

ASK SCOTT

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

1997 (Year 1: the start of Ask Scott)

July 21, 1997

Scott, what's your favorite pizza?

Jeffrey Norman

Scott: My favorite pizza place ever was Symposium Greek pizza in Davis, CA, though I'm relatively happy at any Round Table. As for my favorite topping, just yesterday I was rereading "Ash Wednesday" by T.S. Eliot (who can guess the topping?):

*Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree
In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety
On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained
In the hollow round of my skull. And God said
Shall these bones live? shall these
Bones live? And that which had been contained
In the bones (which were already dry) said chirping:
Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness. And I who am here dissembled
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd.
It is this which recovers
My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions
Which the leopards reject.*

A: pepperoni.

honest pizza,

--Scott

August 14, 1997

Scott, what's your astrological sign?

Erin Amar

Scott: Erin, wow! How are you?

Aries.

Do you think you are much like the publicized characteristics of that sun sign?

Some people, it's important to know their signs; not me. David Hemmings, Anne Rice, Mia Farrow - if you don't know *their* signs, you gotta be missing a rich other plane of being.

Do you believe in astrology?

Two star beliefs are popular: one, that adventures involving gods and animals ended in their outlines being traced in the stars, and their position at our birth imprints our personality; two, that long ago, matter was crushed infinitely close together until one day it exploded into the observable universe, which is still generally expanding.

What I personally believe is that people born at the same time of year have a weak tendency to share traits, and that light from distant sources is frequency-shifted as if we were moving away from it. I think the other two beliefs are abstractions from those, the logic of which seems shaky to me.

Keith Moon is in the 7th house; Donnie Jupiter aligns with Chris Mars,

--Scott

September 4, 1997

Scott, do you think that you would like to, at some time, pass on your musical/scientific/artistic/tennis genes to your progeny? Would you encourage your sons or daughters to be musicians?

Bill Holmes

Scott: Well, my mother plays a *little* piano, but other than that my parents don't do any music, science, art, or tennis, so chances are I'll have to go well beyond the modest biological requirements of fatherhood if I'm going to pass those interests on.

I wouldn't encourage my kids to be professional musicians. It's a difficult life. It seems like a bad idea to have kids for anything like a furtherance of your own scope and endurance on earth. I don't want to be like a dying tom cat trying to spray all over so his inconvenienced survivors will be forced to think of him as formidable. I hope if I have kids it will be a way of giving myself up, not a way of hoarding myself.

--Scott

September 8, 1997

Scott, apart from those included on [Friends of the Family](#), are there other songs you would like to see covered? Or, is there a particular artist/band you wish would do one of your tunes?

Bettina

Scott: Most of my songs have a sort of skin-crawly aspect that I have trouble imagining putting a lot of singers in the position of having to deliver. I mean, if David Bowie decides to do "Together Now, Very Minor," yippee, but I can't imagine him singing "look-at-me togs boxed up at mom's on the floor." Or Pavement either, for different reasons. Having said that, maybe someone like Chris Stamey, since he's to some extent the source of that style for me, if you can call it a style.

Do you listen to your own recordings often? Do you listen because you think it's a good album and you (like the rest of us) enjoy hearing it or because you want to critique some aspect of it?

Oh no, I wouldn't say "want." A whole lot of personal investment goes into an album and it's awfully painful when it occurs to you that something should have been different.

Have you always lived in California?

Yes. In fact, my family on my mother's side has been here since before the gold rush. They didn't save me any.

Has the thought of moving out of the state ever appealed to you?

What, and give up surfing? Not even, bud.

Traveling is great, but as far as where I live goes, I don't think it makes a huge difference given the focuses in my life, and just making a move is a big distraction from other things in a lot of ways.

How many pets do you have and what are their names?

Right now I have six pet rats whose names are Bat-rat, Princess Rat, Runty, Capar, Jim Scurrier and John McEnrodent.

drunk on civil rats,

--Scott

September 17, 1997

Scott, have you read the recent (well, last year) manifestoes from the Eliot Was An Anti-Semite camp, the Eliot Was A Product Of His Times camp, the Eliot Was An Evil Genius camp, and the rest? Has it changed your reading of his poems?

