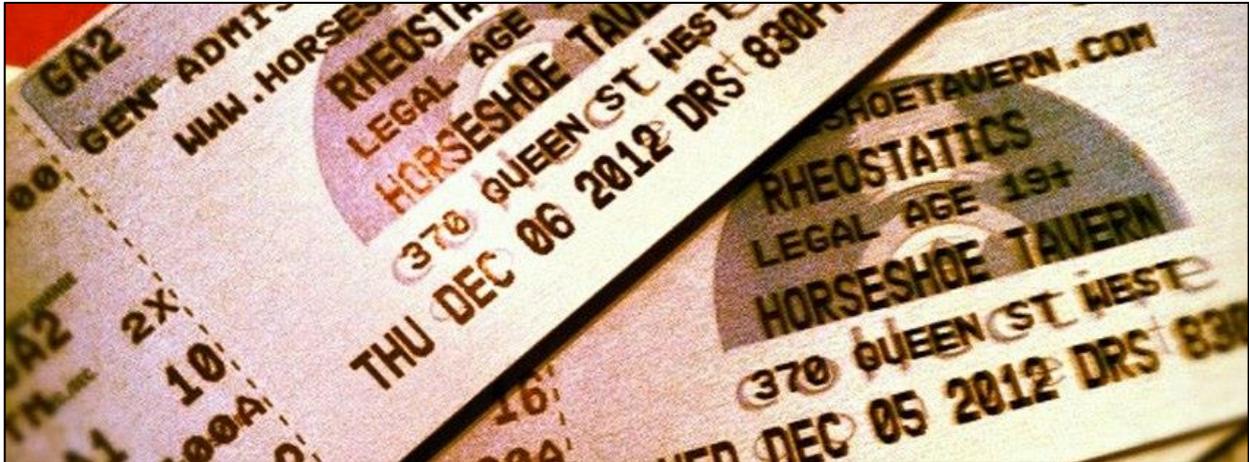


The Martin Tielli Interview 23Aug2013

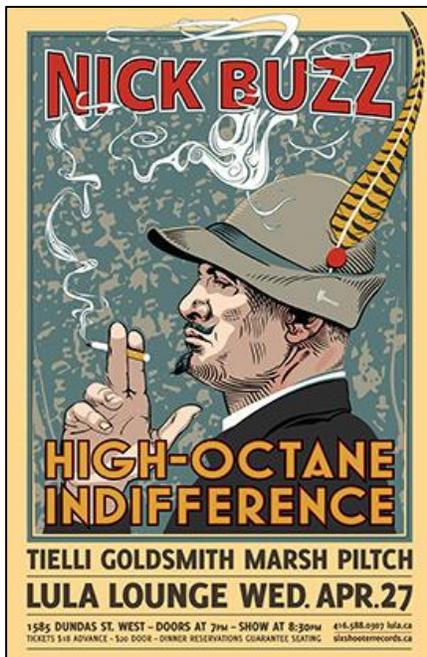
Part 3 of 4

By Darrin Cappe



After a short Break I ask Martin about the failed Rheos reunion in December 2012, which were cancelled several days prior. I ask him about his stage fright and if that was what the reason was for him backing out of the shows. Christine Peters mentions that the build up to the Lula Lounge shows were problematic for him as well.

M: My apologies to blowing out the Rheos reunion thing. There is more to it than that but there's more to everything. But there is no exaggeration or lies. If anything I'm playing it down. I've always had a real damn problem getting on stage. No problem being on stage necessarily, but living before being on stage is REALLY difficult.



C: With any gig he would go through three to five days, with the Nick Buzz ones too. You hadn't played live at that point for years.

D: You mean the 2010/2011 Lula Lounge shows.

