

ASK SCOTT

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

2000 (Year 4)

January 3, 2000

Scott, hope all is well on your end of the continent. Haven't resorted to the Ask Scott venue in awhile, but I'm eagerly anticipating your work for the Rykodisc benefit and have a few questions on that front.

Scott: That benefit release seems not to have gone forward, though I'll be up for participating if the idea gets resurrected.

First, to the best of my knowledge this song will be the first song you've ever recorded and released as a "solo artiste," per se. How is the process of recording as "Scott Miller" differ from the process of a bandleader writing and then recording with others, as you did in *Game Theory* and the Louds?

The most obvious difference in the process is that I play the drums and piano myself, usually in the form of tapping the keys on a sampler keyboard, with terrible results.

Second, when another of my favorite songwriters, Neil Finn, broke up Crowded House and released a solo album after two decades of band work (*Split Enz* and *Crowded House*), there was a lot of unhappy muttering among his fans that the new material was missing the intangible nuances of his band work with established collaborators. Do you worry that some of your fans may find fault somehow with your solo work outside the Loud Family?

I don't know Neil Finn at all, and I can't critique myself like that, let alone keep a straight face while discussing *My Solo Process*, so instead let's talk about what we'd all be more interested in: Pink Floyd. If I never have another forum after "Ask Scott," I'd hate to have squandered the opportunity to publicly complain about Roger Waters.

First, why does Roger hire Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck to play all over his records? Because that's how you Replace David Gilmour. As if anyone wanting to make an album has to Replace David Gilmour. It's easy to imagine most of Roger's recent artistic decisions being made with that kind of reactive, obstacle-surmounting logic. It's sort of like watching a person ride into the ocean on a tricycle out of sheer spite for people who don't think he'll make it across. His records paradoxically end up sounding like junior versions of the post-Roger Floyd records, with the female choir vocals, the sound effects, the arena-style blues guitar, but as if it's the work of an impresario who wouldn't budget to hire the original band. Moreover, the real desperation shouldn't be over the loss of Gilmour's guitar, but of that *glorious* voice. His singing was for one thing *sine qua non* for the hits to have happened, and for a lyricist, if you've got someone who can sing "run, rabbit, run/Dig that hole, forget the sun" and not sound like William Shatner, hold on to that resource!

Almost as valuable to Roger as Dave's voice was the presence of a crack team working tirelessly against him.

I was a teenage (well, college-age) Nietzsche head until the day that I woke up and realized the problem with Nietzsche: everybody who was reading it was doing so from the perspective that they were the Ubermensch. Now I keep Nietzsche at a safe, petting distance.

--Tris McCall

I think the chronic random feeling of being thwarted used to give Roger just enough oneness with the non-Ubermensch to keep the big problems, like imagined blood fueds with Andrew Lloyd Webber, under control. Roger knows the world is dehumanized, but while part of him knows to pursue the science of love and forgiveness, he--like most of us--lunges toward the opposite: that we should figure out whose fault it all really is (the warmongers, the televangelists, the middlebrow composers) and never, ever let them off the hook. It's sound enough logic at the level of consumer protection, but when he's giving peace sermons while dragging Gilmour, Wright and Mason out to the killing fields, we can see that *Wall*-management is tricky business. And kids emulate all of this in minor ways; they strive to be able to spot rotten guilty mediocre teachers, associates, mothers.

I wouldn't presume to recommend attempting more Floyd-with-Roger albums this late in life or not; frankly, as a maker of music I'm not worthy to tune their instruments, let alone counsel them. But as any idiot, I can spot Roger's need to apologize to, and forgive, the other members unreservedly. Failing that, maybe he should just ask himself if he's really doing the world a favor by withholding his expertise from these Floyd-without-Roger records.

Third, I understand that your contract with Alias may be winding down...any prospect of finding a new home amidst the green-tinted artist haven of Rykodisc?

I don't know; let's ask them. Ryko, are you *playa* enough for the Loud Family? Please reply to scott@loudfamily.com!

Hoping my move to Boston is timed well for another tour,

Michael Zwirn

You'll want to have the platforms and hot pants out of storage by mid-March.

hey, bassist, leave them billionaire light-musical composers alone

--Scott

January 10, 2000

Scott, in response to Geoff Woolf's question about long CDs and filler (which, by the time this question comes up, will probably be half a year old)

Scott: Missed it by that much!

--it is true that most long CDs contain a bunch of crap, but finding two people who precisely agree about which songs are the crappy ones and should have been cut is nearly impossible. Although filler bugs me on a certain level, I also sort of appreciate it when a band essentially says: "Here it all is. We decided to let you make your own album out of it." (Although I appreciate it even more when a long album *has* no filler, like *London Calling*, say.)

It doesn't have filler *exactly*, but some of the musical material is a little on the public domain side.

So as to make this an "Ask Scott" instead of an "Opine to Scott": what with CD-R technology getting cheaper and cheaper, have you given any thought to starting your own little home record label, and bypassing the irritating music industry entirely, if no renewal contract is forthcoming from Alias? Jeff Davis, formerly of the swell Balancing Act, has started something along those lines. Seems to be going not too badly for him.

Francis Heaney

I'm really glad to hear that. For myself, though, I don't know. I've put a lot of work into a lot of records and it's a little beaten out of me at this point. I still enjoy my band, and the contact I have with lots of great people who are listeners (like yourself), but if you ask me today, I feel like minimizing any future bureaucracy for myself. I like the idea of doing little odds-and-ends types of releases in the future but I'm not in much of a mood to flog the "recording artist career" horse any more.

I don't know if *Attractive Nuisance* will be my last record, but it was made as if that were the case. I realized there's a difference between making a record and making your last record. It's hard to explain; for some reason I'm tempted to say I no longer feel we're trying to build an audience so I feel less ingratiating, but in a way that's almost the opposite of the truth. It's more that whatever ingratiating I'm going to do, it had better not be that kind of ingratiating that says "here's the exciting direction I propose that you and I pick music to go in"--"direction" points to future projects--but rather: whatever our boring old direction was, this is where it led; let's make it add up to what it can add up to. Settle the account rather than take out another loan.

lowest interest rates in town,

--Scott

February 1, 2000

Scott, I can't remember if I asked this already, or only dreamed I asked it already. Please feel free to ignore and/or have me killed.

Scott: Nonsense! The number of questioners I've actually had to have killed is extremely small. People exaggerate.

But: Anything to say about the version of "Nine Lives to Rigel Five" popping up on the new (Rose Melberg side-project) Gaze record? Does this mean that you are the Scott Miller who's been thanked in the liner notes of some of Rose Melberg's records previously?

Fine print reader,

Doug Mayo-Wells

If it's the one I think I heard, it's a very nice version. I don't know myself to have been thanked on their other records, though.

--Rigel Tufnel

Scott, I've been a huge fan (not the oscillating type) ever since I bought a record of yours called *Dead Center* on a French label called Lolita back in '84. It seems to be a compilation of the first two Rational EP releases, but some of the versions of the songs, including the title track, are different than the ones on the CD re-releases. Just wondering what the story is behind this. I assume by now that this is a pretty rare item.

Scott: I believe we recorded two versions of the song "Dead Center"--the one on the OP (pre-"Option") magazine flexi, which has those really silly speech fragments, and the one on the French album you're talking about. The one in the '90s repackaging is the flexi version. I think the best version of that was one we were doing in the late '80s that had the verse about Carole Lombard and Vince Lombardi. There may not be a recording of that one.

I don't know if the French record is particularly collector-priced or not. It's not one of the ones I hear anecdotes about.

Great new record, by the way.

Rob Disner

Thanks! Wait, what's this behind your ear? It's another new Loud Family record!

any day now, any day now, I shall be re-released

--Scott

Scott, how much time and money does it take to make a Loud Family disc? Are there any technical and business differences between how you make records now as opposed to how you made 'em as Game Theory? Finally, what's your status with Alias and what future do you see for Scott Miller (TM) brand music?

Waltzing the Halls since 1985,

Chatty Charles

Scott: Charles! Great to hear from someone I used to hear from when I didn't hear from many people!

In the Game Theory days, everything was done in a big studio with a big producer (Mitch Easter). Nowadays a lot of it is done in my living room on ADATs and only the drums and mixing really have to be done in the studio. I'm the only producer. It's hard to give exact money figures but, you know, somewhat less than a Barbra Streisand record. *Interbabe Concern* and *Attractive Nuisance* were really slow records to make, like six months or thereabouts. A lot of that time is spent doing little arrangement touches at home, so it's not running up studio time.

The future? In the future people will listen to music in a kind of virtual reality where the musicians and singers aren't even in the room with you, yet you hear them,

--Scott

Scott, I was shifting through my old vinyl yesterday and, as I was admiring the covers of my Game Theory collection, I suddenly realised that there was a question that I have always wanted to ask.

What was the deal with the ever increasing size of the "G"? Did it signify anything? (apart from a "G" that was increasing in size.)

Scott: Ah, yes. "G" was short for "Game Theory."

Ba-dum bum.

