

Road Diary

Deniz Tek, Scott Morgan and Three Assassins

Europe 2001

4/23

I'm sitting in seat 22F on the Boeing, looking out at a line of storms over Wisconsin and Lake Michigan. I'm feeling hungry. They quit feeding people on airliners some time back. The food in the cheap seats was always awful but it did kill one's appetite, so it served a purpose. We swing low over Interstate 94 on the southerly approach, and I'm checking out the cars and trucks streaming like cells along the main artery between Chitown and Motown. We slam down hard on the runway in Detroit...must be an ex Navy pilot. I go to the bar and order a draft Fosters, thinking it's funny that export Fosters here tastes way better than local Fosters in Sydney. Waiting. Another beer, finally ask the waiter for a hot reuben sandwich, passing up the ubiquitous airport 'grilled chicken Caesar'. Last American meal should be something substantial. Finally less than an hour before the flight time of our connection, Scott Morgan walks in, dyed curls a toxic shade of yellow spilling out the sides and back of his signature Tam. I wave my boarding pass at him, he spots me, comes over, gets a draft Bud and double vodka rocks. We talk too long, including telling stories about planes we have missed. Our final boarding announcement is called and we head for the gate. Its way at the end of the F gates...a long walk. We get there. The waiting area at the gate is empty, an ominous sign. Scott decides to head for the mens room, but the girl at the gate says if we're going to Paris we had better get on. They are closing the door. I am fretting. Scott's still in the can...prostate trouble? I know if these people are having a bad day or dont like the look of you, they can say "sorry, FAA requires the door be shut no later than ten minutes before departure time, you'll have to go to customer service and rebook." Anyway here he comes, walking up with his old '67 faded sunburst Telecaster in a gig bag, the one he played in the Rationals, and in Sonic's Rendezvous. Under the withering glare of the Northwest gate agent, giving us a look that could kill a potted cactus, we get on the Northwest DC10 at the very last second. The heavy jet taxis north

to the end of the runway, and we roar off into the Michigan night. A slow left turn takes us over the downriver area .. the lights of Lincoln Park, Wyandotte and Ecorse wink good bye to us and now we are over into Canadian airspace, where we'll head northeast along the dark coast of Labrador. The drink cart comes around. We settle in. I take a Stilnox and sleep a couple of hours. Scott does not.

4/24

Breaking through pellucid layers of overcast interspersed with haze, we see outer northwest suburbs of Paris. The light here is somehow bright and dull at the same time. I have a mild hangover but I'm awake and ready for the day. We get off, straight through passport control with no conversation, and head over to the baggage claim. At DeGaulle it was in a circular building with the bags coming up through a central conduit and then radially spewing out onto their predestined carousels, arranged like the petals of some giant concrete fleur de mal. I wonder if the system works. It doesn't. An hour and a half later I am filling out a lost bag claim form for my missing guitar while waiting in a queue at the service desk. It's not the first time the Epiphone hasn't shown up, and I've always got it back eventually, but still there is a gnawing unease about it. Then Scott calls out. My guitar was mislaid but now has been carried up by an attendant, on a cart with a pile of other bereft looking pieces of luggage. My compadre was fortunately alert enough to spot it. I get it and we go. The problem is, this has taken up all the time we were supposed to have in reserve to get from the airport over to Gare de Lyon to get the train. We have reserved first class seats on the TGV to Montpellier. Not that we are first class kind of guys, but it's only \$30 more than coach and we might be able to sleep. That's fine, but the train will leave at 1:30 and it's 12:20 now.

We rush down to the street level, and find the AirFrance bus which is about to leave. Timing is perfect but when we board, I ask the driver if we can make our train. He looks amused, says: "perhaps...just." We consider getting off the bus and taking a cab, but there are none in sight and instinct tells me we should stay put. The trust in gut feelings is sorely tested when the bus circles the airport for what seems like forever picking up more people. I want to crawl out of my skin. Finally we are travelling into the city. It is surreal, filtered through the distortion of sleep deprivation and hangover. The strange yellow gray light suffuses everything, conjuring images of the crashed Concorde, which

must've gone down around here somewhere. Miraculously we arrive at Gare de Lyon 10 minutes before train time. The trouble now is hauling all of our equipment and bags up flights of steps. It's more than we can really carry, and we get a cart which keeps tipping over. It's rough going and then we find out we are at the wrong tracks. So we have to go another 200 meters to the other side of the station. Scott is gasping like a beached fish. He looks like he's about to have a heart attack. We end up on the train within 30 seconds of doors closing. We are exhausted, totally sweat soaked and all our muscles aching like the first day of football practice in junior high school. We sink back in the first class seats as the train picks up speed with amazing smoothness. We find the bar car.

