.

And: good question. I used to be somewhat infatuated with the idea that I was skilled as a songwriter, and felt writing was part of the holy process of increasing my fame. These days I'm sufficiently disabused of the impression that I owe it to us all to battle for a place in the music business that I don't just reflexively dump a bunch of energy into a song idea anymore. The ideas still come regularly enough, but now the reflex is to just count to ten and go do something useful, like my laundry. If it's a particularly stupendous idea, I'll record a little piece and jot down a lyric.

Let's say for the moment that despite popular consensus I'm a worthwhile artist, and despite even minority consensus my later material is exciting and worth following. I sort of have to hope that enough people miraculously arrive at that conclusion to even pretend that the pop music deployment mechanism is worth my cranking it up again on what will be *even later material*. W.H. Auden can write later poetry that people think is disappointing until 25 years after he's dead when they start to get it, but the kind of arty pop music I do just isn't going to have an audience of any kind unless it's part of some kind of ephemeral, fad-thinking at some level -- let's not kid ourselves.

But to answer your question, I find that the songwriting energy is in fact resulting in laundry that is better folded, and less frequently overdried.

If some great hook should pop into your head, do you store it away anywhere or let it go back into the ether? A lot of us former college DJs have developed that conditioned response where you start back-announcing the records you play in your own living room, and I was wondering if there's an equivalent of that for songwriters.

I guess I have a good laugh, like: a hook! Oh my goodness, how quaint. My, but the music world has walked with a purpose away from anything remotely resembling the world of pop hooks as I imagined it.

This is also an excuse to say hello and send an overdue thanks for all the music (especially that last LF show at TT's, which for all the frustrations of that tour, was probably the best I ever saw you play).

Cheers,

Brett Milano

I had a great time at that show, too. Thanks for coming, Brett, and thanks for writing.

Romance? Not in this weather. [--Auden, "Plains"]

--Scott

March 3, 2003

Scott, don't write any more songs if you don't want to, but I submit that it's time for you to stop insulting those of us who know you're a great musician, especially since we're the only ones reading your Ask Scott answers to begin with. Do you seriously think anybody believes you wrote songs hoping to be Bryan Adams or Vangelis? You better not. And this crap about your music's only justification being membership in some fad? Did you have your self-esteem accidentally amputated?

Scott: Thanks much for the message. I am a big fan of your writing.

I seem to have achieved an apparent crescendo of self-pity last week that truly grated on some nerves.

I've still got it!

I'll reassure everyone reading this that I think awfully highly of my bands' recordings, and I'm also convinced that some of my results are good in a way that is tied up with most people not knowing what to make of them. And certainly I'm very grateful to the people who have shown me enduring support, and I know that includes many people reading this!

I didn't make my meaning clear about the "fad" business. I don't think the only justification for my music is membership in a fad. I think the justification is the communication of my feelings, the exploration of human nature as I see it, and the shaking of groove things, and those are fine justifications. What I'm saying is that if I'd happened to decide one day years ago that my medium of expression was to be doo-wop music, doo-wop's going out of fashion as a fad forever would have probably spelled a fatal squandering of my efforts. Unfortunately, getting pop music across depends a lot on being in the right place at the right time for the tender ears of the mob, and my efforts to isolate and win an audience which would somehow spell viability have been -- statistically -- disappointing.

As for Bryan Adams and Vangelis, it is my sad duty to inform you that I had every intention of reaching that level of popularity, cannily inducing millions of people to listen to music more like the way I listen to it.

Listen: you are great. Really, really great, and it's not your prerogative to disagree with me or the rest of us. There's no reason that should bear on your music making or lack of it in one way or another, but it should bear on how you answer these emails. Your self-deprecation has crossed over into a bizarre inverse egotism.

Stubbornly yours,

glenn mcdonald

Thank you so much -- consider me encouraged. It would be easier to express myself in these matters if everyone had the experience of putting out nine or ten albums over a twenty-year period. Eventually there is a note you didn't used to hear, or at least you didn't know you'd ever dislike, in the reception of the releases, along the lines of "here is his latest attempt to please us; how has he done?" And you think, no, that's not it anymore. You want people to ask -- and you begin to understand it's not going to happen -- "what is he bringing to us that we don't *expect*, in advance, to want to hear?" You discover that the only way to produce something that will be taken as innovative is to stealthily imitate another work which has recently been taken as innovative, and never, but never, to actually innovate. God bless punk rock, but ever notice how a hundred alarmingly similar 1977 punk albums can be taken as simultaneous out-of-nowhere bolts of original expression?

maudlin lang,

--Scott

March 24, 2003

Scott, I was looking over my old True Gamesters newsletters from about 1990 and found the one where you listed your 120 favourite records. It's an interesting document that inspired me to get a lot of the albums you ranked. What would a list of your 120 favourites look like today? I'd particularly like to see how many Nineties and Naughties releases would make the list and what old favourites would be shunted to the hinterlands. If you don't want to take up valuable Ask Scott space, maybe you could put the list with your year-by-year ones.

Scott: I don't quite have the resources to generate that much detailed critical commitment right now, but just off the top of my head, some of the big news albums of the '90s for me were *Exile in Guyville* by Liz Phair, the Aimee Mann albums, *Frosting On the Beater* by the Posies, *Either/Or* by Elliott Smith, *69 Love Songs* by the Magnetic Fields.

Also, I'd like to goad you into some "trash talk" about the WORST or most disappointing records you've ever heard. Your comments on Roger Waters a while back were very perceptive (but you can't criticize music until you've heard "Eleanor Rigby" by Vanilla Fudge).

There are many levels of bad, disappointing, okay-but-vastly-overrated, and so forth. Here's a random sampling:

Never Let Me Down by David Bowie was almost superhumanly disappointing. *Born to Run* and *What's Going On* are two plenty okay albums, but my reaction to the ubiquity of their presence on rock critics' best-of-all-time polls is: huh? Pretty much any post-Syd Pink Floyd splinter project except the first David Gilmour record, which has the mighty "There's No Way Out of Here." The soundtrack for L. Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth* with Chick Corea stands a decent chance of being the worst record ever made. The live jam from *All Things Must Pass* and the live jam from John and Yoko's *Some Time in New York City* both raised an

already high bar for ex-Beatles releasing crap. Everyone loves the group Portishead except me. Everyone loves that last album by Beck except me.

How's that?

My last question is about a subject that recurs in your lyrics, interviews and in Ask Scott: the desire for fame and success as an artist. Over the last few years I get the feeling that you have worked hard to understand this desire and deal with the source of it, but what do you think would have happened if your deepest, most extravagant desires for fame had been realized? How would this have affected you and the music? Would it have been different if it had happened in, say, 1985 or 1993? Would you have tried to maintain your success by giving the people what they want or would you have been more bold than you were? Could there have been a happy medium of success for your groups?

There are always a few ways that can go -- the worst is you get just enough fame to get a major label deal, but don't quite have enough clout to get to make the albums you want to make. Fortunately, except for a limited budget here and some compromises for the sake of democracy there, I've gotten a lot of my artistic intentions down, and they've been as marginalized as God intended. I'm glad I didn't release albums that sold fifty thousand instead of five thousand but were subjected to a lot of market pressure.

I've rambled on but I'm dying to know what you think about these things. I wish you could know how much your records and the things that you've inspired me to check out (like Joyce and Girard) have meant to me.

Thanks,

David Thomas Lynch

It means a lot that you'd say so; thank you!

Zapple forever,

--Scott

Scott, I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for a *stunning* live album. *From Ritual To Romance* is a classic.

Also, an extra special thanks because it contains my favorite Loud Family song: Baby-Hard-To-Be-Around. What a blistering version!

You f-in' ROCK!!

Tom Enroth

Scott: Much appreciated! It was a real treat to have so many talented people contribute to both the audio and visuals of that release.

--I, Finrock

March 31, 2003

Scott, I just saw you play at Highland Grounds here in LA and enjoyed it immensely. (Scott Miller playing for free, how can that suck?) This was the first time I'd seen you since a Game Theory concert in San Luis Obispo that I promoted (at a tiny little Caribbean style bar/restaurant called DK's which I'm sure you don't remember) back in the late 80s sometime. Thanks for the version of "Erica's Word" at the end of the show; it was really great to hear it again.

Scott: Well, thank you for coming, and for promoting that show!