I thought of the G increasing in size as suggestive of it being descended into, as in objects getting bigger in your field of view when you move toward them. Sort of parallel to feeling I was going deeper into psychology with my lyrics, I think I'd say in hindsight, and for the 1988 record, the "G" didn't get bigger, and that had to do with a shift in my thinking away from the idea that getting deeper into psychology all the time was precisely the way to go.

Regards and thanks for *Days for Days*. How does it feel to having never released a "weak" album?

Like if that's the case, people have sure acquired a taste for weak albums in my lifetime. Thanks for writing!

Health & Happiness

Charlie Watts

Rolf & Florianness,

--Scott

Scott, since you once had a Zachary Smith in the Loud Family I feel I must ask this question: Did you grow up watching "Lost In Space" and if so did you prefer the (earlier) fairly serious sci-fi adventure episodes or the (later) ridiculously campy ones?

Scott: Having been born in 1960, I did grow up watching it, and I believe I can summarize the reaction I had to this and most any other shows which had a TV family: Wow, the daughter is really cute.

Love your music.

Sincerely,

Beppo Jones

Thanks much,

--pusillanimous pipsqueak

February 14, 2000

Scott, I'm going to be annoying because I already asked you this. Have you ever watched the t.v. show "Dr. Who"? It's an old British sci-fi series. Has anyone told you (besides me) that you look like Tom Baker? He played Dr. Who during the 70's. Oh yeah, and how old are most of your fans at your concerts? I think I am the only 16 year old who knows who the Loud Family are. Well, at least in Pittsburgh. *Days for Days* rules and I'm looking forward to the new album!

Elissa

Scott: Thanks much! You're right; I saw your question and didn't answer yet because I try to answer earlier mail before later, but now, out of guilt for disillusioning young people in my audience, I'm answering yours out of turn. Of course, you could in actuality be one of those 50-year-old internet perverts who *claim* to be teenage girls (albeit one with a genius for stalking sites that won't arouse suspicion).

Yes, people have told me I look like Dr. Who. I personally thought he looked like Roger Daltrey, singer for the Who--a far more metaphysical connection. I've only watched Dr. Who a couple of times, but my wife Kristine has gotten me into a sci-fi (though more comedic) Brit series called "Red Dwarf"; highly recommended.

Though you're not the *only* 16-year-old who knows about us, our shows are typically in 21-and-over rock clubs. I sympathize because when I was 16 and liked the Velvet Underground and Roxy Music, it was unthinkable that bands like that would ever play a big venue where I could have seen them, largely because they didn't sell to the under-21 demographic. Needless to say, it's gratifying if our songs occasionally connect the way those others' did with me.

not a doctor, but resemble someone who plays one on T.V.

--Scott

Scott, you seem to have reached Maslow's "self-actualized" state. Do you feel like you have?

Scott: Thanks to the web, I can inform myself that the person in such a state is "autonomous, easily motivated, able to solve problems, and accepts and assists others. [Such people] are mature in all dimensions and can realistically deal with failings and doubts."

So thanks very much; the question alone implies an all-too-generous appraisal of me. Unfortunately I really am kind of a non-stop embarrassment, especially when it comes to "assisting" others with my attempts at being deep. The only hope is that I get habitually shamed into consulting valuable sources, causing me to sometimes accidentally parrot something useful. This is pretty far from being "autonomous."

Was there any one moment in time that you realized you were "awake"? Details?

Actually, yes, in a way that has personal significance to me, but which I'd only cheesily misrepresent if I try to express it in my typical embarrassing way--I didn't instantly decide I was poised and masterly or anything. Two of my recent readings have been Dostoevsky's THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV and the BHAGAVAD-GITA (a sacred Hindu text), and I take them both to be *straining* to get that kind of wakefulness you're talking about across, and they're both vastly more brilliant at it than I'll ever be, yet you have go in prepared--unconsciously craving to hear what there is to hear--otherwise the din of social context will drown it out. But it's not like no one's prepared; I'm not Mr. special reader of those books.

Have you read anything from Vernon Howard? Comments?

Sorry, only what I could pick up right now from scanning his Amazon book blurbs. Sounds like he could be interesting. My comment--knowing nothing--would be that the easiest way to decide for yourself if an author's take on "wakefulness" is for you is to catalog what he or she thinks is keeping people asleep and seeing if that rings true.

Do you consciously change "mental states" while writing or playing a show? or are you always on this "higher plane"?

Thanks,

Jeff Brown

Your question reminds me I could stand to improve in that area. By "higher plane" I assume you mean really aware of how the performance is affecting everyone in the room, the audience, the promoter, the other band members, as opposed to being in an egotistic, mechanical frame of mind. I tend to be in the latter just because it's sometimes all I can do to get the notes and chords right.

--shame of the waking universe

February 21, 2000

Scott, I'm sure you get tired of the "I'm a big fan of yours" letter so I'll begin by saying you're a big fan of mine--or so you told me once about a million years ago when my band opened for Game Theory. I just figured you were being polite in a disinterested way--we opened for a lot of assholes who told us they were big fans but didn't have a clue who in the world we were--but you went and proved me wrong by picking up a guitar and asking me to show you where you were going wrong in the chorus of our current 7" single (you were playing an E flat minor where I played some weird-ass chord I stumbled across by accident that I'm not even sure *is* a proper chord). I didn't tell you then, but being treated like a peer by someone with a major label contract was one of the nicest moments I'd had in music. So thanks. And I am a big fan of yours.

I don't have a question so much as a suggestion. Or maybe it's a tip. Or hell, it might be just a funny story. I just hope Mitch Easter hasn't told you this one already. I don't know if you ever made it over to Sam Moss Guitars in Winston-Salem when you recorded at the Drive-In, but if you did you know that it is *the* place (in North Carolina, anyway) to pick up some vintage cheese--and Sam is cool as hell to boot. So anyway, I'm in there one day many years ago and Sam is trying to sell me a tweed Fender Bassman which I really want but can't afford and Mitch is trying to talk me into it so he can buy back the Orange he sold to me when the doorbell jingles and who walks in but Poison lead guitarist C.C. DeVille. And we knew it was C.C. DeVille because he announces himself thusly: "Hello, I'm C.C. DeVille, lead guitarist for Capitol Records recording artist Poison, appearing tonight at the Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum here in Winston-Salem" (an exact quote).

"Big fucking deal," is Sam's exact response, which upsets Mr. DeVille somewhat. He makes a rude comment, Sam makes a ruder one, and the situation escalates until such time as Sam offers to, "with the help of my friends Mitch and Drew here" forcibly eject Mr. DeVille's big-haired ass from the establishment. Being that neither Mitch nor I are especially imposing physical specimens, we blanched somewhat at the prospect of violence but Mr. DeVille's response was astonishing.

"Mitch?" he replies. "Mitch Easter? The record producer Mitch Easter? Man, I *wore out Two Steps From the Middle Ages*. I love Game Theory!" Whereupon he picked up a handy Taylor acoustic to perform a credible version of "Wish I Could Stand Or Have." It was a hell of a moment.

So the suggestion/tip is this: I haven't heard Poison's name for a while, so if you find yourself in the market for a guitarist any time soon I'd wager "The Pussyman" (as the headstocks of his guitars read--his mother must be so proud) would be glad to get the gig. Been meaning to share that with you for about ten years now.

Scott: I only wish we'd had more opportunities to bump into each other in the hallways at Enigma Records and get into exchanges of "you the pussyman," "no, *you* the pussyman."

Ain't looking for nothing but a good time,

Drew Weiss

P.S. If, as this week's Ask Scott suggests, our days of readily available new Scott Miller tunes is drawing near their end, that's a shame. But I know exactly what you mean, and understand completely. The day I said music will always be a passion but it's time to call it quits was one of the toughest of my life. I hope it's not so, but if it is thanks for all the tunes.

Thank you! In my case, after a contract where the band didn't make the label money, the "decision" not to do another record in the near future is not best described as agonizing, but I appreciate the sympathy anyway.

--Capitol Records recording artist poison

March 6, 2000

Scott, if you were to host a dinner party or similar social event where a few of your guests were unfamiliar with your music, which one of your songs would you play for them on your living room stereo if you *actually* chose to honor their enthusiastic requests: "Oh, please play us one of your songs!"?

Scott: I'd first try to divert their attention by trying to get them interested in seeing my wife dance a scene from *Swan Lake*, but if that didn't permanently shift focus off me, I'd probably start asking myself: which of my songs is not *that* embarrassing, and is pretty short?

Here are some candidates in that category:

"Just Gone" from *Interbabe Concern*

"Save Your Money" from the new one

"Crypto-Sicko" from *Days For Days*

"Aerodeliria" from *Plants & Birds*

"Still Its Own Reward" from *Tape Of Only Linda*

If some of you are saying "hey, that one's a *little* embarrassing," welcome to being me at a dinner party and why I'm not running my catalog over to the CD player while you're eating.

I would never tell you to be quiet. ;)

You might if you thought anyone could pull it off.

Kristine Chambers Miller

lots of love,

--Scott

Scott, is that the flaming baby head sun thing from Teletubbies in the upper left corner of the *Days For Days* cover? If so, why has he (she?) been turned into a white bean?

Scott: That baby, for some reason, always reminded me of Kurt Cobain. I just see a strong facial resemblance. And of course, now there's Frances *Bean* Cobain. It all adds up.