TGV ride..this is my second bullet train ride and I really love it. Rocketing along at 300 km/hr is the closest thing yet to low jet flight. It would be even better up front in the cockpit, maybe with an espresso con grappa, feet propped up on the dash, enjoying the fluid motion. On a previous European tour I heard an amusing story from Jim Dickson. Apparently, a group of environmentalists were making a TV documentary protesting fast train service in England. They went to France with film crews to get the "man on the street" reaction to the French bullet trains already in service. They had assumed that the farmers and villagers interviewed would provide powerfully negative media images that could be used to give impact to their arguments. To their dismay the French rural people unanimously expressed deep pride in their fast trains. Nary a negative comment could be got from them.

Montpellier. The train pulls in and Rauky is there on the platform waiting for us. Having lost his right arm at the shoulder in a high speed motorcycle wreck, I grab his left hand and hug him. The right is a prosthesis on which he wears a menacing black glove at all times. He wears a black sweater, Black leather jacket, black jeans, and black converse sneakers. He has wavy black hair cut short, and a heavy jowl. He is an archetype of the swarthy visage of a true southern Frenchman. No one will mess with this guy. He's fearsome and I'm sure he can and does deal with bad guys easily. He is always ready with a smile and a laugh, he sees the basic good in life, lives it to the full, and doesn't worry about the sometimes unfortunate details. He is a true man.

We get the next commuter train to Sete, a 20 minute ride, and there is Romano, Pippo, Stefano and a van full of gear. The madness has started. We drive through the most

beautiful fishing town on the French mediterranean coast. Boats of every description line the canal, and the place seems timeless like a great painting. It reminds me of the town in Hemingways' Garden of Eden story. It could have been written here, although I am told it was actually based on Le Grau du Roi, another similar town down the road. From this scene of beauty we descend into the depths of the Practice Room. One of a few rehearsal spaces run by the town council, it is situated in a concrete and stone cavern built underneath the city park where the old men play bowls and talk about the Germans. In fact it served as a bomb shelter in the second war. In it there is no fresh air or ventilation. The mold and damp is intense. There is no room to move around without banging your guitar headstock against something or someone. The amps and drums are deafeningly loud in here, all pointed inward towards the small central space where we stand in little pools of sweat. Someone has attempted decoration with some paint and old band posters. Down in these depths, we are embarking on a long journey together. A positive tone and good spirit must be set in place from the start. This is even more important than the songs. We've never played as a group before, and have only exchanged tapes. We have this evening and tomorrow to get it together before the first show. The songs won't really gel until the first week is over anyway. The objective is to become a band, meanwhile. We resolve the leadership issues early on, and roles are established to the satisfaction of all. This is not spoken of directly but simply allowed to happen. Each finds his space. The first practice is a wild card, because of three guitars. With some bands and individuals this could be a disaster, but here we fall easily into ensemble playing, and amazingly everyone can be heard. The biggest issues behind us, what remains are the details to be filled in: arrangements, starts and stops, tempos. We finish at 10 pm and head over to Rauky and Clarisse's house on Rue Martial Perret for delicious oven roast duck, haricots vert, and local wine of the languedoc region. Some smoke hash. It gets late. We are unbelievably tired, beyond exhaustion now, after the long journey of the past two days. We go to the house of la Mouche, a friend of Rauky's who has generously offered his flat while he is away. It's a bare place, Without furniture. It doesn't look lived in at all. It hasn't been cleaned in a while but there is fresh white paint on the walls. There is mold. But at least we have separate rooms. Scott's loud snoring can't keep me awake through a closed door, a set of earplugs, the alcohol, and sleeping pills.

The bright morning sun streamed in through the windows, outlining the white plaster of the houses and the lush underwater green of the almond trees along the road with hyperclarity. I left the house, careful not to wake Scott, who is sleeping in the front room (with eyeshades like Dorothy Kilgallen used to wear on the game show Truth Or Consequences). Emerging into the intense light of a new world, I went for a run up the mountain to the top where there is a tourist lookout. From here, you can see all of the bay Etang de Thau, the mountains to the east, a hundred kilometers of peninsula and strip of beach, and the dark blue Mediterranean, as well as most of the town of Sete. The air up there is seriously invigorating. If I lived here I would try to make this run each morning. There is a memorial to Setois war dead, and a large aluminium cross. With a good endorphin buzz going, I made my way back down the hill and walked to Rauky's house for coffee. There is no jet lag, I feel fantastic, and I am ready for this beautiful day.

Rehearsals went well. We dropped the song Outside ... couldn't hit the groove, and there is no more time. We added the slow ballad Give It Up, because the set needed more variation in pace. We don't know all the starts and stops, and the tempos are a worry. But we are OK to play the first show tomorrow.

