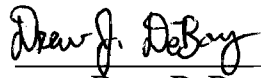


# Grandiose Echoes

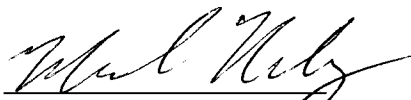
Deconstructing Rock and Roll

an Honors 499 Thesis by:



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Drew DeBoy



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Thesis Advisor: Mark Neely

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Abstract:

*Grandiose Echoes* is a series of five creative nonfiction pieces that detail accounts related to my experiences, over a period of nearly three years, in playing with a rock and roll band. They are all inter-related, and form the best picture I can give so far in an attempt to demystify and deconstruct my experiences in the music community.

Acknowledgements:

- I'd like to thank Mark Neely, my advisor, for reading and commenting on the pieces throughout the semester, providing helpful criticisms and letting me know when the writing was at its strongest.
- Jill Christman, my Creative Nonfiction 3 professor, for allowing me to submit pieces from my thesis to the in-class workshops, and for reading extraneous pieces related to my thesis that weren't involved with the class.
- My band mates, current and former, for reading early drafts of the pieces, always pushing me to write more, and never being angry with any of the scenes or depictions. Yet.

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## Prologue

Everything, Now! has played in Muncie forty-four times over the previous two-and-a-half years, building a following from scratch. Over this time period, I suppose we've become somewhat of a minor musical sensation, regularly drawing crowds of 150 or more. On campus, I'm often recognized not by my name, but my identity of being in the band. I've done more in the band than I probably ever would have achieved musically by myself—two records so far, three tours, countless shows and interviews. What is written here is an account of those experiences—not a summary, because that would be way too long and uninteresting, but a series of essays deglamorizing the often mythic, mystic concept of “the band.” What is here is honest and true, a series of interconnected moments that show how much the band has affected my life, and how my life has affected the band.

## Epic Shit, Man

525 North Wheeling Avenue was the Muncie home-base of Everything, Now! for two years. For years “the 525” had been home to artists, musicians, slackers, anarchists, computer nerds, alcoholics, stoners, and general twenty-something disillusioned anti-hipsters. Upstairs was a three-bedroom apartment, in which Dan, Crafty, and Doog, three band members, all lived, though never all at the same time. We practiced in an upstairs bedroom until the floor threatened to cave in from the weight of six guys with equipment, and the window was busted out by an errant drumstick. Downstairs, there was communal couch-space for bands passing through and drunks passing out; three bedrooms with 12-foot ceilings and decaying molding; a filthy kitchen with communal food shelves with mostly dumpstered food; a large glass table decked with past-date pies and brownies, cats’ food, and bill notices; and a refrigerator usually filled with expired juices, quickly-softening produce, and large volumes of High Life or Pabst. The house was a failed experiment in communal living, the rules binding its residents to cleaning schedules and food sharing had decayed into several shouting matches, residents pissing on each others’ bikes, and dishes being thrown into the yard. The lone remainder of the attempted idealism was the weekly Food Not Bombs meetings, which usually consisted of several pounds of stir fry served in bowls along with whatever breads and sweets the dumpsters behind Marsh could provide.

The basement was a mass of shoddy bunk beds, bold blue tarps separating two of the “rooms,” piles of amps, pieces of several P.A. systems, broken cords, outlets packed full of power strips, drum skeletons, carpet fragments, and a rusty tank of a furnace. The pipes in the ceiling began leaking bits of sewage halfway through the band’s tenure,

which gave the entire place an odor stuck between a dirty bathroom and a zoo. The stairs down to the basement were narrow, making it impossible for even the skinniest pair of guitar-wielding vegans to haul an amp or head up side-by-side.

The house next door had been condemned for several years, and after break-ins by 525 residents, was purportedly in better condition than the 525 itself. The power was spotty in the basement, often interrupting practices or providing smoke breaks. Still, there were benefits to practicing in such a pit. Well, really just one. Noise laws didn't really apply to the 525, since the basement was low enough to prevent most sound from escaping its earthy grasp. You could practice at any time of day or night as long as there were enough members to convince the residents.

In the fall of 2005, only three adventurous residents would sign the lease to continue renting the 525. Eventually, they had to move out due to ever-decaying conditions, escalating rent, and the realization that they were living in a cesspool with walls and running water. The house was subsequently condemned, something we had joked about in-between power outages and stepping on shit-soaked rugs. In July, though we didn't know it then, we played the last show ever hosted by the 525, on a night when at 10pm the temperature still hovered around 85 degrees, the humidity near 100 percent. The show was an explosion of sweat, shirtless bodies, forty-ounce bottles, and countless bum-jugs of Carlo Rossi. When the last note buzzed out, we stumbled away from the broken drum set and dissolving jingle sticks, up the stairs into a muddy yard filled with slurred voices and cricket calls.

When people ask what Everything, Now! sounds like—I have a couple stock responses based on their looks. If they're aged, well-tanned and wearing a polo shirt, or

think art is that Thomas Kinkade hanging in the doctor's office, that the new Ashley Simpson single isn't just contrived bullshit created to replicate a white suburban girl's fantasy of what "rebellion is," then I tell them it's "rock and roll." To the more astute, the kid in fitted jeans, or the short-haired girl in glasses and Chuck Taylors, I may say "indie rock" or "indie rock with keyboards and bells" or "epic shit, man." The 525 is an accurate metaphor for the sound of Everything, Now!—even our name sometimes seems to be a reflection of that past residence, whether its the number and types of people that paid rent there, or the types of food Dan, the original drummer, would coat sloppily with ranch dressing. Everything, Now! incorporates a diverse set of often dissonant, opposite influences. In a given song you may hear the grandiose echoes of David Bowie, drum circles of Afrobeat, the wall of noise of a shitty gutter-punk band playing through shredded speakers, the intense, detail-focused micro-percussion of Brian Wilson, even the glitter and fade of the modern ambient noise movement.

Live, the band is a different monster, but like the house we came to band-hood in, full of a punk rock ethos. The songs are extremely loud and are structurally flexible, to allow occasional free-form interpretation. On-stage, instruments and members are strewn haphazardly across the stage or floor, our soulful but cool demeanor the result of long hours of practice, the constant rehearsals even an hour or two before scheduled show-time. Like the 525, we're a mix of high ideals and punk aesthetic, a blender of precision and chaos, an ear-blistering ball of energy always ready to disintegrate, but retaining enough control to reel in each song.

It wasn't always that way, and the birth of the band didn't even take place in the wet, warm womb of the 525, but in Athens, Georgia, where guitarist, vocalist, and songwriter Jon (known to everyone but his parents and girlfriend as Crafty) was born. He

began writing songs for what would become the band while he worked graveyard shift at a gas station in Indianapolis, where he had moved after high school graduation to pursue love, not music. For the same reason, he soon moved up to Muncie where he started a project with the other three original members, Rob, Dan, and Ben, calling it The Grand Opening. The foursome's first show took place on an icy January night in 2003 at a local punk rock bar called the Speakeasy. In its infancy, The Grand Opening was showing signs of the psychedelic, multi-media project that it would eventually become.

