

3) Pop-Op

We rolled into 1983 hard at work on our third album “Uneven Stitches” and preparing for a forty-five city tour slated to start in late August. Headlining for the first time. We had a lot more control, but there were a lot more decisions to be made as well. It was the first time in my life that someone asked my opinion about ticket prices. And backup bands – we didn’t want anyone louder than we were, but aside from that didn’t really care. Which pictures to put on the t-shirts, and did we need to have both posters and a booklet ??? I know Mike took one look at my face during those sessions and knew that he was on his own. I was thinking I should have taken some psilocybin mushrooms or peyote, or something.

Leah and I moved back into the place in Santa Monica. I proceeded to hole up in the back bedroom for a week with just The Gibson, a typewriter and a hash pipe. I came out with the rest of the material for “Uneven Stitches”, including “Labor of Love” and “The Inner Voice”. One began our foray into the ZigZag reggae sound, and the other became our anthem and show closer.

When we weren’t in the studio or rehearsing, Leah and I would take driving trips all over the central California coast. Up U.S. Highway 101 to Santa Barbara, or even further sometimes to Morro Rock or San Luis Obispo. We really liked S.L.O. There is a hotel there called the Madonna Inn. Every one of the one hundred and ten rooms has its own personalized theme and décor. There’s the “Golfer’s Room”, the “Italy Room”, and the “Indian Room”. We even stayed once in the “Caveman Room”, complete with a pseudo rock enclosure, animal print linens, and a couple of authentic looking “clubs” in the corner. S.L.O. also has a farmer’s market every Thursday, when they shut down the city streets and the local vendors bring their fruit and produce to sell. Some of the best strawberries and avocados I’ve ever tasted have come from the market in San Luis Obispo. There are bands of different kinds on every corner, from a church choir to a grunge band to a jazz quartet. And you have to see “Bubble Gum Alley”, where passersby have been leaving their used chewing gum since the early 1960’s. The California Polytechnic State University (better known as Cal Poly) is also located nearby so the town has a bit of a college feel as well. From there we’ve taken the short drive to San Simeon and the Hearst Castle, newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst’s monument to the notion that rich people can’t buy good taste. A lot of beautiful stuff, but it was obvious that there was no master plan. It looked like a garage sale at the Sistine Chapel.

The place we loved more than any other was Topanga Canyon. We hiked the park trails and watched the wind surfers at Will Rogers State Beach. Leah loved the little shops and the secluded homes. Close enough to L.A. to get to Capitol in forty five minutes. Yet far enough that you could forget you were in the big city. The locale just lent itself to the feeling you get from a deep, cleansing breath. For the most part the people were friendly, and the pace just seemed a little slower

## Long Live Rock And Roll

than that of the rat race on the other side of the mountains. The Topanga Canyon area has always been an “artist colony” of sorts. Over the years, musicians from Woody Guthrie to Marvin Gaye to the members of The Doors have called this area “home”, as well as actors Dennis Hooper, Louis Gossett, Jr. and Lynn Redgrave. Actor Will Geer (perhaps best know as “Grandpa Walton”) was blacklisted during the McCarthy Era and moved to the Canyon to save money. On some property owned by Guthrie, he opened a theatre for other blacklisted actors and folk singers. He and his wife also grew and sold vegetables from their garden to make ends meet. Today the Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum, a non-profit professional repertory theatre company, lives on in his memory in Topanga Canyon.

It was while we were on one of our little “day trips” that I came to a startling conclusion (remember – I’m a guy. We stumble upon the obvious quite by accident on most occasions). Leah had just come out of an antique store and I was standing by the curb having a smoke. She came up behind me and poked me in the ribs. I turned around and gazed into the most wonderful set of brown eyes. It sent my head spinning back to the first time we made love in the apartment in Houston. Before I had ever touched her, felt her breath on my neck and her breasts pressed firmly against me, I knew I loved her. It was the connectedness I felt just from the warmth of her gaze.

I knew I had felt that way one time before. But it was a long, long time ago.

Her name was Cathy LeMaster. We were both high school seniors at the time, but I had known Cathy, and adored her from afar, for a couple of years. She was a raven haired beauty with beautiful blue eyes, an easy smile, and a great sense of humor. And she was gorgeous. We had both recently ended lengthy “high school sweetheart” relationships, and both had close friends who were dating. We were all on the high school newspaper staff together. They fixed us up on a double date, to a movie I think. We only went out the one time. We only shared one kiss. But it was the look I saw in her eyes just before I kissed her that I will never, ever forget. There was something very wonderful, and at the same time very worrisome, in that moment. Almost like a chemical reaction. It was one of those times, one of those events that remains etched in my brain all these years later. It was what LOVE was supposed to feel like. It would have never worked for Cathy and me, and I think we both knew it. She was a good girl, and I was a bad, bad boy. She was on the all “A” honor roll and volunteered at the senior citizen’s center. I hung out at the Pizza King, chased the “easy” county girls, and smoked cigarettes. She was headed for the Ivy League and I was headed – well mostly nowhere at that point in time. We ran into each other a couple of years later at a wedding. She was a bride’s maid, and I sat in the back row with my long stringy hair and a nose full of cocaine. Cathy and I were headed one hundred and eighty degrees in opposite directions. I haven’t seen her since. Someone told me a few years ago that she was a Congressman’s aide and lived in a Georgetown brownstone with her architect husband. I always thought I’d see

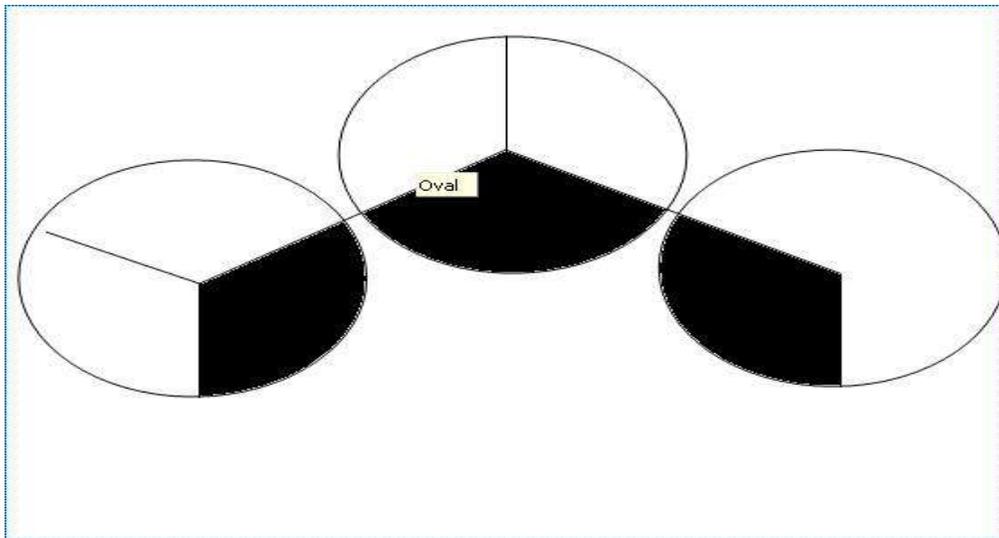
## Long Live Rock And Roll

her some night anchoring the ten o'clock news in some major market somewhere. A little piece of me will always be in love with Cathy LeMaster. I'd like to think that she feels the same way.

The term "Pop-Op" is short for "popular opera". The basic premise is that every song is an adventure in art. Music, dance, theater, lighting, sets, props, video and more bring each song to life and tell the story on a multitude of levels. Although the concept is certainly not new, and is actually more like a Broadway musical than a true "rock show", Pop-Op is different in that each song is its own entity and need not be part of a larger "story" to be effective. The idea rattled around in my brain for several months, dating back to the early Queen shows.