Thanks for answering this Burning Question,

Roger (Po) Winston

--Scott "Tubby Custard" Miller

March 13, 2000

Scott, I have enjoyed your album lists and they have led me to some bands I now enjoy. I still think you *must* check out *Joy 1967-1990* by Ultra Vivid Scene. I discussed this with you at one of your shows. Hugh Jones produced it and it is his masterpiece.

Scott: I'll watch out for that one. I think Joe Becker played me some of it and it sounded good. There was a period where I was getting told that the singer sounded like me, which ought to frighten anyone.

Anyway...in one of your interviews you mentioned classical lit. as a contributing influence in *Days For Days*. I realize how pretentious it would look if you released "Scott Miller's Reading List"; however, I am curious to know what sort of stuff you enjoy.

Christopher M. Hall

I see what you mean about the posting of reading lists being pretentious. I've done some approximation of that on this site, and in retrospect it seems pretentious. Not in the sense of biting off more intellectual material than I can chew -- I guarantee that I'm pretentious in that sense 100% of the time -- but in the sense that a reading list stands to mismanage how people absorb our culture. I realize teachers have skills I don't have in advising what to read in what order, and no one in particular has ever scanned the set of books I've read for important holes.

I usually read literature which has a reputation for being heavy and influential, because I want a big payoff for investing my time. Even if I hate a book, I still want the reward of understanding what sort of effect it has had on the thinking of the world. For instance, I disagree with Nietzsche on practically any issue of morality, but he has an amazing genius for bringing the right issues to the surface. He's J. Alfred Prufrock's nightmare; he makes it impossible to avoid everything the timid, rationalist mind wants to pretend is a solved problem.

Often enough, I'll go back and read some favorite thing of mine even though I've read it many times before. I'm always going back to "the Waste Land," for instance. I think everyone should try to read "the Waste Land," if only for the experience of humbling oneself before what by academic consensus is the poem of the century and not knowing what the hell it means, letting clues to the meaning come to over time. One comforting thought is that if you read it and you don't get *a word* of it, you're not much worse off than the most literate minds that first read it in 1922. In my opinion, it wasn't understood that well until the 1990s.

I don't remember the context for my saying "classical literature" was an influence on *Days For Days*, but if you caught me today I'd put it slightly differently and say I've gotten more conscious of what cultural history produced me, so I have an appetite for the classics which parallels my appetite to write songs. For me the term "classic" implies a revelatory power which should apply to anyone's life, and where it occurs to me "oh, what this certain writer is saying is what it feels like for me to be in this certain situation," that might turn into a lyric under the right circumstances.

Right now I'm reading Machiavelli and I'm writing a song about how I regret my inability to govern the band through the use of fear. Kidding!

--Machiavelli Vanilli

Scott, I recently began using digital audio editing (ProTools specifically) and can't believe how much better the recording and production process is. I'm wondering when you made the transition to digital.

Scott: *Interbabe Concern* was the first one done on ADATs as opposed to Studer 24-tracks, but it was still tape deck recording -- none of these albums has been recorded and edited on hard disk. We actually did the most computer stuff on *Plants and Birds and Rocks and Things*, the first record. Paul Wieneke had SoundTools and Rob Poor did some crazy programming tricks on, of all things, a Next box. That was how we got the opening Doppler and chop-edit effects, for instance. An example of a SoundTools track is "Self Righteous Boy Reduced to Tears."

***Days for Days* sounds much more digitally produced, but less creative (at least from my perspective) than *Interbabe Concern* (which in all fairness is one of my favorites)...**

Digital audio is a tool that requires mastering like anything else. While I was able to remove all the *warmth* and *life* the first try, it wasn't till *Days for Days* that I was also able to get rid of the creativity.

Finally, thanks for your work. In my collection you rank with Abdullah Ibrahim, MBV, and that Chilton fellow.

Justin McReynolds

Well, that's a very nice thing to say; that's some good company.

thanks and good luck with recording,

--bit player

March 20, 2000

Scott, I was wondering what your opinion is of The Magnetic Fields' *69 Love Songs*, since I know you've been a fan of Stephin Merritt's work for a long time.

Scott: Hey, Jeffrey, thanks for a good question. I finally got a copy of that and I love it. Two musician friends of mine whose end-of-year lists I always consult, Ken Stringfellow and Steve Wynn, had this as their #1 pick, so I knew to take it pretty seriously. I was nevertheless prepared for it to be good but not great, since Stephin Merritt's romantic leanings go in a somewhat different direction from what I think of my own stuff doing, and this seemed a little like asking Robert Plant to stretch out and explore some Hobbit themes in depth.

But I guess this was the case of a just plain great record being a just plain great record, because he's more of a hopeless romantic than ever before, and the results are unbelievably inspired. Best record of '99 I have to say. A lyric like "If I was the grand canyon/ I'd echo everything you say/ But I'm just me/ I'm only me/ And you used to love me that way" is typical of the sort of effortless success *69 Love Songs* sustains over the marathon running time. "Grand canyon" suggests a wide emotional gulf, but it's the gulf of adult tragedy rather than adolescent longing, because we know this love was once requited. The fact that a canyon echoes, and thereby becomes a fortuitous metaphor for a lover being forced to "echo" sentiments rather than being allowed his individuality makes me wonder why the hell such happy accidents never happen to me when *I'm* writing.

Actually, when I talked to Stephin and Claudia a couple of weeks ago they mentioned that they recently read *Ulysses* out loud to each other, indicating they're at least somewhat societally crippled along my own lines, although Claudia was, I believe, convinced that Molly Bloom was damaging to feminism, and again I think: would that a thought with that potential to be loved ever cross my mind.

Me, I'm quite impressed by the album's range of approaches, both musical and lyrical, and also by what an effective singer Merritt's turned into.

Couldn't agree more.

My question, though, is whether you'd ever consider doing such a large-scale, thematically unified work. One could extract some sort of unity from, say, *Lolita Nation* or *Interbabe Concern*, but one virtue of *69* is that Merritt is so direct in naming his topic. My first doubt was whether it would be financially feasible for you to mount such a huge production...but then, I hear *69 Love Songs* has outsold the rest of Merritt's catalog combined: something to be said for doing something big and buzzworthy, I guess.

That's very true. The short answer is I've never been on a label that would have put something like that out, so I didn't waste time making impossible plans. The closest I've

come was when *Lolita Nation* required two vinyl disks -- and even so, Enigma wouldn't go two CDs, so we had to cut it by seven minutes or thereabouts. Alias pulled the vinyl release of *Interbabe Concern* because it was going to require two records.

(Obligatory gush time) You're one of the few currently working artists who I think might be capable of doing justice to such a large-scale project -- along with, of course, Kid Rock.

Jeff Norman

I'm speechless, and I'm sure Kid Rock is, too. As you probably know I'm in something of an am-I-still-currently-working? mood these days, so the last things on my mind are magnum opera (always wanted to use that plural in a sentence; I don't know if it's even technically correct), but I couldn't be more tickled that someone thinks I might do a good job of it, so consider the idea to now be lodged somewhere at the back of my mind. If Stephin and Claudia will do all the singing.

'69 Love songs,

--the other SM

March 27, 2000

Scott, my name's Matt. I met you back in '85 when you stayed with friends in a band called Other Bright Colors.

Scott: Wow, hi! They were a terrific band.

I remember we had an interesting conversation about Joyce and Nabokov. I just read your interesting, entertaining Schopenhauer-esque defense of *Eyes Wide Shut* but still don't understand your adulation for Kubrick the Will-Moralist. Every time I see his films I feel like I'm going to Sunday School. My advice: check out Max Ophuls, Kubrick's mentor...

First, thank you for prompting me to read *The World As Will and Idea (or Will and Representation)* by Arthur Schopenhauer. It was slow until "book 4" about morality, at which point I started eating it up.

Second, congratulations on identifying Kubrick as a moralist; I'd be surprised if many people confuse *A Clockwork Orange* with Sunday School, but I agree there's probably more than a little similarity.

"Will-Moralist" sounds like it might be academic jargon I don't know about, but let me say that I'm all for artists moralizing. There's a pretty fascinating debate raging at the Amazon *Eyes Wide Shut* customer review page -- you've never seen so many one-star and five-star reviews -- and one of the more articulate complaints is that Kubrick dares to lecture us on sex at home being okay whereas sex in cult rituals is bad, with such sermonizing corrupting the dream reality that was captured in *Traumnovelle*. I think Kubrick's point is that we *are* in a dream reality, and he's going to be so unsporting as to corrupt it for us. The masked ball is

a magnification of what people strive for in the absence of spiritual authentication: a vague notion of participation in power and advantage, behind which (preferably out of our view) there must be those at whose expense the power and advantage are defined.

I believe Schopenhauer was the first Western philosopher to have digested Hinduism's *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, and I think this more than anything earned him the tag of "pessimist." Thinkers of the European Enlightenment had become so happy to think of man as initially good but methodically corrupted that when Schopenhauer came along talking about man being inherently deluded by *Maya*, they must have thought he was Kubrick's variety of spoilsport.