Aaron Mandel

Scott: Not only was Eliot *not* a product of his times, he was so much at odds with his times and in so complex a way that it's very easy to misunderstand him. Though it's easy to see why the 1920 poems are taken to be anti-Semitic, I don't think it's that simple.

First, let's remember that Eliot's favorite contemporary work was Joyce's *Ulysses*, whose "Nestor" chapter was as profoundly critical of anti-Semitism as you can get. Eliot read the "Nestor" chapter (which, as an aside, is my favorite passage in literature) in 1918 and it influenced his 1918-1920 poems deeply. The best of these poems, "Gerontion," is narrated with a voice not unlike that of Joyce's Mr. Deasy, echoing Protestant progressive-industrial Europe in feeble old age. Even years before his conversion, Eliot was firmly aligned with the Anglican/Catholic tradition and like Joyce, he saw the progressives as having an anti-Semitic streak he wanted to deconstruct.

The old man in "Gerontion" complains that his "house" is a "decayed house, and the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner." Elsewhere, caricature Jews are "thought to be in league," and a narrator sneers at "Bleistein" who "stares from the protozoic slime at a perspective of Canaletto." At first glance this might read as vile snobbishness about post-Renaissance art treasures, but it should quickly be noted that Eliot disliked the Renaissance ([footnote 1](#)) and the Enlightenment; his theme was that a certain pious humility was lost with the Medieval age. The diction of "protozoic slime" is obviously not Eliot's (if Eliot were pleased with himself for freshman name-calling, this be a sorry spectacle); "Protozoic" betrays exactly the sort of Darwinian mind-set that Eliot would think points up a failing of the "Age of Enlightenment." Eliot had no quarrel with evolution as science, but he (and Joyce) were appalled at the acceptance of it as the new LOGOS of sociology. In short, Christian "progressives" would think themselves superior to Jews precisely because 1900 years of historical "progress" had been made since Christ started this *ball of progress* rolling. I think Eliot the linguist is also noting that at least Judaism is "protozoic" in the sense of being generative of vitality. Eliot's complaint is that the narrators dislike Jews hardly out of any high-minded wish to revive Christianity, but because they have chosen a socialite commercialism they would associate with Jewishness, and simply resent the competition.

Now, this is dangerously close to wishing to unite Christians in their common distate for Jewishness, and Eliot deeply regretted that such a structuring was perceived; regarding such usages, in light of the rise of Nazism, he has said he "was a sick man." Yet, it is important to realize our own susceptibility to that sickness. Far more straightforward religious bigotry than anything in Eliot can be witnessed today; it just happens to be fashionably acceptable to refer pejoratively to Christian "moralists" whereas in 1920 it was fashionably acceptable to refer pejoratively to Jewish "bankers." Think of Sinead O'Connor tearing up the picture of the Pope; if some world power started mass-murdering Catholics, this might be a gesture history would never let her live down. The issue of whether Eliot was out-of-line or not has to be decided in the same breath as whether Tool, Public Image Ltd. and Nine Inch Nails have been.

Eliot's later poetry is my favorite of any poetry; it shows the way out of the scapegoating mentality, and celebrates the Old Testament, Buddhism and Hinduism as well as his own Christian faith in a way that avoids dogmatism and didacticism. "Prufrock" is the easiest as an introduction, "The Waste Land" the most spectacular, and *Four Quartets* the richest.

like a girl Moses,

--Scott

(footnote 1) I'm no expert in categorizing paintings, but I see a definite meaning in the choice of the word "perspective." The Renaissance introduced perspective painting, which, while yielding wonderful results, was a way of handing sovereignty over to the worldly self by, in effect, saying "what *you* see, the way *you* see it, is what is worth exalting in art."

September 22, 1997

Scott, what are your thoughts on the pros and cons of working with someone with whom you're romantically involved?

James Hogard

Scott: The "pro" is that it's convenient--for at least one party; the "con" has to do with that word "romantically," which means by definition that something or other is being romanticized. If part of the something-or-other is the very glamour or success of what one person is "working" on, it's obviously dangerous magic to break that aura of mystery by turning it into part of the daily routine.

--Dr. Ruthless

September 29, 1997

Scott, why didn't dating a supermodel make your life ok? And what will make your life ok?