Accompanying the band on the tiny stage was a three-foot tall purple and red, wire and papier-mâché octopus, complete with eight tentacles. Above them was a green banner with decorative trumpets read "The Grand Opening," and on each side of the stage was a TV/VCR stack playing loops of old cartoons, public service announcements, and 70s-era educational programming.

At the very first show I was immediately drawn in to the artistic production of the band as a whole—in addition to the interesting songwriting, which rarely fell into a verse-chorus-verse format. Being good friends with Ben, and having been acquainted with the rest, I went to many early shows, and when Ben moved to Indianapolis the following fall, I told Rob, "Hey, I've seen you guys enough to fill in for Ben at practice."

This was a lie. I couldn't play any instruments at the time, and had no more knowledge of notes and scales than I did of nuclear physics. Within a week, I was called to practice. Before leaving my dorm room, I was nervous about being found out as a fake, a phony. I'll get there and not be able to play a single instrument and they'll laugh until I walk home, I thought. Crafty didn't ask me what I knew, however, just began teaching. The first song I learned, "I am Trying to Break Your Neck," would have been easy for me to play on the glockenspiel with a spine injury. I picked it up quickly,

because, honestly, a five-year-old probably could have played “D (pause) – C – B – A” with as much ease. I also played some toy percussion instruments, and began to think that international trade laws were the only thing preventing an untrained monkey from taking my place. The second song, “Bowel Sonata,” only required me to learn three or four chords on the piano, and really, I just memorized the key combinations, marking them with duct tape on the Roland keyboard. After learning this song, Crafty’s girlfriend, Abby, said, “I think Drew should join the band.” I looked up, and the rest of them said, “Yeah, okay.” That was that. I was in.

My first show, the band’s first under the name Everything, Now! (a performer in Chicago threatened legal action for using the name “The Grand Opening”) was in two days. The new name was chosen to reflect our sound, an amalgamation of a thousand influences, and to take a shot at American culture, the bloated material-oriented society we’re surrounded by. I remember little from the first show except that, after the two songs I had learned were over, we decided that I’d sit next to the TV we had on-stage, and pretend like I was watching a movie for the rest of the set, looking bored and pensive. Meanwhile, the rest of the original line-up— Crafty on lead guitar and vocals, Rob on bass, Dan on drums, and Ben on rhythm guitar and bells, played through a solid but tame set.

Shortly after I joined the band, we self-released several hundred copies of our first record, *Sunshine of Doom*. Complete with psychedelic hand-drawn cover art of a monkey in the lotus position atop a pyramid, its muddy, 8-track lo-fi sound (recorded mostly in the upstairs of the 525) came out in December of 2003. At a show in January 2004 in which the band debuted new material, the owners of Standard Recording Company, a small record label then based out of Kokomo took interest in the band. The

show was in a dirty Muncie basement, filled with people who had come out to see if we were as awful as our first review stated, out that week in a Ball State newsmagazine. “This CD isn’t even good enough to level the uneven fourth leg of a rickety table,” the reviewer had said, “It sounds like it was recorded in a funeral parlor at the bottom of a bottomless hole.” Kevin, Evan, and Mark, the three burly, bearded men of Standard Recording, saw us play live quite a few times that winter, apparently loved the “funeral parlor” sound, and by May, we had signed a recording contract and begun work on our second album, which was to be called *Police, Police!*

Despite a small recording contract, the band remained largely DIY (do-it-yourself), producing almost all of its art, helping out with much of the recording process, booking our own shows and eventually, tours. Inside the band, this is a source of pride, something we can look back on and say, “We did that ourselves, didn’t have to suck up to anybody.” Doing almost everything ourselves helped to keep us independent, which in turn allowed us creative control over anything we were producing artistically. In a way, this is why the band comes off as a collective rather than just a band, as it’s not just the music we’re creating, but packaging, advertising, shirts, books, and various side projects. The attitude is also an outgrowth of our sound, or at least correlates closely to our sonic intentions. We don’t have glossy business cards, expensive t-shirts, an image, or a sound we are trying to fit into. Patches, t-shirts, and early on, CD cases were all hand-made, partially because we’re usually broke, partially because we all believe in the art and energy of the process.

The spring and summer of 2004 was spent recording *Police, Police!* in the basement of the 525, which was then being used by recording engineer Tyler Watkins as the base of his operations. *Police, Police!* was a much more fleshed-out sound than its

predecessor, as Crafty's songwriting ethos here was to fit as much as possible onto each song, a la *Sgt. Pepper's* or Brian Wilson's lost album *Smile*. Some songs on the album were mixed from over 100 separate tracks, including smashing glass, toy marimbas, roomfuls of handclaps, bubbles, found sound samples, remixed classical tunes, and an army of other noises. All of the combinations of sound to produce these rock songs was almost a flexing of creative muscle by Crafty, the lead songwriter, wanting to fit as many separate ideas into a song without it sounding weighed down, or heavy. The record shows this, as the songs are deceptively complex, the multitudes of different noise tracks smoothed over by the sheer catchiness of the songs. The recording process was arduous, dealing with an engineer who loved to tinker, and was in the midst of moving his studio to a different city. Money coming from Standard was also scarce, so convincing Tyler to work for free was an added difficulty. Our sessions often started early in the afternoon and went late into many spring and summer evenings throughout 2004.

Ben's last shows with the band came after recording finished in August 2004, a sweaty long weekend we spent in Illinois. The first night was at Chicago's renowned Empty Bottle, where Standard attracted a modest crowd by providing a keg's worth of free beer. The next night was spent at Nargile's, a velvet-covered hookah bar in Champaign, and was attended by exactly five people. Two were a couple, a dour looking husband and wife who had played before us, and stood near the soundboard in their khakis looking like laid-off high-school hall monitors. The third was a piss-drunk local, who flitted between stage and bar constantly, the fourth was my older brother, along for the ride, and the fifth was the sound guy, whose real job was playing shitty music during intermissions. We played a loud and brash set, ending with a ten-minute noise freak-out, during which Ben turned off his amp, and Rob threw himself to the ground in a faux-

seizure, shattering a pint glass with his jerking foot. Crafty wailed on a saxophone until he couldn't breathe. Dan stumbled off-stage the moment he stopped playing, completely trashed.

We waited in the parking lot for Dan to stop puking in the bathroom, and for our four dollars from the door. We left the show with only our equipment and a penis gun that Rob bought at a nearby adult bookstore. He kept clapping the pink plastic balls together, shooting the shaft of the gun at Ben's face. Had Rob known this would be Ben's last show, I can only imagine he would have done worse. We drove home that night, and I never thought of a failed show like that as paying your dues, the sweat, puke, and fake penises that are required before you start to leave your mark, however temporal, on a music world in Indiana that matters little in the grand picture of light-shows, hair-dos, six-figure recording advances. We were striving towards something we couldn't know or recognize, that we worried we couldn't achieve—like the hallway in horror movies or nightmares that keeps extending in front of your eyes, pushing toward a distant door through the thick white walls and light. I realized later that the glamour of a band doesn't come from playing packed clubs or sold-out art centers, but lies instead in its own energetic output. This energy was cumulative, something you had to build up every night, no matter if there were fifty people or five. That weekend was the start, earmarked by a review the piss-drunk local sent us a few weeks later, a paper he had turned in describing our show as “the best he'd ever seen.” From this moment, we were like traveling evangelists, spreading the word five people at a time, whether in basements, coffeeshops, or living rooms.