Michael O'Leary is an eccentric expatriate Australian from Geelong who lives in Sete. He has the ability to talk the legs off a table. When not working as an editor of childrens schoolbooks, he spends most of his time fishing, and today he has caught a trophy sized Dorade. Dorade are the gold striped sea bream that migrate between the etange and the sea, running a narrow gauntlet of dedicated Setois fishermen. It is most unusual to have got one this big, so Michael has invited us all over for dinner. The one fish is big enough to feed the entire band, Rauky, Clarisse, and our hosts. The wine flowed freely. The fish is delicious, with firm white flesh cooked perfectly... Apparently the fish's liver is a delicacy, and a small piece of it ends up on my plate. I'll try anything, but the taste of the liver is just too much....rather than gag the rest of it down, I discreetly replace it on the big platter for someone else more appreciative than I.

Dinner conversation began to get rowdy. The volume levels increased as the Italian drummer Pippo and bass player Romano engaged Rauky regarding the history of southern Europe, followed by a discussion of the relative merits of French and Italian cuisine and wine. Things heat up and then Pippo gets up and aggressively gets in Rauky's face. One armed Rauky whips out a knife and holds it to Pippos throat. It's all apparently friendly but Scott and I have a heart stopping moment. In a second,

everyone is laughing. Scott and I exchange glances. We go back to La Mouche... I cant sleep and stay up all night reading.

4/26

We leave Sete in the Transit van. The drive carries us through the heart of Cathar country past Carcassonne to Toulouse...only about 3 hours. "Show B" is a tiny bar and we wonder because the area of the stage actually exceeds the area of the floor....Stephan from Bordeaux is there, (the man with the worst teeth in the world, who confusedly greeted the tired New Christs, when they arrived at Club Jimmy after a gruelling drive, with words of praise of the Deniz Tek Group) A few other fans gather and shyly wait around clutching mostly bootlegs they want to get signed. The opening band turns up. The load-in and soundcheck are uneventful. Then we wait. And wait. And more waiting. Food is provided: roast pork, frites, haricots vert and a drinkable Bordeaux wine. There is no dressing room, but we can change clothes in the back of the kitchen area, where everything you touch is covered with a thick layer of old grease. Time drags on. the first band starts. Meanwhile we spend a lot of time outside on the sidewalk in front of the venue talking to the sound guy who is an expatriate Brit, and an American who is in a decade-long custody battle with his French ex wife, within the local court system. After a while I am sitting watching a group of dogs running around in front of the club. It's loud inside, I am saving my ears. A local youth comes and sits by me, offers a joint. As soon as he knows that my French is poor, he asks: "American?" I say yes. He immediately turns cold, tells me to fuck off, because he hates all Americans. He doesn't know I am in the band, and I don't say anything about it. He'll find out later, and he will be made to feel uncomfortable.

We finally go on. For a first gig it's pretty good. Most of the songs are played too fast. But Pippo's energy is exceptional. For some reason the previous band threw peanuts at the crowd and the stage is slick with thousands of crushed up peanut shells. Our endings are rough, but no one cares. The crowd is going off. It's brutally hot and we are completely soaked in sweat. We end with a couple of encores. There is a surprise ending of an unrehearsed TV Eye, totally free form, no one knew where it would go until it got there. We are done. We go to the kitchen to dry off and sign a few things.

Laurent the photo man from Bordeaux is there and we take a few shots. Now, bone tired, we pack up the amps and get out of there around 2am.

We are staying at the house of a guy named Yves, who is in a local band. When we arrive there tired and ready to sleep there is of course a party going on in full blast. I end up hanging out in the kitchen, where you usually meet the best people at parties. After a couple of hours I manage to get away and sleep. Three hours later it's time to go. I get up, face the painful sun, get coffee.

4/27

After a "mandatory" wakeup at 0930, according to the prearranged plan, Romano and the van finally arrives at 1230. We start the long drive to Thiers. It's all secondary roads with many villages along the way. It's slow. Stefano drives following Rauky and Clarisse in their van ahead. We stop at a village for bread and chevre. Political discussions ensue. On and on we go, endless driving. We listen to a tape and critique the Toulouse show. I ask Scott about many things from Rational's and general Detroit music history, he fills in gaps I have. It's great to finally know this stuff about Mitch Ryder, Barbara Lewis, The Frost, et al. I sleep only the last 15 minutes of the drive. Around 7pm we arrive in Thiers, pulling up in front of the Balthazar Club. The other bands are standing around smoking and waiting impatiently for us to load in.

We check in and set up fast and soundcheck with the Balthazar regular sound man Danny. He's the guy who was there during the DTG show in '99, when Tony Horton our drummer vomited a steaming pile on the brand new stage carpet during the song Outside, dropping out for a few bars, then going right back in. He's a good soldier. He also whacked a crash cymbal so hard it turned inside out in the same song. I haven't ever seen that happen before or since, and no amount of effort could bend it back the right way. Anyhow, when we were loading out, Danny was just standing there, looking at the puddle of puke. I thought he was going to be upset, since they had just remodeled and had a new stage and new carpet. I apologized to him, saying we would clean it up. He said " "No, no! You must leave it! Zat is ze REAL rock and roll!" For that comment I will always love this guy.

