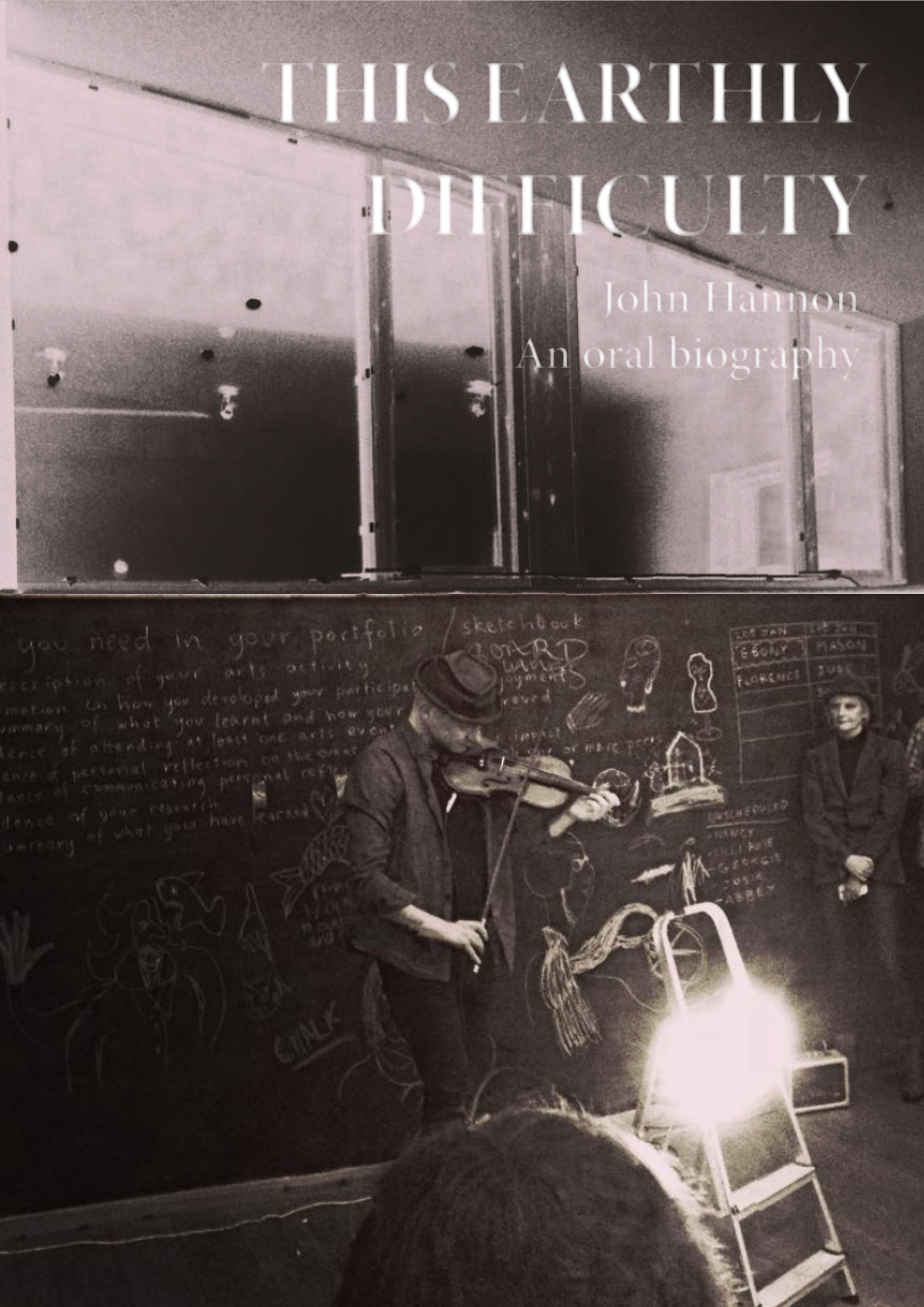
THIS EARTHLY DIFFICULTY

John Hannon

An oral biography





FOREWORD

The following is a work by and for many of those who knew and loved John Hannon. The idea for it grew organically and spontaneously from conversations with Jane Hannon and Rob Coleman who were my only contacts with John, along with Amy McKenny, after he had gone. It felt very important to me that John be remembered in a permanent and concrete form and this idea emerged, agreed to with Jane and encouraged by Rob (who suggested the idea of making contact with people and recording the conversations with them as an alternative to writing, which most people semed understandably averse to). This then became an 'oral' biography inspired by the desire to avert the intrusive narrative voice and, as far as possible, to capture the spoken voice of each contributor. This means faithfully transcribed, punctuation-only added, with the ungrammatical phrasings, misspoken words, factual innconsistencies and other verbal quirks we all have and makes every voice unique. The only exceptions are those who preferred to write about John than talk about him.

David Vick

That was the best thing with John. Whenever you went to see any band, Liberez, Understand, whatever - and I think most people would agree with me - they were watching John.

Jane Hannon

Definitely with John it was not the pleasure of performing, it was the pleasure of contributing to something. It was about people coming to see Liberez and having a good evening. Using his music as a kind of beacon for other decent people. Your music is this kind of distress signal: "Is there anyone out there?"

Rob Coleman

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John in his studio photo by Jane Hannon
Interviews conducted and transcribed by David Vick
Layout by Matthew Reay

CONTENTS

1 I Can Get You In: GREENSWARDS, HOCKLEY, ESSEX 1983-89 4

2 On the blocks: 54 FUNK & SKATEBOARDING 1988-89 6

3 In The Bag: 89-90 MEETING ROB COLEMAN, HARDCORE & STRAIGHT EDGE 10

4 Real Food At Last: UNDERSTAND, SKATING AND THE RUNTS 14

5. Southend: SOUTHEND AND GOING TO SHOWS 17

6 (Intro)Small Boy. FORMATIVE INFLUENCES, FIRST STEPS 1990-91 21

7. Screwtop Milkshake: 14 WARRIOR HOUSE 1994-99 and RAVENS COURT 1999-2019 26

8. Lightweight: 92-94 PEARL JAM AT THE ESPLANADE, CHRIS 'TANK' GILKS 31

9. Long Driving Contest: NORTH-EAST TOUR AND STAND OFF 33

10. Roules: CONSOLIDATION EP AND FIRST 7-INCH ON ARMED WITH ANGER 37

11. To Live By Drawing From A Stone: 1993-94 REHEARSING, RECORDING, SHOWS AND NAME-MAKING 38

12. Sentence: 1994 EAST WEST SIGNING 41

13. Bogdan: 1994 NEW YORK AND DON FURY 43

14. The Rudeness We Encounter: PLAYING THE PART 1994 47

15. Around For Nothing: 1995 CHRIS SHELDON, BURNING BUSHES AND BURNING BRIDGES 49

16. Chicken Scratch: END STRAIGHT-EDGE 51

17. Fleeced and Felched: END EAST WEST 52

18. One-Percenter: 1993-96 PETE WILKINS AND STERLING 54

19. This Is My Instrument: 1996-2000 MUSHROOM / NO RECORDING AND UNDERSTAND SECOND ALBUM ... 56

20. You Want The News...Well Here's The Blues: 1994-98 END UNDERSTAND 62

21. Ceiling Sniffing: 1994-98 WOE, FRITZ URSCHITZ AND FINDING HIS OWN THING 66

22. Reason Gets Paid Back: WOE, SOME RECORDS AND RIVAL SCHOOLS TOUR 71

23. Staircase: WOE INTO LIBEREZ I 84

24. Forget So That You May Be Forgotten: 2013-2020 LIBEREZ II 93

25. What's Mine Is Mine: 2000S-2020S NO RECORDINGS AND EAST LONDON 102

26. Way Through Vulnerability: JOHN HANNON ON HIS OWN 119

27. Here Is The Proof: JOHN HANNON AS SUCH

The story teller 122

DIY guy 125

The influencer 127

Lost in music 130

Essex man 133

Pillar of the community 135

The Artist 140

The Musician 145

John Hannon as such 147

28. John gone 154

The authors by themselves (unless*): 159

1

I Can Get You In:
GREENWARDS, HOCKLEY, ESSEX 1983-89

Jane Hannon: Growing up, I guess we always got on. He was the protective big brother, and we always played together but when I was 15 and he was about 17, that was when we started to socialise, I guess. Growing up in the village of Hockley, there was a big crowd of people very much led by Understand. There were lots of brothers and sisters: Tony and his brother, me and John, James and Tom, a few of us my age group and John's age group and there was a party in Hockley at James Reddick's, a friend of John. His parents had a lot of money. Everyone was talking about it and - I didn't know about this at the time - but my best friend, a guy named Stuart, was friends with James, so I got an invite to this party. So I was in the kitchen at home getting ready to go out and John's like: "Where're you going?" and he's: "What? How did YOU get an invite to that?" And I was like: "I dunno. I'm going with Stuart", and he was: "I can't believe this! I didn't get an invite to that". So that was it. I was in, and it felt like that was the turning point, and from my memory, we just all started to hang out.

John Hannon: Dominic and Hallam and Tony and Stuart and I we were all from a little village called Hockley in Essex. I met them when I was 11 years old. I had got into music, trying to play guitar. Dad was in a band in the 60s, taught me a few things. Not much though. He can't really play guitar.

Jane Hannon: John got his first acoustic guitar when he was about 9 years old, but I don't think he played it seriously until he was at Greensward. His first musical influence would have been our dad. Our dad was very much into music and used to be in a band when he was a teenager, so he definitely encouraged John and taught him what he knew – but I don't think that was very much! John quickly surpassed our dad in talent, and their tastes were no longer aligned as John started to form his first band. It was definitely a shared interest while John was a kid but as soon as he liked music my dad couldn't relate to. It became more of a wedge between them – at least when he was a teenager.

Stuart Quinnel: The first time I met John was at secondary school, Greensward, in around about must have been in the second or third year I think it was. Basketball and music was, I think, where we started. One of my first memories of John is that John played the bass guitar. That was my first introduction to John and music, and that he wanted to learn to play the guitar and we are in his room, being two young guys and, in a kind of twenty-second decision, I said: "Mate, if you wanna learn guitar, play the guitar, can I play the bass?" For me that was one of those weird moments when, not really thinking about a lifestyle or a future but two young guys being together and saying: "Well if you wanna do this and I wanna do that and we can do that together." And I followed John from those young days.
Paul McDermid: I went to the same school as John, Greensward in Hockley in Essex. I think John was 3 or 4 years older than me. I remember seeing John at school, I'd see him around. He lived in the road behind my road, he lived with his mum and dad. I lived with my mum and dad. So, walking home from school, we'd take a similar walk home, living very close to one another. I didn't know him at all, cos when I was first year he was probably fourth year. That's a big leap at that age. He was a cool looking dude, a handsome dude. I remember walking past him, there was an alleyway as you walk back to the house, I remember walking past him once. He had this cool haircut, this golden haircut. I remember being at Club Art in Southend on the Tuesday night, whatever, and I was talking to some girls and stuff, and I remember looking up and thinking: 'John's supercool', two or three girls around him.

Tony Maddocks: I was introduced to John at Greensward by Stuart Quinnel. We were in different classes from Dominic and John. Knew Stuart from football, sat together in French. They were getting into music at that time, and I was into swimming more than anything. That was my crowd. I was always into music as such but never thought of actually doing anything with it. Never a performer in that regard. Started hanging out with the wrong crowd and then drifted over towards this group of Stuart and Dominic and John, and that's

how I met him.

Stuart Quinnel: We played in some silly little bands, I think, just learning and stuff, and in school. And John never really liked to talk about this but one year we were in a school production and we were acting and the next year we were in the musical, in the pit, if you will (one year we were acting and the next year we were playing music) and I don't know how it came about but it was myself, John and Andy from Understand on drums and we were in the pit and we had the idea of getting a curry and eating it during the performance. Don't remember the performance but the one that we acted in was Dracula Spectacular. John would never like that to be known of course. Then we had this idea of sleeping at school one night, and we stayed one Friday night and just mucked around in the art rooms and then jumped out of the window in the morning and went and did our paper rounds.

Paul McDermid: Me, John and Kev on the roof of John's house in Harrogate Road in Hockley, I lived in Leamington Road right next to him and me and Kev getting through his window and then John. I think John had these baggy shorts on, dungaree shorts, he was a tall bugger wasn't he, and his nuts getting caught. One of my fondest memories, and he's going 'Me nuts, I've caught me nuts!' but he's laughing with it. We're all just cracking up! So many good memories. Me and John playing kerbsies in the street outside his house, with the basketball, stand on either side of the road and throw the basketball and if it hits the kerb, it bounces back and he was always really good at that.

James Reddick: So I guess the first time I met John was in the summer of 1990 through Tony Maddocks. Me and Tony had struck up a friendship some time before that. We both were swimmers at the local swimming club. The thing is, Tony was quite talented. He ended up getting a scholarship to swim in the US. I was at Greensward, Hallam was at Greensward, his younger brother, Nairn, was a bit involved in what we called the Hockley crew. Not all of us were from Hockley, but the Hockley and Southend crew. Nairn I knew very well. We were in the same class at Greensward, and Hallam I didn't know so well when I used to go and hang out with Nairn, when we were 12 or 13. I've lost touch with Nairn since we left school, but we were all gigging back then in 1990. So John, Stu, Andy and Dominic were all at Greensward but a year below me. I didn't really know them particularly well when I was at Greensward.

Matt Randall: I was first aware of John - I was trying to think back on this today - it was about 20-25 years ago. So I was first aware of John when I was at school, because Jane was going out with this group of skaters at school, Matt Harding, Steve Norris, Kev Reed – and they were going out with Jane, Alex and Leigh Child. John's a year older than me, and Jane had this mythical brother, who was in a band who was doing quite well. I remember going to a few house parties and seeing him there and he always come across as this beautiful silhouette in the room. He didn't age.



2

On the blocks:
54 FUNK & SKATEBOARDING 1988-89

John Hannon: When we were 14 or 15, I had already been playing with Stuart, just playing the kind of music you do when you can't play music. "Can we play this AC/DC riff? Yes, we can" and then play it all day in the garage until the neighbours bang on the door.

Jane Hannon: My dad converted our loft when we were at secondary school and that became the music room. That was when Dom played drums and John used to sing. Dom kept his drum kit in our loft as his mum and dad wouldn't let him play at home. There was always a bunch of kids in our loft playing music - that's how I remember it.

Tony Maddocks: We were always a tight knit group. John, Stuart and Dom were always very close, growing up, and I was the sort of the new guy who arrived. It was completely a new world for me. More artistic. John was always this incredible artist, very musical, and it just sort of clicked and he opened my eyes to a lot of things really. 14-16 years old. A really tight-knit group and that's when Understand were a school band called 54 Funk. John wouldn't want us to talk about it probably. Nothing to be embarrassed about. They were really like, y'know, Chilli Peppers kind of funk.

Paul McDermid: I didn't know John the musician then, I only knew John. Like I was quite good friends with Jane, she was a bit closer to my age. Sometimes I'd walk home with Jane from school, stuff like that, so I only knew John like that. I'd see him at school, see him with Stuart and with Dominic and Stuart Flint's sister, and I remember seeing them play in the school gym once at a lunchtime or an evening, and I remember looking through the door and seeing Dominic going for it and I could see John going for it.

Jane Hannon: Sometime during 1988/89 John played a gig at our School. He was 15 or 16 years old and was in a band with Dom Anderson, Stuart Quinnell and a girl from his class. They were playing a gig for the whole school, I'm not sure why or how it came about, but it was happening and we were all really excited. I was 13 years old and was sat on the floor of a packed school gym. A sea of white shirts and stripey ties all waiting to

Photo by James Reddick

hear the band. I think it was their first gig, a few covers and one original song. John on guitar and vocals, Dom on drums and Stuart on bass – the band would later evolve into Understand. I had always adored and looked up to my brother but that was the first time I'd seen him do his thing and I remember feeling so, so proud and thinking to myself that my brother was really bloody cool! This beautiful kid in his school uniform playing guitar and singing. From that point onwards I have never tired of watching him perform: from Greensward school, to countless gigs all over the country and beyond, to a solo performance in Brighton (the last time I saw him play) I have loved watching him, and have loved watching everyone else watching him too. All eyes on John.

James Reddick: There was one key moment where the people I mentioned - like Rob, Hallam, Jamie Stone and what was Understand - they weren't called Understand, they were called 54 Funk, a funk band - and they were quite influential. As I remember, my first meeting, and I took Jamie and Hallam and Rob there as well, and I kind of sensed it was a good idea to get these two groups together. So Dominic also knew Rob and Hallam quite well. Whether it was a gig or a rehearsal, it was at Greensward school and they had this stage and they played this little gig, as a I remember, that was a key moment as a kind of coming together.

Kev Hutchins: First met John? At school, Greensward. I actually didn't really know him but the first time I did know of him, when they did this school band in the school hall or something - and he always used to cringe when I mentioned it - that by all accounts sounded horrendous. I didn't see it, fortunately. I did meet him at basketball, Dominic and John. I was shorter than him, obviously, but didn't have any interaction with him other than that.

John Hannon: Dominic, from being little, was really into all kinds of music - metal and hardcore, Bad Brains, Minor Threat, Dead Kennedys. We were just hanging out with him. He was much more advanced at that age. He was the one going to London to buy records at shops like Shades, Rough Trade, Vinyl Solution. When we were 13 or 14, there was a collection of about 10 people who got into this thing of playing American hardcore. Those who had an instrument and even played a couple of chords got involved along with those who couldn't get the music thing together. The village we were from is a pretty small place in a two-to-three-year age range as well. It's a small collection of people but over a short period of time managed to do quite a lot in the time.

Bad Brains: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NAPYIMMbWQ*
Minor Threat: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOf6w59jz_g*
Dead Kennedys: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xf7GuuobUqI*

Tony Maddocks: Last year at school everyone was really close, we started going to gigs. I used to go and watch them rehearse at the old fire station in Hockley. Hired a room at the fire station. I just used to hang out, helping out. I was pretty much there at the beginning from their first shows. We all used to hang out in one of the art rooms at school and, like, converted the tables into a ping pong table and it was a really cool little hangout.

Kev Hutchins: When I met John, he told me about a demo and started playing me the band and I thought it sounded like Carter the Unstoppable Sex Machine or some terrible reference - which he really didn't like - but I had no idea what they were trying to do, y'know? But it was odd cos we went to some of their really early gigs and yet I had the impression that they had been playing gigs for years, but he would have been only 18 or 19 himself. But they hadn't. We were literally there right at the start, maybe we just missed one or two. They played at James Reddick's house, really early you know.

Dave Nevard: Where we met was where I usually met people for the first time in those days, which was a chance meeting of skateboarders. Underground car park in Southend called Farringdon where everyone went when it was raining. Mass of people from Hockley, Benfleet, Rayleigh, like a group of pack animals and we're back in the day when we're 18, 19 and John came down with the Hockley lot, and we got chatting. You make friends quickly, don't you, and I think from there on we stayed in contact with one another. This was the time when they were a big thing in Southend, a local band. So, we'd go up there. One of us had a car and we'd go up there. It's a bit different from how it is now when everyone's connected. So, yeah, met him through skateboarding first of all and obviously there was a music scene, and a famous little place called the Esplanade.

Paul McDermid: How I got to know John first was through skateboarding. And when I think of John. I have to think of Kevin Hutchins too. The three of us were thick as thieves. And my memories of John, I wasn't coming from a musical background, I was learning to play the drums, took lessons at school and that, but I skateboarded, Kevin skateboarded, and John was starting to get into skateboarding. Couldn't tell you when we first met. Might have been through his sister. So, it was always me, John and Kev Hutch, thick as thieves. And then I got to know Dominic and Understand, got to know the band. But when John wasn't rehearsing or doing his thing we'd be skateboarding together: me, Kev and John. Me and Kev had been into it for quite a long time, and I'd imagine that was the in to meet John.

James Reddick: Skateboarding as a topic is really important. How we met Paul McDermid and Kev Hutchins. Maybe this was because of the Beastie Boys. We always felt that link to that culture was core and important and we were genuinely interested in that, and I remember when me and John first got skateboards. I have to say, I was not very good. Paul and Kev were really good. From my perspective I was just happy to hang out with a skateboard and occasionally stand on it! But we had a lot of happy times over at Leigh skatepark and the Hockley skaters. We quickly met up with another lot from Rayleigh, Matt Harding and Tony Spackman and others and also the skaters from Southend. It was quite easy to link up when it came to going gigging or whatever

Paul McDermid: John never got seriously into it, we never went to any skateparks together, it was just in the street or on his ramp or go down to the sports centre at St Clements House down in Chalkwell. I've got memories of us going down to Adrian's music shop in Wickford, skating in the car park. John's main love was obviously music and this was just something for him on the side. But he was the only one in Understand who was into that and it felt like a nice thing that Kev and I and him had to ourselves. These days skateboarding is going to skateparks all day but that wasn't our thing, it was just in the street, practising tricks, going along the kerb. John had his own skate style, how he would stand, his stance, with his shoulder, I can't describe it, but I can picture it now, how he would hang his leading arm. It was never that we were going to be professional skateboarders. It was just a bit of fun, but it was nice sometimes because me and Kev had been doing it for a bit longer and if we could give John any pointers we did. But it was good times. Big Dickie jeans, checkered shirts, the wallet chain hanging down, Pumas. We'd see the Understand boys and hang around with them, but my fondest memories was just me Kev and John going skating.

Dave Nevard: Like the rest of us he had a few tricks, none of us were amazing. There were a few boys who you could see were imbued with different genetics, had a different DNA in their muscles or something. They'd fly around doing all the pro tricks but the rest of us were sort of average, level playing-field really. John was alright. He had a little mini-ramp built in his garden. His dad wasn't happy. I don't know if you've heard any of John's comedic stories about his dad at all? Almost like a Kray twin, this sort of gnarly, indestructible old Londoner, heavy duty, spoke with his fists first. John had a mini-ramp stuck in his garden and he wasn't too happy about that. "Why can't you just go down the pub like the rest of the blokes?" y'know? But yeah, that was amazing. John had a mini-ramp in his garden. We couldn't believe it.

Kev Hutchins: It was through Paul McDermid. He just said, "Do you want to come round to John's house?" John was interested in skateboarding, I think, cos we were skateboarding and I was "Yeah, sure" and that's how it came about. At that point I was only interested in skateboarding and had only a very vague idea about music. Anything that was on a skate video. Somehow actually buying record for me, was... we didn't have much money growing up, and I dunno, everything like that seemed a bit unobtainable for some reason. I just used to tape the music off the videos and things and listen to that. I didn't really know the names of the bands or anything. Some of the stuff I was listening to was pretty dreadful. I had a guitar and was trying to play Jimi Hendrix. This was the one thing I could do on tab, Foxy Lady, and the only other thing we had was Led Zeppelin. So me and my brothers used to mess about with that, but I wasn't very good, to say the least. And I remember going to John's and I could play that and also something rubbish. What was it? Oh yes, More Than Words by Extreme. I'd worked out how to pick these notes out and I don't know why - some guy at college really liked them, I think. And John was like: "Oh you can play that? That's cool" or "You know that song on that video? Have a listen to this." and then he picked up this Dinosaur Jr record and played Freak Scene, and

I was like: "No way, that's off of..." and it just went on from there really. He showed me how to play that, and I was: "Yeah, that's really easy."

Paul McDermid: My memories of him...living life, healthy, well, checkered shirt, Dickies and it was all about the Beastie Boys, got me into the Beastie Boys. Me, Kevin Hutch, John Hannon, woolly hats, Dickie jeans, Pumas, checkered shirts, Beastie Boys 'Check Your Head' all day long. He got me into so much music. I think the first album I ever owned was Freaky Stylee by Red Hot Chilli Peppers. That was through John. Any music I knew of or learned about was through John. Obviously, I got to know that wider scene through Understand and John and Dom, all that came about, Mr Bungle and Faith No More, all through John.

Kev Hutchins: Up until that point I hadn't really considered a lot of these bands. John started picking out all these records of all the videos we'd been watching and songs that we'd heard, and it was pretty mad: "So you've got all this stuff?" And he was always making tapes for us to listen to. You'd go round there, and he'd say: "I've got the album, here, you can take it." All the time you were taking records home with you. It was crazy, crazy. From that point it was, I dunno, whatever really, what he was into, and we'd just share you know, just started getting into that stuff.

John Hannon: Left school in 1989 when we were trying to put that band together. Never thought we could do it. Didn't even know anyone who had been in a band. All of our friends were like: "Who the hell do you think you are? You can't do this kind of thing." And I thought that as well. Everyone I have mentioned, this was people all doing like Guns and Roses covers, wasn't really a band. We had great aspirations to do a gig. We didn't even rehearse in a rehearsal studio. We rehearsed in school or the former fire station in Hockley, or people's garages and thought (a proper rehearsal studio) was in another world that we didn't have the right to yet.
Dominic was the drummer at first. He had bigger designs on what we were going to do, steered us as a group towards what he was into. At this stage I wasn't really into the music, it really went over my head, didn't get it, thought it was just a lot of noise and it was more about hanging out with these guys. They really seemed to have it together, knew what they were doing. We didn't really differentiate between hardcore and Napalm Death, thrash or Minor Threat. We didn't really register that these people were all coming from different perspectives, it was just all loud music. But one band that we all really liked was The Stupids. We made it our mission to try and track them down and to find all the old members just to say that we'd seen them and went off on all kinds of wild goose chases all over the country. Ticked them off one by one.