Kelly

Scott: It's actually "supermodels," plural--that's how lively a (fictional) social life I was having. When I wrote the song, in 1991, people said "supermodel" pretty reverently, as if actually describing some new breakthrough in human desirability. Now it's David-Lettermanized into common irony, so I doubt I picked too durable a term. Anyway, the idea was that, surprise, even dating the most desirable person you can think of doesn't make desire pack its bags and say "my work here is done." Yet that's what human brains are hardwired to perpetually expect.

This year I read an utterly brilliant book on desire in the formation of culture and religion. It's called *Things Hidden Since The Foundation Of The World*, and it's by a French theorist at Stanford University named Rene Girard. Talk about a book with a pretentious title somehow managing to live up to it! If you put a gun to my head and said "make my life okay or else," I'd hand you that book and say "okay, you asked for it."

oh, the rich people want what the poor people got

--Scott

October 6, 1997

Scott, i love all three loud family albums.

Scott: Thank you. They love you, too.

How come *the tape of only linda* is the usual standard album format (meaning 10 songs - average 3 to 4 minutes long and like 45 minutes in length, while the other two seem to be less structured - 20 songs, ranging from 1 to like 4 minutes in length and a hour long or so)?

The short answer is that since 1986 I've been tending to write songs in that variable-length mode, but that doesn't mean I always get to do things exactly my way. A lot of people have input on records, and people sometimes raise the completely legitimate objection that too much experimentation distracts from how music is supposed to work. You try to strike the best balance you can, and you also try to avoid making an album that's uncomfortably similar to any of your other albums.

Also what exactly is interbabe concern anyway?

Ant

It doesn't refer to anything; it's just a phrase that popped into my head. I suppose it's deliberately ambiguous, if you can glorify thinking "aha, that's a good title, I'm not sure why" that way.

long and like 45,

--Scott

October 13, 1997

Scott, in listening to a live Loud Family tape I was struck by how your guitar sound translates so well live. Specifically the intro to "The Real Sheila." I'd like some info on your amplification set-up and effects.

Kenneth LaBarre

Scott: I play a Telecaster, which since about 1992 has for some reason been the guitar used by almost all alternative rock acts--probably just because they're inexpensive and pretty expressive compared to something like a Les Paul. By "expressive" I mean they're trebly and you can hear a lot of string transients, as opposed to having a purer, ringing sound. My "clean" (unfuzzy) tone has a lot of compression and an EQ in sort of a rolling hill pattern which boosts the lows and cuts the highs, except for a little spiky boost at about 3k. Marshall EQs are all but useless so you need an outboard EQ to get a bright guitar like a Fender to sound warm at all.

Fuzz pedals are sort of a black art. Each one has its own input volume and EQ it likes the best. I've had good luck with Bosses, which are dependable, Rats, which I guess you'd say have the most purely aggressive sound, and something called the Yardbox which allegedly has the electronics

used by Jimmy Page from 1966-68. Can't you tell? I never use Marshall overdrive (this just means you turn the first amp stage way, way up) live because it requires too much fussing to get it right, but in the studio that's probably the best sound.

Here's one live issue not many people believe in, but is real: if you use long or crummy cords, it worsens the sound--you get high frequency and transient loss from long pieces of metal in close proximity--and the best way to compensate is to boost the signal at the source with a preamp. My friend Don Tillman designed an ingenious tiny preamp that's distributed into the housing of the cord plugs, and I swear by those but obviously they're not mass-marketed; they should be!

what do we sensitive songwriters know, we're too busy stopping war

--Scott

October 20, 1997

Scott, I'm the proud new owner of a Loud Family J-shirt. I'm sure this has probably been answered before, but I can't recall the response. Just what does the "J" on the front of the shirt stand for? Joyce? Jesuit? Justification? Joker? Prying, bored minds need to know!

Roger Winston

Scott: It's one of those cases where if you answer the question you probably spoil the fun, but ostensibly it was "J" for "Jimmy" in the song; we did one prototype shirt for the "Jimmy Still Comes Around" video before we decided to make production copies. Zach Smith's son Joaquin played (if that's the word) the Jimmy of the video and wore the shirt. The letter is positioned as it is to look like a tie if you wear it with a jacket. Just like those tuxedo T-shirts we never get tired of.

Of course, I had in mind that people might pick out different "J" associations, "Joyce" being among them, and there's one other that relates to a lyric of mine. And of course Jamiroquois.