I wasn't okay with it yet.

## No Control

“Get the fuck outta the room. Get. The. Fuck. OUT!” Rob is a screaming, stringy mass of straight brown hair, standing atop his four-foot tall black bass cabinet, his rubber-masked head almost touching the ceiling of the Funhop house in Bloomington, IN. The house was named after a crate of CDs was found in the basement with awfully produced rap songs about Mexican food, staying off drugs, and having fun. A minute ago, we had just launched into the closing chorus of “Angina Pectoris,” and the whole living room was jumping to the beat. Then, it felt like something inside my head shifted, skewing my perspective. My keyboard slouched forward, and the room dynamics seemed to pitch everyone inside towards the center of the room. Rob jumped off his cabinet. The band stopped playing one-by-one. A jingle stick slid towards the crowd.

The middle of the room is almost evenly concave, like the birth of a sinkhole in nearby Brown County State Park, only there was no underground cave system causing this collapse, just ancient support beams that had snapped out of their century-long slumber. When we returned to the house to sleep that night at past 3 am, we went down into the basement, surveying beams as thick as shipping boxes that had clean, jagged cuts at the midpoint between vertical support beams.

“Unless you’re fucking stupid, get the fuck out of the room!” Rob is still yelling. My head hurts. I begin to think that maybe the room is going to cave in, but there is no escape. I wonder if all our equipment will slide into the basement from the pending collapse, since I will find out later the room is a couple feet away from the basement, resting on a crawlspace instead. Attractive girls, eyes mostly dilated with alcohol, begin

to shuffle towards the door, followed by their shaggy-haired boys. I am wondering if anyone is looking at me, in my Incredible Hulk suit that said "Suitable for Ages 7-9" on the package. The package. My package; can anyone see it? Is anyone looking? I reach down instinctively, covering the bulge in my purple tights, looking like I borrowed a wrestling singlet from a midget in the Wizard of Oz.

It was Doog's idea that we all should wear costumes, on our first tour, which was to last exactly 10 days in March 2005. "Yeah man, costumes make perfect sense," he'd said during a practice at which Rob wore a ski mask with his cheek skin pulled back so all you could see was teeth and eyes. "I mean, think about how much you sweat when you play. This way, you're just dirtying the same clothes each night. You won't have to do laundry at all." Not like there would be ample opportunities. Everyone agreed with him, costumes, yes, great idea. Except I had no idea what to wear.

For Halloween the previous fall, I had obtained an Incredible Hulk suit designed for young boys. I got it from a friend-of-a-friend, who was planning on wearing it with his housemates, who all bought similarly sized superhero outfits. But when he took it out of the package he had second thoughts, and thus it ended up in my possession. My lack of creativity being at an all-time high the week before tour (coincidentally, the week of midterms), I stuck with the Hulk suit. Crafty wore garish orange sweatpants and a purple t-shirt onto which we wrote random names in glitter-paint; Jared wore a velvety blue bathrobe and slippers; Doog slipped into a short, brown plaid sundress; Erick drummed regally in his red velvet suit, looking like a pirate with his dreadlocks whipping frightfully around; and Rob, he broke the rules and didn't wear anything after the first night. He also smelled worse than anyone in the van, and constantly asked, "Hey, can

you see my gruff?” He was dedicated to not shaving for the duration of the tour, in hopes that such negligence would somehow produce the facial hair hormone that he completely lacked.

“Get your beard outta my face,” I pushed his pale chin out of my eye socket.

At just past midnight, the crowded lawn outside the Funhop began to dissipate, as drunks wandered off in search of more exciting parties, or at least houses whose floors were structurally sound. The rest of the crowd milled around while the show promoter made phone calls frantically, then announced to everyone that the show would be moving a few blocks away to Smith and Grant Street. I don’t know who asked; but within a couple minutes, most of the crowd had grabbed an amp, gear bag, loose drum, or stand, and began walking it over to the other house, still in costume, where we threaded our way through an ongoing house party and into the small, musty basement.

It was a month prior to tour, and we had no transportation. For a couple years we had been surviving by splitting up the gear, most of it going in Crafty’s truck, the rest of the band and scattered cords and boxes in an additional car or two. Tour couldn’t work that way, with gas prices, and the innate ability of two cars following each other to get lost within minutes. Our minds thought through options, and eventually asked a friend and fellow resident of the 525 if we could use his van. Zach agreed on the condition that he be allowed to come along with us, and that he definitely wouldn’t be chipping in for gas.

When I write “van,” you probably get the wrong impression, like a big, shiny, white vehicle with comfortable seats, a step up through a double door, one of those TVs beneath cup holders big enough for a two-liter bottle, maybe even window blinds,

reading lights, a reclining rear seat doubling as a bed for pseudo-camping. No, our vehicle definitely didn't match any of those descriptions. It was a dark-blue, peeling, minivan, with a single sliding door that you had to slam or it would leap back open, brakes that wheezed, and a battery that occasionally couldn't get the engine to turn. An early 90s Dodge Caravan, the kind you see sketchy guys selling sunglasses out the back of, or gap-toothed farmers hawking melons and tomatoes under a tent.

A perfectly fine vehicle for hauling red-cheeked kids to soccer practice, or going to the grocery store, but not so well-suited to carrying seven uniquely-odored guys around for 4,000 miles in just over 10 days. Our bodies and smells would be the only things in the van itself, the gear, pillows, blankets, food, backpacks, boxes of free candy; they would all be in the trailer, rented (with a complimentary rusty relic of a chain) from U-Haul, which hung dubiously low to the ground and forced the hood of the van to slope up past the horizon.

“Where’s the back seat,” I asked one day, a few weeks before departure.

“In Calumet,” Zach replied, not turning around from his computer. Apparently everyone else expected three people to roll around in the back of the van the entire trip. “Yeah, we’ll throw some blankets back there, some pillows, shit, I’ll sit back there the whole time,” Crafty said.

“It’ll be like a party,” Doog said.

“Well, I want a seatbelt. The whole time.” I didn’t want to die, though the increasing stress leading up to a week of midterms occasionally made me rethink that statement.

“Whatever man, you can’t just claim a seatbelt for the whole time,” Crafty said. So I offered to pay Zack half the gas it would take to get to Calumet and retrieve the seat.

I don't remember if I had to pay or not, a week later, there it sat, looking right at home in the clutter of the 525's kitchen.

The morning following the Funhop show I woke up very early, began walking around the trashed front yard, chewing on a bran muffin, washed down with some water from the bathroom sink. I could keep walking, I thought. Find a ride back to Muncie, stay at a friend's house in Bloomington. Leave the tour, I thought, and not die in a van crammed with enough sweat to increase the flammability of the entire vehicle. It sounded like a real option, I convinced myself, letting the soothing power of a second option ease my crowded mind. I called my parents, told them about the first night, pushed down the desire to leave, the desire to give in to the icy fingers of fear. I shook it off in the warming, sunny side-streets of Bloomington, and we left for Nashville, where we'd be staying with my eighty-something grandparents.