Ironically, the word "enlightenment" nowadays has a more Buddhist flavor, and we multiculturalists don't want to be too unfamiliar with the related topic of *Maya*, or we could be accused of not knowing what we're supposed to be enlightened *out of*. So in a way Schopenhauer had a somewhat fashionable attitude. He doesn't divide the world into the righteous and the unrighteous according to strength of "will." For Schopenhauer, the will is always the same -- for everyone -- all that varies is what knowledge the will has at its disposal. He's at his most inspiring (I think) when he talks about the "good" person. He says the good person looks at another person and doesn't see an impassable gulf of time, space, and identity, he or she recognizes himself or herself but for a detail of manifestation. Where the similarity is not recognized, the Hindus would say the "veil of *Maya*" is making reality look like the false world of appearances. In our culture, reincarnation is an absurd violation of causality. To others it's a useful way of thinking outside *Maya*. If I say "don't victimize that person, you could literally come back as that person," I would expect to be treated as an idiot, but I think such treatment is the result of a culture that has forgotten how to be awed by the mystery of consciousness without having answered any of the tough questions.

Kubrick faces tough questions, and he's willing to say "you don't really want what you think you want" in *Eyes Wide Shut*, which is not what Hollywood is supposed to say. It's supposed to say "what you want is a precious dream that bad people are trying to take away." If not for this sort of very gentle moralizing, can we have morals imparted to us at all? Are all morals terrible encroachments on our freedom? Considering historical evidence of the alternative, I think we should be open to a few morals! I think we need to seek human guidelines outside of our own impulses, which impulses always prove to be terribly faulty. I think the little interlude with the costume store owner deciding to pander is Kubrick making the point that something can be immoral even though everyone in the room seems to be happy about it. I think Kubrick knows we try to put distance between our business and anyone who is going to get hurt by that business (our eyes are "wide shut" to those who get hurt), and he's a skilled enough artist to do something about it.

Do you like Robbe-Grillet?

I don't think I know him, unless he sang "Strangers In the Night."

Have you ever read his later, more baroque novels *Project For A Revolution In New York* and my favorite, *Topology of a Phantom City*? If you haven't, I think you would enjoy

them. Also: do you like Pavement? I thought *Terror Twilight* was a beaut, and *Brighten The Corners* is also excellent.

Oh, but of course. Pavement are unfailingly terrific.

Matt Morris

I've enjoyed talkin' Schop

--Scott

Scott! Scott! Scott!

Scott: Hey, Jeremiah (Jeremiah Jeremiah); how are you?

A new album, but no appearance in Pittsburgh? And after I sat in an Amtrak all the way to Chicago and back to see you? And I've NEVER EVER done that for anyone before. I feel so hurt. Can't make it this year. (big heavy sigh) Maybe you'll put out a live recording for the rest of us poor losers?

As far as I knew, no one ever cared about the Loud Family in Pittsburgh, and already this year I've heard from two people. Had I known of this groundswell I could have alerted our booking agent.

New album is on order... can't wait! You are easily my favorite songwriter along with Ian Anderson, who's new album "The Secret Language of Birds" is, btw, quite good (but I've never traveled to see him).

I'm not worthy! Try as I might, if I'd put "snot is running down his nose" in a song, it would have sounded awkward.

I do hope you have a safe and successful tour, and the new recording does real well for you.

Jeremiah McAuliffe

Thanks!

all the best,

--Scott

April 3, 2000

Scott, I was chatting with a friend the other day and we both agreed that the '90s have been a virtual musical wasteland compared to the '80s (particularly 1980-85). We both

could come up with at least 300 great and essential releases from that period, but were hard pressed to come up with 200 from the nineties.

Scott: Really? I think of '80-'85 as a time where there was some music I loved intensely but in a somewhat unshared way; '91, '93 and '94 were more broadly respectable (Nirvana, Pavement, Teenage Fanclub, Liz Phair, Aimee Mann, Posies, Guided By Voices). Still, for sheer spirit-of-the-age, I wouldn't put either in the same league as 1965-69, or probably even 1977-78.

I wouldn't want to have to describe the cathartic power of psychedelic music in the sixties to someone who only knows it through a veil of (perfectly justifiable) ironic detachment, but maybe I'd start by having you picture your future adulthood as a time when you will very likely go to Vietnam, and die. This occasionally flares up to trouble you, but the world is strangely unconcerned, as if remote warfare were the plot of a movie everyone likes, and you don't follow it but you realize you are supposed to like it, too. The music of the sixties was there to say "no, you are not crazy; something is wrong with the system. The system is lacking in love, and you must wake up out of this system where when the system requires it, blacks and women are expendable, and you are expendable." Now, that quoted sentiment is a romantic myth, but one with a large intersecting region with truth. A romantic myth contains a false promise of freedom, but here real loss of freedom could be pointed to in the counterexample, and that has real force for music to play around with.

What's your take on this, and do you feel that there is hope for the future? I know that there are still many great bands to found out there, but unlike the '80s it's much more difficult to hear about them unless you're able to read massive quantities of fanzines.

Jack Fraser

I think music is in a certain amount of trouble. If someone loves music, he or she will find music to love, but someone looking for music to have cultural directedness is probably frustrated. What is happening in culture is that the myths are losing their power, and I don't feel we yet know how to relate well to the music of myths losing their power. Although in that category, there are some blazing successes which people *can* relate to -- the song "Rose Parade" by Elliott Smith comes to mind.

a ridiculous marching band started playing and got me singing along with some half-hearted victory song

--Scott

May 8, 2000

Scott, I'm a longtime fan and always wondered where you went to school (college). Some of your Game Theory lyrics mention UCLA, but you are SF based.

Scott: I wrote "Bad Year At UCLA" in 1981, when I was going to school at UC Davis, which is part of the same system as UCLA but located in the Sacramento valley. "UCLA" happened to

be better for the scansion of the line, so I used that -- it's also a big sports campus, hence widely recognized (compare "UCD").

Where do you work for a day job? Do you have a day job? It says you're a programmer.

As we would expect, IT is correct. I work as a programmer in C++ and now Java.

What do you think of Linux (and any related platforms; TurboLinux etc...)?

I like Linux for not being Microsoft, and anything TurboNotMicrosoft is even better.

How many more silly questions can I get away with asking?

Three.

What is your favorite guitar?

My current hollow-body Telecaster is probably the all-around best electric I've ever played. It stays in tune, and as with most Teles you get the right kind of payoff when you play hard. But I've frankly never picked up a guitar and thought "this one is far better than other guitars." A great guitar sound is more the result of fussing a lot with what the amp and the effects are capable of. You can sometimes use a terrible guitar to get a really ear-catching sound.

Do you (or have ever heard of) Roy Harper?

Anglophile that I am, I like him quite a bit; he is after all an intimate of both Zeppelin and Floyd! He writes sturdy melodies and he's an uncommonly intense lyricist. Like Julian Cope, he's developed that English eccentric's grudge against Christianity -- it's Stonehenge-where-the-demons-dwell loopy in the head, but it's inspired; none of your typical bourgeois irreligiosity-Lite of the sort Nietzsche lets loose on in entry 58 of *Beyond Good and Evil*. He has plenty of good less-heavy material, too. There's a song called "Home" which reminds me of (and rivals) Big Star.

Make more LOUD music,

Tracy Norton

A mildly disjointed and harmless fan.

thanks for writing!

--TurboHarmless

May 15, 2000

Scott, I've got a truly obscure question for you, but first let me say that I am wasting no time in getting prematurely alarmed by all this talk about the end of the Loud Family. Your music has been an endless source of enjoyment and inspiration for me, and the interview I had the pleasure to do with you (back in Santa Cruz!) a few years ago, along with the couple of times we've spoken at LF shows, have convinced me you know way too much about what you're doing and about making truly meaningful music to give it up anytime soon. But that said, I remember that I was pretty unnerved back when I first heard Game Theory was going to be morphing into this odd new thing called the Loud Family -- after all, I truly felt Game Theory got me through high school back in the '80s! But despite all my hand-wringing, it certainly worked out well, at least in the good music department. My only point: if you do decide to stay in the game, there are quite a few people who are willing to follow you into a new project or wherever you feel like going musically. Well, except maybe for tone poems...

Scott: Hi Steve. Good to hear from you! Thanks for writing.

I appreciate the encouragement. I actually have only limited experience asking people to follow me somewhere musically, and it's a nauseating, icy job. What most people would really thank me for, despite what they probably think, are the times when I've restrained myself and played the game like a good fellow. Ordinarily the entire process of making music, from top to bottom, is directed at getting the audience to like you, suiting its criteria for quality, and not being a brute with significance. It's mostly an illusion that there's any such mechanism as liking something because it's original. If I say "this is good," that means it's good *compared* to something, yet if I say "this is original," I ought to mean its value is in *not being comparable*. The two don't go together. In reality "this is original" probably means "I have some *model* for 'originality' (which is nonsensical) and this fits it" -- if a piece of music successfully imitates what people have associated with the avant-garde, or with what they have decided is exotic or off-putting, they'll often incorrectly call that "originality."