Jesuit, Joker, midnight toker

--Scott

Scott, wordy folks' words seem to provide a good deal of inspiration to you. Here's a very select list: Joyce, Eliot, Nabokov, Joyce, Barthes, Joyce.... This little column itself has been rather literary itself thus far, already kicking out a recommendation I plan to track down in Rene Girard. So: What have you been reading since *Interbabe Concern*, and do you see any of it making its impression on future recording projects?

Jon Tveite

Scott: Thanks to my friend Bob Lloyd (who I'm pretty sure is or has been on Loud-Fans) I've been introduced to this guy in Sonoma named Gil Bailie who does Christian-oriented lecture series on literature. I hesitate to say the word "Christian" because it conjures up images of sweaty

televangelists and people dancing with snakes, but this guy is better at stating the truths of the classics in plain language than I thought possible. He bests anything I've experienced academically or, say, on PBS, and I mean that to say a lot. Via Bailie, I've gotten much more interested in classic writing lately. I've been studying Dante's *INFERNO*, a couple of Shakespeare plays--*KING LEAR* and *JULIUS CAESAR*--and the Gospel of John. I've also gotten interested in the philosophical writings of Derrida, Wittgenstein, and Martin Buber, and I've been reading a lot more poetry: Wallace Stevens, Yeats, Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold, Allen Ginsberg, W.H. Auden, to name a few.

I can't say it all affects "future recording projects" much, because study is understanding, and what I write and think of as good lines are those that say something I don't understand, but feel is true. What it has done is reveal that much past ground I've covered has been covered earlier and better, and that is a good feeling.

Also: What would you consider your (let's say) 5 favorite books of fiction (Is it allowable if I ask you to exclude Jimmy J.? Is he not a given?)?

Here is a speedy listing of my ten favorite novels. You may pick the Joyce out with a fork if you like and that will still leave five, but I want to stress that Joyce seems to me to be in a league of his own given the novels I've read, though I haven't read many. I don't love the novel form; maybe I'm just thick, but I think novels overextend what one person can have to say to another about the world given a year or two's research. The top half of my list strikes me as refined past this, but whenever novels run out of simple intrigue, they tend to fall into a sort of formulaic display of personal insightfulness, and beyond the scope of about a chapter, one insightful individual carries on in fiction a lot like the next. That said, I have nothing against intrigue, even porn; if I were honest with myself, I'd probably put *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE* on a list of 20.

1. *FINNEGANS WAKE* - James Joyce
2. *ULYSSES* - James Joyce
3. *A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU* - Marcel Proust
4. *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* - Jane Austen
5. *HEART OF DARKNESS* - Joseph Conrad
6. *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN* - James Joyce
7. *WISE BLOOD* - Flannery O'Connor
8. *THE SOUND AND THE FURY* - William Faulkner
9. *PALE FIRE* - Vladimir Nabokov
10. *NAKED LUNCH* - William S. Burroughs

Finally, for extra credit: Does the name "Donald Barthelme" ring any charmed bells for you (just curious)?

Not to presume I got any regular credit, but I lose the extra.

"I'm not a literary critic, but I play one on the web"

--Scott

October 27, 1997

Scott, I'm not even going to gush fan-like. It still wouldn't do justice to what your body of work means to me. However, if you feel like answering one of these. . .

Geoffrey Woolf

Scott: Thanks very much.

1. Do you know what Michael Quercio is up to these days? Do you know if there's any chance of another PGL LP happening any time soon. Any chance that you will collaborate with him again?

Last I heard he was in L.A. doing wonderful things with Permanent Green Light. Oddly enough, he called and left a message some time ago, and the return number didn't work. If someone contacts him, please ask him to try again.

2. Do you have any thoughts on the new Oasis LP?

I haven't heard much of it yet. I liked the first and loved the second, but I have trouble imagining a long and full relationship with them.

If I'm remembering right, they gave one of the most Tufnelesque interviews I've ever heard, which went something like this:

Oasis member: "The only important bands have been Oasis and the Beatles. If we were around in those days, we would have been the Beatles."

Interviewer: "Who would the Beatles have been."

Oasis member: "They would have been the Beatles, too. We both would have been the Beatles."

--Scott

November 3, 1997

Scott, it's often been said that the highway to hell is paved with good intentions.