The show, with a junior high ska band called Off-Duty Ninjas, was a bust. Sure, we'd been paid, and managed not to lose any equipment despite leaving the trailer door open for at least three miles on I-65, but fewer than twenty people had watched us, several of those being members of my extended family, my 14 and 16-year old cousins, who, after seeing my Uncle rib me for at least fifteen minutes about my costume, had gone from thinking I was supremely cool to questioning my sanity, grasp on reality, and probably, sexuality. They were not impressed. I wanted to go home.

Fighting off a growing migraine and a shortened version of my grandpa's life history, I tried to sleep in the guest bedroom of my grandparent's modest, ranch-style house that lay around a bluff-winding creek an hour outside of Nashville. Later, I was

fairly certain I had a nervous breakdown, but at the moment, I thought I was just “freaking out.” I sat up on the aged quilt and tried to stop my racing mind. Wasn’t going to happen.

Rob emerged from the bathroom and sat down next to me. I told him I’d been thinking about leaving the band, even right that second. “I’m not cut out for living the band life,” I said, gripping my knees. “I don’t think I can live my life this way.”

Rob nodded, sat there for a minute. “You know what I think?” I looked up. “I figure, this is just an opportunity I’ve been given, and I’m going to have the best time possible until it’s done. You can’t control everything around you, so you might as well run with it.” I swallowed and try to quell the involuntary shaking inside my chest. No control, this was something I’d have to learn to accept, either that or face the swelling anxiety I’d felt the first few days of tour.

Two nights later we were back in Nashville, the result of a convoluted touring route that comes with booking shows last-minute in a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-internet-pants way. The show, at the most inappropriately named hovel in the universe, the Springwater Supper Club (a clapboard bar with sticker-covered paneling, two small rooms, a cleared-out space in the rear that was marked as the “stage” by red and pink tinsel covering the wall, a fenced-in patio, and next-door, a walk-up pit barbecue counter with the same chain-link fence enclosing the whole Southern package), was another bust, attended by seven people, four from Muncie that were on Spring Break, two extremely drunk, belligerent, and moronic drunk middle-agers who argued for multiple hours. “Who’s hotter, Bo Derek or Cuuuuuuuh-hristie Brinkley?” they slurred, back and forth,

from the back of the bar, popping peanuts in a manner both excessive, and strangely professional.

“Bo Derek’s a wrinkly-ass bitch!” said the older-looking one, in a green-sweater vest the color of stained pool table felt, which even looked overdressed for a pit like the Springwater. He ate another handful of peanuts in under five seconds.

“Sheeeeeeeee-it. Fuck you! I’m gonna headbutt you square in yer nuts!” replied the one in the Nascar t-shirt, his mustache wet with beer, his eyes dark and wild as a muddy hog. This general exchange continued before, during, and after our set.

The seventh man was a mountain of long, white hair, a similar-colored beard that hung down to his barn-sized chest. He was wearing a white t-shirt and overalls whose size must have read “Bunyan.” “Cletus,” as I affectionately dubbed him sat at the bar in the stage room, focused entirely on a TV tuned to the History Channel, showing a special about extraterrestrials. Occasionally, his mammoth frame would angle toward the video poker screen, but would always be pulled back by the cheaply animated U.F.O’s on the television above the bar.

We loaded out into a rainstorm that night, through the back patio next to the oil drum grills of the barbecue place. The holes in the gravel lot swallowed my shoes a couple times, and while we waited for a friend to direct us back to where we were staying that night, I looked across the street. Standing in the downpour, lit by a thousand spotlights was Nashville’s replica of the Parthenon, built in the 1930s for the World’s Fair. The columns divided the building up into alternating stripes of bright white concrete and black shadow, the enormous building standing by itself in the middle of a park in what must have once been the nice part of town. Jared, Rob, and I walked over in

the pouring rain and ran around the façade, echoes of shoes bouncing off the hollow concrete and giant bronze doors.

When I fell asleep a couple hours later in a lumpy brown convertible couch, the utter loneliness and despair of the Parthenon was still in my mind, the spotlights doubtlessly still scarring its artificial, machine-poured columns, rain licking its lifeless slate roof. I imagined Cletus walking in-between the doors with a checkered knapsack, checking his boots at the door. Two forgotten behemoths, two empty replicas. I rolled over, fell asleep in the glazed quiet of the Belmont neighborhood.

## Nothing Matters, Dude

I met Justin in the haze of my freshman year at Ball State, a year consumed by defeat. My girlfriend had broken up with me recently because she found God in the form of a polo-shirt wearing, Corvette-driving veterinary janitor; I had to drop my physical conditioning class because the instructor, a hard-ass to anyone that wasn't a cute girl, wouldn't let me make up a class I'd missed due to fevered hallucinations; and my roommate, a large, sweaty theater guy who showered four times a day and wore two types of cologne at once, had spread rumors about my sexual behavior to the meatheads on the floor. The combination of these events had reduced my already dangerously low dorm-floor "coolness" factor to zero. On a Sunday that Spring, I sat eating greasy fries with a few friends in a dining hall. The previous day, my friend Dave and I had rapped to horribly plastic beats produced on his laptop, spitting lyrics with little rhythm and less rhyme for about fifteen minutes to a ever-dwindling crowd of 30. Justin's band, a more serious project known as ...Revel in the Morning had played at the same event. Unlike us, they weren't a joke created that Friday night before to fill a fifteen-minute timeslot left open in a dorm lounge event. They were the real thing, a real band, talking about shows, records, and the sexual escapades of the drummer the previous night.

A year and a half later, in the fall of 2004, I was riding in Justin's car down to Terre Haute to play a show. Gone was his dyed-black hair and stylish jeans, which were replaced by an old t-shirt, older pants, and moccasins. Our bassist at the time, Rob, was riding in the front with Justin who had just ended a long passage of silence by suddenly saying, "Oh snap...I'm the first member of Everything, Now! to wear moccasins." Justin was the band's new rhythm guitarist and jack-of-all-trades, which consisted mostly of

never quite learning his glockenspiel parts, and breaking any tambourine or jingle stick he could get his hands on. He had replaced Doog, who in turn had replaced Ben, both having left to concentrate on their other bands. Justin had entered the scene due to a lack of “other band,” and when he asked Crafty to join, the answer was yes.

The revolving door status of our members was partially artistic difference, partially *mid*-mid-life crisis. Jon, the founder of the band (originally known as The Grand Opening), wrote all of the parts. Not just all of the guitar parts, but the bass lines, the basic drum patterns, the syncopated children’s percussion, keyboard countermelodies, and even composed the tape loops utilized early in the band’s existence. When former second guitarist Ben quit to pursue screaming for a hardcore band, Justin quickly joined. While some musicians would complain of the lack of freedom, Justin exerted his own artistic sensibility, and creative control, by playing with twice the normal intensity, and barely half the accuracy.