When you play at Balthazar, the bands go down the mountainside to a private dining hall where a wonderful woman cooks dinner. She takes no crap from anyone. She's a tough one eyed Communist who reminds me of Pilar in For Whom The Bell Tolls. It's always excellent here. Tonight it's beef stew, with roasted rosemary potatoes and aubergines. We are there with the opening bands, sharing dinner. The TV Men from Bretagne, and Puffball from Sweden. There is good wine, a warm convivial spirit develops. I talk with the Puffball kids about vintage muscle cars. It is strange to find young people from the land of Volvo's interested in the same thing I was into as a teenager in the Detroit area 30 years ago. Just look at their Scandinavian rock posters and t-shirts, it's all Mustangs and GTO's and girls with huge tits and devil horns and tails. What?? I ask.

Scott, who is a champion drinker of Labatts Canadian beer but usually avoids wine, is drinking wine tonight. It kind of creeps up on him. Back at the dressing room there is a bottle of Scotch. Scott is hitting that as well as the fridge full of Kronenbourgs and 1664's. Joints are offered. The TVMen played a good, hard set of rock, and then Puffball hit the stage with their Mopar driven version of the strangely popular Sweden - Detroit connection sound. We have to thank the Hellcopters for it I guess. It's all Sonic's Rendezvous Band stuff recycled, but with the beat weirded out. I wonder if they know Scott was in that band. I suppose they must, but are being too cool to say anything about it. They all complain about the stage sound, but the front of house sounds all right to me. It is a red flag.

This place is cool because the dressing room is upstairs at the back, and there is a rectangular window up there from which you can look out over the top of the crowd and see the stage. The support bands are up there ready to relax and drink the rider and watch us. They want to see what we've got. It's always a challenge, but never stressful to me. The better the support, the better I play. Even with Wayne Kramer opening, in Australia during the 96 reunion tour of Radio Birdman, it was never a problem. Only another way to the solution.

We go down the spiral steps to the club floor, and wind our way through the crowd to the stage. The set starts well. It's loud. I can hear everything. The playing is good, and as we warm up it gets better. There are people down the front obviously into it, and that always makes for a better gig. You find one or two dancers to play to. The energy flows.

Halfway through the set in Love and Learn, Scott breaks a string and never recovers. He seems confused, as we are telling him to just pick up a spare guitar, which we have

sitting there already strung, but somehow he can't get his head around this simple idea. He leaves the stage, goes back to the dressing room, presumably to replace the string. We go on without him. Next song is rocking hard, but I break the D string in Blood From A Stone right at the end of the solo. It's not a problem. I tell Romano to go ahead and play an A10 song while I change strings. We go from 5 to 4, and now 3 members. By the time the A10 song is finished, Scott is back. We try to start "Heaven" but Scott is brain dead. He is too out of it to recall how it starts, so we go on to Hanging On instead. Somehow we get through the set. We find out later that he has put some weird wire thing on instead of the proper string. Scott is wasted. It's all the wine, beer and scotch together that did it. He slams his hand in the van door on the way out of the club. Could be a disaster, but miraculously it's caught the rubber molding in just the right way, and is only bruised. We go to some place out in the middle of nowhere, and get to bed about 4 am.

4/28

At breakfast, Scott is remorseful about last night, and he beats himself up over it. There's no need. We won't let it happen again. The drive to Niort is a brute. It started to rain and it rained hard, slowing everything down. The van arrived in Niort late, and we loaded in with rain streaming off guitar cases, amps, everything. There is cold rain in our boots and down the back of our shirt collars. The club is like a palace, a modern place in an old stone building with high ceilings, great lights. Equinox is on the PA. Charly from CD Rama is there waiting for us. He set up this gig, and Bernard Masanes from Jukebox Magazine, is there too from Paris. Bernard is an old and dear friend of mine. Greg Bowen, who runs the Radio Birdman website, has driven down with a friend from Morlaix. It's like a class reunion of old mates. Soundcheck is a bit rough, and Scott has a problem with one of the sound guys who apparently copped an attitude. We sort it out. The dressing room is great, but the door to the toilet is locked and we are forced to go outside and around the building to another area. It's always something!

We eat, get interviewed by a woman who knows nothing about our background or even about what we call "rock music". There's no time for showers, we have to start. There's no support band tonight, just us. The band is at its best, but I don't really get into it until the 4th or 5th song. Love and Learn rocks really hard. Heaven peaks. City Slang finds the right tempo and grooves out for the first time. Scott lights his guitar on fire with lighter fluid. Alarmed, I douse it with beer. Encore. We invite Greg Bowen up to sing

New Race on which he does a splendid job. TV Eye finishes the night, another free jam version. This stuff all got recorded.