In high school, I spent part of each summer working on the stage crew for the local civic theater organization. They did such classics as "Music Man", "West Side Story", and "The King and I". I even acted a little with the school's thespian troupe, and though well enough received, I never thought myself as being much of an actor. My mom loves musicals. We had a huge RCA stereo in the living room at home, and she used to play soundtracks of all the current shows. There was just something about the small stage that intrigued me.

The staging ideas came in phases. We didn't want the usual "flats" (although we use them on occasion), and we needed a way to change the look and feel in just a few seconds. What we came up with was a set of circular stages that could be divided into thirds, and rotated to provide the needed changes. While one-third of each circular platform (two stories, about ten feet high each) was visible to the audience, the other two thirds were being prepared for the next songs. So for each song, there were a total of six visible sections of the stage. Each section could be used as a musician's platform or a staging area for actors.



**Pop-Op Stage Design 1**

## Long Live Rock And Roll

When I say “we” came up with the design, there really was a group effort. Now I’m not going to tell you that this was an easy sell with the band. In fact, NOBODY liked the idea in the beginning - especially not R.L. and Scotty. They wanted to “rock”. It was suggested (in a less than subtle fashion) that this was a conspiracy on my part to make the band a watered down version of what we ought to be. It was contrived, and it was too mechanical. They thought I was being self serving, and “mellowing” way too early. In other words “selling out”. Even Leah had her doubts. We had a good thing going – why try to reinvent the wheel ??? It was one of those battles that I won by taking a slow and steady tact. And I started with the one person who could either make or break the entire scheme – Mike.

It had to make sense on paper. We were already making more money than was imaginable, but we couldn’t jump off into this “Pop-Op Thing” as Mike called it without having some sense of the economics of the situation. The notion was fairly straight forward. A “tour” would be divided between theater (Pop-Op) dates and stadium dates. In some cities we would only do a stadium show. In others, specifically cities that had a stage that would work for our set design and house at least three thousand people (and could tolerate the “vile” music we were spewing from their venue), we would do a series of theater shows (and triple the ticket prices) and then do a stadium show at the end of the run. Skip a week between Pop-Op events to give the cast and crew time to relocate, and then do the same thing again. The theater concept was going to be expensive from both a financial and time management perspective. Lots of labor costs for cast and crew and a ton of hours in concept building and rehearsal. But I believed in what I was conjuring up, and stuck to my guns. After Mike and I had a reasonable budget put together, we approached Capitol management with the idea. They hated it too. They said there wasn’t enough margin, and the masses who came to stadium shows in droves would stay away. It wasn’t the right environment for a “rock and roll” show. The response from the record company did nothing to quell my enthusiasm. In fact, I think I was more focused after facing their criticisms and rejection. I also had a card that I had yet to play. There was an “out” clause in our current contract with Capitol. If our first two records yielded at least three top ten singles, we had the option to terminate or renegotiate the deal. And I planned to do just exactly that. Unless...

Two days after our attorneys flew this trial balloon over the circular earthquake-proof structure near the corner of Hollywood and Vine known as Capitol Records, I had a proposal that I could sell to everyone. A four record deal that netted each band member \$1.5 million up front. Total package worth close to \$69 million. Lots of outs, lots of incentives. And a \$4 million dollar investment in “Pop-Op” (it was actually a loan – with zero interest and a ten year payback option). I had lots of logistics to negotiate with individual band members, and a lot of advance press that I was going to have to live up to. Reminds me today of a fella named Gates, who staked his entire fortune against a little project called “Windows”. Last time I checked, that worked out OK for Bill and the folks at Microsoft.

## Long Live Rock And Roll

I grabbed the bull by the horns and went straight to R.L. I had the argument down cold. We had to look at what was happening with MTV and realize the future was on the small screen. Production was going to be as important, if not more so, than content. If we could make the change in mindset that would allow us to think this far outside the box, and we were successful, the sky was the limit. Dictate our own terms on everything from here on out. As close to “carte blanche” as you were going to get in Hollywood. I figured, once you are on top, the only logical thing to do is to create a new “top”. I didn’t want to change the ZigZag song building process, or the recording process, or the live process. I just wanted to add another “process” to our arsenal. He still wasn’t in love with the idea, but it wasn’t our money on the line either. I needed R.L. in my corner. I needed him to work on Scotty.

The legend of “Naughty Scotty” McNaughton is partially created from actual events, partially contrived for media purposes, and an equal part conceived in the mind of the subject himself. I was far from the first to ever call Scott “Naughty”. It was a familiar refrain from his youth, and it just kind of rolls off the tongue. I started using it during the set, introducing a lead section with “get Naughty now”, or “let’s be Naughty”. Scott has a boatload of both talent and charisma. He is confident to the point of being headstrong. He’s had lots of brief encounters with lots of very good looking women, and is a big fan of pharmaceutical grade cocaine. Most often, when Scott goes out looking for female companionship he uses Tate as his wing man and driver. On the surface not a very good choice perhaps, but it goes back to the trust thing. Scott believes that Johnny will always have his best interests at heart no matter what. Basically the same relationship I have with both R.L. and Mike – and with Pee-Tee.

Scott’s good looks and jet black hair are both a gift from his mother’s gene pool. Rita McNaughton is a statuesque woman from the south of France who met Scott’s dad while he was hitch hiking through Europe one summer during college. She is what I’ve heard some refer to as a “handsome woman”. Her facial features are flawless and her hair is always done immaculately. She dresses up for all occasions, and makes it know to all how important looking good is to her. When you looked as good as she does (even now in her sixties), you deserved to flaunt it a bit I guess. Interestingly, Scotty has never tried to look the part of the rock star. His hair has always been short and well trimmed, and he is almost always clean shaven. The sweaters and t-shirts that he often wears on stage make him look more like a grad student than a lead guitarist. If it weren’t for the trademark black leather pants, you might think that Scott just walked over from the research library. All of these are probably factors in why Scotty was well received within the “celebrity circle” in Hollywood. Interestingly, Scott had some issues in the beginning with being too passive and subdued on stage. I used to go bang into him and when he bitched I told him that if would get upstage like he’s suppose to for solos, then I’d leave him alone. I think he sometimes gets in a “zone” while he’s playing and forgets the audience even exists.

## Long Live Rock And Roll

From a public relations standpoint, Leah and I are pretty boring. We rarely go to parties, even more rarely dine in public, and mostly keep to ourselves. We also have this two man shield of Mike Bennett and Pee-Tee Brown in constant vigil over us. When the Capitol PR team approached us about “controlled leakage” to the press, Scott was their primary target. Although I expressed concern about this to Scotty, he was fine with it. Got to keep ZigZag in the headlines. So they started allowing some photographs from private events, especially if there were “A” list Hollywood insiders at the affair. Scott in a picture with this actress. Scott at dinner with these television executives. Scott at the opening for a new posh restaurant on Wilshire. But in order to foster the “Naughty” persona, the other side needed to be revealed as well. Scott has been involved in several scrapes with the law over the years, but nothing serious until the possession arrest in L.A. A speeding ticket that Pee-Tee had managed to squash (one hundred and ten in a sixty five mile zone) was released to a specific writer who was doing a “celebrity criminals” piece. We even let a brief mention of the cocaine arrest slip through the cracks and into the rags. I remember a quote from a journalism professor at U.K. – “good press is better than bad press. But bad press is better than no press.”

