

EURO TOURO ACOUSTICO DUO-O/APRIL 2003

Why?

Simple and complex and paradoxically Captain Kirkian in scope. Especially as it's applied here to our decision to do a tour as the OXBOW Acoustic Duo. That is, Niko Wenner, OXBOW's guitarrerist, and Eugene Robinson, crooner and lover of life. I mean why chop the dog's leg off? Why turn your back on your friend electricity? I mean why NOT go through the Herculean effort of hauling 2500 pounds of musical equipment wherever you go, especially if you go to Europe in the middle of a war? Why NOT endure Greg's high, keening girl-like whine because we've wandered outside of the 50-mile radius surrounding his house in Santa Clara, California?

Why? Why? Why?

Jesus Christ like you need to ask. It goes something like this:

Niko Wenner sipping on an expensive single-malted scotch: Perhaps we should tour Europe with me just playing acoustic guitar and you actually singing.

[Note: As Saint Elisabeth always says "In Niko's world, ANYTHING is possible."]

Eugene Robinson: Pass the scotch.

NW: It's very expensive. Are you sure you don't just want some water?

ER: What? No. Fuck. Just give me a sip.

NW: Aren't you driving tonight?

ER: Yeah. But that's hours from now. Just give me a sip of that goddamned Scotch.

NW: What Scotch?

[This goes on for painful hours before Niko relents and wets the inside of a glass with the expensive Scotch.]

ER: Genius idea. You play, I sing, we get drunk, we come home with cash. Perfect. I'll contact the Swissman.

And so I do.

And so book it he does. We'll spare you the painful peregrinations around shows booked, shows cancelled, shows almost booked, shows that were never booked because of a stunning lack of interest, the whole kit and fucking caboodle and cut straight to the part where we decide in a rushing nuclear blast of genius thinking to load up the crystal meth

and ketamine and head out into the heart of Euro-troubadoring all sensitive and Donahue-like with the OXBOW ACOUSTIC DUO. Like some wag once said, "probably like hearing SLAYER unplugged."

Yeah.

Except better.

THE SWISS MYSTERIES

I got a fool-proof way of beating jet lag I decide. Call it the hair of the dog methodology. Call it vaccinating yourself against the crushing fatigue. I decide that my best stratagem is to NOT sleep the night before I fly MEANING when I get into Geneva, where I'm flying into, and my head hits a pillow, I will not have slept for almost 48 hour. Easy peazy. No prob. I email everyone (those who owe me money, those who will avenge my death if I die, those who need beatings and won't get them, those who need beatings and will) until the clock cruises around to 4 am and I watch the crack heads shuffling into the crack house across the street in the gently loaming lights of early morning and I think all of my pre-flight death thoughts and try to make sense of getting snuffed out for the sole and singular purpose of singing what fucking amounts to FOLK songs to probably no more than 500 Europeans whose horrible lives have led them down the road into OXBOWALIA where everything goes wrong all the time and even the fact that they've chosen to spend an hour or so with us is the last and final proof that their lives are just one long low moan of wrong turns. The crack heads (why are they all FAT?) move off with their packages of burden and packages of need and the cab pulls up and I'm gone.

I chat with the driver. Until I start passing out. When I pass out he slows down to 55, when I wake up he speeds up to 65. The cab ride costs me \$56 fucking dollars and ends up being the most expensive one I would take on this whole trip. But the fatigue, the fatigue, the fatigue. I can barely keep my eyes open and as I sit in the terminal I can hear the crystal meth saying USE ME, you fucking bastard. But then Dennis Hopper tells me in full-on AA support mode says "when you're in the right time, with the right people."

Okay.

When I wake up next they're about to shut the door to the plane.

"Hahah..we wondered if you were going to wake up in time."

She's amused. She laughs AT me. Gently.

"You weren't going to wake me up?"

And her look said it all, it said "when I next blink my eyes I won't even remember who the fuck you ARE."

But instead she says, "Well you looked so cute sleeping there. Have a nice flight."

Jesus. The service ethic on this airline is shit. What the hell? Continental?!? Jesus. I used to go to college with the broad whose father owns this airline. Doesn't that count for something?

Yeah.

A seat right near the fucking bathroom where like Rich Jeni says, "people sit who HAVE diarrhea or want to meet people who have diarrhea,"

And they do. So I nod in the fecal haze of shit stink and perfumed blue waters. And I read every magazine on the airplane because we're flying INTO day and now of course I CAN'T sleep and the movie on my screen doesn't play and so I read. Compulsively before I stagger back to the back of the airplane where lo and behold I stumble over one of the Sky Sissy's sleeping spread out on the fucking floor with a blanket wrapped around him like some kind of weird sky bum. He gets irate and starts getting ready to holler something and I move toward him faster than this time of the morning should rightly allow and say in a voice trembling with all of the unsynthesized thinking of a man in the grips of a bad no sleeping jag

"RELAX."

Like all fucking shaky and dangerous and he says nothing else and I step into the piss pot, 10 mags jammed under my arm and catch my fucking handsome face in the mirror and I figure that I need to sit down back in my seat and hope there's no one there to arrest me when we land.

And so I do.

WELCOME TO GENEVA.
NOW TAKE YOUR FUCKING HANDS OFF ME

Niko gets in a few hours after me but of course by the time you add on the

- 1) time I spent lost in terminals in Newark and Geneva
- 2) time I spent waiting for the Continental pilots to sober up
- 3) time I spent waiting for the plane to leave Newark in the middle of a ohmigod I'm going to die snowstorm

...there's only 40 minutes between his flight and mine so I stay.

And things are moving along smoothly until these women start making their way through the crowd toward the three-seater bench where I'm sitting.

No big deal. They're hot. But that's not the issue. The one of them that's sitting next to me is wearing this waist length coat that's like made from polar bear fur and it starts to pulse and glisten and call out to me in a way that only heavy users of LSD will understand.