Scott: Yes, for sorting out your finer Faustian points of the afterlife, your 80s metal rocker is your man.

What does that mean, anyway?

Paula Carino

AC/DC slant aside, this question is important as hell (rimshot), and since modern people don't conceive of hell, I may have to, as Dante used to say, get Medieval on your ass (rimshot w/ cymbal).

Einstein showed that time is like a fourth dimension of space; moderns should be uniquely qualified to say "eternal" and not necessarily mean "repeated infinitely into the future" but "true regardless of passing time." It should not be mysterious to say "all moments of our lives are eternal." We (more than most cultures) are hypnotized by the apparent specialness of the present moment, but do past moments disappear into unreality? It seems more likely to me that all moments are always "there" and just as real in geometric spacetime.

Yet when modern people hear "sin leads to hell," we think of God repeatedly punishing someone forever for breaking a taboo. What I think people like Augustine and Dante had in mind was closer to defining sin as thought which by nature deteriorates into inescapable misery. "Sinning" is acting on an incorrect model of reality--what is translated from the Greek as "sin" in the Bible is the same word ("hamartia") as the word meaning "tragic flaw" in Greek drama--and the deadliness of "deadly" sins isn't that they're greater abominations per se, but that in the social order they feed back: envy leads to more envy, wrath leads to more wrath.

Without speaking of reincarnation or afterlife (or upgrade!), hell has a useful meaning: it's getting into so wrong a frame of mind that you die before you get out of it. Your whole life is spent desperately grabbing and not getting, hurting those around you and infecting them with your attitude; and if that is what you have made of your existence in the spacetime cosmos, too bad. You have authored a reality which is always as it is.

Now, what road leads to hell? The first hell-on-earth most of us think of is the Nazi death camps. Let's note that the success of Nazism was by its own proclamation a "triumph of the will." In other words, a triumph of intent, a refusal to be slowed or contaminated by other points of view. And of course every impassioned person thinks his own intentions are "good." Dante and the Buddha would agree that the self before it is purged of worldly desires (what Rene Girard deftly identifies as "mimetic," or imitative desires) is something like a spoilt (Victorian?) child. The self outgrows "selfish" behavior as it learns more about the world, but for a time it only knows that it wants what other people want--shooting a rival to get his jacket or tennis shoes is good because you assimilate something you have observed to be perceived as good in other people's eyes.

In other words, everyone is initially on more or less the same road of bad (selfish) intents from the start, and human culture has the perpetual task of heading off crises of conflict. This, to me is the "Fall of Man," eating from the tree of knowledge in Genesis--not so much that knowledge is bad, but that a little knowledge is dangerous. The individual's will must be brought gradually in line with what has been called the divine will, what you would desire if you knew infinitely much about the cosmos, if you were fully awake.

To get off the road to hell is to go from "life is hell" to "life is hell because of people acting with the same intent as I have had." It is learning not to have your will triumph.

always back, never in the black

--Scott

November 10, 1997

Scott, You and Todd Rundgren would seem to be kindred spirits, with regard to both your musical sensibilities (read: genius)

Scott: What a generous word choice, thank you.

and your technical background. Have you ever considered a collaboration? Would one be possible?

I consider Todd to have made some of the best pop music of my era; I would be delighted to collaborate with him. However, I doubt he's heard of me, and I doubt he'd like my music if he had.

Should we fear that the two of you in close proximity might cause some sort of karmic meltdown?

jbenson

Let's put it this way. If the universe were to bring about sudden atonement for the combined effects of Todd and myself, I wouldn't want to be standing near electrical equipment.

--the ever-affected populist art torturer

Scott, I've recently been rekindling a dormant but once torrid teen affair I had with the music of Steely Dan. Aside from being struck by the odd notion that the Louds would sound wonderful covering "King of the World," I'm curious what feelings, if any, you have or have had for their music, their influence on you, their legacy whether good and evil (pronounce that short "i"), etc.

Jeffrey Norman

Scott: Really love their first three albums. I suspect my musical and lyrical worldviews owe them a large debt. I've had moments of intense nostalgia for that band--as if it's an unmistakable tragedy that college students in the future, who will have their own Ramones or Jonathan Richmans, will not have a Steely Dan, and will miss a certain feeling, maybe when grades are going rotten, of hints at the magnificent gravity of high culture, and of big city culture, by and for those who are just barely outsiders.