M: Those were my last gigs. I was going to try to ease myself into it. Once I get out of practice...I mean when things were rolling with the Rheos and we were always playing it's not that big a deal. It's healthy fear. It's not a normal situation. You've got to be jacked up. But I get into a frame of mind. The thing I'm realizing with distance from it though is that I don't necessarily like my state of mind when I'm a performer. I have to change my whole metabolism. I have to become somebody I'm not in order to perform. It's not that I'm being phony; it's actually quite the opposite. In order to be honest, in order to be normal and natural, I have to overcome this

horrid fear I have of being in front of people. It's probably the most common fear people have. It's nothing unique at all.

D: But I think most people ONLY know you from that persona. They only know you as someone in front of the crowd. So to hear after seeing you perform for so many years and not having any idea that there may have been a problem there for YOU as far as a difficulty in getting up. When you're in the Rheos and playing on the road night after night you do not have to deal with the build up to every single show.

M: No it's sort of just rolling. You don't have a chance to let that kind of neurosis start creeping in. Even if it's weekly it is easy, everything is in place. I'd know we had a success and I don't need to worry so much next time, but every time it was a new big thing, even with the Rheos, I knew I had a couple of days to spend in some sort of state of mind that was really, really not good. But you live through that and you get on stage and it's over. Then you've got it down and you move on to the next one. The Rheos was an easier thing.

D: There is a collective involved where it wasn't all on you.

M: And we were good if somebody was off everybody would pick up the slack. We could do a night where somebody didn't do ANY of their songs.

D: Which comes back to what we were talking about earlier which is the essence of the collective nature of the band, the synergy of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.

M: It also made me lazy. It's easy being in a band like that.

D: On a lot of the earlier stuff I've heard, those earlier shows from that era, Dave Clark seemed to be leading the shows. He would talk in a way that when he left you and Dave....probably more Dave Bidini, ended up filling in on. But Clark seemed to be like the lead singer from the drum kit at times, leading the discussion or guiding the audience component of the discussion.

M: In a way he was practically the leader of the band pretty well. The one who would actually...like battles...huge battles. I think that is why I got hung up on the idea that if a band doesn't fight they are not a good band, because I do associate it with the best period of the Rheos. Because there were battles on stage

that stopped shows for 20 minutes or half an hour. I remember once Tim and I would just leave the stage for 40 minutes and getting a beer. Sitting in a little hole at the Railway Club in Vancouver in the band room and just waiting. We could kind of hear it had piped down. They were yelling into mics at each other on stage. We finally went back, sat down had a cigarette and waited for these

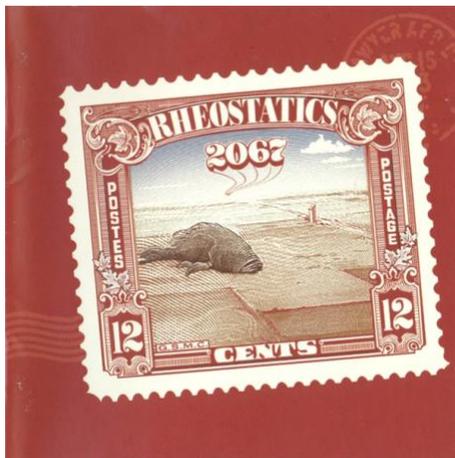
guys, Dave and Dave, to stop fighting. THE AUDIENCE STAYED! I mean the audience was probably like 23 people but kudos to those people. They probably got great shows. The shows after those big fights, not to sound like How I Met Your Mother, but it was like make up sex.



D: Maybe there is an element of that that draws the audience in as well. As uncomfortable as that might be, you become a participant in the event.

M: Yeah if I was at a club I'd be fucking riveted. I thought we were incredibly entertaining, especially at those points. You're watching real people fighting. What more do you want? That's why I love these guys, because they are SO uninhibited on stage and I am completely inhibited. Who else would I want to be with except somebody who can do something that I could never do? That's why I'm with Nick Buzz, because these guys can play things that I could never play. I go where people do what I can't do.

D: From the perspective of the last album then, you said you felt like at the point it was past...