Back at the hotel the night manager is upset about noise and all we are doing is talking. The guy is obviously on edge and weird so we decide to go out. We try to follow some guys car to Stephan Cybart's chateau for drinks, but get behind the wrong car, get lost and wander around in Greg's car for what seems hours to find our way back to the hotel, where we are confronted by Charly et al who insists we go back. Finally at Stephan's enormous 14th century stone villa, there are rounds of vodka followed by loose jamming in his studio upstairs. It reminds me of the inside cover in Beggars Banquet. Just before dawn's first light, Greg heads back towards Morlaix and we crash for a couple of hours. Up at 10, we start the long drive back to Sete where we will spend a night and a day. We stop for lunch at a strange American cafe in a small French village north of Bordeaux, run by an expatriate whose name is Peggy. We get BBQ pork chops. She likes to talk, but we have to drive on. It begins to rain. Everything turns a dark, nauseating shade of gray. After dark, we arrive in Sete.

We are having a night off at Raukys. Dinner is omelette, quiche, and potato salad. We listen to Otis Redding and play songs from Let It Bleed on acoustic guitars. Scott plays and sings amazingly well, and we listen and learn. He is a real musician, knows harmony, theory, he is comfortable and adept with all kinds of music. The rest of us are just dogs of rock, nothing else, and are rather in awe of this master. We play and listen to "Medium Rare" and are enthralled. Next morning, I do laundry, which is at once the most important and difficult duty while touring. It becomes obvious that the laundry will not get dry before we have to go. I walk outside in the rain.

With stiff and sore limbs, we get out of the van on Rue Martial Perret and walk up the cobblestone path to Rauky's. He is waiting there with grilled sausage dinner and the mandatory tielle, the spicy octopus pie which is the local speciality of Sete. After hanging at Rauky's a while, Scott and I go off to Michael O'Leary's house to gather up our things, grab the damp clothing from the stairwell rails, and we sort of nap for an hour before a long night drive to Italy. We get up for a cup of strong black Ceylon tea around one a.m, and then we load the van in the cold steady rain. It is pitch black, there is a heavy overcast and no moon or stars here. Slowly at first, creeping through the silent

streets of Sete at midnight, then on to the Autoroute de Sud and we head east towards Italy, the already tired start of an all night drive. When we leave at around two it is raining harder, and there are ominous flashes of lightning to the East. I am driving the van, while the others try to rest. The weather deteriorates into a dangerous thunderstorm, with visibility down to a few meters in blinding rain, and down to zero while passing trucks. The sheets of water in the headlights cause a total grey out, and I am maneuvering on instinct alone. The insanity of this is obvious to all. We know we are hanging it off the ragged edge. It is really stupid not to simply pull over and wait for things to clear, rather than fighting hurricane force wind gusts whipping solid sheets of water across the road. We can't see any bloody thing. Yet we drive on, madly, 130 -140 km/h in an overloaded and difficult to handle van. At some point, when touring on this level, things just happen. You go along for the ride, oblivious to reason. The French part of the tour is over. Only three gigs, but it already seems like forever. We are now a band, created in France, ready for the Italian road. If we survive the drive.

5/1

We cross the Italian border just before dawn and immediately pull into a petrol station and pit stop to get real coffee. You pay lire, get a little receipt, give it to the barista, who then gives you Life in a tiny cup. There is a pink sky over Genova. In that strange state beyond exhaustion, you enter an alternate universe, while running on a cocktail of caffeine, endorphins, adrenaline, and cortisol. Things do not look real now. We pass vast marble quarries. More coffee, more driving. More marble mines. Assisi, up there to the left on that hill north of the road. It reminds me of the time they wouldn't allow Kent Steedman and me into the monastery a few summers ago because we were wearing shorts, in 40C heat. We pull off the autostrada at Foligno. If you don't stop before 2pm to eat, nothing will be open. After that storm we feel like eating a hearty lunch: Tartuffo pasta, chicken grand marnier, white wine Greco di Tufo. On the way back to the van we go in a wine store and browse enviously among the bottles that we cannot afford to buy. Barolo, Brunello di Montalcino, on and on. The store owner hands me a bottle of Morellino di Scansano, and with a conspiratorial look, says "Hey Australiano! Thees as good as Brunello, half the price!". I buy it. How could I not?.

We pull off the autostrada and go a couple of kms. Just outside of a nameless dusty town we get a couple of hours sleep pulled off the side of the road. We rest just enough to lose the high, but keep the pain.