My question is this: You mentioned on stage that *Lolita Nation* is in the early stages of being remastered for re-release. Can you give any information about this? What label, when, etc., and will Mitch Easter be involved at all? (You also professed to having forgotten about "Chardonnay" and what a good song it is, which nobody would ever believe!!)

Thanks and take care!

Dave

To be honest, it's too early to talk about it in any detail. Nothing concrete has really happened yet except that I listened to the album to figure out which songs I might like to remix if that were an option (and it would only be an option if Mitch were involved). For a while I was saying I wanted to re-record a bunch of the vocals, but I guess I've been mostly talked out of that because, you know, the exhibit in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame would have to be updated and all. But I'd like it to be reasonably spiffed up at any rate, with today's mastering technology, some at least minimally interesting packaging, and, if at all possible, the uncut version of "Chardonnay."

But the rub there is this: I hadn't listened to that song in years and years, and I'd become more and more convinced it was a really stupid song, but I finally listened to it and I thought it was okay. Yet, I'm now thinking, it could be that the particularly stupid parts were in the cut verses! I just don't remember a damn thing about them. One embarrassing detail is that I was listening to *Moss Elixir* by Robyn Hitchcock, and I think Mr. Cambridge pronounces "Di Chirico" right and I don't.

thanks for writing, Dave,

--a tiny little Caribbean style bar band singer

April 14, 2003

Scott, let's get physical.

Working with the notion that light is composed of wave particles called photons, a theory (fame theory or shame theory) occurred to me while going for a jog (wonderful things, those endorphins!).

Scott: Thanks very much for writing, Jack.

It's been a long time (23 years) since my modern physics education, so expect some high impedance in my brain. My feedback won't be scholarship, but maybe the exercise is useful for purposes of (1) publicizing of your idea, and (2) talking an amateur through it.

These photons, of course, have a velocity component of 'c' in one dimension, but there just may be much slower velocity components created by the wave oscillations themselves in the other 2 (known) dimensions. Unlink the forward 'c' which is independent of frequency and amplitude, these other 2 dimensions have velocities that are dependent on frequency and amplitude.

Are photons thought to have a velocity component in directions other than their direction of travel? What I thought was that light has wave and particle natures, the photon concept describing the particle nature, and so you couldn't really talk about the y and z velocities of a photon -- y and z components are electrical and magnetic amplitudes, not physical oscillation of the photon.

Even if I take a classical wave example like sending a wave down a jumprope by wiggling it, I wouldn't think I'd talk about a velocity component of the wave going down the jumprope in the x direction and another velocity component of the rope molecules at any point going up and down in the y direction. There *isn't* any actual movement of matter in the x direction -- it's the nature of a wave system to propagate energy in some direction without accounting the local displacement as a velocity component of that propagation.

Going back a very long time ago to The Big Bang (memories are a bit foggy, because I was just a teenager then), the theory states that an incredible burst of energy occurred at a rate of 10^{-43} seconds. If one were to plot this on a Laplace/Fourier frequency vs. amplitude plot, one would get almost incomprehensibly high frequency components.

Personally, the Big Bang theory has always sounded a lot like creationism to me, only updated to what we know about constituents of matter. In biblical times you could say something like "one day there were just continents and animals and humans," and now you have to say "one day there were just photons and electrons." Maybe it's just me, but it seems at some important level like a bit of a lateral move.

A little quibble is that 10^{-43} seconds is not a rate, it's a time, and it's hard for me to even think about what you (or anyone) must really mean: in that much time, all the energy of the current universe is flowing out of a sphere of some definite size, for no reason, and limited by nothing. Some part of my mind wants to know something like: how do you know if you have high amplitudes at high frequencies, since at one end of the measurements you're taking, there's no time or space?

Sorry, that's all pretty much digressing.

Perhaps the aforementioned other 2 dimensions have a velocity limit of 'c' as well. So here's the gist (finally): when the oscillations approach 'c' this is the point at which energy changes back into matter.

Something about this seems like an interesting thought, but it's mostly beyond me. For one thing, I think I only know about high energies changing more matter into more energy, not high energies causing a net change back to matter -- except, I'm imagining, in black holes or something beyond my comprehension. Maybe something like what you're talking about is why there's matter in the universe, not just energy, but as noted before, my building blocks of knowledge don't go that high -- I'm stuck at that problem I was describing earlier of conceiving photon oscillations.

I shared this theory with a fellow citizen of Planet Mensa, who seemed open to the concept. What are your thoughts?

Light travels at 186,000 mi/sec... here comes some now,

Jack Lippold

P.S.: you should hear me on "York or Sargent: which Dick was the superior Darrin?"

Sargent was never quite silly enough -- he was just sort of miffed all the time. York was addled, and I think there was something kind of funny in being able to imagine him having a somewhat indistinguishable amount of anxiety over meeting a big client if he'd lost his briefcase, or he'd been turned into a golden retriever.

social Durwoodism,

--Scott

May 5, 2003

Scott, did you ever play in the UK at all in any of your incarnations?

I've been a fan of The Loud Family since they started and even managed to track down some Game Theory CDs a while back. Feel as though I missed out a bit not seeing the Louds live as I've seen most other singers I rate like Tori Amos, Aimee Mann, Suzanne Vega and All About Eve. Also, have you heard of a singer called Nerina Pallot? Her album *Dear Frustrated Superstar* from last year was superb. I think you'd really like it.

Scott: No, I don't know her. Nice title!

I've played in and around London a couple of times. The first time was a solo show in 1991, set up by a friend, at a place called the Mean Fiddler. Then the first Loud Family line-up played a few shows in 1993. We did a Greater London Radio spot, played a place I think was called the Powerhaus, played a place I think was called the South Cross Venue, played some place in Leicester, and played some place in Aldershot. The main thing I remember about

the Aldershot show is that Elastica were on the bill. I remember talking to someone in Elastica (who I am now deducing from their web site was "Donna Matthews, vocals and guitar") and being flabbergasted to learn that they were getting cover stories in national magazines and all they'd done is release *one single*. What -- you don't have to have three college radio hits and tour for years over there? I like England!

I'd love to play England again, but I no longer really have the kind of connections and career momentum where some promoter in his right mind would fly me over.

Any truth in the rumour that you'll be working with Aimee soon? If not, then I guess we'll just have to respect your retirement and know that another musical genius has been lost.

Franko Kowalczyk

I'm blushing! But actually, I'm thinking pretty positively about the Aimee project (which I won't describe in detail now, having described it in other messages). It's about half recorded, and as part of finishing it up, we're writing a song together, which I think is coming out great. It's fantastically thrilling to work with Aimee.

thanks for writing; don't forget to shop at Minus Zero!

--Young Blighty

May 19, 2003

Scott, I am not writing you for the first time after having been a fan for many years. Actually, um, who are you again? Oh, that's right.

Scott: Thanks much for writing, d. -- IF THAT IS YOUR REAL NAME.

I had a dream in which people, including you and including me, were travelling across the country in a van. Actually, I had to sort of stand on the back bumper and hang on to the door and the molding, while someone on the other side of the bumper poked me with a carrot to try to knock me off.

I have to jump in and say how sad it is that classic psychoanalysis would be at such a total loss for words at this point.

We stopped at some cramped hovel, where dwelt an old man and a scruffy-looking black dog. The old man apologized for his dog's apparent lack of socialization (due to unfortunate circumstances in the dog's early upbringing) but defended the canine's essential worth thusly:

"That dog smells better than any calamari around! You want to talk about loving your enemy... that dog loves calamari."

What does this mean?

d. (doug mayo-wells)

Why we dream is a good juicy mystery. In a way, it's farfetched to think dreams are constructed complete with meaning somewhere in the unconscious, and then they're exposed like a movie to consciousness, which then might or might not figure out that meaning. It would be an odd evolutionary inefficiency for the brain, once it *had* the meaning in hand to begin with, to go through this risky, cinematic process to get the meaning to some other aspect of the brain. Though maybe not inconceivable.

But I'm more inclined to think there's not so much an inherent *meaning* in dreams as there is the possibility of some class of encounter which the brain feels like playing out to test its own reaction and interpretation. Which sort of goes along with my theory that it's not all that mindless to watch what is typically thought of as mindless TV. By watching something like a soap opera, I'm thinking that to an extent you're doing brain work that's valuable in the same way that dreams are valuable -- you're doing on-the-cheap refinement of your reactions to provocative situations to be better mentally prepared for similar real life situations. The down side is the untrustworthiness of it all: you're probably also receiving recommended resolutions from people who are poorly qualified to do anything besides get your attention; but that's another subject, and I'd better start circling back to yours.