I mean at first you try to ignore it. Making it absent. But by trying so hard to make it absent you just make it more present and finally I'm just looking at it directly all Rainman-like and then propelled by the forces of idiocy and darkness I say to her.

"That's a, um, great coat."

She smiles and sort of nods confusedly and it dawns on me that fucking of course she doesn't speak ANY English so like Lenny in Of Mice and Men I try to SHOW what I'm talking about and I start stroking her arm (I know, I know, God help me) and OF COURSE not only does it look like Polar Bear but it also feels the way you'd expect Polar Bear to feel and I CAN'T stop stroking it and I'm watching in horror as my body speaks louder of my intentions than any amount of English would and I'm stroking and she's smiling and finally I force myself to stop and the next thing I know Niko is there and I've never been so glad to see him as all of a sudden NORMALCY has returned and it is OK for once.

"I'M GOING TO LOS ANGELES TOMORROW.."

The fuck you are. The speaker is the guy who is driving us from the Geneva airport to the club Usine where we're playing AND staying. He's in a band apparently and has all of that pre-tour, what the hell is that most bands feel? JOY? He's got romantic notions about some of the long drives they have through Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and into California and I know to a foreign ear that sounds soooooo fucking cool, but having made that drive like a million fucking times I know that he's up for misery without measure and this plays on my face and I see his eyes darken.

Good. He knows what's coming.

Karin our promoter shows us around and a la shows in Europe the deli tray is running thick and full. And the club is huge and it's going to be weird playing to the 10 people who are going to show up but I'm sure you know at this point that it doesn't happen that way.

THE WAY IT HAPPENS: Enough people to not feel like a fool, but not enough people to NOT feel like a fool.

The place holds like 200 and we have like 70 there. For what amounts to essentially a jagged and drugged Simon and Garfunkel, this is not bad.

And so we play and after we play we announce that we're going to show Christian Anthony's film MUSIC FOR ADULTS and then AFTER that, if we're still sober and ambulatory, we'll have a question and answer session.

And then everything went BLACK..with the exception of the following three anecdotes I remember nothing.

POSSIBLY MADE UP STORIES TO CONCEAL THE VARIETY OF FELONIES I WAS, IN REALITY, COMMITTING WHILE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF EXTREME SLEEP DEPRIVATION

1) FEAR AND TREMBLING AND A SWISSMAN UNTO DEATH

One of the guys who promoted the show kind of crab-legged up to me and said "do you remember playing at Pez Ner last time you played there?"

"Of course." I say. A skosh tentatively.

"Well I brought this friend of mine. We drove 2 hours to get there and after 2 songs he said 'I can't stand it.' I said, 'what? What do you mean? Where are you going?' and he said 'I don't know...just out..OUT.' And he ran away. It was your music, you see. I later found him out in the gallery talking to this crazy guy."

"And that made him feel better?"

"I think so, yes. But he's coming tonight and I want to bring him over to meet you if that's all right."

I say that it is and so later, during the movie, while I'm manning the Merch table I see him inching toward me and his friend retells the story and the guy starts off slowly at first

"I just..I..couldn't take it. It made me too..nervous. But I made it tonight," and he smiles with the briefest flashes of triumph.

"What do you do for a living--I mean outside of being a trembling Swiss man - that you have such a clearly pronounced nervous condition like you do?"

He sticks out his chest and intones "I AM A BUS DRIVER!"

God help us all.

2) THE MAN WITH THE SILVER KNIFE

I look up from where I'm fraternizing with some of the NATIVES and I see this FELLA standing there with a knife in his right hand down by his thigh and his left hand draped over his eyes like he's about to swoon Isadora Duncan style.

"They...THEY TRIED TO FUCKING ROB ME!!!"

I ask the couple I'm sitting with if they see him.

"Haha. Why yes."

"Do you see his knife?"

"OH. Does he have a knife?"

A nation of people who will never see the knife until it's too late.

I reach for my tour weapon and watch this 50-year old Brit with a knife try to speak French and get some water for his apparently tear-gas-sprayed eyes.

The couple I'm with says "do you think we should help him?"

I don't even dignify this with a response and return to my conversation with them which leads to

3) A DONUT AND TWO SAUSAGES

During the post-film Q & A there's a scream from the back corner.

"Hey." That universal "I've finally had enough to drink and will now proceed to try to suck your cock" cry that's familiar to performers everywhere. Even Yo Yo Ma gets it. I know because someone told me he told them so.

Anyway I say "Yes?"

"We want to ask you..um..in private." Hmm...I can't see them so I move closer and when I'm in eyeshot I go to sit at their table.

She's about 36. Dark hair. Pixie cut. Sort of a Swiss Laurie Anderson. He's about 38. Crew cut. Looks like an engineer. Or murderer.

She leans into me "why do you always grab your, um..."

Oh god. It's the cock discussion again. I mean percentage wise I grab my cock a whole lot less than the average guy at the average sporting event in America but that's a red herring (Nice touch: my cock = a smelly fish). The physiognomy of this transaction is usually just to get to the point where I say

"..COCK. Is that what you mean? Is that that hard to say? How do you say it in French?"

They laugh nervously. And call it the fatigue but I just stare, patience expired, my eyes like the backs of nail heads.

"Well, yes. But why do you grab it?"

"I grab it for YOU. For you and for all of those quietly yearning slightly bookish types who want to grab it but who fear it..they fear the COCK...and so it is for them that I grab it in all of it's semi-turgid glory. Grab it and hold it, grab it and stroke it, grab it..."

"Yes, yes..." And he interrupts to change the topic and the conversation ranges afield but I KNOW what's going on here and so I wait for it for like 15 minutes, through the knife-wielding Brit, before I remember that this is still SWITZERLAND: THE OFFICIAL NATION OF PEOPLE THAT FUCK IN THE DARK and so they will NEVER get around to it so I start insinuating in my kind of gentle and sly way..