I can't remember much about the rest of that day. It's a gig at a railway workers union hall. Before we played, there is a May Day dance. Old people. I wonder, can we have as much fun when we are 70? Sound check was a debacle, guys standing around pointing at squealing monitor wedges saying "quello? questo?" while another guy randomly turns knobs and pushes faders on a mixing board. Amazingly, we got there too early. There are free drinks. Pizza is delivered backstage. OK, I am now starting to perk up and feel a bit better. The worst pizza here beats the best pizza anywhere else. But the second wind was only skin deep. During the actual show we opened up and bled. There was a high anger factor, the guys scowling at one another onstage. Scott breaks 3 strings. Blood From A Stone was played stupidly fast. But we are good troupers, and knowing that we had bit the big one, we swallowed our pride, finished the show, and tried to smile during autographs. I gave a T shirt to the promoters son Uri. Promoters Flavio and Otello...good Italian citizens all. Finally we will get to sleep in a bed, after what seems like forever. We go to the hostel, which has 4 bunks to a room. Pippo takes a blanket and sleeps outside on the stone floor to escape from Scotts snoring. Romano notes that the girls around here all look like portraits in medieval paintings. Not surprising when you consider where we are.

5/2

We leave town at 1030 and head south on the autostrada. It's a nice sunny clear day for once. Yay! A smooth ride ahead. Until we crest a hill and see a line of stopped cars and trucks stretching ahead as far as the horizon. There has been a major road problem just north of Napoli. A few kms ahead of us there was a collision involving petrol tankers which exploded, destroying an overhead bridge which falls over onto the highway, completely wrecking the road in a burning mess. This causes a few deaths and several casualties who have to be evacuated from the inferno by helicopter. Photos of this in the newspaper the next day show a scene of destruction comparable to that of a successful bombing attack. We sit in the one spot for an hour and a half, then pull off onto the shoulder and illegally skirt the line of cars up to the next exit with all kinds of yelling and wild gesticulating aimed at us. This led us off the main road to a 200 km detour. It would

have been a 150 km detour, but, but we took the wrong road. All this time the Italians up front are driving and arguing. Meanwhile, in the back, discussion focuses on popular left/hippie version of recent world history. We discuss the CIA involvement with Kennedy assassination. In an interesting take on events, Scott states that Nixon didn't really end the Vietnam war....it just happened to end around him. I mention Kissinger and the Paris peace talks and that Henry did work for Nixon but these facts don't impact the discussion much. Political review continues on about the virtues of the Green Party which Scott likes, versus the Libertarian Party which I like on some points. Scott laments that Ralph Nader took votes from Al Gore. Scott leans forward between the front seat backs and asks Romano about the CIA involvement in the failure of the communists to gain control over Italy just after WW2, interrupting a lively exchange about which might be the right road to take. Romano, who has read extensively in European history, has a longwinded explanation of it. Finally tiring of politics and world history, the theme changes to medicine with Scott offering herbal based cures for many illnesses. We talk on into the evening. The highway winds its way up through the mountains. All right, I am going to stop here. It's getting too rough in this van to write.

OK, back to the journal of events as they unfold. Scott Morgan is on fire about the CIA ... how they 1. concealed or possibly 2. invented the flying saucers, and also how they might have staged the 1969 moon landing in an antiSoviet disinformation campaign, versus Soviet disinformation disseminated in the third world that it DIDNT happen. This conversation helps pass the time. It makes me wish our old friend Mark Sisto were here. Being a very well informed conspiracy buff, he likely would have had some vital additional information.

This drive seems endless. We run into long stretches of roadwork, dozens of kms where half the autostrada is blocked. There are many trucks. My back hurts from an old ruptured disc. I have to get out of this van and stretch. The sun shines, for the first time in a week, but we have no time to enjoy the rays. Finally after an eternity of driving we pass Cosenza, and another 10 kms brings us to our exit. We head east up the mountain on a secondary road, to the town of Rogliere, and as we pass through the town square we are waved over by two Polizei standing next to a patrol car. Oh, shit. If they search us this is gonna at the very least cause hours more of delay and we're already so late. I don't even want to imagine the worst case scenario. Who knows, really, what Pippo is carrying? He says he is clean. But don't they all say that, at one time or another? In a vortex of paranoia, I recall that he never met a drug that he didn't enjoy. There is a flurry of rapid fire machine gun speed Italian between Romano and the cop. What happens next is that the stern face of the cop breaks into a grin. We are told to follow.

The police car turns around, lights flashing, and we begin to follow. What, we ask? What what what? Romano lights a fag, blows smoke, says: "They are our escort, arranged by the mayor, who happens to be a big Birdman fan". We drive by motorcade into the town of Marzi. Now I've seen everything. The 3 Assassins Romano, Pippo and Stefano, especially, are amazed and amused. They simply cannot believe this. We are directed backstage at the town park amphitheater, where the police HELP US unload the backline. We set up and soundcheck. The big ElectroVoice PA seems more than adequate. Bliss! We go back to the albergo which is a converted farm, "agritourisme" as they call it, named, strangely, La Cisterne. Ordinarily this would seem to be a red flag, but the rooms are clean, tastefully austere without being spartan, simply beautiful! We shower and go downstairs to the dining room and have a glass of wine and panini with prosciutto, pomodori secchi, and champignons. We are going to start at 11 pm. We get back to the gig at 1105. Everything is a go. Romano kicks off the opening riff of Future Now. The drum roll brings the rest of us in, and on my side of the stage, nothing happens. I have no sound. At the same moment I note the alarming presence of a smoke machine six inches away from and pointing straight at my effects chain: a Boss tuner, a Tech-21 gain pedal, a Boss PN-2 tremelo pan, and a Crybaby wah. Not sure of the cause of the problem, I have to check everything, so I disassemble and check all the leads, change 9V batteries in all the pedals, check the guitar jack port. Can't isolate the problem. Things seem to work intermittently, and none of it makes sense. My frustration grows as the band powers through the first three Scott Morgan songs without me.

