

ASK SCOTT

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

2008 & 2010 (Years 11 & 12)

May 19, 2008

Reading the recent posts, I'm excited to hear you're considering jumping back into the fray with another album, maybe produced on a DAW. I can do things with Ableton Live and a Korg Wavestation virtual instrument plugin that I really haven't earned the right to be able to do.

Scott: Thanks for writing! I'll consider myself emboldened. Home digital music isn't evil, it just threatens awfulness from a new and confusing angle. There's no longer a sea of obviously mediocre demos in the world, there's a sea of final products whose mediocrity is subtle—the result of tepid passions and unearned technical merits. As Bradley Skaught said, the good news is that anyone can make an album now; the bad news is that everyone has.

If a duffer like me can fake and spin his way to people thinking I had a coherent vision, then I'm convinced you'll be a master once you decide to do it... and this brings to mind to a question I've always wanted to Ask Scott.

Having been a True Gamester since way back when there was such a thing, I've been around for just about the whole ALRN/GT/LF ride. Over the years I've frequently gotten the feeling that your work contains within it the idea that "Businessmen Are Okay." You've always seemed to be able not to take your music too seriously—even though the artistic quality of your work has been so skilled and feeling that it's entirely possible for your fans to take it all too seriously.

I'm utterly serious about music, I just respect the buying public's judgment that it's not what I should do for a living. I listen to and think about music all the time. But I also do think businessmen are okay—or at least I think an impulse such as disliking "suits" is suspect.

The counterpoint to the experiential effect of your music is when you reply to questions; often referring to the mundane aspects of making a record (and all the stuff that goes with it) as being borderline "not quite worth it." Furthermore, popularity appears to be a strong operator in your view of your musical career.

Really not so. For example, I'm completely capable of loving producing records under conditions of extreme anonymity. But unavoidably "a career" means "a level of marketability," and I've reached the limits of what I'll sacrifice to achieve that.

It seems like a well-honed balancing act between idealism and realism. It would be great to hear how you achieved the balance between *ars artis gratia* and *redde Caesari quae sunt Caesaris*.

Question: How did you learn to love the bomb? Are you like enlightened or something?

**Doing the Fake and Spin,
Ken S.**

Enlightenment makes you love the bomb?

Most of what I know about enlightenment I've absorbed from Western literary figures, who tend to be Christian if they are religious themselves; the following quote from W.H. Auden comes as close to having koan-like power as I (being a Westerner) have come across: "I believe because [Jesus] fulfils none of my dreams, because he is in every respect the opposite of what he would be if I could have made him in my own image. None of the others [Buddha, Muhammad, etc.] arouse all sides of my being to cry 'Crucify him.'"

Bomb Factory Not Bombs!
--Scott

December 22, 2008

First, thanks for all the fantastic music over the years—I have long loved Game Theory and The Loud Family, and pretty much any GT album and *Plants and Birds and Rocks and Things* are on my list for "if you were stranded on a desert island and could only pick 10 albums"—all are favorites. Also, thanks for a very special memory from when GT came to Baltimore and I bought you a beer to welcome you, and you made a valiant effort to sign my cd book from *Two Steps*... I can still make out the impressions, even though the pen wouldn't work on the glossy surface—you really tried though. My questions are fairly bland, but I've been listening to your music for two decades now, and it never gets old—the songs are just too interesting musically and lyrically, with a very personal feel. A friend of mine says she hears classical training in your music, so I'm wondering about your training in that area ("w/ all our well-trained ears") and its influence on you.

Scott: As a kid I had some classical guitar training and some general music theory. That may have caused me to grow the tendency to value melody by itself more than most people. That is, I like melody more than people like melody, not I like melody more than I like people. Although come to think of it, some songs are definitely better than some people.

But to give some perspective, I've probably expended a hundred times as much effort acquiring studio recording skills as I have at anything like mastering counterpoint techniques, or studying scales to improvise in.

Also, "Regenisraen" and "Inverness" both sound like they involve personal experiences with actual places—can you describe what they hold for you (and if "Regenesraen" isn't a place, where does the title come from)?

That first one was on an album called *Big Shot Chronicles*, and most of the lyrics on that album came from dreams I'd had, and I was also reading the 1939 James Joyce novel (if that's the right word) *Finnegans Wake*, which is 700 pages of a sort of Jabberwocky speech meant to communicate a dreaming state, and that technique rubbed off on me for that title. I suppose my intention was to conjure up the feeling of finding yourself in need of spiritual renewal, but when I go into detail about lyrics I wrote when I was pretty young, it's usually an exercise in trying to sell them as respectable to my current self, so I'll save everyone that embarrassing spectacle.

"Inverness" is a real place in Scotland and there's also a city of that name not too far from where I live, which is the San Francisco Bay Area. The song is supposed to convey a longing connection to a place where a soured relationship occurred, but it's a complete fabrication—I don't know anything about those places. I can't tell you why it seemed to mysteriously capture something for me. Songwriting at its core is completely unconscious; it's not like I crafted the idea for that chorus, it was just one minute not there in my head, then the next minute it was.

Not to say this would be true of you, but for some reason it's generally a mild shock to people that songs aren't autobiographical, when something like a film or a novel, which goes into much greater detail, is just assumed to be a complete invention.

Also, I loved looking at your top 20 lists and am especially glad to see bands like The Feelies and Prefab Sprout in there—Did you ever get into the Go Betweens or the Chameleons? Thanks again for such phenomenal music.

Scott Soud

You know, I'll check those artists out further when I get the chance.

Thanks again for the beer.

--Postfab Sprout

March 29, 2010

Since you are one of the few people who without question is a significantly bigger Alex Chilton fan than myself, I (a) wanted to pass along condolences from one fan to another on the loss of a major musical inspiration, and (b) wondered if you were planning on writing some sort of memorial piece. I have no idea if you knew Chilton or ever even met him, but I know his work clearly meant a lot to you, and I'd be curious to know if you had any final words on the man behind Big Star.

Mark D.

Scott: I spoke to Alex only a few times, mostly in a single backstage encounter in Memphis in 1984, and the first thing I feel obliged to report is how entirely good-natured he was. I didn't know better than to do a fair amount of geeking out about Big Star Third, to the point of having him help me get lyrics right, and he participated in this discussion with no hint of annoyance or attempt to change the subject.

I realize there was such a thing as him behaving antisocially, but if I'd never actually met him, I'd assume from what I read that he was antisocial day in and day out. There's a big difference. Alex had a precise and literary mind, and the closest facsimile of a literary life available to him in his formative years was Memphis's community of the musicologically hypereducated, a seductively rich atmosphere in the midst of which there was far too much positive reinforcement of colorful excess. He had a black sense of humor that, in the patterns I've seen it deployed, I think perversely indicated that he liked you, or was considering liking you. If you were overly sensitive to crossing the line, it was an unfortunate fact of life that he was going to have to put some distance between you and him, because crossing the line was what he did.

We can learn from the personality traits of great originals like Alex that originality, in the first instance, is contentiousness: an arbitrary rejection of some habit of mind. But just as Alex spent occasional defining moments in opposition both musically and personally, he spent the whole rest of his day being pleasant and loving life, both musically and personally. It's no accident that his later musical career is difficult for most people; he directed his affections to neglected corners of the musical landscape, where affection was needed most. My heart goes out in gratitude to Jody, Ken, Jon, John Fry, Laura who seems entirely wonderful, and everyone who gave Alex a good life, and I'll testify again to what a supremely successful artist he was—I would guess one of the ten best American composers in history.

very best,
--Scott

This was the last Ask Scott entry.