

The Martin Tielli Interview 23Aug2013
Part 4 of 4
By Darrin Cappe



D: Have you ever thought about doing albums with your brothers? Or are they not involved in music anymore?

M: They are all fully involved. They've proposed it. I've thought about it. It's too weird; families are creepy (laughing). It would be amazing harmonies though, strange. We have the same physical properties and they couldn't escape that in the past. It was like "you sound so much like the guy from the Rheostatics". Well...can't do anything else...what can you do?

D: How much do other musicians influence or impact what and how you play and write such as Neil Young and Bruce Cockburn?

M: Neil, Cockburn yeah 100%?

D: I was looking for a percentage answer so that's good.

M: Totally

D: What painters inspire you?

M: Andrew Wyeth, Vermeer...Andrew Wyeth is huge. George Mclean who's a wildlife artist from Grey County.

D: Did you study art?

M: Not really but periodically I did.



D: So no formal art training?

M: A little bit here and there but nothing really long term. They don't teach art properly in school anymore. They don't actually teach you how to paint, from what I've heard. I also hate artistic people so...(laughing). I got booted out of a Catholic high school and went to an alternative high school and it was for the most part SO fantastic, but it was also full of kids who thought they were poets and were into art for art's sake I guess, and I found them equally despicable as the most conservative people you would ever meet. Like poser poets, they are a dime a dozen, there are fucking thousands of them. They get booted out of normal society, which is so rife with Conservatism that they get booted out. They are in love with that, but they forget that they have to be GOOD or SAY something. It's dreadful. They're cartoons of what artists are. Artists don't smell like art. When I smell art I run. I smell art and "OH this is fucking

art, arhhh". I smell art and I'm out of here. Stinks like art! I'm probably guilty but I don't intend that. I don't want people to think that.

D: Well there is probably a difference in intent or motivation.

M: Traditionally artists are supposed to get to the crux of the matter and strip away the nonsense, not be into the presentation so much right? That's what makes Neil Young great; MADE him great.

D: When did Neil Young stop being great?

M: Um...1982.

D: I would give him up to 1989 cause he redeemed himself...maybe even 1992...

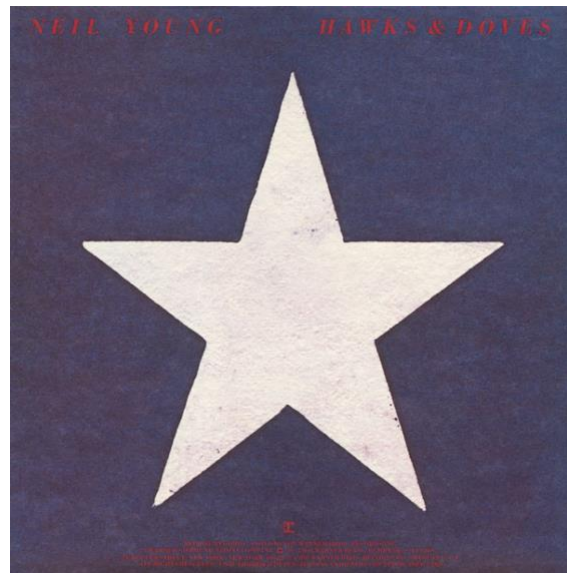
M: Oh he redeemed himself, he's still redeeming himself.

D: The last Neil Young album I thought was great was probably Sleeps With Angels, everything else after that I'm OK with. Ragged Glory, Sleeps With Angels were good albums.

M: Those are good but I've heard him do those before, although Sleeps With Angels was street. I like him at his weirdest. Ragged Glory was sort of like Rust Never Sleeps.

D: Hawks And Doves was what you picked as your favourite Neil Yong album.

M: Yeah well, no it's not my favourite, but it's this thing that people just forgot. It's fucking priceless. The first side is...I've stolen so many things from that first side, Digital Beach probably (Stupid Girl). I think I stole the whole feel off that first side. It's folk music but it's Psychedelic and it's just got this other worldly feeling that he never got before that or after. He's so high, he's out there. It's perfect. Then the other side is this tight little country rock stuff that's kind of right wing straight up...it's the opposite but the guitar is so good on that, chunky little fucking country guitars, so...the beginning to Union Man, the guitar on that is the best guitar I've ever heard (Martin then sounds out the intro riff to Union Man). If I could ever do that I'd fucking kill myself – it is the best! The ambience on it, everything about that sound is fucking choice.



D: Do you like selling paintings? Do you have a hard time selling them? I know you have sold a lot in the last couple of years.

M: Some. I have a hard time finishing them because they are never finished. There is always something you can do to make it better. I think it is a bit harder with paintings than music.