“When are we gonna play?” Justin says. We are standing outside of the Melody Inn, the seventy-odd year old dive on the old north side of Indianapolis, a couple days before New Years 2006. Justin’s wearing a yellow biker’s stretch shirt over what looks like diving gear. The next moment, he’s wearing a rubbery gorilla mask, staring in through the pane glass windows that front the bar. The previous night, in the same venue, he’d brought an extra large George Foreman grill and browned vegetables right on stage, sucking power out of a dirty power strip. Between playing catch with a deflated kickball with a few willing participants in the packed crowd and dancing around the room, he was handing out napkins filled with strip-burnt celery, sliced carrots, and green bell peppers. None of this really surprised me too much, as it seems his mission in life is

to confuse or surprise people he doesn't know, getting off on their varied reactions. He also lives in a tent somewhere down in Bloomington. When I ask him why, he says, "To see if I can do it." The way he says it, in his characteristic low-key monotone, anybody would think it's a perfectly sane reason, well thought out. His voice is probably the same reason he can get away with saying almost anything no matter how offensive to whomever he wants, and yet another reason to bring him along on tour, as an actual member or not. His deadpan delivery can defuse almost any tension on the bus.

In reality, Justin's not even technically in the band, having quit in January 2005 to sell all his material possessions except a backpack, sleeping bag, and bow and arrow, and try to live in the woods in Connecticut. That didn't work out, so after hitchhiking to California and back, living in a Brooklyn warehouse flat with a kitten named Dance Party, visiting a Manhattan anarchist commune, and sleeping on my couch for a week, he ended up in a Bloomington tent. If a tent is one of the less interesting places you've lived in a calendar year, that's an impressive achievement. He bummed a ride to Indianapolis from his parents in Hammond for the express purpose of joining us for two shows, and we let him. After all, it's not the first, nor the second, nor the third time he's rejoined the band for a show or two or ten. One of the benefits of the revolving door membership is a large cadre of former bandmates who, when in the area, appear at shows and often join the band for a song or two, picking up someone's instrument like they'd never left. I suspect this all plays in to Justin's mission to confuse and surprise, since audiences usually view a stage as having that theatrical property of a fourth wall, and thus when someone as wild-looking as Justin sprints onto the stage in the middle of a set, or even song, we come across as more of a collective than a band, like a tribe without warpaint.

The previous summer, due to line-up changes, he re-joined the band two days before our summer tour started, helping to completely rearrange all of the songs in the absence of both a real drummer and a real bassist. The tour, going through a rather humid chunk of July, consisted of Justin clad a good 95% of the time in only teal blue swim trunks that extended halfway down his pale thighs. During this period, he was into learning gymnastics and flexibility and at every gas station grass strip, rest area, or peach orchard, he'd do a series of cartwheels and somersaults. While in Indianapolis for the Midwest Music Summit, a huge thunderstorm struck near midnight while we were waiting at a venue. Justin responded to the weather by dumping his pants and shirt in a pile, and running around the flooded streets and alleys in his trunks. Right around the corner from The Alley Cat, the tiny punk rock bar we were playing at that night, two drunk guys yelled at him, "Hey buddy! The swimming pool's down the street."

Justin stopped running, stood in the rain, and yelled back, "No it's not, man." He continued down the graffiti-filled alleyway, teal shorts flapping in the wind.

Inside the Mel on night one, well-dressed girls in their twenties wandered around with vodka and ice. One touched my hair. I looked back at her in the stump of a hallway by the bathroom, and she stared back, vacant, unenthused. I felt a mix of arousal, curiosity, and deep-seated self-loathing, the latter the product of multiplying a Lutheran childhood with the type of rock and roll born in a dirty basement. I tugged on my hat instead of re-examining myself further, and then fought the urge for a free beer since I had to drive later. I never do understand the need to dress up before going out to a show, as everybody sweats the same. In fact, Justin had been performing in the same shirt for months, a dirty white undershirt he'd had on the first time I saw him in Connecticut, the

shirt he'd wrote all of his rap songs about, under the moniker Kid Primitive. Songs about riding bikes, sleeping outside, the raw foods diet, and anti-consumerism. He had to buy a mini-laptop to finish the songs, sold it afterwards though.

Whether it's the wacky persona, or the ability to float through life, Justin gets away with more character inconsistencies than a soap opera star. I suppose that's why I admire him though—considering I try and keep my own to a minimum. It's my way of trying to ensure I stay in a band that, in the beginning, I didn't even feel like I belonged in. By manufacturing, or improving on my already fairly steady and calm personality, I thought I could secure my place by being constant, someone dependable, which, in the art world is often hard to come by. It's also a way to reconcile my differences with the lifestyle; I feel like if I'm secure in a world of chaos, it somehow makes my existence more safe and less radical. In a way, it has worked, the result being that I consistently gained more and more organizational and managerial duties, becoming the band's mouthpiece for interview requests, show offers, and general questions. It has changed though, from pseudo-posturing to become part of my personality, a way to defuse my inner anxieties.

On-stage, the energy floats through the place in thick gasps. It's sweaty, the wet windows proving what I already feel. During the last song on the first night, Justin, out of vegetables, half out of a shirt, pops up in front of my keyboard, slapping a tambourine into his palm. He steps onto the crowded stage, somehow avoiding black cords, cups and cans of beer, and equipment stands, and is screaming a foot away from my face. It takes hold of me, the mixed smell of eggplant and menthol, Milwaukee hops and hour-old pizza. I scream back, smashing my own tambourine's plastic frame into an unforgiving

palm. We spell out S-T-R-E-E-T S-M-A-R-T, the gang vocal chorus, twice, and start clapping. The song accelerates, Justin is in and out of the crowd, someone is yelling. Girls hold drinks, conversation grinds near a halt as the volume peaks. Late in the set, I see a man with waist-long sweat-filled hair headbanging in a Pink Floyd shirt near the door. Mission accomplished, even though he must be near forty or fifty, the rough age of our parents.

Over pizza the second night, Justin was telling me about his dad. “My dad told me some really bad news about when I was born,” he was saying, “he said that I wasn’t the messiah, so that sucked. But, I may have been immaculately conceived.” He turned back to the Veggie Supreme slice in his hand, spiritually considering it before stuffing it into his mouth. He usually had some anecdote about his Dad, a man I’d met only once, in Muncie on Justin’s birthday one year. His parents were divorced, his Dad was gay, but his Mom still didn’t know. What most people would consider family secrets, Justin seemed to have no problem talking about, a result of either brutal honesty, or him actually practicing his newfound mantra, “Nothing matters, dude.”