Rob Coleman: It started accidentally, cos we went to the Senseless Things once and Wolfie Retard was there and he denied being Wolfie Retard, which was hilarious. So then it was: "Seen Steve Snacks at a Sink show and seen Wolfie Retard at a Senseless Things show. Who else is there. Let's randomly track down the members. Never found Marty Tuff. Well, not til The Stupids reformed. So Steve Snax actually gave me his address. I went to see Sink and the Chemical People and I saw Steve there and we'd exchanged addresses or something. People just did that then. So a little while after the fact and then while we were in Brighton – don't know why, gone to see a band or something – while we're there we said: "Let's go and see if Steve Snax is in." And we knock on the door and someone answers and says: "Yeah?" and we say: "Is Steve there?" and he says: "Which Steve – White Steve or Black Steve?" Funny, I'd forgotten all about that. Could have gone the rest of my life and never, ever thought of it.

Stupids: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OoWWmLYl4bk*

Tony Maddocks: At the time they really got into skating. I was still into swimming, so I just used to hang out, didn't have much time to spend on skating, wasn't any good at skating, but the others were really into it, and the music started to snowball, and the skating just went kind of hand-in-hand with that style of music. Rob Coleman appeared, other musical influences infiltrated into our group.



3

In The Bag:
89-90 MEETING ROB COLEMAN, HARDCORE & STRAIGHT EDGE

John Hannon: Then in 1989-90 we met Rob Coleman. He came with a star aura because of this story that at 15 he had tried to get a gig with The Stupids. He'd called up Vinyl Solution just to find out when their next record was coming out. They said: "We don't know. They don't even have a guitarist at the moment," and he said: "Oh, maybe I could be a guitarist in The Stupids," and they went: "Oh, I dunno," and took his number. Eventually he got a call from Tommy Stupid and off he went to do this audition. I don't know if you can cast your mind back and think what your perception was like as a kid, but he was like: "That's it, I won't have to go to school anymore or get a job, I'm gonna be in The Stupids. They make records that are in shops, they must be millionaires or something." There were these gaps in our understanding of what it was like to be in an independent music band. You see them in Virgin Records next to, I dunno, Slayer and assume they live in the same world. One's a record, the other's a record, what's the difference?

Rob Coleman: So I was pursuing certain activities and trying things and I was a massive fan of The Stupids and was like: "I wanna be in The Stupids. That is what I wanna do. I want to be a guitar player in The Stupids." And I think I accidentally set things in motion. I didn't make it – but goddammit did I come close. And, in my defence, they never got another guitarist. They never did anything ever again. It's not like they chose someone else and went on to have a nice big career. That was kind of the end. And maybe auditioning me was their low point! "If this is where it's ended..." maybe Tom and Steve were: "We've officially bottomed out and this is what we're dealing with." I might have been the nail in the coffin. But I remember making this prediction to a friend of mine that I was going to be in The Stupids by next year, and him laughing and saying. "How are you gonna do that?" and I was just: "Watch this space." And then, as these things work out, a whole series of very strange unrelated events unfolded and then, yeah, it was the weirdest thing.

I remember when I got the phone call. I'd been at a friend's house and my parents called his house to say: "Can you come home?" And I thought: "Oh shit, what have I done." And when I got home, I said: "What's happened?" And my mum said: "Oh, Tommy Stupid called. He's gonna call back at 10 o'clock". 10.05 the phone rings and I'm just insanely nervous and he's like: "Tape's alright. You sound alright. We'll make a date and book a rehearsal."

I remember leaving school. I took my guitar to school and went straight from there on the train. It was in Old Street. Fuckin horrible. This was before it had been gentrified. I remember going out of Liverpool Street and

Photo by James Reddick

walking to Old Street and just feeling terrible. Really horrible. But just being in a room with my heroes for an hour or so... It probably didn't even take an hour, the songs were so short. No, I'd probably never been so happy. I was 15. Lied about my age and said I was 16.
It went alright but I wasn't good enough. I hadn't really got my chops down well enough. I was a bit too metally. I had sort of a metal style, like a bad version of a metal style that they didn't really need. I just wasn't really great. I was alright. The playing was good enough on the tape for them to consider that, but when we actually got in the room together I think was I was bit to metally-chuggay and a bit more at the thrash metal end of things than the frenetic punk thing they were and needed.
But it was definitely one of the highlights of my life. I was thinking the other day about days I could relive and how many happy days of your life would you like to relive again? That would probably be my first. That was the first truly great day of my life so far. And I thought: "This is it. I'm in!" And then I wasn't. Which probably just as well because, as John has said, I thought that once you have a record in HMV you're made. Everyone was on the same kind of income. Also, they had already done all their best parts. I would have just been the scrappy bit. The dude that everyone hated because I wasn't Ed or any of the others. None of those people. They would have made another record that sounded a bit like the last one, and it probably wouldn't have been the high point for them, just been a disappointment for me. But yeah it was unbelievable and just an indication that willing something can make it happen.

John Hannon: We all came from safe little homes in Hockley. There was the other story going on in Great Wakering. Not the kind of place you'd expect to breed hardcore music. Rob's parents had kind of left him. Not in a bad way, but because Rob was very mature for his age, they'd left him to go and live in Scotland. Left him in this house all on his own. He's 15-years-old, the family house and he invited all his friends round and they lived there and they formed a band, the periphery of them - the first Cynical Smile - in 1988. DIY crossover band.

Rob Coleman: Basically, my parents moved to Scotland around my sixteenth birthday. They bought the house in Scotland before they sold the house in Southend. My dad was working part of the time in England and also in Scotland while he worked off his notice and they lived up there but they didn't make me go with them. So, I was living on my own in this house which was pretty much empty because they had taken all the furniture with them. So I had a bed, some garden furniture, a tv and a microwave. And then some other friends moved in, and we started our first thrash band with a friend who lived in the same area as Dominic and John. And the next weird thing that happened was that a friend of mine whose dad - who was from Uganda - had just died and his mum went back to Uganda to take care of some business and left him a house. So we had two houses! He was a year older and had left school and I was just finishing school. So we were the two cool kids with two houses and then my parents sold the house, and I just moved in with him and pretty much the same people who had been living in my house gravitated to his house, so we had another thing going on there and it was quite a wild time to be like sixteen, seventeen, living on your own in a group of friends. I knew Dominic first.

John Hannon: But the big connection was, it was with Hallam who was from Hockley. He was two school years older than us. He was the singer in that band. We didn't know Hallam at that time but somehow Dominic got a cassette of them doing a gig in Southend and we used to play it like they were playing CBGBs or something, and we were like: "This guy, the same age as us and he's like playing a gig and he's really good" and we were full of awe for him. And then we met him, and it was: "Oh yeah, haha."

James Reddick: There was a coming together in the summer of 1990 and meeting John was a key moment for me. Quite a few years before that I had made friends with a guy called Jamie Stone, and he was a friend of mine growing up. Very much into electro and the Beastie Boys, when they turned up, B-boying and break dancing and stuff like that. Obviously, musically, we go through different things, but Jamie had been around in the Cynical Smile days, when those guys were playing. I wasn't involved in that episode. Jamie kind of introduced me to Rob, really, and Hallam Foster, who played with Tony in Above All.

Rob Coleman: John and the others came to see me and my band, and Hallam was in the band and later in Above All with Tony and Stand Off with John, and he was the singer in this band, Cynical Smile, and



Stand Off demo tape, photo by James Reddick

my friend Ed from Uganda was the drummer, I was the guitar player and that's how my connection with Hockley was cemented because I was friends with Hallam and then with Dominic and then with John, and we hit it off straight away. But he and Dominic and Stuart had their poppy rock band going on, very unusual band.

John Hannon: First time I met Rob he had this bandana, like Mike Muir would have worn, with a skull and crossbones on it and plaid shirt done up at the neck and looking like he's playing in a thrash band - and he's living in Great Wakering! And its like: who is this guy, who does he think he is? And he is like: "Yeah. I'm straight-edge." And we're like: "You're what?" And he said: "I don't drink, don't do drugs" and we were like: "Oh, that's weird." But after a bit of time we were like: "This is really cool, this guy's strange."

Tony Maddocks: Rob Coleman was a massive influence on the musical direction at this time. We had been all into the Chilli Peppers and heavy rock and Rob introduced us more to punk and hardcore elements.

Stuart Quinnel: James Reddick was a great help to us when we first started playing. His mum and dad were very positive: "Yeah, you wanna have the guys round, play some music?" They had quite a nice big shed. We did some shows there, did some recording down in the bottom of their garden. James's dad had quite a good job and he had a big Mercedes estate car, limousine, 9-seater, 250 TE or whatever it was and James could drive cos he was a year older than us, and we'd go to hardcore shows and turn up in this great big Mercedes car two in the boot, old school and you'd get in the boot-facing seats. James, who looked the youngest out of everyone, of all of us, driving.

James Reddick: My house featured quite a lot in our growing up years. I had a bit of a privileged upbringing, and my parents had this really lovely house in Hockley, and it backed onto woodland, and we had this garden which was like over an acre big. At the bottom of the garden was a summer house. I'm gonna call it The Shed. It was a place which featured quite a lot over the years because it was a place where it was out of earshot and eyeshot at the bottom of the garden. My parents were quite cool; they would let us hang out there. I remember John was like: "Oh yeah, this place is great!" I think already he could see potential. One thing about John, and why he was really key and so influential in the whole thing, was he just had amazing ideas, really. I think he probably looked and thought: "There's some good opportunity here." When I was getting to know the band and those guys, John had already been to my place and I remember we'd been out, maybe I'd been to see them rehearse at Maple Studios or something. We did this so many times afterwards, a blueprint for what we did afterwards. We went back to someone's house, John's place or my place. I remember this time going back to mine and being anxious because my parents were asleep and it's past 11 and we were downstairs in the living room, just chatting, a place to hang out, drinking tea. And John says, "James, you need to show them your garden and the shed" and I was like: "It's pitch black!" and I think I managed to find some torches, and we went down and that was the beginning really of many other things we organised. So those were the early days. The energy and the happiness of all being together. We organised a party at my parents' place, and it was supposed to be outside but the weather was terrible so they set up inside. The house was split up into three levels, and they set up on the middle level.

Rob Coleman: My first kids thrash metal band had wound down, and I knew Dominic and started to pursue this straight-edge thing. I didn't expect it to cost me as many friends as it did: "Hey, I'm not gonna drink, be vegetarian, not take any drugs, not gonna be whoring around at nightclubs, isn't this brilliant?" And this was met with: "Are you out of your mind, Coleman? This is supposed to be the best part of our lives!" I was like: "Trust me on this one, this is what you want to be doing." And I just found myself drifting away from my usual core of friends who seemed to be living more for that. John and his friends weren't necessarily straight-edge

as such but just less focused on that kind of stuff. I remember at a rehearsal an amp was misbehaving, and it was: "it must be on drugs" as an insult and I thought: this is good, they associate drugs with not necessarily being a good thing. I thought that was really quite cool.

John Hannon: I think it's a misconception about what that was all about. I can only give you my perspective of it, of what got me into it for that brief period that we were straight-edge. Growing up in Hockley, as we did, you get to that age of 16-17 and people are leaving school, and some people are doing this and some people are doing that. It's that idea of just repeating the patterns that the previous generation has done, going down the pub, and it's mostly about the social interaction that drinking alcohol entails and I think we got into it to annoy our parents and act superior to our friends. I think that's all it was. It becomes this instant little club that separates you from everyone else - as hardcore is as a scene. We never presented ourselves as a straight-edge band, cos we weren't, Stuart was never interested in that whatsoever. So that was like a chance to just wallow in it. It was meant to be hilarious. There was always this kind of slightly tongue in cheek element to it, if Rob has anything to do with it. Certainly, everything that Rob Coleman has had anything to do with. Even if you are not aware of the joke, it's there somewhere.

Paul McDermid: We all started getting into straight-edge, when we were 17, 18 when we should have been popping this, popping that, people saying: "Whaat?" We were saying, "No, thank you very much, I won't be drinking, I won't be having a good time, I will not be going to that nightclub." We were doing the exact opposite of it.

James Reddick: We were obviously - the straight-edge thing. I'm not going to overplay it - but we were always a group that didn't want to fit in with - this might be unfair - the Essex stereotype of growing up, going to those kinds of clubs and drinking. Just weren't into that kind of thing. Not necessarily because we wanted to be straight-edge but we were just looking for other things.

Tony Maddocks: Once I got with Rob and discovered straight-edge, I liked it. I mean, I never drank much as a kid anyway cos I was sporty. Always had swimming events at the weekend and I just remember Rob introducing the straight-edge punk thing to me and I was like - it gave me such a sense of identity. This is how much I was into it: when I lived with my parents, I came back from boarding school and John had started doing a bit of graffiti at the time, so I persuaded my mum to let me strip all the wallpaper off one wall of my room and he did a huge, massive, straight-edge mural on my wall. It was guy with a cap, shorts, big trainers on, giving it sort of like a cross between a hip-hop B-boy and with a massive X behind him. My parents looking at me and thinking what the hell is going on? I remember him spending the whole day doing it and whole house stinking of spray cans.

Walter Schrieffels: I was straight-edge, the music coming out of it was really good, the fashion, the whole package was very tight. You had a band like Minor Threat who were the best band in hardcore who were into it, and Youth of Today were probably the most well-known or most important. When all the kids in your town, and this is probably Southend, chavving out, drinking, chuffing paint or whatever and you're into this wild aggressive music and you're not doing all of those things, it's an awesome form of rebellion. You're dressing in a way that has these very distinct markers but would be confusing to the average person: "What? Are you like an American high-school person? What the hell is that?" And yet the music you listen to sounds aggressive and crazy, and hard to listen to: "Sounds like garbage, how does it sound good to you?" And yet you're dressed in this clean package. And all the people in your town are doing this, like normal stuff. So, if you're someone like John, its gonna have an appeal because you don't wanna be like all these normal idiots, cos you're not that. How you modestly differentiate yourself from that. Do I wear a top hat and a monocle and peacock around town to show that I'm different or do I tone it down and abstain from the behaviour and do it in that way? And that was the appeal for me too. I liked being in high school, into this crazy shit and have this wild alt society that I was a part of. But it was not based around drugs, not based around these sort of typical nihilistic ideas that you would associate with punk, like spitting on each other. No, it was about respect, about anti-racism. Even though it packaged almost like a right-wing-looking - the shaved head, cool sneakers and all this sort of crap - it read right-wing but, in fact, the values for the time were more left.



4

Real Food At Last:
UNDERSTAND, SKATING AND THE RUNTS

John Hannon: I always said that if anyone is going to become a cult leader it's going to be Rob. He's got this appeal; he knows how to win people over. We didn't really know what we were doing, playing some really bad music, and he was measured enough, and came along and tolerated that for a while but then he gently pushed us into this new path, into the hardcore thing.

Rob Coleman: Dominic and I had some kind of mutual friends and, y'know, into that kind of hardcore stuff. We'd been exchanging tapes and stuff and seeing each other at shows in Southend and started to go to shows in London together. We'd been to see Bad Brains and Faith No More and Gangrene, around '89 and then I joined Understand at the end of 1990 as second guitarist, by that point they had Fugazi and Mudhoney covers in their set, so in that room. Dominic was ahead of the game and was a bit more streamlined. I was a bit narrow.

Faith No More: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7dD-JJJytM***
Gangrene: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVFea_9Vexw***
Fugazi: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGJFWirQ3ks***
Mudhoney: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_nGsT_qFMBs***

John Hannon: So this was in about 1990 to 1991. We still had no idea what we were doing but we had our eye on this new goal. I really have no idea when the first gig would have been, but it would have been local. The name was Rob's idea. You have those horrible meetings, "What are we gonna call ourselves" and it's agreed by democracy. Rob just said: "I wanna call it Understand," and we were like: "Oh yeah, that's weird why would you want to call it like that?" But he insisted and we liked it and we followed his lead. Rob with Dominic was leading things.

Tony Maddocks: John and Jane's house was always the central meeting point. Just about every day I was round there, still at their dad's house in Hockley. He wasn't around much, at work. His mum was. John had a skate ramp in the garden, yeah, don't think his dad was too happy about it. That house was the main meeting point. That's where we spent a lot of our time. Don't remember rehearsing there. John's room was in the top. John was the nucleus, Rob lived in Southend. As much as Rob, he was the massive lynchpin.

Photo by James Reddick

Rob Coleman: We were really lucky with Andy because he had been playing with his mum and dad's function band since he was 14, all these classic rock standards, and while we were still learning he already had it all down, like in another league. Having a good drummer, you're halfway there. You can bluff everything else. The ace up our sleeves. It was just difficult to get him to play sometimes cos we weren't making any money, and he could get 50 quid for playing with his parents: "Can't make it guys, got a wedding over on Canvey Island."

James Reddick: Kevin and Paul had a little side band with John called The Runts. As I remember they were a bit like the Beastie Boys. Basically, if you remember the Beastie Boys' Check Your Head, it goes off into these little jams, kind of funky, jazzy, lounge music.

Beastie Boys: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djbD3rROa2Q*

Kev Hutchins: It was only upon meeting him, really, things started to happen. I had a guitar, Paul bought a drumkit off Dominic. He had that set up so we started messing about in his bedroom, just writing songs and it was only me, Paul and another guy, Mark, who was a skateboarder as well. We were just writing songs basically from listening to Understand, and I was like: "I can do these riffs". So, he'd show me a few barre chords or whatever and we'd write some songs. I remember one of them being called Suck Shit. Can you imagine how bad this sounds? Absolutely dreadful. John comes over one time, after finding out that we were doing this. He goes: „What's going on? Are you guys doing a band? Play us one of your songs". I say: „I've only got a couple of riffs. "And Paul says: "Play that one called Suck Shit." And all of a sudden John was really interested in this song. It was really like three chords, but it was his enthusiasm. And he was: "Let me play bass. You gotta let me play bass!" and I'm: "Why would you wanna do that?" But he was enthusiastic about things like that. His idea was that it was a skate band, y'know?" Never mind that we were terrible. And so that was The Runts.

Paul McDermid: I was in a band with him, again me Kev and John, called the Runts. Me, Kev and John on a Saturday. Kev lived local as well. The dedication of it. We'd put suits on as well. Don't know where they came from, must have been borrowed from our dads or whatever. How we'd have suits at that age. So I was probably 16 or 17. Put suits on cos that was the whole look of the Runts, set the drum kit up in John's lounge, get the guitars and the amps and he'd just rehearse, somebody would film us, we'd just film everything. He'd write all the songs; there was no vocals. I never knew what I was doing. John so did and he just carried us and that was all just meant to be a bit of fun. We were meant to have a gig once, but John decided last minute in the end not to do it, and I've always wondered why. Somebody did tell me, and I've forgotten but it was all good.

Kev Hutchins: We still used to spend a lot of time skateboarding. And we'd make videos, little comedy skits y'know? Paul's got them somewhere. And we were trying to do a video, even though we had no video edit, for some of the songs. One time John is trying to climb out of his window to get on the roof and got caught up completely crushing his nuts. We're all just creasing up while he does that. There was one point when we were round at Ben's - Ben and Si were Southend skaters - and decided to dress up in Ben's sister's clothes and go skateboarding. So, there's all this kind of stuff going on: skateboarding in dresses. Feels like it was before, I dunno, Jackass and all that. But it's all influenced by skate culture, videos that we watched, not as if we were doing anything original. Paul documented a lot of that, but I don't know if he's got it anymore. The idea was that we would put something together for a skate video, that was the kind of genesis of it. So, John, like being John:"Oh, I've just written these songs" and we're playing these songs all of a sudden and they were going to be part of like a skate video or something. It was never going to be a band, y'know. And John being John, we'd record the songs while we were playing them, and he'd put together this little cassette with a bit of art on it and a-hey - that's us! And all of a sudden it was a thing. But was never going to be. I think it was Jane's 18th birthday was coming up, and we were like: "Oh, we should play that. That'd be really good." Cos we were really into, like, the Beastie Boys had come out, Check Yer Head, and on that they had a lot of that sort of mix, a jazz-bar sort of sound. But in the end John was adamant that he didn't want to go somewhere where he was playing, so we didn't end up doing it.
So, we didn't end up doing that but me and John - there was another thing that he wanted to do. I'm trying to think who it was, but he had another connection with a guy at Slam City Skates. He had a label called Slam City, this guy, and he sort of put it to John about doing some music so someone could do some lyrics, sort

of hip hop, over the top of it. I remember driving up with John to some guy called Miles somewhere near Colchester and John had written a couple of songs. Miles was a really good drummer, and he'd shown me the bass line, and he was like: "We'll just work it out", and we practiced it there. So that was gonna be a thing, but I can't remember who it was for now.
I remember my car broke down on the way to Colchester, I had an old Morris, left it on the side of the road. Miles comes to get us cos we weren't far from his house and then I called my dad when we were there and told him where it was, but these directions were very vague. My dad turns up after about five hours of driving, and I remember John saying to me: "I can't believe how calm your dad was. If it was my dad, he would have been breaking me head." My dad was like super chilled: "Alright boys?". I remember a couple of times with John's dad, he was a bit lively. Definitely. I remember him leaving Jane and John to their own devices and going on holiday and leaving them a note: "If you do any damage to the house I'll break your heads." John was like: "Look at this!" I folded it up and put it in my wallet. I thought, I'm gonna keep that. His mum was so chilled, that's the funny thing.

Dave Nevard: There's just these incredibly blunt stories. His dad was the kind of bloke who thought you should eat raw meat with your bare hands and do weights. He had this shed full of weights that looked like they been made by Charlie Manson, lumps of brick and iron and God knows what, home-made dumbbells made out of lumps of metal and cement and all sorts of Christ knows what. Saw it once, an incredible load of contraptions. His dad was a very blunt man's man and there was John who was this sensitive artistic creative genius, so you can imagine the kind of - the clash. I mean, John was a vegetarian from quite an early age cos they were all into the whole straight edge thing. His dad used to leave these leaflets about, like public service leaflets - Meat to Live or something like that. That was the level of tact he was at - Meat to Live. He was just so blunt. He went to see John doing a gig once and he didn't know what sort of music John was into. And afterwards he: "Yeah, not bad son. At first when you started playing I thought you were shit but, yeah, it was alright by the end of the night, I didn't mind it." And John: "Oh thanks, Dad." He was just so abrasive, almost like a caveman. I got on alright with him. You could have a conversation with him, bloke to bloke, over a pint. Gammon, your red-faced, Sun-reading, fist fighting, and if you were kind of on that level you were fine with his dad but if it was anything arty, he was so blunt. "Did you see that play on BBC2?" and his eyes would just glaze over and you'd be written off.

Matt Randall: He'd talk about him and his dad liking Bruce Springsteen, I think that was the only common thing they had together.

David Vick: One of the several things we had in common was the usual adolescent embarrassment about our fathers when we were younger that didn't go away for a very long time. My dad was a real attention-seeker when we were growing up and I went around hiding in the corner at parties. John's dad was a big embarrassment to him, pretty old-school and not worried about it in the least, quite to the contrary, and John the complete opposite, liberal, artistic. He bought John his first guitar but apparently only saw John playing once, took him to see the Shadows and generally seemed to embarrass John at every opportunity with his (for John and Jane) rather crass mannerisms almost to the end. They are, aren't they, the dads? Love 'em or hate 'em. It's scary how they suddenly start to manifest themselves in you as you get older. And you've spent half your life cringing at the very thought of them and then you've become them! This was the stage I was at by then, but John was still on the way. This changed over the years we knew each other.

Tony Maddocks: At that age you are trying to find your identity, musical identity. I was more drawn to the guitar style of music. We had been all into the Chilli Peppers and heavy rock and Rob introduced us more to punk and hardcore elements. When school finished John went off to Southend Tech to do art, Stuart went off to work and the others to college to do A-levels. I went down to Devon to a sixth-form college to do my A-levels and carry on with my swimming career. There were two really good swim teams in the country that were boarding schools, and I went to one to carry on with my education and the swimming there. Our relationship then was with phone calls and letters. John, being the kind of thoughtful guy he was, he would be the one I was getting regular updates from - letters, compilation tapes - he really put himself out. Down in Devon no one was into that kind of thing, it was more rave, Manchester scene, Happy Mondays, Stone Roses thing and what I liked was different, kind of exclusive. No one else was into it. Gave me a bit of a swagger. I was a bit different. Couldn't buy that stuff down there, relying on compilation tapes the boys sent me.



5.

Southend:
SOUTHEND AND GOING TO SHOWS

Rob Coleman: One thing I really liked about The Stupids was that they were from Ipswich, which is for all intents and purposes similar to Southend. and it's almost like they'd inched into the world and captured something, like when it's medieval Europe and getting to America, and getting a new plant and bringing it back and cultivating it in your own country and suddenly you've got his whole new thing growing hat you're responsible for. They just planted something in Ipswich and it grew. And I was like: "I wanna do something like that in Southend and I wanna do to Southend what they did for Ipswich, That was like the most inspiring thing, that you could go somewhere, find something growing, cut yourself a piece off, plant it, look after it. And we kind of did that. If they'd been from London, I still would have liked them but it wouldn't have had the same effect. And if they'd been from America it wouldn't have mattered one way or the other. Because it was Ipswich it was like: that seems possible, someone's done that, we can maybe tr and do that.