COUNTDOWN TO ECSTASY is probably the peak. Its hand is the steadiest. It can be apocalyptic without being brutal, consoling without being naively optimistic. It reminds me of EXILE IN GUYVILLE in that through its conversational flow alone, incisiveness together with the humility not to leave deadly blame lying around, it gives the impression of being in the presence of a young master.

Their mature period struck me as mannered and melodramatic--retelling of the plight of the *player* beyond my willingness to stake him.

there is most definitely a hole in the ground where they used to grow,

--Bodhiscottva

November 17, 1997

Scott, what inspired you to the tune of "Still its own Reward"? I can, or think I can make out the lyrics, but it would be fun to hear about those from the preverbal horses mouth as well...

Tim Pintsch

Scott: It's not so much a single emotional event with me, but more like over time I'll notice that certain emotional events share certain details, and then I'll use those details in referring to a fictional event. Rhyme schemes are funny; by placing this silly restriction on you, they can be good as the first cause of wanting to talk about something: "Survival," "rival"--"turn into your fiercest rival"; wait, I've actually felt that occur in relationships and no one really talks about it! Perfect! That kind of thing (I don't remember actual details of writing this song but you get the idea).

Kudos on your music, I just recently heard your music for the first time.

Thanks very much. Please tell hundreds of thousands of friends.

--the preverbal horse

Scott, I was walking to the UBahn stop in Munich, listening to *Interbabe Concern*, and I realized:

Someone else reads shampoo bottles.

Cool.

Libby Wilson

Scott: Thank you. With my hair, it can't hurt to send out the message that I've probably washed it at least once.

walking to the UBahngi stomp,

--Scott

November 24, 1997

Scott, whatever you do, don't take this as a criticism of your music...

Scott: Yeah, sure, then just when I start trusting you, in goes the knife.

The other day, I pulled out my copy of *Big Shot Chronicles* and popped it into my car radio. Played like a charm, despite my reckless college years a decade ago (eek!) when I abused tapes

horribly. Many an artist's work found a frightening death in the hot July sun. *Real Nighttime*, too, has played flawlessly since I first bought it oh so many years ago.

Contrast that with my experiences with *Lolita Nation* and *Two Steps...* About a dozen times after I played them (or, about a month after first buying them when they were released), they became plagued with this ungodly tinny sound. (No, Scott, it wasn't your voice.) I still have them, but they're pretty useless now.

What gives? Was the tape quality poorer as time went on? Luckily, I have *Two Steps* on cd, but I'm screwed with *Lolita*? What would Joyce or Eliot do?

Raymond Hennessey

LOLITA NATION, of course, was an underground release--not an establishment tool to keep the people from the truth like so-called "high quality" products. Maybe a few cassettes were exposed to tear gas when the man raided our basement, or crushed when we huddled together for warmth under the printing press; that is the tinniness of freedom, brother, and the azimuth error of revolution.

--Abbie Roadman

Scott, what's the best way to make new friends and meet interesting, eligible young babes?

Scott: Joining loud-fans didn't accomplish this? I blame myself.

Okay. Throw a party and invite your six favorite IEYBs, and also the five most attractive single guys you can think of. The guys will be all over the IEYBs, think you're the greatest for facilitating this, and feel good about being your friend. And even if they all pair off successfully there will be one babe left over for you.

How do you keep towels smelling fresh rather than stale and musty, downright funky at times?

John Cafiero

Dry the extremities of the body as usual, then while drying the face and shoulders, hold your breath.*

--King Solomonella

* And remember: a down bay towel to wad and chew on (a down bay towel's a wad you need).

December 1, 1997

Scott, what does the word "Regenisraen" mean and what's the song about?

Eric Davies

Scott: There's no hidden meaning that I can recall. I'll say a few things I think are obvious, and maybe they're not so obvious because I'm not so vivid a lyricist:

The word came to me in a dream, sung roughly as it is on the track. I'm sure it's not any real word. I hear fragments of the words "regeneration," "rain," and at least two more that I can't remember. It puts me in mind of something like a hymn, glorifying and calling up a source of renewal.

In the first verse I'm sleepless, and walking around outside at Christmastime in the snow, looking at the houses with Christmas lights.