“Nothing matters, dude,” was more a way of life, a philosophy on ethics and morals, than just a motto, although for Justin it applies mostly economically, materially. It’s not jobs that matter (he delivers sandwiches ten hours a week or so by bike), nor what products you use to clean yourself, make yourself smell or look better, or even consume. On the same day, he might eat a whole box of organic, family-grown grapes, then apples he pulled out of some rusty grocery dumpster. He made hummus and peanut butter for the summer tour, both by hand, and even the fact that they tasted like a combination of old shoes and Styrofoam packing peanuts, he ate them anyways. On the rainy drive back downtown towards the Mel, he starts talking about his latest business idea. “People are

always buying dumb stuff, flavored water, all that shit,” he says. Then outlines a plan to bottle tap water, and hug the bottle for an hour afterwards, or as he puts it, “imbuing his love.” Then slap a label on it that says “Love Juice: Water with Vibes” and sell it for a couple bucks. “Everyone needs good vibes, you know?”

I laughed but secretly agreed with him. I could never follow his quasi-nihilist stance on life, whether it’s because I’m just more uptight, or that I don’t really feel the need to part from a decent part of the moral system I was raised in. However, I see beneath his philosophy, past all the jokes and the bottles of “Love Juice.” What does matter to Justin is the people around him, treating them with honesty and expecting that in return. Though he doesn’t subscribe to a particular belief system, I still find it refreshing just being around someone who isn’t trying to be anything more than what they are. In the world of music, where everyone seems to be trying to play up who they are, who they know, where they’ve been, it’s a welcome departure, even if his whole anti-society persona is more inconsistent shtick than deep-seeded philosophy. At least it’s honest, at least it’s real.

A night or two before our Summer 2005 tour, my roommates had a garage sale on the wide front porch of our house, just setting mostly broken stuff out, then drinking beer in lawn chairs while a few people browsed but didn’t buy. To get back in the house that night, they moved the bigger objects to the lawn, including a couch, a loveseat, and two recliners. Justin, two more friends, and I bought some whiskey and wine and sat out in the front yard, facing a busy street, till the dew came down at about 3 a.m., drinking and talking about libertarianism versus anarchism, about upcoming and past tours, about life’s odd philosophies. This memory is one of the few etched with clarity into the film at

the back of my brain, and whether that is attributed to the preserving effects of dew on the brain, or a slow time in a fast summer, I'm not too sure. Barefoot in the front yard, we said our 3 a.m. goodnights. I felt like those people in the front yard, or in our tour bus, were all that mattered. The streetlamp on the corner blinked its assent.

Later that week, on the hottest day of the year, he was doing cartwheels again, this time in the front yard until a policeman came and started talking to him on the front porch. Thinking Justin could handle this one himself, I watched from inside through a slit in the Venetian blinds. "Where are you from?" the policeman demanded.

"Brooklyn," Justin said.

"No, I said where are you from?" he yelled.

"Brooklyn man, that's where I'm from," Justin said again.

"Well what are you doing here then, rollin' around in your underwear so that everyone can see? You think people wanna see that?"

"I don't know, man. These are swim trunks. And these guys are my good friends." Laughing, I turned around and went to find some clothes.

## Used Up, Burnt Out

On the evening of July 4<sup>th</sup>, Muncie blocks off the section of North Wheeling Avenue that runs beside the murky, sluggish flow of the White River. Townies and students set up lawn chairs, coolers, grills smoking with burgers and brats, listen to live music blaring from the gravel lot of the 909 Grille, and everywhere, drink flows. Little kids run around in the turn lanes, drawing lines in the grime that accumulates on the road shoulder, and everyone waits for dusk to drop down over the mansions of Minnetrista, the Muncie Central football field, the pale blue public pool slide poking its head over the trees of Tuhey Park.

I think they launch the fireworks from the fifty-yard line of the Central football stadium, though I can't see through the bleachers and purple Bearcat billboards to truly tell. The first firework shoots up with a whine, quieting the street momentarily, before it expands instantly into a ball of dancing red stars, sending a boom that rattles the windows of the abandoned house behind my sidewalk perch. Children stop playing and seek out empty laps or sun-warmed arms now starting to cool, and a hundred radios flick on, the static-licked orchestral versions of various Sousa marches fill the air, soon to be followed by synchronized broadcasts of "God Bless America" and other patriotic filler. Even the anarchists, skinheads, and drunks trying to sting each other with sparklers, aiming bottle rockets at houses and porches and faces, I see them puff up slightly, their chests swelling a bit despite their sentiments, though they would never admit it.

After the glow of the finale faded from the sky; after the lawn chairs snapped shut, aluminum tubes slung over shoulders; after the neon of the 909 stopped buzzing; the streets were bare, still barricaded somewhere beyond sight. A lone policeman on a bike

rolled leisurely down the river-side of the road. The crowd had jettisoned cans, bottles, bits of paper that flaked off smaller fireworks whose empty bodies lay burnt out in the street. I had moved to the porch step of the 525, most of my friends already having left for home, gone inside to the plastic air of an air conditioned room. Down the street toward the High Street Bridge, a figure walked through the gloom, down the yellow stripe between the four lanes. It was Dan. He wore a ratty Chewbacca t-shirt, shorts hanging just above the Ghostbusters tattoo on his leg. His hair was matted down in the back and his neck beard clotted his pale face. He didn't seem to so much walk up the street as just generally drift in the direction the street pointed him in, like flotsam in a river of molasses.

It's usually tough to get Dan to shut up, his mouth automatically sorts through his thoughts, an audible stream-of-consciousness that is usually sarcastic, sometimes silly. When he approached the 525, he didn't say a word, his feet shuffling past me onto the porch, where he flopped into one of the chairs brought from the trash or left by a previous resident. He produced a cigarette, a motion that took more effort than it should have, and lit it shakily. His eyes rolled towards the back of his head as he took a drag or two before his head settled on the weathered chair.

This was the first time I remember being legitimately concerned about Dan, a fact that is scary in itself. I wasn't concerned when he had started sleeping till 5pm, where Ben and I would have to create inventive ways of getting him out to practice, like taping body spray containers in the "spray" position, then throwing them inside his room, or rolling an amplifier speaker-side to his door, then turning it up to 10, hit the reverb switch, and wail on random chords. I wasn't overly concerned when he didn't show up to practice, or came to a show already drunk with his ubiquitous soft drink cup filled with

wine. I found myself detached when Doog, the rumor-monger, told me a few months previous that, “Dan’s hooked on heroin man. Hooked. I saw him the other day, he was all strung out and laying around.” A couple punk rock kids said, No, you can’t get heroin in Muncie. I didn’t really side with either, just waited for the evidence myself, like there would be some big sign, some annoying thought bubble with a lightbulb that would let me know absolutely that Dan was using heroin.

When you’re growing up, in whatever drug-resistance program the local government is currently mandating, the only pictures you get of drug users are monsters, horribly inept, weak-willed people who use drugs have no other purpose in life. They have no other interests beyond getting high, and live only to get little kids hooked on whatever substance is hip. They don’t tell you about the users that are functioning, or half-functioning, holding down a sandwich delivery job and paying rent, playing music, blending in with all the other grungy twentysomethings in a college town. They don’t tell you that you’ll be scared to find out the real extent of the problem, that not knowing, keeping yourself separate from the specifics, that’s what makes you feel better, more comfortable with your own life, your own consuming problems. They don’t teach you how to show compassion to the ones who don’t want it, how you get somebody help when they won’t take it, not from you, not from anyone.