"So you want me to fuck your woman while you watch?"

"WHAT?!?! Noooooooo..." But while his mouth says Noooooooo, she inches closer to me all warm and smiley and just trills a laugh that's high and clear.

"Hahahahaah..." And he frowns and says referencing the probably-now-blinded Brit, "But you might end up like him."

"I seriously doubt it." This isn't a brag. If you travel for even 5 minutes it becomes clear that the only people on the face of the earth crazier and more violent than Americans are Brits and the SWISS, well let's just say that it's not a mistake that Swiss rhymes with Miss. "I mean I'M not a fighter," I lie, "I'm a lover. Especially of other men's women."

She smiles again. He buys her a CD. And a lifetime of trouble.

I remember nothing else and won't until I find me and Niko and lovely, lovely Karin, our promoter shivering in the cold of the Geneva bus station and I feel like fucking Ratso Rizzo because naturally I only brought one thin coat because, well because I want to die. Obviously.

THE BEST LINE HEARD IN GENEVA...spoken by Niko as he peruses the initially empty club (and in reference to the graffito that we once spotted that said "If you can't draw a crowd, draw a DICK!") while chortling darkly, "I'm going backstage..to draw a dick."

EUGENE? HE'S HAD SOME TROUBLE WITH MURDER BUT HE'S OK NOW.

LYON, FRANCE

So we get to Lyon, we get to the club, no one's there so Niko wanders off in his ever-occurring search for a music store and I sit in front of CAFE MYZIK eating dried mango, beef jerky and glaring at passersby who have to struggle up a long hill to get to where the club is. My head is clearing and I almost feel all right.

Almost.

The promoter shows up (Good sign) and promptly tells me he has a gig tonight so he actually won't be able to stay for the show (Bad sign) but he's a nice enough fella and he cracks open a bottle of local Red and I drink and gobble from the deli tray until, well, you know, the most reasonable thing in the world is to shove all of the ash trays off of one of the bar room tables and go to sleep there, which I do.

Lyons, France: Drinks for all my friends!!! Well actually we don't know ANY of these people and this is a stolen photo but you know what the hell we mean.



Lyons, France: Drinks for all my friends!!! Well actually we don't know ANY of these people and this is a stolen photo but you know what the hell we mean.

When I'm awoken by a youngish fellow who excitedly and in very good English talks about just about everything, I find myself suddenly swept away by his enthusiasm, so much so that I ask him..

"is there a decent whore house in Lyons?"

Well that's not really what I said. I really said something about liking the cut of his jib, but that's another story. For another time, Oscar Wilde. But, speaking of Oscar, a photographer friend of his shows up and I recognize him right off. He imagines that it

will be impossible for me to recognize him. But I do. A guy like me HAS to. It could be all the difference between a knife in the throat and a cock in the ass, but I digress.

"We've met before," he says, smiling slyly.

"Yes. I know. I said. It was in Lille. You came up to me after the show and wanted to know if my song lyrics were about how hard it is to be Black AND Gay and..."

"Yes, yes, yes, well I was wrong about that..." He rushed to shut me up, seeming sort of embarrassed, which is like pulling a piñata up a tree in front of me.

"Haha...yeah. I wrote all about that in an old tour diary. Yup. Wrote allllllll about it. But I never caught your name..."

No way is he going to tell me his name and it wouldn't matter anyway as I seem only capable of remembering like ONE name per country. I mean as far as I know or care every guy I met in Switzerland is named GREGOR (the bus driver's name I think). Everybody in France is Patrice. Perfect. It works. But he changes ships quickly and says the cook will be there in a bit and she shows up and the food is served and it's a fucking jolly, cigarette smoking, wine-drinking time to be had by all. Fuck that Freedom Fries shit. That totally stupid, retrograde shit. They're still FRENCH fries to me and I will still stand by their mighty tradition of running away from more fights than they take, proudly surrendering to live to fuck another day, until I DIE, clutching my black beret in arthritic hand. I LOVE FRANCE AND THE FRENCH and I don't give a shit WHO knows it especially if it's the cook. Who I keep sipping wine and watching. Sipping wine. Watching.

Well the show is great. Sixty people in a club that holds 60 people is not bad. And since I'm a Negro I commence to steal things of little or no value, like the photo below, as I was too cheap to bring/buy a camera but I wanted to remember what the club looked like so I took it and here it is.

But it's AFTER the show that of course the real fun happens and it happens when I'm braced by the shotgun-toting Richard Compte. He, who used to helm France's answer to OXBOW, this band formerly known as BATON and he's a fucking genius and he's taken the photos from our last show in the next nearest town St. Etienne and reintroduces me to all of the people who I pawed and bumbled through back then and since this show finds me in the same buzzy head space, aided and abetted by the libations pouring cook-sip, watch, sip, wait-I latch on to him and his friends, one of which includes Marie-Claire. Now not the FAMOUS Marie-Claire whose mother strangles cats from a tour diary long ago but a FRIEND of that Marie-Claire who fixes me, watches me and tells me all of what I'm about to tell you...

She says, "Well yes, I know what they say. They say he had a few problems with murder. He's had some trouble with," and she makes that great French hand gesture that seems to say *comme ce, comme ca*, "murder back in San Francisco but he's OK now. He's better.

He's moved past it and now he sings these nice shows, with the acoustic guitar and he wears suits and he's turned his life around. The music has turned his life around. His ART has kept him from going crazy again and so it's allllllll right."

"What the fuck are you talking about? WHO says that?"

"EVERYBODY. That's what they believe. But not me. I have you on top of my refrigerator."

"A place you might actually really find me."

"I'm an artist. And I sculpted a bust of you. Well not of you, but it looks just like you and it watches over me and my kids."

