

APRIL 24

Arrived in LA after 13.5 hour flight on a United 747-400. I was in 19C sitting next to a nice couple who were dressed goth / newage / hippy, introduced themselves as a musician couple. The lady was Wendy Rule from Melbourne. They were on the way to Reno where the boyfriend's family has a ranch. She was reading a book during the flight called "Finding Your Inner Light." They had veg meals ordered but the airline only brought one.

None of the movies seemed worth watching. I read Mojo, Word, Uncut front to back then half of an Iain Banks novel, along with 5 or 6 red wines, before taking a couple of triazolam pills and falling asleep. Recovering from a cold, I tried to hide coughing as much as possible, not wanting to be quarantined on arrival as a possible SARS case. Woke up 3 hours before landing. Sweet!

Art and Steve picked me up at the airport. Anne's flight arrived from New York shortly after, we picked her up and headed south to Long Beach on the 405. First stop was the Godoy warehouse, where we began to sort out our gear and merch. We got a new totally black Dodge Challenger from Enterprise. Of all the new cars it looks the most classic, like old Mopar stuff but a little too thick in the vertical. It looks like a car that guys would steal and go on a crime spree.

Danny came over on his bike and we went to Jalisco's for dinner. Typically great. Tacos pastor and asada. Camerones diablo. Pacifico beer. Art tells of the time when asked to change a large bill, the guy pulls out a gun and a bag of money from behind the counter, makes change, smiles, says "Thees ain't no Taco Bell" and laughs.

We practice the songs at Steve's warehouse / tattoo machine factory. Behind the factory is an alley and behind the alley is a little castle. It has parapets and towers, etc, very crudely made from what appears to be plywood. It looks like a child might have designed it. It is brightly lit with green and red light. It is the "Fantasy Castle" ! A low end strip joint where Art and Steve like to go for the chicken sandwiches, which apparently are the only quality items the place has to offer.

For the rest of the tour, "going out for chicken sandwiches" takes on a new meaning.

On the way home we went by a place called Porky's BBQ. Steve said he hadn't tried it but it must be pretty good because he'd seen a 300 pound black lady walking out of there with 4 bags of takeout.

APRIL 26 - COFFEE BEAN, AND OUR FAN

Anne and I got up, twins already out and busy. Looking for caffeine, we rode bikes down to Second Av where there are lots of shops. We found one called "The Coffee Bean and The Tea Leaf". It was a typical early 2000's coffee shop with fake old wood chairs, papers and magazines. They call out a cheery greeting when you enter. That can be a mistake since tired people, before they have had their coffee, tend to be unappreciative of perky people. The place had free wifi of course and a few people with bald heads and trim Lenin beards and glasses were sitting around, with the cold white light of the apple logo framed in silvery rectangles shining here and there. We got cappuccinos, but since they make everything too big here, even if you order the smallest, that generally means too much foamed milk. This throws off the espresso to milk ratio. So to compensate you have to get double shots of espresso. It turned out that it was plenty strong that way, to the point of slight nausea by the end of the cup. I left a half inch at the bottom and went out into the headache-bright sunshine.

One morning in Denver at the end of a 4 week tour across the USA, during which Rob Younger had bitched about the lousy coffee in America the whole time, I went with John to one of these coffee shops. He was sharing a hotel room with Rob, and was bringing him back a takeout coffee. He ordered a latte (called "flat white" in Australia) with 4 extra shots ... yes, four extra. Rob commented later in the van on the way to the airport: "That was a bloody good coffee for a change!"

We pedaled the bikes to the beach and then went north along the trail ending up on a pier across from the decommissioned atlantic liner Queen Mary, parked there since 1967. We took photos of the Queen Mary. A seal popped up its head from the murky water, looked at us, disappeared. Did I really see that? Yes! I forgot sunscreen and got a mild dose of radiation.

Went home to Steve's house on Livingston St. and changed guitar strings. The guys showed up with bags of food from the Valu-Plus market. We fired up the grill for lunch of porterhouse steaks, sausages and asparagus.

At band practice we were at a rehearsal space called, knowingly, "The Backline". I plugged the Sovtek head into the backline quad box. The amp seemed excessively loud, and got louder as we went along. I started with it on 2, then went down to 1 and it was still too loud! I had a closer look at the volume control and counted the gradations, noting for the first time, this amp goes up to ... 13! Those zany Russians! Maybe, in retrospect, I had mismatched the impedance into the borrowed quad.

All during the practice we were at first amused then a little concerned by the antics of a giant cockroach. He ran back and forth, visiting each band member. He tried to mount the equipment several times. When Art sang "Lets Go!" the big brown bug ran straight to him from across the studio and tried to get up his leg. He then climbed the wall behind me, leaning over as if wanting to jump. I've had some unpleasant experiences with these guys before, so I'm always a bit sketchy around them. I had one try desperately to get up my nose once, while I was sleeping. It

all became a bit much. So, we get out to the car, and there he was, trying to get in the car! He must have rode out on the equipment or on a bag. We took off, leaving our fan in the parking area to find food, and hopefully avoid being food ... by the crows watching from above.

APRIL 27 - FIRST SHOWS

We drove the Challenger to Hollywood, walked around on Hollywood Boulevard. It is a weird mixture of cool old stuff and modern sleaziness. It still seems local ... not taken over by the big chain stores, at least on the east end of it. Headed down Sunset past the Ralph's, where John Needham has been known to amuse himself by watching psychotics wander in after 2am. Looked for the Hyatt (Riot) House Hotel where the Stooges lived, and where Ron used to spend the early hours of the morning at the bar hanging out with Robert Mitchum. Couldn't find it ... they either tore it down, or remade it into something else. Like the Stooges, and everything else great, nothing lasts forever.

Headed out of Hollywood west on Sunset, through Beverly Hills and Century City to the 405, then the short climb up into the hills to the Getty Center. You park and then take a little train ride to the gallery, which sits on a high cliff top overlooking LA. It's all free to the public, the most beautiful place with a mind boggling art collection, all paid for and maintained privately by the Getty oil fortune. It's better than any publicly funded museum I've seen. Spent an hour looking at amazing paintings and soaking up the view and the marvelous architecture. Had to choose between paintings and eating ... paintings won.

We headed over to TKO Records in Huntington. TKO was a label that had a small store. Now it's a small store that has a small independent record label. On Fridays they provide free pizza and people hang out. We did a short set. Much enthusiasm from a packed house. Some collectors brought shopping bags full of records and posters for me to sign. They bought a TON of merch. Merch flew off the merch table, like a flock of seagulls if someone at the beach drops a bag of chips... TKO had some great used vinyl in the \$0.99 to 4.99 bins, but I only had time for a superficial look, and didn't buy anything. We have a long ride ahead. Gotta keep the bag light!

Came back to the Long Beach house, took a short nap on the couch.

Tonight's show was at the Blue Cafe a typical dive in downtown Long Beach. We walked in while the opening band was on. The Hitchhikers ... pretty solid aggressive rock and roll. Anne set up the merch stand, and we sorted the gear. I came out after a while to see how Anne was doing, and saw Heather Harris the famous rock photographer was there with Jimmy Recca (ex-Stooges and New Order he filled in on bass with the Stooges for a while after Funhouse when both Ronny and James were on guitars.) Jimmy looked pretty well, considering. Much better than the last time I had seen him, and that is not saying much, but he was cheery. Photos and drinks all around.

The set was fun. We went for a low stage volume, so I could hear the vocals great. Easier on the crowds ears in a small room, too. The few stoked fans yelled loud enough that we came back on and played Hand of Law and Aloha. They sang along! Heather took some good photos. After drying off and sorting gear, I made it to the bar which was closed, but the good bartender made me a very stiff vodka and soda water which I needed and appreciated. Hauled stuff up the stairs, to the van.

Out in the street after the show, we got Philly Cheese steaks at a faux 50's diner called Johnny Rockets. The waitress asked "Cheddar, swiss or pepper jack?" I said "Cheez Whiz", which anyone who has actually been to Philadelphia would know is the correct answer for a proper Philly cheese steak. She just looked confused so then I said "pepper jack". It was good anyway.

APRIL 28 - PUNK ROCK PIKNIK AND MY POMONA

(This section will appear in my upcoming memoir, to be published on Picador)

MAY 12 - Recording

After a couple of weeks off, we met up again in Billings, to record a couple of tracks at Bob Brown's "Ship's In Studios". The idea was to have a new vinyl single ready for the next tour, since vinyl was the only physical recorded format that still sold.

We picked up the twins at their hotel. They were staying at the Holiday Inn "Montana Grand" which is off King Ave down by the I-90 overpass. They could have hung out at Bob Brown's, but they needed their own place where they could bring "chicken sandwiches" back to the room. The euphemism seems to have stuck and now all unattached girls are known as chicken sandwiches.

We were ready for breakfast, realizing we needed to eat on the way to Bob's about 3 in the afternoon. We stopped for take-out at the Arby's on Grand, got the triple cheese and bacon Angus sandwich, fries, and what they call a "garden salad" which consisted of bits of shredded lettuce and orange coloured processed cheese shavings. After drowning that stuff in Ranch Dressing, you do not need to eat for a whole other day, so that was breakfast, lunch, and dinner all in one sitting.

We rehearsed the new songs for the single, a Roky Erickson cover "Bermuda", and a new song of mine, "Calendar Girl". We went over the tunes about ten times each, then we were ready for Bob, who got off work at the car lot about 5.30, came over, broke out a couple of bottles of Penfolds Bin 28, and hit the record button. Our Grammy winning engineer/producer friend Mort says: "95 % of producing a session is hitting the record button." Bermuda is pretty straightforward, we did it as close to Roky's single as we could. The challenging part of that of course is the singing. I don't have the range for it. In Calendar Girl, we switched the beat around a few times, sort of got

a Bo Diddley thing happening. It needed something for the middle 8 bars. Art suggested getting Anne to say something in French. We made her leave her computer, where she was working upstairs and get in front of the mike. She came up with some great lines on the spot which suited the song perfectly. It was fun, we were laughing and throwing hi-fives. I'm willing to try anything in recording, and sometimes something out of left field works so well it takes you by surprise. That was one of those moments.

We were done tracking by 9.30. Dropped the guys off, stopped at Albertsons on the way home to pick up meat for tomorrow's BBQ, then headed back to the Little Trailer.