Dan was either passed out or completely oblivious to the world around him, sitting in the porch chair, cigarette in hand. Even Thomas, who has several DUI’s and alcohol-related nicknames, just looked at Dan and invisibly shook his head. Thomas palmed his bottle of Night Train and reached for the cigarette in Dan’s hand, setting it down on the concrete where it slowly burnt out like a fading firework.

The process had started back in January, when one of Dan's closest friends had swallowed a handful of pain pills, put a record on the turntable, fell asleep, and never woke up. He overdosed on painkillers and died in his mid-twenties, something we thought might shock Dan back into what most people would call a "meaningful" life, one that extended beyond working a few hours a week and then getting high. At the record release show for *Police, Police!* in January 2005, a crowd of around 450 gathered in the Ball State Student Center to see the show. After we got into our places in a huge stage set-up that included a dancing santa, 15-foot long orange stuffed snake, two projection screens, costumes, rotary lights, plastic deer, and a baby drumset, Dan sat down at his drums and said into the speaker, "I wanna dedicate this show to Eric, my buddy. He woulda really liked to be here, and I know you're watching from somewhere, man." He teared up and the crowd was silent for a second, before everyone began clapping. We waited a moment for Dan to compose himself, then launched into the set.

In February 2005, a month before our first tour, Dan informed the band that he wasn't going to tour, but wasn't quitting the band. He said the idea of tour scared him, and he didn't want to be in a small van for ten days, didn't want to be an anxious wreck the whole time. We found another drummer and completed the tour anyhow, and it began to feel like Dan was being phased out of the band. Later I would find out the real reason; Dan was scared that, while on the road, he wouldn't be able to find heroin in a strange city. At first, part of me was frustrated at Dan, at his addiction; it was my first tour and I was a nervous wreck too, probably would have been that much closer to the edge if I had to deal with substance abuse. After tour, Dan distanced himself from the band, didn't come around, didn't even work much. I didn't make the effort to keep a connection alive, convinced the life Dan was living wasn't one that I wanted any part of,

wasn't one that he'd want me involved in anyhow. Later, I would realize that I had been too hard on Dan; I'd distanced myself, and allowed him to stay away, even though he'd done the right thing for the band, which was to stay home.

Erick, the new drummer, kept playing drums, and we moved Dan to bass, thinking the move would keep him motivated to show up to practice on time. In July, he was conspicuously absent from a practice less than a week before tour. We called his house repeatedly, finally going over there to find him laying in bed. Two days later, he showed up to the 525 basement like usual, soda in hand, hat on, cigarette between his lips. It was our last practice before our journey to Connecticut and back, with dates in Washington, D.C., New York, Philadelphia, and Providence. "I can't go on tour," Dan said, wildly. "I'm out of money, I can't pay rent. If I go on tour, I'll get evicted, and I don't have anywhere else to go. And I owe Joe money. There's no way I can go. I can't go," he kept on rambling for a few minutes about the financial problems he was facing, then walked up the stairs. I thought he was just going for a smoke, but he left, leaving Jared and I to tell the rest of the band the news.

We absorbed the loss, thought hard for a few minutes, and added two last-minute members to fill out the sound, rearranging all of our songs over 4 hours that night, and two lengthy practices the next day. Dan was gone, but as a band, we were more artistically unified than ever, playing the same songs in radically different forms. And Dan? He flew to Disney World with his parents for a week, having never been before, and I wonder if the park was like therapy, or a drug in itself. Either way, he didn't return to Muncie when he came back. From the pieces I've been told from several people, he cleaned himself up while living back at home, disappearing from Muncie, and the band in general, for a good five or six months.

Drug education people would tell me, This is why you don't wanna do drugs kid; they'll mess up your life. But I look at Dan and I don't see a lesson learned, I don't see a percentage or statistic, a monster, a bad influence. I see a guy who made some decisions, some of which maybe weren't the best, like the Ghostbusters tattoo on his leg. Anti-drug messages always seemed to romanticize the junkie by making him the mysterious "other," the dilated eyes that lay foggy behind some inspirational font spouting some bullshit about why people use drugs. But Dan was always just Dan, not someone to be hated, pitied, looked down on, or sifted out from the rest of us. Dan's habit didn't consume him, just the relationships he'd formed within the band. And we were consumed too, left as helpless as Dan to affect any change, only being able to watch his quick descent. To me, Dan's coping device was hardly different than people who lose their lives to TV, sleeping pills, or a soul-less, pre-packaged job, house, and life. We all find a way to sedate ourselves in a world that doesn't consider its own great speed, all the little bodies trying to stand up down below when the grass becomes a little too wet, and all the fireworks have fallen cold into the river.

## Ever-Present Buzz

Richard is a living, breathing fairy-tale, unshaven, brown hair in his eyes, dressed in a hip brown jacket, and fitted, faded jeans. He's drunk, which is normal for the last innumerable times I've seen him, or at least buzzed off of something, his eyes slightly dulled over, like his jacket. We're sitting in the back room of the Melody Inn, the aptly-named PBR Lounge, in a big rounded, red booth. Free pizza boxes are piled nearby, and cigarette smoke hangs thickly under the low-hanging red lamp. The back room we're in hasn't been specifically designated "Bands Only," but that's what it is, the few booths sparsely populated with band members, girlfriends, managers, promoters, and a few local label representatives. It's not that the doorway has any sort of aura keeping the random showgoers at bay, though, instead it's probably because you have to walk through a part of the kitchen, and a strange strip of now-roofed in alleyway to get to the room. How appropriate then, that it's the PBR Lounge.

"I'm telling you man, it's worth it. \$100,000 advance for the next record, \$150,000 for the one after that. And we have complete control," Richard is gesturing as he speaks, his hands trying to get the importance of his message through without spilling his beer. I try to remember our recording costs; *Sunshine of Doom* was basically free, recorded by the band, while *Police, Police!* threw us back a couple grand, half provided by the label but then recouped in album sales the first weekend it was out. Six figures would do wonders for us, especially when I spy our equipment in the corner, a ramshackle pile of amps with busted speakers or broken inputs, malfunctioning keyboards sticky with beer and old duct tape, torn drumheads, fissured cymbals, and a

polyester suitcase filled with a snake-like tangle of mostly non-functional instrument cords.

Major label money would be nice, but getting at it is like looking for through a haystack for a needle that isn't even there in the first place. But Richard and company did it, and their proximity to us, their high opinions on our music, could be played to our advantage. Still, even with big money tales, we're skeptical of the loss of artistic freedom that is usually associated with a jump to a major label, the possible loss of choosing song order, album art, recording philosophy, all of which are extremely important parts of our records. There's a little (or a lot) Steve Albini in all of us, and though the possibility is probably smaller than we could ever realize, it's nice to dream about for a minute—the warm sound of fresh, new speakers, the reassuring thump of a four-hundred dollar bass drum head.