"Well good. Your phone keeps ringing. Is that your husband calling?"

"Husband? No. He left me for a younger woman. A blonder woman. A woman with bigger TEETS. But they're just men who want something from me."

"What do they want?"

"They want one or more of the following things: they either want to go snowboarding with me, they want to stay at my place, which is at the base of a mountain, TO go snowboarding.."

and though I like snowboarding my attention is starting to drift...

"or they want to fuck me. Or they want to do drugs with me.."

..right back front and center.

"Well speaking of the fucking thing.."

"Ah. I don't want to fuck anymore..."

"Uh yeah..well listen it's been nice..." And I rush for the exit and drive my head into a low-hanging French beam and I hear the bells tolling for me and we go to a guy named Jean-Louis's tattoo parlor, which has just opened up and it's totally fucking swank and called VIVA DOLOR and he and his pal tell me and Niko some long drawn out JESUS LIZARD tale that has as it's extended punch line David Yow commenting that he couldn't take it when confronted with his 8 hours of intensive alcohol consumption and the bleeding, recently hemorrhoid-ass-operated on roommate that was rolling around their place like a drunk (LIKE?!?!--editor) in a blood stained diaper and while I'M perfectly well entertained I see a picture on the wall of his parlour resplendent that catches my eye.

"Who is this?" And I can tell suddenly by the flush of blood to his face that I got a live one here.

"That's my girlfriend."

"Oh." Wait for it. "So, uh, where is she?"

"Look. Don't even fucking THINK of it." He's smiling but there's a madness in his eyes that clearly indicates that the universe he lives in is PRE-OXBOW. Because if it's POST-OXBOW you know certain things. You know for example

1) that when you don't see your lover, they are gleefully fucking as many people as they can. Do you understand what that means? The full RAMifications of that? WHAT I'M SAYING IS THAT WHENEVER YOU DON'T SEE HER OR HIM YOU SHOULD JUST IMAGINE THEM WITH A COCK IN THEIR MOUTHS BECAUSE THAT'S WHERE THEY ARE. EVEN IF THEY'VE ONLY STEPPED INTO THE OTHER ROOM. ESPECIALLY IF I'M ALREADY IN THAT OTHER ROOM.

"Hey I just wanted to know where she.."

"She's not HERE," he said a little too quickly. See, my motives are frequently misunderstood. Someone once asked, "how come you talk about sex so much but you never get laid?" Well my objective is NOT to just get laid. My objective is to serve as a catalyst for the kind of life change that YOU need the most. I mean WHATEVER that might be. Of course it interests me more if it involves my COCK but not necessarily and here what he needs is to have the thick slather of paranoia spread over his idyllic dreamscape.

"So she doesn't LIVE here?"

"She lives in Rennes." He's smiling the whole time but I can see the sweat on his lip and I'm in fucking heaven.

"Rennes hunh? Nice town Rennes. A college town. Full of lots of college dudes. What does she do for a living?"

"Well she's got a tattoo parlour there..."

And the smile starts to slowly spread on my face...

"Ahhhh..FUCK YOU. I'm going to call her right NOW."

"Nah, nah. Don't do that. You'll just make her angry and then I'll have to calm her down and..."

"Fuck you." And he walks around with his phone in his hand and he's almost pacing until the cook and HER boyfriend show up."

And so on the full on roll that I'm on it's clear I'm not going to be happy until I've ruined everything for everybody so I wait for the cook's boyfriend to leave the room to piss and I ask her.

"So. Is that your man?"

She ignores me and I know I'm right in the midst of having one of the best times of my short and totally dickish life.

"Is he your boyfriend? I mean are you two TOGETHER?"

And she concedes, almost sadly, "Well, yes..." Almost apologizing.

Jean-Louis is still pacing the room and now he's screaming "you're fucking EVIL..." And Niko, ever the peace maker, is nursing a glass of something and serving as the official Eugene Apologist but I won't be stopped and like some scene out of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? I keep it up until I notice the time.

3 am.

We have to catch a train in 4 hours.

Jesus Christ.

We turn in and not for the first time it's insinuated that Niko and I are more than just FRIENDS and bandmates..

"I only have ONE bed..and I don't want t hear any noises from down here."

"Oh. You won't. We're very quiet when we do it."

And I can see from his face that I need to add,

"I'm joking."

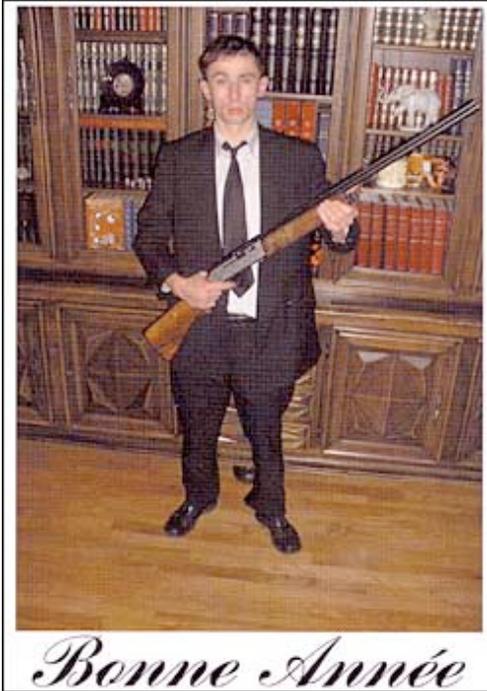
But Jean Louis is a great guy, a great artist and I'm going to go back and get a tattoo from him some day but when he drives us to the station in the cold morning frost and early rain of Lyons I ask him one last question.

"How long have you and your girlfriend been going out?"

"Well just 3 or 4 months now."

I say nothing until he leaves and I turn to Niko and say,

"He's doomed." And he is. And so are we all.



The Genius Richard Compte, former singer for BATON (the french OXBOW), wishing us all a prosperous and head-wounded new year!