D: Do you feel you are getting rid of something that you will never have that you created?

M: Well a little bit but for the most part if I have...I've sold a lot of stuff where I never, even got a photograph or scan of it, that I regret. But if I have a scan of it I don't really care cause that's what I was doing, an image. The surface is pretty small percentage of that thing. So I would really regret it unless it was something that I really don't like and I sell some things that I just...somebody's going to like it. I can't believe what people like. People have liked drawings of mine that I despise, that I'm selling to actually get rid of...like I don't want this in my collection, and I have a shame collection. I have a shame file of art that I really don't like but it sort of has significance, but I have to keep it because it represents something. There is some information in it that I need for the future.

D: What do you wish that you had that you don't have?

M: Ed Robertson has the Whale Music album cover which I would kind of like, but I'm glad he has it, he likes it a lot. He paid me ok for it so he deserves it.



D: That's a pretty iconic image.

M: It's real nice in person. I had to get it back from him because we were doing a reprint for the vinyl.

D: How big is it?

M: It's not that big. It's pretty tiny, pretty detailed.

D: You did the Jacques Brel song on the new album.

M: Jacques Brel – do you know about him? He is a massive influence on North American popular music. Sinatra ripped him off over and over. His songs were rewritten for the North American market, translated, some with credit, most of them without, from the early 60s to 70s. He was just massively copied. They would take his songs and make the melodies kind of spiffier, but Jacques Brel is one of the best performers of all time.

D: You did the song on the album but you did it in English. Who did the translation on that?

M: I forget. I looked at about 5 or 6 English translations and made the best choice I thought from the bunch of them.

D: Why did you pick that song to do?

M: I kind of regret it because it is kind of an overdone song but it is just such a straight up perfect love song, horrible, fantastic song.

D: Well it fits in perfectly on the album. If you didn't know that it wasn't a cover it would sit perfectly as well. The style and feel of it is totally in tune with the album.

M: We had to do three Brel songs for Art of Time and I was already a longtime fan. That was the one that really worked out. I think I sang it for a month over and over and over and over in my head. I was walking around thinking that song all the time, for one performance of about 15 minutes on stage, 3 songs. But that was the song I wanted perfect because you can't do that



song unless you elevate it. It's like covering Elvis. Don't do that unless you can think of something else. You have to update it or live it or something. That was really hard and that may be my best live performance on tape right there. It was horrifying and excellent (laughing).

D: Is that a live take?

M: Oh yeah it was 100% live from the Glen Gould Theatre. That felt so good and one of those moments, so good it was recorded properly. There are thousands of those but they're not recorded. With the Rheos we had these perfect moments but only the people there would have known. That's fine and dandy but when you get one on tape and it is totally pristine, that should be on a record. That Neil Young idea; live records, it's the best idea. The first one Time Fades Away, he is ashamed of that record, and it is one of my

favourites. I put that up there with On The Beach, Tonight's The Night, Hawks and Doves. I think Hawks and Doves is now out on CD.

D: I think Time Fades Away and Journey Through The Past are not out yet.

M: Journey Through The Past I kind of understand, there's kind of nothing on that.

D: You did Time Fades Away.

M: Yeah with the Rheos. It's amazing, the thing that's on the internet of us doing Powderfinger...

We talk for a few minutes about having the 8 channel recordings of the Fall National Shows from 2003-2005.

M: I always think of doing the Zappa concept of taking live tapes and chopping them and fucking them up and overdubbing, bending things backwards. I think I proposed that to the Rheos guys. Let's not tour but let's do stuff. Send me shit and I'll send you shit but that's what everyone is doing now. Just futz with stuff and make it interesting. I do that.

D: You seem to have a lot of archive stuff.

M: Oh yeah, reams. I fuck with it and try to make it sound better.

D: When you sent me that version of Bobcaygeon I emailed you and said you should do a covers album. Part of it was that and part of it was having heard you do River and Farmer In The City and versions of Powderfinger, the Bruce Cockburn stuff and I thought you should have a covers album out there.

M: It would be fun.

D: Would you ever consider doing something like that?

M: Sure, yeah.

D: What is your favourite Rheostatics album and why?

M: Whale Music cause everything flowed right, simple, easy. Everybody was there and on the same page. There was a little bit of money but not too much money, and lots of people involved, which was nice.

D: There were more people involved in that than probably any other album of yours.

M: Yeah and on Introducing Happiness we kind of went to not so many people just to be different, but we didn't realize that that was pretty inspiring and that kind of dampened it a bit. Cause they were pretty close together; there wasn't much time between them. But Whale Music was that time you were talking about where everyone was congruous and having fun and silly, not too serious.