M: I thought 2067 was a bit of a nice redemption because there is something good on that record.

D: I think a lot of people feel like that.

M: I think Tim's songs were....Tim stepped up to the plate. I wrote almost nothing.

D: No you did.

M: I wrote two songs...

D: Shack In The Cornfields, The Tarleks...

M: The Tarleks I like.

D: Tim's stuff on that album I think is great.

M: Making Progress is a beautiful song...

D: I think Here Comes the Image is one of the best songs he wrote and Marginalized...I think it is a great album. I agree there was an element of redemption to it. It felt like a respectable way to close out the band in hindsight.

M: I wish it was wilder but it was a decent album. I can't say I contributed much to that. There was one moment though we were doing harmonies and we just nailed something and it was fucking glorious. I don't even remember what song it was. It was just me and Mike doing it. If you soloed those vocals it was like WOW! It was perfect. I was like Queen! You should have heard it. Nobody will ever hear it. It's in there somewhere.

D: So obviously you guys had your break up and decided to do the last show at Massey Hall where you had some problems with your voice.

M: OH Jesus Christ! I went to this idiot doctor who was just such a jerk. An old friend of mine Michelle Rumball said "I can't believe you went to that guy". He had pictures of every celebrity in the world on his wall. He was someone who was known for singers with problems and he had a signed picture of Mick Jagger and all this shit on his walls. We went in and he was one of these doctors that just yelled at me for smoking and drinking. He put me on steroids, antibiotics and stuck something up my nose and down my pipes. That was an experience; that was fucking weird. After chastising me for smoking and being a bad person he said "well there is nothing wrong with your throat or vocal cords" which I knew. You've got this bug and you've got to get over it. Here are some antibiotics and some steroids to help the healing right now. None of it worked whatsoever. That was just like the worst serendipity; probably a bit due to stress but it was the worst scenario. I would have Whooping Cough with the Rheos and I would sing fine, go off mic and you know whooping cough how you would kind of puke/cough (imitating a retching/coughing sound). Then I'd get back on the mike and sing fine. That would be a week of the tour and that would subside and you'd sort of get better. I pushed through everything. Last gig of my fucking career...Laryngitis. LARYNGITIS! LARRY! If you put that in a story it would be cheesy.



D: So how do you reflect on that show? Have you seen it?

M: Yeah I've re-watched it a million times.

D: Does it upset you?

M: About the laryngitis?

D: No well I guess...

M: No I think that was good. It was good. I think we did that sweet. That was like Rheos at their best.

D: I agree I think it was great. Everybody was with you the whole time.

M: How could we not? If we couldn't rise to that occasion somebody sold it. There was no way. It was ridiculous. If anything I was trying to be as cold as possible so I didn't puke and meltdown. It was too emotional.

D: That was evident with everybody there. Tim even vocalized that "I'm just barely trying to hold on".

M: For Tim to say that is heavy.

D: And everybody knew what was going on and was there in the favour of the band and wanted to make it as great an experience as possible for everybody. For a big show like that I think you guys rose to maintaining the sentiment of a club show in a big venue and being able to keep the essence of what the band was all about in that environment with everything that was going on.



M: Yeah I was thinking about that a couple of months ago. I sat down and I watched it. There is some new CBC footage. I thought this would make a really good crux of a documentary. Certain parts of the show interspersed with the history of the band and such because this band will be absolutely forgotten in a couple of years.

D: I don't think that's the case. One thing I've always wanted to do was something either with music as a box set or visually as a documentary or a book...those are the kinds of things I think that as far as the Rheostatics go are SO highly deserved in the context of what I think was the importance of what you guys did, but also a document of you guys as a band.

M: I was thinking about how to get that in motion, something of that nature.

D: It's a lot of work.

M: Yeah...I know the best people; people that could do a really good job of that. Even better, Mercury Films, to do something better than just a standard rock documentary. It still has to be about .... I don't know...