THE SHROUD OF TURINO

Italy is fucking great.

Though Jean-Louis says about our impending attempt to try to catch a train to Italy "You know when the train leaves...but when it gets there..." And he shrugs and his friend from the night before who told the bleeding ass story, from his vantage point as a worker for the Train company agrees, and they both shake their French heads, looking slightly amused at the foibles of their southern brethren's total inability to get anywhere on time for any reason whatsoever.

Fuck that.

Like Hitler said, A nation run by Negroes. Beautiful. And this is more true than they themselves will even believe and so I'll say it again and not for the last time but I think Italians need to understand that NO ONE, absolutely NO ONE but other Italians believe them to be or even qualify as any version of WHITE PERSON. Same with the Spaniards. I mean I now KNOW that you THINK you're WHITE. That you believe your swarthy

skin is not really dark enough to qualify you as BLACK but, and this might come as a shock to you, really, NO ONE ELSE DOES.

And so it is with great joy that I find myself in Italy. With all of these goddamned Italian women doing that Italian woman thing of looking so fucking hot AND returning your looks before turning away in this slather of shyness. Very Catholic and very fucking becoming and my cock is awake and happy to be here even if it is freezing in Turin.

But Jesus I can't walk. My knee joints from all of the fighting, training for fighting, and stumbling down flights of stairs are angry at the weather and like the Tin Man (whom I played wonderfully in a musical theater version of the Wizard of Oz way back when) I creak everywhere and everywhere seems to require that we climb flights and flights of stairs to get to it.

But we get picked up by Fabrizio of the band LARSEN. Kind of the Italian Kevin Martins. Kind of a bit like the white rabbit in Alice in Wonderland. Rushing hither and yon. Almost running actually but devoid of any real outward signs of stress. He talks about going to a branding seminar in San Francisco. A THREE day seminar.

"What the fuck do they need to tell you in THREE days about branding?!?!"

"Well how to do it and.."

"You take something hot and you stick it on...that leaves 2 days, 23 hours and 58 minutes..."

"Well there's the philosophy and all of that and..."

"Yeah yeah..the Amway of body modifications...whatever."

He's a curious study though and I watch him while he goes through the standard song (and dance) of trying to figure out if we're assholes.

I mean you wouldn't think this needed much figuring out but Niko is so nice and retiring (read: drunk on the liquor) that I figured this would provide all of the protective coloration that I'd need but I'm watching him watch me and so I ask right away.

"WHY ISN'T MUSSOLINI BETTER APPRECIATED BY THE AVERAGE ITALIAN?"

Well, he laughs and I figure he's all right and we eat and then off to the show.

THE MOMENT OF DOOM: We asked him how many he expected for the show tonight. He said "well usually we have like 200 but with the Jarboe show last week we had the worst showing ever. Only 75 people but tonight should be good."

And then I know as surely as I know that the sun will rise and the moon will set, that we are doomed.

And I'm right. 32 people and now OXBOW Acoustic holds the record as the most poorly attended show in Turin. But we care not at all. Daniele Brusaschetto opens and he is very cool and Paul the American Ex-Pat takes care of our Merch and he sells a shitload of it while I drink drink drink but idiot savant like I am, though drinking like I am, I do note that when he gives me the merch money it's 10 Euros lighter than it should be but then again these guys are taking us to Milan tomorrow so fuck it. Live and let live is what I say and we take off post-show to Alessandro's house where we'll stay and he's like a real Oxbow fan and has all of the hard to find shit and is a DJ besides so he spends the next morning playing cool music for us and I ask him how you say the word "BETRAYAL" in Italian.

He says "what's 'betrayal'?"

I say "well it's like if you ask Fabrizio to give your girlfriend, the one with the ass that makes me want to cry while fucking it, to give her a ride across town and you later find out that he's fucked her."

His eyes get hard and in his Italian mind I can see the video playing itself out for him complete with the requisite Italian knife of JUSTICE and he says quietly

"tradimento."

I'll remember this.

A few things to note:

- 1) Alessandro is limping as a result of a scooter accident and I'm limping due to the cold and when we walk down the sidewalk together we look like we're doing an Italian revival of Waiting for Godot.
- 2) All of the food in Turin is fucking toooo salty. What the hell is the problem?
- 3) Fabrizio hates anything South of Florence. I'm not sure why but perhaps it's because he doesn't know that he's ALSO a Negro.
- 4) There's an earthquake in the early morning. I thought it was Niko jerking off in the same bed I was sleeping in. I resolve to not mention this. However at breakfast that's the first thing I say. He, of course, denies it. I remain suspicious.
- 5) No one in Italy stops for stop lights. There is no traffic law at all in fact. Pedestrians instead of assuming like Californians that their humanity will be recognized and appreciated know to get the fuck out of the street if they want to keep living.
- 6) I LOVE ITALY.

YOU SAY MILANO, WE SAY MILANO, MILANO, MILANO, MILANO, MILANO,
OH LET'S CALL THE WHOLE THING OFF

Fabrizio and Paul drive us here and make their graceful and amusing exit.

"Um. We're going to, ah, leave instead of staying for the show and um..."

We let them off the hook, "go, fly, leave...fuck, man. You drove us here, no WAY we expect you to suffer through ANOTHER show."

And so they do.

And dinner comes and unlike when we were here in September I don't knock all the glasses off of the table and stain my suit and the woman who booked the show, the beautiful Silvia even talks to me this time. NOTE TO SELF: WOMEN LIKE A MAN WHO DOESN'T KNOCK ALL OF THE FUCKING DINNER CROCKERY ON THE FLOOR IN A TORNADO OF DRUNKENESS.