MAY 12 - BILLINGS "MANNY'S BAR"

Woke to the sound of formulaic country pop for Nascar fans, blaring out of a boom box at 6am. Immediately after that, there was loud banging of hammers. This all coming in through the thin trailer wall, from a site across the driveway where a work crew is putting up a building. They apparently started building yesterday while we were recording at Bob's, and got pretty far on the frame. There was nothing yesterday, and now there is a huge building !! These guys work like demons, hammering these buildings together, apparently taking only 3 or 4 days to finish. They are based in Utah, and travel around the West, taking construction gigs on the run. They have the process finely tuned and the building springs up as if by magic.

We hauled my Mesa amp, Marshall cabinet, and Pearl drum kit into the back of the old red truck an '88 Suburban.... and rolled to Manny's at 2 for sound check. After we set up everything, the bartender recommended special laotian egg rolls (in Montana!) made by ... his mother! So we had to get egg rolls and they were outstanding.

Back at the trailer, I got the fire going, and prepared a pile of petite steaks using a bbq rub sent to me by my brother Karl for last Christmas. We had about ten friends over, including Dave and Olivia, who are the owners of my trailer; and Olivia's brother Patrick who brought his cute Downs daughter, now 20 months old. She was the delightful hit of the evening. Karen Sanchez drove over from Bozeman, and brought a large firework called "PyRoBotica" to help send the band off on tour. After a case of Pacifico beer and several bottles of red disappeared, the sun finally went down, and Karen lit the fuse to PyroBotica. The fuse caught alight, she ran for cover, and it went off excellent fiery orange and super loud explosions over the trailer, shaking the ground. It was even better than the "40,000 Megahertz Feedback", "Crazy Ox", or "City Crasher" fireworks that she lit off during last New Year's Eve, when it was fifteen degrees below zero out in the street in front of her house.

Ron Sanchez didn't make it, because he had to work. Art got on the phone to him, twisted his arm a little. He told Ron that he should claim to have severe uncontrollable diarrhea and take off work. That didn't fly with Ron. He was very conscientious when it comes to work.

We went back to Manny's. The comedian that was on before us was just finishing up. We hung around outside for a while, then went on in and played to a strangely quiet and reserved mix of cowboys, nurses, accountants, friends, and local music people. My old band mate drummer Tony Horton showed up. I didn't recognize him at first, without the dreadlocks.

Loaded up the gear, went home, drank Calvados and listened to records until very, very late.... or early forgetting of course that the work crew would be blasting away at dawn again. So ended up with only a couple of hours sleep. The next day would be filled with preparations for heading off to the East.

MAY 16 - MICHIGAN - Everything Is Yoga Pants

The four of us flew from Billings, Montana to my hometown Ann Arbor, Michigan on May 14 and we were staying at my brother Karl's house with his family. Art and Steve went to a skate park at Livonia with Karl. Anne and I went to Mediterraneo Restaurant to meet Kathy Asheton, walked in, we were the only people in there except for Kathy. I ordered the Tiger Shrimp Saganaki and a greek salad and coffee. Kathy told a tale of woe. She had been relying on a film editor to assemble the DVD of the Stooges RAF benefit show that I played on last April. There was delay after delay, it turned out he had done nothing in a whole year, was evasive, and finally abusive when confronted. Apparently the DVD project is in better hands now. She brought me up to date on Stooge news, as well as Ron Asheton Foundation business. She asked me to write a story for the foundation website about the guitar of Ron's that I inherited. Here's what I wrote:

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Ronny's Black Stratocaster

In the years after the end of Destroy All Monsters and Dark Carnival, Ron was involved in several exciting music and film projects. Among these were the Wylde Rattz, a band with Thurston Moore, Don Fleming, Mike Watt and Mark Arm, assembled for the feature film "Velvet Goldmine". I was in very close touch with him in those years, and he shared his enthusiasm for these projects. Ron was always sought out by musicians who understood the importance and seminal influence of his work. Shortly after the Wylde Rattz, Scott Morgan recruited both Ron and I to play as special guests with the band Powertrane, destroying clubs in Ann Arbor and New York City. Later on, Ron teamed up with brother Scott and Jay Mascis in the Stooges Project, which led directly to the reformation of the Stooges.

During this transition period, Ron had a distinctive black Stratocaster, which was Japanese made, of late 80's vintage. It was not particularly rare, nor was it an expensive guitar. Ron customized it with an American flag sticker, behind the bridge. He played this beautiful black guitar often during those years, before the Reverend guitar sponsorship. I loved the sound that Ronny got

with the Strat, which brought back to life the early days of the Stooges, when Ronny would stand stage right, totally in command, with his skinny white jeans, Go-Kart t-shirt, Iron Cross, and his Stratocaster.

The last time I played on stage with Ronny, he was playing the black Strat, which he so clearly loved. That, in itself, makes the guitar important to me beyond words.

During the Ron Asheton Foundation benefit show at the Michigan Theater, in Ann Arbor in April of 2011, I was delighted to see Ron's black Stratocaster set up with the stage gear. Chris, from the road crew, told me I was welcome to play it. I picked it up on the last song ... No Fun, when everyone joined in together on stage. I was hammering away on the guitar, James Williamson on my right, Steve Mackay on my left, Henry Rollins in front of me, muscles straining, pushing back at the surging crowd. The sound was huge. I could feel Ronny there, his spirit encompassing the entire event, but his eternal energy focused and beaming through that guitar.

Backstage after that incredible event, which I consider to be one of the key moments of my life, Scotty told me to keep the guitar. Kathy had wanted me to have it too. I was speechless with gratitude.

I play Ronny's guitar often. When I do, my dear friend is right there with me.

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Went back to Karl's house, where Carla had brought back some pizzas. Ate pizza, drank a beer, got ready for the show. As the sun was going down and the western sky's glorious pink, salmon and orange hues faded to gray, we loaded into the rented black VW Passat and drove east on I94 to the US12 Ypsilanti exit.

Woodruffs is in the old railroad depot area of Ypsilanti down by the Huron River, full of old civil war era buildings, some restored, some not. Going to that neighborhood took me back in time. When I was seventeen, I had a girlfriend who lived down there. Her name was Gay Gardner, and she was into witchcraft. She lived in a dark, abandoned second story ballroom, full of cats, candles, and gauzy parachute drapes hanging over the bed from the high ceiling. She was convinced there were ghosts there. The cats seemed to be watching things moving that I couldn't see. It was pretty spooky, that dark snowy winter of 1970/71. I had met her the summer before when her boyfriend Mitch Miller, who was also gay, took an interest in me. He was working at the waterbed store on South University Ave, when I stopped in to get a cheap bed for my unfurnished flat. I was too young and naive to guess what was going on in his mind, and I was always open to new friends. We hung out for a while and used to drive way out in the boondocks west of Ann Arbor to pick her up after work at the Anchor Inn, where she was an exotic dancer. On the way home around 2 in the morning we would stop near the town of Dexter and swim in the river in the moonlight. Soon after that she and I ended up together, to the chagrin of Mitch who felt betrayed by us both. We eventually parted ways, when I moved to Australia at the end

of 71. The next time I returned to Ann Arbor in 1973, I was shocked to find out that Gay had died of cancer.

We loaded our gear into Woodruffs, a funky old bar. Chris Taylor's band Blue Snaggletooth had already set up ... we plugged in and ran through a couple of songs. I played through a beautiful vintage Marshall Super Lead. Everything was good. Anne set up the merch stand next to Blue Snaggletooth's merch. They had a big suitcase opened up with a dayglo snaggletooth poster on the back inside. They ingeniously had a black light installed permanently in the case so their merch stand was literally ON FIRE ... and they were selling BLUE vinyl copies of their album. Their merch display totally upstaged ours but we had a much better looking salesperson so it balanced out.

The first band was called Rainbow Vomit. They had a girl sax player, and a balding hippie type front man. They all had giant "third eyes" painted on their foreheads. The attention to visual aesthetics could have been promising, but they didn't follow through, wearing nondescript t-shirts, baggy jeans, even flip flops. I'm sorry. People just have to try a bit harder... They had a few good riffs (and some very bad ones) which they hammered into the ground, and a lot of noisy high pitched hollering. Their grand finale was a song called Yoga Pants. The girl put the sax down and for several minutes chanted the line "Everything is Yoga Pants! " at megawatt amplified volume, in a broad southeastern Michigan accent.

Hiawatha Bailey showed up. He's the ex-black panther who went to federal prison in Lexington, Kentucky with Michael Davis and Wayne Kramer from the MC5, and who was later the front man in the band the Cult Heroes. He's tall and thin, all long arms and legs and graceful like a black spider about to pounce. He was good friends with Ron and Niagara, which was how I met him back in the mid 70's. He was in good form, very happy, and there were warm hugs all round. He is seemingly ageless. He hasn't aged at all in his appearance in 30 years!

Hiawatha once brought a cherry pie he had baked himself, to a Rendezvous Band rehearsal. He's one of 16 children from a farm family in Belleville Michigan. He complained that when he went to see his dad, his father looked up from the newspaper and squinted at him and said "Which one are YOU?"

Retro Kimmer arrived with a friend of hers who said she had driven up from Virginia Beach. Kimmer tried to take photos of everyone with everyone else, and pretty much achieved that. She wanted a poster of her upcoming Retro Guitar Expo critiqued. I liked the poster except for the Huckleberry Hound figure in the center. I mentioned it and she said "Thank you! Thank you! No one else would tell me the TRUTH!" and she immediately contacted the artist by text, with strict instructions to take Huckleberry Hound out and insert a mod Retro Kimmer image in the center instead.

Hiawatha took a shine to Steve and invited him for a walk behind the club. Steve said, "Hiawatha, we heard you are gay. Is that true?" Hiawatha replied: "I go where I'm needed."

Scott Morgan came along with Maureen. He'd aged 20 years since I saw him last. He's had some bad health problems, and needs help. We arranged to give him all the proceeds from the show. I didn't get much chance to talk to him. That's the trouble with being on tour in a town where you have friends. It's a job and there's no time to spend visiting. It creates a time conflict, usually.

Blue Snaggletooth played. They are sort of like a post psychedelic British rock outfit, somewhere between Sabbath, Hawkwind and the Pink Fairies. Chris Taylor played with so much violent energy it almost took the roof off the bar.

Then we went on. The response was great. By the end of the set people were slamming and running around in circles, and generally going berserk. My brother gave me the lovely compliment that he thought my playing had achieved a "new level"!

We dried off and drove back to Ann Arbor.