Perhaps the most interesting part of this process is that we get to see the real Scott on a regular basis. He’s just doing the same as the rest of us – taking advantage of opportunities as they present themselves, and enjoying the hell out of the journey. If he has to “take one for the team” every once in a while, so be it. And Scotty’s good with that. The rewards incredibly outweigh all of the consequences. It’s all just one big charade here at the “Hollywood Freak Show”.

We sold Scott on Pop-Op with a combination of sense and nonsense. First, in the theater setting, he (as well as all of the other members of the band) would have opportunities to showcase their talents through Pop-Op that just weren’t available in a stadium environment. Controlling the vibe of a crowd is much more difficult in a sixty five thousand seat football arena than in a three thousand seat theater. And the acoustics are WAY better. There would also be the need for instrumental interludes as transition between songs while the set was being changed and players moved around. Scott would certainly get his share of the spotlight. The second topic was strictly a marketing angle, and it fed Scott’s ego as well. While spending a week at a time in many of the major cities in the country, Scotty would have time to delve into the social scene almost everywhere we went. He would become (and still is) a major player on the celebrity circuit at a national level. Every town had their own “Naughty Scotty” stories. Some even have a kernel of truth about them.

Eric and Greg were both closer to embracing the concept from the beginning, and really their diverse talent sets were going to allow us to do a number of things in a scaled down environment that weren’t available in the live stadium show. Hell, let’s be honest here. Once Mike said yes, the studio said yes, R.L. was on board,

## Long Live Rock And Roll

and Scotty was OK with the idea, I told everyone else what we were going to do. Greg and Eric had a vote – but in truth the election was rigged from the beginning.

I started breaking down a few songs and coming up with staging ideas. Simon Crowley, our newly hired lighting and stage consultant, started through the back catalog (both albums) and making suggestions as well. It became the topic for dinner conversation and meetings that ran late into the night. Leah became a sort of filter. She processed everything that was said and any resultant actions that were planned. I'd get her feedback and opinions from the pillow next to mine later in the evening. One of the first songs we agreed upon was "Who Comes and Goes" from "Embrace the Reality". Here's how I wrote it up:

I'm sitting on a wrought iron park bench on the left side of the stage. There is grass at my feet and a couple of leafy trees behind me swaying in the breeze. The violinist is standing to my left and slightly behind the end of the bench. She and I have subtle spot lighting and there is another more focused spot on me. Greg is directly downstage to my right. R.L. and the drum kit are in the first section of lower staging almost directly behind me. The intro is long, with an extended violin solo and a video clip from an old movie showing in the top center screen panel. Once the film clip ends, the moon is visible in the upper right corner of the panel. The keyboards are far to my left in the upper staging area, and only slightly lit.

From near mid stage a young woman in a business suit walks purposefully to her left. The lower right hand staging is of her apartment exterior/living room. She steps up onto the stoop, takes her mail out of the mailbox and opens the door. As soon as the door is opened this flat is removed and the interior of the living area is exposed. She looks at, and then sets down the mail (and the keys) and as she is removing her coat, she exits through a doorway into the lower middle stage. As she enters the lower middle staging area the lighting on the sets changes. She has changed dresses, is at a dance or social, and boys in tuxedos are paying a great deal of attention to her. I have gotten up from the bench and moved a few steps to my left angling slightly back toward the scene. The violinist trails behind.

"Duty calls as evening falls all around you.  
Sure fire hit what a bit the boys surround you."

The young lady and one of the gentlemen move from the middle of the scene to a street that leads to a stairway between the middle and left panels. As they move toward the stairs, I move the opposite direction and begin to sing towards them. The violinist moves across and is again slightly behind me. Scotty is now visible in the upper left hand section in front of a sheer curtain. He has a couple of steps and a small platform to his right. There is a doorway to his left and he moves away as the couple approaches.

## Long Live Rock And Roll

“And oh the cold wind blows,  
But there’s nothing to expose.”

The couple goes through a doorway at the top of the stairs, the man leading the woman by the hand. There is a window next to the door, and the light reflection shows their images as they pass in front of it. Scott leans over as if to take a peek into the window. Then the light goes out.

“For the darkness never knows  
Who comes and goes.”

In between the first and second verses the violinist moves forward for another solo, the lights are brought up on Eric as he joins in on keyboards. With the start of the second verse the entire band is now in view. The keyboards create somewhat of a carnival atmosphere. The woman and her current beau are in the lower middle section at a table in a restaurant, and she is being very suggestive about her desires towards the man. She leans in close to him and you see her leg slide across his under the table.

“Pleasure game, led to shame, why feel so blue?”

The lights go out on this section and the next focus is on the stage in front of the lower right panel where the woman is now having a picnic with a different gentleman friend, and acting anxious and slightly agitated. She has a glass of wine, and takes a big drink before she gets up to walk off.

“Ill at ease, impossible to please, hard times are true.”

There are lights in the drums that go off as they are struck during the chorus. The woman is seen entering one door on the upper level with a man, and then exiting.

“And oh the cold wind blows,  
But there’s nothing to expose.”

Suddenly she is entering a door on the first level with a different man, and again departing.

“For the darkness never knows  
Who comes and goes.”

Eric takes a brief keyboard solo. The woman, with her coat over her arm, wanders towards center stage and seems to be peering out into the night. I move to the right and a little behind her. The violinist had moved to the right and is further back. Greg moves up closer behind me and has a bass run that transitions into the bridge. The woman is oblivious to my presence.

## Long Live Rock And Roll

“Now I’ve not been busy spyin’  
And I’ve got no tears for cryin’  
Even though I truly care.”

I get down on one knee as if to plead with the woman. She turns a little my direction, but still pays no real attention to me.

“You see no sense in tryin’  
As a part of me in dyin’  
For something that we can’t share.”

The guitar solo is staged in the upper left section where Scotty is perched on the little platform at the edge of the stage. There is a sheer panel across the section, and the outline of two people in bed is obvious. Scott whirls and shrieks as the lovers tussle in the bed.

Before the third verse begins, we are back to the initial scene in the lower right section with the door and mailbox; there is a window to the right.

“Lonely nights, candles bright reflect from the window pane.”

I have moved to my left, across the stage, and in front of the door to the woman’s home. Greg and the violinist have now moved nearly together at center stage.

“Shadows embrace but there’s no disgrace,  
Though it all seems insane.”

Just as the lyrics indicate, there is a candle burning in the window and the reflection of a couple in a very tender, affectionate hug is seen.

The entire stage explodes in light with R.L.’s rumbling into the final choruses.

“And oh the cold wind blows,  
But there’s nothing to expose.”

I move at a brisk pace for the left to the right, back in front of R.L. and near the bench from the beginning. The violinist makes a slight move my direction.

“For the darkness never knows  
Who comes and goes.”

The moon is back and full in the center panel. The breeze is obvious again.

“And oh the cold wind blows,  
But there’s nothing to expose.”

## Long Live Rock And Roll

I move back in front of the bench and then I sit.

“For the darkness never knows”

The man exits the woman’s home through the doorway and wanders across the middle of the stage and toward the stairs between the left and center sections. Greg gives him a knowing look as he passes. The violinist moves in closer beside me.

“Who comes,  
Who comes and goes.”<sup>14</sup>

The song transitions back to just my guitar, Eric on keys, and the violinist. The stage goes black. I exit the stage with the violinist, as Eric continues to play and transitions us into the next song.

“Uneven Stitches” was released in July, 1983 – a month before our tour was scheduled to begin. It hit the Billboard album charts at number eight. Three days later “Freedom Fighter” was the first single offering from the project. In three weeks time it went from number fourteen, to number six, then to number two. “Every Breath You Take” by the Police held the number one spot for most of July and all of August. We occupied the sport right behind them for five of those eight weeks. The album went as high as number three, but could never outmaneuver “Synchronicity” or Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” for one of the top two spots.