And the show is cool. 200 people show up. For Simon and fucking Garfunkel. We are still amazed. But despite the amazement some things stay the same and there he is. I mean you don't KNOW who he is but you KNOW he's going to be there. I'm talking about THE TOWN DRUNK who at first is doing this drunken guy pirouette in front of me. Toasting me with his drink and then with his drink and cigarette, and just generally ASKING for the kind of treatment that predictably guys like him receive at the hands of guys like me.

I jump into the orchestra pit though and try to get him but he escapes and the show cruises to a close and the promoters are quickly sticking up the screen for the movie and while I'm getting dressed behind it the drunk comes back to where I stand behind the screen. His English is bad and my Italian is no good but we both speak Drunkonian so we're fine.

Until he grabs me.

And then I grab him and then in yanking away from where I've got a fistful of his sweater he makes the universal "let's fight sign" of hands now raised in the air and now I grab him tight and hold him tighter right as some of the promoter guys get there to break it up.

"He's going to get hurt."

And they talk to him in Italian and he wanders off but he wanders off in the direction of the screen and I grab him again and this time they hustle him off the stage.

He later tries to get Niko to come to his house.

But as I'm exiting the stage this woman comes up to me with her hand outstretched.

"Hi. My English is bad and I only saw one song but I liked it."

"That's because you only saw one song."

"No, no. It was good. And spotting me now standing on the dance floor THE TOWN DRUNK descends and he forces us down to a table and through her he asks..

"Is he Gay?"

I ask her, "Is HE gay?"

"He says 'No.' Well, wait. He says 'Maybe' He says he wants you to come to his house."

"Eh. And find out?"

"He wants to know why you pull out your, how do you say..."

"Cock. How do you say that in Italian?"

"Cazzo. Why do you pull out your Cazzo?"

"Well he probably pulls out his Cazzo several times a day, doesn't he?"

She's hanging with the translation. Not embarrassed at all. I tell you I LOVE these Italian women.

"He says 'yes,' but not like that."

"Well he should try it." And that's when I notice her handbag with the big silver letters on it that say LOVE & SEX. Fuck. Genius.



Cave Whores! Get Your Cave Whores! Can a city that boasts of Cave Whores (also known as Grotto Gash) really be THAT bad?

But then the famous Mirko Spino Spino Mirko (he has two names that both seem like first names to me consequently I can never remember the order) from Wallace Records

comes up to me (2002 European Tour Diary PART TWO > Page 5) and says in total life and death fashion.

"Eugene. I need to speak to you."

Well I know this voice, having heard it out of the mouth of many a man and it usually then goes on to say something like

"..I understand that Mariah spent the night at your place last night...and I understand there was some, um, activity, fondling, of some sort and I just want to hear from YOU whether it's true or not."

And sure enough he says "I finally sat down to read your," and he almost spits these words, "tour diary." His pupils are dilated and he's clearly in the grips of something and I'm trying desperately to remember what I said since I can't recall what with all of the Italian vino that's been flowing and whatnot.

"Yes. I was at my girlfriend's house and I sat down to read it for the first time. And I got to that part where I asked her to drive you home and I started..." And here he paused for effect with his hand over his heart. "...to not be able to breath. And then I'm scrolling down to read 'WHAT NEXT?!? WHAT NEXT?!?' and I when I finally get to the bottom and read that nothing's happened...well I could breath again."

And he finishes spent and still just staring at me quietly and so I say.

"Hey man. I'd never have fucked your girlfriend. I LIKE you. Haha. I mean you need to worry if I shift the emphasis to I like YOU, but fuck man...what kind of guy do you think I am?" And he seems temporarily mollified and almost on cue his girlfriend comes up and I shake her hand and then figure Fuck It, and I give her a long, passionate hug, kisses on both cheeks, the whole bit.

She says, "I tried to tell him..." And we all share a laugh. Some more heartily than others, but I think he's left with, most importantly, a truism for the ages: There is no WAY that Eugene is going to be good for your relationship no matter what.

And one more: True love becomes more pure through continued betrayal.

On to Rome.

WHEN IN ROME, FUCKING FREAK OUT

I can't stand it. There's some sort of psychological phenomenon whereby visitors to certain parts of the world, weighed down by the presence of just the sheer weight of ART HISTORY, lose it. Jerusalem is one of those places. I knew of a guy in college who they caught running through the streets, his feet bloodied from his journey through the old city

and the only way they could catch Jesus Christ as he now preferred to be called was by telling him that crowds had formed in New York waiting to hear him speak. THEY THUSLY USHERED HIM ON TO THE AIRPLANE-BAREFOOTED AND DRAPED IN A SHEET. HIS FIRST WORDS WHEN HE LANDED IN NEW YORK AND JUST MOMENTS BEFORE "THEY" DESCENDED ON HIM WITH TRANQUILIZING SYRINGES HELD HIGH WAS "WHERE ARE MY PEOPLE?"

But Rome is another such city and I can feel the spirit of Julius Caesar running through my blood. Julius Caesar, the raper of men, the conqueror of nations, the pincushion for the fucking people. The city is heavy, completely and totally, and when our Italian agent shows up on a scooter to pick us up at the train station I am smitten. With her, with the city. All of it. Now under normal circumstances when she offered to give me a ride on her scooter like she did I'd have taken it but having watched Alessandro limp around Turino I thought better of it and took the cab, the driver of which was like the archetypically bad MTV video hot bitch cabbie...The other cabbies only wanted to take us when they thought we were JUST Americans but when Francesca whipped out the Italian on them they would stop talking to us IMMEDIATELY and so we caught a ride with the hot bitch cabbie, tattooed and tough talking as she was, she drove like an angel of light through the streets to the club.

Pietro (go back, back, back in time to read an older tour diary for his first appearance) booked the show and he won't show up until later because he's home watching soccer. How is it that this sport inspires fucking riot? I'm a baffled.