MAY 18 - Bowery Electric

We stay at Anne's friend Charlotte's apartment on Kent and S.9th in Williamsburg, a hip neighborhood of Brooklyn. The previous August we stayed there during Hurricane Irene, when all the shows of that tour were cancelled. Mayor Bloomberg ordered the evacuation of the area. We decided to stay and watch events roll forth. Charlotte's building is right on the East River where she lives with her daughter India and a giant black poodle Basil. Her apartment is on the 12th floor. There are big windows. It is great to sit and watch the boats and barges go up and down the waterway with the backdrop of Manhattan and the Empire State building. On the day the hurricane was due to arrive, all public transportation was shut down. Eerily, the city was dead quiet. No planes flew. No buses drove. No trains clattered noisily across the Williamsburg bridge. It was like being in the abandoned metropolis of the future in some post apocalyptic sci-fi movie, awaiting final reclamation by nature. It was wonderful!

In the evening it started to rain. The rain became torrential. No stores were open. There was a ring at the door one of the building managers was taking a survey of who had stayed, rather than evacuated. We thought we were in trouble, but no. Just taking a head count. Apparently a few others had also decided to stay. I asked the guy, whose name was Steve, if he knew any way that we could get some wine. There is no way that we wanted to face the hurricane without some decent wine. Steve thought for a minute, said he'd go ask his gay partner, and that he'd get back to me. I went over by the window to watch the sheets of rain pelting down. Then, the phone rang. It was Steve. He said "Go to apartment 4B. See Vinnie. He'll fix you up." We took the lift down to 4B. Rang the bell, and Vinnie opened the door. He is a wine distributor. His whole apartment is full of wine racks from floor to ceiling. He decided to stay with his wine, and go down with his

wine if it came to that! He gave us a good bottle of Napa red. We chatted a while, then went back upstairs.

By about 2am the storm peaked. There was extreme rain and wind. We went down to the street to watch, went outside to the covered driveway in front of the lobby. Watched the wind blow the trees almost horizontal, getting soaked, and then went back in and said Hi to the two black security guards. One looked like Samuel Jackson, with a wide gap between his two front top teeth. I offered them a drink, and was a bit surprised when they said "Oh yeah!". I went back upstairs and fixed them vodka and tonics with fresh lime wedges. Brought tray of drinks down, and had a nice social time with the guards until about 4am. We went upstairs and said "Goodnight Irene".

Irene kind of fizzled out ... there was no major damage in NYC, although there was major flooding in Pennsylvania and elsewhere.

So there we were, 9 months later, same place, different scene with beautiful spring weather. Heading for our New York show at the hip club Bowery Electric, we drove over the Williamsburg Bridge across the East River in Keith's van. Keith is best known as the guitarist in The Fleshtones, and is also Anne's ex-husband. But he is also in The Master Plan. The Master Plan was supporting us for these three east coast shows. Keith had a big white Dodge van that he used in his business, moving people's stuff when they change apartments. His business was called "Man With Van" and in that context he had a secret identity, and was known as "Carl". (Due to savage rivalry in the moving van business, he could not reveal his true name lest his residential details be found out)

Across the bridge in heavy traffic, we crawled into Delancey St and then past Katz's famous deli, and turned right on Bowery. We finally crept up the street and unloaded in front of the club, blocking traffic, only half a block from the old CBGB's, on the same side of Bowery.

We were late, although the sound man was later. In fact he never even showed up. Bowery Electric has its own back line. We checked out the house amps : Fender Deluxe, Vox AC30, Fender DeVille. The Deluxe sounded best, so I chose that one. No sound guy, so we tried to figure out how to run the PA ourselves. Ended up with a very basic kind of soundcheck with the help of Nick who owns the club.

The first band was Daddy Long Legs, featuring the wild harmonica wailing of Brian Hurd. The drummer uses no cymbals, and beats the kit with one stick and one heavy maraca, which he uses to pound the floor tom. The guitar player, a Turkish guy named Murat Akturk, has old school blues down, sounding something like Elmore James. They play raw, edgy blues, like how I imagine the Rolling Stones might have sounded at The Crawdaddy Club in 1963. They finish with a crazed version of Death Train Blues.

Then, The Master Plan: party rock and roll at its finest. Keith is the front man, and likes to engage the crowd, even to the point of jumping into the crowd, and encouraging singalongs. When Andy Shernoff takes the mike on a couple of tunes it sounds very much like his old band The Dictators. A highlight is the "We Like Barbecue" song.

Al Bouchard from the Blue Oyster Cult showed up, and I hung out and chatted with him about his new band, which includes his brother Joe, and Dennis Dunaway from the original Alice Cooper band. Dennis was supposed to come by the club after an interview shoot for VH1 up the street, but he didn't show. He texted that his wife insisted that he go home instead. David Fricke from Rolling Stone magazine was there too. I recalled how he had attended the Silverchair recording of the song New Race in New York some years back, and I had got him out in front of the mike to sing the shouts at the end of the song with the band...his first recording session as a backup singer.

Our set went great, we hit some high energy grooves, and played 2 encores. Nick and Diane from the club were pleased. Despite being over time, Diane made us do the second encore, as people were hollering and stomping. For New York City, that was an unusual response, as they are normally TOO COOL.

We loaded out fighting crowds pouring down the stairs for a private party that was starting up at around midnight. Rode in the back of the van with the equipment over the Bridge.

MAY 19 - Terri T / Maxwells

We walked down to the river and caught the Ferry across to the Wall St stop, near the old fish markets ... long abandoned but still standing. Then took a cab to World Trade Center, looking up and marveling at the construction of the Freedom Tower at the ground zero site. The new tower will be 1776 feet tall when finished. We hiked down into the depths to the Path train, and caught the train under the Hudson to Jersey. We were ahead of time, so stopped at an Au Bon Pain for a Wasabi Salmon Bagel and coffee, all for under 5 bucks.

Another couple of blocks up Montgomery St and we were at the WFMU radio station. We took the elevator up 3 floors to the studio and began to set up. We sound checked and the engineer was ready to roll when the glamorous Terri T showed up with beer and sandwiches. Terri T was all dressed up, with a scarf, miniskirt, boots, and makeup. She is very tall, towering over us. We sat around eating sandwiches and reading "Weird New Jersey" magazine in the office area while waiting to play, as Terri T in the control room broadcasted various discs of New Race, Visitors, Birdman and several cuts off my solo albums. Anne commandeered the office computer, working the social media to promote the days activities, as she did on all show days. That is how gigs are advertised now. Handbills and posters were obsolete, and no one was reading actual print media any more to find out what's going on. But it seemed like no matter how much you put something on Facebook, there were people who didn't see it even if they looked at it.

In the studio, we finally got the GO signal, and played six songs live to air, and worked up a sweat. I had to say who we were between songs. There was a little sign in front of the band, taped to the window looking into the control room, reminding us not to say bad words when broadcasting. The sign reads simply: "no shit / no fuck", those apparently being the two words you can't say on the radio.

Because the show was called Terri T's Cherry Blossom Clinic, I made a few clinical jokes while tuning up between songs. I guess it got a bit close to the line when I invited listeners to come by the WFMU station for their free pap smears and HIV screening, since it was a "clinic", and gave the station address over the air. There was laughter in the control room, but it was nervous laughter. Sorry, Terri T!

After we finished playing, I took off my wet shirt to towel off and Terri T said "Oh My God he's taking off his shirt", and came running in to get a photo with me. She brought me a dry Terri T Cherry Blossom T-shirt, which I started to put on, but she said , "No, no!! Only after the photo!"

We got picked up out in front of the station in Keith's van, for the short drive to Hoboken. We set up in Maxwells. I had played there a few years ago with Scott Morgan's Powertrane. It's a great club, attached to a good restaurant and one of the few northern USA venues on our level, that provides dinner for the bands, although it seems to be more common down south. Anne and I had a big salad and a grilled chicken sandwich and fries.

The Master Plan played their set, and we played ours. There were a couple of old guys there who really got into it. They were stoked, and stayed after to let us know.

We got in the back with the gear and drove through the Holland Tunnel, then across town. It was about 2am. I asked Keith to pull over so I could go to a liquor store on Delancey just before the Williamsburg bridge, so I could have a drink before going to bed. The van stopped in an illegal parking zone and I ran over to the store. It was like a bank vault. All the bottles were behind plexiglass, and the store man was behind a barrier with a little speaker and a tray you put your money in. It was like Vickie's BBQ on Warren Ave in Detroit. There were weird characters in there screaming at each other, who glared at me when I came in, and although they were in front of the plexiglass, didn't seem to be buying anything. I said "excuse me" and they looked at me like I was from another planet. finally managed to get to the window and pushed the cash into the slot, and got my prosaic bottle of Kendall Jackson merlot, and ran back to the van. We drove over the river to the relative sanity of Brooklyn.

MAY 20 - Philly

We all crammed in the van to start the long haul to Philadelphia. Keith's at the wheel with Tmmie Lou, who has decided that we would listen to a "Classic Rock" mix tape. Anne, Nascha and I are

in the back seat, and Art and Steve are in the back with the gear and no seats. The van was going to be too crowded, so we got Keith to head for Newark Airport, which is on the way. Me, Art and Steve have reserved a car. Thankfully the tape breaks so the music stops. When we get to Newark, we pile out of the van. Anne and Nascha stay on board, and the van heads off.

We get the car at Enterprise Car Rentals, a sporty black VW. Our one rule about rentals is, they must be black. I decline the GPS option, since it is obviously a no brainer getting back on the highway and heading south to Philly on 95. We headed out of the lot and onto the airport service road. We miss something. It's not obvious. So we immediately get lost in darkest Newark. The wrong road we took can't be got off of. It's all no left turns, barriers, and no U-turns. Like a barbed hook or a candiru fish, which swims up its victims urethra, we can only go deeper. We know we need to go back, but can't. We go way deep into an exceedingly depressed and seedy area of Newark. It looks even worse here than Detroit. I am regretting not being armed. Finally Steve uses his i-Phones' GPS feature and it finally guides us out of trouble and on to the New Jersey Turnpike. Once on the correct highway, we stop for Popeye's Fried Chicken Po'Boy sandwiches, before continuing south.

Later I told Andy Shernoff that we were late because we had ended up in the ass end of Newark, to which he replied: "It's all the ass end!"