This is not really a problem since Scott and Stefano are quite capable of rocking the house guitar wise. Stefano is a powerhouse player with incredible sustained energy and occasional blasts of jaw dropping brilliance. When combined with Romano and Pippo, his brothers in arms, all ex-members of A10 who are now in the Sonic Assassins, anything can happen. Anyone who has seen A10 knows this. When I toured with A10 in 1995 it was a challenge every single night to match their all out frontal attack. And Scott Morgan can outplay most if not all the lead players he has worked with over the years. He just doesn't show it off.

Suddenly everything is on again, and I realize the problem was most likely caused by the fog machine (which I hate), causing condensation in the pedals and shorting them out. The only thing worse than fog machines is strobe lights. I gradually work off my frustration as I get warmed up, and the rest of the gig goes pretty well except for a too fast, over the edge Blood, and a problem with the bass drum being ineffectively

anchored and sliding forward off the edge of the drum riser, severing the mike connection in the process. A full moon shines down on the little town, it's peaceful existence in this valley tucked away in the mountains of Calabria joyfully shaken up for this one night. After we finish, the good people of Marzi gather around the stage and chat with us as we pack up. I am getting the feeling they have never had an authentic rock and roll gig in their town before. They are ecstatic, warm, friendly, and they leave us with a great feeling. We head back to the albergo for dinner. We're joined there by the mayor Giuseppe, the Chief of Police, the local promoter who is a radio guy, the owner Frank who looks like a Don, his wife, a real southern cookin' Italian mama, a farmer, a record store man, and an old mate from London Roberto Calabro. It's a meal we'll never forget.

Menu:

local Calabrian red wine
pasta 1: penne with tomatos and garlic
pasta 2: penne with bacon and hot chilies (Thai hot, only in Calabria)
roast lamb chops with fresh sage
insalate
fresh local fruit
espresso
grappa

At 4am after many photos and hugs we retire to our chambers upstairs for a needed rest. I sleep six straight hours in total comfort and without dreams.

5/3

I wake up 10am and no one else is up. I feel so good, having rested, that I want to run. I head out and immediately face scary killer dogs, who back off when I pick up large rocks. I find a beautiful rail line flanked by tall dense green forest to run along. It is a beautiful morning, with clear bright sunshine. My run eventually winds back through town and takes me past walls of political posters for the upcoming elections. It is weird to see huge communist and fascist posters in the same street. In my two homes of America and Australia (I'm a dual citizen), the 2 major parties are so close in comparison, as to be indistinguishable. I get back to the accom, and do my usual pushups, and sit-ups. I normally do a daily 50, but I haven't exercised since the first day in Sete. And now, feeling great, it's time for shower, and coffee.

We get back in the van and take the Ionian way by cutting through rough steep country across the mountains to the coast. This is the most remote area. There are deep valleys, a dry desert, 400 meter vertical walled canyons. We see no tourists. I didn't know Italy had this kind of country. The whole trip is worth it just to see this stuff.

The van conversation of the day includes discussion about what animals have milk. Turns out to be mammals. On this I am sure. Having achieved consensus on that, we turn to the question: which mammals milk can be drunk? The whole range is considered from tigers down to rodents, and even aquatic mammals were not spared close scrutiny in this regard. This takes up the better part of an hour. We stop for espresso and beer at a tiny village on the shimmering blue Ionian Sea, where the southern horizon faded into glowing haze. Scott and I decide to write two songs: "Ionian Sun" and "Calabrian Moon" We write them in the van. We used some of the van time wisely to trade lyrics to Morgan and Tek songs, since we might want to cover the others in our respective solo groups someday.

We blast along the coast road heading north, past Bari and Termoli, where there are huge thunderstorms. On time, we drive through the outskirts in to the center of Pescara. It's raining steadily but not unpleasant. We hang out in a little bar waiting to find out where to go. The gig is at Kabala, a tiny jazz club. There is pizza and beer at sound check. Sound restrictions resulted in us having to use restraint and actually achieved the best sound of the tour. A guy we know called "Shoe Paolo" and his brother are here. Everything is loose. Weird loose guys are dancing. Loose drummer drunk again. It's not a problem. The band and sound are together with tight looseness. Unlike the rest of the crowd, which was somewhat reserved, at the back of the room are three beautiful well figured black ladies up dancing. They got more and more into it and became the focus of our playing as the dancing became more wild. Later we found out they were from Brazil. The Brazilian amen corner, we called them. After the show Romano and I are sitting at the bar, drinking Moscato. I'm not usually into sweet after dinner drinks but this was smooth.