In a way the "meaning" of the dream is exclusively the way it made you feel; I'd have to ask *you* what it means. But you're a pretty good writer. I'm going to suppose you may have captured the essence of that dream enough that I could imagine the reasonable generic human reaction to it, which may be pretty close to my attempting to say what the dream means.

In your dream, you go traveling, which I presume has the feeling of venturing beyond your cultural boundaries. What you find there -- here the dream is very realistic and significant -- is a representative of culture's non-included. In a way the sickness of culture is that it assigns worthiness in a big invisible pyramid scheme, which by its very nature requires a bottom layer of those who are utterly abject. But the old man in the dream is giving you testimony that even those abject according to the paradigm of "socialization" have, in your words, essential worth. And maybe as added significance, the old man isn't testifying to his own self worth, but another's: the dog's. So your dream has the potential to enlighten you to the absolute worth of another despite cultural interpretation.

Calamari for the dog? That's what *those people* do with their food stamps??

re-elect Gore,

--Scott

Scott, in your opinion, could a vampire *force* him/her/itself to eat actual food instead of blood?

David Werking

Scott: Commonly observed approximations may be: (1) a cat, and (2) a goth person. Both would prefer to drink blood but *will* survive on non-bloody food for long periods. So I will say that a normal, newish vampire will be able to force him or herself to eat food at least for a while, although perhaps some sort of science diet involving blood byproducts is necessary for immortality and a shiny coat.

mwahaha,

--Scott

June 2, 2003

Scott, I wrote once approximately four years ago, and now am writing again with an admixture of intellectual inquiry and sad avarice. (Speaking of "admixtures," are you a fan of Donald Barthelme's short stories?)

Scott: All I've read is his novel *Snow White*, which I enjoyed very much, although I'm not sure I'm quite on top of why so many people I know seem to single him out as *the* author to recommend. I mean, I'm sure I've had ten times the number of Donald Barthelme recommendations as Anne Sexton, Kingsley Amis, V.S. Naipaul, and J.G. Ballard recommendations combined -- what could that mean?

First, as far as Husker Du, I have always been among those who fall on the Hart side of the coin, like those who fall on the Lennon side of the Beatles coin. Even in my punkiest days circa 1983-84, I loved Hart's compositions, sad, melodramatic, sometimes whimsical hippy stuff though they were (i.e., "Diane," "Pink Turns to Blue," "Turn on the News," "Flexible Flyer"), more than Bob Mould's angry stomping.

I'm not really a Husker Du adept; I've managed to form opinions about most of their albums, but I don't actually own any, nor would I probably ever play them if I did.

That said, I'm with you -- I like Grant's Husker Du stuff better than Bob's. The critical overrating of Bob Mould's Husker Du material was truly a thing of machinelike beauty that I don't think has been equaled since -- and that's saying something, since his songs certainly weren't bad at all. There was just sort of no such thing as not thinking that sound was an out-of-the-park home run every single time (which it just plain wasn't). Bob's stuff starting with the *Sugar* record has been much, much stronger, and gets *nothing* like that level of critical attention. "Deep Karma Canyons"; "Classifieds" -- amazing songs!

That said, are you familiar with Hart's oeuvre post-Huskers? If so, waddaya think? I for one believe that the first Hart solo album was practically impeccable, even the sappy Billy-Joel-on-Dope coda of "The Main." Likewise, I love the first Nova Mob album and all of its goofy historical images (*Last Days of Pompeii*? To my knowledge, although you delve into esoteric literary references, you've never sunk into advanced high school history as far as lyrics go). The second Nova Mob album was horrible, and I wonder whether he hadn't relapsed as far as the drug use goes. Finally, the most recent solo Hart album showed signs of promise, though only about half the songs had the melodic strength to sustain

the poppy production. Are you familiar with these releases? Can you become so and give me your thoughts? Did you ever at all consider yourself (while in Game Theory) a contemporary of the poppier side of Husker Du in anything more than a purely temporal sense?

Only in the sense that people used "college rock" as a catch-all term; we were a hated harmony-mongering, keyboard-using band to any Husker fan, I'm sure. "Diane" was probably my single favorite song by them, which my friend Dan Vallor played for me when it came out. F*** me! I'd kind of considered *Land Speed Record* the sort of thing people still did if they were still stuck in a teenage frame of mind, which I considered myself well beyond at the time (rather embarrassingly, now that I look back), but with "Diane" I came to respect the emotional impact they were capable of deploying.

I probably ought to get *Intolerance*; I'm not sure if I'm up for studying Grant's whole catalog, but I've heard a few post-Husker songs that are pretty damn engaging.

Next, here comes the blatant avarice. I really, really want a copy of *Lolita Nation* and the first and fourth Game Theory albums on CD. I have them on LP but don't currently have the technology to transfer them, and anyway my LPs are long since scratched. If anybody out there in Millerland is willing to trade with me, I have a fair deal of 80s stuff, as well as decent 90s stuff on LP and CD, particularly a pretty complete backlog of Guided by Voices rarities / live versions, etc., on CD. If anybody is willing to trade (and if you, Scott, have any thoughts on the latest GBV offering, *Universal Truths and Cycles*), please feel free to post here or write me at tfriedman@nc.rr.com. Thanks.

Terrence Friedman

Let the swindling begin.

P.S. My vastly younger 19-year-old sister (14 years younger than me, arghh) is just now getting into intelligent pop, starting with Aimee Mann. I'm waiting about another year to spring you on her.

Here's hoping that move doesn't grind the whole program to a halt.

everything's in boxes at 2541,

--Scott

June 9, 2003

Scott, this "Ask Scott" thing is getting to be a habit. This is going to be a bit dicey, so if you don't answer it, I'll understand; although none of the loud-fans know where I live.

This is my twisted little take on deity. It just might ruffle the feathers of believers, agnostics and atheists alike. I expressed this thought to a regular at an establishment I go to often and I must have scared the be-jesus out of her, because I haven't seen her since.

Okay, here goes: "I believe there is a God. But in light of the power, scope and secrets of the universe that we can't begin to understand, I just don't believe we humans are a significant part of God's plan. An odd paradox exists in many -- if not most -- believers. These believers display the ultimate in humility and fear in God, yet they often have the arrogance to believe that we humans have the power to offend or protect God."

Scott: You're right -- people who value humility and believe in God ought to be open to the possibility that God might, in the vast possibilities of all universes, have more significant creations than humanity. I guess anyone who's read Milton has a flavor for that Puritan theology where God is a sort of cabinet-maker whose newest project in *Paradise Lost* is humankind -- but that's probably not quite what you're getting at.

There, I said it. Although I haven't come across anyone who has expressed a similar outlook, I imagine they're out there. I'm curious if you have come across any.

A grayer shade of pale,

Jack Lippold

I may never have heard that before, or looked at it that way myself before -- I congratulate you for a rather original thought! But my personal impression is that human consciousness is enough more remarkable than anything else in my realm that I wouldn't know how to begin to imagine something more significant. When I say I believe in God, the core of what I mean is that I can't talk about the specialness of my own consciousness -- the *subject* world -- without bringing in the concept of God, and were I to say I don't believe in God (which I don't, because people would take it as a cheap rejection of Western spirituality), the core of what I would mean is that I don't have a coherent way of talking or thinking about a privileged aspect of the *object* world which manipulates the rest of the object world as a result of motivations we would have some chance of understanding.

Short sentences, Scott. Hemingway. Short sentences.

thanks for writing Jack, and best wishes

--the God-doesn't-play-dice man

June 23, 2003

Scott, I was a fan of yours in high school and even saw you play at Northwestern in Chicago in the mid eighties. I would love to be able to find *Real Nighttime* and ALRN's *Painted Windows* on CD. Are they available?

Stephanie Grove

Scott: ALRN -- no. *Real Nighttime*, on eBay quite a bit, sometimes Amazon.

Scott, I've recently undertaken the arduous task of converting a centuries-old coal bin in my basement into a writing/recording space.

Scott: Wonderful. I have heard of writers trying to go it without a coal bin, or with a contemporary or unconverted coal bin, and I wonder what they are thinking.