The club is in downtown Philly. It's called "Kung Fu Necktie", and is in a funky old tavern. The little stage had red velvet drapes, perfect for an old fashioned strip show or a ventriloquist act. Today's show is an afternoon matinee only about 30 people turn up, but among these are our friends Jonathan Sipes, aka "Little Jonny Sipes", who was in Deep Reduction; and John Judge aka "Johnny Epiphone", who drove up from DC. Daddy Long Legs played a blistering set to a few people. The Master Plan did their thing, and we did ours. I played through Keith's mid 60's vintage Super Reverb, which sounds spectacular.

Art and Steve met two sisters, Laura and Laurie. Laura had a Ramones T-shirt, but was never old enough to remember them. Laurie was even younger maybe in her teens. After the show we got the big group photo in front of Kung Fu Necktie, and headed out. Art and Steve wanted to follow Laurie and Laura in their little Honda Civic. They were going to lead us to Pat's cheese steak place where we could buy a real Philly Cheese Steak: A bread roll full of thin sliced grease-fried meat, fried onions and peppers, and melted cheese whiz. Apparently the cheese whiz is essential. If any real cheese is used then it's not an authentic Philly cheese steak. Anyway, the girls randomly drove all over Philadelphia and were driving in circles, or rather, big squares. We followed. I was getting a bit over it. After about half an hour they pulled over in an industrial area. I rolled down our window as Laura walked up. "We know it's around here someplace " she says. I made a command decision to abort the cheese steak mission and get on the road. Enough time had been wasted. We said bye, drove off and left the hapless sisters behind.

The traffic was heinous on the way back to NYC. It took us over 3 and a half hours, finally rolled in to Brooklyn, picked up Anne, and walked over to Moreno's Taco Truck on the corner of

Bedford and N 7th. Art and Steve spoke Mexican dialect Spanish to the guys. We got a great dinner.

The next day, we awoke to a gray sky and rain. It was just a gentle light drizzle at first. The twins went out walking, but then it started pissing down in earnest. It was raining buckets. Art and Steve went into a store, bought big trash bags, and made rain suits. They walked up to a restaurant, with pockets full of cash, but were denied entry because of wearing trash bags!

Anne and I went to Manhattan and met up with David Fricke for lunch and coffee. I first met him at the Big Day Out, where we played in 1994. We had a nice catchup. He is a lovely person, and happens to be the longest serving journalist at Rolling Stone, having started there around 1979. He'd seen the Bowery Electric show, and wrote a nice review.

That night I went on my own to a show on the lower east side. My pal Joe Chonto's band "The Chonto Tamura Sonic Insurgency" was playing at a cultural center on Rivington near Suffolk St. I was asked to sit in on a couple of songs. There were some structured intros and stated themes, but outside of that it was an aural free for all, a total blitz on the senses. I love experimenting on guitar, and had enormous fun finding ways to fit in to their massive edifice of sound, which has been described by reviewers as "post Coltrane free jazz". After dinner we dropped off the gear at Joes' partner An's store. An Ren is a successful fashion designer. She grew up in China, the daughter of one of China's greatest (maybe the greatest) impressionist painters. He was imprisoned for many years (for painting) in Mao's Cultural Revolution, and the family almost starved to death. She overcame all that, and now is involved in presenting her father's formidable body of work to modern China and the world. She was dressed in a fantastic green chiffon see thru dress, and super cool retro green and yellow shoes.

An was on fire. She yelled out "C'mon boys, dinner is on me!" and we went off to a cool Japanese restaurant. We drank a lot of sake and beer, and ate whole grilled smelt fish on skewers, heads eyes and all. An wanted to get martinis after, but it was past 2am and the martini bar was closed.

The next day I did some last minute business at Main Drag Music. I traded in my Rickenbacker 620 for a sweet 1965 cherry Epiphone Coronet.

That afternoon the twins, Anne and I drove back to Newark, dropped the black VW off, and caught the night flight to Madrid on United.

MAY 24 - OVIEDO

Five hours of driving got us to Oviedo. The road north from Madrid took us past the giant cross on the mountainside, where Franco is buried. I told my Franco story:

Franco is on his death bed. His aides hover, attending to his last wishes, while an angry mob outside the palace is screaming insults and waving placards. As the crowd becomes more noisy and begins throwing things at the palace gates, Franco raises his head slightly and in a weak voice asks: "What are they saying?". His chief of staff leans over and says: "Your excellency, they are saying "Goodbye". Franco looks up and says "But where are they going?"

The road winds through the Mountains of the Moon, with their strange, evocative shapes. We speed past a beautiful clear blue lake without stopping.

In Oviedo, there is a medieval central zone where no vehicles are allowed. The club was in the center of this zone. The heavy flight cases had to be hauled up a steep cobblestone street. Finally after much effort all the gear is in the club. A lone skateboarder jumped rails in the central plaza, and gave us not a single glance. The club was painted with red and black dots.

After soundcheck Chris Masuak showed up with his Spanish wife Clara. We all went to dinner, which started with a salty oily fish salad, went through a pasta course, a mushroom omelette, and then roast pork and gravy with chips. I skip dessert, but have coffee.

After dinner, I went through the amp hauling routine again with Chris's Fender Vibro-King, which we hauled into the club so that he could play with us. He got up with us for the last 5 or 6 songs, and the sound was huge. Chris played the solo in Endzone. Hand of Law killed. I gave him the nod to go ahead and take a solo at the end of New Race, too. The small crowd appreciated the rare event, and who knew that if it was the last time that we would ever play together again?

MAY 25 - BURGOS

We got in the van at noon and stopped for coffee and petrol straight away. Interesting that petrol was only 1.45/L, not much more than in Australia, and only double what it is in Montana. Not long ago it was multiples more, in all of Europe.

We stopped about every 2 hours on the road, to stretch and relieve our bladders and get coffee. Kike Louie, our tour manager for the Spanish leg, always gets a nonalcoholic beer. The twins always get some food. Sausages, tortillas, roast chicken, chocolate, nuts. Anne and I usually do not have breakfast until late afternoon, and then it's only to share something small... a tuna empanadillo or a salad perhaps.

In Burgos we go to soundcheck, then the ultramodern hotel and nap for an hour. Then to the dinner restaurant, called El Fogon De Jesuson. It means the Cooking Pot Of Jesuson. Jesuson is a huge guy with a chefs cap and cooking apron. He says there are three levels of food available. Great, super excellent, and musician level. We can get musician level food, but he required an

autographed CD. We say sure.... while waiting, we ate olives and drink vino tinto while the twins chat with a noisy bunch of women at a table outside. They are getting drunk and louder, and Art and Steve, who speak fluent Spanish, are trading who knows what sort of comments with them. They came back in to tell us: "They're ready. But not quality!"

But the food was quality. Started with Vietnamese rolls. Then Japanese udon noodles with tuna flakes. The whole dish is actually moving. Somehow the dried bonito flakes create motion as they pick up the sauce, and it looked like a writhing plate of worms! Almost nauseating, but delicious if you didn't look at it. The final dish was medallions of tenderloin with a special sauce which is delicious. Jesuson comes over and we are marveling at the sauce, and he shrugs and says "made from coca cola and onion soup"!

Estadio 27 was the name of the club. It's opposite a bull ring. We played. I was soaking wet. Even my boots were wet. I changed completely into dry clothes backstage, then cautiously emerged. We signed stuff. We got drooled on by completely shitfaced slobbering drunken fans. We shook dozens of hands, and worried about getting sick from it. In these situations, every night, it takes me forever to get my stuff packed up. I am constantly interrupted by fans who must get their photo taken with me. A guy there complained that we were not as tight or as professional sounding as the New Christs. I chose to take that as a compliment. I smiled and offered him his 10 euros back, but he didn't take it. We loaded the gear out into the van and get back to the hotel around 3.30.

MAY 26 - MADRID

We looped around to the east of Madrid to visit friends of Kike. Marcelo and his wife Christina had invited us over for afternoon lunch. They live in a new complex, a "city of the future" sort of affair. All the apartment buildings are identical. All the landscaping, the yards, playgrounds, little parks, street infrastructure ... it is all very upper middle class anglo-suburban in style but all modular and exactly the same, making the overall impact unsettling and weird. It would be sort of like being in the grounds of a giant mental institution, if those still existed.

Marcelo was cooking BBQ in the tiny back yard. Blood sausage, pork sausage, and big fat steaks smoked and sizzled on the grill. We opened some red wine, which was charmingly labelled "Canteburro" (singing donkey). They had an 11 year old daughter named Maya, who was wearing a t-shirt that said "I AM A ROCK STAR". Maya wouldn't say anything, being shy. The parents tried to get Maya to speak english to us, since she was learning it in school. No way was she going to utter a single word, but instead cutely practiced eye rolling and pouting. As soon as she finished her plate, she ducked back in the flat to get on the internet. They had a Dalmation dog too, named Lula, who was exceedingly well behaved given the overwhelming temptation of the heaped platters.

We headed on in to Madrid. We stayed in modern but cheap apartments in an industrial area on the outskirts, right by the "Bimbo" bread factory. Again, enticing smells ... but no ambience of beautiful exciting Madrid. No shops or cafes or bars or anything even remotely within walking distance, just a sterile and bland cafeteria attached to the complex, full of german and scandinavian tourists.

We rested up a little, trying to sleep off some of the giant lunch, then went into town to the Rock Palace for sound check. It's near the center. Too far to go back to the accom, we hung out until stage time which was around midnight. The support band was "The Government". The Government rocked hard, like a Spanish version of the MC5. They were big fans, stayed in the front row for all of our set. It was hot and sweat drenched, and we went over well with a couple of encores.

We packed up the gear, then went back to the apartments to change guitar stings and shower and eventually fell asleep, as the sun began to lighten the eastern sky.

MAY 27 - VIGO

It was a long drive to the northwest coast, up through mountains and vast emptiness, more like Montana than Europe.

In the van, Art and Steve told their stories of Dave Dude. He's a friend of theirs from Texas who was a roadie for The Reverend Horton Heat. No one knows his last name, but he is called Dave Dude because he uses the word "Dude" all the time, in every sentence.

Once Dave Dude was balancing a handstand atop a plastic rubbish bin outside a venue. The bin, full of glass bottles, collapsed and Dave fell in it. He got up from sitting in the pile of rubbish, and said "Hey, dude, I'm OK. Not even hurt." That's when they noticed blood running out of his pants leg and pooling on the parking lot pavement. A broken bottle had exactly cored out his rectum! They said, "Holy shit, Dave, we better take you to the hospital." He was taken to surgery for exploration of the wound. The circular cut had missed vital structures by a hairs breadth. Dave said the doctor told him (paraphrased no doubt) "Dude, if it had been a quarter inch either side, you'd have had to wear a butt sack!"