D: What do you think is your most misinterpreted song?

M: I'll answer with a question, "Why do hippies like me"? Because I've had flakes coming up to me saying stuff and I'm like, don't mistake me for that. I'm not a member of PETA. I'm not a poet or anything of that nature. Do not mistake me for someone that reveres art.

D: People think you ARE a poet.

M: That's their problem (laughing). I've written some good things, maybe...



D: Do you have a favourite song you've written if you had to pick one song?

M: Nah they are just all so good (laughing). Nooo. Like in a way my favourite ones are songs like Saskatchewan because I co-wrote it with Dave and I don't feel that much...there is just that little part that's not so invested in it. I'm not as neurotic about it. It just flows. There is nothing wrong with it. It is just a beautiful song. Shaved Head even though these days I've grown very anti-sentimental. That song may be I'm a little bit scared of now because it talks about dying in a very obvious way.

D: Is that song a true story?

M: Yeah but the metaphors I kind of...I don't know if I like them so much anymore. Ten years ago I would have said that was my best song. Digital Beach I like but it's a rip off (laughing). It's like part 2 of Stupid Girl that I wish Neil Young had written.

D: Do you have any unrealized musical goals?

M: To replace Eddie Van Halen in Van Halen (laughing).

D: You wrote three songs about Joey. Is there a story there?

M: Fuck yeah.

D: Is there a story you are willing to tell? Who the fuck is Joey?

M: He was this guy we wanted to put through the ringer. Like the puppet you just wanted to put through the tortures of life.

D: Is Joey a real person?

M: No...no....yeah! Like I said the name came from Joe Mohos. The song Fish Tailin' is all about our misadventures. When things got really out of control early on we were having way too much fun. It was really fun in the Melville days and before that with those guys, really hilarious, everybody was an adventurer and we were out to experiment and go crazy. But not in a yahoo kind of way, but it was pretty mental at the same time. It wasn't like we were disrupting anything but Jesus...if something presented itself there it was. It got scary especially when Joe Mohos got involved.

D: When you guys did 2067 did you...I guess Greatest Hits was the first album but Melville was kind of the first album. It was kind of like the first REAL Rheostatics album.

M: Greatest Hits sounded really horrible.

D: There is a lot of reverb on it. Were you aware at the time you did 2067 that you were kind of bookending this process with the first song on Melville being Record Body Count and the last bonus track on 2067 being a revised version it so to speak?

M: Yeah I don't know if I was aware of that, maybe Tim was aware of that. That was all Tim's idea. Maybe he was aware that was our last record. I don't think we were. I don't think that was the plan necessarily.

D: Are any of you aware of the fact that on the GSMW 1993 Live album that on the Outro of the music played after the end of the last song, that I mixed in the 2067 version of Record Body Count in the background as if it is the music playing in the club by the sound booth after the band left the stage? We've never told anybody and nobody noticed.

M: Cool (laughing).

D: So Record Body Count 2067 is present in Green Sprouts Music Week 1993 live album.

M: Morbidly (laughing). Awesome.

D: Who is Christopher Jane? Is it a real person?

M: It's me.

D: Christopher Jane is you? Really?

M: I used my brother John as a model for that drawing. That was a jacket that our parents bought all of us boys, like Simpson-Sears winter clearance, shit-o winter jacket that we all got and wore.

D: There is somebody on the CD back of Greatest Hits when it was reissued that posed in that position underneath a big sign.

M: That was me. I got my friend Dave Berman to take that picture.

D: What is Christopher Jane? Does it mean anything?

M: It's a random name and you know at the time being sort of non-gender specific was kind of funny and interesting and intentional, that he was a complete outsider character.

D: Kind of like a subdivisions type icon. That's how I view Christopher Jane.

M: Yeah kind of completely ordinary, lonely guy, thing.

D: What is the song Ship Of Fire about?

M: That song is so old. I think I wrote that when I was like 17. I wrote so many epic crazy, jazz, stuff before I was actually in bands; these really complex things that I would structure out.

D: We're you into progressive rock?



M: Not really. I thought I was inventing it kind of, by myself. I didn't have all of these examples but as soon as I heard prog rock I was like, Oh yeah I like this. Although I didn't like YES and I found Genesis annoying, not in retrospect, I've grown to love Genesis but by the time I was 17 I had discovered RUSH and I went MENTAL over RUSH. I can DO Lifeson. I studied the way he played guitar until I could play it, or get the gist of that style. I love his playing SO much. I actually had one of his guitars in my apartment for a couple of years which I gave back. I loved Folk, I loved everything...all good music especially if it was sincere. Even though I do like some phony pop music and good catchy shit if you could tell it was somehow sincere, like it's not fake, my first favourite music was 50s pop like Rockin' Robin and Chantilly Lace. When you are six years old it sounds great but then I started thinking that's pretty silly I want to hear songs about rocket ships. You know what I'm talking about...