Now, I'm saying neither "let's all try harder to be original" nor "let's give up on ever being original." It's complicated. But to illustrate, I thought George Harrison was fairly genuinely original when he tried to include "Krishna consciousness" in songs -- there was no hidden shared context; it wasn't merely a sneaky imitation of something with the *cachet* of originality, it was something he truly felt deeply and his audience truly did not. Now, he probably got a *few* people interested in something related at the level of exoticism (maybe transcendental meditation), but if you want to see the reaction of a mind which is keen in the way you and I feel ours are keen, read Robert Christgau's lacerating reviews of Harrison's mid-seventies albums. You will see what we really feel about what I've called originality: we shriek that didacticism has been aimed at us; we openly loathe its audacity.

Okay, finally, here's my question, guaranteed to refresh with its pop culture-y goodness and child-proof obscurity seal: Is *Two Steps From The Middle Ages* some kind of tribute to "The Twilight Zone"? I always got a kick out of the "Room For One More, Honey" reference, and I think most people remember that episode.

You are correct, sir. It is a reference to that fine episode.

But isn't there an episode called "You Drive" as well? Like a guy hits a kid with his car, and his car sort of becomes his conscience and ends up driving him to the police station? Were both of these conscious references to Rod Serling's little masterpieces, and if so, are there more I missed?

The phrase "You Drive" didn't come from there, at least consciously. But if that's true, I like that coincidence very much. I think the writer (and/or you) was thinking along the same lines as I was.

These are the kind of freaky questions that should assure you -- if that's the right word -- that people will be poring over your work well into the year 3000 (when life as we know it will be animated by Matt Groening).

If mankind spends a thousand years pondering the meaning of "Room For One More, Honey," and someone discovers that the meaning is that it was a line from a TV show, I am afraid of things turning ugly.

That and the fact that CD copies of *Lolita Nation* seem to be going for over \$100 on eBay. I'm thinking of buying a security system for mine. If you've got a bunch of extras lying around, I swear you could finance your whole music career with them.

Thanks for your time,

Steve Palopoli

I thought for a long time I only had one copy of that, but I found a second in a shed when I moved. I'm trying to look at the high collector prices for that thing and find the good news for me as a recording artist, but it's hard to translate into any sort of strategy.

two security systems shy of peace of mind,

--Scott

May 22, 2000

Scott, from the liner notes (as well as the sound), it seemed like *Days For Days*' songwriting was more collective than on previous Loud Family albums. Is this regime likely to continue on the next album? Or will you retake the reigns of compositional power? Remember: "Strength alone knows conflict, weakness is born vanquished!"; some Russian said that, but I can't remember which.

Erich Vogel

Scott: This question is from 1999, so we'll skip forward and note that the collective songwriting continued more or less unvanquished.

I've never heard that quote and I'm a little slow assigning aspects of songwriting to their metaphorical counterparts in St. Petersburg under siege, except that I can sure picture Kenny in one of those hats.

Brothers Karamazov gonna work it out,

--Scott

Scott, shall I be honest? When I was in my 20s in the mid-'80s, Game Theory was a big deal to me. *Big Shot Chronicles*, in particular, was very special. In 1989 I went away to college, life changed, priorities shifted, contexts evolved. In short, I haven't listened to Game Theory since 1989.

On a lark, I just bought the latest Loud Family CD, and instantly remembered what I loved, and why I loved, Game Theory. I was excited by how vital your music still sounds. And obviously, I went searching the Net for Loud Family "stuff", and here I am. I read your music lists and was caught up in some nostalgia for the heady days of my early 20s. A time when the Berkeley Square was filled with Husker Du, Camper van Beethoven, Robyn Hitchcock, Dumptruck, Let's Active, Meat Puppets, Replacements, and the Minutemen. The Smiths and REM played the Greek Theatre. Those were fun and innocent days.

Like most of the folks I know, I am more jaded these days (for better or worse), but these are good days, too. I am happy to be looking forward to spending some of them with Loud Family music!

And by the bye...what's happening with Game Theory re-issues? Shouldn't some company like RYKO reissue them just as they have with the Meat Puppets?

Scott: Some of them were re-issued in 1993. I feel terrible breaking the news, but Game Theory is a much, much harder sell than the Meat Puppets, and this was the case even before Nirvana did two of their songs on an incredibly high profile live album. We're not such a chunk of alternative music history, and my singing is funnier. In a way a potential Game Theory audience has to be more open to something mainstream like Rush -- only when they listen to Rush, they're thinking "if only this sounded a little more like the Left Banke."

And lastly, I just saw Pavement this weekend (for about the 10th time since 1992 at the Kennel Club), and I just couldn't make up my mind whether or not I was still engaged with it. Most of the crowd seemed to have been born in the '80s, and I wondered if it was time to pass the torch on to the next generation. I couldn't help wondering if the band was wondering the same thing. Did you go? What do you think of the new album?

I haven't seen them but have always wanted to. They've always been sold out by the time I hear about the show. I'm pretty happy people born in the '80s are listening to Pavement. I think they're near the top of the scale of bands that have something musically valid to offer. It's kind of like Led Zeppelin. Led Zeppelin used to have a critical reputation for being thuddy, but their music was actually more varied and nuanced than almost anyone in the '70s. Pavement have the reputation for being tossed-off, which is a good point of mass

recognizability, but where there's a languid vocal delivery, or any end effect where the sound is casual rather than forced, serious listeners shouldn't confuse that with any actual laziness on the band's part at the time of writing the songs or making the record.

Okay...this note has gone from latent sentimentality to idle chatter. I think I'll hang up...

Dale Chapman

sweet Calcutta (crooked) rain,

--Scott

May 29, 2000

Scott, I've followed your music for 5 years now, and although like all fans of your music are a wee bit saddened at the thought of your recording contract ending and all that that implies, realise that sometimes for doors to open, other doors must shut (though preferably left ajar in the case of your songs!). May I venture that perhaps priorities are changing, and that makes the writing, rehearsing, recording, touring cycle more difficult to pedal (ha, excuse that terrible pun!). My priorities are changing, in that at 38 I am about to buy my first acoustic and start to write, play and sing.

Scott: That's great.

First, I just wondered what your past and current (if different) ideas were regarding age, dilettante-ism (is that a word?) and the songwriting process...

I used to think songwriters peaked at about 28, and I had no idea why, and now I guess I think it's partly natural to lose focus at a certain age, and partly natural for it to *seem* -- to a person who was my age when I thought it -- that writers lose more focus than they actually do.

It's very hard to just repeat the old successes, because pop music, being a young person's medium, is always impatient to get to a new style which will displace the old style, and after a while the audience may simply lose its ear for what you do. It also gets harder to put mature attitudes across to a young audience. You get some distance outside of the fashions of the young, the romantic and narcissistic notions that are *clearly* going to send them crashing into a wall, and you realize you can't do much about it. You don't want to just mount a campaign to spoil their fun. So you find yourself needing to do trickier surgery.

Dilettantism is an important asset to the world. Dilettantes don't worry as much about what I just talked about, and they don't worry about things like "a song is supposed to be for getting something across, but it's burdened with being a machine for generating fame and income" -- they just do the job. Without dilettantism, pop music would not have much life in it.

...and secondly, how such ideas might relate to the music "industry," particularly in terms of the industry's influence being diluted by the ever increasing value for money of home recording and the possibilities of MP3 and internet distribution channels. Tips for the young(-ish potential) player, if there must be a question mark?

At some level it spells better exposure for new artists, obviously, but it also may be that making pop music is stripped of its ability to glorify successful artists, which you have to figure would cause a lot of people not to try as hard. In fact, I'm starting to think more seriously that the shock of the future could be that all the systems for accruing prestige go haywire. Oscars, Nobel Prizes, New York Times book reviews, big record deals, mentions in the local paper, and a million other validating institutions may dissolve in a vat of web sites and email discussion groups, and people whose *religion* involves such things could reach a point of terrible disillusionment.

Thank you for your answer, and on behalf of all your New Zealand and Australian fans may I wish you and your family and friends the best of luck in all your future adventures...

Wayne Patrick
provisionally aka seedcake
Fremantle,
Western Australia.

Thanks very much for writing!

--Scott (provisionally a capella)

June 5, 2000

Scott, I have recently got into your second record. I think you should come to Scotland and play some gigs, so I guess I'd like to ask: any chance of a British tour (or you could just make it Scottish.

NANDRALADES

Scott: I'd love to play in Scotland, but ye cannae believe the shite I have to go through to get an overseas tour organized. It will probably happen one day, but I can't presently envision what is going to make the parties involved get serious enough to actually pick up phones and book dates. I thank you for the interest, though.

--Scot(t)

Scott, I'm a recent convert to all things Loud and Gamey. I rank The Loud Family/Game Theory as one of my top two musical discoveries of 1999 (the other is Badfinger).

Scott: Thank you very much! -- if we pop artists like anything, it's being discovered, and if it happens before we hang ourselves, that's the icing on the cake.

Out of all your songs that I've heard, I'd have to say "Baby-Hard-To-Be-Around" is my favorite (followed closely by "Even You"). I was wondering if you could shed some light as to what this song is about. Is it a literal tale of a girl obsessed with her new dolly, a dolly that turns out to be very different from what it initially appears to be? Is it a tale about a man who thinks he's in control of his girlfriend, only to find out she's in control of him? Is it a cautionary tale of teenage pregnancy? For the love of God, Scott, you've got to help me!!! This song has consumed every waking moment of my day.