You know what Southend is like - it's tiny. If you're not into that obvious mainstream thing then there's only about a hundred other interesting people in the whole town. There were only two or three places where you didn't have to wear a shirt, smart trousers and proper shoes to get in. You didn't want to be around people like that, behaving like that. It was tough. So it was no surprise that you ended up meeting the people you did get to meet, cos you were being funnelled into, like, two bars. Which is a great smalltown thing to have. It's perfect. If you were evenly distributed, you'd have never come across each other. Because of the way things were then, you couldn't avoid each other. That's also great because a small town can be far more open-minded. There's not an awful lot going on and you have to make a real effort to get something going on and that means interacting with people you might not necessarily choose to, but out of necessity. Anything that comes out of a small town is always made better by the fact that, you know, the bass player is into grindcore and the guitarist wants to be in Stereolab and the drummer just lives next door and you can play in his garage and out of that comes something great, whereas all those people, if they'd lived in a large city, would never have met and then only with like-minded people which is really boring and stereotyped. Living somewhere like Southend you get in touch with more interesting types of people, different kinds of interests. One week I went to see Cannibal Corpse one day and Stereolab on another and I wasn't the only one.

John was always interested in other bands and living in Southend you were never more than an hour away from London, not a bunch of country bumpkins, and seeing anyone you wanted to if you made the effort, and the record shops. So you had all the access to all this cool stuff in London, up the railway line, but on a day-to-

Photo by James Reddick

day basis you had this local homeliness. And it's a good place, Southend, because you are in a corner. You've got the sea on almost 180 degrees cos you've got the estuary going round. You don't go there by accident, no through traffic, there's nothing beyond it, it's a dead end, you can only go there. Not conventionally pretty, there's the mud with the tide and not much in the way of sandy beaches.

Cannibal Corpse: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VPlzvEP1DQ*
Stereolab: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ttq4RLTszWg*

James Reddick: A lot of the times we spent with just hanging out, and a few of us were lucky to have cars so getting about was easy. One place was Ali Baba's in York Road. Typical pizza and kebab shop. We were all vegetarian at the time so typically cheese and tomato pizza was somewhere to hang out. Terrible, but still. There were some key things like watching films and one key film was Repo Man and watched that a few times, weird cult film with the Circle Jerks. Me and John had rather an inane appreciation for US comedy like Weird Science and Revenge of the Nerds. And TV shows like The Word, Friday night staple of low budget trash. Go home after being out and watch that roll in. Rob and Tony were into In Bed with Me Dinner by Bob Mills with him showing video clips with a commentary - another staple piece of TV. So, Southend Bowling Alley. No Internet or social media and we had to phone around to co-ordinate everything, so the phone bill was a real problem with my dad. Spaghetti Junction was another place.

John Hannon: The other big thing for us at that time, when we first started putting on shows in Southend, there was no one, audience didn't exist in Southend, compared to today. What I was so impressed about when I saw Unite and Radon - that scene that came along - there was this audience which didn't exist for us at all. We used to lie about it, invite people who weren't really into the scene to make up the numbers and things like that. While in Tunbridge Wells, just across the Bridge, there was this real thriving scene which I forget how we got into, from going to gigs in London, I think. We met these guys from Tunbridge Wells, and they invited us down to play and we were like: "This is perfect. This is what we read about in fanzines from America. There is actually people who come out every week to go to these gigs and it was really diverse as well, like a proper punk club. There'd be like an old guy on the corner with a moustache and some crazy guy, like a real mix of people, oddbods, people who were really there for the music. We spent about a good two years going down there all the time to the point where people from Understand had girlfriends down there. It was like a real second home. The Rumble Club, that was the name of the place.

Radon: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUNsrLR8eqA*

Kev Hutchins: And then at Tunbridge Wells, we went down there. I just remember it being really small, the venue. Maybe I'm getting it confused with some of the other places we went to. There were some other bands, Angus Bagpipe I've got in my mind for some reason, Barry from Strength Alone, Joey Fat, a lot of these bands that they all seemed to know, were friends with. And I know with a lot of the gigs we went to in London they said: "Oh, this is the Tunbridge Wells crew." I get mixed up. Maybe I mean Harlow! But I'm sure we went to one of their shows there. Early doors Understand, I guess. They made a massive impression on me. Huge. They really opened my eyes. It's funny. I'd never even been to a gig before I met these guys.

Angus Bagpipe: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPyICaxGg9s*
Strength Alone: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVj6T2JG2_E*

James Reddick: Dominic was briefly at university in Brighton and actually before we even went there, we knew of this girl called Vique and a guy, Tone the Bone, who would always be at the same shows. There was this Brighton-based band called Fabric, really good, we went to quite a few of their shows. Understand played with them. One of the memorable places we used to go to was Tunbridge Wells. There was a venue there called the Rumble Club. We saw Green Day play there in '91. It was a very small place. It used to be on a Friday night, pile into the cars. There'd be a lot of phoning round and there'd be a convoy of four or five cars with the Southend crew, going through Dartford and then down to Tunbridge Wells to this club. There was a band called Angus Bagpipe, another was Couch Potatoes. Kev and Paul McDermid used to come along

as well. We were quite privileged in being near London and having that influence. Rob was key. Then Rage Against the Machine on The Word gig. Basically, the way it worked you went up there, and you might get in or you might not and we went up, and the Brighton guys were there, me, Tony, a guy called Barry and we all met up near the studios in London and queued.

Rob Coleman: The band A were friends of ours and Understand's manager later managed A too and Stuart and Dominic and I have all worked for them and Andy drummed on a tour when their drummer broke his arm and John played trumpet on one of their B-side, The funny thing is, long before we knew each other as a band, before we had a record deal or anything, Rage Against The Machine were on The Word and a whole load of us from Southend went up there and it all ended in total chaos and it's a big pigpile: Dominic's finishing the last line of the song and the last camera shot is of John on top surfing on people and the drummer from A said he watched that and thought: "That's the coolest looking guy I've ever seen" and went out the next day and bought the same outfit that John was wearing! So when we finally met A years later, I remember the drummer came out and he said: "I can't believe that's John! It's the coolest thing"

Rage Against the Machine: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAZGJUK7wfY*

Tony Maddocks: I would come back at main holidays, and so I wasn't out of the scene, and this was when Understand developed, started to become a more serious thing. The idea of trying to get a recording contract and make it a career. There was a lot going on. No internet and social media so it was all word of mouth, letters, magazines, Maximum Rock'N'Roll, NME. I just have really fond memories of that period on my life - as I think everyone has -where it was pretty much carefree. Still doing the training. The music wasn't yet distracting me from my swimming career, and it was just fun, and I was just the kid hanging onto their coat tails. Enjoying the ride, having a great time doing it. That was how I got to know John and the others. And then in the summer I was back, and it was literally going to as many shows as possible. Go up to record shops in London. They were still skating, and I would just tag along. Because I was away, I missed out going to a lot of gigs, before that I was a bit too young. The summer before I went down to Devon, I remember going up to the Astoria to see Living Colour and that was going to be my first gig and we got up there and it was sold out! All wearing our checkered shirts, shorts, Converse and that was gonna to be my first proper show.

Living Colour: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSp9GZ2GHvs*

James Reddick: So, we started gigging about that time, 1990, going up to London, some thrash metal in there. My first seminal punk gig for me was Agnostic Front at Tufnell Park. This is before I met John, but I was with Rob, Jamie, I think Hallam was there and it was madness. The Tufnell Park Dome was just full of these sweaty skinheads, my first time in a pit of that magnitude and Rob was saying: "You've just got to get stuck in!" and I was bricking myself to be honest! And I think that was an important moment for me. The energy of Agnostic Front was something to behold. It just started from there really. In 1990. I remember we went to see Living Color in October 1990 at the Town and Country Club. It wasn't my kind of thing but Dominic and that were like: "They're playing. We should go." And I was: "Yeah, yeah, I'm totally up for it". Cos it was just so great, hanging out and going to gigs really. And there was a bit of an incident, as I remember. We got a bit lost on the trains and we're in this minicab. In those days you didn't have phones or anything. So, we're a bit lost and we jump this minicab. And this minicab driver pulls over at the station. And the others were like: "I think we're pretty near, shall we just do a runner?" And we did. Another gig quite early on - we were into a band called Bomb Disneyland, a Welsh punk band. They had to change their name to Bomb Everything, I think, understandably. We'd been to see them at the Marquee in London sometime before, but they played at the Esplanade in Southend, and we ended up with John and that whole group there.

AgnosticFront: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8Ef0ui74JM*
Bomb Disneyland: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNRyow8cm3E*

John Hannon: I don't know how you feel but thinking about those early gigs, I think if you 'd asked me after the gig: "How much about the music do you remember?" it was probably not a great deal. Everybody just got hot and sweaty and jumped off the stage. That was what the thing was all about more than necessarily if the band did a great set or anything.

Tony Maddocks: Next summer, the first proper gig was Quicksand at The White Horse or Boston Arms, small venue. I've got visions of everyone jumping on the train and, for whatever reason, whenever we went to gigs, Rob Coleman just had to run everywhere! We had to get from one station to another, and I think Rob used to jog at the time and he'd run, and we all had to try to keep up. We didn't have to be late; he just had to run everywhere! Not that anyone was a keen runner at the time. Everything was new and buzzy. We went to see Gorilla Biscuits, Jailcell Recipes. That was the first time I ever did a stage dive and also the first time someone did a dive on me - and it nearly broke my shoulder! And the smell of the gigs, sweat and smoke and the crusty punks. The whole New York, straight-edge punk scene had started to die down, cos I remember seeing Gorilla Biscuits and the drummer had long hair at the time and I was like: "What's going on? What's happened to everyone?" We still had the crew cuts and the caps and Nike.

GorillaBicuits:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2s9A0iIa8Pc&list=PLXavi9Np7YieczlVV3O53KmIxgb8M0H2L
Jailcell Recipes: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB0k_uJHlBk*
James Reddick: A band that really influenced us quite a lot was Quicksand. Saw them in early '91, that was before they released Slip, but they had an EP out. So, Rob called me up, this was always the case - we're going up to London tonight. There was a group of us there, not sure if John was there actually, and we obviously knew who Walter was. After that they released Slip, summer of '93 I think. They came over to London and played at the Borderline. That was full-on that gig. I just loved what they were doing, and they were also a big influence on Understand and what they did.

Quicksand: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIaJWOMDRJ8*

Tony Maddocks: It took me a long time to...John was more free-thinking, not that he was stopping being straight-edge but he was always free-thinking, doing his own thing. We were all listening to the same music but where I was into the standard straight-edge bands, John was delving more into the post-hardcore, Quicksand, Fugazi, Bob Tilton - the English band. Everything started diversifying so you've also got to throw it into the mix.

Bob Tilton: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fh2IfokPHEo*



6

(Intro)Small Boy.
FORMATIVE INFLUENCES, FIRST STEPS 1990-91

John Hannon: We were calling ourselves Understand by 1990-91 but when you are very young, life seems to move slower than it really is. One summer feels like four years or something. With that group of people in those places with that intention, that was when it was happening.

Rob Coleman: They were just a really good band, not just a riffy band playing the same thing at the same time. Writing proper songs. Poppy but kind of scratchy, hard to describe, but with that terrible cheap Stratocaster that John had, a bit of that Rough Trade sound, a happy accident, but also writing proper songs, half covers, half originals.

John Hannon: When I was sixteen - just left school - I heard Fugazi for the first time and I was: "Ah I understand this now." They seemed to have this intelligence. Before that it was just all aggression for the sake of it and, at that age that sounds quite cool. But at that point in time, I was not really into it. After (hearing Fugazi) I backtracked. I knew all about these bands and just picked it up by osmosis. At that time, we all had quite a wealth of knowledge of hardcore and stuff that had been going on in the 80s in America. But then in 1990, Fugazi released Repeater and Quicksand released that first seven inch on Revelation and Bad Brains' Quickness and then bands like Inside Out and Burn. There was this moment in time where all these conclusions were being drawn in Washington and New York and California and this new sound was happening that people were calling emo before that was a really offensive kind of term, and we wanted to do it too and we couldn't believe no one else was doing it in the UK. The only problem with that was like: "How do you do this?" We literally had no idea how you play that kind of music: "I know how to play a Creedance Clearwater Revival song, but I have no idea how to copy Fugazi, or something" and we started to go to work, working that out and started to rip those bands off.

Inside Out: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASJFqvI8-kY***
Burn: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixC6J1KBiAo&t=29s***

Photo by James Reddick

Rob Coleman: Fugazi really had their own thing going on. Simple things like the way two guitars both playing octave parts to make up a chord rather than two guitarists playing the same thing, sounds very different on the record, sounds complicated but it's a very simple thing that merged into each other. That was something that John and I did quite well together. You couldn't tell where the sound was coming from, which we liked about Fugazi. Even though we ended up a bit too songy. Their song structures were different, not just, verse, chorus middle eight, chorus, end. Songs just went off on odd little tangents, like Led Zeppelin. Yeah, yeah, you know, they had the weirdest concepts for songs which got missed by bands that copied them. Fugazi could be quite poppy without sounding like Green Day, or really noisy without being too annoying, they got everything right. And they had a really good rhythm section.

When you listen carefully and deconstruct what they were doing, they were quite different from regular rock songs. A great example of when intelligent people make music when they are not particularly good musicians, technically. The rhythm section of Fugazi is very good but the two guitarists are technically quite average, but it doesn't matter because they have such fantastic creative intuition and intelligence. And the sounds they were making, the noises you could get out of a guitar, push some of that dissonance, bending strings and hitting harmonics at the same time, making these great squeals and abrasive percussive noises. They never use any of the distortion that you think. If you're really tight and punchy, your records sound heavier than they actually are. If the average heavy metal band used AC/DC's backline they'd end up sounding like an indie band cos there's so little distortion there, and Fugazi were quite similar: not much distortion but it's the percussiveness, tightness, makes it sound heavier than it is and that's the trick - not crank the gain up but down and use more dynamic gives you more range. If you hit the heavier strings harder rather than using distortion, you get a contrast with the lighter strings and there is more variation.

Playing with John was really good because he was a totally different guitar player to me, totally different interests. When I had started learning I was really into heavy metal, that was kind of what I really wanted to do, so I was really only interested in shredding. The crazy high-pitched, fast guitar solos -that was what I was practising, and I'd been a bit sloppy on my rhythm work where John was the complete opposite. He had no interest in guitar solos whatsoever but was this really interesting guitar player; and when you're young you're focused on (the shredding) and think: "Oh this guy's no good." But when you spend time together you realise there are so many embellishments and percussive parts and it's: "Whoah, what are you doing?" And you're just playing chords but playing them in a very interesting way with so much personality and character to it, and that was a very interesting thing to me. Made me realise there was a lot more to playing guitar than I had realised. I'd just been focused at one end of the fretboard and neglected the other end entirely and that really helped me to improve a lot. No matter how many times you've played something, there's always another way you can play it - and improve on it. The simplest thing, one tiny little accent, can make the thing come alive and John had a great knack of doing that. You'd play something and think: "Oh that looks easy", and you play it and think: "What, have I had a fucking stroke? I can't make it sound like that." He had this way of injecting so much of his personality into his playing that was really difficult to copy. I really enjoyed that challenge.

Stuart Quinnel: So generally, I'd be looking across the stage at John as a right-handed person looks across, with Bob on that side. I'd always stand back a bit level with the drums and lock into it and look across at John who always looked cool with a guitar. It's weird, you look back on those things and he's just playing it and just loving it. Generally, John would break a string a lot, which was pretty frustrating! We're on and hitting it pretty hard and thinking "Here we go" and then John would break another string. John always knew a lot more about what he wanted from his guitar while I was much more open to suggestion, and because my musicianship was less than John and Bob I would listen to what they had to say back then I would imagine, cos they were both very good guitarists in my eye.

Rob Coleman: We had a very austere set up. Didn't have a monitor system, monitor guy to work with so it was quite simple. If everyone could hear the vocals and the snare drum, everyone did their own thing and you trusted each other to be in time and in tune because you couldn't always hear each other and it was like: I know the songs, I know my part, I can hear the drummer, he's off doing his thing over there, I'm doing my thing over here and hopefully out front these things are working out. But we couldn't hear each other. It was more out of necessity than anything. We didn't like sound-checking, it's annoying. It's more like: "I trust him entirely, he's doing the right thing, off he goes." No playing off each other. We didn't even bother.

In rehearsals it was different, very intimate of course. All the parts were written in conjunction with each other very, very tightly. We'd do both things. Sometimes I'd write a song and write both guitar parts or sometimes just write one and John would write his or do the same thing, write both parts. Whoever wrote it, it had to be very solid and precise. We'd practice the hell out of it beforehand to make sure that everything was right, so when it came to doing a show, you didn't really have to polish it up, it was already taken care of.
But it was really great. You'd come up with a song or three quarters of a song and then he'd contribute his part, and it would sometimes completely change a piece of music. You'd think you had a idea about where this is going and he'd say: "Great what about this?" And it was like someone opening a door in a house that you'd never seen before, a whole other room, and that was wonderful. And you'd go: "Okay stop, I now have to completely rethink the whole thing. What you've contributed is infinitely better and it's made me rethink it. We're going to have to go off in another direction now." John could do both. He could happily play what I had shown him, or he'd make his own thing up. It was great. There were no hard rules for anything, you know, really nice and relaxed.
In the beginning, it was pretty much John and I ending up writing most of the lyrics. Dominic was far too happy in life. He had a nice life, a nice girlfriend, he didn't have anything to complain about, to needle him, whereas me and John were both pretty angst-ridden. We had a few more axes to grind with the universe back then. But as time went on, Dominic wrote a few more of the lyrics, so then it was more evenly split.

Tony Maddocks: I did my A-levels, the two years, and came back and had a year out trying to decide what I was going to do, and that was the time when I really spent a lot of time with the boys going to shows all the time. I did a bit of work but still figuring out what to do. John was still at college, Stuart was working, Dominic was still at college, so we had a whole year of just going to shows, doing a night here and night there, and I was driving. So I was going to be the roadie sort of guy, which involved me doing the driving too and I was still nailed to the X so drinking wasn't an issue. Spent a lot of time with them.


Rob Coleman and Stuart Quinnell, photo by Phil Howes

Rob Coleman: Our first gig was probably the Esplanade, '90 or '91, we started to get our oeuvre on. But it all happened very gradually with that band. Little tiny steps before it became what it did.

Stuart Quinnel: The first shows that you're doing outside your area. I think Shrimpers, the Southend United clubhouse would have been one of our first shows, under the different name, and you're trying to find yourself as a band. Five of us then, at this time. I would have passed my driving test so we are now 17 and I would borrow my Mum's blue Nova and the five of us would get in this car with what two guitars, a bass guitar and a snare drum and we'd drive down to Tunbridge Wells, the Rumble Club, and play a show and then drive back again. We used to play the Esplanade. So, we'd play the Esplanade, supported Cop Shoot Cop there, and John, years ago, he cut a basketball in half and wore it as a hat once. It's on the back of a seven-inch of ours, jumping up with a half a basketball on his head. And in the first song he jumped up, cracked his head on the beam and went straight out on the floor. It was dark and I didn't even notice it, but Bob looks over and he's thinking: "Wow, look at John he's really into it tonight!"

Jane Hannon: When I was 16-17, I worked in a fish and chips in Rayleigh and I got John a job there just serving fish and chips, and the owners were lovely, really sweet. So, we were working together this night in the front. He's wrapping up the fish and chips, and Understand were playing this night at The Ship on Southend seafront, the worst venue in the world. So John had to work on Friday night and he said to the owner: "Jack, look I've got to leave at 8 cos I'm playing tonight," and Jack said: "Okay, that's fine" and John says: "But Jack, I do have to leave at 8.00." And Jack's said: "Okay, that's fine." And so, it's 8 o' clock and someone's come to pick him up and John's said: "Okay I'm going." And there is literally a queue down the street and Jack says:

"Well, you can't go now." And I'm wrapping the fish and chips and thinking: "I don't know what's going to happen." And John's like so polite and just says: "Well...I've gotta go," and Jack's said: "You can't" and John's saying: "Well, er, I've gotta go. "And Jack says, "Well, if you go, John, you lose your job." and John says: "Okay. Thanks very much. See you later."

John Hannon: Tony was to-ing and fro-ing but when he came back, he formed Stand Off, which we were kind of peripheral to. It was made of different people from Hockley with Hallam Foster, who was the bass player, and a guy called Stuart Flint, the guitarist, and Andrew from Understand as drummer were the members. Came and went and one summer. I think, we let them rehearse in our rehearsal space initially and traded a bit. The initial Stand Off was really good and Tony was coming and going, so they had to make up for him not being there, and then he was back for one summer and that was when Rob and I said: "Let's try and do a record" and we had quite a good relationship with that place out in Maldon, Adelaide. We booked up Grant and wrote a couple of songs - Rob and I and Andy - and we went off with Tony and did that record with Stand Off, which I think is one of my favourite records of that period. It just came together really quickly. We were always recording. As soon as we had six or seven songs, we would go over to Adelaide with money we had saved and record them. I forget how many recording sessions but by the time we actually got to make a record we had loads of recording experience.

Tony Maddocks: My musical journey definitely came from John and my musical career. In my musical career I never would ever have picked up the microphone, me being lazy and not really having the self-confidence. So what am I going to do? I never thought of playing the guitar but it was just: "I tell you what I could do, I could probably scream." and especially being into punk and hardcore: that's all you need to do. So John was a massive positive push in that regard as well. We decided to start our little side project and that was Stand Off, which was Andy, the drummer from Understand, and John playing guitar, Rob playing guitar, and Hallam. Understand were doing well and starting to turn a lot of heads. This is well before social media, your Instagram, well before MySpace and all that stuff. So it was all world of mouth, very DIY ethic, pen pals writing to people. We started playing shows. A really strange place on the way down to Brighton, place called Nutley with a pub, with a collective of kids we got to know down there, and they'd put on these hardcore punk shows in the middle of nowhere, which was really cool. And East Grinstead, can't remember the name of the venue, and Understand were playing quite a bit. We had a much more ferocious, punky, hardcore sound than Understand. That was the idea of it. They were sort of going more into that Quicksand, post-hardcore direction. Cast off the 54 Funk shackles long ago, as your taste changes. We're all a bit older, 16, 17, 18, started rehearsing at Maple Studios in Southend. Understand were rehearsing a lot. I was jumping in between, never really a serious band, but funnily enough we put out a 7-inch on a German record label, Crucial Response. I think we recorded one demo.

John Hannon: Tony was a big influence then because he was such a ball of energy and positivity, really into hardcore but wouldn't have anything against me saying that he really wasn't musical in the way, say, Rob was, and didn't have a band. And he got to study in the USA. He was a really good swimmer, and his parents made a lot of sacrifices and enabled him to get a scholarship to go to America to study swimming. He started going to real hardcore shows there. These were the days before the internet, and we were just obsessed with American bands who seemed better in nearly every way to what was going on in the UK - or that was our perception at the time, y'know. And you could only discern this from fanzines or Maximum RocknRoll, and it was hard to get information, and sometimes you could be quite wrong about what was going on, or misinformed, and it was trying to join the dots cos there wasn't a lot information to go on bands. So Tony was like our man-on-the-ground there and I remember him going to these straight-edge festivals and sending reports and pictures and we were like: "Oh my God" and it was so much more intense and that was the first time I really saw people doing all that Kung Fu shit and everything, flying off. A different level.

Tony Maddocks: What happened was, we played some shows. And then, basically, I got recruited to go to an American university. I had a friend here who had done well and asked me "What are you up to? What do you think you're going to do?" and I said: "I don't know, what are you doing?" and he said: "I've been offered a scholarship at a university in America." So, I went through the process and I got recruited to go to a university

near Pittsburgh. One, because I thought it would a great opportunity, plus I thought, while I'm out there, think of all the bands I'll get to see a lot. Education and swimming were not the top of my agenda, to be fair! So then I was off to America. Rob, at the time I am sure, he thought I was just bullshitting him. But I went. I love all the guys to death but John - he was the one. And it was in that time that Understand were doing big tours. I was in America and having a great time, but I'm missing out on a lot of things. So, it was the odd phone call and letters and, I wasn't in the best place in the world to be seeing hardcore music at my university, but I still went to quite a few things. The others were probably jealous of me, but they had a lot going on.

Ed Wenn: I was playing in a band called Sink, which was the band I was in after the Stupids, and our drummer had moved to Leigh-on-Sea. Did the classic thing. He was living in E17 and then he moved out to Leigh-on-Sea, the East End by the sea. And he got to meet either Rob or John, and he came to us one day and said that he had met these young kids. We were probably 24 or 23 and John and Rob are younger. So, my friend James Kermack, the drummer, told us:" I met these young kids. They came to see us." You know, John and Rob would have been: "Aren't you the drummer of Sink?" or something like that. We were playing in Harlow and he said: "I've invited these kids to come along". I've just got this vague memory of us playing at the Square Club in Harlow and towards the back of the room there's this kind of a line of Colegate-kid punk rockers. So, they all looked immaculate, right, and kind of nice: not goodie-goodie but clean cut and mischievous. So, they clearly had their own thing going on. But they were like present and correct and it was really interesting, and Kermack said: "These are the kids from Southend." And we all said "Hi"and then for the next couple of years we went from strength to strength, in a slightly different kind of scene, and the band I was in was transitioning to a kind of alt-country kind of thing, and this was as Understand were taking the world by storm in must have been 91-92.