Another time, the car broke down on the road. Dave Dude was under the bonnet, trying to pry a valve cover or something off the engine. He had his head down, pulling hard on a screwdriver. It gave way suddenly, and the screwdriver flew up and poked into his eye socket. He stood up, and everybody was shocked to see the screwdriver handle sticking out of his eye. He said "Oh, man, dudes, this sucks." At the hospital, the eye surgeon found that the screwdriver shaft had penetrated through the upper lid, and had slid exactly between the eyeball and the bone of the orbital rim, barely missing the essential nerves, all the tiny muscles that control eye movement,

and the globe itself. The screwdriver was pulled out, the wound cleaned, stitched, and Dave Dude walked out of the hospital without a care in the world.

Most hilarious was the time Dave Dude went surfing. He got pounded by wave after wave but kept trying to paddle out. Exhausted, and finally stopping to rest, he was lying on his back on the beach. He had a habit of using his tongue to flick a false front tooth. He would pop the tooth out, and then catch it. He flicked the tooth out. Before he could catch it, a seagull swooped down from the sky, grabbed the tooth in midair, and flew off over the Pacific Ocean with it. Dave cried out. "Dude! My tooth!!!"

We stopped at a place called, enigmatically "HOTEL" . The letters spelling HOTEL were huge, six feet tall, bright red letters, by the side of the road. We had to go in. It was full of people eating. We all got roast chicken and chips. Kike watched a formula-one car race on the tv. Then we got in the van, headed across the coastal ranges which bristle with ugly German-made wind turbines, more than half of which don't turn.

Vigo is on an ocean harbour and looks sort of like Geneva. The Iguana Club is a semi-famous gig. It has the usual motif of large breasted women in devil suits with tassles or tiny stars on their nipples. This motif of minxy naked or semi-naked girls, mixed in with late 60's Detroit muscle cars, is ubiquitous in Scandinavia but also popular across Europe wherever so-called "Garage-Punk" bands play. The Iguana Club had multiple levels, and was mostly red and black. Many infamous bands have played there. It looks quite good, in a funky, carnivale-esque way.

We soundchecked, got a few minutes rest at the Hotel Panton, then went back to the club.

After the show we were ravenous. We found an open restaurant we could walk to, and ate dinner at about 2am. We drank a couple of bottles of wine, and topped it off with the Spanish equivalent of good armagnac, which is called Lepanto. I knew about it, already, because Pip gave me a bottle once.

MAY 29 - ORIEHUELA

We drove all day, heading south, ending up at the Mediterranean coast. We arrived outside the club, "La Gramola". It was closed and no one was there to meet us. While we waited, we bought fruit at a store. I used the pocket knife I bought at the petrol station earlier, to cut up a melon. Finally we loaded the gear in to the tiny club. It had a silver curtain behind the little stage. We checked the sound, then went off to eat.

The restaurant was called La Cantina. It sat on the corner, by the rail line, and we got a table outside so we could watch the trains go by. We got a paella ... fantastic, with a dry rose. The restaurant owner had been in a band himself in the 60's called the Black Shadows. He went in the

back and got an old photo of himself with the band, brought it out to show us. We took a photo with him.

After eating, we went to the hotel for about 20 minutes. It was a really nice hotel ... the best of the tour. Deluxe!! And a lovely view!! We had an early wakeup the next day. There is an absolute law of the road. Simply stated, this law is: "The quality of the hotel is inversely related to the time one is able to spend in it".

We got in the van and drove back to the gig. Again, a small but overexcited crowd. I broke an A-string in Lets Go, then the D-string in Hand of Law. A lesson re-learned: never go more than 2 shows without changing strings.

There was a blonde Russian lady there who was aggressively trying to get ... well, someone ... anyone ... for the night. She was about 35, kind of nondescript looking, hair sort of yellowish, like the van. Super drunk. Drooling drunk. She got right up in my face. I made it clear that I was unavailable. But Art and Steve were cornered by her for quite a while. I wondered if they might actually accommodate her, since they hadn't made out with any women at all since we arrived in Europe.

We assembled at the van to pack up.

Art: "She wanted a twin sandwich".

Steve: "Yeah, but she was a pile"

Art: "Theres no way we're goin' for that"

Steve: "Her breath smelled like vomit"

Art "Yeah, or like she was eating dog shit"

Me, wondering: "Have you ever actually had sex with a woman at the same time?"

Steve: "Yeah, we've done it. But only with really super tall chicks where if you are at the head end you can be about 4 feet away from the action at the tail end."

They recalled one such encounter in more detail than necessary.

Then we went back to the hotel.

MAY 30 - BARCELONA

We drove into Barcelona, finding Club RockSound. It's so easy these days with GPS. Before GPS, to find the club, it would take hours of driving in circles around weird cities, guessing, finally asking people, getting bad directions due to language barriers. Tempers would flare after long drives in the van. Now you just drive straight to the soundcheck. No more vicious group attacks on the piteous band member or driver who haplessly got us lost and made us LATE. And God help that individual if the band missed dinner because of it!

Soundcheck was notable for a completely inoperative monitor. The sound guy, a nice but fearsome looking fellow, had to go out and get another speaker wedge. We went for coffee at a strange American restaurant with sports themes. It looked really good, with all these baseball, football, and boxing artifacts from the previous century. Someone had spent a lot, and went to a lot of trouble to make it look like American sports culture. But they got everything wrong, like banners for teams which do not exist (Boston Redskins) and events which didn't happen (Super Bowl XVI in 1935!)

Finally hours later, got done with soundcheck but it was too late to eat.

The gig was really spectacular and we had the best merch sales yet on the tour. After the show, we were not lucky as the restaurant we wanted to go to had closed. Only the hapless American one with the alternate universe sports culture was still open. We walked in but it was annoyingly loud and raucous, and we were in no mood for it. We walked out.

The twins disappeared for a while "looking for ass".

Next day, we went to the car rental place and switched our big ponderous and ugly white Iveco for a smaller van, as we now had less gear to haul. We are getting other gear in Italy. We took off driving in our new silver van which is much sportier. It's a Citroen with the amusing name "Jumpy".

We lobbied Kike to take us to the Dali museum in Figueras, which is more or less on the way. On the outside it looks like a giant Fantasy Castle with huge eggs on the roof and gold figures standing around naked. Then you pay 12 euros and go inside. The Dali paintings and sculptures are far more impressive in person than in the books we marveled at during our student days. There are no words for it. All that cool stuff you've seen in books was there. We left after a couple of hours, shaking our heads in amazement at the sheer amount and variety of work he created.

Going outside, into the cool breeze and bright mediterranean sunshine, I was seeing things differently. Trees, streetlights, cars, the sky, all took on a hallucinatory aspect. We got coffee. We got back in the little Jumpy Van and headed across the French border, rocketing east on L'Autoroute du Sud, at 160 kms/hr.

MAY 31 - SETE - FRANCE

Along the autoroute, I was still thinking about the Dali museum in Figueras. I knew I had to go back to it. The body of work was impossible to comprehend. How could one man do it? He did everything ... everything, and in every style, and then some. He got down to the molecular level, into the heart of the DNA of it ... Looking at that work I was both inspired and humbled.

We arrived in the port town of Sete. The canals are lined with boats, beautiful and impressionistic. I sensed that I was still seeing things through that art lens. We ascended the hill in the van, coming close to scraping the sides on the houses that line these narrow streets. They were not made for cars, but for carts drawn by donkeys and horses. The writer George Brassens lived here. The street we are on is named after him.

We rang Tony Truant, who met us in the square a few minutes later on his motorcycle. He drove up with long curly Bob Dylan-ish hair, a loud shirt, lots of jewelry, big black shades. He is as thin as a switchblade. Tony is a friend of Anne's. He was in the French rock and roll band from Rouen, The Dogs. Tony is in multiple music projects and is always going to or coming from a gig or a recording session. We follow in the van to Tony's house. He has a big house on the hill full of great posters, thousands of cool records, and weird guitars and amps. It's an old French house, funky, bohemian, run down in a good way. We sit in the back yard.

Tony: "What would you lak? Some wine?"

Art: "We don't drink."

Tony: "'Ow about some ash?"

Steve: "No, but we'll take some pussy if you have any of that!"

Tony: "I don't know about zees sings."

Deniz: "I'll have some wine."

Tony is from Beaune. He knows about wine. He opens a bottle of red.

He says: "Eet's may bee ... ahhhh...not zo ... bad." It is actually great. He makes a pot of green tea for the twins and we drink the wine. Tony brings out a tielle, the local specialty of Sete: spicy octopus pie. We all have a slice. The twins love it.

Tony explains: "Ay am drinking ze green tea all ze day and at night ay am wiz ze wine and smoke ze ash". This proves to be correct.

We head over to my friend Rauky's place. Rauky was in the band Tabasko and Sonic Assassin, and is now in Little Green Fairy. He is famous as a one armed guitarist, having lost his right upper limb in a motorcycle crash. He simply turns the amp up loud enough to feed back spontaneously and plays that with the left hand, and sings. We have more wine and snacks. Then we head out to eat. There is a little restaurant right on the beach in the middle of nowhere. No

other buildings are near. The tables are all outside facing the water. The edge of La Grande Bleu is only a few meters away. The bright sunshine is turning to blue gray dusk with a pink rim.

We sit around for hours, until way late, drinking wine and eating. We eat something called Xinxin. It's sort of like a satay chicken curry. The lights of Sete and Montpellier twinkle like stars in the far distance, as the coast curves in a sweeping arc to the southeast.

Back at Tony's, we drink and play guitars till very late, then oblivion until the sun beats us awake with its magical headache rays.

JUNE 1 - CICLIAMINO BEAT

We drove down L'Autoroute du Sud past Montpellier, Arles, Nimes, Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, Cannes, Nice and on into Italy, straight from the expansive country of southern France into the mountains, winding roads and a zillion tunnels of the southern Alps. Trying to avoid the megatraffic of Milano, we still got stuck for hours gridlocked on back roads as everyone had the same idea. Finally, got onto the A4 east of Milano and the traffic gradually opened up. Got off the autostrada at West Brescia, and headed north along the shore of a massive lake. It seemed like the lake shore went on forever. On and on, rolling in and out of tunnels. Finally got to the end of this lake, in a narrow valley, and kept going north in the middle of nowhere. By the time we reached the club, stiff and sore after being on the road for eleven and a half hours, we were only an hour and a half south of Innsbruck.