I've always regarded the Loud Family albums as sterling examples of skillful self-recording, so I wanted to ask you a technical question. Recording vocals has always been my weakest point as an engineer. Assuming that most of the tape hiss and ambient noise isn't coming from my own throat, what microphone(s) do you use for such a purpose?

Most of my vocals have been done with an AKG 414, but don't let stop you from using them -- I think they're the best mics you can get for about a thousand bucks. For acoustic guitar right in front of the sound hole or miking an amp, a Shure SM 57 -- around a hundred bucks -- has always sounded as good to my ears as anything else.

If you have a lot of money, it's really done these days to throw in a fancy pre-amp, but I'm not completely confident the money for those things always ends up on the screen, whereas time put in learning to compress is essential -- including learning to use the side-chain feature to control hissy-ess frequencies (a skill I think I finally got good at around the song "One Will Be the Highway").

Do you scrub down the raw tracks with any outboard compression / noise reduction gear, or is it all about post-production in ProTools?

I'm actually waiting for ProTools to port to Mac OS X, then I'll buy it. All my stuff has been on ADAT (or in the old days, 24-track 2", or in the very old days, Teac 4- and 8-track).

I have dbx 166A compressor/gate/limiter that has just been the workhorse of my home recording life. I always record with lots of compression and some limiting -- the hotter, the better -- and unless it really bugs the singer, noise gating.

Incidentally, I've discovered that *The Tape of Only Linda* is the best possible album for scrubbing down concrete floors in abandoned coal bins. It happily beat out strong competition such as Wire's 1985-1990 *The A List* (too murky), Ultra Vivid Scene's *Joy 1967-1990* (too robotic) and Maria Kalaniemi's *Iho* (too NPR).

Myke Weiskopf

It will take the paint off most anything. Thanks for writing, and happy recording!

--Alfred E. Neumann

June 30, 2003

Scott, I just read this on "Ask Scott":

One project I'm fervently hoping gets finished is an album of quasi-acoustic versions of my songs with Aimee Mann and her guitarist/ producer Michael Lockwood (who's an incredible talent in his own right). It's about half recorded, but of course she's a pretty big star these days and we need to find some time to finish it that works within her touring and recording schedule.

I've never written to you before, but reading what you wrote above compels me to do so.

I'm not the flattering type, really, but I think your recordings remain to this day among the most interesting and literate that I have ever heard, or probably am ever likely to hear in my lifetime. When you discuss Auden or Joyce (I'll throw Wilde in as a comparable favorite), you refer to them naturally as masters or geniuses within their particular area of artistic expression.

Scott, through your work in Game Theory and the Loud Family, you occupy this same hallowed ground within power pop, or post-Beatles rock -- I don't know what to call it exactly. I can only tell you that I've listened to hundreds of records of this nature and no one ever equaled your ability to create interesting, tuneful, soaring music that never failed to be a reflection of a keenly intelligent, musically gifted mind: writing from the heart when you wanted to, being enigmatic when you wanted to, challenging everyone that listened to simply pay attention and reap the incomparably unique benefits of your musical and literary viewpoints, or kindly step out and soak up the new Ratt album instead.

Scott: Well, I'm blushing, of course; thanks very much for saying all that. I honestly don't think I know what Ratt sound like. Less Auden influence, you say?

Personally I've never been more than half satisfied with my attempts to tie in with what I consider great literature. I have the vague goal of presenting certain interpretations I came by with difficulty in a way I imagine I would have found more approachable; but even if I'm successful at this reeling in of a putatively lofty idea from literature down to the reality of my own life, I've likely made it uninteresting to everyone except someone like you who has unusual patience with a project that's laborious in this way.

So I appreciate hearing when it works out for someone. As an example of what I take to be the more typical reaction, [this Attractive Nuisance review is handy](#). Besides the just praise of Alison's contributions, I like as a closing put-down the writer's declaring that my efforts made him "painfully aware of [his] own mortality while putting [him] to sleep" -- oddly close to something I might have offered as a stated goal (I might have said "invite consideration of ultimate concerns without using shock tactics").

To people that love the idiom of music that you contributed to and brought true artistic growth to, you are a genius and immortalized in our eyes. Anyone who does not believe this either never heard your music in the first place, or for whatever reason could not listen carefully enough. Your contributions to popular music are much greater than I think you, or the world at large, quite realizes yet.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart that you have dedicated yourself to your art for as long as you have; had you not, my life and those of many, many others would have been far poorer without your voice somewhere in the mix.

I thank you again. I don't predict any sort of snowballing interest in my recordings, but to provide a pleasant experience to an always limited but fairly steady number of listeners is very gratifying.

Now that I've gotten that off my chest....

I hope this project with Aimee comes to fruition. She is a very intelligent and concise musician who makes impeccable music with an absolutely unique and original approach, just as you have done in your own career. Her keen observations of human relationships contain unusual insight; her talent is a gift to all of us, just as yours is.

I hope that it does not appear too lofty to say that the fact that she regards you as a musician as highly as you regard her is a undeniable testament to the strength of the human spirit; your mutual collaboration reflects one element of the highest aspirations that people working together could ever hope to achieve in their lifetime.

It's a dream experience. I still have to pinch myself. Michael Lockwood is now working steadily with Lisa Marie Presley, though, so that may mean our producer is not too available for a while.

I anxiously await the fruits of your work together. Save the realization of true love or the birth of a healthy child, I'm hard pressed to think of anything that would lift the emotional fabric of the admirers of your craft to a higher level.

Lawrence Sweet

Highly encouraging words. I am very grateful.

born to be Wilde

--Scott

July 13, 2003

Scott, since I know what a huge Beatles fan you are through interviews I've read and detecting the influence in your music, I was wondering when your father bought you *Sgt. Pepper*; I think you were born in 1960 (10 years before my post-womb existence), therefore, if you did possibly get it in 1967, did you buy each subsequent Beatles LP when they came out?

Scott: Close. After *Sgt. Pepper*, it was my friend Joe Becker and his parents through whom I heard Beatles material as it came out. Being 7 to 9 in the last Beatles years, I didn't actually have albums' worth of buying power.

If so, what was that like?

Like they were gods walking the earth, and a new Beatles album was the most radiant event in life. But always in a complicated way. The white album was certainly a strange experience -- I remember initially being just short of totally confused by it, but it was still incredibly compelling to imitate them even as they were pushing the boundaries of it being too weird to get away with doing that -- e.g. by having *really* long hair like John in that strangely captivating white album photo (and since that wasn't an option given my parents, I remember hunting down a flea-market pair of those round National Health spectacles, just to have and keep in a drawer).

Although, the great yet confusing white album was almost concurrent with "Hey Jude," which on the other hand spoke as directly to my soul as anything ever. That they came up with such a familial, encouraging take on love relationships is just one of hundreds of aspects of the Beatles I look back on and wonder: where did they ever find the mental poise to do something like that? To say nothing of the surreal filter of childhood that all of this was coming at me through -- metaphysical connections between, say, the green of the Apple logo and the lime green of lime green Hot Wheels cars. I'm sure anyone who was at least that old in 1966-69 understands the pop culture nirvana unique to that period, which probably sounds like incoherent nonsense to anyone else.

Where any Beatles release was too bizarre to be instantly lovable it was equally valuable as an aesthetic challenge, and this was even true when the breakup was occurring and they started releasing a whole bunch of disturbingly experimental records like "Zapple" releases. It seemed like whatever value was lost by them being unlistenable was compensated for by it all just being that formidable a mystery.

The Beatles' explosive breakup with all the bizarre solo records makes more sense when you consider that at the time, their music wasn't necessarily considered as bankable and timeless as pure musical craft as we all take it for granted to be nowadays. There was much more of a feeling of it all as super-fad -- essentially a souped-up dance craze which if it was of any lasting importance, was important as an exponent of a youth movement whose manifesto was something like: more freedom is always better. That category of idealism did most of its unraveling concurrently with the Beatles. When the Beatles had done classic work, it was all a very disciplined operation, and the problem of emancipation-as-freedom degenerating into anarchy-as-freedom is maybe nowhere clearer than in contemplating John Lennon being *constrained* to produce "Come Together" rather than being *freed* to produce "Unfinished Music #2: Life With the Lions."