Sink: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hloc_yQR9FI*



7.

Screwtop Milkshake:
14 WARRIOR HOUSE 1994-99 and RAVENS COURT 1999-2019

Jane Hannon: Our parents separated in 1992 when I was 17 and John was 19. It all came a bit out of the blue for John and I, we didn't realise what was going – we were both probably too caught up in our worlds to notice. We stayed living with our dad. He was a difficult character to say the least, but he became particularly unpleasant during that time. I constantly butted heads with him, but John was much smarter and just kept out of his way. We stayed at home with our dad for about 18 months – it some ways it was a really shitty time but it was also pretty liberating as we had so much freedom, our dad wasn't there much as he'd met someone else so our house always seemed to be full of our friends. In May 1994 we moved into a flat together in Southend, which our parents bought when they sold the house after their divorce, and that was the start of a really pivotal time for all of us. We were the first to move out I think. We were still pretty young. Understand had recently signed their deal. I remember that I moved in on my own because John was on tour in Europe with Helmet. We both really loved that flat – it was very cool. Old offices turned into flats above some shops on Southchurch Road, but it overlooked Warrior Square. The rooms were huge, the whole set up was great. We decorated it ourselves and we lived there together for 5 years. We were gutted when our dad sold the flat and we had to move out. Flat 14 Warrior House. I have so many good memories from that time and from living with John. A constant stream of people, the band were always there, I'd work late nights waitressing and always come home to a flat full of people. Often meeting new people that John had brought home, or bands staying over. Don't get me wrong, there were plenty of times when I just wanted everyone to piss off (John was far more sociable than me) but it was a very happy period in my life. We were very happy living there together, we had always been close but those years, especially, were really special to me.

Jay Thornton: I met John through Kev Guy. Like John, Kev was a bit of a social lynchpin. He knew everyone, everyone knew him. We were working together in a shop in Essex and as I got to know him more, I was introduced to his friends. He is a year or two older than me and, when you're a teenager, that's quite a big difference. He was a skateboarder, already doing bands – like playing bass and stuff – and he had a big social group. He started talking about his friend John who was a person he looked up to because he had signed to Sony, had been on tour, a cool guy who knew everyone. So, I was introduced to John through Kev Guy and I can't remember the details of how I met him but I would have been 16, 17, something like that and John was living in Warrior Square in Southend at the time.

John and Stuart at a Stampin' Ground show, photo by Phil Howes

Kev Hutchins: Warrior Square - what a cool place to have for starters. Two teenagers, basically. John was maybe twenty? Your parents split up and all of a sudden you're living together in a flat in Southend. Amazing, amazing. We were round there all the time, all the time. Cos it became the place where everyone would hang out all the time. I remember parties there, New Years party there. I remember John had a fish tank. He had a Siamese fighting fish. I think it died one day. He just put a coat over it, or something. It just stayed in his room. "John, what is going on in that tank?" Poor thing.

Rob Coleman: I think it was a converted block of offices because all the rooms were big and square the bedrooms were huge, the living area was huge, the kitchen was huge, it was unusual seeing an apartment so big really. Very square and very modern. He would have moved there in, I feel, early 1994, spring 1994 he moved in there. And it was great, right in the middle of Southend. I have to say that every time I visited him there was already somebody there and when I left there was someone else coming in. Going to see John was like being the guest on a chat show. You'd buzz the door, get buzzed up, but there'd already be three other people sitting on a sofa and it was like: "And now, introducing Rob Coleman!" and you'd hear this kind of imaginary chat show walk-on music and you'd sit there and talk to him for a bit then someone would leave and someone else would get buzzed up and it'd be like the next guest. I could have imagined a continuous cycle of people arriving and leaving and John entertaining them all.
He had all those gadgets for making coffee from the barest of ingredients. It sounds normal now but back then, watching someone with a hand-mill grinding up the beans and using all kinds of other bits, like a scientific experiment, making this cup of coffee. It was great and he would take great delight in doing that, and he was really into experimenting with all the different types of coffee and all the different processes, getting all the temperatures right, the sizes and everything. He would be in the kitchen, which was almost like a bar looking into the living room, so he was almost like a barista at home and entertaining people. And people would ask for coffee just to see how long the procedure took, and you would think: "Whatever you do, don't ask for the toast. You don't wanna see what goes into that!"
It was just a really good meeting place, pre-mobile phones, pre- internet. It was perfectly acceptable just to knock on someone's door and see if they were in. I can't think of anything worse now. Unless someone's giving me two days' notice, no one's getting in here. But - and I guess being thirty years younger helped - then it was just a constant steam of anyone in Southend who was interested in anything other than the local night club and fighting. And there wasn't that many people like that, so John's apartment served as the meeting place for all of them. It was like going to a cool coffee shop in the hip part of town. Actually, he should have charged for his coffee. Would have made a fortune.
Anyone who was in a band or any other kind of interesting project seemed to gravitate towards him and it was nice to see who you'd run into there, you know? And touring bands. He could accommodate them: Cable stayed there, and Jawbox, various members of Jacob's Mouse stayed there, some of the bigger bands that did that. Walter Schreifel visited. You were never sure who was gonna be there when he answered the door. Like the post-hardcore version of Noel's House Party, if you remember that.

Jawbox: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Isg7sPsb_mo*
Cable: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M25yWjRKws0*
Jacob's Mouse: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8EukE46Mt8*

Jane Hannon: There were always bands staying with us, usually bands that Understand were touring with – they would always end up staying at ours. The flat was huge so it was easy to accommodate people. I remember when we were decorating the flat, Zak from Jawbox was staying with us and was advising me on which shade of green to paint my bedroom. It was definitely a community space. One night I came home from waitressing to find John in the kitchen holding court to a band called Lash Out – at least I think that's what they were called. I think they were from Norway. Anyway, they all had this weird look; dyed black hair, but blonde eyebrows so they all looked really startled. They were sitting in the lounge staring at John who was in the kitchen. He was standing there holding a slice of bread. I asked him what he was doing and he said "I'm trying to see if they want some toast but they don't speak English", he then points at the bread and says really slowly "Hot bread?" I couldn't stop laughing at him. So polite and such a nitwit. I said to him: "Just show them the toaster you idiot."

Lash Out: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAvELfrFpZA*

Kev Hutchins: I remember their early days of touring, and I turned up and there was the drummer from Jawbox, cos they stayed there. I was like, no way! All this type of stuff going on. Funny, really funny.

Jane Hannon: Monday night dinners became a new tradition. Every Monday whoever was around would gather at ours and we'd make a big pot of food, usually pasta, and we'd all eat together. John and I used to then live off of that pot of food for the rest of the week. By Thursday I would have surrendered but John would keep going – he didn't really care what he ate. It was just fuel. He would be eating pasta in a sandwich by the end of the week.

Kev Hutchins: Yeah, we spent a of time there. We all spent a lot of time hanging out together. Going to the late show at the cinema. Remember going to see the Exorcist. I'd never seen it before. I was traumatised by that film! It really freaked me out. The mixing of the traditional medical stuff with all the tests that they were doing. 'Let Jesus fuck you!' That stuck in my mind for a long time. I was really innocent for a long time.

Jay Thornton: He had a flat and nobody else his age had that, and it looked like a New York loft apartment. So I thought: "This is a cool guy and I am not cool enough." "Cos I'm this shy little teenager from Canvey Island and he was from the big city lights of Southend-on-Sea. But he was always really friendly. I suppose we would have met at a gig or something. He was always very friendly to me. He didn't have to be. I was just this nobody kid and during that period John and Kev Guy had a year of really hanging together. They really hit it off and they loved the same music, New York, but where they really gelled was that they both loved Seinfeld. John really liked New York punk, all that New York CBGBs Bowery stuff and he had a real affinity for 60s, 70s, 80s New York and Seinfeld was this really cool New York sitcom that nobody in the UK watched, and I think Kev Guy probably did some nefarious stuff at night with his PC and he could record onto blank VHS Seinfeld episodes. Cos Kev Guy is a kind of OCD collector. Kev Guy would sometimes meet up with John in Southend for a coffee and I would go along and they'd talk about Seinfeld, so I then got into it. So, I knew John from gigs and my friend Kev Guy and John's friends from the band Understand.

Jane Hannon: Then there was the infamous party that we had. I don't even remember the reason why, I just remember that John had this idea that he wanted to have a party and he convinced me it was a great idea and assured me it would just be our lot there. This is before the worlds of social media and mobile phones but somehow word got out. I think it's safe to say that John just told everyone and anyone he knew! Our flat was packed and it was a big flat. There were so many people there, people I knew and people I didn't know but I assumed they all knew John. He absolutely loved every minute of it – he was completely in his element. I hated every minute of it! I remember some drunk girl trashing my bedroom and I asked anyone who looked like they could potentially vomit to leave. Definitely not my favourite night.

Tony Maddocks: Considering, such a small group of kids from a small place like Hockley we created something, started putting on shows together, especially me, John, Jane, going out putting out flyers, posters in the town. John and Jane had left home and were in the Warrior Square flat and that became the centre. I was there nearly every day, five days out of the week from midnight, sleep round there. Jane was always working and we all had part-time jobs, and we had a really good bunch of kids, skaters.

James Reddick: So, another example of how key John was behind ideas and driving things, we did organize - and I helped out, and Tony Maddocks helped out - gigs in Southend. So Saks wine bar was a key venue. We used to hire it cos the guy was like, you could hire the basement, and the guy was like he didn't really want any money for it; it was just what he made over the bar. But with us, he didn't really make any money! But what John liked about the venue was it was small, and you don't want anywhere that's too big. We never thought that we could pull that many people in, 50-70 kids, so everyone was jammed in but that made the whole thing. We even had bands that we invited and Understand would support, or Above All. 1992-93. The real thing was that at the time we were hanging out and we used to just talk and inspire each other and John was a real confidence driver for me, and I was happy to help if it had John's seal of approval. I think, John, Tony,

we felt that like: “Well if there is a scene in New York” - not that we ever thought we were going to create the same sort of scene - “but just how cool would it be to have a scene in Southend and people would talk about it.” Sharon from Slam City Skates, Barry from Fabric, Vique was there so we had people from all over. Then we’d just get all the skaters, and it was important to have the right image with the flyers and postering and stuff. We wanted to create a buzz about. It was pretty underground. I remember like helping to create demo tapes and doing stuff like that. Over 92-93, we even did a gig at Rochford 100 Rugby Club which was way too big, and it was in the middle of nowhere so hard to get people there.

Jay Thornton: And I just remember the things he was into. He was into The Make Up band. He wanted to have a night, like the guys from the Make Up. The Make Up were in another band as well. Anyway, John really loved that band and he really loved that guy. Cos I think, and I might be mixing up my names here, but they would put on nights in Washington DC, and it would be like an amateur’s night for local weird bands, and John wanted to do that in Southend. To have a little night, a scene. He was in his early to mid-20s and there was nothing like that in Southend. And he showed me some photos of one of these nights. And he said: “I want a flag like this behind the stage with like stars on and lights. I think it was the flag of Washington D.C. And I think he created a flag like he wanted with stars on it. He knew what he wanted to do at an early age. He always wanted to have a night on in Southend, put on some weird bands, and he did it.

The Make Up: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kKEmi1byr0*

Jane Hannon: We lived in Flat 14 for exactly 5 years and then our dad put it up for sale. It was the most amazing flat and John and I were so sad to leave it. So much happened during that time, it’s also when I started working for the band, so for me personally it was one of the happiest periods of my life. I see my life in parts and that part was really special.

Jay Thornton: And then we get to the late 90s and, somehow, he and Kev Guy were going to move in together. He had to move out from his amazing New York flat where he was living with his sister Jane at the time. For some reason, they had to move out of that flat and John was looking for somewhere else in Southend, and Kev Guy was thinking of moving in with him. Then Kev said to me: “Do you wanna move in with us?“ I must have been 17 or 18 at the time and said: “OKaaaay, that‘s cool,“ not really knowing what it would mean to do that. I think it was a bit early for me, quite frankly. Eventually Kev Guy didn‘t move in and I moved in with John and Jane Hannon. I remember going to viewings with Jane to look at houses and eventually we found this one on Alexandra Road. I had the box room and John had the medium-size room and Jane had the big girly room. And I was the one who chose that place. I said to Jane: “Let‘s get that place.” So I was living with John and Jane Hannon, and they must have been in their mid-20s. So quite strange for me because I had never moved out of home before. And I‘m living with two siblings. Quite a strange dynamic. John and I were buddies, Jane was the much more sensible: “C’mon guys we‘ve got to do this, got to tidy up today, got to pay the rent.“ And I was basically a child really. John and I would be messing about, listening to music, and Jane was like: “We‘ve got to tidy up the bathroom!“ On the surface they were really quite different but they had a shared deep sort of connection, you felt there was a closeness there, even though John wound up Jane, and I‘m sure Jane wound up John. It was like I‘d left my family to move in with another family! I only lived with him for about a few months. It all became too much, and I said to him: “John, I’m leaving.” I had various problems, and he said “Jay, you can’t leave! Why are you going? Don’t go!” He couldn’t stand change. You’ve got to understand. He was in his mid-twenties, a very well-known, well-liked guy and I was this little twinkie from Canvey Island. I don’t really know what he saw in me, but we really hit it off. We were buddies. I was the first person to live with him outside of his sister, and he was quite upset when I moved out. He didn’t like change. When I did move out his friend Dave Nevard took over that box room and I think Dave was there for quite a while. Then Jane moved out with her boyfriend and Dominic from understand moved in and eventually bought the flat and strangely became the landlord.

Dave Nevard: So I moved into the flat, Ravens Court. He’d been there a while, and I moved in. Obviously, we had our own lives. Dom would disappear for three months at a time on tour with Muse. John was a night owl really. But we had a lot of humorous friction, when I look back. Now it’s hilarious but at the time we used

to fight like cat and dog a lot of the time. You don't know someone until you've lived with him, you know that saying? John was very much - he had it the way he wanted it, and he was very adamant about things being the way they were, not OCD but he was quite fastidious about things.

Pete Wilkins had all these tapes at one time from a friend in America, not snuff films or anything but obscure films and obscure things. He brought them round once and he had a bag of them, VHS, and I said: "Can I borrow them?" and he said: "Yeah, yeah." And I noticed that all the record tabs were still intact, and I said to him: "Well, I don't want to record on these Pete," and he said: "Okay, well do what you like." So I started systematically snapping out the little black tabs that means you can't record over them and I got about two or three into the ten or eleven that I had and John's on the couch next to me and he says: "What the eff do you think you're doing?" and I said: "I'm making sure I can't record over them." And he absolutely went berserk 'cos - I don't know what he thought - having heard that Pete said: "Ok mate. go ahead, do what you like" - and it turned into what I can only describe as a kind of berserk game of Twister, with us rolling about on the floor and me trying to snap out the tabs and John ripping them out of my hand, and it got down to the last tape and we're literally rolling about on the floor fighting over the last tape. And Pete is by this time over the other side in the corner with a face like a kite going: "What's going on?" We weren't really fighting but it really triggered him. He was desperately trying to stop me taking all these tabs out and was horrified.

He used to come in and help himself to bits of my food. He wouldn't have anything in the drawer or whatever and I'd get something nice, and he'd have a few slices of bread or something. So I started hiding all my food in my room and he found out and went to my cupboard and it was empty, and he said: "Where's the food?" and I said: "It's in my room" and he went berserk and it was kind of another psychotic, like a food-fight, and he was flinging all this food onto my bed going: "Have that then, and that!" And me throwing it back.

Imagine a pair of twenty-year-olds. You're a lot more geed up with testosterone at that age, aren't you? Me, being quite an annoying person, if you're that sort of person who can be quite serious, I've got that thing in my nature where I will just gently goad you for fun, and I used to draw it out of him a bit and he'd go off like a roman candle.

There was a vintage coffee table in the middle of the lounge, big round piece of glass on legs. Now, with my hand on my heart, I am sitting there one day, how or why it happened, the sun was on it or what, or it was just like stress fatigue, but out of the blue the top just literally broke in half and fell on the floor in two halves. A perfect crack. There was no broken glass anywhere. John came in and went absolutely berserk, and I absolutely swore on my life that it broke by itself. And he never ever dropped that. He was convinced that I had dropped something on it. This was something he would bring up regularly. A weird one.

I was in a metal band a few years later, cos the guy who was in it before was a raging alcoholic and just about destroyed the band. So he asked John once: "What's it like living with Dave?" - and this is still the best thing I've ever heard - he said: "It's like living with a dog that can speak." He was amazing with words.

His impressions were incredible. We had a raging alcoholic living above us and he was so bad some mornings, John would have to go up there and he'd cut his hand, cos the bloke had the DTs so bad, he used to keep his front door key on a piece of string through the letter box and he couldn't get his hand through the letter box. John went up there one day and let him in, and he had to go in with him to get him into the front room and he described his flat as Charles Manson's something. The guy ended up with a pigeon infestation, and they lived there with him and one day he was carted out, and the spacesuits had to come and in full asmat gear and had to steam clean or whatever you need to do cos if you've got pigeon crap everywhere you can get really ill from the dust. John's descriptions of and impressions of this guy. He'd be up at five in the morning wailing and screaming his head off.

8.

Lightweight:
92-94 PEARL JAM AT THE ESPLANADE, CHRIS 'TANK' GILKS

John Hannon: We were just trying to copy the great bands like Fugazi and Quicksand and we were really proud of that. Had one friend who had MTV, and we were watching it and reading the Evening Echo and saw an ad for Pearl Jam at the Esplanade - who were just on the rise - and we liked all that - Dinosaur and mid-period Sonic Youth and other grunge.

Stuart Quinnel: We used to play the Esplanade, which is now a luxury block of flats, and this is where Pearl Jam played their legendary first ever show outside North America. They played Southend-on-Sea! We were rehearsing that day and Andy said: "Oh, Pearl Jam are playing tonight" I didn't know who that was but let's go along and there it was, wowser, Pearl Jam in a little tour bus, a Sprinter.

Kev Hutchins: I think the first gig I went to with them was Pearl Jam at the Esplanade. The infamous gig. We turned up at this gig. Didn't have tickets obviously. So originally, we can't get in and John - I think the guy on the door had something to do with Maple or something and they clocked each other. Anyway, we couldn't get in, and it was a bit annoying. Dominic being the kind of guy he is, he clocks one of the band, I think it was the drummer actually. Cos Dom, at the time, he'd hurt his wrist, had a bandage of his wrist and it turns out the drummer, he also had a bandage on his wrist. "Oh you've got..." and they got chatting and it turns out: "Oh we've come down to see you and we can't get in. Is there any way you can get us in on the guest list?" and the next thing the bass player's walking up: "Is it just you four guys is it?" "Yep" and in we go. All of a sudden, the bass player's taking us in. So that was one of the first things I went to and I remember, cos there was a moshpit or something and I'm thinking: "What's going on here, it's kicking off" and was: "Oh I wanna do a stage dive" and John gave me a foot up and I went straight across the top of the crowd and right into the bouncers who grabbed me, threw me out and I was like: "What's going on here?!" It was firing off somewhere. It was pretty mad, I remember that. And I thought they were alright but going out everyone else thought they were rubbish. Pearl Jam at the Esplanade. That's crazy, crazy. At the time, Paul had MTV and they were on MTV. And playing in Southend. Crazy.

Rob Coleman: Nobody knew Pearl Jam then, and this was their first tour outside of America and the first show and they chose to do this at the Esplanade in Southend-on-Sea. They'd been booked obviously before they were blowing up, but they were doing okay. So here was a band from Seattle and Pete had mentioned that someone from Green River was in the band, which made it interesting for us. Autumn '92. So, we went down.

John Hannon: So, we saw them outside, cos we couldn't get in. We were just kids, and all the others were so old. So we told them: "We're the real scene here," and they got us in. And we were shocked at the long hair and Dom immediately jumps off the stage and causes a fight and this guy broke it off and he had been impressed by our look, and we got talking and he was from Reading and heard we were in a band.

Rob Coleman: The Esplanade was largely full of people who didn't behave the way we were used to, and Dominic had done something deemed inappropriate by other audience members, done a stage drive or something, and he got himself into a fight and right in the middle of it, someone else appeared who we didn't know but had short hair - everyone else had long hair - and joined in on Dominic's side and sorted it out, and he was this guy from Reading and we kind of bonded cos he was like us in the sense of not like the others there who were in check shirts and long hair, and he was friends with the guy who became our manager, Chris 'Tank' Gilks. We told him we were in a band and gave him a demo and he helped us out a little bit, had some friends, bit more involved and subsequently Tank came along to some of our shows. He managed Neds Atomic Dustbin at the time, whom I didn't really much care for, but they were a big band and he knew what he was doing, and it made sense for him to manage us. Ned's Atomic Dustbin were headlining Reading and doing big shows. He allowed us to support them in Poole, our first big show ever.

David Vick: Yeah, apparently the manager's had this idea – which was quite clever really – to raise a bit of interest in the press about Ned's Atomic Dustbin's tour to promote a new album and he's told the Melody Maker that there's a support slot on every show for any band who applies. So he ends up with about 300 demo cassettes to listen to – and you can imagine what kind of bands would be desperate to take advantage of this apparently fantastic opportunity to play early doors for a big indie act. All terrible. But as it happens they didn't have anyone for the show in Poole and that's where Understand got to play.

John Hannon: Drove down and it was terrible, 20 people in an 800-capacity room. But their manager liked us and took an interest in the band. His background was indie music, but he took an interest in what we were emulating and started managing us. He had a certain amount of clout, and with someone like that on board doors suddenly open and Polydor are coming to see us and all of a sudden there was this period of time when we were kind of choosing who we were going to sign with.

Rob Coleman: He then became our manager de facto just because he was there and you could have a conversation with him. So, he was really helpful to us, and we were lucky to find somebody in the music business who wasn't a sleazy, coke-taking nightmare, do you know what I mean? We just took it for granted. This guy's cool, he's straight and honest and we appreciated that and since then - having worked with a lot of bands - I appreciate it even more, some of the awful managers I have met.

John Hannon: I was very low down on the pecking order as far that goes and had this slight scepticism of whether it was going to happen anyway. Then someone called Nathan McGough saw us at the George Robey of all places and made an offer to our manager. He used to be the Happy Mondays' manager, had left them. He was, with Tony Wilson, an important figure on the Manchester music scene.



Understand demo tape, photo by James Reddick

Rob Coleman: And luckily, Nathan McGough, the A and R man, came along to see us at the George Robey. Because you didn't take these guys seriously saying: "I used to manage the Happy Mondays", cos you'd meet idiots like that all the time. People just used to lie: "Why would you be interested in us then?" And Tank says: "No this guy is who he says he is, I know him, and he could kind of represent us."

Jane Hannon: In '94 When John and I moved into together I was waitressing. Later that year Tank, their manager, phoned me and asked me if I could type, when I said yes he then asked me if I would like to work for him as his assistant. It was like a dream come true – working for Understand – I could not believe my luck. I knew I had to talk to John about it first as I thought it would be really weird for him, but John already knew. Tank had asked John what he thought first and John seemed to think it was a great idea. To have his approval meant everything. Tank had a tiny office, at S2 (the label Neds were signed too) in the Sony building on Great Marlborough Street in London. It was such an amazing time. Going up to London every day, working with Tank while he managed Understand and Neds. Can you imagine how exciting that was and with the whole band being totally cool with it – I was a very happy girl! I really got to know the band during that time in a different way. Working for them and for Tank was very different to just going to their gigs and being John's little sister. The music was very much John and Rob, but press or anything like that was mainly Dom – he was more like a manager in that way – and I think John was very happy to take a backseat with that stuff. One of my jobs was keeping track of all of their reviews in Kerrang, Melody Maker, NME etc. I remember showing John an amazing review they got in Kerrang once and he just didn't take it seriously. He explained that for him, good or bad, a review was just one person's opinion, so it didn't really mean anything to him. I've never forgotten that – it's good advice – to not get caught up in what other people think about you.



9.

Long Driving Contest:
NORTH-EAST TOUR AND STAND OFF

James Reddick: The Gorilla Biscuits gig was quite key. Met up with the Bradford guys for the first time. I never went up to Bradford, but they struck up a link and went up there. Being away at uni, I missed that. The only time I met them was when we went to see Sick of It All, 1992, and they were there.

John Hannon: I can't remember how we got invited to go to places like Middlesborough and Durham, but we got on really well with Lecky and Sean. With Ian Leck, how much interest he would have had in kids like us? We met Lecky and Tony Levers at the Gorilla Biscuit show. Back then there was this rivalry between the older set of people and the younger (so-called Northern Wolfpack) and these stories of glorified acts of violence. We were never into that kind of thing but there is a sort of connection between the physicality of the form of music, and we thought it was all interesting. That was in the days when you find people inviting you to places and being really hospitable and taking care of the organisation and everything and you're wondering 'Why are they doing this?' and you realise this is like a relay baton and next time it'll be your turn to take it on and host someone else.