There's a little stage set up in a tent by a pool and there is a pool party going on with 60's records being played. It's weird. All around are stunning vertical granite peaks disappearing into clouds above.

Salad, pizza, wine. We met our new tour manager, Franz. His native language is Italian, but his English is with an Austrian accent. He kind of sounds like Arnold Terminator. He's a young hipster, with an early Beatles haircut.

Opening band had a girl drummer, the guy had a Mosrite, they played some psychedelic surf punk. We played. We rocked, but my impression was that we were pretty much incidental to the pool party. After we played, they kept the disco going. Our hotel room windows faced the pool. The noise blasted up until about 3.30. At least they played good records

First thing in the morning, we woke to noisy dirt bikes from a local club racing around in circles behind the hotel. We wearily assembled for coffee, and then got in the van.

JUNE 2 - BERGAMO - CHOCOLATE BERRIES AND THE UNGA BUNGA MAN

Franz was eager to show us around his home town. We got in the van and drove to Bergamo where we had a lakeside lunch. Franz is full of conversation, about anything and everything. He has 2 university degrees, is in his late 20's and has a business partnership called Otis Tours promoting, managing and touring bands.

Franz says: "Even zo I am very vell edukayted, I chust vont to tour and play rockanroll, zat all I vont to do, ha ha!".

Franz is very much into ice cream.

He tells us: "In ice cream I am expert. I 'splain you. How you vill know if gelateria any good. You zee pistachio ice cream, if ees green colour, ees no good. Zey add somefing ! ... If you vont, we get speziale ice cream invented in my own town Bair-gamo, ees 'straticella'. Because in old time, zey havink too much super giant chocolate after festival und zo ... zey chust put in ze ice cream ! ha ha !!"

So we go to the gelateria. There is straticella which seems to be regular vanilla ice cream with pieces of chocolate in it. There are also ice creams with different kinds of berries and chocolate. From now on, we call Franz "Chocolate Berries". It just seems to fit.

The outdoor gig is at Edone. A group of young people have applied for a permit to use a public park attached to a cemetery, as a venue. All summer they run gigs there. They have set up a bar in a tent, and in a side area they cook BBQ. There is a DJ playing 60's hits. There's a stage with a PA and lights. The smoke rises above the park, and the odor of charcoal grilled pork fat pervades the air.

During the load in, I twisted the wrong way while pulling a heavy box out of the van, straining a muscle in my left upper back. It felt like a dull knife blade sliding in and out every time I took a deep breath or turned in a certain way.

During the show, about 4 songs into it, my left hand went numb. I was worried my neck was involved, but my surgery 2 years ago had been a complete success. I had bone grafts and fusion at C5/6 and C6/7, with a titanium plate inserted to hold everything in place while the bone grafts took. After an awful recovery period, made into sheer torture by the brace I had to wear, the pain went away, my paralysed left arm came back to life. I'd had no neurological symptoms since then. I was horrified to think that something was going wrong with that repair! I had to take a couple of minutes between songs to stretch and relax, and the numbness faded. I worked out later that it was probably carpal tunnel, not the dreaded return of spine problems. The distribution of the sensory deficit was more consistent with the territory of the median nerve, not any of the cervical spine nerve root dermatomes. A huge relief washed over my mind. Carpal tunnel I can deal with. More spine surgery ... I shuddered at the prospect.

Whenever we finished playing, first thing I did after thanking the crowd is I always grabbed my pedals off the front of the stage (I only have 2 or 3 ... a Boss tuner and an XXL and RC boost device) and I stick them on top of my amp. (I've lost 3 tuners in the past by having them snatched off the stage by someone in the crowd..) Then I go off to wherever I can, to dry off and change out of the soaking wet clothes. I usually even soak through my socks and boots. Best in a dressing room, but some of these small places don't even have a dressing room. Then, with dry clothes on, I'll go back out to the stage and start packing stuff up. At this most basic level of touring there is no road crew to help. You do it all yourself, from load in through soundcheck and the show, all the way through loadout, and into the van, trying to keep an eye on everything so stuff does not disappear.

When you are trying to pack up the stage, you are always beset by fans wanting stuff signed and wanting their picture taken with you. I always smile and comply. These interruptions can go on a half hour or more. And the many hands shaken, I'm sure that's where the ubiquitous "Tour Cold" comes from.

The guy with a shopping bag of 20 albums, singles and ep's comes up to the stage and hands them to me one by one to sign. Soon there is a pile of rare vinyl on the stage, that is probably worth a couple of thousand euros on e-bay. There's a guy like this, a deep obsessive collector, at every other show at least.

After packing up, Anne and I sat at a picnic table to the side of the stage. The guy in charge of the food was a short guy with curly black hair and a beard. He had a T-shirt that said "Death By Unga Bunga". He brought us bowls of pasta, grilled pork, sausages. He brought us beer. Then bread rolls. Then another plate of meat. Then vodka and soda waters. Amazingly, I was so hungry by this time at about 2 am that I ate everything.

I was looking over at the stage and noticed something weird. Earlier, for the show, I had to plug my Hiwatt amp head into a 2x15 Fender speaker cab instead of the usual 4x12 Marshall cab. It's difficult to get a good tone out of that Fender cab, so in an effort to improve the responsiveness and get some possibility of feedback or at least sustain with the guitar, the speaker cab was raised up on 2 short beer kegs. After the show, looking at it, I was struck by how much it looked like a little robot. It was cute. We took a picture of it.

JUNE 3 - CLUB STRADO / SAVIGNANO

We walked around the Old City. It was built in 1431 by King Luxembourg of Bohemia, on top of a village of quarreling families, which was based around a catholic church built on an early Roman Christian church built around 430, which was built on a pagan temple. And so forth, on down through time. The Bohemians only had it for about a decade, when the Venetians took over, so for centuries Bergamo belonged to Venice. Which is why there are sculptures of winged

lions everywhere. The people around here don't all consider themselves actual Italians, many identifying more locally and with lands to the north.

Over at the club around 2pm, we ran into the Unga Bunga Man who was in the same T-shirt and pants as last night. I asked him, "Hey, man, did you sleep here"? "No, no. I went 'ome" Maybe he has a whole set of unga bunga shirts? Anyway we loaded the gear and the new tour manager came to take over from Franz. He is Diego, a tall, thin, dark, Roman looking chap. He speaks a zillion miles an hour into his mobile while driving.

The van is a beat up pale mustard yellowish affair, underneath layers of grime, roughly the color of the worst baby poop. The front window hasn't been cleaned in years, and it is possible to see light through it but not any details of the outside world. The van has a little sign on the back that says "Otis Tours".

I complained about the seat belts.

"Hey Diego. You gotta get these belts fixed. Two belts in the back don't work."

Diego laughs. "Zees ees Ee-taly. Ees no problem. Police dont care"

"No, you need to have functional seatbelts."

"No, eet ees OK. Van pass inspection only uno mont' ago. No have to worry until one more jeer."

"Yes, but what about the people who have to ride in the back?"

"Bands zey always ride in back, and never zair ees any problem"

"That's because you haven't crashed the van, yet. "

"Reel rockanrolla band don't care about seatbelt."

For a minute I am thinking, he's probably right about that. Seatbelts would be fairly low on the priority list for the typical brainless rock band on the road at this low level of touring. Road safety would be somewhere well below drugs, alcohol, smoking, pissing in empty water bottles, and getting the level of the loudness of the van cd player up to an appropriately deafening level.

Diego offhandedly adds, picking up his phone, "Een my caountry when you play in band, we don't worry zees kind of sings."

By now I realize that in his mind, he's grabbed the high ground ... a real rock and roll hip cat wouldn't worry about such mundane concerns as seat belts. He is not only ignoring the voice of reason, but is even questioning my rock and roll credentials! Me, Deniz Tek, Radio Birdman

founder! Hall of Fame inductee! Number Seven in the top one hundred Australian guitarists of all time!! ... and he's sticking to it!!

How can you argue against safety? I wonder. Argue against prevention of death and disability? I went into this discussion thinking it was axiomatic ... a no-brainer. Axiomatic!! I am not yet giving up, but am now sort of off balance and I do not see the sure fire outcome I expected. And when you no longer envision victory, you've already lost.

I continue on.

"Well, you SHOULD worry. Especially, the way these lunatics drive around here, you definitely need belts." I think about maybe adding in a couple of personal horror stories from the trauma room to make my point ... I look over ...

He's not even listening! He's leaning into his iPhone, texting furiously, not watching the road ahead, which can only in the vaguest sense be seen through the filthy windscreen anyway.

I clutch for one last straw: "And, you know, your insurance won't pay medical claims if the passengers are not wearing seat belts."

It sounds lame even to me.

It's over.

Diego without looking up: "We no worry about eensurance. Ees OK. Andiamo!"

The question remains, how on Gods earth did Italy become the fifth biggest industrial economy? This is a deep mystery.

We drive down the autostrada and Diego puts on a fabulous 36 track Roky Erickson compilation which has several slightly different versions of all the songs from "The Evil One" and is intercut with dialogue about how he spent his childhood going to horror movies.

Eventually we reach a little club in middle of nowhere. It's a little bar with a recording studio and record label offices above. It's called "Go Down Records". Across the road the farm fields stretch off to the south, with the silhouette of San Marino on the horizon. We load in the gear. Anne and I drink a beer. Art and Steve get pineapple juice. "Shoe Roberto" shows up at sound check. On the 2006 Radio Birdman tour, he came by the show at Bologna to show me his guitar, a red '65 Crestwood Deluxe. (Everywhere I go, I am identified with the Epiphone Crestwood, which has been both a blessing and a curse.) At that show, he insisted I play the guitar, which I did. I noticed he had some pretty cool desert boot type shoes. So I said "cool shoes!" That's all I said. It was just a comment, to make nice conversation. The next day as we were leaving the hotel, there

was a box waiting for me at the front desk. In the box was a pair of the same shoes that he had dropped off as a present!

So here he is again, and he attends soundcheck and leaves his guitar, in case I want to play it again.

The support band is called: Los Kamikazes. Art gets a green Los Kamikazes T-shirt. We eat. We drink the local wine, which is presented without labels. The wine is very good, comparable to a 1re cru Bordeaux. There is a full moon rising above the Adriatic.

After the show, Anne says to Steve: "You guys played great. You sounded so tough. Can you get any tougher?" Steve says: "Yeah, tomorrow night."