After this good show we retire to a miserable albergo that reeks of urine. If I wasn't so tired it would be impossible to sleep here. Next morning I've got to get some fresh air. I go out for coffee down the street with Romano and Scott. On the way back there is a nice girl who catches Romano's eye as she enters a travel agency. He does his usual thing yelling out after her "che bella!" She rolls her eyes, flips her hair and does not look back as she goes in the shop. I go out for a long run on the beach, end up getting lost after using a church tower as landmark. It turns out there are several just like it. An hour

later find the Albergo after backtracking to the sea. We get our stuff, and get ready to go.

5/4

We go to the shoe store and Shoe Paolo sells me some shoes. He insists that I have them. Of course, I get a big mates discount. They look weird, like astronaut shoes. The girls on the street are out in force. Romano admires them openly. Most walk on with an imperious shake of the head, pretend not to notice, but occasionally we see a smile. We go with Paolo and his brother to lunch at "Trieste", a cafe with tables on the beach. They bring capers, olives, pizza Margherita slices, champagne. Life on the road is so tough!

We go back to the club for the gear. Maneuvering the van from the narrow street between randomly parked vehicles into the tiny alley at a bad angle takes a full hour. We load out and head west to Rome.

Villagio Globale is a huge Communist (and so called Anarchist) squat built into an abandoned army barracks right near the center of Rome by the river Tiber. I've played here many times by now and know the drill. As per usual, sound check happens among many odd people hanging about. A guy actually takes a dump right on the pavement. While changing strings people shamle up, say things in strange tongues, shamle away when they find out I have no dope, no cigarette. Many africans, middle easterners, displaced rastafarians, neorastafarians, shaman impersonators, and many young western european misfit acolytes of all sorts of half baked new ageisms. They are looking for something, or not. Or maybe they were looking but forgot what it was and ended up sort of milling around this place. Anyway, we are given typical communist food: small amounts of poorly cooked pasta with red tomato sauce out of a can, baked chicken, and cheap red wine, all served in plastic by unhappy looking women in men's overalls. I cant eat this stuff if I am in Italy, sorry, thank you very much anyway. We go back to Pippos flat on Via Donna Olympia just one block from the vast palace grounds, which is now a park. I am delighted to find the pad is a wonderful satire of a hippie hangout as I remember them from the 1960's. It's complete with black lights, dayglo posters, great books lying about, opened, everywhere, including the mandatory Salvadore Dali and MC Escher books. Vinyl records are out of their sleeves. Ashtrays overflow onto burned bits of carpet. Keyboards. TVs. Hanging sharks in aerial display with little plastic UFOs. It is like deja vu within a dream to see this kind of thing again after three decades. Mold covers all. He has no food.

We go back to the gig. It's loose. We play well but the sound is difficult. It is hard to hear the vocals onstage. We do the usual two encores then we are done. It could have been

better but we rocked hard. Somehow we manage to break through the barriers and get into the Zone, even if only for a song or two, each night. It has been a dream fulfilled for me, to play with Scott Morgan, living green eyed rock and soul legend of the motor city, and the Three Assassins, Romano, Pippo and Stefano, the battle hardened punk vets of A10. Beyond all the great music, these are free spirited guys who I am proud to know and have as friends. We walk off the stage together arms around shoulders.

The dressing "area" (not a room ... a curtained off corner next to stage right) immediately fills up and things begin to disappear. Items literally vanish, including belt buckles, shirts, my dry pair of jeans, and the professionally recorded DAT tape done by Roberto Hanrahan, the son of an expatriate Australian author who lives in a villa outside of Rome. I'm told later that the DAT was ripped right out of the machine. So much for communo-anarchism, Roman style. It could be funny, but I'm getting sick, with a sore throat and fever. I have a restless night on the floor among mold and cat urine which is making me sneeze and cough. This tour is over. We get up in the morning for cups of tea and sit in Pippos flat. We work up the figures to see how much money we are out of pocket for this lovely vacation. We haul the equipment back to the Assassins practice room, and perform a sweat and rain soaked load-in one last time. Then we get back in the van and the guys take us to the airport at DaVinci. It's been raining all day, and it is certain our clothing will not be dry before airplane time.

Thirteen hours later I am looking out of the window across sunset painted snowcapped peaks of pink and gold, the sun's light reflecting and throwing prisms in the ice cubes of my vodka and tonic. I cant wait to see the family, and I'm looking forward to sleeping in my own bed. As the 737 begins it's initial descent through the layers of colour, I feel a pang of regret that the road is over for now. I'm dreading going back to my day job. I know that before long, one way or another ... I'll be packing up a guitar and some disposable t-shirts, and heading out again.