We made our second appearance on Saturday Night Live on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1983 in the midst of our U.S. tour. Danny DeVito and Rhea Pearlman were the hosts. We opened with “Freedom Fighter” and closed with “The Heat of The Night”. The most notable part of that week for me was visiting with Dick Cavett backstage, and hounding for his autograph during one of the skits. We sold out Madison Square Garden for the next two nights and recorded both shows for what we hoped would be a series of live videos. Mike Campbell and Benmont Tench from the Heartbreakers showed up Monday night and joined us onstage for “The Heat of the Night” and our version of the Tom Petty and the Heartbreaker’s classic “An American Girl”.

The second single released from the “Uneven Stitches” project was “The Heat of the Night”. Although the title and the choruses reference the 1967 film based upon John Ball’s novel, the song is a bit of a commingling of this movie and several other Sidney Portier films, specifically “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” and “To Sir, With Love.” Obviously, the sexual overtones have been exaggerated, and the lyric is a bit too abstract to understand the back story without explanation. We don’t try to do this with the piece, instead using it as the vehicle for exhibiting a unique perspective on the dating game. Here’s how we staged it.

## Long Live Rock And Roll

I'm sitting on a stool with a cold beverage on the table near by, and in front of a structure in the first panel on the left that has an old style ceiling fan and a bar with a bartender and two or three patrons. The weather is obviously very sultry. When trying to describe this scene, I think back to Paul Newman's "Cool Hand Luke" and the way the inmates in the cell block looked and acted in those conditions. I particularly remember George Kennedy's character Dragline always sweating and wiping his face. It's the kind of night where dogs are known to howl at the moon and grown men behave like wild animals. It's also the kind of night when the unthinkable can happen, and usually does. The human condition only has certain physical controls. Sometimes the beast within all of us needs to break free.

R.L. is in the lower center panel right next to me, and Scott is in front of the far right lower panel and Eric is inside that panel. Scott is leaning against a chain link fence. Greg is on a stool between R.L. and me. The entire upper section of the stage is brick with multiple windows (three in each panel, so nine total). There's a fire escape ladder on the end next to Scotty, and a platform across the entire top section of the set. It's the back side of an apartment complex or housing project. One of the windows is broken. There is a light on in another of the windows where the blinds are pulled halfway down. The outline is of a woman ironing clothes. The other seven are currently dark.

### The Heat of the Night

"It's no occasion for a lullaby,  
The pressure's on in your head,  
And you're feelin' so tight.  
The more you think it might be worth a try,  
Yea the urge to jump rings so true,  
Still can you face up to the spite?"

A black man in a suit with his tie pulled loose at the collar enters from offstage behind me and into the bar. He is carrying a satchel style briefcase that is fairly full and sets it down in front of the bar. He removes a handkerchief from his pocket and then removes his hat with the other hand. He wipes his brow with the handkerchief and puts it back in his pocket. He waves the hat back and forth three or four times to create a breeze in front of his face. With his hat still in his hand he looks to the bartender and orders a cold drink. Everyone else on the set is white. There is a young woman who is talking to the bartender and another couple sitting at a table. While the black man is having his drink another couple and finally a woman in a red dress come through the bar. He is immediately attentive to her, as is the bartender and another man sitting at the table holding hands with his girl. The woman in the red dress appears to be unaffected by the heat. She brushes away the offer of a drink, and also that of a chair. She looks at the black man, and flips her hair as she turns away toward the center of the stage.

## Long Live Rock And Roll

She takes two or three steps and without turning looks back over her right shoulder. The black man immediately pays for his drink, puts on his hat, picks up his satchel, and follows the woman as she exits between the two panels. He looks back once as well, but his glaze is upon me. I just shrug my shoulders and he turns and walks out.

“Of wakin’ up in the morning,  
With some stranger in your bed,  
But human nature heeds no warning,  
That can put up a fight.”

The couple reenters between the top left and center panels. You can also see a young black man sitting on the end of the fire escape ladder with his legs dangling off the edge. He is smoking a cigarette. The couple walks across to the far left end and exits quickly. He looks back, but she does not. The light comes on in the first window, and as the woman is removing her dress, the man reaches over and pulls the shade. The light soon goes back off.

“In the heat of the night.  
The heat of the night.  
The heat of the night.  
The heat of the night.”

As we enter the chorus, flames appear at the base of the building. There is backlighting that exposes the images of those in the apartments through the translucent brick walls. The young man sitting on the fire escape gets up, peers over toward the other end of the building and goes down the stairs. He jumps to the ground, looks to his right, and goes left in front Scotty, who reaches out with his right hand and gives him a shove as he goes past. The young man stumbles, rights himself, glances up at the building briefly, and then exits the stage.

“Not just another lonely passerby,  
Your heart is cold to the world,  
Though the fear’s out of sight.  
Beneath that solemn composure,  
There’s room for just a glimmer of doubt,  
Still I’m believin’ I’m right.”

There is a sidewalk that runs across the length of the stage in front of Scott and I. It is not quite to the front edge, and parking meters indicate that there is an adjacent street. A woman comes by walking her dog. Another holding a child in one arm and a bag of groceries in the other. Two young boys on bikes. The black man from the first scene, this time in more causal attire. And not sweating. Three or four others hurry by, and then the woman in the red dress appears. She encounters a bespeckled white man with black hair in a pinstripe suit who is holding a folded newspaper. They immediately exit to the rear. He drops the

## Long Live Rock And Roll

newspaper in front of R.L. on the way out. The black man reappears and approaches an African-American woman in a sequined mini skirt. They too meet and exit.

“It’s only out there for the takin’  
No use to pretend you understand,  
Why try to assess the sins awaiting,  
Where there’s just that prayer to recite.”

The couples reappear on the second level with the woman in the red dress leading the bespeckled partner back to her room. She removes his glasses and starts to loosen his tie. The lights go out. The black man and his mini skirt clad companion go the other direction and into the room next to the woman who was ironing. She is now folding clothes. The black man begins kissing the woman while she unbuttons and removes his shirt, the lights go out.

“To the heat of the night.  
The heat of the night.  
The heat of the night.  
The heat of the night.”

Flames and backlighting again. This time the young black man runs across from between Greg and I and in front of R.L. He picks up the folded newspaper, looks at it, runs over and shows it to me, looks left, and then exits the way he came in. Apparently, he wants nothing to do with “Naughty Scotty”. The woman who was folding clothes is now staring at the wall between her space and the adjacent one where the black man and the African-American woman in the miniskirt are located. As we move into the guitar solo, Scott, who is dressing in the normal black leather pants and a bright red shirt – the same color as the woman’s dress, moves from in front of the fire escape to the fence on the inside half of the right section, where Eric is located. As he starts the solo, he is leaning up against the chain length fence with his right foot propped up against the chain. He moves across to the front of the stage, and the woman in the red dress comes out of her room and down the length of the set to the fire escape. She looks at Scott, and he looks back up at her. As the solo ends, she exits between the center and right panels.

“Every question heeds an alibi,  
Every tick of the clock,  
Makes your future less bright.  
Requesting massive exposure,  
It says a lot to wear it so well,  
But your peers are just bein’ polite.”

Random people start moving through the set. Some on the sidewalk, others from between the panels. The African-American woman in the mini skirt takes a

## Long Live Rock And Roll

muscular white man and leads him off. The bespeckled white man meets a short blonde and they depart. The black man comes back on stage once again in his suit and hat, sweating again and running with his satchel in tow. Two police officers arrive from the front right, handcuff the black man, and lead him off. His satchel is left on the ground. I hand him a business card as they cross in front of me. The woman in the red dress appears center stage and motions with a finger for Scotty to follow her. He looks first at Eric, then at R.L., and then at me. He takes a few steps, looks back toward the audience, and then departs.