But we go to the Coliseum, pass all of these people, thousands maybe, carrying the San Fran Gay Rights Rainbow flag and I think "how wonderfully progressive..." Until Francesca says that it's a peace parade and then I notice the flags emblazoned with the words PACE. Which she says means PEACE. Yeah. Sure. Whatever. I mean I knew that. But the Coliseum is mind-BOWLING...and I mean to spell it like the game played by Fred Flintstone. Completely. I start to dissociate aggressively. From Marcello Mastroianni to Nero (whose palace we see) to buildings built in 64 AD to oh, oh..man. I need a rest.

And Francesca gives us one by taking us to this restaurant across from the club called La Villetta that's absolutely fucking genius. Genius. Food, food and more food, and drink and wine and song and I know why fucking Italians die at the age of 66...I mean why would you live longer and why would you want to and how you could care if you did?

We go back to catch the opener ONE DIMENSIONAL PLAY and they are great and Shellackian in scope and timbre. The house is full. Beautiful.

We play and play well and afterward though Niko is grouching about hating it because there was a light in his eyes and he couldn't see anything other than ME the whole show

it WAS a great show and afterward the drummer from ONE DIMENSIONAL MAN comes up to me and says...

"Good show...I usually play naked but..."

And my first response is to want to punch him right in his fucking mouth as he's talking to me in this unbelievably high falsetto and being a stupid American I figure he's clowning me and so I want to teach him a lesson in fucking public deportment until I realize as he continues that this is his actual VOICE.

Kind of Mike Tyson-esque it is a marvel to behold. High with no signs at all of breaking anywhere along the register. Once I realize he's not fucking with me we're fine and he says

"..but I'm glad I didn't play naked tonight. I mean you try to explain that it's cold on stage, that all of your blood goes other places, that you are not really that small..."

I laugh and he takes off and we hit the hotel where the next morning we're awakened by the fucking bells that won't stop ringing and the Gestapo bed and breakfast squad that threw us out on the street as soon as the bells stopped ringing and as we blink back against the sunlight we head over to Pietro's where we hang, catch up on old times and I watch Pietro's girlfriend. She's cute. Too cute. I'm predicting in the space of the next year she will have him crawling through the streets of Rome holding his guts in with a paper plate where he'll pass Jean Louis who is doing the same thing in the opposite direction. There'll be the briefest looks of recognition before they continue on their own separate and miserable ways screaming and wondering where it all went wrong.

Meanwhile the lovely and lovelier Francesca wanders around Rome unfucked.

Ah well. Life is beastly.

IN NAPOLI WHERE LOVE IS YOUNG AND BOY MEETS GIRL THIS IS WHAT THEY SAY...

So we're in Naples and Andreas Testi and a friend come to pick us up at the station. The prevailing description of the people in Naples by almost every single person we meet including Italians is "strange but cool," and so it goes.



Andreas Testi: The Man, The Myth and the Mustache that says "Hey Baby!"

We get to the club first off and before I've put my bag down Andreas says to me "do you have a gun?"

And I give the official US state department answer "we have not confirmed the existence of any weapons in my present domicile."

"Don't FUCK with me. It's an easy question. Do you have a gun?"

"Hmm. I like direct talking men. But let me answer your question like this: I have a friend who has a gun."

"Just one."

"Oh no. Many. More than you could count on two hands. Hidden. All over the place."

He appraises me quietly and drinks at the bar before he sends two other men to take us to eat. And drink, drink, drink.

At this point in time I'm drinking grappa, amaro, and red, red wine (for the health benefits) and I've been sleeping badly or little at all and as we stretch like Caesars at this restaurant I ask the fellas that are there to babysit us what they do for work.

"Well I'm getting my PhD in Political Science with a focus on Jeremy Bentham and he's studying civil law."

"I thought civil law in Naples was handled with an ice pick."

They laugh and say "Oh, no, no..."

"But do you OWN an ice pick?"

"No."

"Hmm. Well you'll have to get one. Now, WHY ISN'T MUSSOLINI BETTER APPRECIATED BY THE AVERAGE ITALIAN?"

Niko strikes up a conversation with a guy at the next table who he happens to hear is American. From Detroit.

"How long are you going to be here?" Niko smiles benignly and the guy has suddenly gone deaf and so Niko asks again "How long are you here?" And the guy turns his back and goes back to his conversation. I tell Niko in what's probably a really bad stage whisper, "HE'S MAFIA. LEAVE HIM IN PEACE!!!" But Niko trundles along because well in his universe anything is possible, even a comfortable convalescence from a major head wound.

The guy SAYS he's just on vacation, doesn't know for how long or when he'll go back and I imagine he mumbles his business as "union organizing," but Niko persists saying, "oh no...he's not Mafia, he's an INDIAN."

Indian or Mafia he doesn't murder us and leave our brains spreading out like so much red paint across the festive gingham prints of the table cloth and it's not that I didn't like him but I just feel much better when he leaves. There's only room for one psychotic killer in any restaurant at any given time and right now that's me.

And post-prandially I decide to leave Niko at the club and wander around alone and the deeper I get into Naples the deeper I get into these tight and sparking groups of Neopolitians and their vibe is full on Bay Bridge, Brooklyn, and periodically the groups break up and people start doing that frantic run that city dwellers will recognize as the "fuck, someone's getting their head kicked in run and I want to see," but I'm in the grips of my search for this special pastry that they only make in Naples and I finally give up and get back to the club just in time to watch Andreas giving Niko a guitar lesson during soundcheck while Niko watches him with a mixture of curious wonderment and high amusement.

"No, no, no...see the way the frequencies work you must hold the guitar like this.."

Genius.

But the show is packed and out of all the shows we've played this one, our last one, seems to be the one where people most clearly pay attention and moreover they seem to understand the language both during the set and the ensuing showing of the OXBOW documentary MUSIC FOR ADULTS, which we've been showing the whole time but which we got fucked on since the transfer house gave us not one, but TWO defective copies.