Later she asks Art the same question. No way Art could have heard what Steve had answered but without hesitating, he says "Yeah, tomorrow night".

JUNE 4 - BUCINE

We took a short detour to check out San Marino. We hiked around the old citadel, took a bunch of cool photos. (one of these would find its way on to the back cover of "Detroit" a year later).

In a light rain, we then ascended into the mountains of Tuscany. The van traversed a succession of progressively smaller highways, then roads, then dirt roads, then muddy jeep trails, finally arriving at.. Spectre Castle. It is a small chateau, or a large villa.. with servants quarters made into accommodation for bands. The main building has a bar and a small club. It's a family property, the guy who started the club said his mother owns it. She apparently stays upstairs and tolerates the noise and crowds. I can't imagine it being a viable business, so it must be a rich kids vanity project. It has an octopus logo and a "secret agent" theme. The main room has a stage on one side. Opposite the stage is the bar. The actual distance from the front of the stage to the bar is 3 meters. I measured it. It is literally smaller than most rehearsal rooms. The walls were hard surfaces. They echo against one another, like a hall of mirrors does to light. The sound pressure in there is enormous. The drums alone, unmixed, were deafening.

Ten minutes before going on, I got an overseas phone call with some distressing family news.

After we started playing about half the people walked out. I don't blame them I would never go to see a band in there. They were hipsters wearing 60's style clothing, at least the girls were. The guys: pretty nondescript, the usual jeans and t-shirts mainly. They would have been much happier with a jangly low volume sixties pop band. I wondered why we were playing there. Why? For what purpose? Yes they paid us, we got nice rooms to stay in, a reasonably good dinner, free drinks. The next day we hung out, swam in the pool, drank espresso. The place was like a resort, built centuries ago.

There was a big white sheep dog and a small brown beagle. The owner said, "Whatever you do, you must ALWAYS close ze gates ... " Of course the next day, while chatting on his phone, Diego opens a gate. There is a shout from owner. Too late. The dogs rocketed out of that gate, blew past me working at an outdoor table with my Mac Book. I looked up in time to see the dogs disappearing into the tree line like greased lightning. Freedom!!

Back in the van, I complain about the lack of air conditioning. The day was hot and sunny, we were driving south in the late afternoon, and my right side was in direct sun and getting roasted.

Diego says: "We don' feex because we never use van in summer. Bands, they don' tour so much in summer. Today ees June, only seem 'ot because global warming."

I say: "But you are taking Nikki Corvette around Germany in July."

He says: "Germany can be cold in July"

I made a mental note to send Nikki an e-mail warning her about this...

JUNE 5 - LATINA

The van headed south, swinging around to the east of Rome and then cutting in towards the coast. We ascended through hill villages where people looked more like figures on Etruscan frescoes than the more germanic tribes up north. We arrived at the coastal town of Latina and drove up to the club. We were met at the curb by the local promoter, the support band, and a couple of autograph hounds. We walked in, drank coffee. The coffee variety we want, is macciato. We like cappucino first thing in the morning, because the bright sun of midday is harsh, the nerve endings can be sensitive due to the effects of alcohol fermentation products, and straight espresso at full octane would be too much. It would fry sensitive neural circuits, and be too much of a shock to the central nervous system. Later in the day, say around 8pm, macciato is better as it has a teeny bit of milk in it. Then, right before going on stage, we progress to doppio espresso, slammed down, in my case, with a grappa chaser.

After we soundcheck, they serve us the meal at a table right by the stage. It's another nondescript pasta with cheap red wine. Mondo Topless, the support band, does their soundcheck, which is conducted at decibel levels that would make a full artillery barrage sound quiet. We try to eat while this is going on but the volume of noise threatens to shake the fillings loose from our teeth.

The singer comes up to me. He's apparently a fan.

He says: "Weel you play Stooges song thees nite?"

I say: "Sorry ... what?" while digging the embedded earplug out of my left ear.

He says: "Weel you play-a ze Stooges? TV Eye?"

I say: "No, we play Dirt, but not TV Eye".

He says: "Ah ha ha, aye sink you very tired from too mainie tine zees song."

I think about responding to that, then decide against it. I just smile.

He says: "An thain, weel you play Bairdmon song?"

I say: "Well, yes. We do a number of them."

He says: "Weel you play Do Ze Pop?"

I say: "No, not that one."

He says: "We like to play TV Eye and Do Ze Pop tonite but we waile not if you want play zem."

I say: "No that's OK. Go for it."

We drive to the hotel on the beach. It's actually someone's private residence, that is vacant for the weekend. The promo guy driving the car had some experimental noise on the car stereo. I told him, "Hey, you might like this" and passed up my Chonto Tamura Sonic Insurgency CD. It is furious free jazz. He likes Chonto. "Heet soun like-a John Zorn".

I shower, dress, go back to the gig. We play. I am changing the set slightly every night, so it stays interesting. Regardless of the crowd, it's always a challenge to play as hard as we can while maintaining accuracy. There are defined points in the set also where it is a free-for all with improvisation. In Christmas Eve, I have begun to take out my leatherman tool and use it as a slide. It sounds great and people are amazed. They love novel stuff. When we goof up or crash and burn with a massive mistake, we laugh about it and the crowds love that too more than if you played it "correctly".

The accom has some goodies waiting ... potato chips, chocolate bars, salami, beer, stuff like that. We tuck in to it after the show.

JUNE 6 - PIACENZA

Now we are right in the middle of ten consecutive shows in 10 different cities. At this point the little challenges begin to build up. The "tour cold", which is making everyone in the van cough and sneeze now ... the back and neck trouble from sitting in the van seat on rough roads several hours a day ...no laundry ... the irregular food, and lack of green things or any fruit (We'd have scurvy like the sailors on the Endeavour, if it went on much longer) ... too much alcohol and not enough sleep or exercise. The tour becomes a vortex of getting up, putting sweaty clothes back on, getting in the van, stopping for coffee, getting to soundcheck, hanging around and eating whatever food is provided by the venue, waiting, waiting, waiting, and finally playing for an hour, then hanging around more in soaked clothes, and finally repacking the gear and going to the hotel. We have postcards we wrote 6 days ago and no time to find a mailbox to post them. Singing is becoming a challenge with hoarse sore throat and blocked sinuses. It is becoming a survival exercise.

We stop for coffee at a little cafe in the town. There's a girl making the coffees. She is quite friendly and has a cute way of speaking. She says "Cacao?" I look blank. I AM blank, with no idea what she means. She points to the chocolate shaker, repeats "CACAO ??". OK, maybe I do look old enough to be deaf. Well, actually it turns out that I AM half deaf. But now I get it. I nod. "Si. Cacao per favore!" She shakes chocolate powder on our cappucini. We sit outside in the sun with our coffee, keeping a watchful eye on the van full of equipment and guitars.

We get to Piacenza after a 6 hour drive from south of Rome. We are sitting backstage at a tiny little outdoor gig, with a bowl of potato chips. The makeshift stage is set up in a little tent in a clutter of rubbish at the back of a vacant lot.

Even the screenwriters documenting the end-stage decline of Spinal Tap never envisioned anything like this. The dinner was dreadful ... some horrible wet cardboard-like pasta in little bow-tie shapes, with what seemed to be tomato sauce or possibly old ketchup, right out of the bottle, on a plastic plate with a bendy plastic fork. I think the promoters girlfriend probably cooked it. I am rather familiar with this type of fare, and it brings me back to the mid-90's. It's exactly what you get when you play shows at communist squats.

We had to eat it in front of the stage while the awful support band blasted unrecognisable noise over a rapid polka beat at deafening decibel levels They call it "garage rock" here, and seem to think that the very unpleasantness of it has some sort of intrinsic merit. I feel very out of place among all this stuff. I wonder, since all the support bands have been like this in Italy, do they think MY music is "garage rock?" But why do they think so? I shudder to imagine!!

Art tried hard to get at the bar girl, who was wearing an "I Heart" New York T-shirt, super short denim shorts, and long tall boots. He asked her if she'd like to spend time with him after the show. She pointed to this brutish looking guy built like a Coke machine with a crew cut and hideous tattoos and giant muddy work boots. Says: "Ee ees mine boyfren".

After our set, there was a guy who had no prior knowledge of my work, who happened to wander in to the gig. Somehow, this random stranger was touched by it emotionally. He asked Anne how he could hear more, and take some of the experience home with him. He bought some merch, and sincerely thanked me. I felt a lot better after talking with him.

JUNE 7 - RONCA

When the van pulled up in the rain in front of the "Jack The Ripper" club, a flood of memories washed over me. This was where, 15 years ago, I performed an incision and drainage of a large abscess on the thigh of our drummer Tony Horton, with a sharp pocket knife, under difficult conditions. It is where manager John Needham fell asleep on a bench while we were doing our sound check. It is where he later consumed so many margaritas that he was unable to drive the van the next day, having to ride in the back while I drove it to Pisa, and embarrassingly disgraced himself during the ride. By the time we arrived at that next show, at a huge anarchist squat called "Macchia Nera" ("Black Stain") he had recovered sufficiently to appreciate, if not enjoy, the girl-on-girl live act that followed our band on the stage.

The club manager remembered me, too, and brought out a large bowl of fresh cherries which grow all around the club. After sound check, we sat outside with the support band and ate pasta, strips of grilled pork, pork burgers, and chips. The support band is an all girl 3-piece called "Kill The Mayor". They look about 16 or 17, but they insist that they are 23. They were quite endearing, and while technically at an early stage of development, they more than make up for it in enthusiasm.

I ask about their band name.

Erica says: "We are saying zees name becuz ze mayor in aour town, she ees a right-weeng." I look over at the club manager. He says: "Oh yes, eet ees true. Ze mayor ees terrible woman. She is on ze right. We 'ate zees. She as been mayor for many many years. Everyone in town 'ate 'er." I say: "In Ronca, do you elect the mayor by popular vote?" He says: "Of course! We are democracy! ". I ask: "If everyone hates the mayor then why does she get re-elected?" They look at me blankly then tuck back into the pork burgers, speaking rapid-fire Italian.

The kids there have a strange mix of fashion. The boys are hip-hop / skater punks with buzz haircuts, ball caps, giant baggy shorts with chains hanging ridiculously low, oversize Tshirts featuring skulls or obscenities, and skateboard shoes. The girls are mod-swinging 60's retro and generally look great.