“And in the end there’s still no answer,  
It seem so hard to ascertain,  
Not a soul joined here among us,  
Can survive the wound of a bite,”

The woman in the red dress reappears first and moves toward her end of the building. Scott reappears and continues to play as he moves across the length of the stage. The bespeckled man takes the short blond into the room with the broken window. He unzips and begins to remove her dress from overtop of her head. Lights out. The African-American woman in the miniskirt goes into her room with the muscular white man. He picks her up and twirls her around. Lights out. The woman next door now had her hands on her hips and turns toward the window.

“From the heat of the night.  
The heat of the night.”<sup>15</sup>

The woman in the red dress is getting impatient with Scotty. She stomps her foot and points her finger again as we finish the third chorus. The young black man runs in from the spot Scotty had just vacated, grabs the satchel, and runs between Greg and I as we feign attempting to stop him. He immediately comes back on, with the police in pursuit, exiting between the center and right panels. As the song ends, Scotty has gone around the corner into the woman’s room and is taking off his guitar. Lights out. As the young black man enters the top section of panels between the center and right, the young woman suddenly opens her window, pulls both he and the satchel inside, and then closes the window. The lights go out just as the two police officers reach the second story.

On one of our trips into Topanga we stopped at a real estate office and started to look at some properties. There were some really, really nice houses in the area – and all with really nice price tags. Neither Leah nor I are incredibly domestic creatures. The idea of having to take care of a big house wasn’t something we were looking forward to, and we probably weren’t going to be very good at it. We knew that we wanted some property, so that our space and our privacy could

## Long Live Rock And Roll

be more reasonably managed. Then we started thinking about all of the other people in our lives, and how we wanted to make sure they were taken care of and felt like family as well. And my father, Mike, the CPA's, and Mike's brother George were all after me to come up with ways to invest money. Every one of them gave me the same advice – buy property. Land in California was expensive, but it wasn't going to get any cheaper. And there was a finite amount of it to be had. They were also after me big time to set up a charitable foundation and start giving the money away. It was either that or give it to the IRS.

We looked and looked and looked at houses and property in Topanga Canyon until I was sick to death of the entire process, and my response to almost everything became “fine” or “whatever you think dear”. This woman I loved was turning into a monster !!! Not really, but Leah was being very deliberate with this process. She had a group of ladies on what I called her “housing subcommittee”: Steph, her mom, my mom, R.L.'s sister Kelly, Greg's wife Patty, Mike's new girlfriend Joy. After awhile I came to the conclusion that the perfect house, as defined by whatever power was ruling this process, did not exist. The Judge told me that there was no better way to burn cash than to design and build a custom home.

The other part of this discussion was with Mike and the band about the need for a better recording environment. The scene at Capitol was just wrong, at least we thought so. Too much transitional management. Too many set ups and tear downs. Too many artist and repertoire (A&R) executives interrupting producers in the middle of a session to let them know that “so and so” was in town and needed the room for a week. We did good work at Capitol, but the process took a bit more out of us that we would have liked. R.L. was testy throughout, with the mantra “we've got to be better than good.” He rerecorded several drum tracks after we had all of the other basic parts finished. Definitely made the overall project better, and he was right to insist on getting the drum parts the way the “god-damned DRUMMER wants them to be.” But it was still a lot of additional tracking that we thought could have been resolved with better planning. On the other side, Scott was pure magic on these recordings, and watching him work (especially considering that a great deal of the time there was someone from the “rich and famous” set looking on) was quite a sight. The Los Angeles life style was a good fit for “Naughty Scotty”. But it was agreed to by all that we needed a more permanent solution to the recording studio situation.

During our travels up and down Topanga Canyon Boulevard, Leah and I probably looked at fifty homes. It seemed like a hundred and fifty. She probably looked at a couple dozen more with the “girls”. As we started talking about the studio issues, I remembered back to a small (4000 square feet) ranch style house that was on the back of a good sized piece of property not too far off the Boulevard and just north of Tuna Canyon Road. We knew the house was too small, but Leah had dragged me there because she wanted to see how the kitchen was designed.

## Long Live Rock And Roll

The interior space was very open and I remembered thinking at the time that there was a good “vibe” about the place.

I first talked to dad and Mike. Then to Leah and the band. Then to the CPA’s and the bankers. Then I put my signature on a contract to purchase fourteen acres of the Santa Monica mountainside for a mere \$5.9 million dollars. My hands were a bit clammy when I picked up the pen to sign the documents. They told me to spend money, so I did.

I called everyone together for dinner at a local restaurant and laid out the master plan for one and all. This was the first of what I call the ZigZag “family tribunals”. We were moving the base of operations to what the Tongva Indian tribe that once roamed these hills called “the place above.” Here was the plan: The existing house would be converted into the studio. Our house would be built in the middle of the property, and Leah was in the process of finding an architect. The “subcommittee” now had a new assignment. Finally, I was going to have a sound stage built so that we had a place to conduct Pop-Op rehearsals and perhaps create our own videos. I had names for each of the buildings. The studio would be called “The Stitchery” (referred to as “The Stitch” by most everyone). The house “The LaVonda Inn” – a play on our love for The Madonna Inn in San Luis Obispo, and the ever increasing list of “rooms” that the new house would require. The soundstage was the “Pop-Op Place.”

We recorded our first video for “Ladies of the Evening”. Being behind the curve on the whole MTV video process, we needed a way, while between records (and having no live footage from the Queen tour!!!), to enter into the fray. Mike hired a director named Hamilton Butler from Houston, and a local production crew was secured. Pee-Tee pulled in his local contacts, and police protection was secured. Hamilton wanted to film on Jensen Drive – after dark. And use real local talent for the cameos. He believed that the set would look more authentic that way. I didn’t care, as long as HPD had a car for me to be in and an officer or two to have pleasant conversation with while we were on location. I wanted no mishaps, and no real arrests. They shut down Quitman Drive for two city blocks at 3 o’clock that afternoon. The production trucks rolled in with police escort and literally blocked the street on both ends, one with the production truck, and the other with the lighting truck. A couple of vice squad detectives had made introductions between one of Butler’s production assistants and several of the local girls. A very odd, yet effective casting call. The girls really did make the video feel genuine. I was mostly a lurker. Peering out of windows and emerging from darkened doorways. I probably sang the entire lyric some twenty five times that day. Different angles. Different lighting. R.L. was set up in two different places. One was in an alleyway where we did most of the full band shoots, and the other was on the porch of one of the homes (actually two blocks away, but it worked for the way they wanted to capture the drums. Scotty spent most of his time in of all places – the middle of the street. Eric was in a cab part of the time and set up in the sidewalk on one of the corners, where everyone had to walk around him.

## Long Live Rock And Roll

Greg was dressed as a collared priest or minister, and had scenes in front of his congregation and on the sidewalk near Eric, not far from where Scotty was playing in traffic. We gave Tate a scene where he drives up to the curb to pick up one of the girls. Pee-Tee and Mike had cameos as well. I think we were there for about four and a half hours. That night Leah, Mike and Joy joined me at a gala for inner city youth being held at the Intercontinental Hotel near the Galleria on the west side of downtown Houston. A standard fundraiser, but one that Mike encouraged me to attend – based both upon the timing and location of the video shoot and the ease with which it fit into our schedule. We had planned to be in Houston three days, just in case the weather or technical/logistical issues required an extra day of shooting. ZigZag, LLC wrote them a check for \$500,000 to build several playgrounds and a couple of indoor basketball facilities. I was handed an old Gibson Hummingbird by Bart at Rockin' Robin Guitar that afternoon, and fell in love with it. I played the old Righteous Brothers tune "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" that night with just me and that guitar. We "donated" that performance as well as the check. Dad said I should give some away. We got a couple of suites in the hotel and threw a little after party. Lots and lots of local friends who we wanted and needed to see from the early years. Mike and I also had a private reason to celebrate that evening. Our little enterprise was now worth more than a hundred million dollars.

