

November 2005

INTELLIGENCE

TOP SECRET

Mat Callahan's Newsletter

The Trouble With Music

was published October 20, 2005 in the United Kingdom. AK Press, Edinburgh has organized a speaking tour which includes the following appearances:

- Tuesday 8th of November, 7 pm at The Cowley Club, 12 London Road, Brighton, BN1 4JA.
- Wednesday 9th of November, 7 pm at The Basement, 24 Lever St, Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester M1 1DZ
- Thursday 10th November, 6.30 pm at The Forest, 3 Bristo Place, Edinburgh EH11EY (booklaunch/talk.discussion)
- Friday 11th November, 7 pm also at the Forest, gig
- Saturday 12th November, 12 noon at The Common Place, 23/25 Wharf Street, Leeds

Please contact AK Press for more information:

AK Press and Distribution

PO Box 12766

Edinburgh

EH8 9YE

<http://www.akuk.com>

ph: 0131 555 5165

fx: 0131 555 5215

Orders: <ak@akedin.demon.co.uk>

Intelligence top secret interviews the Man In The Street

I found him standing at the intersection of Houston and Ludlow in Manhattan. He was holding a cardboard sign that read: "Man In The Street". I asked him if he'd consent to an interview. "Yeah," he said, "Everyone wants to ask me questions. Like I'm some kind of wise man or sage. Actually, I'm just the Man in the Street."

I asked him where he lives. "In Your Imagination," he answered. "My imagination," I replied, puzzled. "No, Your Imagination... it's a town in Nevada. Just outside Sparks."

"What brings you to New York?" I asked.

"Oh, the Networks. They fly me out here-all expenses paid-whenver there's a problem. It's pretty routine. Always ask the same questions."

"Do you answer truthfully?"

"Well, I say what I think. But that's not much, really."

"Then why do they ask you?"

"I'm the world's foremost authority, I guess."

So began the interview.

Intelligence top secret (Its): Do you have a personal philosophy or guiding light?

Man In The Street (Mits): Nah. The closest I ever get to philosophy is Why, Arizona or Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. The truth is 'Life is hard and then you die.' Freedom is doing what you want, whenever you want without having to ask permission. All that really matters is guns, money and luck.

As for God, well he's out there, somewhere. I mean, look at all these churches! And people seem to like the idea. Gives 'em a warm feeling when they're alone. Or when someone dies.

I'm not a gambling man, myself, but if I was, I'd be worshipping Lady Luck. If you stop and think about it, you can't have it both ways. Either there's God, absolutely, totally in control or there's Chance. Absolutely, totally out of control. Either the script is written or it's improvised. Predictable or unpredictable. It's a proven fact: there is a difference between shit and Shinola.

Most folks like to bet on both horses, though. Figure there's no sense getting anybody upset. One man's superstition is another man's faith, I always say. So you pay your membership fee, you do the dance you see everyone else doing and you get your place in Heaven. A little security for the world to come. Meanwhile, you don't walk under ladders, you don't let a black cat cross your path, you keep a rabbit's foot on your key chain, check your horoscope, whatever. This way, you figure that here and now you're improving your odds.

Its: Is that what the Networks talk to you about? Truth? Freedom? God?

Mits: Yes and no. They usually want to know what I think about war, epidemics, catastrophes, science, sex, children—things of general interest. Also, things that some big shot wants money for. You know, the government is supposed to be working for the people. So they ask me what I think.

Its: You sound a bit jaded, rather 'ho-hum' about it all. Does that mean you don't take it seriously?

Mits: Oh, it's serious alright. But that doesn't mean I can't laugh at it. Heck, I've been at this game a long, long time. Nothing really changes. Everyone gets agitated and fireworks start going off. All the noise is just to keep folks from getting bored. Let's face it, for most of us growing up means reaching a point where life is a see-saw between hard work and utter boredom. Fatigue and restlessness joined at the hip by a yawn. And don't think most people don't think that. I know. I'm the Man In The Street!

Its: That sounds cynical, though. Aren't you FOR anything? Don't you have any principles?

Mits: Darn right, I do. I'm for democracy, peace, human rights and private property. As Rodney King said, "Why can't we all just get along." That's what I think. But there's always someone who wants to spoil the party. That's why we have to be tough on crime, tough on immigrants, tough on drugs, tough on deviants of all kinds. Can't let things get out of hand, you know.

Its: I guess this trip the Networks wanted your views on Iraq.

Mits: Yeah. Things are pretty shaky over there. Funny thing is, they got a Man In The Street in Baghdad, too. In fact, they got a Man In The Street everywhere. And we all say the same thing. Isn't that funny? Not really 'funny' funny. But it tells you something. Live and let live, I always say. But then there's protecting our way of life, too. Gets kind of messy at times.

Its: Do you see any way out?

Mits: Of Iraq?

Its: Well, Iraq and Afghanistan and all the trouble spots in the world.

Mits: We're in a world of trouble, that's for sure. And they're not starting shuttle service to the Moon anytime soon so I guess the only way 'out', if you want to put it that way, is to hunker down and start solving some of these problems. Give everyone a job, I say. Make 'em work if they don't want to and take a little responsibility. You know, pick up after yourself. Don't throw candy wrappers on the ground. Also, fences make good neighbors, let's not forget that. There's got to be respect for people's privacy. Leave folks alone. But then, say 'Hello' from time to time. This could go a long way to solving things. I don't know much about economics but I figure there's always work to be done. Besides, what else can we do? Watch TV?

Its: Some commentators argue that you're being manipulated. That public opinion is molded to fool the public. Do you think that's so?

Mits: I wouldn't know about that. No one tells me what to say. I get my information same as everyone else does—I watch TV. When I read, it's the sports. Once in awhile I pick up a book. But then I put it down. Just lifting it's enough for me.