In the second verse, I talk about "coastal cities" that "glitter on the black," maybe as they would look at night from an airplane. Then I say "mustard yellow and brick red between" meaning I guess (I just like the words there, I don't ponder what exactly they have to mean) inland, less flashy places, such as the primitive hut-dwelling veldtlands of Sacramento or Denver.

I say I cry to lose a friend, and that would be the dead variety of friend. The last line questions if I'm becoming patient in the face of such things, and whether that's good or bad. Then it's back to the old tabernacle for another rousing chorus.

December 8, 1997

Scott, I would really like to know how you were able to deal with the five year hiatus between *Two Steps* and *Plants and Birds*... You had formerly released an album a year up until 1989, it must have been a difficult period. Why didn't you just self produce a record during that period? I feel like we lost five years out of the career of one of the all time great songwriters.

Steven Matrick

Scott: That's incredibly nice of you to say. Right after TWO STEPS I had a hot writing streak, so about 2/3 of PLANTS could have come out in '89, but it wouldn't have been too good. That was a low-confidence period of my life, and sometimes that causes you to blow a project in subtle ways. There were a lot of hideous lyrics that the following years allowed me to identify and fix up. The early "Aerodeliria," for instance, was a real zero lyrically, it didn't have the "look what we've gotten ourselves in" part--which is maybe the best part--and of course Paul wasn't on the scene yet so it wouldn't have had any piano at all, and it's hard for me to think of that song existing without the piano solo.

I could have plowed ahead and put something out in about '91, but by that time the Loud Family had started, so there was some startup overhead for that lineup to learn songs. We talked about putting something out if we didn't get a deal, but as I say it was a low-confidence period and on some level you're waiting for labels to tell you you're good enough.

December 15, 1997

Scott, have you ever thought of going for broke, swallowing your pride and writing that complete and utter college radio symphony sell-out single that would instantly propel you into the land of Deep Blue Something and Four Non-Blondes?

Scott: Wow, I'm so old I remember when college radio wasn't a *leading indicator*, it was just a backwater. Those were the days.

It's obvious to anyone that really listens to your music that you can certainly write excellent songs, but lurking in the back of your mind (or even strutting at the front) must be the desire to sell (what we call in the UK) an absolute shitload of records. I know you can do it. You know you can do it But do you want to do it?

Ian-Paul Rushbury

Thanks, that's quite a compliment. I suspect my songs would stop seeming excellent to you if I tried to sell a lot, and not because it's somehow less noble to have a less exclusive audience. In the music business there are basically two ways to get popular: to imitate what is popular, or to imitate the preferred manner of distancing yourself from what is popular. Both severely limit the range of what you can get across--you effectively have to dedicate most of your bandwidth to making yourself acceptable by stylistic association--and the latter is insidiously deadly because it works against the musical experience. The problem with hipness is that it usually means you know not to do certain embarrassing things, and if you get a large enough library of things you have to avoid doing, you become hysterically unmusical: music, being entirely temporal, will only ever run on similarity, it will never run on difference. There is no such thing as negative resonance at the level of the ear. To put it in overly poetic terms, music can only be love, it can never be hate. What is purely musical is always love of what the music is, it can never be hatred of what the music is not--such a reaction is only valid in the realm of rhetoric, not music (not to claim my records work independently of a rhetorical dimension).

and the crowd goes mild, *

--Scott

* Footnote: this phrase is as far as I know a coinage of Tim Walters.

Scott, this is not in the form of a question, so I hope I'm not disqualified.

Scott: I don't know. Judges...?

Though your humility is charming, I can assure that Todd Rundgren both knows who you are and admires your work. (Editor's Note: The writer is referring to the 11/10/97 Ask Scott column.)

Okay, the judges will accept this since you used the word "charming."

On a "Guest DJ" feature that aired sometime last year on Philadelphia's WXPN, Rundgren played "Slit My Wrists" as one of his first selections. Though his exact words have long since escaped me, he was very complimentary.

Jim Sundra

Wow, that's very exciting. Thanks for passing it on.

--Scodd

December 22, 1997

Scott, tell us about what goes on in the studio. More specifically, are songs finished when you sit down to record them, or does the band help you mold them into the works of art that they are?