Ramon Matteo was recognized within the music industry as one of the best drum tech in the business. After working in quality control with Ludwig Drums for more than a dozen years, he was looking for a change of pace. One of the first endorsement deals we ever did was R.L.'s signing with Ludwig in the summer of 1983. It was really a no brainer; R.L. was using Ludwig's already. He went to the meeting along with his sister Kelly, Jerry his brother-in-law/drum tech, and Tate at the wheel of a big Lincoln Town car. Interestingly, Johnny disappeared shortly after they arrived at the suite where the showing, and hopeful signing, would occur. He got chatty with the sweet young Oriental receptionist, and one thing led to the next. They spent the next hour in one of the bedrooms in the back of the suite. Tate said he knew he had her when he told her he had been to, and the band had played in, her hometown of Sapporo, Japan. He had handed over the keys to the Lincoln to Kelly before he departed.

I stated earlier that Jerry was the drum tech, which might have been a bit of a reach. He was in reality more the "drummer's assistant". Jerry didn't play, and never really got the chance to try. He did the same thing he had been doing since the late 1970's when he first started dating R.L. Chamber's sister – he got the kit more or less set up, and then R.L. would tweak things until he was satisfied. Sometimes that took more than just a few minutes. Don't get the impression that I undervalue Jerry's contributions to the ZigZag cause. He was there from the very first day, was responsible for procuring most of the smoke in the early years, and was always thinking "band first". Saw his wife beat the shit out of him one night because his allegiance to the band and making sure that everything was packed up and loaded before anyone could leave didn't align with Kelly's plans

## Long Live Rock And Roll

for the evening. He's worked his ass off for us, and has been in a few scrapes as well. He didn't need a "job" with the band. Jerry was part "of" the band.

As R.L. and Jerry began to examine the jet black and chrome kit that was on display, the company representative who greeted them wandered over to the sofa on the other end of the room and sat down to chat with Kelly. At about the same time, Ramon entered the room and took over the presentation.

He was an odd little man, with very thick glasses. He was probably close to the rest of us in age, but appeared much older. He rambled a bit, and used lots of run on sentences. But there was little doubt that he knew exactly what he was talking about. After about half an hour of chat and review, the Ludwig rep returned and the serious discussions began. Ludwig was thrilled to have their product on the ZigZag stage and hoped to consummate (I think that's the part Tate was managing in the back room) a deal that would keep R.L. and the band in the Ludwig family for a long, long time. And there was an additional request. They wanted Ramon to be part of the deal. On the surface, this didn't cause much alarm. Then there was the kicker: Ramon is legally blind. He could see about three feet in front of him with the powerful spectacles on. Take them off and he was literally "as blind as a bat". He'd managed all these years by leasing an apartment seven blocks from the office. Relied on his younger sister to do his shopping and chauffeuring. Mostly he survived due to the efforts of an incredible guide dog named "Bear". Bear was a six year old German shepherd who had been with Ramon since he was a puppy. After spilling all of this news the Ludwig rep took a breath. Ramon had a couple of considerations that he wanted factored into the agreement as well.

First, he preferred the English pronunciation of "Raymond" over the Spanish "Ramoan". Second, he required that someone take him back to the "workshop" he rented behind his apartment from time to time. He liked to tinker with automobiles. And being from Detroit, he was partial to Chevrolet's. A fact that was not lost on R.L. Chambers, the Camaro man. In his spare time he was refurbishing a 1962 Chevy Pickup. He was especially proud of the paint job - Candy Apple Red. He couldn't drive it, but it felt real good to sit in the driveway revving the engine and playing with the radio. He still did his own tune-ups. And he managed his own accommodations for the most part. He could see well enough to tweak the absolute maximum out of a drum kit, and to know which end of the joint was on fire. As far as we were concerned, Ramon's eyesight was just fine.

I was spending more and more time talking to the press and doing interviews for music magazines and radio disk jockeys. In June of 1983 we got the most interesting interview request of all time. Playboy magazine wanted to interview the entire band. And they wanted to do the interview in one of the conference rooms at the Playboy mansion. There was no need for a band vote.

## Long Live Rock And Roll

When we arrived at the front gates, Pee-Tee was asked to leave his hand gun with the security on duty. He NEVER likes doing this. It happens from time to time, like at the White House (duh) or international airports when we aren't flying on a charter. Come to think of it, Pee-Tee doesn't get harassed by the authorities near as often as I would have thought. There are several other members of our crew who have gun carry permits, Rick for sure and probably two or three of the security/transportation crew members. From time to time one of them was always being detained. Almost never happened to Pee-Tee. In part I felt the reason for this was that the Cartage folks knew what they were doing. I also wondered sometimes what else might be on the plane with us.

There was a party in our honor at the mansion that night. But apparently, there was a party in someone's honor on a fairly regular basis in this place. To really understand the way things work at the Playboy mansion, there are observations one can make and basically get the lay of the land. There is a large "public" area, where photographers are overtly visible and a video presence was obvious. The security detail was in full view as well. And all by design. If you did anything outrageous or stupid in these environs, then you were due the punishment received, whether it be from the Playboy staff, the media, or the police. There was almost nothing of a sexual nature that happened in these areas, but the scenery was quite spectacular. The second "section" of the mansion is what I would call "semi-private". These areas are restricted either by credentialing checkpoints with key code access, casually dressed but none the less obvious "guest relations" (read: security) staff, or both. What was restricted was the access to these areas. What was still obvious was that movement in this section of the mansion was being carefully monitored and probably recorded as well. It was kinda spooky, and a couple of the guys quoted lines from "Spy vs. Spy", but I understood. Mr. Hefner and his sexy minions had a tremendous "asset" to protect, and were being diligent about that task. We were led into a large, plush conference room that had a full bar (including bartender), a small buffet, lounge chairs and sofas lining the walls, and a conference table that could seat about two dozen or so comfortably in nice fully adjustable leather conference chairs. There were framed covers of the magazine on two of the walls. They had all been autographed and addressed to HH.

When they asked Mike how many would be in the party, he told them "about twenty". The public relations folks balked and said there was no way that there could be that many people in the room for the interview process and photo shoot. Just too many folks. There were only five "band" members. And Mike. Not more than a dozen folks max. Interestingly, none of the guys wanted to bring their current female companions. Expected behavior from Scotty and Eric. Greg's wife Patty simply didn't want to come, and I think R.L. wanted to make sure his extra guest got to be someone in the family. Of course Leah went with me. And we couldn't torture Tate by not allowing him to come along – with a fairly stern monolog from Mike on the way over. One mistake on the big stage and disaster would be inevitable – for all of us. Then we went back to the PR

## Long Live Rock And Roll

folks and said that Pee-Tee and Scott Silversteen the photographer shouldn't be counted as part of the "party". They were in the room doing their jobs. At first they said no, but before Mike could call back to revisit the interview terms, someone called from the mansion to say that twenty would be fine – and that we were expected to stay for dinner. I think there ended up being seventeen of us in the party. It was a shrew move on the part of the Playboy folks, who know how to throw a party with the best of them. Adjacent to the conference room was another room about the same size that had been set up with tables for dining, another bar, and wait staff. A lounge area had also been set up around the bar with sofas and televisions. There was a stereo playing in the background. And there were a few "bunnies" in the room as well, serving as wait staff. All but eight of us left the conference room. Pee-Tee's job had just gotten twice as hard in the first five minutes. But the interview went fairly quickly, and the photo shoot rather low key. We mostly talked about the current record, the upcoming tour, life on the road, and the craziness that is Los Angeles. Pop-Op was still something that we only discussed internally at this point. The band was not yet fully committed. After the business of the day was taken care of, the entire group retired to dinner and drinks. Even though the mood was relaxed and rather subdued, you could still sense that there were plenty of eyes and ears keeping the scene under observation. And they were probably well equipped to mobilize if any issues arose.