D: When you look back on you guys as a band, do you see yourself as more important than you might have thought of yourself at the time? Because I think in the Canadian context you guys are a pretty important band.

M: I know we did shows that were so fucking good and nobody ever saw them, at a point before anyone really knew who we were at all. And I know that we never did that again. You can't replicate perfection. It happens. There were points where we were better than ever, and then everybody is going crazy over what we're doing and you're going, "you should have seen us LAST year. Holy shit man you think THAT was intense (laughing)". I don't know.

D: Do you feel that what you guys did as a band was important in Canadian music? In the development of what has gone on? I mean maybe it has and maybe it hasn't had an influence... I don't really know. I think it has because it means something to me and I know it means something to a lot of people but how do you feel in the context of that being the creator of a lot of what it is?

M: Well when you do something that is good and you see it and you know that it was good, it can only make you happy.

D: Are you proud of your time with them overall?

M: Overall? Yeah.

D: As a band do you think it should have stopped at some point when it didn't?

M: Yeah. It's kind of hard to say because there were even good points after that but really...(pause)...I've got two levels of that. When Dave Clark left we should have thrown in the towel firstly. After that, probably after the Group of 7. There was a good little period with Don that I thought was good. Not to denigrate when Mike was in the band cause he was as far as I was concerned, a saving grace.

D: He stepped into a difficult situation and helped maintain it for a period of time.

M: And did it SO well...

D: I remember those shows when Don was leaving and Dave saying "Does anyone know how to play drums?". He kind of hit the sentiment of what everyone was feeling, like what's going to happen with you guys. Are you going to be able to continue...



M: Drummers are SO important. To me they are the most important.

D: Being in a band now that has no drums (laughing). Maybe that's why you like Nick Buzz so much, because they don't have a drummer.

M: Well the no drummer mandate was from square one. But it was all bands have drummers. Why should all bands have drummers? As Dave Clark always said "the rhythm is always there...if I'm not keeping the tempo right it's up to you to keep the tempo", which is my favourite thing about that guy.

D: Until I read on the website that the band had no drummer, I never even thought about it.

C: You don't notice it do you?

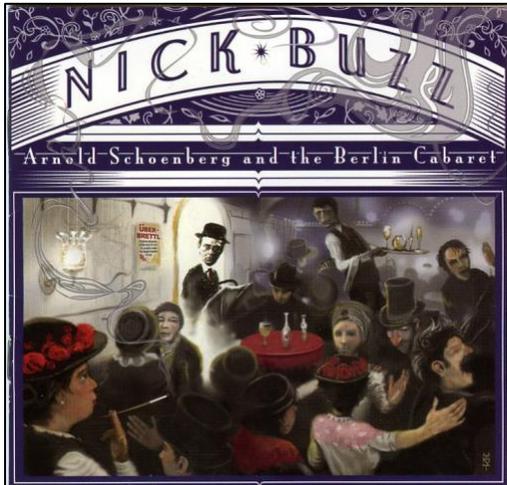
D: No. Listening to the new album there are drum beats but I never actually thought about the fact that...

M: There are more drums on the first record. We actually hired a guy...well he's actually a percussionist. There was a drum loop on one song.

D: What motivated you to do another Nick Buzz album at this time?

M: The Lula shows.

D: Were you worried about making sure there was a distinctive Nick Buzz sound on this record or is it innate with you four as players?



M: Yeah definitely innate. It is about as natural as you can imagine, nothing to think about. No plan, honestly. Easy!

D: What inspired the Schoenberg Cabarets?

M: That was an assignment by The Art of Time. Strange and weird and I only liked it afterwards. It is a weird thing.

D: It came off really well in the context of the Lula shows, having that piece in there. This Is Not My World sounds to me like a letter to people asking about the Rheostatics.

M: Excellent.

D: To me I read that as this is you saying I have to move forward and I'm not staying in the past. I don't know if that is what that song is about but that is what it meant to me. What is that song to you?