The "tale about a man who thinks he's in control" etc. seems like a first class interpretation to me. In a way, though, I'm not much more qualified to say what's the "right" interpretation of my lyrics than I am to interpret other people's lyrics or poetry (not that there's any stopping me from doing that, by the way).

Also, I noticed two band I really enjoy didn't make any of your lists: Redd Kross and Enuff Z'Nuff. Do you have any opinions on their music? I noticed a similarity between "Jimmy Still Comes Around" and the Redd Kross song "Lady In The Front Row." Since *Plants...* and Redd Kross' *Phaseshifter* both came out in 1993, I assume there was just a "vibe" in the air and no one was nicking riffs.

Phaseshifter -- great record. I have it as #26 for '93, but my lists on the web page only go out to 20, I believe. Good year, '93; very tough competition. That record would have been top ten in some other years. I'll have to re-listen to "Lady In the Front Row" (FYI "Jimmy" was written in 1990, and I'm sure both our and Redd Kross's records were wrapped before the other came out).

I've never heard Enuff Z'Nuff.

Thanks for your time,

Tom (a man with ammonium laureth sulfate hair and an avid fan of seriousnesshouse guitar playing)

Ammonium laureth sulfate: the *other* white degreaser.

take up thy KROSS

--cautionary dolly

June 26, 2000

Scott: I'm excited to see that I have an Ask Scott from the Great One--her whose powers exceed my own even on this, the very Loud Family web site. It is a question from the Webmistress Herself. Strike, dear mistress, and cure his heart!

Scott, do you have any thoughts on the Napster controversy? Metallica recently filed suit against Napster on the grounds of copyright infringement by users of the company's software, and your pal Aimee Mann has also gone on record voicing her negative opinion

of the popular program. Not even you are immune -- a recent check showed that someone had posted *2 Steps from the Middle Ages* in its entirety, as well as a handful of tracks from *Lolita Nation*, and a couple of rarities that originated right here at loudfamily.com!

Do you feel that Napster and similar programs such as Gnutella help or hurt artists? On the one hand, it's possible that someone could decide not to buy *Attractive Nuisance* if they can grab the whole thing for free on Napster, but then again, Game Theory's CDs aren't for sale anywhere these days unless you're willing to pay \$50+ per disc on eBay, so perhaps the person who posted those tracks was doing your fans a favor.

Sue T.

Napster and I have two significant things in common. (1) major labels don't like us, and (2) we make our homes in San Mateo, CA. I go by the Napster building fairly regularly and am eerily drawn to it, a bit like the monkeys and the black monolith in *2001* (there is in fact a slight physical resemblance).

The Napster issue is knotty, and it touches on some important issues -- issues where I feel I'm used to seeing things get botched up through dismissiveness and oversimplification, so I'm afraid I'm going to have to give a long, heavy, boring, circumspect answer involving Kierkegaard.

I suppose the most important thing to say is that I don't want to see Napster *users* hauled into court. I'm in favor of finding ways to limit use of Napster, and I'm perfectly fine with people getting their Napster licenses yanked for infringing copyrights, but I'd want to talk the industry side out of spilling blood if I could. I'm not too happy with the amount of money Metallica wants from Napster -- it seems to me like they're doing too much of a war dance over this -- though it's possible I have faulty perspective when I see so many zeros in dollar figures.

Now, that said, I'd like to talk to the users about *their* duty not to spill blood. The pro-Napster argument goes something like "it's inevitable that copyright enforcement as we now know it will become impossible with Gnutella, so everyone should just get used to Napster." This is precisely the logic of the mob. "The police can't stop us from looting these Jewish shops now that fascism is insurgent, so everyone should just get used to fascism." The mob supersedes truth and falsehood (that is why Kierkegaard said "the crowd *is* untruth"). Consider: what would it have mattered if fascism *succeeded*? What if it was unanimously told that the rioters at *Kristallnacht* were heroes? Would that make it right, or at best morally undecidable? What if it's perfectly true that Gnutella will make copyright protection a thing of the past, and that if in fact the sooner it dies, so much the better for the vast majority of mankind?

Kierkegaard knew that from such success -- and it alone -- you can deduce its moral *wrong*. For the self to align with insurgency is to accept its truth as *the* truth -- to be absorbed into this machine for displacing truth, recasting it as an obsolete way of thinking. How could a Nazi tell the truth to his rioting compatriots? "We must renounce our common cause and grant these shopkeepers the dignity to price their wares." What, those smug, chiseling

shopkeepers? What a relic you are! "To preserve our humanity, we must let major label artists charge what they want and respect their copyrights." These price-gouging majors and their rich, out-of-touch artist lackeys? Your thinking is obsolete!

For what it's worth, I think the era of intellectual property, which I reckon for cultural purposes to be a few hundred years old, is probably starting to wind down. But we don't know what it means to live without it, and living without it will be a very big deal, so we should proceed with caution and humility, not giddiness, if we know what's good for us.

--Napinducer

July 3, 2000

Scott, this is kind of an Ask Scott and kind a plea to come down South. I love Loud Family and Game Theory, and people are always surprised to find out about such good music that they previously were totally unaware of. There is a community space/venue in Sarasota, FL that I would give my right arm to have you play at, if you can ever make it all the way out here.

Scott: I'd love to come play there some time.

My "Ask Scott" portion of this is: what do you think about the newer manifestations of indie/alternative music?

I don't know; do the Magnetic Fields and the Flaming Lips count as "newer?" Things at the college radio level feel a little low on inspiration to me. Electronica was sort of a cultural non-event for my money, though maybe the "rave" concept has real power if you're young enough.

Nothing could possibly be more depressing than MTV programming in 2000. I can say to myself "if I flip to the premier current music channel in America, I will see a white rap/metal guy doing hand-jive at a fisheye lens at ground-level" and usually be right. Aimee Mann is right that the average adult listener is strangely neglected by the music industry. If you're not a teenager and it just doesn't interest you to fantasize about being a messed-up tough guy, it will probably be deduced by the industry that what you want is to watch Human League videos.

Where did the name Loud Family come from?

Danny Wood

In 1974 (I believe that was the year), there was a PBS show called "An American Family," which made somewhat reluctant cultural icons of a Santa Barbara family whose surname was Loud. A film crew documented their daily lives over nine months, and when anything occurred that families in 1974 normally didn't publicize more than they had to (divorce, homosexuality), it became a scandal. I remember the press being decidedly unkind, tending to accuse PBS of deliberately selecting a troubled family, as if it were important to

stigmatize the Louds lest it be accepted that any family selected at random can be made the subject of scandal. No doubt if the press wishes to scandalize a family, it wants credit for a special and valuable discovery.

see also the Mumps' CD

--Scott

July 10, 2000

Scott, I feel a little embarrassed that my only question to you ever on this page is so prosaic, but : I have heard that you are thinking of not continuing with Loud Family after *Attractive Nuisance*, but that you will be doing a tour in support of it. We would so much like you to play in England again (missed you in 93) -- is there even the remotest chance?

Suzanne Beard

Scott: I definitely appreciate your being interested. It hasn't been officially pronounced, but my gout is flaring up in a way that tells me we probably won't be continuing the Loud Family. I hope I get a chance to play in England some time again under some circumstances; maybe if I'm ever on vacation there someone could set up a show ("right, we'll just ask the bands that draw to wait outside, so this fucking tosser who no one gives a fuck about can play his nice little songs"). If nothing else I *must* shop at least once more at Minus Zero. There has to be a copy of "Oh No, Won't Do" by Cud with my name on it out there somewhere.

mind the gap,

--S

Scott, I'm a Joyce enthusiast also. You are the only person I've met (several times at the Hotel Utah, and at a DuNord gig Alison did) who has also read the *Wake*. In your 1998 interview with ana m., you said, "I recently put *Finnegans Wake* at the top of my favorite novels' list and then thought dear God, what if people go out and buy it?" Why, exactly, do you think that would be a problem? It has to be among the funniest novels ever written.

Scott: Yes, but if someone picks up *Finnegans Wake* and just starts laughing hysterically, I'll be wanting to leave them to enjoy it *by themselves*. Let's say that if you thought *John Lennon In His Own Write* and *Ulysses* were both drop dead knee slappers, there's at least some chance *Finnegans Wake* is for you. For sheer (dark) humor that's as intellectually advanced and a whole lot easier, I'd probably go to Flannery O'Connor's short stories first.

To me the big *Finnegans Wake* payoff is in linguistics and the anthropology of consciousness. There's a critical work called *Joyce's Book of the Dark* which I thought made that case very well.

Having read Joyce, have you ever read the work of William Gaddis? I think he's everything literary critics claim Pynchon is supposed to be, but funnier and more interesting. I highly recommend *The Recognitions* and *JR*. As with Joyce, the books appreciate with multiple readings.

Tris McCall likes him, too, so I'll probably check him out. I'm still of a mind to give priority the classics (currently in Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*).