I sat down to a gin and tonic and a small plate of Italian meatballs. Others were already partaking in full meals. There were lots of wine bottles emptied and quite a few pounds of steak grilled that evening. Apparently the chef had been instructed to offer anything that anyone cared to eat. They had some "recommendations" that all looked incredible. Spinach and garlic stuffed pork chops, gigantic rib eye steaks, stone crab flown in from Alaska. Lots of people ordering the rib eye. I heard the girls say something about salad. Then a request for spaghetti. I just had a T-Bone, medium rare, with a baked potato – loaded. A wonderful spinach salad for starters and a couple of glasses of Cabernet Sauvignon with the steak. Dinner for a king – and the perfect meal for the great grandson of a dairy farmer. There were a couple of Playboy management team members present, but none partook in dinner.

Along with the wait staff in bunny outfits, there were several other "maidens of the manor" who joined the party after dinner had been served. All were very beautiful women. Most were there to do their job – which was to entertain the guests. There were boundaries, but they were mostly concerned with the safety of all involved. Whatever happened between consenting adults was not a topic for discussion or judgment. Which leads us into the third section of the mansion, of which I do not have first hand knowledge, but there are some in the band who can verify this account. There are private rooms that a guest may "check in" to much like a motel room. They are very nice and supplied with a fair quantity of liquid libations and other assorted toys and treats. Some of the staff have their own private rooms in this area, where they may entertain, sleep, or prepare for work.

## Long Live Rock And Roll

You have to be escorted into this area by a management employee, and a liability agreement is signed by all parties prior to entering.

Scott was the first to be obvious by his absence. Someone asked about taking a picture with the band, and then it was realized that the entire “band” was no longer in the room. A week or so later, this event was enshrined by the “Naughtyman” – he had the simple phrase “Miss September” tattooed onto his left shoulder. To this day Eric swears he left with the best looking woman in the room, and that she was one of the kitchen staff. The mansion sent us a bill for some damage done to a mini fridge in the room Eric occupied that evening. I told the CPA’s not to even ask, just write the check. After dinner and a discussion with Scott Silverstein about a cover shoot for the new record, I went across the room and sat down next to Leah. She introduced me to the young lady she was talking to, whose name was Charlotte. Charlotte Kemp was Miss December, 1982. She had the same color hair and basic facial features that Leah had. They could have passed for cousins. When Charlotte excused herself to check on her schedule for the following day, I told Leah that she should ask if Charlotte was interested in doing the both of us. Got to keep the hopes for that three way alive, you know. In reality what happened was that Charlotte and Leah had been talking about casting for videos and Pop-Op. They were trying to arrange a lunch meeting to discuss some ideas. Charlotte would become an integral part of the casting operation for video models. Oh yes, and I almost forgot. Steph hooked up with one of the pool boys from the mansion and spent the weekend – in his apartment in Thousand Oaks. But to this day she will always use that encounter in any game of “can you top this”. It was stupid, but funny as well. Mike would walk into the studio and say that we had a meeting with the one of the producers at MTV about their new “Unplugged” series, and Steph would say, as if on cue, “yeah but I slept with a pool boy from the Playboy Mansion.”

Almost from the moment we landed on our return flight from Europe in 1981, Stephanie has been a permanent fixture within our entourage. She doesn’t have a “job”, although she knows a lot about what goes on backstage and can be an asset when situations need detail and assessment. She isn’t listed on any of the band manifests or booking information, but she always has a room and a seat on the plane. She’s had sex with every member of the band except Greg, probably most of the crew, and a fair number of the paying customers. I’m certain Leah hands her spending money. But I don’t care. Steph has logged enough miles with the band to be an insider. She and Leah have a bond that will always help keep their lives balanced, and I look at that as a good thing for my relationship with Leah. Stephanie could be something in Leah’s life that I could not – a childhood friend. And I think it made Leah’s folks feel better about things too, at least in the early days.

My relationship with Steph, and the dynamics between Stephanie, Leah and I are unorthodox to say the least. I’ve probably had sex with Steph a couple dozen times. Always when she approaches me, and always with Leah’s consent. It’s

## Long Live Rock And Roll

not so much permission as a mandate. Not only behavior that is expected, but also desired. For whatever reason, the balance of power in our relationship is in part maintained by Leah's expectation of aberrant behavior on my part. It was strange the first couple of times it happened and I even approached Leah to find out why all of the sudden Steph was aggressively hitting on me. The behavior seemed to please rather than upset her, and until she told me I would have never guessed – Steph was asking Leah for permission in advance. After the second time, I asked a few more questions. I was reminded of two realities: First, that I had made love to Stephanie BEFORE I made love to Leah, and secondly and more importantly, Leah whole heartedly believed that in some ways Stephanie loved me more that she did – and maybe deserved a little “gravy”. Who was I to argue with logic like that?

Interestingly, Stephanie and Tate also have what I would call an “arrangement”. They are not a “couple” or “together”, but often times at the end of the evening when neither has arranged a better offer they end up in each others company for the night. Neither will admit it, but there is some destiny at work here I think.

The cartage company employees that were now in charge of the transportation for our tour were nothing but profession on the road. We had a few issues with the folks in California who where providing town car services and delivering equipment. Mostly drivers trying to sell drugs to their passengers, or pieces of equipment that were “missing” when initial deliveries were made, only to be later “found” once we inquired. I guess they thought we had so much stuff that we wouldn't check. Pee-Tee had a private security service follow the ground transportation for about a week while we were in the Midwest, and they didn't see a single irregularity. We just chalked it up to the notion that the “small time” folks like Ace Trucking needed the additional scam or hustle to get by. There was big money in what we were doing now, and possibilities ahead for even greater usage of their services with the advent of Pop-Op. They didn't want to screw that up.

Back in the early days in Houston, R.L. had a girl who was a friend of his sister's and was always hanging around. She loved “Rowdy” as she called him – a nickname from their youth. R.L. created a very interesting and odd relationship with Alicia. Two out of every three days, he ignored her. I mean literally disavowed her existence. On day three he was very attentive and attached. That was the day they had sex. R.L. somehow came to the rationalization that he needed sex every three days. And for the best part of a year, Alicia was a willing and subservient participant. At some point she just went away. Not a mention from R.L. or anyone else about where she was or what she was doing. And our lives moved on.

We had just played a sold out show in Indianapolis at Market Square Arena and landed in Columbus for the next night's show. I decided that I wanted pizza, and with Pee-Tee sped off in search of Canadian bacon, black olives and mushrooms.