But it's a great audience, a great show and later as we wander back to Andreas' house where we'll be staying and where of course he lives on the top floor and we ride the, shock of all shocks, the ELEVATOR to the top floor (Note to Germany: it's okay to rebuild your elevators. We promise that as long as you stay away from your Jews we'll not bomb you again) and I sleep like a Turk for the first time the whole tour. That is, really well.

And the next day Niko and I take a train out to Erculano, a town colonized by the Greek demi-god Hercules or some shit like that and in typical Oxbow fashion get there too late. Niko is in high dudgeon and suggests bribing the guard who I'm talking to in my pidgin Italian and trying to answer while he's asking what we do.

I say that I'm a singer and Niko plays guitar.

The security guard loses it and tells me that he's the greatest singer in Rome. He tries to get me to sing but I demur and then I try to get him to sing and he, struck by some professional bashfulness, doesn't but the whole time I'm chatting with him Niko's saying, "give him some money. Bribe him."

The guy turns away for a second and I try to explain to Niko that the guy digs that we're professional colleagues but Niko prevails and I start half-heartedly digging through the scant Euros in my pocket and the guy sees what I'm doing and says, No. We're closed but he follows us into Erculano and lets us look for a bit while he asks questions of all kinds and finally he asks if we're together. As in TOGETHER, together. As in I'm going to use your toothbrush because I can't find mine, together.

I laugh and say we are not together and that if we were TOGETHER, together I'd have been arrested long ago for murdering Niko.

But he then runs off to chase some other people down and we're left to wander around the upper portion of the town and while I'm watching the isle of Capri off in the distance and Mount Vesuvius in the other distance, Niko is like fucking about to lose it.

"We should just run down there. I mean what's he going to do? Kick us out?" And while he has a point I don't understand what the deal is and say

"C'mon. This man's now a fucking cumpari of ours and there's no way I'm running down there and making his job harder."

"But the guide book said they were open until 7:30!"

"Hey. It's Italy. It's 6 o'clock. Someone probably wanted to go to dinner. As I do. Let's get the fuck out of here."

And disconsolate Niko leaves Erculano a sadder man while I'm glad to just have seen it, Capri and both the sun and the moon in the sky at the same time. Why did pantheistic religions die out? Where's Hercules when we need him? And how is it that Yahweh proved to be a much more attractive figure than Zeus?

But back in Naples we meet Andreas and the night takes a 100 foot leap into excess, Italian style, and there's food, and wine and drink and we meet his friends Alberto and Daniele and even though we leave the next morning at like 7 o'clock we drink and drink and sing and try to fuck our bar maid and when we finally get back to Andreas' place those guys start a full band jam session and amazingly there are no neighbor complaints and I huff an absolutely criminal about of Go Fast and then the party spins into 5 AM and we need to get to the airport and I'm flying and we're cascading down his circular staircase and Andreas gives me a photograph of himself and starts mumbling

"Eugene...you..ahhh, you fucking nigger..."

Did he just call me a nigger? I mean I know there's been grappa, grappa, grappa, amaro, whiskey and a panoply of other substances but I really think he just called me a Nigger and as we roll down the stairs I get that drunk guy resentment going and as we stand down by the car he hugs me and kisses my cheek and mumbles it again like a term of endearment

"You nigger..."

And in a flash I'm transformed into Ultimate Fighter guy. Not because I care especially that he's called me a Nigger but because I think he really wanted to see if I WOULD be motivated to show him how well I can fight and well everyone should always get what they want and so I lock him up in a front choke and say

"We all like those words with that repeating G sound. Like TRIGGER. And FAGGOT. NIGGER." And I'm tightening the noose of the choke around his neck but unlike just anybody in America who would probably offer a grace struggle, he's not resisting at all, he's just relaxed and smiling at me all beneficently and so it goes until he starts to feel a little light-headed and then finally says

"Tranquile, tranquile..." I know how to say "relax" in like 6 languages. Strange, I think but I let him go and I smile and pat his cheek while he smiles and we smell like gin factories and we pile into Daniele's car as he's refused to even consider that we would take one of the cutthroat Neopolitan cabs to the airport. And when he drives through the early morning streets of Naples he does so without heeding any sort of traffic law known in any sort of civilized nation. We, dream-like, float through all of the red lights and no one is beeping at all and they're all in fact, driving the same and when we get to the airport we stand on the ticket line and they stand with us and because it's an Italian airport everyone's smoking and so I ask Andreas

"Your mother's dead, yes?"

And his eyes get watery when he answers "yes."

"And she died from," and I point to his cigarette, "smoking?"

"Yes."

"And you smoke?"

"Yes."

We both pause and watch each other. Him looking for malice in my queries and me looking for, well, looking for a willingness on his part to go on with me into wherever I was taking this.

"Well you need to come to California and visit us before you die."

And there are hugs and kisses all around and tears and almost tears and I feel like I'm about 5 minutes from tearing my shirt open and falling to my knees while pulling big chunks of hair out of my head because I'm leaving Naples and my Neopolitan brothers and I'm awash in a sentimentality that's as real as the shoes on my feet or the ass on my back or the drugs taped to my groin.

I don't sleep all the way back to California and when I get back to California I don't sleep still.

I'm all right. I'm fine. Though it's clear from the tone and timbre of my thoughts-kill him. It'll be easy and I KNOW you can get away with it; fuck her. It'll be easy and I KNOW you can get away with it; snort, huff, shoot, drink it. I KNOW you can get away with it- has grown increasingly unsound.

And so I sleep. Finally. Dreaming of pastierie, scrotum sinks (bidets) and great and growing barrels of grappa, grappa, grappa alllllllll the while.

But I wake with a start at like 2 AM and wonder against wonder, where am I? And much more significantly, WHO am I?

Ah, I'll figure it out sooner or later.

END NOTE: OXBOW returns to Europe in July.