Vorhees: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jciuuhGpXSg***

Tony Maddocks: So, then I depart Southend again but the summer before we left - my times and dates could be a bit off - but Understand and Stand Off did a UK tour. When I say a UK tour, basically there were three shows: Bradford 1 in 12 Club, Durham Rowing Club and I think there must have been somewhere else. Got good memories of that. Through my dad's firm we got one of the engineering vans. I think of it as a massive transit, but I don't think it could have been that big. So we loaded up. It was all eight of us, all of the equipment. Cleaning out the van the day before, I wasn't even sure if we'd get there. We just had the best time of our lives, really. Everything was fun.

Rob Coleman: Vorhees were a great example. The 1 in 12 Club, I believe, was named after the unemployment rate at the time in Bradford, like the old UB40 song '1 in 10'. It was the West Yorkshire version of that. And it was an old building. Whether it was bought or rented I don't know, and it was a really cool old part of the

John, photo by Phil Howes

old industrial area - it's probably gentrified now - but back then it was horrible, old factories and things, but this cool old building an anarchic group had acquired and there was a café and venue, and they put on a lot of punk and hardcore shows and people could put shows on there externally too, I believe.
So there was a whole crusty scene that sprung up around that, y'know? It was great, really really cool thing and so this was the summer of '92. I believe There was a Norwegian or a Swedish band that was supposed to tour we'd been booked to support, and then all of a sudden they couldn't make it,as it is often the case with these things, but the shows, all three of them, were still booked, and as half of us were in Stand Off it was not a great hassle for us to do it and then another band from Sussex called Angus Bagpipe filled in the other spot and it was excellent because it's an example for how well things worked back then. So, members of Vorhees, half of them shared a house together and they were like a proper Boston-style super-fast hardcore band, and they had a reputation for being like proper barbarians. Like the first time we saw them was at a Gorilla Biscuits show, and they got into a fight, and we were like: "These people are terrifying", pussies from Southend thinking: "What is this gonna be like?" And of course they couldn't have been any nicer.
Typical example of how things worked: you had the sketchiest of details to go on: "Turn left at the pub and there's phone box outside", or a petrol station or something and you had to call someone who would then give you the last bit of directions to their house, cos there's no mobile phones, no emails. It's Friday and you drive from Southend to Durham, pull up at a petrol station you've got the address for and you'd call Lecky and he'd give you like the last, you know, the last details or might even turn up himself and get in the van and

direct you the last couple of miles to his house. So we played the Durham Club and then in Middlesborough, St Mary's Centre and then the 1 in 12 Club in Bradford.

John Hannon: We'd been going to London and trying to put the pieces together, seeing people selling Class War and Hunt Sab and that kind of thing. We were really young and not really aware of the political aspects of the thing. Some of us were vegetarian and we got into that, but it was this kind of comedic combination of personalities at that age. For instance, our bass player wasn't even remotely interested in any of the extra traits of hardcore, he just wanted to make music, and he sort of walked into the 1 in 12 Club with a big bag of McDonalds and there's that sign on the door of Ronald MacDonald with like a dagger through him or something like that. And we're like: "No, no you can't do that!" We were kind of in-betweeners sort of thing. Always putting our foot in it and getting things wrong. This could be something I heard, someone who was straight-edge getting annoyed with Lecky because he bought a cider lolly from an ice cream van and was debating if that was kosher or not in the straight-edge world, you know? Even at that age we saw the humour in lots of this. Many of these well-intentioned ideas are very simplistic to start off with and then someone explains that it's all about this or that. That's how so many political ideologies happen.

Rob Coleman: The political aspects came out in how you conduct yourself as a band, it was all very personal stuff, but not in the lyrics to reinforce that. We were part of the DIY underground and there was a set of ethics that went along with that, rather than politics. It was a pretty bland time socially, politically. Thatcher was gone and things like Clause 28 and the Poll Tax and the clamp down on illegal raves too. Still the Tories, but Major and then Hague, was it? Missed all that. Missed all the big strikes. By the time we hit our stride, things weren't very controversial. Coming from Southend, I think, did affect our music a bit because although we were obviously not into that Conservative thing but even that image of your Essex man - in Essex there's no excuse for not achieving something. That kind of Conservative, Essex-man thing came about by accident. It was an area that was traditionally overlooked. Some politician noticed that there was a demographic here whose parents would have been Labour voters but moved out of the East End to Basildon and Southend and could afford their own little houses and these were like perfect Conservative voters. We were surrounded by this attitude: you moved out of London, worked your way up, anything is kind of possible. So: start bands, create fanzines, put our own kind of shows on. It wasn't even a punk, collective kind of doing it - it felt more entrepreneurial than collective. You can be influenced by something without actually belonging to it and we were in that current but with a different aim. There was a feeling of optimism, I have to say.

John Hannon: So that's when we first met bands like Kito and Ironside, Nick Royals, he became a good friend of ours throughout that period, and we made this big connection between us kids in Essex and these people

spread out around the north of England, and it was a big wakeup call because, you know, you go to a place like the 1 in 12 in 1991 to 92 there was a massive social divide between what was going on in, like, Bradford than compared to where we came from and we were like : "Oh right. these guys have actually got something to sing about." In the early 90s, the 1 in 12 was pretty much the most important hardcore venue in the country. As to where people got their information from was mostly from Alans of Wigan which had a record side of it as well, bit like Rough Trade. And you couldn't get the real rare hardcore records that were coming into the country. I'm not talking about the bigger bands but like the really obscure stuff. They carried all of that and would write these kinds of quite hilarious descriptions of what these different kind of things were and people would call in and the guy would, like, talk you through it: "Oh yeah, we've got this, we've got that" and "it sounds a bit like this or that." I mean, I have never had any money in my life, so I never bought anything, but people like Rob and Hallam bought so many things. He used to do a t-shirt with all his best customers on it. They even licensed things like Show of Strength in the UK, did the vinyl release over here and bands like Jail Cell recipes. I think the singer from Jail Cell Recipes worked in that shop. So that was another big connection in that time.

Jail Cell Recipes: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXiZxgqJ55k*

Rob Coleman: Then there was a fantastic shop in Wigan, Alan's Skate and Record shop and so you'd order a record, and it would arrive along with a handwritten list of new releases that had just arrived. Cos you'd have your mainstream underground stuff and then a bit more underground and then you get to that point where you are buying records with runs of say just 300 or 500 made in the world, and you're in on that, and there are literally just two or three people in the whole country who are selling the stuff and he's one of them. These things you wouldn't even find in Rough Trade or Vinyl Solution. This is bedrock. Which is good fun. You'd enjoy the ridiculousness of that. And he was great, he'd have all that stuff and the way Maximum RockNRoll was a bit too overwhelming really, it was too big, too many pages of shit, you'd get lost a bit in it. So, he didn't just do a good job of reviewing that stuff, he'd let you know the stuff existed. It was so hard to find anything. People would do a fanzine with all the best intentions, overlooking the fact that it was going to take the best part of three months to get it photocopied and sent out, so you were always felt you were a long way behind everything. He made you feel he kept you up to speed with what was coming out and stuff. And he did a really cool thing where you could have an account with your debit card and while you were on the phone to him, he'd be recommending other stuff as well. His sister used to work there as well as the bass player from Jailcell Recipes: "And if you like this, you'd like that as well." He also had First Strike records, the first Jailcell Recipes record. A really, really good shop, bit expensive but that's the price you pay for imports and small runs.
At that age there's a little bit of peacocking involved, like who can get the most obscure records and t-shirts. When you went to a gig, you'd want to stand out a bit and get a bit of attention. Which was great. Some of the better relationships I have made in my life is because someone has come up to you cos of your t-shirt. So, he also had a t-shirt with Alan's Records, cos his shop became a bit of a thing, and on the back, he had a list of people who were his best customers and I was on it and most of the people I knew were on it. Kind of a proto version of Patrons today, to get it up and running. It was just funny getting the t-shirt and having a look who else was on there. It would be people from all over England, and you probably knew about 70-80% of them.

John Hannon: The scene was so tiny. I mean, you've heard Understand - and admittedly we were more like a hardcore band to start off with - but we weren't really a hardcore band by any stretch of the imagination. We played with MDC, DOA, Slapshot, Cromags, we toured with Sick of it All, proper hardcore bands, but only because there wasn't anyone else to do it! And we just kind of got in by default, I think. Playing with Sick of it All, we got heckled and playing with Pantera, that was terrifying - getting bottles thrown at us and everything. We played with Sick of it all a few times and got quite pally with them but the Sick of it All crowd were really your meat and potatoes hardcore crowd. Hardcore for me was what happened in America between what 1980 and 1985 you know? We weren't a hardcore band but were definitely in the hardcore scene.

Rob Coleman: We played with Sick of it All first in 1993 in London and it was great. Another band called Black Train Jack and Understand and back then, people who liked Sick of it All - it was quite a small show - were probably a bit more open-minded with their choice of music. They liked other things: punkier things,

popper things, noisier things. They were still relatively - even if you're still talking a pretty small slice of the musical bite - slightly more varied in their tastes. And then we played with them again in New York and that was all fine. There were a couple of emo bands on the bill, and we played with Sick of it All and it was all great.

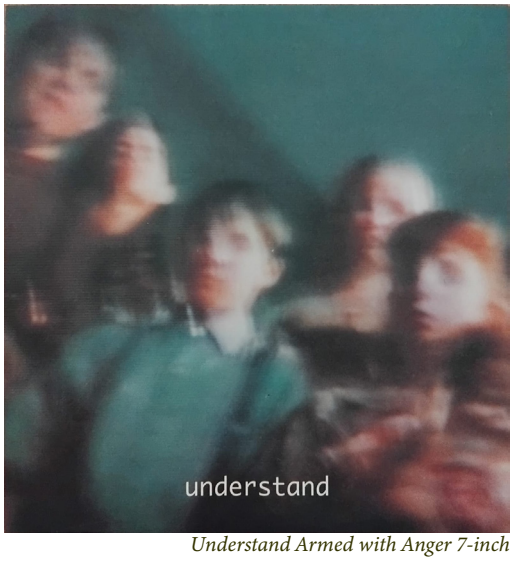
John Hannon: I think people who have grown up getting into music, listening to records, going to see their favourite bands haven't necessarily been a part of the thing we are talking about. They don't get it. They don't realise that it is way more than just being in a band - you are part of this community, and your own band is really only a minor part of that. We were just in love with the whole thing. Our part of it was Understand and, yeah, we were fortunate enough to be as successful with it as we were, but my fondest memories are of being part of that community. If you look at any of these seminal scenes from New York, Chicago, Boston or whatever, and you look at the bands that part of those scenes, there are always bands that you can say: "They're not a hardcore band" or "They're not a punk band" but they were all mates, and they loved it or they put on shows. That's what that scene is and it's really attractive, and I've always really been into (that) culture and obviously as an old man, a bystander now, but I'm really happy that I was part of that. And that stays with you, I think.
You met other bands who were infinitely more talented or had a better perspective on things than you and weren't part of a scene and they were always hitting a brick wall with how far they could go. And to us it was so easy. You're part of this scene and you can network all over the place quite quickly just because you're in this little gang. You trade information. Everyone was so generous, it was almost like a badge of honour to be like that. "If you need anywhere to play, I'll put you in touch with so and so" while bands maybe that you played with locally, they didn't have that kind of a trait, they weren't so obliging. It's every man for himself kind of thing.

Rob Coleman: It was great, and there were all these hardcore faces around at that point as well, and the cool thing about that scene was that you were just as entertained by the audience as you were by the bands. You would put on a good show for them because you had this respect for these people, for their contribution to the scene, whether they had fanzines or sold t-shirts or put on shows or played in bands - everyone was doing something. Didn't matter if you were playing to 50 people or twenty, you'd look out and think: "There's somebody from this fanzine or this band, you 'd better be on top of your game because these people have seen it all." It was the complete opposite of how a show normally works - the band looking out at the audience thinking: 'Who are these idiots watching us?" whereas those shows, there was an audience looking at the band and saying: "Who are these idiots on the stage?" Which is something I really liked.

10.

Roules:
CONSOLIDATION EP AND FIRST 7-INCH ON ARMED WITH ANGER

John Hannon: As for people ripping off that American thing, as I've mentioned before there were bands like Quicksand and Fugazi but really what they were doing was so light years beyond our comprehension. There was this other stuff coming out of the States at the same time, with people like us trying to mimic those bands. It was always 7-inchers, no one ever made albums, and I felt like we were kind of like a UK version of that scene that was going on then, you know, and we had a seven-inch! That was like an incredible achievement: we'd come from this little Greenswards School. So we were really, really proud of that. And then things started happening really. really quickly. There is so much stuff going on at that time I just really find it difficult to put it in a precise timeline. Back then I wasn't a major player in Understand. Dominic and Rob, especially Rob. He just knew everyone. He was just fearless in getting new connections. So, Rob would know how that happened,



Understand Armed with Anger 7-inch

Rob Coleman: The Armed with Anger 7-inch came about because in the summer of 1992 Understand had played in Bradford at the 1 in 12 and Richard Corbridge who runs the record label Armed with Anger asked us to contribute a song to a compilation EP that was coming out shortly after, which we did, and it was called Consolidation. Featured Britain's best at the time: Ironside, Vorhees, Kito, etc and on the strength of that he asked us to do a single for him which was recorded in early December 1992 - the day after Fabric's first show in Colchester and then we recorded in the studio, Adelaide, the next day. That came out about three months later, I think, in the spring of 1993.

John Hannon: Did the Consolidation compilation and it was on that and so was Stand Off and it's a 33rpm 7-inch comp of about 10 bands and there wasn't a lot of choice, it was just everybody who's in the scene at the time. Cos things were tiny. It was literally micro - the number of people we're talking about who were involved up and down the country - that constituted the scene.

Rob Coleman: Fabric was great. Cos when we sprang up, we didn't feel like there were too many bands who were like us in what they were doing. Cos especially those bands in the North were superhard, aggressive and then some bands in the south who were like pop-punk, like Descendants, things like that and we didn't really fit in with either of those things. So, when Fabric appeared, we had the same influences. So, it was nice to have a band that we could play with without thinking we're not poppy enough or not heavy enough. We could actually feel quite comfortable playing together. Played their first show with us in December 1992 and the next few shows they played were with Understand as well. Tony the bass player lived in Brighton, as did Dominic at the time, and they were quite good friends. Fabric was a funny collection of people, perhaps a bit too much talent for one band. Each band seems to have one or two driving people, and the others are solid and quite happy to take the reins while Fabric had five of them. You could have got three other bands out of them. All of the band members had some kind of attention-deficit disorder and were screaming for attention to release their creativity. They were all songwriters and the music sounded like that. It was really busy, and you never really knew which Fabric you were going to get from one show to the next. You could see them one week and the next they had written seven new songs and it's a whole new sound and a new set. The next week they could be back to playing their older songs. You never knew what you were going to get. So, it was always really interesting and exciting.

Fabric: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-0WsBu-Yvc***



11.

To Live By Drawing From A Stone: 1993-94 REHEARSING, RECORDING, SHOWS AND NAME-MAKING

Stuart Quinnel: So, I was still working, I was in the print trade, so a lot of times if we were doing a show in Leeds or in Glasgow we'd drive back overnight and drop me off in London in our wagon which was called, 'scuse me, The Fucker. Robbie Coleman bought that van for 400 quid, an LT35 and that got us to some shows that then pushed things forward, and we only had it for about 4 months, but that van got us to playing shows like say The Powerhouse in London.

Rob Coleman: As for being the so-called hardest working band in England - we cracked on a bit but not for very long. That first year we were busy, after that it wasn't that bad. I dunno, we were just lucky. We caught some weird wave where we had one thing really going for us and that was we were equally popular - did really well, at the beginning - in the NME and even Melody Maker a little bit and Kerrang and Metal Hammer and there wasn't many bands that could do that, and Select, the big indie things at the time. The indie monthlies and stuff were all really super-positive about us and it seemed like we were always in one or the other, which sort of created an illusion that we were really busy or more present than we were because there was always something being reported in the MM, NME, Kerrang, Metal Hammer, Select or - what was it? - Q or something. We were so lucky. So if you were just a casual observer - a lot of people are a lot more open-minded than you realise - so a lot of those reading Kerrang were also reading the indie press and if you were working at a record label and your job was to read all of it you'd think: "Understand are everywhere." But we weren't doing more than anyone else, we were just lucky enough to get covered in lots of different places which made us seem like we were busier than we really were.

The way we built up a rep in the press was an interesting little phenomenon - and it was a phenomenon, extraordinary how quickly it happened. And it's two things really. The rock press had genuinely decent journalists who cared about music and they were happy to see a young rock band who were half-decent, interesting enough and lent some support because that is what they do. These Kerrang types are all decent journalists who like music and were really supportive. And then you've got the indie press who were by and large fairly reprehensible people, and they are so pathetic that, I don't think we were really of any interest to them but we were so - it was like the Emperor's new clothes for them and the idea of a bunch of twenty,twenty-one year olds who were vegetarian and didn't drink and played this abrasive music and collectively weren't stupid. Sounds arrogant but then you take your own intelligence for granted. We didn't think we were particularly

Dom and John, photo by Phil Howes

intelligent as a group of people, but we aren't NME journalists. We don't get to meet all the dimwits that they do. So, on your first meeting with us as a bunch of twenty-year-olds who all had their lives together, weren't drunk, weren't taking drugs, weren't idiots - they just didn't get it. They pretended to like us because they were thinking: "What the hell is this? This makes no sense to us because everyone we know wants to go and do speed and coke in the Good Mixer in Camden and we've got these people from Essex, the worst place in the world for that kind of thing, seemingly articulate, got their act together." So the NMEs of this world and Melody Maker seemed to just go along with it, whereas I feel that the rock people genuinely got it, were more open-minded. So, when those two things met it created a bit of a buzz because it wasn't usual for a band to crossover the magazines like that, and we did get nothing but positive reviews in the NME for a long time, and Kerrang, and that was almost unheard of.

Stuart Quinnel: John had a Stratocaster for a while and then we were supporting Therapy, and I had both my bass guitars stolen and John had both his guitars stolen, lovely Les Paul. I had a Music Man; I also had a 4-string Kramer bass that had a chrome neck. So, we had both our guitars stolen and then we're borrowing guitars. That was in Manchester, so I never liked Manchester after that. So that was with Therapy. They were super cool, they were banging and so when it came to recording and we had to find somebody to mix it cos we had to find our own people and they would tell me names but I always put forward Chris Shelton cos I thought that Therapy album really captured Therapy live , that was my only push.

Rob Coleman: The first show we played with Quicksand was in Bradford and we were quite lucky in that we played our set and then the PA broke and we wondered if Quicksand were going to play still cos of no PA but it was a tiny place so they ended up just playing with the backline and turning the monitors around for vocals and still sounded infinitely better than we did with the full PA and we were like "Jesus!" They were not that much older than us, but it was enough to make a huge difference. All those American bands were good because they played so much more, cos if you were, like, a New York band you could play like every week, twice a week. You'd hear stories of how The Cramps were booked to play Max's Kansas City every Saturday for months. There wasn't a Southend equivalent of that. We could play once every two months if we were lucky. So, all those Americans were getting infinitely more practice, infinitely better. Quicksand was just so tight and so powerful, and it was both inspiring and depressing in equal measure to see that they were somewhere near to being your peers but infinitely streets ahead. And the takeaway from that was: we've got a lot of work to do. But they were great, and I can't really remember now if we played with them again.

John Hannon: Best gig? Probably the Understand verses Above All show at Saks: I've still got the flyer of that. If you come from a hardcore beginning or a punk band, or any kind of rocknroll band with that visceral kind of thing, where you imagine that kind of thing working is on a small show, isn't it, it's not on like a big stage and at that point we had played some big gigs I know. But for me, if you asked me where my favourite show would be it would be somewhere like Saks, where you've got this low ceiling, you've got the sweat dripping off you, off the ceiling, it's a really intimate thing and ever if I imagine a hardcore show in my brain it's at a place like Saks.

Above All: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdGnbn1Q0Fo***

Matt Randall: I remember going to see Understand a few times at that point. I didn't know him. I remember a gig at the Esplanade. I think he had a basketball cut out on his head, right at the side of the stage, he was a really enigmatic performer, but then after that we played with Understand a couple of times, and gradually got to know them a little bit. I was always a little bit in awe of him at that age I guess, and being a year older might as well be 10 years at that age.

John Hannon: We were always a physical band. A gig was always about getting hot and sweaty, everyone going absolutely mental and it didn't matter if there were two people in the room or - best estimate - twenty-five, you know? We were playing an all-dayer at the Esplanade, not a battle of the bands but something like that, not a cool gig, no one gave a shit, and I think it was daylight as well. So we're all keyed up and ready to go thinking we are really gonna do it here, Andy's counted the first song in, and I've like jumped up in the air and

I hit the top of my head really hard on the ceiling and nearly knocked myself out again. I've just gone straight out on the floor cos I couldn't see, I really felt like sick and Rob's said: "I looked around, and you were already lying on your back on the floor and I'm thinking I'm going to have to up the ante here and get more into it." Worst gig? The Grand in Leigh-on-Sea. The day before that - we had a room in Maple at this point in time and where we went every day. We wouldn't rehearse, we'd just sit there talking shit all day and Stuart Quinnel, the bass player in Understand, one of my best friends, he is very good at what you might call physical comedy, likes to pretend to do things, jump out at staff and that kind of thing, he's got good timing, he's very good. So, we're sitting around and joking and he says: "Right, Hannon, that's enough, you're gonna get it." And he picks up this skateboard and pretends to hit me with it, round the face, and he actually smacked me right on the nose. It didn't knock me out but broke my nose! His timing was a little off that day. And he was absolutely mortified that he had done this.
So, the next day this gig at the Grand, my nose was broken so I remember that about it. And also: Understand were very anti-guitar pedals, so like Fugazi, you never saw them using anything, just a lead into a Marshall, that's it, and Rob and I were very much about that, wouldn't dream of using a distortion or reverb pedal or anything at the beginning but later, I think, we had just discovered the Ruts and were ready to use a little layer or flanger. But we had never ever used any before and in Maple, where we had all our gear stored, they had a big box of old shit and we found all these old pedals, one might have been an old Ibanez but otherwise they were just shit, so we came back into the rehearsal room and said: "Look, we've got all these old pedals, we're gonna be like the Ruts" and the other two were like - Let's just say: that gig was the only one we ever used them on and we thought we were being really tasteful and, you know when you see a video back or something and its terrible? So, Rob and I thought it was insane and decided not to do that anymore. And falling off stage. Done that lots of times and not in a cool way: "Oh look he's turned it around." No, it was also obvious: "That guy didn't mean to do that and it's absolutely hilarious."

Stuart Quinnel: We'd always rehearse in Maple Studios in Southend and we'd always go for lunch on the corner, did for about a year.

Kev Hutchins: Me and Paul played in a couple of bands with Rob Coleman. We supported John in his band Sterling. We were called Bad Diesel. Rob's idea of a band based around the idea of us being people who worked on a farm, and we played this kind of bluesy, Led Zeppelin kind of stuff. We only had about five songs, dressed in boiler suits. Rob said later that he really wished he'd worked on his schtick a bit more in between the songs, a few more choice words to come out with in whatever accent he was trying to put on. We used to rehearse at that room at Maple, when Understand started they had. Anyone could go down there and play. They didn't mind, so we used to. Me, Rob and Paul, had a few efforts at different stuff. Rob's outlet at doing music really, just getting something else going really, did a few side-projects. None of them did anything! It was just available really, they had the keys. You could go down there until two in the morning.

Stuart Quinnel: And there was like another one where you got a bit of a buzz about you and like money and record companies came to have a look at us and we're just five guys in the back of the van and it was just funny and we were laughing all the time and like Dominic and Bob were always squabbling and me and John laughing. Me or Dominic would be driving and yeah, just laughing. I can't remember arguing, I'm sure we did and we must have had some big turnovers but all I can remember is laughing. Just remember letting Dom and Bob squabble and bicker and me and John just laughing. What a great time: young and in a band. What could be better? I had finished my apprenticeship and the company said to me: "Well you can become a studio manager next, and I said: "I've been offered a record deal!" and it was so weird: "This is now my job, I play bass guitar for a job!" Amazing.

Rob Coleman: Stuart is quite tall. He liked to think of me and Dominic as two characters from Time Bandits. He used to think that we were a couple of aggressive, fighting midgets. Forget about the age or male privilege, there's a height privilege and you know the stereotype of dwarf as being aggressive, always rolling about fighting over something and this is how, in his mind, he always used to see me and Dominic: the two Ewoks fighting themselves out of their costumes. So I would refute that. I think that's just Stuart's heightism.



12.

Sentence:
1994 EAST WEST SIGNING

John Hannon: I mean everybody's got their Year Zero and every five years someone's going: "What the hell are you talking about. That was all shit. We were doing this before you!" For our Year Zero it was just this tiny little scene. I remember Nirvana being on The Word, and I can't remember what year that was, it would have been about '91 or '92, something like that. We were in Tunbridge Wells, hanging out with our punky friends down there, doing a gig. More often than not we'd been watching bands. We'd gone round to somebody's house afterwards, saw that and I just remember looking round the room and there was this feeling 'Oh, it's all over. That little scene we were into - it's all gone. Now it's out. Everyone's into it.' That sort of alternative guitar sound, which was a particularly broad thing, from, I dunno, Agnostic Front to Dinosaur Junior, a very broad spectrum of music but all American underground music. It just felt like the door's open and its bolted, and it felt like this tiny little scene is over. And it was!