Kill the Mayor plays. We play. The shows continue to get better all the time. The constant daily attempt to be even better than the night before gets you sharp. We are exploring new territory, changing things, learning more each night. It is a great place to be as a musician. I pack up my gear and see Steve and Art at the bar.

The girls in Kill The Mayor are quite enamored with the twins, and after our show they hang out chatting. They want to learn some english slang sayings. Steve suggests that one of them learn to say "I want to sit on your face". She is shocked. "But why? Eet is a bad sing? Eef you say seat on face, heet mean you don't like ze person?" Steve says: "No, no. It's a GOOD thing. A VERY good thing! Just go say it to Art. Say: I - want - to - sit - on - your - face". She does. Art says: "Great! Lets go do it right now!" She finally gets it, and laughs. When the girls leave the guys, to go home to their boyfriends, she gives Art a sweet kiss on the cheek and says: "Eef I no haf boyfriend, I would seat on your face."

JUNE 9 - TORINO

We got up around noon, got coffee, walked to the beach. The water looked really good but I did not have my board shorts handy. They were locked in the van, along with my running shoes, stuffed in between bottles of wine in a box, to keep the bottles from banging together with the g-forces in the back of the van.

We sat with more coffee at a little bar and watched the ships sailing out on the blue water. Some time later Art and Steve showed up and they did go in for a swim. We noticed that the locals were eating what looked like "Fisherman's Baskets" ! Fried shrimp, calamari, sardines, little octopi. We had to get these Fishermans Baskets, since our pal Suz would never forgive us if we didn't.

We drove up to Torino, which looks like an industrial Swiss or German town. It has the Fiat factory. They call it the "Detroit of Italy". That's a bit of a stretch, they still make cars in Torino for one thing. The club, "United", had some food and wine laid out for us. There was a plate of various salamis and hams, and what looked like white slices of turkey or chicken. I popped one of these in my mouth. Not what I expected. It was slimy and nauseating, like thick snot, and I involuntarily gagged. I spat it in a rubbish bin.

A little while later Diego pointed it out on the plate, said "You must try zees one. Ees "lardo", a specialty of ze region." Pure pig fat sliced to look like smoked turkey!

The opening band, Killer Klown, dresses silly in priests vestments and crosses, one dresses like a dead sailor, and one is a female keyboard player in mod 60's black and white frock, white boots, and playing an orange Vox Jaguar organ. They are a weird Italian version of a party band! They are crushingly loud. Weird up to a point, but they have nothing that compares to "Yoga Pants" by the Rainbow Vomit!

We eat pasta, thin beef slices and salad, and drink chianti, espresso, and grappa; in a room with vinyl albums plastered on the ceiling and all the usual "garage rock" motifs of flames, dice, devils, pin up girls except no hot rods this time.

The gig was packed, but we had trouble with the drums sliding around. The carpet would not hold. There was angst and the bass drum mic took some hits, to the consternation of the sound guy who came running up. The language barrier made things worse. The sound on stage was crap. I could hear only the bass, booming over everything. The soundcheck was good, but everything had changed. We struggled through a difficult show. There were deep fans there, ready to go crazy. It could have been a monster show, but technical gremlins prevented it. After we got back to the hotel at 4am I called my Dad, who was hospitalized this week with complications of his prostate cancer. The morning birds were beginning to sing outside the window when I finally got into bed. I stuck earplugs in.

At ten in the morning the housemaids banged on the door, complaining that we missed checkout time, and eventually opened the lock and barged in. Naked from the waist down, all I could do was to say "Buon Giorno! " She ran away.

JUNE 10 + 11

The next two entries are lost in the mists of time so we skip forward to the end of the Italian run of 10 shows in 10 cities in 10 days by unairconditioned van.

After the last night in Villadossola, we dropped Art and Steve at the train station. They are headed to Bergamo, to spend the night there and then go to London the next day. We hung on to Art's bass, whose case was by now falling apart and was being held together by packing tape, and Steve's drum pedal and stick bag. Diego drove us to La Pereree, in the mountains near Grenoble. It was an easy 5 hours in good weather, through incredible countryside, entering France via the Frejus tunnel. After eating roast pork with chestnuts, and drinking two cups of coffee, Diego got in the van, turned around, and drove back to Italy that night.

Anne and I spent the next week at her parents' home, gradually recovering from illness and injury, recharging energy levels, and relaxing by hiking in the mountains.

Art and Steve meanwhile went to a big Punk Festival in Portsmouth, England which was to be a 4 day long event. Some of their favorite bands were supposed to be on the bill, including the Vibrators, the Damned, and the Rezillos. After a brief start, the great majority of the poorly attended festival was cancelled, apparently because the bands realized that they were not going to be paid. This left the twins without much to do in the UK except to look around for girls, expensively.

JUNE 21 - PARIS - FETE DE LA MUSIQUE

We took the TGV to Paris, impossibly lugging 8 cumbersome pieces of baggage, including the very heavy Hiwatt amp head, up the steps and on to the train. I had bought a new box for the amp in Italy, and in Grenoble I got a hand cart to wheel it around. So we went out to look for a hand cart. We couldn't find the Mr. Bricolage which had closed down, and so we went to Entrepot de Bricolage, but that place was difficult and unfriendly, had only one type of cheap dodgy hand cart and no Weber BBQ's. Castorama, on the other hand, turned out to be a great store, featuring a range of Webers and about six different hand carts. I got a good one with an 80 kg capacity. Castorama is sort of like a French version of Bunnings or Home Depot. Comme ça.

Up until now everything had gone easily in the back of the van, but that luxury was behind us. At Gare de Lyon we were lucky to get a taxi willing to haul all the stuff, and us, to Belleville. Art's bass rode in the front seat up by the driver.

The next day Art and Steve arrived in Paris. By chance, they immediately hooked up with an attractive lady tattooer named Olivia, who runs a shop in Gambetta called "E-XXX-otic". They were very happy to have met this nice lady who kindly offered to show them around Paris.

The next day, we did an interview and a couple of acoustic songs live to air at Radio Aligre FM. The Screaming Tribesmen were in town and they were on the show too. It was all friendly, everyone had a good time, and Chris Masuak and I did a couple of Radio Birdman tunes together at the end of the show. Afterwards, we went to eat at a restaurant. We had bavettes au sauce poivre vert, pommes de terre fried in butter and garlic, and confit du canard aux cepes. Some had cheesecake for dessert, but I just had a Noisette which is a double short black espresso with a single dollop of cream. The cream dollop is only the size of a hazelnut, which is why it is called a noisette.

Au Petit Garage is a small bar owned by an independently wealthy Greek man named George. Neither his French nor his English is particularly understandable. George is a big fan of Australian rock and roll music. He had the New Christs play at his bar last year. This time it's me. The one day of the year when all music and noise restrictions are lifted, is La Fete De La Musique which is held on the summer solstice. This is the only day of the year when George installs a stage and a sound system at the front of the bar, open to the street, and has bands play. On this day, everyone takes to the streets, there is a lot of ill defined noise coming from all directions. It is a cacaphony of noise bouncing off the hard urban surfaces, echoing off the paving stones, refracting and phasing off the corners of buildings. It is sonic chaos! Bands of all kinds are playing in the streets all over Paris. Walking 6 or 8 blocks from Eric's house to the venue, I saw rap, DJ's, death metal, russian folk music, salsa beat music with wild street dancing, and a weird bunch of about 30 women marching around in circles banging on all sorts of drums all at once. Every few meters it's something else and it all seems to blend in together in a great roar. People also set up BBQ pits all over the place and the streets are full of smoke and the intense aroma of charcoal and meat and cigarette smokers are out in the thousands.

We had dinner in a little cafe in the street but the waitress couldn't hear the orders because of the noise outside. Finally they closed up all the windows and doors. Anne's friend Jacques ate with us. He is a theoretical subatomic quantum particle physicist, who commutes between the giant CERN Hadron Supercollider and another similar facility in the USA. He's in charge of looking for the Higgs Boson. Having covered that topic to death last year, I had to ask about a time machine He didn't bat an eyelid, just smiled and said "C'est possible".

We ate a salad with chevre and lardon. This prompted a joke about "The Lard-Ons" but it fell kind of flat.

We were supposed to set up in the street but the cops came by following a complaint, and so the stage had to be inside, but facing the open air of the street. The drums had to be way back in. It had the effect of playing in a bathroom with one wall gone. The walls were hardsurfaced and mirrored. It was like a death chamber of noise.

There were 5 bands on the bill:

Dick Tracy Lords : middle aged punks

Road Kill Kattas : happy Greeks

Whudunit : silly party band with aggressive in your face unpleasant singer

Holy Curse : Featuring "Marseilles Paul" with an American Flag "Wayne Kramer Signature" Stratocaster, Vinz with amazing fuzzed out thundering bass tones, Goulou from Orleans pounding on the drums, and incredible frontman Eric. They did some of my favourites, like "Preacher Man" and they did Electroponic Tonic. I was feeling pretty tired by then, but their energy and quality picked me right up. I joined them for their last two songs, "Future Now" and "Burned My Eye '78"

Then, we set up and played. The sound was difficult. It was very loud in that box, but very unclear. The monitors were inadequate to the task. I was standing right on the edge of the street, with a huge crowd in front of me. At times, there were 20 or 30 people on a flatbed truck off to my right, jumping up and down in time to the music, in unison it was one of the weirdest things I've ever seen from the stage. The owner George was getting his picture taken by Detroit native rock photographer Sue Rynski, and she was getting him to stand right by me. He is lurching around, stepping on my leads, getting between me and the mike, bumping into the guitar. Finally I lost it and threw him off the "stage". A few minutes later he is wandering back on the stage with a half dozen beers, spilling them, veering dangerously between me and Art. It was nuts! The crowd reaction was great, they said it sounded good out the front. I was happy to have a good show to end the tour. Anne brought me a vodka and soda water while I was packing the gear.

I put the amplifier on the hand cart at 3am and wheeled it up the hill, crossed Avenue de Belleville where there was a crowd and police cars with lights flashing. Out of energy, we arrived at Eric's apartment on Rue Bisson and unfolded the couch bed. We sat and talked a bit, Eric, Anne and I. We had a couple of glasses of red wine. I was just so tired. Just tired. Not thinking about anything. At 5, the sky lightened and birds started singing. I fell asleep, but woke often, finally rising about 8.15 to pack and get ready to go to the airport. Every bone hurt. Throat was sore clothes were smoked out. It's an interesting life. The twins are texting, and already want to plan the next tour.