M: You know it's sort of I don't like this world. I hate it (laughing).

D: So it's not specifically about that.

M: It's also a letter of resignation. Not my world, I'm out. OUT! (laughing)

D: OK what do you mean by that?

M: If there is a way to actually not participate in this world I'm gonna try and find that.

D: So where do you see yourself seeking happiness?

M: Outside, just away from things.

D: Outside of the public realm?

M: Definitely outside of the public realm but even further if that's possible.

D: Do you want to move further away from here (Hamilton)?

M: Yeah. Ka-puss-ka-sing, that's near Ni-Pissing right? We played there. It was either Kapuskasing or Timmins where...

D: You guys were running around naked?

M: Yeah in February or something like that. I don't know how we were capable of that.

D: If You Go Away, Just Because, The Happy Matador I was talking earlier about how they sound like old school European folk almost, whereas some of the stuff is almost full Broadway productions, like Milchig which actually means The Milk in Yiddish by the way. I looked it up because I thought "what the fuck is Milchig?".

M: Well, I think it's the title of that song.

D: Is the title A Quiet Evening At Home a veiled reference to your preference of creating music over performance? How does the cover tie into this idea? Is it a caged monkey that tossed a trumpet or is it about to pick it up?

M: (laughing) I'm sure that image is tied into all this bullshit.

D: You told me earlier before we were recording that the actual picture itself was something that you had created a long time ago.



M: Yeah but the reason it resonates is for those...I'm not going to say...yeah sure...(laughing). Yeah I want to play but I can't...

D: Do you feel like a caged monkey (laughing)? Are you the monkey or are you the trumpet?

M: Definitely the ape.

D: You made a reference to the fact that it's actually a Miles Davis reference.

M: (laughing) That's what Hugh said when he saw it...that it looks like Miles Davis looking over his shoulder, which is really fucking funny.

D: Birds and Fish. Discuss! You got a lot of birds and a lot of fish.

M: If you know me, those are my major interests. Animals.

D: OK this is interesting – You have a lot of songs about water: Waterstriders, Ship On Fire, The Yachtsman, Onilley's Strange Dream, Sea Monkeys, Digital Beach, You Are A Treasure – a lot of water images and I was wondering if there was a reason you write about water.

M: Everybody likes water.

D: Are you aware of the fact that you have a lot of songs that have to do with boats and ships and water?

M: No I make a conscious attempt to not be aware of anything. I don't want to be aware of anything I do. I don't like to be thinking about it when I'm doing it or else generally it's not good, unless you are in the refine stages of things. But water is not a theme I've picked. But water is a pretty easy metaphor for so many things.

D: (laughing) And you have the soundtrack to Watermark coming out soon (at TIFF). What's that about?

M: It's beautiful holy crap! We'll it's about Water (laughing). Really! Yeah it's about water and ice form.

D: It seems atypical for you.

M: (laughing) In liquid form; how people relate to it. Jenn Baichwal and photographer Ed Burtynsky.

D: You've done work with them before.

M: This will be my fourth film with them. Act Of God, Payback and she shot me doing one of my solo songs in my apartment once. That was the first time I met them...From The Reel...a little short for TVO Ontario Arts Council.

D: We talked about moving out of the city...

M: Not enough...have I told you how fantastic that is? Not living in Toronto?

D: Are you guys (Nick Buzz) going to do any shows for this album?

M: No.

D: Do you have any interest in doing any shows at any point at this point?

M: Not unless I get over my problems.

D: Are you trying to? Are you interested?

M: I've been too busy painting, but I do want to get therapy and figure it out, the stage fright problem. I want to figure it out because I don't want to be just thinking I can't do it. I want to actually be able to do it and go "I actually don't want to do this". I don't know if it's my fear or...because I really do love playing music. Obviously I wouldn't have done it for this long, but I have to know it's not just because of my fear but at the same time I don't want to have to do it all the time. I don't want to have to go on tour again to know.

END OF PART 3