David Vick: It's painful when that happens. Back in the mid-1970s, me and my friends in Southend were into the soul and funk and jazz-funk coming out of America, going to clubs in London like the Global Village and Chaguaramas and Lacy Lady in Ilford, Monday nights at the Lyceum. You'd go to see Kool and the Gang or James Brown or Ohio Players at the Hammersmith Odeon and be almost the only white person in the place. There was one local club, the Gold Mine on Canvey Island of all places, that did a night there. We had our own style of dressing – probably the first wave of retro come to think of it. Raided our parent's wardrobe for a 40s-50s look, shopped at Acme Attractions and Seditionaries in the Kings Road. It all felt really special, like we were special. Then it got in the papers. All of sudden disco gets big, someone comes up with a name for it (soul boys) and all of a sudden you couldn't get in anywhere cos of the crowds. Funnily enough, a lot of the faces from what became punk were in that scene (Siouxie Sioux, Billy Idol, Johnny Rotten and his crowd, Joe Strummer) and (thank God) that's what replaced that scene. Told John about it and he was really fascinated. Had a thing about youth groups.

John Hannon: Yeah, it was a thing back then: the ethics. If you remain independent, you don't cross that line, the big selling-out argument. Lots of those things, you have to remind yourself now that was actually a conversation. And I think, for the most part, you could wear that badge of honour because it was unlikely that Sony were going to come knocking on your door anyway. But that weirdly did happen to us. And without getting too boring, it was like this. Nathan took us out to dinner and he started talking about Sealand. We were like: "What's that?" and he was like: "What? You've never heard about Sealand, off the coast of Essex?"

Understand, photo by James Reddick

Nathan's girlfriend, Lady Lara of Sealand, was the source of the knowledge he had of it. A lot of what came out of Nathan's mouth was questionable. I'd be like: "Is this true?" A Second World War gun tower that had been commandeered by an ex-army high ranking, named himself Prince Roy of Sealand and claimed it as an independent principality, and because it's just outside British territory it was tolerated. And suddenly, that became the most important aspect of us signing our record deal. We were trying desperately to keep it low profile. We were well aware that signing a major record deal was not cool, and there were already bands refusing to play with us. Bob Tilton dropped out of a gig that we were meant to be playing, for instance. We were losing friends as such. So, if we were going to do it we wanted to do it as pared-down as we could. Not a big lavish thing like this. In the end it was: "Just let's just do it." And then all of a sudden, the big hold up was the weather conditions about getting to Sealand. Our manager was all over this. He really wanted to go to Sealand and there was a helicopter that flew us in late January, early February 1994 from Southend airport, off the coast from Clacton. This huge structure and then, as you get close to it, it's like a bungalow on stilts. Landed and met Prince Roy. Someone from the family always had to be there. Did it in shifts. Pretty bleak. Only meant to last a matter of years. Still there now, 70 years later, massive holes where the steel has corroded. It wasn't very punk rock. Or maybe, actually - in retrospect - I guess he had this 'against all authority' spirit at least.

Larry Hibbit: With Jetpack we played with Understand but the first time I think it wasn't even with Jetpack but with a hardcore band I'd played with before Jetpack called PSI, who never even put out a record, but I think we would probably have supported them. Cos the Southend lot used to come to Kingston to do gigs, and it would have been Understand and Cynical Smile as well and we definitely supported Cynical Smile and I think we also supported Understand. So, we'd met them before and I remember I was - we were a bit younger than them so we would have been still at college, 18 or 19 or something and they would have been in their 20s - and they had a deal and they were absolutely terrifying to us. I remember being absolutely terrified! They turned up in a splitter van which might as well have been a spaceship you know with the blacked-out windows and they got out of it and were the coolest people we had ever seen! So yes, my experience of meeting them, for the first time? Terrified! They were like the big boys at school. And I remember seeing John playing guitar with Understand for the first time. He just had this style of playing guitar. It was all in the hips and he had this lean, and he could get right over and he had this black Telecaster which he would wing around with his hips and I thought it was the coolest thing I had seen in my life. So even though we supported them in a bar in Kingston called Backers - which has a capacity of maybe 80 people - to me they might as well have been fuckin Bon Jovi. Like so unbelievably impressed by them. So that was the first time I met them.

Tony Maddocks: I was literally just coming back at Christmas and then it was: "Hey. I'm back!" It was just hanging out everyday. John, again at the time, he had probably left college at that time and my relationship with John and Jane and the family was very strong. I'd come back and he'd be like cutting my hair. I'd come back and see what it was, whatever John was wearing, what colour we were dying our hair, and it was just the local hangout again. At that time, I really wasn't taking my education side of things, swimming, very seriously anymore. I had a good scholarship, but it was still costing my parents a bit of money and then I got to the point when I said: "You know what? I'm not going back." Understand had just signed a major deal and I was: "Okay. I'm gonna be the roadie. I'm gonna be the driver, sell your t-shirts and my parents were like "Well it's up to you, take it where you like but you've got to be earning some money." So I was like: "That is what I want to do."



13.

Bogdan:
1994 NEW YORK AND DON FURY

Rob Coleman: The whole indie thing wasn't very indie anymore. The biggest bands had all signed to majors. In this 'post-Nevermind' period - which had made a big impact, '91 that came out - the scale we were operating on, bigger than a pub seemed enormous. Whether Nirvana played at the Astoria or Wembley was equally inconceivable to us. Not so much the music industry thing, grunge being the next big thing, but that we were lucky with how we caught that thing of CDs being at their peak. If you were with East West, as we were, they were responsible for the Atlantic reissues, and these were coming out and they weren't cheap at full price. So if you were East West you were selling as many AC/DC and Led Zeppelin records in 1994 as you were, whoever was big in 1994, Oasis or something probably. So there was so much money floating around, and those things were so cheap to produce, such a scam, people were spending 12, 14 pounds on a CD, 15 pounds on a record! The record companies had so much money to speculate irresponsibly with, on stuff like us! You could sign ten bands, don't have to do anything. One of them might do okay and pay for the other nine but if they don't it doesn't matter because you've got Led Zeppelin 1-5 or whatever and you don't know what to do with all this money. They could take a risk with someone like us for a ridiculously large sum of money. Which was good for us in the short term. That was a bigger thing in the '90s. All that money came from CD reissues. Condense 30 years of music into that one short period of time and that's a lot of money.

John Hannon: So we signed this record deal. One week we're gonna record a record and the next week we are actually in New York. If we had been asked who we wanted to record with we wouldn't have even understood what the question was. We just thought: what d'you mean? You just go to a studio don't you, and make a record don't you? The idea of 'Oh we want to work with this guy or this guy' was completely alien to us. The guy that signed us, I think it was the band Orange 9mm that had just released an EP that impressed him and because they were with, like, a major record label it was: "Oh; let's go and do it with this guy." And we are like: "But he's in New York!" and they say: "Yeah?" And we're like: "Oh okay." I don't know how much thought went into it. We actually knew the name Don Fury because his name was on pretty much all the hardcore records. Him or Walton Tiers out of New York. If he had said Don Zientara we would have been over the moon too. In fact we would have just done what we were told actually. That was the reality of it. If it had been

Understand, photo by XXXX

something that we had on opinion about we would have been quite pig-headed about it but as it was we just did what we were told.

Rob Coleman: I don't know how that came about, because it didn't come from us. It wouldn't even have occurred to us to go to New York and record with Don Fury. I think it came from the A&R man because a band he liked, Orange 9mm, had recorded at Don Fury's and there were some similarities, and he'd floated the idea and we jumped on it. Like a schoolboy fantasy to record with Don Fury. And that we didn't even realise that there was a difference between recording studios. And if we would have known about it, we wouldn't have suggested it because it was just a tiny demo studio, overlooking the fact that some our favourite records were not necessarily the best sounding records, in terms of recording quality.

John Hannon: We played New York. Yeah, it all happened really quickly. We landed and Nathan, our A&R guy, the ex-Happy Mondays manager, was like: "We've got a show" and we're like: "What?'" "Yes, I've organised this gig with Sick of it All at Wetlands. And we're: "Oh great, when is it?" We're all really tired. He said: "In three hours!' And we're: "What? Today?" And he said: "Yeah, and we've got another one afterwards." So, we've just got here, and we've got two gigs today and no instruments, nothing, cos they wouldn't let us bring anything cos we didn't have work permits. So, we are like: "Okay'...". So we had to go to this place and wait for this hire gear, but it didn't turn up in time. They take us to Wetlands, which is like this big venue of the time for bands to play, rather than CBGBs or something. So, you get to the line to go into the club and you realise: "Holy shit, this is not like an English show." Everyone here's about seven foot tall and looks like they could kill you They're searching you for guns going in - proper grownup stuff - and we are slightly terrified, I'll be honest. We get in and it's a, you know, proper New York hardcore festival going on. And they said: "Right you're going to play after these guys." And we're like: "We don't have any gear". And we had nothing - a guitar, a plectrum, a drumstick nothing at all. And they say: "Well, you'll just have to go and ask them if you can use their stuff." These were proper tough guy bands and everything. so I remember we went and broached them: "Alright mate? Can we use your gear?" and they were like: "Yeah, sure, but don't break our drumsticks or our guitar strings cos we don't have any others." So, we played this show and then we came off stage and then they drove us to another place called the Limelight to support someone else, I can't remember who it was, and by now Dominic couldn't even speak, he was so hoarse and we said: "Let's not even do this. We've gotta make a record tomorrow."

Rob Coleman: If you have a relationship with the producer and you know the room, its great. Because if you come from the outside expecting to get that, you don't. And that was a bit of a learning curve thing because that record sounds absolutely terrible, which was largely our fault, because we thought we could just walk in there and come out sounding like all these other bands that we liked, and it didn't really work out. The equipment we'd hired just wasn't good and we weren't technically proficient to fix it up. If we'd had proper guitar techs we could have turned all this stuff around, but you go to a hire place and get a Gibson Les Paul and an SG, you think it's gonna be like the one you've got at home and it's not. The amps aren't the same and nothing sounds like you're used to, and you've got this time pressure, and you're just not prepared for it. But having said that, it was a great experience because everyone in that NY scene was so pleasant and mildly bemused that an English band on a major label would fly all the way to record in this demo studio. Made no sense!

John Hannon: The studio was on Spring Street, right in the heart of Little Italy, and he lived above, and it was in the basement. It was still possible in Manhattan at that time. There were still no-go areas. You can ask the other guys, and they would say something different perhaps, but I really valued working with Don Fury. For me it really reinforced for me what you need to make a great record, or the things you really didn't need to have to make a record. Later on, we ended up in bigger studios and were not as happy with what we got as with that recording studio, and you had to ask yourself: "Why is that? They've got all the gear. It's all amazing". But we were happy with what we got in this tiny little 16-track studio that was local to us. Don Fury had very little equipment back then. I think he was running two ADAT machines, a tiny, tiny little recording room. I don't think there was enough room to bring your own stuff in. There wasn't enough room to get a drum kit through the door. So it had this drum kit in the corner, and it looked like something out of Star Wars wrapped

around in a cylinder of perspex, and there was just a couple of inches to spare between the perspex and the cymbal stand. Like tiny. Undeniably he made some great records there and I went back a couple of times and hung out with him, and he had a couple of really wild stories about recording with people like GG Allin and Swans rehearsing in his basement. Interesting person. So we made this EP in New York. And that was when we really got to meet, you know, people like Quicksand and all those New York people cos we then went on to play with people like CIV and Shelter and those kind of people, when we started sort of hanging out with them. And even though I don't think they thought our band was any good, they really liked that we were these English kids. I think if we had been from New Jersey or something they wouldn't have been interested, but we were seen as exotic because we were English.

Walter Schreifels: I may have met John at a show in the UK when Quicksand was playing, maybe we played with Understand maybe, but when I really got to know him and Dominic from Understand was when they stayed at my apartment when Understand were recording an EP in New York City. He stayed at my place, and I just immediately hit it off with him. I remember meeting Dom and Understand's manager, Tank, in Nottingham. They had come to a show. They gave me the Understand 7-inch. That was my first introduction to Understand. That I remember clearly. It's possible that Quicksand played a show and John was one of those I shook hands with, but I do remember him staying at my apartment at the West Village in Manhattan, at least part of the time, when they came to town. They might also have been staying in a hotel in Soho as well. But I just remember those guys sleeping on my couch. I guess cos I knew Dom. I said: "Cool, one of the other guys can stay too." But I do remember hanging out with John in my apartment and thinking: this guy's hilarious and cool. He's just funny and really sharp and just a cool, fun guy. You know. Every once in a while you just meet someone that you just like super click with, and I think a lot of people felt that for John but I surely did. I think it was him and Dom were staying at my place. You know he had the energy of how these guys in the band looked to John in a sort of a kind of leadership role, that's the way I saw it. Not the kind of leader: "Hey, I think we should do this" kind of thing, not like a boss, but he was the one they all trusted in an artistic sense. He was loved by all those guys. I mean they all got along, you didn't get much tension from those guys, but John held a special place.
Physically he was a very striking guy. He has this like sort of strawberry-blondish hair, and he was super tall and he played guitar really cool. Like he just had a lot of panache - you know what I mean? You could tell that he was inspired, like the source material, you know: a lot of DC - kind of music that I was pretty close to - like he was taking that and making something of his own with it. But he had a lot of flair, a lot of style. He just seemed to really know what he was doing, which was why those guys - I don't wanna say 'looked up to him' but I think they did in a way. You'd have to ask them. And I was also hanging out with Dom, and John is so much taller than Dom, but also taller than me, so maybe we all just looked up to him for that reason!

John Hannon: And then there was Hare Krishna and that being a thing back then. That was really a thing, y'know, people forget that. Hare Krishna was an issue people really used to talk about, and you know we found it fascinating as well, these people. Rob and I had visited the temple on Soho Square and met some of those people. You know we weren't remotely interested in Hare Krishna itself, but we liked the apartness and insular society sort of thing. That's a very, very different branch of Hare Krishna than you get when you go to Soho Square. I don't know what you get when you go there. Gonna make you a tough guy. So in New York you had Equal Vision, which was this like Krishna consciousness label, Shelter were on it, 108, Resurrection and that kind of stuff.

Shelter: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLCZAElN9o0*
108: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LY8NfgA8ST0*
Resurrection: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-thwOP3xHT4*

Walter Schreifels: The guy that started the record label was in a band called Shelter, a Hare Krishna hardcore band. Initially the focus was that band, and another band called 108. He ended up selling the label to another Krishna devotee and then they opened it up - you didn't have to be Krishna to be on it. They've become very successful and they are still a record label now. they do great business. The Hare Krishna hardcore scene is connected to the straight-edge thing, an off-topic or a side-street. Especially in the 80s, if you are gonna find

troubled youth like that you are gonna find Hare Krishnas. So hardcore was a natural place for Hare Krishna kids. A lot of kids in hardcore were coming from difficult places. Now it's a bit different, seems like it's a bit more broad, but at that time there were a lot of kids who were dealing with trauma from their childhoods, fuckedupness and Hare Krishna has an appeal because it will keep you out of trouble, you know, and there were a lot of bands that kind of picked up on it. The Cromags would be one, Shelter was another one, which started the Equal Vision record label. Hardcore is also kind of nihilistic, dealing with drugs, violence and Hare Krishna is not about that at all and neither's straight-edge, so if you're straight-edge and you've got some interest in devotional service or spirituality, it's kind of like right there for you.

Cromags: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BLcCM8nPY*



Understand, Bored Games EP

John Hannon: So that was The Bored Games EP which came out on East West, and they released it in the States, but that was all done through Rob. We started out, one or two trips, Rob, being the kind of charismatic person he was who could always see through the bullshit and just organised that and went back to the UK and said this was going to happen. There was a bit of a furore: "Why are you doing this? You're signed to a major." But then we went ahead and did it anyway. I think that's how it happened anyway. Rob and Dominic realised quite early on - we were on East West, it was like Warner Bros. Lots of the bigger gigs and stuff we were on they were like organising. But Rob - give him half a chance and he'll organise something and he got us on this Equal Vision label.

Rob Coleman: The Bored Games EP came out in the summer of 94. Recorded in February of that year at Don Fury's studio. While we were in there recording, Steve Reddy of Equal Vision dropped into pick up some recordings of a band on his label that had just recorded there; and we got talking to him and he was a super nice, cool guy. He liked what he had heard of the record and said that if Atlantic passed on it in America he would be happy to release it, which he did. True to his word. And, as I said, he sold five times as many copies out of the Hare Krishna temple in New York than Warners and East West managed in England. He was actually fantastic, we owed him so much for that. It was brilliant.

14.

The Rudeness We Encounter: PLAYING THE PART 1994

John Hannon: American-influenced hardcore music had come of age and really exploded by then, and the possibilities which seemed available in the 1990s expanded incredibly from when we had first started out. From post-Nirvana and Rage Against the Machine, where bands of that kind would have been expecting to play to audiences of a few hundred, it was now thousands - biggest bands in the world - and so we were lucky - right place, right time. When we went to New York and made that record, we got to meet a lot of people in the music scene just purely because we were a bunch of English kids. I can't overstate how much that seemed to be a novelty: English and in New York, the importance of that fact. The music we were into at that stage was still a living breathing, happening, evolving thing at that time, but a mostly American-centred thing, and we were English doing it and therefore a novelty: a UK band, emulating American bands, where with a lot of the bands in that scene there was a big influence of English bands. The post-punk and the indie scene, everything like Gang of Four and the Smiths, for them, was really cool. Being English, we had a little extra cache, so we got a lot of attention for that reason.

Walter Schreifels: I had a surprise birthday party and John and the others were there. I remember seeing them play at Wetlands and I remember them dropping by the studio. We might have gone to CBs. there was a lot going on in New York at that time, or I was at an age when I was up for everything! I just remember just feeling cool that they were around. I just loved those guys. The thing that they were plugging into, especially in the UK at that time, would have been niche. The kind of music Quicksand was making at that time was not popular in the UK at all. It was surely very niche for an English band to be onto that kind of stuff, would have had a bigger audience for it in the United States, especially on the East Coast. Being into Jawbox, Shudder to Think, DC bands, Quicksand, Orange 9-Millimetre, whatever was going on. Helmet. I don't think that was a typical thing to be into in England, that wasn't the hot sound at the time. The UK likes a wave of things that can tell a story, like some kind of movement, and there needed to be like three Understands for it to really happen, and I don't think they ever got enough wind behind it to do more than open for Quicksand when they came over. So those guys coming here, there was certainly a novelty about it.

Jawbox: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXuIQa9uzpg***
Shudder to Think: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5VLhwR4Y14***
Orange 9mm: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xearzoqI3KY***

Rob Coleman: So, then 1995 comes round. By then, that whole Roadrunner Records, metally thrash thing is really kicking off and suddenly there seemed to be a whole wall of people who used to listen to the hardcore-thrash crossover stuff were all into Sick of it All now, people who listened to Biohazard and Life of Agony, maybe, that kind of more-your-metal-side of Sick of it All. They'd suddenly inherited all these kinds of fans. With the Pantera experience, they weren't really into what we were doing, so that was quite interesting to see how a band's fanbase had changed - and not to our benefit. Yeah, we played in London, and someone heckled us with "Fuck off, REM!" which I thought was a bit harsh. When we first started going to shows you could have a grindcore band playing with a really poppy, scratchy emo band and it was nice to have the contrast but then, at that stage of their career, Sick of it All seemed to be attracting more of those people who just want that metalcore mosh stuff and less other things. I think after that point I just thought we just need to stop playing with these American bands, it's not really working, and try and do more of our own thing.

Biohazard: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ob5ZvH9NRmk***
Life of Agony: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQmchEpKcLo***
Pantera: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DOamgay6Mw***

John Hannon: Everything was so focused on America at that point in time and it wasn't our imagination, you know. American bands that had come up through the 1980s - they were just better. They were louder, they were self-aware, tighter, everything else felt inferior. When we met people of our age group, they were - and I don't mean this necessarily in a positive way - self-aware. They were very focused on their own craft and what they were doing and who they were and what their scene was. We were like: "These guys!" They were taking photos of themselves and talking about this legendary gig. It just felt very weird. And I think part of us was: "We wannna do that". We wanted to set up our own thing, but we knew we had to bullshit about it really cos, you know, any scene is very rarely anything like as good as it looks like in the four photographs you've got of it. So we saw all these American bands who would say: "This is where we are from and we own it. "There's lot of places that we think of being these cool places in hardcore but the people who came from there really didn't think they were that cool. But that level of reality: "This is where I'm from and we're bringing it back home" sort of thing. So, there was an element of that we wanted to do. We wanted to say that we were from Southend and we were not about to move to Stoke Newington and be something that we weren't. I mean they've all done that now! But while we were still in the band. We all know that lots of music has come out of this town. Some people do, they don't wanna talk about where they come from and I understand that as well. But we were quite happy to go on about where we came from.

Rob Coleman: When you play with someone like Pantera and they have a particular kind of audience, they don't see you as just a support band warming up. They just think that's it's entirely your fault that they are not watching Pantera at that moment. And boy did they let themselves be heard. We'd been offered the show because the band doing the whole tour couldn't do a couple of the shows and we shared the same agent - the band Downset couldn't play Glasgow and Newcastle and we thought: "That'd be good, we could do that. How bad could it be? It'd be good fun."I wish we'd recorded it for a live album and not made any reference to the fact that we were playing with Pantera. It would have been hilarious. When you've finished a song and there's just booing, people screaming: "Fuck off!" and "Pantera, Pantera, Pantera!" in between every song and people would be saying: "Why is that happening between every song?" It was at Glasgow, Barrowlands, AC/DC played there. Would have been a good place for a live recording with in-between songs just abusive yelling, psychopath Scottish metalheads taking offence that you're there. And we had no business doing that, that's for sure! Shortly afterwards, somebody was talking to the bass player from Downset and asked: "Oh, how did the shows with Pantera go? We did the first two in Glasgow." And he said: "Yeah, I heard. I asked Phil Anselmo from Pantera how were the first two shows with Understand and Anselmo allegedly said: "What? Understand? That Scottish band? What the fuck was that all about? What the fuck!" So that's the singer from Pantera's opinion of us. Fair enough.

John Hannon: We went back to New York about a year later to play the CMJ festival. We ended up playing CBGBs with a really great band called Garden Variety - they've been forgotten about now - and another band called the Stamford Prison Experiment. We went to New Jersey and played Bruce Springsteen's club, the Stoned Pony. So we didn't properly tour in America but we did some gigs. We met them all: Roger Morret, Ray Kappo, John Joseph. It was that point in time when the scene was more in Manhattan. If you hung out with the right people you'd meet these people, you know?

Garden Variety: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z489VBuRSIA*
StamfordPrisonExperiment: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hYScHgsAmk*

Tony Maddocks: I know this is not about me but all the same, without Understand we would never would have formed the band Above All and we wouldn't have got a record deal. We got label interest from Roadrunner Records, who were a big pretty independent record label at the time. Without John and the boys from Understand, that would never have happened. They were the ones who kicked down the door got people interested, and at the time you had hardcore, post-hardcore, metal, people were getting signed all the time and it's not something I ever thought of as a career, but I thought: "They're doing it why can't I?" We just hung onto their coat tails and they opened a lot of doors for us. We were all best friends just enjoying the ride really. Came back from America, don't know how many years it was even to the point where we became a serious band in our own right and started touring, I was spending more time with Hallam and the Above All boys so didn't see so much of Understand then.



15.

Around For Nothing:
1995 CHRIS SHELDON, BURNING BUSHES AND BURNING BRIDGES

Rob Coleman: We did a tour with Therapy in 1995 and to illustrate how nice they are, we played a show in Manchester and left our equipment in our van overnight and a lot of stuff was nicked, the guitars, bass guitars. My guitar was okay but everything else went: cymbals, high-hats, you know, and we said: "Oh, well, we won't be able to play then." And Therapy said: "Don't be ridiculous" and gave us what we needed to be able to play, and so we could continue the tour using their equipment, which was really good of them. Lovely people. Cos we weren't in a position to go out and buy a whole load of new Les Pauls at that point. I think that's the reason John started playing a Tele after that, cos he lost two Les Pauls and our financial situation was that we were getting by but didn't have thousands of pounds to be able to spend on new guitars. Back then, 1500 pounds for a new guitar was no small amount of money - seven months' rent or something! So John picked up a cheap copy Telecaster and put a gnarly Humbucker pick up on it, and off we went with that sound, which was good actually, broadened the sound a lot more cos I had an SG and he had had a Les Paul and they have quite a similar sound but when he did that it broadened the sound a bit more, a bit more dynamic I think. So that was something good to come of it, I suppose, made the sound a bit more interesting. We played another show with Therapy in Austria on that Helmet tour when Helmet had a day off and we played with Therapy instead in Kraz, which was where we met Fritz.

Stuart Quinnel: We toured with Therapy in Austria. They were super cool, they were banging. So when it came to recording an album and we had to find somebody to mix it cos we had to find our own people, they would tell me names, but I always put forward Chris Sheldon cos I thought that Therapy album really captured Therapy live. That was my only push.