I try and squelch the thought as quick as possible. The music world is more fickle than a room of manic depressives; money there one second was never there in the first place, bands come and go as fast as musicians can make up newer, more witty names, and selling records is an absolute necessity if a band wants to keep tapped in to the world of six-figure advances, shiny new vans, and vintage equipment. Selling records has never been the focus point of Everything, Now!—we'd rather put out five records in a year by ourselves, than focus on one that would sell a few more copies. Beyond that, our line-up, always somewhere between six and eight, isn't exactly too appealing to the streamlined world of most major label bands, because, after all, diversity of sound doesn't sell to the masses. But maybe all of this reasoning is just a way for me to talk myself down from my highest hopes for the band—a dream world in which our van isn't a van anymore, it's a giant bus, and we can collectively make the music we want to while at the same time

making a living. It's a huge dream and a small dream all at once, since the collision of art and money is simultaneously impossible due to the demands of mass marketing, and so close that I could reach out and touch it, prod the empty plastic cup sitting in front of Richard. "Get this," he's saying, "they sent us this box yesterday, and inside were eight gingerbread men, all decorated with our names. They were still soft, same-day shipping!" It's like he's dangling the cookies right in front of us, daring us to cave in and reach for the invisible.

In the summer of 2005, we took our newly-acquired short bus to the East Coast, playing a string of dates that would culminate in New York City, playing the lower-level of a three-tiered venue called the Knitting Factory, a place we had played that Spring to a sweaty but enthusiastic Manhattan crowd. Before we'd even made it to our fifth show, an hour north of Philadelphia, our bus's transmission began to go haywire, a likely heat-induced crack rendering our first and reverse gears badly damaged. By the time we crossed the Hudson Bay Tunnel, the bus was jerking in-and-out of gear like a Tourette's-ridden fiberglass elephant. We knew this would be the last show on tour, that we'd have to cancel the final four dates and see if we could nurse the broken bus all the way back to Indiana.

At the Knitting Factory, a line of hip-looking kids stretched down most of the block, into the construction zone that made parking a mathematical impossibility. However, these kids were there for a show on the main stage; a show we weren't playing. No, in the basement waited the two acts we were booked with: a singer-songwriter that sounded like Jeff Buckley swallowed a referee's whistle, and an obese rockabilly chick

who played lounge versions of popular songs on her laptop, and crooned over them while sitting down and making vintage Ronette hand-movements.

The crowd and the party that we expected to debut our re-worked songs to was nonexistent. At this point, the only redeeming point of the evening was that I knew I was due to play drums on at least three songs. Who could have known I'd get to play drums at the Knitting Factory, I thought to myself, silently proud though my beat-keeping skills were amateur at best. I sipped an icy Boddington's and waited for the tone-deaf Mama Cass to wrap up her painful set.

While we were loading in with the aide of the ponytailed Puerto Rican doorman who remembered us from March, Richard and Andy, his bandmate, accompanied by Doog strode in, clearly intoxicated. They immediately ordered more whiskey, and stood near the stage, talking a mile a minute. Epic Records had brought Richard and Andy to town, and was showing them the New York life we probably couldn't afford even after selling our crippled bus. Doog had been living in New York in a Manhattan commune next door to an unofficial Caribbean voodoo center, and had met up with the other guys that day, grifting as much money out of "the man's" pockets as possible. "Shit man," Richard said, "they took us out for pizza, New York-style you know, then drinks, paid for it all. Shit, they even gave us money for these drinks, and a bunch more." He smiled and held his icy cup in the air. "Got us a hotel room in Times Square even, way up high, looks right down into the intersection." We brush the celebrities-in-training off and continue to load-in, finally starting our set to a crowd less than ten.

The set was by far the worst of the tour. Justin smashed a tambourine by accidentally jumping on it during the first song, the monitors didn't work or were inaudible, Richard and Andy were the only visibly excited people in the dingy lower-

floor room, and I completely screwed up the beat on a cover of the Stones “Sweet Virginia.” We didn’t even get paid a single dollar, and couldn’t even assuage our transportation anxieties with the regular remedy of Pabst, the current hip beer in Manhattan absurdly priced at \$4 a can.

Doog was waiting in the back by the now-closing bar, wishing he had time to get another free drink. “Yeah man, Richard was way drunk during dinner. The label guy kept asking, ‘So tell me about you guys, the band, how you formed, influences, all that.’ And Richard just kept saying, ‘You gotta meet my friend Crafty, he’s amazing. They’re called Everything, Now! If you heard them, you’d sign them, right away.’ And he never answered the questions, just kept talking about you guys the whole time, it was amazing.”

After this admission, Doog, Richard, and Andy left for the plush beds of their hotel rooms, while we attempted to find the afterparty we’d been invited to by the former booking manager of the Knitting Factory, who felt invited us after feeling bad about the shitty show we’d been stuck on. Not only could we not find the party, but when we headed to Justin’s girlfriend’s warehouse flat in Brooklyn, we got hopelessly lost. As Justin drove, we went ten minutes at a time without seeing anything that looked like a residence, saw whole blocks of boarded-up townhouses, and wandered around the endless pits of Brooklyn. Finally, we found the place, across the street from a Chinese noodle factory, and went to sleep on the dusty hardwood floors.

Jealousy isn’t the word to describe the feeling you get when those close to you experience the unlikeliest of artistic success—the milking of major labels for money, meals, and artistic freedom. Really, we were amazed, star-struck for a minute, then back to normal. The glamorization of rock and roll wasn’t a concept we were interested in,

weren't into theatrics, groupies, or gifts for being marketable enough to sign. We were striving to be a working man's band, and if that meant sleeping on a hardwood floors, then that was okay. Those free dinners and drinks sounded great, but I wouldn't trade them for the homemade pancakes that kids we didn't know in Pennsylvania scraped together the ingredients to make before we left for New York.

Sometimes financial success seems like the most foreign of all concepts; and sometimes, talking to Richard, it seems five minutes away. But I don't even know if I want to see what that other world is like, how people treat you when you finally are "somebody." What will happen to all the good deeds people do for us just because they know we're a band struggling to write music that adheres to our own artistic aesthetic, to tour on our own money, book our own shows; will they dry up and disappear or just become sugar-coated obligations?

I don't want to lose the brotherhood that hard times have forced upon us, even with the rotating members, the constant fighting and random bad attitudes. If success destroys that, for me, it's not worth it. Luckily, the outfit as a whole believes that. After all, it's the sense of purpose, the sense of soul, each other, and belief in the music itself that drives the live performances, the desire to make records according to our own specifications.

There's no guarantee that we'll be together and touring in a few years, even in one year. But if it all slowly dims like a seaboard sunset, or blinks out like the popping of a fluorescent bulb, there are moments I can look back on that define the band's existence. The train of kids we didn't know carrying our gear from a busted living room to a different basement in Bloomington; Dan eulogizing his friend right after we'd ran through a sheet of decorated paper like a football team at the *Police, Police!* release

show; Crafty playing his sax from his back on the floor at Nargile's, to a crowd as small as the band; Jared and Justin playing catch in-front of a bewildered capacity crowd at the Mel; Rob hugging me after the last song of our last set before his move to San Francisco. I know the grandiose echoes will inevitably fade at some point in the near or distant future; but hopefully these moments will stick, the ever-present buzz in the back of my mind.