OK, here's the big question. I have a book of poetry coming out. Some of the poems have references to your lyrics. Will you bring in a big law firm or a small one to have it quashed?

Well, you know, poetry law is such a high-stakes arena, I can't make any promises. Congratulations on having a book of poetry coming out.

BTW, Alison & I used to work together at Green Apple Books, so you can find out from her what a tough litigant I am. Maybe we could duke it out at your Feb. 18 gig (just to generate publicity). I'll miss with my punches if you miss with yours. Deal? I think I'm coordinated enough to consistently miss. After all, I used to be a bass player.

As I remember I held up my end of that bargain.

Finally, I hope *Attractive Nuisance* makes Alias tons of money, and they re-sign you or someone nice out-bids them. I need new music from you in my life on a regular basis.

David Fox(x)

Thank you very much! I believe that album made over a hundred dollars.

mind, the gap

--Scott

July 17, 2000

Scott, it's an unavoidable frustration, I suppose, that as my interest in music continues to both deepen and broaden, I have less time/attention to devote to any particular album or artist. I've been thinking a lot about my listening habits lately, and since you are an important member of my sonic pantheon (and the only one likely to answer my e-mail), I thought I would ask you about yours (if it's not too personal).

When, where, how, and how often do you typically listen to music? Do you tend to spend a lot of time listening closely? Do you like to have it on in the background when you're paying attention to something else?

Scott: I should start by saying that music is necessarily a background concern, necessarily glorifying and contextualizing other aspects of life. That's why many religions fussily regulate music, and something to do with why Plato wanted to curb the lyric arts in the Republic.

It used to irk me that music by my native people the Californians was too often *about* something else, like surfing, skateboarding, dancing, dressing up, or whatever. Now I consider that a naive complaint.

Why do you listen to music? That may seem like a silly question, but I think people have a number of reasons: relaxation, stimulation, nostalgia, the desire to make a fashion statement, sociability, inspiration, mood alteration, etc. I'm sure you have multiple motivations, and different ones at different times, but I would be interested to hear your thoughts.

When I was young I was consumed by music, and when I wasn't making it I was listening to it, always interested in what made good music good. My favorite way to listen to music was while playing solitaire. I learned the habit from Nancy Becker. For me it ideally occupies the aspects of the mind that might otherwise rebel against focusing passively on sound.

These days I don't have that kind of spare time, and I'm not compelled by the possibility of music being my livelihood, so I listen more casually, usually while driving, paying bills, etc. I no longer listen responsibly enough to make lists of favorite music in the 2000s, for instance. Strangely, I don't listen to music any less passionately for any of that; sometimes I'll want to stand in front of the stereo and marvel at a great track. Maybe I can say that the spells I fell under are no less wonderful on reflection, but I don't fall under the same spells anew as if nothing of youth were special.

Do you tend to listen to an album repeatedly, or are you more of a variety/spice/life kind of guy? Do you listen mostly to new music, or frequently go back to past favorites? Do you listen to much music outside the pop/rock genre?

I'm one of those people who can listen to a song I like a hundred times and not get tired of it; old music is hardly ever less okay with me because it's old. Current pop/rock is also not as right for me as sixties-based pop/rock, though. I feel a boring speech coming on, but I'll limit it to saying pop/rock's charter used to be something like allowing the young and excluded to feel okay and have fun, and now it's far more focused on the retribution due the excluders, where the "fun" is at best ironic and at worst vengeful. The error is that no exclusion goes on consciously, or at least the exclusion getting a reaction is less brazenly self-serving than the reaction itself. An overused but clear illustration is the rioting at Woodstock III.

I listen to a little classical and jazz, but as nothing but a novice, and jazz is in some ways deliberately unhelpful to novices.

Finally, I'm interested in the way that listening interacts with the creative process. Since I got my first 4-track, I've been spending more time listening to and working on my own songs, at the expense of time devoted to others'. Since much of the process takes place in my head, I have gotten away from the habit of playing my stereo every waking minute I'm

at home. Does songwriting have a similar effect on your listening habits? Do you ever listen to particular music with the conscious intent of allowing it to influence a particular project? Do you ever listen to your own CDs after they've come out?

Before making every album I've forced myself to buy a batch of currently popular college radio CDs just to avoid getting too isolated. I listen to my finished CDs now with less anguish than in the old days. It's liberating not to think they stand a chance of competing successfully against other CDs for national attention.

I hope this barrage isn't too overwhelming. Feel free to pick and choose. And thanks for making the noise you make. The new album is much more "attractive" than "nuisance" in my book. I only wish there were some way the band could play closer to the center of the country. It's a doughnut of a tour and I'm stuck in the hole.

Only about 699 times happier than the unjust man,

Jon Tveite

Thanks very much for writing, and I hope I've been able to turn the untidy mystery and wonder of music into useful, clinical analysis.

writing about music is like dancing about music

--Scott

August 7, 2000

Scott, I've admired your music since 1985 when I bought *The Big Shot Chronicles* simply because the song titles sounded so intriguing. A grad student ca. '87-'89, I saw you twice in Iowa City and to this day make my wife's eyes glaze over every time I fail to convey your ferocious solo performance of "Erica's Word." I recently snagged a CD of *Lolita Nation* which, absent any foresight, I bought on LP in the '80's, and think your Loud Family work, including *Attractive Nuisance*, among the very best rock of the past ten years.

Scott: Thanks very much. Sometimes I wonder what it could be that someone likes about my music, when most labels would never think it's something they'd like to put out. I don't often guess right about what listeners whom I care about will consider a stylistic error, yet sometimes along comes someone like you thinking I didn't mess things up at all. Musical tastes are mysterious, and I respect recording artists who are masters of that business!

I infer from last week's "Ask Scott" that your Alias Records contact is almost up; can you be more specific about your plans? In response to the writer's P.S., I printed up the lyrics to *Attractive Nuisance* and thought that, among others, "One Will Be the Highway" and "Motion of Ariel" directly address your lack of career success. (Both beautiful songs, by the way). Have you framed *Attractive Nuisance* as your last album, or last Loud Family project?

Yes, then and now I think of it as my last album. Doing additional work damages the ability of future listeners to hear what I've already done. For example, almost all reviews of my albums now talk about how I've been slugging it out so long with little success, and the only way to cure that misunderstanding is to stop doing anything that has the structure of slugging it out.

I wasn't thinking about lack of career success when writing "One Will Be the Highway" or "Motion of Ariel" -- which is not to say it's beside the point. Lack of success makes for a clear understanding that I can't speak with authority to my listeners -- but that's progress, not cause for redoubling efforts. In the system of fame, if I earn authority, those giving it to me think "he is a great one, and by listening to him, we will learn what is good." But I am thinking "without their granting me authority, I am nothing, so I must carefully learn what they want me to say is good, and say that." On the surface (and for the young), this is not a problem. "Of course! That's called wanting you not to suck!" But there is unseen machinery working out what sucks and what doesn't, to which one is liable to object if one studies it carefully.

I hope not. A few years back, I was delighted when, waxing nostalgic over Game Theory to an ex-student, she told me about the Loud Family and I could once again look forward to your music. Whatever the form of future projects or any possible sabbatical, will you continue to write and record?

At the moment I don't think so. It would just be disappointing a few people around me rather than a lot of people, or later rather than sooner. But maybe I will one day come up with a new and better tactic for being both communicative and entertaining. You never know.

Good luck with the new CD and congratulations on your marriage. Will you play in New York or Baltimore this year?

Ned Balbo

Thank you! (NY si, Baltimore, no)

--ferocious Erica

Note: Ned Balbo is the author of a really terrific (Towson University 1998 prize for literature!) book of poetry entitled *Galileo's Banquet*.

August 21, 2000

Scott, this goes without saying, but I'm eternally grateful for the robust Loud Family/Game Theory catalog you've give us over the past two decades. Also, I love the new album and I've really enjoyed reading your Ask Scott responses and your ruminations on everything from Nietzsche to Girard to Roger Waters.

Scott: Thanks very much. I'm glad you like *Attractive Nuisance*, and emboldened by this I'll share with you what a weird job it is trying to make a record that people will think is good. I remember when just coming up with a melody I liked and words that I liked was this satisfying and successful act, and lately that just seems more and more beside the point of what anyone's interested in. Maybe I just used to be good at it and now I'm not, but I feel like I work the ol' magic like always, and listeners are standing there blinking and saying "why are you writing these depressing things?" "Why aren't there more experiments?" "Why do you still sound like the '80s?" Jesus, I don't know -- I was standing there ready to make one of my *good* albums like *Lolita Nation* or *Plants and Birds*, when I just impetuously decided to be tedious and out of date.

A couple quick questions: one thing I've never had the privilege to experience is a live LF show. Are there any plans in the works to release a live retrospective? I'm equally interested in hearing shows from the original '93 lineup as well as the great current ensemble.

I'm not sure any recording exists of that lineup. I think there a couple of decent 8-track recordings from 1995 and 1996, but I'm probably forgetting some. I'm a little afraid of live recording because my voice is so terrible sometimes, but you could probably selectively string a few tracks into something not totally devoid of merit. I know some people out there have some Game Theory tapes they're fond of, but generally I don't hear much I can listen to vocalwise.