## Long Live Rock And Roll

We had only gone a few blocks when I spied a Pizza Hut on the right side of the street. We pulled in and Pee-Tee went inside to order. Leah and I got out of the car, and I lit up a cigarette. A couple of customers went in and out, as well as a delivery boy. A red compact car pulled into the space next to us and a woman with a young boy got out. I looked – and then looked again. I recognized this woman, but from where. Then the light bulb went off. And then I looked at the boy. Rusty red hair and freckles. One of his front teeth was missing. He was a dead ringer for R.L. Chambers. The woman was Alicia. I approached her and quizzically called her name. She looked at me and I saw a sea of disbelief wash across her eyes. She stood frozen like a statue. As I approached, she pulled her son to her side. After a few brief words, it just blurted out of my mouth – “does R.L. know ???”. There was no reason to argue or attempt to look beyond the facts. This boy, all of about four years old, had to be R.L.’s son. The answer was no (which of course I knew already). Alicia started talking very fast and making little sense. Something about what was best for her and the boy, and how her life was stable now. She didn’t want to mess any of that up. And she asked me something that I could not promise – to not tell R.L. About that time Pee-Tee came out and announced that the pizzas would take about twenty minutes. He’d never met Alicia before (neither had Leah for that matter). But it was only a matter of seconds before the ex-state trooper had figured out this little riddle. His trained eye immediately recognized the father’s jaw line in the boy’s face. And the tension in the air. I was ready to have Pee-Tee throw them into the back seat of the car and haul us all back to the hotel to sort this out with R.L. Alicia wasn’t about to subject herself and her son to that confrontation. Leah and Pee-Tee searched for middle ground.

The boy’s name was Randy. Leah talked with him while I was attempting to reason with Alicia and Pee-Tee was making “arrangements”. Randy told Leah that he was from Texas, but his mommy had to move to Ohio so she could make enough money for them to have a house with a yard and a sandbox. He liked to watch Bert and Ernie, and he liked his “beep-beeps” (toy cars and trucks as Leah was shown when Randy produced a small dump truck from his backpack). He also told her that his daddy was a long, tall Texas cowboy and momma said he was off working in the rodeo. I had to chuckle at the irony, the story wasn’t all that far from the truth.

We took Alicia and Randy back to the hotel and got them a room on the first floor near an exit. One of the hotel employees was waiting with the room keys and another was holding the service door in the back of the hotel closest to the room. Pee-Tee didn’t miss a trick. He quickly had them both in the room, and a Muppets video playing on the TV. Juice and snacks and toys. He was offering Alicia a drink when I looked at her and turned around to leave the room. She knew I was headed straight to R.L. I knew she would probably need that drink.

R.L. wasn’t all that upset at the news. It took a little while for us to have our conversation, as when I got to his room, he was entertaining a guest. I told him

## Long Live Rock And Roll

I'd either be in mine and Leah's room or across the hall in Mike's. About thirty minutes later he arrived, freshly showered. In that half hour I had talked with both Mike and the Judge, and had called down to the room and chatted with Leah as well. All was calm and they were eating the pizza. He wasn't pissed she'd had a baby, but he was pissed that she (or somebody) hadn't told him. I had prearranged with Mike to have R.L.'s sister nearby within a few minutes, and partially briefed, Kelly and Jerry entered the room and equalized the situation. R.L.'s first response to his sister was to lash out that she "must have known", an allegation that both Kelly and her husband denied more than once. He settled down when she asked if he had seen the boy. His response was a gruff "not yet", but the softening in his face and eyes was noticeable. This was going to take a little time, but it was going to be alright.

After playing the following night in Columbus, we were leaving right after the show on a flight to Detroit. Tonight wasn't the right answer, and I didn't want to make Alicia feel like we were holding her hostage until the next day, so I had Mike instruct Pee-Tee to offer to drive them home, or follow them if Alicia wanted to take her car (which he had arranged to have moved from the Pizza Hut parking lot to the hotel). It was suggested that she might want to go home and get a few things and come back to the hotel room for the night. The room was already paid for, and Randy could take a dip in the pool if he wanted. Room service was available and Alicia could just run a tab - it would be taken care of. R.L. was going to see them mid-morning the next day. After waffling a couple of times, Alicia finally decided to accept that offer. Randy put his swim trunks on while still at the house.

The meeting went smoothly from my perspective. R.L. was cool with Alicia, but warmed immediately upon seeing Randy. There was no sense trying to tell the boy that R.L. was an uncle or something. He just looked too damn much like his daddy. Leah and I had talked the night before about making sure that Alicia and Randy were taken care of regardless of the next morning's outcome. We brought Pee-Tee and Mike into the conversation early the next day, and we were set. But it was all overkill on our part. Right after breakfast R.L. had a private conversation with Mike, who then arranged to have Alicia's rent paid for the next six months, and a bank account was set up for the boy. Kelly was the only one who was caught in the middle. Alicia tried to convince her and Jerry to help them disappear. Kelly wouldn't do it. Jerry informed them both that with Pee-Tee Brown around, that notion would be next to impossible to accomplish. Kelly didn't know about the boy, but had her suspicions. She had called Alicia's stepmom after we hadn't seen her for about a week (R.L. never said a word). She claimed to know neither Alicia's whereabouts nor her circumstances. Kelly wished now that she had pressed the issue a little harder. All she could do now was advise Alicia to relax. R.L. wouldn't make a scene in front of the boy.

We headed off to Detroit the next morning, and then on to Chicago, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis. We had issues in Milwaukee, and Eric very nearly ended up in

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jail. It's a quick flight to Milwaukee from Chicago, and we went up right after the show and got a good night's sleep. The next day we all went to lunch at a seafood place down on the Lake Michigan shore that my local friends Jarvis and Maria had suggested. Everything was going fine until Eric started complaining about something in his meal. First, the waiter tried to resolve the situation, then the owner of the restaurant. With each new encounter, Eric got louder and more agitated. Finally, he reached down and grabbed the chair he had been sitting in, twirled around in a three hundred and sixty degree circle and flung the chair with all his might. It went right through a plate glass window and into Lake Michigan. Pee-Tee went to the manager immediately, but it was too late; one of the employees had already called the Milwaukee police. When they arrived, the police were hell bent on locking Eric up. Financial arrangements had already been made with the restaurant owner, but Milwaukee's finest were not deterred. It was one thing to resolve the issue of the window, but quite another to deal with the piece of furniture and broken glass that were now part of the lake. Pee-Tee talked with the officer in charge and it was agreed that Eric would turn himself in the following morning, and that some sort of restitution would be made regarding the lake. We got Eric in a car and back to the hotel. When he found out about the deal Pee-Tee had made on his behalf, he was furious again. First he threw a lamp, then the telephone, and finally an end table that somehow managed to get stuck in the wall. He was off the hook. I heard the commotion from down the hall, and saw Pee-Tee standing wearily in the doorway as I approached. He looked at me as if to ask what we should do next. I told him to close the door and post two security personnel outside. Eric would be OK, just give him some time to cool down. In parting, I added that if he tried to get out of the room or started breaking more shit to "shooting him with a fucking tranquilizer dart." Eric never once mentioned the incident. We wrote the local wildlife preservation society a \$25,000 check. All of the charges were dropped.

Our lives were changing at the speed of a 747 in mid flight. Pop-Op was about to be debuted, our records were climbing the charts, concerts were mostly sellouts, and life was very, very, VERY good. Leah was becoming a force within the operation, taking charge of backstage coordination while Simon managed things from the front. They were working very well together, and so far, we were exceptionally pleased with Simon. I knew Leah would be up for the task. The number of times she has disappointed me are few and far between. Mike and the financial team were doing an amazing job of running a highly functional business in a highly dysfunctional environment. Everyone in the band seemed to be taking things up a notch – "Getting with the Program" was what R.L. called it. Interestingly, I believe the stadium shows improved as a result of the preparations for a theater show. It was a release, and we were feeling young, alive, and free.

A quote I made on our second visit to The Late Show with David Letterman pretty much sums up the year: "Just when they think that they know you're gonna Zig, that's when you gotta Zag."