John Hannon: I think I can speak for all of us here at that point in time it felt like we hadn't made one good recording ever. I go back to those early demos we did, which was a long time before that of which we would be really proud, with hindsight we'd listen back and we'd say: "We haven't made a record that anyone would wanna listen to." We did that EP, and it sounded like slow and boring, and it didn't have anything with it. So we just wanted to make a record that people would listen to. I remember feeling that. Then we had to find somebody who we could work with. Somebody teamed us up with a guy called Chris Sheldon who had worked with bands like Therapy.
Recorded it at an amazing studio called Britannia Row, which is kind of like a audio recording college now, not a functioning studio anymore. It was where Joy Division made Closer, some really cool records made there.

Understand, photo by James Reddick

To be fair, that would have gone straight over our heads at the time. So many people that I was introduced to, people that meant very little to me in my little hardcore bubble. Later I'd be thinking: "I wish I'd asked that guy something, wished I'd paid more attention." I think we did it in two weeks, to record the record, which sounds like a long time but when you're working on tape like back then, it's considered not to be a very long time at all. Then he mixed it at The Church, which is in Crouch End. I remember that. At that point in time, The Church was owned by Dave Stewart of Eurythmics.

We were just going mad. Bratty, energetic kids. So I remember we'd have to go there every morning, sort of set the mix up and then they'd say: "Okay you lot go away." Go and play some kind of like 90s arcade game or something all day long. Then they'd wheel you back in at about four o'clock and say: "What do you think?" And I remember listening back and thinking: "Sounds good, but I don't like it really, and I don't really know why." Somebody would say: "I think it sounds a bit bass-y and they'd say: "Oh no it's fine." And we'd go: "Oh okay," and walk out, and that was about our input on how that record sounded.

To be fair, when it was finished, we all felt we had achieved something and that it sounded like a proper record. It didn't sound like, you know, a hardcore demo. We were dropped more or less there and then, and they were kind of legally obliged to just press up a certain amount of copies of the record. I'm pretty sure we sold more copies of our Armed with Anger 7-inch than our album. Whenever somebody says: "I've got that record "or "I've heard it" I always say: "Oh really?" because there were so few of them out there. They put zero effort into promoting it. I just don't think it hit the mark of what they wanted it to be.

You've got to remember that Nathan, who signed us, he was like a band manager, more like a Malcolm McLaren, like an artist. He was very conceptual. And I think he was attracted to us cos he had managed the Happy Mondays, one of the most hedonistic, over-the-top bands ever, and then he's got these guys who were trying to present themselves quite seriously, who don't drink, understated. He thought that he could turn us into something, thought it could be a gimmick or something. I think after about a year and half of working with it he thought: "Oh this is nothing, this is boring. If we're gonna do this straight-edge thing, let's do it ridiculously over the top." We weren't going to do that. I'm second guessing, I don't really know that at all. We didn't get dropped immediately. To be fair Nathan kind of - or our manager, or someone - anyway, some money was given to us, and we bought us some recording equipment so we could then start recording ourselves, and that was part of why I started to get into recording - because of that equipment we bought.
As far as the video of the single goes - you try to, want to, own your past but that - when I think of that I start sinking into the floor. No, it's not wicked. It's terrible. You didn't see it? Why would you have seen it? Look, I am pretty sure that the video cost more money back then than the recording of the record, and it might get a play on, you know, MTV, and if you didn't see it - that was it! There was no YouTube. You never watched these things unless you happened to be up at two o'clock in the morning when it was shown and taped it. But there was one before that, recorded a video at the Sunrooms a bit before that - Bored Games.

Part of the reason why I wanted to do the recording studio once the band had wrapped up was, I had this immense frustration with going into these situations where you're not in control of what happens. You know – you're in a band and you wanna make a record but it's down to this other guy you might not get on with, or he's got some other agenda. I wanted to have - for all my shortcomings as a recording engineer - to be able to oversee the whole thing.



Understand, Around for Nothing
Promo CD for the album 'Burning Bushes And Burning Bridges'

16.

Chicken Scratch:
END STRAIGHT-EDGE

Rob Coleman: Got to about 1995. Still definitely straight-edge but also I remember looking around at what was happening at that point and thinking that I had nothing in common with any of it because they were all a few years younger and just annoying brats - which I had been, and is great when you're the annoying brat, but it's like the way everyone likes the smell of their own farts but for other people it stinks, which is kind of how I felt about the straight-edge thing in 1995. I just didn't like any of it. But I had definitely been that annoying when I was a few years younger. I think also you get a little glimpse of yourself and its like: "Oh, we weren't as cool as we thought we were".
It sort of went like a house of cards. It's a funny thing, cos it's a hard thing to maintain. There's plenty of stories from all around the world of people pretending to be straight-edge and that was a funny aspect of it. Cos why would you pretend? You either are or you aren't. That's when you realise that something has some kind of power. It used to annoy other people. I found that quite funny and quite flattering because - who cares? Someone turns up on a November night to go to a show pretending to be straight-edge. That gave extra validity to the straight-edge thing - that people would aspire to it but couldn't do it. I was never annoyed at that happening, just thought it was quite funny.
I have my suspicions that some people were starting to waver, not letting on, a lot earlier on because they're embarrassed about it and that's hilarious. I'd say that the infidelity started a lot earlier on than most people realised. Dominic could have been out drinking with his golfing friends and Tony with his swimming mates and not letting on. I know John had had a couple of beers with his friend Fritz out in Austria out of sheer boredom. I'd been out with some old school friends and had a glass of red wine and not bothered to mention it. So probably about 1997 maybe, aged 24, when it all finally started to fall apart - morally!

John Hannon: Rob and I even - this is embarrassing- when these more extreme straight-edge things came along, we set up this bogus hardline fanzine called Crossbow and it consisted of these kinds of paramilitary photos we had taken of people with crossbows. And then we'd have all this kind of nonsense we'd written which just didn't really make any kind of sense and it was all related to straight-edge. We'd print these things up and leave them around in Southend, leave copies in WH Smiths. We did loads of them. Rob had this job where he had access to this photocopier, and I think now you'd probably get arrested. God knows what people thought it was. But we were trying to create this bullshit scene.

Kev Hutchins: John had this thing for Julia Sawalah. At the time there was this thing called Press Gang on TV, and she was basically this girl he fancied. It was always about a girl he fancied. Even thinking about the Runts' songs. They were all named after girls he fancied. One was called Fisher Queen about this girl he liked called Gemma Fisher, another called Roller Cola about a girl he fancied called Nicola, all this stuff. So, Crossbow was his idea of a bogus militant edge band. John did all these flyers which had Dexter Fletcher, one of the actors in Pressgang. He was Julia's character's boyfriend and there was a picture of him in the crossbow sights, and we went down to WH Smiths and he put these flyers into the magazines.

Rob Coleman: We were flogging a dead horse for years. I can't believe we stuck with it for as long as we did. It's impressive! It's easy to do things when you're young and zealous with that motivation that all youth groups have, you know. Should feel lucky that we chose straight-edge. You read about these black-metal Norwegian groups, burning churches and murdering each other. We were lucky that we chose something else, but it's the same youthful spirit. Could have been blowing ourselves up in airports. I can see these things mirroring around elsewhere. When you're that age you're very susceptible to that kind of fanaticism. We got off lightly. Could have been all different. Probably more biology than anything. You lose that extremism as you get older, mid-20s. There was definitely a point at which I was still technically straight-edge, but I didn't really like a lot of the new straight-edge stuff, and it was all becoming a bit embarrassing. I thought: "That isn't really my thing. I'll just carry on with my thing."

17.

Fleeced and Felched:
END EAST WEST

John Hannon: It all went a bit south with the record company straight afterwards. At that point in time there was still a certain amount of belief amongst people who thought that we would get another record deal, nowhere near as big, but I don't think that we were really that bothered about that. We were writing all the time and coming up with new stuff and then bit by bit we realised that's not gonna happen and things are moving on. It's difficult. You can't go back then. Pardon the pun but you've kind of burnt your bridges with where you've come from, if you like. No credible hardcore label was going to touch us with a bargepole. We were never a hardcore band as such, but we were in the hardcore scene; suddenly we're playing with our hardcore idols, but no longer a hardcore band! And again, you've actually lost touch with the scene which legitimised who you were in the first place - what you were doing in the first place and you're kind of all at sea then. We were on a major label, nothing made sense. I didn't understand those people whatsoever, and the gaps between you making your music and the end result, and all these intermediate people like booking agents and A&R people - this isn't what we wanted to do, this wasn't why we got into it, and it all just happens. I'm not just wanting to - we had some great opportunities, and I really enjoyed it, and at no time was I saying: "Oh no, we should sign to dogshit records and not do this," but it's like suddenly we're not part of that anymore cos we've gone and done this thing. split

Jane Hannon: John loved being in Understand but when thing started to go off the boil I think he was ready for it to end. He'd fallen out of love with that type of music and he was ready to explore new things. When the band were signed they took it really seriously - it was their job, they took wages, rehearsed every day, recording etc. I don't remember them actually splitting up, it just all seemed to fade away and they moved onto new things. John worked at the Terrace Café for a while. He really liked the owner, Malcolm, he was good to John. I just remember John telling stories about serving all these old ladies who used to comment on him being left handed as if he had a disability. Other than working at the chippy with me, I think that is the only time he's earnt money doing something that didn't involve music.

David Vick: John rarely spoke about Understand after they had split up, which was pretty much about the time when we started hanging out together as I was now back living in London. John certainly didn't seem to have any regrets about it coming to an end. Not knowing any better and not having been around when the record came out (in as far as it did, apparently), I asked him for a copy of it and he went: "What do you want that for?" Woe was up and running and I almost felt embarrassed to say that I liked the single and made some excuse about it being another Southend band, as if I had a collection of, er, Status Quo, Kursaal Flyers? Tonight? The Understand story really reminded me of a band I hung out with in the late 1970s called The Automatics. I wanted to be a roadie and attached myself to them and we became really good friends. They'd got sucked up by Island records in the punk breakout but nothing came of it. Recorded a single with Blondie's producer somewhere posh. Made them sound like he wanted to be Phil Spector. The Pistols had recorded Never Mind the Bollacks there a year earlier, if I recall correctly. Their manager had a little box room of an office in the West End too. In the end, their main claim to fame was making The Specials become The Specials AKA cos they'd called themselves the Automatics too, but we'd got the copyright on it a while before. But the same situation as Understand. Grunge happens and the record companies start signing up anyone who sounds remotely similar cos they might be the Next Big Thing, as the phrase was coined back then.

The Automatics: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDK6S4UC2_c***

Jane Hannon: I remember the band getting dropped by the label but Tank was still managing them and I was still working for Tank. By this point Tank had started a label called For All The Right Reasons and he was putting out American bands which were similar sounding to Understand – bands like Seaweed, Shift and

Chamberlain – releasing their records in the UK. Then one day I find myself at a showcase in the middle of the afternoon at the LA2 watching Reef. At the time they'd recently sacked their manager whilst also having a number one hit with Place Your Hands. They were nice guys, and were on the same label as Neds, hence us being there, but they were very mainstream, a real contrast to Understand. We were there because Tank was now going to manage them as well. So back in the office Tank would be focusing on Reef, the band that were making some money, and I was focusing on Understand, the band that weren't. Needless to say, Tank let me go around that time. I must've annoyed the shit out of him back then – I was very loyal to Understand. I would come home and they would all be at the flat, I felt a bit like the go-between, no record deal and not really knowing what was happening. I don't really remember how it all ended – but the boys gradually all just moved onto new things.

Walter Schreifels: And I see that sometimes now, where they're picking up on an American thing that's just very 'American', if you know what I mean. And I saw them in the UK as being a little bit out on their own musically. It was a tough break because what was happening at that time was, you know, Blur and Britpop, and Understand were trying to do something that was not in that flow at all. It wasn't even grunge. Something that picked up in the UK like twenty years later. They were a very cool band. Definitely felt like a kinship to them, and as people I really gelled with them. Thought they were great. But coming from England they couldn't be here, and in England there didn't seem to be any way to contextualise them, they didn't fit in with what was going on there. I mean, Quicksand were also not the hot thing. We were playing to these sort of diehard kind of fans.

Dave Nevard: The five of them went to an A and R show or party apparently, all the big bods are there. The ones that don't look at you one minute and then they find out you're in a signed band and they're your best mate. Real fake, up-the-ladder -type people. They went to this party, and they'd just finished this album and they're waiting to see what happens with it and this young upstart comes up to them: "Love your stuff guys, love your stuff but that's yesterday's news. What we want to be working on is the next one." They've just finished recording and this was so deflating for them. From what I heard, someone in a drunken rage got on top of this young executive's BMW and jumped the bonnet in. They were just a very real local band, didn't come from a load of rich families. Some bands meet at university, funded by their parents and no problems at all, it's just like jobbing it for them. They were just very real and didn't lose their heads. Not at all too cool for school about it all. And John was the least affected of all of them. Dominic would say: "We'll all be there in our brand new this or that" they've forked out for and John would turn up with his leads in an old shopping bag and trying out which one worked. He once said it was the uncertainty of it all going wrong which made it unreal for him. I think he saw - that world when you step up and then you're part of the money machine, everything's polished, you're getting branded, you're having a group of experts making you something you're not - I don't think he was ever into all that. That's me assuming from just from being around him, I'd say. Which was why, when the band finished, he just got on with the next project. When Understand had their five minutes in the sunshine, I don't think that meant anything to him. It was a band, a creative outlet that finished and he moved on. Carried on, never stopped creating.



18.

One-Percenter:
1993-96 PETE WILKINS AND STERLING

John Hannon: None of our lives follow the narrative of what you think happened and you go back a bit and then it's: "Oh yeah, I was doing that as well at the same time as Understand." We just wanted to see how stripped down and stupid we could make this and a great antidote to the corporate business of what Understand had become, compared to how we'd started out. Pete became a long term collaborator in Woe and Liberez, and had this encyclopaedic knowledge of American and western guitar music, and he would introduce you to all different kind of things like 60s garage punk and I was like: "What's that then?"

Rob Coleman: Pete Wilkins was a bit older than us, which makes a difference, and had this phenomenal record collection and open-minded in his music. The scene was pretty small, so you soon get to know people. He just came along to a show we had put on in Southend which got cancelled because the venue had been fire-bombed, and we went along just to apologise to everyone who had come along. He was just so surprised that anything like that even existed in Southend. We put on a show for an American punk band called Cringer, and Pete was wondering how it could be that a noisy southern Californian pop-punk band would be playing somewhere like Southend, and he went down and of course nothing was happening and his girlfriend said: "Let's go back again later," and the second time he turned up. He was just interested in Cringer, not us, and that it was actually going on. He was a great influence because back then it was pretty difficult to get to hear any new music, and we'd go to his house and listen to his records that I wouldn't have necessarily listened to otherwise. Took us to a lot of noisier bands like the Action Swingers or Surgery or Unsane, all that kind of thing, and he was into a lot of other stuff and also liked jazz and experimental music and he was very open, and he and John got friendlier and friendlier.

Cringer: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zl_MtQirKtc&list=RDEM5Dfu1ZxILq2L_DyWaOGH2A&start_radio=1***
Action Swingers: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNkzGpETnU0***
Surgery: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJL3o6grH7U***
Unsane: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dy7Cg36qfY***

Sterling, 5-song EP

Kev Hutchins: It's funny to think of those two guys, so funny, the pair of them together constantly. I think Pete used to do John's head in sometimes with some of the things he'd say. John would wanna put him on mute, I think, chatting with people, cos Pete would say something rude. But Pete has never changed, never changed. It's just been him. I used to talk to him about music and he was so funny, just reeling off these bands I'd never ever heard of: "Oh, he sounds a bit like (someone I've never heard of) and he's the guitarist from bla-bla" and I'm: "What? Why are you telling me this? I've got no reference for this at all!" And it's some American garage-punk band. Extraordinary knowledge. Unparalleled knowledge! But those two guys, oh my God. They probably would have messaged each other 50 times a day at the time. They were so close, so close. John didn't drive, obviously, so Pete was the vehicle for getting to shows, or whatever else was going on.

John Hannon: Pete had a friend Sam Knee who lived in San Francisco and was friends with the Mummies and in a band called Marzipan and came back to the UK. They had been childhood friends, got into the Cramps and '80s revival garage bands. I had no idea about it, but I liked it and I said:" Let's play some of this music then. Let's do it." And they could play a simple and primitive form of music because that was their level of musicianship, their skill set. I was trying to dumb down, and they just used their limited skill set. There was a lot of power in it, and we had some old equipment, an old amp and 60s drum kit, the gear to get the sound, and Sam had a tone blender pedal and we'd get a studio with a four-track and Sam had these lyrics he'd made up on the train and it was no different to doing Stand Off - nice to hang out with these older guys and more. We did it for about 3-4 years. We'd play it and record it straight away. The passage of time can throw a different light on things, I enjoyed doing it, a handful of gigs. The passage of time. Maybe it's good that it came out now rather than the time, and you see it in a different light.

Mummies: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4CeRFyO9bI***
The Cramps: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIQR_3TPtJw***
Stirling: ***https://notunloved.blogspot.com/2020/12/stirling-one-percenter-chunklet.html***



19.

This Is My Instrument:
1996-2000 MUSHROOM / NO RECORDING AND UNDERSTAND SECOND ALBUM

John Hannon: Believe it or not, for another couple of years we lived as musicians. We didn't have any money, but we kidded ourselves that Understand was our job. We did have to get a proper job. Dominic, Rob and Stuart all got into the touring game, back then, and kind of employed all the stuff that they had learned over the years in the band, and the networking, you know, and just hit the road running really, went off and worked on some really big things and have never stopped.

Larry Hibbitt: I remember Dom doing one of the coolest things ever. He came down one time with Cynical Smile, and he was tour managing them cos now he's a tour manager - he tour-managed Hundred Reasons for a while too, until Muse stole him. So Cynical Smile turned up, and they didn't have a drum rug with them and the floor in Bacchus was tiles so it was just going to go everywhere, it was just a tiled basement - can't remember how bad it sounded but anyway - and they went to Burger King in Kingston, walked in through the front door. Dom just picked up the doormat, rolled it up, put it over his shoulder and just walked out with it. Me and my friend Charlie, we were just in awe of them. And that remains, still.

John Hannon: I just got into sound engineering. I started working in a local cafe and my friend was working in an even smaller recording studio about ten miles away from Southend. There were all these rehearsal studios, Mushroom, and this one had a recording studio as well, and most of those who used it were cover bands or local rock bands. He was a very gifted musician and a much better engineer than me, but he had to stop because his band, which was Vitro, was getting signed so he said: "Do you want to do it?" He was keen to find somebody who could just pick up from what he was walking away from. So he said to me: "Do you just wanna do my job?" and I said: "I really have no idea what I am doing." You know, it's one thing to be like demo-ing your own band and then working with other bands. He said: "Oh, don't worry." Because back then you couldn't go and study to be a recording engineer, the route in was just to become a teaboy in a big studio and work yourself up the hierarchy, and I was never going to be able to do that, so I just got myself thrown in at the deep end.
I had no experience whatsoever apart from operating the little eight-track that we had. He said: "Just sit in with me and wing it and I'll show you the basics, you'll pick it up." I really didn't know what I was doing for years, and a lot of people probably paid the price for my inadequacy. So that was 1996 and I started doing that

John at Mushroom studios, photo by Phil Howes

before Understand had really properly ended. But the person who actually owned the business had nothing else whatsoever to do with it. He was a divisive figure and not everybody liked him, but he was very decent to me and I worked for him for a couple of years.

Ross Baker: What's interesting maybe for some people is that my band, Stands to Reason, we were like a paint-by-numbers post-hardcore band. We weren't very good, you know. Live we had quite a bit of energy but in the studio, we were never really that great. But we probably did our thing for a couple of years, two years probably. Great fun, amazing, played with some great bands. We played with Understand, John in particular helped us. But what's interesting is that as an engineer, John pretty much cut his teeth, literally cut his teeth, with us as a band as well. So when it was still Mushroom Studios, we would've been one of the very first bands he recorded I would imagine, apart from Understand – I'm sure he was twiddling the knobs with those guys – but I think he recorded us in '96, we weren't very good but equally I think he was learning his trade, if that makes sense. But what I found fascinating in hindsight and what I found through listening to others, listening to the podcast and talking to other people, is that John had the ability, clearly around that time.

Davy, Paul and Jim: We should start with the earliest encounter with John I guess, which was our first recording which we ever did with anyone. That's the best place to start. We walked away with cassettes, which seems weird now, but I do remember having the cassette and after it was finished we were all sitting - there was five of us in our band - five of us crammed into, like, a Ford Fiesta just to check the mix, which doesn't sound like a good idea now! Man, we were young. Jim, you might have been 16? I think I was 14! Youngsters, man, really young. I was trying to timestamp it in my mind and I think it was '97, '98 maybe? '98 I think. So, me and Paul would have been 16 and Jim would have been 15. Springish, I reckon. It wasn't even called NO Recordings, it was Mushroom then. We were all from Benfleet, so Mushroom would have been the nearest recording studio. We used the rehearsal rooms and probably we went there because it was the closest place to go. And it just so happened it ended up being John. Beginning of John's engineering career then. Guinea pigs. That recording was pretty easy really. You were doing it pretty much live. So you'd just track your drums. You'd all be in the live room together. And then it was just a matter of patching a few bits up. There were no ProTools, it was all analogue. I think he used ADAT machines there. So like two video cassettes, eight tracks on each and then do the vocals. I think we were in there for just one day. Or two? Probably a day. I don't think we could even afford to buy more than one day.

Ed Wenn: A friend of mine who did a lot of work at Air studios came along who John synced with, giving him really good tips about how to record guitars and stuff like that. Cos Rup (Rupert Coulson) came in really early on when John was taking over at Mushroom and he was soaking up everything good, obviously. John was saying how terrified he was when he took that over, which you might have heard from other people, did a great job but learning on the job, and any chance he had to quiz an experienced engineer: "How do you do this? How do you do that?" I think he got a lot out of that session with Rup, so he learnt how to put a guitar out of phase, or something. Rupert still mixes our stuff, works in tv and film, really big guy in that area, does loads of soundtrack stuff. Really good. He came along to Rayleigh and I got him there by saying there was a pitch-and-putt nearby. I said to John: "Rup likes playing golf, right. Can we get him up there?" Cos we never paid him any money at all. I said to John: " He's outgrown us in terms of money. We used to pay like 50 quid a day and in the end he said: "Can you stop please?" Cos his daily rate was like a grand a day. "Can you just buy me some wine or something?" So I told him there was a pitch-and-putt nearby where we could do a round and then record something.

John Hannon: I think (the owner of Mushroom) saw some potential in me working as an engineer. Not as a business - because there wasn't anything in it - but he kept putting a little bit of money into it until he wanted to move on and do something else. He had had it with the whole music thing and said: "Why don't you buy it off me?" and he knew what he was paying me and I didn't have it. He said, "I'll make it so you can" and I took out a loan and he let me pay it back over the next couple of years and I took over the recording studio.
I had the confidence to do it because I had made enough connections by the late late '90s - not on my engineering skills! If there was any legacy Understand had left behind, it wasn't really fans as such but kids a bit younger than us who were now doing bands. It was the younger generation of bands coming up who had

been influenced by the same bands we had been influenced by. We'd gone somewhere with it, and people wanted to record with me because they maybe thought that I would understand what it was they wanted to do because I had listened to the same music as they did. Which is what you do when you're younger. You wouldn't use a studio because of the kick drum sound they got but because we liked this band and their overall sound and wanted to record where they had recorded, even if that guy was actually rubbish.

Lee Hall: Rob Scillitoe used to have a party in November, like a beer festival, and everybody would be there, and John would come round. We are very close knitted, us lot, we've all been in different bands, and we've all been through John since '97. He's done every band we've been in. I lived right near Mushroom Studios. I'm Rayleigh, 500 metres away from the studio. We recorded in there first of all before John took over. We just met John from Southend, you know, just Southend faces. My first band was Beatglider with Matt Randall. So we started recording with John but then we were lucky and got signed and then we went off and recorded the first album with someone else. But John played trumpet on our first ever single and we were reviewed in NME, so that was lovely. And he played live with us at the Pink Toothbrush, a couple of places. So that was really cool. He's just been there forever from day one with us.