Scott: In the Loud Family the band have with rare exceptions written all their own parts. I've recorded many songs many different ways, but usually once recording starts, the song is mostly written and arranged. The first thing you record is drums and bass, with scratch guitar and vocal (meaning just for cuing, not the performance going on the record). Then you add one thing at a time, playing along to the tape.

I'm sure you've answered that question before, so I'll get right to the point. Did Gui come up with the bass line for "Last Day That We're Young" or did you?

I wrote that particular line but Gui wrote his own parts at least half the time. I think Rob wrote all his except "Aerodeliria"; Kenny writes all his.

Do you ever envision the other instrumental parts (i.e. how the keys should sound, or where a drum fill should be, etc.), or do you leave all of that up to the ensemble that you have assembled?

There's typically back-and-forth discussion of who plays what as you work it up. I'm not capable of composing the strokes of a drum fill, but I'll suggest that there be more or fewer fills in the song in general. Sometimes I'll write a piano part note-for-note (the one in "Inverness," for instance) but almost always the keyboardist writes the keyboard part.

In my mind, I see Elvis Costello dictating every sound that appears on his record - not because he's a fascist, but because he has this incredible musical vision. Do you think that's how he records?

I kind of doubt he does, but I'd be curious. The Attractions records have about the best small-combo arrangements in history, and his non-Attractions sessions can sometimes get downright incoherent; I suspect the Attractions bring a certain amount of creative firepower.

Is it that way for you? This brings up another question (sorry). Let say "Last Day That We're Young" originally was a sensitive ballad. Gui comes up with this propulsive bass line that transforms the whole thing into a giant-rock-rolling-down- this-big-hill-and-there-ain't-no-way-to-stop-it RAWK song. Does he then get songwriting credit? I would imagine, at that point, he would. The question is: where do you draw the line? How much of what we hear is Scott Miller and how much is Game Theory/Loud Family?

Theoretically the line is based on who deserves money if it's covered. When you talk about covering another artist's song, you usually mean you're going to sing the same words and melody over more or less the same chords, but on some songs you're lost if you don't import parts of the recorded arrangement (a cover of "Super Freak" without the bass line would be a pretty abstract concept), so if people contribute significantly enough to the arrangement I'll give them writing credit.

One of many Dougs,

Doug Stanley

our best wishes to your people

--the Scotts

December 29, 1997

Scott, what were your feelings on Princess Diana's death?

Scott: What disturbed me was the way so many people concerned themselves with whether or not others were mourning properly. "The royal family should have grieved more publicly," that kind of thing. What's with people appointing themselves the Sad Police?

Aren't you pretty tall? Are you a demon at the net? What do you prefer to play: singles, doubles or mixed? Two handed or one handed backhand?

I am a towering five foot eleven, a net novice, an enthusiast for both singles and doubles (have never played mixed) with a backhand which if I remember life before I started making this record was two-handed.

How old are you and are you getting grey hairs?

37, no grey hair, medium crows' feet, some crotchitiness, recognizes relatives' faces, mild wandering.

When are you playing Atlanta? (just kidding)

Bettina

Scott: Presumably we'll be there on the June tour. Uh, should I wonder why you're just kidding?

no slice till Brooklyn,

--Scott

Scott, regarding Raymond Hennessey's squealing tape dilemma--I *think* that might be caused by the gear thingies (am I getting too technical here?) inside the cassette scraping the inside walls of the tape. (*Editor's Note: The writer is referring to the 11/24/97 Ask Scott column.*) I think this because one of my tapes that developed this problem eventually just started sticking and not generally not moving any of its moving parts at all when I tried to play it. Anyway, if Ray's tape has not yet reached this final stage, perhaps the problem can be circumvented by making a copy of the original before it's too late (though he'll obviously have to leave the house while it's taping unless he wants to listen to a lot of squealing). I don't know if this experiment will really work, though, since it's too late for *me* to try it.

Sorry I don't have an actual question for you, Scott, but if it makes you feel better, I haven't been able to get "Spot the Setup" out of my head for days.

Francis Heaney

Scott: I think that might be caused by the song scraping the inside walls of your head. If your head has not yet reached the final stage, perhaps the problem can be circumvented by having the head replaced with a copy (people will want to leave the house unless they want to listen to a lot of squealing).

busy turning on the machines that NEATLY PUMP AIR

--Scott