Also, now that it's more or less a sure thing that the Loud Family chapter of your musical career will soon be coming to an end, what direction do you see yourself going in next? More specifically, I've always wondered if you've considered experimenting with more left-of-center forms like ambient and electronic music. Pop geniuses such as Peter Gabriel and Brian Eno have proven themselves quite adept at creating less commercial and more adventurous music. Ever considered it?

I sure can't think of much that Peter Gabriel has done that tempts me to use the word "genius." Maybe the song "D.I.Y."

As far as pop songcraft goes, I definitely consider you in their league, and more sonically adventurous tunes on the new release like "Controlled Burn" indicate you're capable of such departures...

Well, the "ambient" direction is practically an Eno trademark, for one thing. And thanks for the compliment, but the concept of my taking a less commercial direction is rather metaphysical even as a topic of conversation.

I'm sure I'd like to do another record one day, assuming I have reasonable support in that task, but I want to be careful not to do it just to be doing it, which is part of that sort of "addressing possibilities" attitude which I consider something of the down side of some of the music by people like Eno. I want to have more of a game plan for pleasing people than that, as unfashionable as that sounds.

Whatever the case, thanks for the many years/albums of excellent music. I hope I can catch the band on the upcoming tour.

JP Mohan

Thank you very much for writing.

--the paw paw caucasian blowtorch

September 11, 2000

Scott, I found this at a [Jeff Buckley web site](#), and I was wondering what your take on it was, in lieu of the recent dissolve of the Loud Family (sorry that it is so long).

Scott: ...I'd better cut a lot of this out so we don't infringe anyone's copyright...

"You're constantly trying to make sure that your sense of self-worth doesn't depend on the writings or opinions of other people. You have to wean yourself off acclaim as the object of your work, by learning to depend on your own judgment and knowing what it is that you enjoy. You have to realize what the difference is between being adored and being loved and understood. Big difference."

I know exactly what he means. Fame is probably the strongest de facto experience of the sacred that most people will ever get. What constitutes *the sacred* is a hairy topic, but if you've had close contact with a very famous person, and were left groping for a way to express how he or she was simply more *radiant* than an ordinary person, *that* is the sacred. Not a *developed* experience of the sacred, but the real thing.

The same general mechanism compels people to want to accrue fame. I'm a sufferer of this disease, and I know Jeff Buckley's need to separate the work from the acclaim. There are times and places when working ambitiously toward fame works cleanly, but it's usually it's a pretty polluting burn. Having to *fascinate* people is usually a bad business for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that if you're in the process of soliciting fame, you're by definition unqualified to relate to anyone as an artist. An artist's job is to relate the truth of experience, and if in fact what you're doing is selecting for which simulated experiential truth will *fly*, you will acquire the habit of replacing truth with schlock when schlock flies. It's not an absolute rule, but it is a real and insidious tendency.

One of my favorite social commentators, Gil Bailie, said that people will look back on our time and think it very odd that people *desired* fame. The unalloyed reaction to fame is not very close to good will. There's a strong element of currying favor, maybe. If a famous person walks into the room, we often suddenly want him or her to *like* us, and are ready to credit ourselves with being unusually friendly people, but if you break it down, we don't really worry much about the famous person's happiness. We think famous people already have what we want, and if we behave right, we'll get some of that. If a famous person makes some sort of public misstep, there's a feeding frenzy. Any cold and unimaginative put-down will be *gold* for comedians for a year; that is just life. The magic we take for good

will toward the famous turns into the magic of shared contempt in a way that should make anyone wonder what happened to our inflexible dedication, our *certainty* that the famous person *radiated* something of which we were compelled to partake.

I quote all this partly because it might have some bearing on the state of your music career right now, and also to ask you a question (or rather a series of questions). The questions are this: did you stop enjoying making music? Did it become too much work with not enough reward?

It stopped making sense as a business that takes a lot of time and money and doesn't earn money back. I may have to look to something like feudal patronage if I ever hope to do another serious project.

Or do you just feel creatively depleted at the moment, and feel like calling it off for now?

I have a project in mind which I *think* I'm going to get excited about, but there's just not the slightest doubt that people need a rest from me. I feel like I'm putting stuff down that should be knocking people out, and it's not. Like a lot of middle-aged rock people, I probably need to get smarter about what current music I try to resonate with, and what current music I refuse to do business with, because that's a huge part of how people relate to music whether I like it or not.

From some of your responses to this question, it sounds like you might be ready to hang your guitar up forever, with maybe occasionally playing for fun. Not that my opinion matters in this situation (or should matter as it is your decision to make), but I will definitely be sad to not hear any more Scott Miller recordings in the future, and I feel that I speak for many out there by saying this. I am just hoping that these words of Jeff Buckley (a talent who died before he could even peak musically) might help convince you (a talent whose career has been a series of musical high points with no signs of the inevitable descent) to reconsider. After all, you still have breath in your body, so please let us keep hearing it.

Michael Miller

Michael, thanks for writing. Believe me that I take this as encouraging and inspiring. I'm grateful for all the messages I've received lately, and I can assure everyone that I'm not bitterly rejecting music or anything. If my life goes such a way that there's a respectable opportunity to do a serious project, my heart will be in it! But I'm honestly not talking nonsense when I lay out reasons for not doing records under the present circumstances. I have to be conscientious about how a release will be received. I can't expend a thousand hours on something that doesn't have a pretty good deployment system -- meaning not that it's going to sell in malls, but just that it gets a reasonable number of people excited.

fifteen minutes of flame,

--Scott

November 13, 2000

Scott, Any chance you'll ever play in the UK again ?

F. Kowalczuk

Scott: Thanks for asking! I just don't know. Believe me, I'd love to. If I were on vacation there one day I could always pick up an acoustic, except that being label-less, I no longer have business ties to people who could set up a club date. "Hello, operator, this is Scott Miller. I need the number for playing my guitar somewhere in the country."

Reminds me of a Derek and Clive skit where Peter Cook is talking about addressing a letter to the BBC: "I just wrote 'C***s, London'; I knew it would get to them."

keeping that American boogie steamin' hot for ya

--Scott

Scott, I never heard of you before but it seems like Aimee Mann likes you so I'm gonna check out your stuff.

Plus I thought you seemed pretty cool by your high estimations of early Kinks and Who albums but I knew for sure when I noticed you dug the dB's.

Brad

Scott: Glad to hear it! I hope for new listeners' sake that history keeps scrupulous track of the dB's; I just consider their stuff rewarding as anything.

Hope you either liked our material or were able to avoid it without monetary loss.

--seemingly liked by Aimee Mann

November 23, 2000

Scott, it's not so much an Ask Scott as a Tell Scott, but man, I've been searching high and low throughout New York City, supposedly teeming with decent record stores, in search of LF's latest. And I'm having a rotten time of it. I don't know what's worse, not finding it, or the stares of record-store employees, blank and pitiless as the sun.

Scott: I am sorry you couldn't find that CD. The Loud Family message was always anti-blank-pitilessness.

I know I can buy it online, but it is goddamned distressing to not be able to get my very real hands on your very real latest release without involving ones and zeroes. This is New York! It's not like I'm in Hale Eddy (that's upstate, and i'm sure if you were an East Coaster, you'd have used it in a song by now).

Hale Eddy
You got the love I need
Maybe more than enough
Oh darlin' darlin' darlin'...

Something is just wrong with this picture.

Thanks for listening,

David Klein

Thank you for writing. So many things didn't quite click in my music career that no particular one irritates me anymore. What I do is somewhat inherently uncommercial (both my content and my not overly obvious vocal merit), and when I look back I'm a little astounded that so many people supported me. It's weird to reflect that there was a time when I would walk into a record store in London and actually be recognized -- a memory that seems oddly parallel to going into the same store as a teenager and being in awe of anyone who had a record on sale there.

So I'm thinking of everyone who bothers to read this on Thanksgiving.

come on pilgrim,

--S

December 18, 2000

Scott, "opera" is the plural of "opus," but I think the adjective has to match, which would make it "magna opera". (Editor's Note: Aaron is referring to the March 20, 2000 Ask Scott.)

Scott: Hi, Aaron! That is outstanding. When one sees "Harvard" in the email address, the mood is set for Latin adjective agreement, and here is no disappointment.

That's not my question, though. What I want to know is, where were the side breaks going to be in the vinyl *Interbabe Concern*? It always seemed to me like the feedback squall at the end of "Top Dollar Survivalist Hardware" belonged at the beginning of a song (or perhaps a side) rather than at the end, but, well, you tell me.

Aaron Mandel

You are right. Side two was supposed to start with the same synthesizer sound (not feedback, actually) as side one. Side? Sequencing seems to have less meaning all the time, doesn't it? Soon we will press a button that causes us to instantly know a piece of music in its entirety, and we'll be able to just hold the button down until we want to stop thinking about it. After that, music knowledge cancellation software! A market for which is not farfetched even now.

I do wish *I. Con.* had come out on vinyl -- the packaging was nice, and the LP had that cool groove-cramming just like *Get Happy*. Then again, I've had two of my records mastered by Bob Ludwig in one lifetime, which is definitely more media karma than one little person deserves.

medium karmus,

--S