But for a long time their instincts were all but infallible. It turns out to have been amazing and rare that the Beatles occupied a niche as top-rank cultural heroes for being creative and intellectually eclectic, yet adhering closely to real life for their subject matter. They were really these wild geniuses who succeeded *as* geniuses -- not as either a cult or as escapist entertainment.

I know you would have been pretty young, however, I was pretty precocious, getting *Piper At The Gates of Dawn* in grade 2 and the banana album in grade 5. Please elaborate with your memories! That would be way cool.

Keep making records or "Don't Doubt Yourself Babe" cuz yer a genius.

P.S. I'm well aware of your love of Alex Chilton so I'd thought I'd tell you that I once played in a short-lived band with guitar player and friend George Reinecke called The Golden Triangle, just after he left Tav Falco's Panther Burns, though we just did a few gigs but often talk about working.

Bret Judges

Fun! Memphis musicians tend to seem kind of crazy to me. But then I guess so do San Francisco musicians.

spo-dee-o-dee,

--Scott

July 21, 2003

Scott, have you heard the new Spoon record? I'm only asking because they've certainly heard yours! Their song "You Gotta Feel It" came up on my iPod right after "Erica's Word" tonight and I'll be damned if they aren't carbon copies of one another!

I pulled out the trusty Telecaster from under the bed and played along with both just to be sure. Besides moving the progression down a half-step, they are pretty near the same.

Can you sue them for ripping off your chord progression? If so, I want 25 percent! Of course, they don't sell any more records than you ever did, but with the present condition of our economy, I'm not ruling anything out.

Rob "half-diminished" Disner
Silver Lake, CA

Scott: Hi, Rob -- thanks for writing.

I appreciate your thinking of my music business interests -- God knows that's rare -- but it would hard for me to work up an aggrieved feeling short of their copying "Erica's Word" exactly and calling it "Erica's Word, Not By Scott Miller." Here's a little theorem of mine about music, which I'll now lay out in the following poor-man's Wittgensteinian manner:

1. All good music sounds like something you've heard before. If you hear good (to you) music, you will either:

a. Consciously recognize (what for your purposes is) the source and attribute the good of the music to that source, or

b. You won't consciously recognize the source, and you'll attribute the good of the music to the music you're hearing itself.

2. All music which you identify as good, to the the extent that you correctly identify it as something you've never heard before

a. Is in fact still actually good (to you), but

b. It is good as something other than music.

Music is a machine that requires the sound at hand, and also *requires* the set of subconscious echoes and reference points that make it act as music. So in my book, being a good writer of melodies is a matter of magic and blarney, stealing without getting caught. I still think it's a valuable pursuit, and I'm never intentionally underhanded when I write a song; it all only turns ugly if I start looking around for ways *my* material has been lifted.

All I've heard from the latest Spoon is a song called "Jonathan Fisk," which I thought was one of the best tracks of 2002.

everything fight about that spoonful,

--Scott

August 11, 2003

Scott, I just saw Richard Linklater's at-times fascinating movie *Waking Life*, and was reminded of something that I was able to ask you about in 1998. One of the points that the movie made was that dreams allowed the main character to come up with fascinating ideas and concepts that he wouldn't have believed that his conscious mind could have conjured up. When I asked you about a particular line in "Idiot Son" ("And I saw real estate that I would not call land"), you told me in so many words that it was a dream image about ecology and land that had been spent of all of its resources barring its inherent financial value. You also have mentioned that a lot of your images have sprung from dreams. Could you characterize what qualities that you feel your dream images could possess vs. those images/lyrics/etc. that you came up while fully conscious?

Scott: Good question, Thomas. Thanks for writing. The short answer is that a satisfying album of lyrics typically has a few striking concrete images, and a dream can be good raw material for that. You may have no idea how an idea or feeling is getting communicated; you just trust the value of representing something that seemed strangely significant to you.

Taking that to an even deeper level, the art that you've come up with, are you of the mind that it comes from you, or simply through you? I realize that before you release a song, an album, you've tweaked the crap out of it to get it ready for prime time, and in that sense

you are definitely the art's midwife. But ultimately (and this isn't meant to trivialize your role in the amazing music you have made), do you feel that the art originates from Scott Miller per se, or that you are the conduit, and that it springs from a vague, undefined "other" realm? And trust me, there isn't meant to be any judgment attached to that; an answer of "I made it" is not a selfish answer, it might be the true one.

In a way, it's hard to know exactly what distinction to make there. I remember reading a book called "Consciousness Explained" by Daniel Dennett, and I took his theme to be something like that we think of the self as a monolithic agent when really it's more a collection of processes acting as preferences, filters, motivations, etc., and when these processes get together, consciousness just magically happens (not incredibly well-fleshed-out as deep thinking goes, I didn't think, though what do I know?). But in a way songwriting is a similar question. I've picked up a lot of motivations for writing songs, axes to grind, reasons things sounds good to me, etc., and a lot of forces, social and otherwise, you could describe as acting *through* me. In a way Todd Rundgren writes songs through me because he influenced me to want to perpetuate certain aspects of music.

Dreams may in some sense be the source aspect that's the closest to being uniquely *me*. Dreams are egotistical, for good and bad. People have to work to build a moral and spiritual sensibility, and dreams may work within that, or may rebel against it in favor of desire and sentiment. The best art is probably both morally sophisticated and decisive while being quite sensitive to human desire (Dostoevsky springs to mind); dreams usually help with the latter, and require a disciplined mind to be helpful with the former.

Once again, thanks for your amazing music. *P&B&R&T* is still my favorite album of all time. Congratulations on your new family.

Copacetically dazed in a daisy glaze,

Thomas Durkin

Thanks much for such a positive assessment.

Neon meate dream of a Oxfordprof,

--Scott

Scott, ta-tan,ta,ta,tam

ta-tan,ta,ta,tam

ta-tan,ta,ta,tam

ta-tan,ta,ta,tam

....

eeeriiccaaaa'sss goooneee shyyyyy

mmmmm mmmm mmmmm

ok,ok, i'll never see/ear it live uhhhhh

Right now at Madrid (Spain) but too at Zaragoza (Spain too) I'll wait for 10 years more, meanwhile I'll grow up some ginkgo biloba seeds against sadness and try to get the rest of loud fam. cd's

And wait for a Good Year At Madrid and for Christmas hollydays.

Javier Martin Garcia Lopez

Scott: Buenos dias, Javier! Hey, if Ken Stringfellow can get to Spain to play live, then so can I. Wait a minute, I have that backward; it's that if I can do something, then Ken Stringfellow can do it. So close. I've wanted to go to Madrid ever since I saw "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown." I think it was the mod phone booths.

Erica esta en casa
Donde es la biblioteca?

--Scott

September 29, 2003

Scott, that two of the most talented, smartest, and flat-out nicest people I've ever met have decided to bring a new life into the world is great and welcome news for all of humanity. Here's hoping Valerie gets your chops, Kristine's moves, a Fisher Price keyboard for Christmas and an open 125 Records contract on her first birthday (watch out Britney, Christina, Mandy...)

Scott: Well, Valerie just turned one, and we didn't hear from 125, so she may keep a dialog open with Death Row.

I've been wanting to write to you to make an observation about your last album, which has been in heavy rotation on my CD player of late. As my previous borderline-psychotically enthusiastic letters to you about your music might have suggested, I've been a big fan of your music for years, but I'm remiss to admit that I didn't much appreciate *Attractive Nuisance* when it first came out for a reason that's now become clear to me: I hated the idea of you singing your own rock obituary so much that I didn't want to even countenance the idea. Seeing you lay down your guitar on your last tour seemed to confirm what some of the songs on *Attractive Nuisance* suggested, and this was terrible news for all of us who are passionate about your music.

In the years (years!?) since that time, I've somehow gotten used to stumbling through adult life without the joy and edification of a brand new Scott Miller album to help make the unfiner points of living tenable if not completely worthwhile. Ironically, finding no other suitably soul-bracing alternate consolation to your music in art or literature (*The Corrections* came pretty close), I found myself turning back to your last album which, now that I can listen to the songs with acceptance and a little detachment, I now regard as some of the best work you've ever done. To anyone reading "Ask Scott" who is un- or under-acquainted with your music, I'd like to recommend in particular to them the trifecta

of songs that comprise the heart of your last album. These three songs -- "Nice When I Want Something," "Years of Wrong Impressions," and "Blackness, Blackness" -- showcase and encapsulate your musical and lyrical abilities like nothing before.