Its: But you're the Man In The Street. What you say is supposed to be the Law or, at least, the opinion that is reflected in the laws government makes, right?

Mits: Oh, sure. And that's the way it is. What I say, goes.

Its: Or what goes, you say.

Mits: What's that?

Its: Or what goes, you say.

Mits: Uh Huh. That's what I thought you said. So let me tell you this. I'm not going to stand here and let you run my country down. We're in the best, darned country there is and don't you forget it. We got problems, sure. But that's just the way it is. Don't start getting any ideas. They'll just get you into trouble.

Its: Just asking questions, sir. There's no cause to get upset. After all, that's what your job is, isn't it? Answering questions?

Mits: Yes it is. But you're steering this whole thing in a direction. I can see that much. And I wouldn't have a job if I got all tied up in knots. The Networks aren't interested in special interests or crackpot theories. They want to hear what everyone thinks. And I'm the guy that thinks like everyone.

Its: Which is not much, as you said earlier.

Mits: That's right. No point in it. Just get all hot and bothered about what you can't do anything about.

Its: But doesn't it concern you that there are special interests and there are those who would profit at your expense?

Mits: Well, just between you, me and the asphalt, I know the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. I know there's a lot of unfairness in the world and that's the cause of a lot of problems.

Its: Why don't you tell that to the Networks?

Mits: They never ask.

El Kookooee


On Sunday, October 30, 2005 in the Little League field behind the South Valley Library in Albuquerque, we will burn the effigy of the Mexican boogiemán, El Kookooee. In a bag, clutched to his bosom reside our fears, written on bits and scraps of paper. As the sun concedes the day to leaf-strewn shadows, and the autumn chill of night penetrates the flesh, a single spark begets a blaze, becomes a wind-whipped inferno as the 25 ft wood monster is consumed in a towering rage of flames and sparks. The heat drives us back against the cold. We stare as one in dumbfound awe as the body glows with devouring radiance. Flames peel back lumber to reveal the skeletal structure of the monster within. And slowly, El Coco begins to list, its head tilts precariously to the side, its supports buckle, and picking up gravity it collapses in a shower of sparks and moans from the crowd. In a couple of hours it is embers, by morning it is ashes.

This is our sixteenth year of burning El Kookooee in effigy in the South Valley. The tradition was invented by the writer Rudolfo Anaya as a means of reclaiming Mexican history and culture against the relentless onslaught of the trivial present. It is also a potential means of coping with anxiety for El Kookooee is the boogiemán. In Spanish speaking families, little children are told, "if you don't behave, El Kookooee is going to get you." Acknowledging your fear and burning it symbolically with Kookooee can provide some psychological release.

The legend of the Coco monster followed north out of Mexico up the Rio Grande River into New Mexico and Colorado territory, and hence the boogiemán's association and alleged sightings have always been along the riverbank. Walking alone at night along the river is risky business. That is the extent of the legend of El Kookooee today that most Hispanic families are familiar with. But as with all popular legends which persist, there lies a buried truth, and this one goes back half a millennium to the arrival of Hernán Cortez and the Spanish Conquistadores who brought not only gunpowder, horses, armor, and metal weaponry into their conquest of the Aztecs, they brought also the epidemic disease of smallpox. In the Nahuatl language of central Mexico, "coco" could mean a bump or pain or blemish, thus when someone contracted the highly contagious smallpox and broke out with the painful pox pustules they became "cocolitzli" hence Kookooee or cucuy. Yes little one, if you do not behave, the horrible cocolitzli will get you.

Our effigy this year is over twenty-five ft high, it is red trimmed in black, and it has a definite Janus personality. It was designed by a seventh grader and built by artist volunteers having fun with donated materials from local businesses. El Kookooee has evolved into something very different from its origin, and that path seems worth pondering of itself.

Thomas Powell

BROKEN ARROW RECORDS	THE NEW ORLEANS MUSICIANS' CLINIC
<p>announces the release of "A Wild Bouquet"</p>  <p>Mailing Address Broken Arrow Records 940 Bay Street, Suite 14 San Francisco, CA 94019</p> <p>E-mail us info@brokenarrowrecords.com www.brokenarrowrecords.com</p> <p>Mat Callahan, former leader of world beat pioneers the Looters, releases his debut (U.S.) solo release A Wild Bouquet. The CD release coincides with the release of his book The Trouble with Music (AK Press).</p> <p>A Wild Bouquet features Callahan as singer-songwriter, surrounded by incredible musicians and talents. He travels to the world's darker corners, but captures his singular view within beautiful songs and melodies. Musicians include Brain (Tom Waits, Guns & Roses) on drums, Joe Gore (PJ Harvey) on guitar and bassist Les Claypool (Primus). Pete Scaturro produced most of the album.</p>	<p><i>The New Orleans Musicians' Clinic (NOMC) is an innovative not-for-profit occupational medicine and wellness partnership offering comprehensive health care to our community's most precious resource: our musicians. Our sponsors are the Daughters of Charity Services of New Orleans, The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, and the LSU Health Care Network. Dedicated on May 2, 1998, NOMC became the first such health initiative in the United States, addressing the health care needs of musicians and their families, an under-served segment of the population. To date our dedicated consortium of service providers has treated more than 1000 local musicians.</i></p> <p>NOMC has relocated to: Acadiana Symphony Office 412 Travis St. Lafayette, LA. 70503 Michelle Gegenheimer NOMC Adm. Dir., (337) 781-9611 email: music_mich2020@yahoo.com Donate to NOMC: contact the above numbers by phone, mail or via the internet: http://wwoz.org/clinic/donate.php</p>

Mat Callahan's Newsletter:
Weissensteinstrasse 53
CH-3007 Bern
Switzerland