D: Yeah but I still don't know what Ship Of Fire is about...

M: (laughing) It's about telling people that they are absolutely insignificant, don't you know. The Universe DOES NOT LOVE YOU. You are not unique.

D: This is an age old thing with you. This isn't a new thing you've come by.

M: If you look at nature and understand it you come to realize that there is nothing significant about you. Though you love yourself and other people, we are all insignificant. Grasp that for a second and you'll never be the same again. I think a few people could learn to understand that.

D: Monkeys Will Come, Elkdog, Redwing Blackbird, In My Second War...

M: Weird lost songs?

D: What happened to those songs?

M: Monkeys Will Come?

D: That was a great song...it led into The Fire I think originally.

M: Oh yeah at that one Canada Day show. The Fire I listened to recently and I thought "Wow, holy shit". It is one of those songs that was too ambitious for its own good. I'd like another hack at it.

D: That was a combo of you and Dave wasn't it?

M: Yeah it was a real heavy duty tete a tete. Really ambitious but I don't think what got on record was like quite...it really needed to be examined more and massaged a lot. It is really ambitious and kind of great. I liked it a lot. I just wanted to go Zappa on it. Take it into the studio and chop it up and find the way it was going to work because it is too nervous. It is

too party. Like Onilley's Strange Dream is almost that. It's almost too schizo for its own good. There is too much going on but I think overall it works. The Fire could have been that good but another week needed to be spent with it.

D: Do you think it was too straight in its execution?

M: No I think it was a premature birth.

D: Did you guys write a lot of stuff together?

M: Me and Dave? No it was more like he gave me songs and I'd run with it.

D: Did you collaborate much as a band or was it more people bringing in songs and working them out.



M: More people bringing in songs but really openly, really raw. Tim was a bit more specific but we'd get out the axe to make it something we could all play together to make it more dramatic. Pretty open but everybody writes their own things...wrote their own things. But you could add a chorus if you wanted. I probably added bridges and things to Tim's songs, instrumental bits. The song that would come would be nothing just acoustic.

D: We talked about if you thought the Rheostatics would ever get back together....

M: You never know with these guys. I mean I quit once before any of that happened and we got back together without even talking about it. I quit for a year after our first tour...second tour...third tour...and then Tim's professor had a retirement party and we got together to play

a few songs and it was like "hey ok", but things are not...It's probably not going to happen. I don't think so.

D: Do you have any desire to? If it never happened would you care?

M: Yeah I would care but I also wouldn't (laughing).

D: What would it take for you to want to do it again?

M: If the whole world became OK with smoking cigarettes and everyone had great ideas. But it's mostly if the whole world became OK with smoking cigarettes...and a MILLION Dollars.

D: Do you think about getting older and...nostalgia has a way of creeping in...you have an opinion about not wanting to be nostalgic personally but I think with a lot of bands who get back together there is a sense of burying the hatchet and just kind of like personally wanting to...I don't know what it is...I don't know what it is that drives bands to want to get back together. I'm not asking you to get back together. I think about that when I was into the Rheostatics which is so removed from what I could as a fan deal with being able to participate in, as the musicians get older as well, life as it goes on around you becomes far more complicated as far as what you want to invest into it as far as time and expectations. What would drive someone to want to do something to get back and revisit or re-ignite a component of their past has got to be something that is more self serving than just playing a bunch of songs you used to play together. I don't know what my question is...(both laughing)...you can just say Yes.

M: (pause) I agree (laughing). Which is the best kind of interview. I find rock and roll so silly these days; so embarrassing. It's nice but I can't really take it terribly seriously.

D: Do you think you are going to do more records? Back to the question of just doing singles from now on?

M: (laughing) Singles..

D: Being the component of your past that has lead to the most lucrative part of your life.

M: If I ever find that I start getting into fitness programs and quit smoking and gain a life positive attitude and decide getting up on stage and telling how people should live is my way of life...I can't think of anything less distasteful...absolutely disgusting.

D: Am I going to be out there in 10 years trying to find you guys like you guys found Stompin' Tom?

M: Kudos to Dave for that, holy crap. Dave had a big part of that to get him to play again. It was like 89 or something.

D: Do you have any other albums you are conceiving of at this point?

M: No not really, but 10 other ideas and tons of songs. But really I just love painting SO much. I LOVE painting. They last forever. They are quiet things that last forever.

End of Interview 5:00 AM



Interview conducted by Darrin Cappe August 23/24 2013