I'm glad to hear about more people liking that album than did when it came out. It wasn't exactly designed to be a hit, but it was really met with an exciting new level of indifference and misunderstanding.

"Nice When I Want Something" reads like an Edward Albee play or Mary Gaitskill short story. The lyrics are brutal, implosive, hilarious, mordant. Like the comic genius of our time, Larry David (our Charles Chaplin), you've made the apparent subject of your venom yourself, with an eye so sharp I'm wondering if you're a masochist or just play one on CD. The Mike Keneally guitar solo and Gil Ray drum fills make this crunchy, jarring Nirvana homage one of the best hard rock songs in your catalog, right up there with "Curse of the Frontier Land" and "The Softest Tip of Her Baby Tongue."... "This is home. This is where we spend weekends." Yeah, you and the Prince of Denmark.

Mike Keneally is really a talent. Besides being the god of prog he's most commonly known as, he's written these amazing unknown pop-rock classics. "Rosemary Girl" is every bit as good as, say, "Venus" by the Shocking Blue for that kind of song.

And from there you somehow segue to the bubblegummy pop that is "Years Of Wrong Impressions," a song that is Archies-Monkees catchy as it is heartbreaking. To me, the second stanza of "Years" might well be the lovers' pact our generation made with itself in some fifth-floor walk-up twenty years ago, and it's not so easy to look back at that day and what we've thus far become. Alison Faith Levy sings this song passionately in duet with Kenny Kessel, recalling all the beautiful vocal parts you've written for your female collaborators over the years, going back to Nancy Becker and her soaring "aws" and "ahs" on "She'll Be A Verb." When Alison sings the bridge of this song, the album's emotional highpoint, I'm also reminded that your happiest sounding songs -- "Hyde Street Virgins" comes to mind -- are sometimes your most despairing, but without any cloying irony. The carnival organ tones, the "la-la" third stanza lyric and the idea that being misunderstood and lonely might be inevitable, are reconciled to the point where it feels like your trademark to be able to reconcile unreconcilable things. How do you do that?

Like the liner notes say, I flattered myself that I was feeling a thematic connection with T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which in fact openly addresses the subject of reconciliation of what seems unreconcilable. I never would have guessed that was explicit at all in my lyrics, but that's the nice mystery of lyrics sometimes. One thing to say is: despair often happens to someone whose goal not achieved is, when you get right down to it, nothing so much as an intense wish for personal advantage; if you can watch that come and go with a little perspective, the despair can be seen to have a sweet and instructive quality.

The next audible sound on this album is perhaps my favorite sonic moment in all of your recorded music, next to the walls-crumbling breakdown on "The Waist and The Knees" with your "I hope I can wake up" lyric and Zach Smith's whinnying-horse guitar solo. I'm talking about those warbling in-and-out-of key piano notes, leading into what I believe is

the best song you've ever written and one of the greatest modern poems I've ever read. Listening to "Blackness, Blackness," makes me wish you didn't have happen to you some of the things that have, so that you wouldn't know what you do to be able to write such a song, but since they have happened to you, I stand astounded that you could distill something as elegant and shattering as this from your experience.

That's certainly very nice of you to say.

With these songs and this album, your legacy is clear: you're among the first to have taken pop music to high art; to have given it the depth, complexity and personality of literature (while still rocking out like a madman -- an "Asleep and Awake"-like whoo to you!). On a more personal level, this is now the album I laugh and cry along to while I wash the dishes, drive to the post office, think about departed friends... It's the music that carries me along.

Best to you and your family,

Mark Portier

Thanks so much for writing and for giving me the feeling I'm not writing this stuff from Mars.

who's afraid of Virginia Plain,

--Scott

Scott, what kind of guitar did you use on "Regenisraen" on Game Theory's *The Big Shot Chronicles* LP? Do you still use this guitar today?

Mark Staples

Scott: Hi Mark!

I think it was my Guild 12-string acoustic, which I still own, and Gil Ray's Fender 6-string acoustic.

Scott, I can remember a time when I would take my walkman and roam the outer reaches of the Lake Michigan shoreline and evaporate into Game Theory's ethereal sound. I would literally walk forever inside the music -- I felt like I wasn't there any more -- just these walls of sound. I suppose I miss those days -- or maybe not -- but your music -- ahhhhhhh... Thank you.

Jim Braun

Scott: What a nice message! Thanks a lot for writing.

Scott, it was awhile ago -- I believe it was the tour promoting *The Tape of Only Linda* -- when The Loud Family came to Toronto, playing at Lee's Palace. I can remember when my friend and fellow band member, also named Scott, casually told me, "That band you like is playing at Lee's." Since I had been a Game Theory fanatic, not to mention a True

Gamester, I freaked! I wasn't going to miss the gig for anything; indeed, I'd been waiting for a chance to see you live for a long time -- I don't believe Game Theory ever made it to Canada... did they, and for that matter did The Loud Family ever return to Toronto?

Scott: No, but we played Vancouver several times. Kind of a drive from Toronto.

Anyway, after the show, I spotted you going to the bar so I decided to try and go talk to you. You were incredibly friendly and refreshingly unpretentious. In fact, you gave me the feeling that I could have talked to you for as long as I wanted, but, since you were such a big influence on me (I'm also a singer/songwriter) I was a little lost for words and wanted to treat you like a star so I pretty much let you know that you were a genius. Do you remember me?

I think so. The name definitely sounds familiar, anyway.

Finally, I wanted you to know I turned a lot of people on to your music and since I've detected a lot of frustration in your lyrics to the tune of "I failed, I didn't make it," many of these people think of you as a star, e.g.: I remember my ex-girlfriend stating after I permed my hair once, "you look like Scott Miller!" Lastly, are you at all into Van Der Graaf Generator or any krautrock?

I'm pretty ignorant of the genre. Maybe my favorite is Neu! I've never heard a note of Van Der Graaf Generator as far as I know.

Thanks for turning people on to my music. I think you just have to do music as a business for twenty years to appreciate how humiliating and discouraging the whole self-promotion process can get to be, even for someone who looks like a star from certain angles. I think I've said something like it before, but I can't tell you what a relief it is to turn to the ubiquitous potential "I'm just not sure there's enough interest in a new Scott Miller project" and say "well, God has shed his grace on thee, because there isn't one!"

P.S. I see I've typed you a fair amount so if you don't edit the responses you get for "Ask Scott" before putting them on the web site and I've sent you too much, maybe you can just email me a reply.

Bret Judges

You obviously have no idea how excessively people are capable of typing at me, or I at them. It's our little ritual.

--Van Der Graaf Perm (ret'd)

October 20, 2003

Scott, I liked reading your list of favorite albums, esp. the nods to underappreciated records of different eras, i.e. Spirit or Royal Trux. However, no mention of Harry Nilsson anywhere. What gives? Aerial Ballet? :)

Scott: Thanks a lot for writing, Paul. I like the label you work for a lot.

Harry Nilsson is one of those artists I'm undereducated about. I own only one of his albums - the Lennon collaboration *Pussycats*, which unfortunately I found quite mediocre the one time I listened to it. Taking inventory of what else I know about him: I like his "Daddy's Song" from *Head* a lot. "Coconut" was a cute novelty song -- maybe like the two hundredth best song of 1972. I liked "the Point" quite a bit as a child, but I haven't revisited it; using memory alone, I rather suspect the hit wouldn't grab me ("Me and My Arrow") but there was something that goes "this is the town and these are the people" that might (grab me). "Jump Into the Fire" is a fine rocker, but probably not as interesting to me as rockers on other records that wouldn't quite make my top 20, like, say, Moody Blues albums. "Daylight" was a more respectable novelty song in my book -- maybe the *one* hundredth best song of 1974, or whenever it was.

So I haven't had the experience it takes to get him into the category of my *very* favorites, but probably within striking distance. Any suggestions what albums I have to listen to?

Keep up the great work, I am a big fan of your records, recently re-discovered *Days for Days* (my favorite) and it hasn't left my CD player for days and days....

Paul Finn
[MERGE Records](#)

Thank you. I very much enjoy hearing that you liked it.

--Harry Nihilism

October 27, 2003

Scott, I've been a fan since high school, blah blah blah. Here's my question: why do your songs have so damn many chords? I'm dumb and I suck at guitar but I want to learn your songs so either make me smart or stop using so many chords.

Scott: I tend to like a lot of chord changes, and I've never quite answered the question of whether it's really the best way to write, or I'm just obsessively adding chords for some spurious notion of improvement. It may be a mix of the two. I think Quincy Jones once said that a song is poorly written unless you can get the gist of it by humming it, or something, and I sometimes wish I could apply that ideal a little better. But part of it is I just have a busy ear. Songs that sound busy to some people sound just right to me. I think when I've done the best job is when you're not really aware that there are a lot of chords until you actually try to learn it. Not to presume it's true for my stuff, but for me, those can be the fun ones to learn because you learn the little secrets of why they sound satisfying.

Sorry if it's been asked before; I've never read Ask Scott before today, though I've been on the mailing list for what seems like forever.

Evan Gregg

Thanks for writing, Evan. I think there are some web sites that have chord charts for my songs. Just search on some lyrics.

chordially,

--Scott

November 3, 2003

Scott, it's me, the guy who got you into *Harper's*, for what it's worth. This is brief and doesn't involve philosophy or literature or anything as dignified as that (just as, as I expected, my frivolous *Harper's* letter followed a more dignified missive involving the tragic plight of some peoples somewhere). But I had to write when, in answer to a fan's question as to why not soldier on alone, you replied:

Maybe if I can get the right kind of help. I'm not too much of a one man band; I can't play (or simulate on computer) drums or keyboards, for instance.

Ever since the tragic plight of the Scott Miller Appreciation People has come to pass, I have been wondering, "what the hell is wrong with your acoustic guitar?" Not that you owe anyone anything, of course (except to me for the *Harper's* thing, but you know that already), but if you regret the circumstances of your situation, it seems like a great idea to put out an acoustically conceived record. I say conceived because I do not simply mean "unplugged" (sheesh -- did that make you cringe, too?). But I have wondered lately just how cool it would be if you were to work up some material to be recorded in a more off-the cuff and intimate way... something sort of Howe Gelb-like, I guess. Where the time between conception and recording is too short for much cranial interference. Of course, you are you and he is him, and that's why your records sound different, but I guess I somehow have the instinct that just such a recording is waiting untapped within you, and this is the ideal time to give that a shot. I know you've played acoustically at shows... so... whad'ya think?

Andy Davis

(ok, it wasn't that brief)

Scott: Thank you for writing!

I think that's a fine idea -- if my project with Aimee Mann ever gets finished and released, it will be a lot like what you describe. It should have one new song Aimee and I are co-writing. I might release some more originals one of these days if there's a good opportunity, but it I'm not sure if it's likely to be more acoustic than other music I've recorded.

unplugging away,

--Scott

Scott, how are you enjoying fatherhood?

Jerry Murphy

Scott: I love it. Like people say, there's a lot of work involved, but I love my little girl supremely.

--Scott

November 10, 2003

Scott, I recently got interested in Game Theory and The Loud Family. I only own *The Big Shot Chronicles* on LP, and *Plants and Birds and Rocks and Things* on CD. However, I have visited the Loud Family website, and love your best albums list.

Scott: Thanks on both counts.

I am also a fan of Radiohead and Weezer, and I noticed that you rated *Weezer* (The Blue Album) 4th in 1994 and *O.K. Computer* 4th in 1997. I checked 1996 for *Pinkerton* and 1995 for *The Bends*, and was surprised that neither was listed. I was especially shocked because you mentioned the Green Album as one of your favorite albums of 2001. In my opinion, *The Bends* and *Pinkerton* rival *O.K. Computer* and The Blue Album. Anyway, I'm wondering if those two albums slipped through the cracks, or if you just don't like them very much.

Matthew Sussman

I like *The Bends* more today than I did in 1995. It would certainly be in my top 20 of that year today. The best cut is the opener, "Planet Telex." I've never been as crazy about "High and Dry" and "Fake Plastic Trees" as the rest of the world. *Pinkerton* I've never heard at all.

I don't like that Weezer green album all that much. I doubt it would make a formal top 20 of mine for 2000 if I did one. But 2000 wasn't that strong a year -- not nearly as strong as 2001 -- so I'm not certain. There are countless recent releases I haven't heard. I used to get sent free albums by labels and fans who'd keep me pretty well informed, but I'm off their radar now, so if I did favorite album lists it would almost be an accident of who I happened to run across.

--former enumeration junkie

November 17, 2003

Scott, I have to admit that I had never heard of the Loud Family until quite recently. Jeez, where have I been?!

Scott: Where everyone else has been, it sounds like.

I came across an old Aimee Mann interview from the time of *I'm With Stupid* and she waxed lyrical about *Plants and Birds and Rocks and Things*. I was intrigued enough to track down a copy and, to borrow a Peter Tork song title, it's blown the top right off of my head! I must find more stuff. Soon!

Thank you very much. And, wow, a Peter Tork song I don't know.

I'm fascinated by [your list of favorite albums](#) from each year going back into the 1960s and I find myself agreeing with many of your choices. However, I've noticed that in the 1980s section you list albums by Black Flag and Husker Du but nothing by the Minutemen. Not even the magnificent *Double Nickels on the Dime*. How come?

Okay, it's not much of a question but I'd like to hear your views on this great band.

Ian Marshall

I've been asked that very question before. I only bought that album about two years ago, obviously long after I made that list, because people kept insisting it was a grievous oversight in my lists. Before that I'd only heard parts, which I'd mostly liked, but nothing that seemed like it was going to threaten to displace the Tall Dwarves at number 20.

Eighties music is a little tough to rank according to any sort of aesthetic theme, because it divides so obviously between ostensibly big-production, emotions-for-the-big-screen music (Prince, U2) and self-consciously indie music. I still feel there was a strange coldness to the decade despite all the various attempts to generate heat.

I think most people would admit *Double Nickels* is magnificent in a difficult way, and you can be a right-thinking person without being in quite the right mood for it. The Minutemen definitely don't schmooze up the community of melodic preciousness the way, say, Elvis Costello or the Smiths do. The tradition here is more beat poetry, art-jazz-funk stuff that for the most part traces easily to styles that were anti-traditional recently enough in history. This isn't bad, it just means the artist will be end-running my ear rather than coming right at it, so it's going to be reasonable for it to be quite good but still miss my top 20 if I'm not right in the sweet spot of the intended fringe audience.

Except that the Minutemen's lyrics have an honest ring, and don't use the words "dawn" and "man," *Double Nickels* reminds me in a couple of bizarre but striking ways of the ELP album *Tarkus*. The playing is very impressive in a jazzy way and the lyrics have the ring of something important and iconoclastic being said, but if you subtract off any "blown away" factor and you hold a gun to my head and ask "what does it actually mean? Are you positive you would embrace this if there was absolutely no cultural pressure to consider it significant?" my truthful answer would have to be it's not obviously stuff I'd hum in the shower, and where I'm actually able to pin down the cultural slant in the lyrics, I confess I'm apt to have the mental reaction that I know more about life than this person.

But that's just to explain negatives. The album is really a triumph of personality and intangibles, which of course *Tarkus* is not, so let's end by saying it would stand a chance of

making my top 20 of 1984 if I scrupulously re-evaluated everything today. Unquestionably, there's something unique and compelling about D. Boon's delivery and lyric style.

bitches crystal knows how I twist all the lines

--Scott

December 1, 2003

Scott, I feel a bit hesitant to ask a question, seeing how I have never heard a full song that you have written (my computer has made it about halfway through downloading "Erica's Word" once) or even seen an actual copy of one of your albums. I'm currently a college student at University of MD, songwriter/ guitarist/ bookstore manager. I actually was born after you released the early EP's with Game Theory (I was probably about 5 when Game Theory stopped releasing music) but positive reviews and obscure song titles have helped me find my way to your website. After looking at some of the Ask Scott archives, I've become even more intrigued with the band as a whole and especially the obvious devotion of your fans. My first question is whether you frequently receive feedback from people such as myself who wouldn't have any medium to hear anything by your band, and who are too young to have experienced it firsthand.

Scott: It would make sense that a fair number of "Ask Scott" submissions are from people in your category.

I'm assuming that comparisons to Big Star (who is practically unknown at my music-illiterate campus, which is actually one of my favorite -- Tommy Keene's -- old stomping grounds) have helped others discover the band. I also was intrigued by your top 20 lists; not only do I love reading lists of any kind (it could have been your top 20 shampoo brands and I probably would have read it) but I also wanted to see what bands besides Big Star shaped your musical direction.

Actually I wasn't well-informed enough to have known about Big Star in my formative years, that is, from 1972 to 1974 when those records came out. I first published those lists in 1982 in a piece in my college newspaper and kept doing them for fanzine publication, etc., until 1999. I think it was 1981 that I heard Big Star for the first time, in a "you sound like this guy" situation.

Now, again, as I am only vaguely familiar with the greater concept of Scott Miller rather than the distillation of the concept into 3 minute packages (quite different than the usual circumstance), I don't know exactly how you funnel these influences into songs. I was pleasantly surprised to see albums by T. Rex, the Knack, and Black Sabbath on your lists. I think that artists such as the Beatles and Led Zeppelin achieve greatness because their songs cover the expansive range of human emotions and aural dynamics symbolizing these emotions. I was a little disappointed that there was a lack of albums that would have made me go "Wow, what an all-encompassing list..." Now, clearly, picking an album for pure kitsch value is probably not the best way to introduce fans to new music, but I was seemed to notice a trend of "critical acceptance" among the artists you picked.

Maybe I'm overstepping my bounds and will get laughed back to Baltimore for this one, but I was wondering what your take on some commonly laughed at, but really quite good bands are (no, not "guilty pleasures" -- remember my whole expanse of human emotions theory). Didn't you ever just want to crank up a Def Leppard CD in your car and sing along (really great melodies and production), or read David Lee Roth's book (one of the funniest people in pop music, and early Van Halen has proven impossible to duplicate), or steal a riff from Guns N' Roses?

Here are some positive statements about those artists: "Sweet Child O' Mine" is one of the twenty or so best songs of that year. "Jamie's Crying" is one of the thirty or so best songs of that year (1978 -- very tough competition year!), and I have laughed more than once at David Lee Roth's witticisms in interviews. "Bringing On the Heartache" is one of the thirty or so best songs of that year -- '81, wasn't it?

But speaking truthfully of my overall personal involvement with them, most of those bands' material is really boring to me, and would have been at any point in my life. I'm old enough that to me hard rock is Hendrix and *Beggars Banquet*; I like my hard rock fairly bluesy and arty. The White Stripes are much more my speed as hard rock goes.

I will also add that if you don't think it's dicier to admit to thinking *Get the Knack* is a great album than *Appetite For Destruction*, you know a different set of critics and rock fans than I do.

(Maybe you did these things and just don't really talk about them...) I mean, I love Pavement records and Big Star's *3rd/Sister Lovers* is a classic, but I can't really listen to them very often...

Maybe it's just me -- I've always found *Big Star Third* to be one of the most pleasant listens ever. Although I'm very wedded to the "Stroke It Noel" PVC sequence. "Kizza Me" is an okay -- if brash -- opener, but put "Thanks You Friends" second instead of last, and I almost think "well of course you won't like it."

Pavement have plenty of songs I've always considered highly listenable: "Summer Babe," "Debris Slide," "Grounded," "Stereo," "Texas Never Whispers," "Ann Don't Cry." They're one of those bands that a lot of people like for, well, I won't say wrong reasons, but maybe the same reason they'd like a lot of other bands I think are terrible. You'd think from the press that they existed just to challenge the faint of heart with grating, half-assed recordings, but most of their material is quite thoughtful and entertaining. I find "Cut Your Hair" off-the-scale enjoyable and accessible and have some difficulty imagining anyone preferring to hear "Running With the Devil."

Maybe I just like a little too much red meat and sugar with my usually healthy musical diet, but I wonder if any of Mitch Easter's Mick Box fandom ever rubbed off on you.

Other people have asked me about Uriah Heep. Never heard a note.

Final question -- any chances for a rerelease of the Game Theory CDs, or a Game Theory box (I'm sure that Not Lame Records would take one look at eBay prices and jump at the

chance, I hear the Posies and Jellyfish sets were excellent too). Thanks for listening -- if you want any recommendations for cheesy fist-in-the-air anthem CDs, I'll fill you in.

Perry

About half the material had one round of reissuing in the nineties, but nowadays I hear about reissue plans coming and going and I'm just kind of numb to it all. I was all set to be involved in a sort of *Lolita Nation* director's cut project (that's one of the Game Theory records, if you don't know), but that seems to not be going anywhere. Apparently one problem is that the masters to all that stuff are in the Capitol Records vaults and it's not clear who will be able to gain physical access to them.

thanks a lot for writing,

--Ramblin' T.S. Eliot

December 8, 2003

Scott, a recent review of *From Ritual to Romance* in *Uncut* magazine referred to the Loud Family as "[t]he Chicago brood." As a native Chicagoan, allow me to be the first to welcome you to the Windy City. It was very clever of you to pretend to be from somewhere else every time you played here.

Scott: Well, thanks; I do love Chicago. And I love brooding. Our booking agent is in Chicago. I wonder if that's the confusion.

I was recently making a "Best of the Loud Family" tape (er, sorry) for a friend of mine who, despite her many positive qualities, has somehow managed to spend 36 years on this planet without becoming familiar with your work. As I was re-listening to all the Loud Family CDs, writing down song lengths, and considering the proper track order to ensure maximum listener impact, it occurred to me that I was spending way too much time and effort making something that I really ought to be able to purchase.

You know, you need Mac iTunes. It takes care of the song length computations and lets you audition the transitions.

So I need to ask: Is there any possibility that we will see a *Tinker to Evers to Chance*-type Loud Family compilation someday? The merits of such a CD seem so obvious that I don't feel the need to go into them here, but I will offer my suggested track listing if it will help ease the pain of trying to condense the Loud Family's history into 75 minutes.

Sure, I'd like to see it -- I value an opinion that's had some thought put into it.

Alias own the Loud Family master recordings, and I don't think they're putting new things out, so I'm not able to imagine how the release of such a thing would go.

Finally, thanks for signing my CD of *Lolita Nation* a few years back, and I'm sorry I joked at the time that I hoped to sell it on eBay someday to finance the educational needs of my as yet unborn children. I feel kind of bad about that whenever I think of it.

Andrew McDonald

Better than selling your unborn children on eBay to buy CDs, though.

trying to condense the Loud Family's history into 10 years,

--Scott

December 15, 2003

Scott, I was wondering what your opinions were on the bootleg trend -- you know, the thing where you take the vocal track to one song and attach it to the instrumental track of another song and hopefully end up with something interesting when you're done. (It could use a better name, though, frankly -- I mean, "bootleg" already has a music-related meaning, and the alternate word "mash-ups" just sounds too juvenile to me.)

Scott: Your mail is the first I've heard of it.

Such songs, of course, dwell in that area of intellectual property rights where things start to get nebulous. One could come up with a defense of the practice claiming that bootlegs are critical speech (the implied criticism being, for instance, "This Christina Aguilera vocal sure does sound better with music by the Strokes instead of the crap on the original song"), but I find it a little depressing to have to get so legalistic. Thoughts?

It's nice to think of people having the right to create whatever they want for themselves, with whatever raw materials they want, and play it for as many friends as they can -- as a noncommercial, social experience, in physical space -- without having to pay anyone royalties.

And, if it turns out you also enjoy the genre, or at least intellectually approve of it, what do you think about making an a cappella version or two of your songs available on the site for people like me (yes, it's true, I have made a number of bootlegs myself, as you perhaps had guessed by now) to play around with?

I'm flattered, but I love mankind far too much to ever let it hear me singing a capella.

Just how unexpectedly great does this stuff sound? It's a little hard to imagine anything like radically serendipitous combinations. Have you tried playing "The Wizard of Oz," only instead of the soundtrack, you play *Dark Side of the Moon*, and instead of the *Dark Side of the Moon* vocal tracks, it's Christina Aguilera?

This isn't meant to imply your songs need improving! It's just that, as someone who acquired the technology to create bootlegs based on the fact that not enough other

people working within the genre were really catering to my esoteric musical tastes, it gets hard to dig up interesting vocal tracks to work with.

Francis Heaney

If it makes you feel any better, I don't own any of my masters, so I wouldn't have the option of playing with my own vocal tracks even if I wanted to.

having a mash-up with the YardAikens,

--Scott