Beatglider: *https://open.spotify.com/intlde/album/3gbsjHd8m5NfqLPwOpeyAd?si=ay7legfOSSqwe6843ykbrA&nd=1&dlsi=43a1d1d0b712482f*

Davy, Paul and Jim: I think I remember that he had some recordings of the second Understand record and he was showing us those recordings. I didn't know who Understand were, but Davy knew. I didn't really know anything about anything to be fair! I remember listening to them and thinking: "Okay, but I wanna get on with my recording." I was probably losing my shit at the time. It was probably a bit of a privileged experience really, but at the time you sort of take it in your stride don't you? I don't think I really knew them actually. We had done a gig at the Army and Navy. Paul, you were driving and Ron, our sound engineer, I think he called our bluff to go to the Sunrooms that evening. I'd never been there before. I couldn't even see over the bar at the time. But I remember our sound engineer saying: "Oh, that's John from Understand, and that's people from Above All, and they're the people from Pepper Man" and I remember thinking I know them, but when we went to record with John I don't think that the penny had dropped that he was John from Understand. I was in a band previously before Resin became Resin, and there were a couple of older guys in that, from the year above us, and they had written on the wall of the practice room - Jim Davis's loft - and they'd written how many times they had seen Understand in pen on the wall. So they already had this kind of mythological reverence for who they were. Going to places and hearing them mentioned, and they were being written about in Kerrang and Metal Hammer and things like that. So then being in the recording studio with him and knowing that he had come from that side of things it was like: "Oh shit!" It feels like he was a bit of celeb

Nikki Nailbomb: So, with John Hannon, we mostly recorded in our previous bands with him at Mushroom. That's where we first come in contact with him. I think we booked John cos I was mates with Mad John and Tits done their stuff there. So, it was usually: "That sounds good where did you get that done?" and he'd say: "With John Hannon. he knows his stuff cos he was with these bands." So we booked a session and it's all going well and John says: "Yeah this is quite good. You might know these guys" and mentioned Tits, and I'm like: "Funny you should say that..." and blablabla. So that was how we hooked up at the studio.
Me and the singer - people just used to name him Mad John around town and that - he started off in a punk band called Tits, and he's like 3 or 4 years older than me. So, when I first met Mad John I was still at school, and I formed a punk band with my friends, like a hardcore punk band. And then me and Mad John got drafted into this Scottish ska-punk band called Ex-Cathedra and they used to do a lot of European squat tours and things, and when the singer moved down from Glasgow he moved to Southend. He had a girlfriend called Nicky who was in one of the old-school punk bands from the 80s and 90s in Southend called Nuclear Anarchy. So, they needed new members and we were like just kids and he was like: "Do you wanna be in a band?" and we were: "Yeah, alright" and we were in Ex-Cathedra for a few years. We went on quite a few tours to Germany and Italy, Norway a couple of times and somewhere else, but it was all like mainly the squat scene.

Ex-Cathedra: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCUofVnd3jA*
Tits: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yfp7nuNhwI*

But me and Mad John, what really got us buzzing was hardcore punk stuff. That was our bread-and-butter. And when we were doing these squat gigs in like Holland we ended up seeing so many amazing bands, and one band that really blew our minds was OlledeGateau and they were like a power violence, thrashy, proper fast band and - not being funny - me and John were looking at each other and going: "What are we doing this kind of shit for? We should do our own stuff." So after that we said: "Right, we're gonna do something that we really wanna do." And Mad John is just such a genius. I'm not, like, sucking his wood, but everything he done was just fantastic - lyric-wise, tune-wise - and he had all these tunes and at the same time there was another old Southend hardcore band that was just fizzling out called Unite and Dobson, the bass player - he's a bit of nutjob, I love him - he wanted to carry on doing something, and then Nuclear Anarchy had just fizzled and we hooked in Dave DeVille, we called him Dave Skull. He was a lot older than us, ten years plus, and he had a band as well. We were all living at home and all the rest of it and it all just fell in place. We recorded this demo after a couple of weeks, not with John, some backstreet place on Canvey Island. We knew a few people in the hardcore scene that had emigrated up to London and so that was how we got Deathskulls started. And a couple of months later we got hooked up with John Hannon, cos whenever we done recordings, he was our go-to man. And I think he really got into it, really liked it.

Deathskulls: *https://thenandnowessexhardcore.bandcamp.com/album/the-real-deal*

Larry Hibbitt: So, yeah, we went out there and recorded with John and that was the first time I had been in a studio and recorded anything that was more than just hitting RECORD. My first experience of working with someone who was actually producing. So, I think those recordings were actually quite formative for me. He was the first person that I worked with where you were deconstructing parts, especially with the guitar, because he was a guitar player, splitting guitar chords out across two instruments. So even within the guitar part you'd have a middle, a lower and high one, things like that. Using overdubs in a way that created a larger-than-life sound which was the first time I'd ever done that. Instead of trying to get everything out of one chord, it was: "No, you could overlay these things, and you can stack them." It was the first time I'd seen someone that could comp the vocal. Before that I'd just recorded on reel to reel eight track machines. He had an ADAT, the VHS machines. There were two machines together and eight tracks on each and you had to wait for them to sync up, an absolute fucking nightmare. They were in that transitional phase between tape and everything being on a computer. This sort of horrible digital technology bit. Remember mini-disc players? And before you could see it as well. He would be incredible with these machines. They were really buggy, really difficult to use, with a tiny LED screen, but he would work so quickly with comping vocals together and he just sort of knew in his head what he was doing, even though there was no sort of visual display with it. He knew the inadequacies and the foibles of those machines but worked so quickly with them. I remember being fascinated with watching him do that. He turned the operation of dealing with these pretty horrible things into a bit of a craft. We'd do three takes of the vocal across three tracks and he would edit them together into one track like magic, without even being able to see what he was doing. So that was another great thing about working with him. I could use his own band as a reference to what I wanted certain things to sound like, in fact didn't even have to because he would just understand what it was we were trying to do, cos we were partly ripping him off. But I don't think he resented us for it.

John Hannon: Made a leap of faith and took out a loan and was lucky in being very busy and there was work out there and I started to tap into that and was really busy straight away. The nature of recording then was that things took a longer time, even rewinding a tape takes longer, overdubbing, less work to make up the same amount of hours - the whole process took longer. Labels like Firefly and Household Name, lots of ska punk and emo around at the time, and I enjoyed that. The labels I was working for were releasing a lot of product on CD and were selling like thousands of CDs, and they would record and make a return and a profit. The bands were always touring and sleeping on floors and there was a thriving DIY community. Musically I wasn't so invested in it but the commitment and how hard they were working from 1998 to 2003 or 2004. I tried to work as hard on those recordings as they did. Record after record after record. I probably wasn't the best man for the job, but I tried to work as hard as they did.

Larry Hibbitt: We were demoing, obviously, back then in the days before you could use a laptop. So we'd come up with these songs in the rehearsal room not really knowing how they sounded at full volume. Then you'd go into the studio to demo them. So, he was part of the demoing process. So it was the first time we would have heard those songs coming back at us through a pair of speakers and he definitely had input in that process, helping us get that down. He was there every step of the way with us really. He was part of the pre-production. And it was really lovely just going out there. Even though it was only an hour out of London it was like a real day out to be with John, listen to his crazy stories and record music. It was such a lovely spot. So that's how we ended up recording with John and just carried on doing it and when Hundred Reasons came along it was the obvious choice to go along to do the earlier recordings with him. So we did our first single, or the first EP, we recorded with him. Then we did the first single when we signed to Columbia with John as well, Primus. We didn't do the first album with him cos we then had major label money, so we went to New York and recorded with Dave Sardy, but we did all the demos and the pre-production with John. So, he was very much instrumental with us crafting all of that, to the point that when we did go to record it with the big-name producer he didn't really change much. John had been part of a very strong preparation for that record. Sonically he did, but the song stayed the same.

John Hannon: I had a little bit of a window there and Hundred Reasons were clearly a very together group of people. When we met them, they were probably 6 or 7 years younger, a generation behind us. There were lots of comparisons. It was: "Oh yeah, this feels like what we were this point." They definitely had it a bit more together than we did. I don't know about that: "If we had got started a couple of years later it would have been different." I don't know. Definitely, At the Drive In, Colin's afro, we felt like we were pretty close to this band. And they were managed by the same guy that managed Understand. Some of the people that really championed Understand were behind them as well. And Larry Hibbit, their guitarist, recorded with me. He probably saw me and thought: "I could do that but probably better!" and now he's a very successful producer. Lots of similarities between the two things. I had a little window of opportunity in that I did the first couple of demos with them and they got signed and the label very charitably said: "Oh, the guy that did their first couple of demos, let's give him a go" and gave me a go at recording them in a big studio called Westside, and I choked. In the end I said to the engineer there, who was a lot more experienced than me: "I am a bit out of my depth." So he took over. So, it had my name on it but I didn't really do anything. Consequently, had I been a bit of blagger in life I could have capitalised on that one chance - you don't really get another one - and taken advantage of that and gone on. But I didn't, and went back to my studio and they went on and had their career.



Larry Hibbitt: We'd been recording with John in Mushroom in this outbuilding of a farm. It was modest surroundings and then we signed to Columbia and we wanted John to produce the first single on Columbia and we said: "We'll get you a studio." An A&R guy booked us a studio and it was a studio in Shepherd's Bush. it's not there anymore, the whole buildings gone, but I think it was called Westside and it was one of those huge studios, probably built in the 80s. The control room was bigger than the entire space of his studio and the live room was one of those you could have put a 40-piece orchestra in. The studio was definitely too big for us, and John turned up there and he was definitely out of his comfort zone - as were we. And there was an engineer who we met on the day who was a bit moody and just sat there smoking cigarettes constantly, and had an idea of how the session was gonna go. I don't remember what the dynamic was like between him and John. My instinct says it might have been a bit frosty. This guy is probably used to doing big orchestra sessions or whatever-the-fuck someone like that does, a jobbing engineer who suddenly has this young band in with shit equipment and a producer who was not used to being in studios like that.
John brought his notebook, cos he always used to have this big tatty notebook open on his knee. He probably felt like a bit of a plum sitting there and like not pressing any buttons cos he was in major label-producing territory. He could have sat on the sofa and done nothing all day which was obviously not what comes

naturally to him. And I remember him like setting up the drum mics and this was like: "This is what I do in my studio - two SM8s on the floor and I point them over there" and he's in a studio where they probably have 10 U47s. So I can imagine that he did feel a bit out of his depth. But we wanted him there so badly, and we needed him there because had we left it to this engineer it wouldn't have sounded right. And that's not about knowing how the stupid big console works or anything like that, cos I don't know what John's knowledge of that was. But I remember turning to this engineer at one point and saying how we wanted it to sound and he said something like: "Well, I don't do that American rubbish" and I was: "Well, that's our sound". So I think we did three songs in a day - or two days? I can't remember. I think the engineer just mixed it and sent it over. It's not like now when you can have it on a laptop and you can just do with it what you want. It's like, we were still recording on 2-inch tape. John didn't have a 2-inch tape machine so he couldn't do anything with it after-the-fact. So I remember we got these mixes that we were not that happy with, but this was nothing to do with John. It had more to do with the fact that, I guess, it was just our inexperience. We'd just signed to a record company and we relied on them to book us a studio with an engineer, thinking that was the right thing to do now we could afford to spend a few thousand pounds instead of a few hundred pounds, and it was probably the wrong engineer in the wrong studio. But thankfully with the right producer. And then we eventually ended up getting Chris Sheldon, who made the Understand record, and he remixed it at Metropolis, and he made it sound as it should sound. I like to think that was John's idea. The other song we recorded there was If I Could, which ended up being one of our biggest singles. After we recorded it there we didn't release it because the label said we needed to save this back for the album. So I do remember that and I can remember John sitting on a chair in this ridiculous studio, there was probably a 72-channel SSL and a lot of glass walls and a moody engineer who doesn't want to be there and there would have been a tape on. I hope he got something from it and didn't just completely hate every minute of it.

Hundred Reasons: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvAL_EBxKPc***

Pippa Wragg: The first time Understand did a show at the Cavern, I don't think I spoke to John much. I spoke to Dominic, spoke to Rob, the first time I met them. It's just all where to park and where to put stuff, I don't remember talking to John much. But a few days later I needed to phone him, I needed to get his address because Dave (who owns The Cavern with me) had taken some photos and he wanted to send them the photos. No email, then, or at least just the beginning of email. Whatever the reason, we would post bands photos and I think it might have been through Mark and Jane at Gravity – who you should speak to as well because they put an Understand record out and booked tours for them - and things like that. Beggars Banquet records in Kingston. They sent all their bands to John. In fact the first time I went to NO was with Mark and Jane, cos I was with them and they said: "We've got to go to John's studio, do you mind coming?" And I was like: "No, that's fine" because I had already spoken to him. Jane and Mark gave me John's phone number and so I rang the flat where he was living just to say we've got some photos, shall we post them, and we were on the phone for two hours. So we just had this massive conversation, which was brilliant, and then that sort of just carried on. So then he rang when the photos arrived and I'm thinking: "Which is this one I'm talking to on the phone?" So then I went to the studio with him, Jane and Mark and we went to the flat. And that was like amazing and I am thinking: "Who is this person? He's the best person I've ever met in my life." So funny, so entertaining, so able to step between saying something really quite serious and interesting to delivering the most ridiculous jokes you've ever heard and telling these really funny stories. And I thought: "This is amazing I've just met my most favourite person ever".



20.

You Want The News...Well Here's The Blues: 1994-98 END UNDERSTAND

Rob Coleman: Hearing Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds around then was an apocryphal moment. Definitely the gateway to everything. That did happen in Berlin actually - or was it Munich? We had a day off on that Helmet tour and we're watching MTV 120 minutes and Nick Cave was playing an acoustic version of The Mercy Seat and it was absolutely fantastic. I'd seen them a couple of years before at Reading and wasn't blown away by it, didn't engage with it properly. Knew about him, saw this and thought: "That's fantastic". Went home and bought the Tender Prey album and then we took that in our own separate way. John got more Bad Seeds records and then the Barry Adamson records, and Crime and the City Solution and that stuff and I went into Current 93, Coil, that sort of way, but it was all down to watching one Nick Cave video! That was it. Thank heavens for Nick Cave records. Kind of filled in the gap for everyone. And definitely brought about the end of the Understand scene. You find yourself stuck in a scene which you just don't identify with anymore. Musically everyone was into more interesting things. I mean, if you take Fugazi out of the list, you're not left with much, to be honest. That band pretty much single-handedly held a pretty terrible music scene together. They are still fantastic and I still listen to them and I still love 'em. But outside of that, not much from that period sticks with me. I wish I'd been aware of that at the time! I'd certainly have a better record collection now. You zoom in in such tiny detail on a particular thing. I wish I could have had a broader outlook on life back then.

John Hannon: At sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, this thing seemed limitless, that little world we discovered seemed limitless. I mean, the hardcore world of a networking scene of people playing like-minded gigs. And we're talking about a specific thing: the bands that played the 1 in 12 and that hardcore thing, and we had an expansive view on what that was, and we liked all kinds of bands but that had similar principals. By your early twenties you start to see these walls you couldn't see when you're younger and suddenly it becomes more about: "If you want to be part of that club you can't this and you can't do that" and it becomes more about what you can't do than what you can do. And soon as that starts to happen, I start to get a bit "Hmmmh". I have never wanted to be part of any club and that was the only one I ever voluntarily joined. I still had a love for the music. I didn't have a love for the music we were making. I think we had gone through that natural

cycle that lots of bands do, and if we had given it a bit of a break and maybe come up with a different avenue maybe it would have been different.

Rob Coleman: Once you stop admiring your audience, it changes everything. The ultimate for me was playing a show in Glasgow once and there was a guy in a Terrorvision, long sleeve t-shirt in the front row making devil signs at me and I had this horror moment when I had this thought: do I now live in a world where I have to care what a 16-year-old in a Terrorvision shirt thinks of me and my band? And that's in the back of your mind when you're writing songs. And now that's in my mind? That traumatised me. I set my stall out and tried to be cool and now there's this idiot: that's what I got.
I think that was the problem about what happened to Understand really. There was this shift psychologically. Like when you're young and you're listening to all this cool and interesting music compared to the mainstream, with this edge, and you think: 'If only I can just introduce Helmet to the metalheads and so people will stop listening to this rubbish, moronic stupid shit' and after a while you realise that people LIKE moronic stupid shit and there is nothing you can do to change that, and then you start attracting those people too and then your whole would view is turned upside down. So you're proselytising.
And when we signed to EastWest, started playing with these more normal bands, people would come and ask us for autographs and things and we'd decided this would go against our ethos: there is no value to my name written on a price of paper - let's never do that, and try and talk your way out of it. Most times it would work. You'd deflect it and just start talking to them and after about 5 minutes they'd lose interest and that was good. You'd think I've met someone and had a conversation with them and hopefully they'll go away and have got something out of that which means more than just a piece of paper. And once someone asked and I tried to deflect it and he just kept on and then in the end got really abusive and called me a frogstart for not signing this piece of paper and I was like: "No this is the opposite of what I wanted.

John Hannon: What I was so impressed with was going to a gig at Saks- must have been '96 to '97 - it wasn't Knuckledust but some of the bands from that scene. And to be honest it wasn't really my thing, but I saw it and it was: "Oh, this is it. This is what we were always trying to pretend was what we had - and here it is!" That whole scene which emerged out of London and into Essex in that late 90s period, it did have an authenticity which we never did have and that was what I was very jealous of. These bands, they were always going on about sounding old school, but they really didn't, they sounded like some new thing, and they had a London identity or a south-east identity. If nothing else, I thought that was really cool and was quite an achievement. Something we never managed. We tried to do it, but it never came off.

Knuckledust: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FWXVXMhcQI*

Rob Coleman: For me it was just about creating an event where 50 or 100 people, decent people, could be part of. It wasn't so much about being a performer but more about: "What can we do to create something to do on a Wednesday night when it's raining, and you can go to a place where you can talk to a stranger who is actually worth talking to?" You felt proud for assembling this group of people who maybe don't know each other, getting to know each other. Everyone's getting on fine and there's no violence - and that wasn't easy or likely - and we could make a deal with someone to use their venue for nothing, and they would make money on the bar, and we could charge the bare minimum, next to nothing. But they made so little money on the bar we had to restructure our deal! And it's not as if I wanted everyone to be straight-edge or anything but it was nice that you could have a 100 people get together for whom alcohol was not the main focus. And the band wasn't either, and it just a nice atmosphere. People could come and chat and that was what it was about. Once that stopped, I lost interest in it. I never had any interest in being compared to other bands or playing to thousands of people I would cross the road to avoid.

John Hannon: For both bands at that time, Above All did their most interesting stuff and they really had it together, at the end. Remember going to see them at the Esplanade and the place would be like really heaving and people really loved them at that point. Tony had that confidence and could really hold the crowd. They had some really good material then. I mastered some stuff for Tony a couple of years back and went back to those old demos, and it was a shame they were never done properly like the main one. What happened to

Above All, from my perspective - the others might disagree - when it came to making an album was similar to what happened to Understand. You get this opportunity and it's a lot of pressure for young guys, you know what I mean? There's all this money flying around and all of a sudden you're out of your comfort zone and maybe you overthink it a bit. When I think about how successful that Stand Off 7-inch was. We put that together in about two weeks or something. Rock'n'roll should be spontaneous, in my opinion, that sort of visceral edge, and you kind of suck the life out of it. I think that was kind of what happened to Above All and Understand's first albums. I mean we came up with more interesting stuff just as it was petering out and they came back with Light of the Morning and I think that was really good, had some really good stuff on it.
To be honest, we didn't really have our eye on the ball, we kind of lost our way a bit, Rob and I in particular. It's weird. I mean Dominic, Stuart and I, we'd been together since we were 11, and that was our social group, we did everything together. it was like a proper gang, you know? And Understand definitely was - it was a real tribal mentality. We fought a lot, but we were always actually really good friends, and we never really fell out about anything. As you got to the end of your natural musical path - which really wasn't that long, actually, in hindsight. It starts 1990 and by 1995, '96 it's really kind of all over. For us as people, it's been a really long time; you're really: "I don't want to do this band anymore but I can't really leave my mates cos I really love being part of this thing, y'know? And I don't really know what to do, outside of this!"
We did record another album, so we were actually very experienced in recording studios. Even though we'd only made three records, we'd done shitloads of recording, demo-ing for years. We kind of knew what we were doing at that point in time, and I think that that material is different but very far the best thing that we ever did. Did it over about a week, I think. It was pretty much finished, but it was always said that someone else had mixed it. Essentially, I didn't make that record. It was done at my studio, but we did it all together. At that point in time, Dominic and Rob and Stuart and Andrew's knowledge of recording was probably comparable to mine, even though I'd been doing it as a job. I didn't know anything more about that process than they did then. We finished it and it was done on ADAT tape at that time, and there were loads of people, as I remember, saying: "Oh yeah, I'll mix it." But when it came down to it, nobody really wanted to do it, and one or two people had a go at it and I'm not even sure if I heard the results.
There was this weird period. I think our last gig was really quite a lot later than that, in about 1997, maybe even '98, but those last two years were kind of..we never split up either. I'm quite proud of that. We never took ourselves seriously enough to go: "Oh, we're going to split up!" It was more like: "Oh right, we're not really doing that anymore, are we? It's like years since we did a gig."

Understand: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0jLwYShIj8*

We never really got anywhere. Nobody ever really knew who Understand was other than those who knew about us anyway if we'd stayed on Armed With Anger. We never crossed over, as such. And it was really weird because one night you were supporting Therapy and the next playing with the normal pub bands we would have been playing with anyway. So we toured with bands that we liked, people like Jawbox and then Clawfinger. Jawbox was one of the cooler bands. Our biggest tour was with Helmet through Europe. Along the way we played with people like Down by Law.

Clawfinger: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLKUiq4cf-Y*
Helmet: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tN_AEyjASTY*

Helmet was going off and doing festivals and in fact the only gig that Understand ever played when only one person came was on that tour. The sound guy had gone off, there was no bar staff, just literally the band and this one person. It was in Berlin and the night before we had played to about 800 people and that was a good example of that: just here's the fictitious world that you're inhabiting at the moment as a support band and here's the reality of how many people come to see when you play on your own. And he was only there because he had seen on a flyer that a band from Southend was playing and just went along because he lived in Berlin but had grown up in Southend!

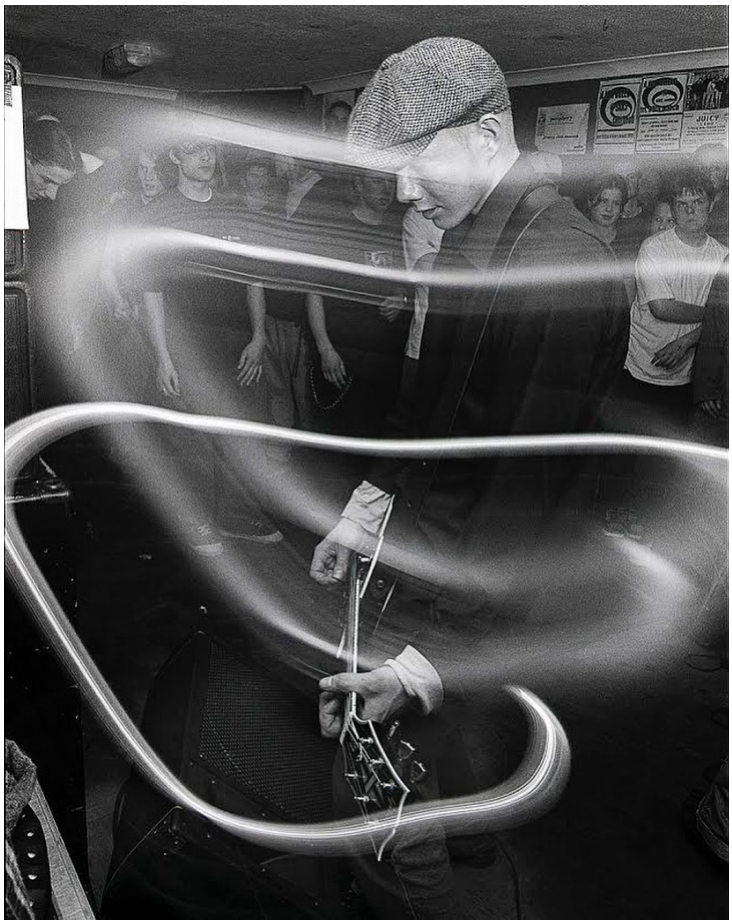
David Vick: Don't remember being the only one there but maybe. That happened quite a lot to me in those days. Like going out on my own. I'd been in Knaack a couple of weeks before and seen a flyer for this old New York punk veteran supported by a hardcore band from Southend and I was curious. Knew about Bob

Tilton from John Peel's BFBS shows you could hear in Berlin. Berlin radio was awful, so I'd tape them. Listen to it all week on the Walkman. But it wasn't something you would have expected from the Southend as I had known it. Melbourne had a thriving hardcore scene in the mid-80s when I was there but nothing like that was apparent in Southend in the early 90s as far as I was aware from just popping down there now and again cos I'd moved to London in the late 70s. So not very well, to be fair! It was all House music, that era. Anyway, went over and said hallo and hit it off with John immediately. He was after tips about what to do in Berlin the next day and I told him a few things, including the Siegessäule on Avenue 17 Juni and he said: "What's that?" and I said: "Have you seen Wings of Desire?" cos it's big feature in that film, you know, The Angel of Victory memorial, big golden angel on a pillar? That film was kind of iconic for me. Used to judge people I met by whether they liked it or not. Sad, I know. He said: "Of course", so I got his phone number and when I got back a couple of years later we started hanging out.

John Hannon: It fizzled out. I'd already started doing this thing called Woe in about '97, initially with Rob actually, and then Rob did Light of the Morning, there was a bit of crossover with that. But Understand had kind of run out of road. It was just a natural trajectory of any group of friends: you're lumped together at school and don't have any choice about being together and then, through the natural course of life, you get older and you all become slightly different people, different at the age of twenty than you were when you were 14, aren't you? Finished off in 1998 or so. We did record this second album and it's all mixed and finished and I couldn't care much about that. Nobody said:" Let's split up" or anything. It just petered out. One day we weren't doing it and that was it. We'd just kind of run out of road. The last few gigs there was a feeling of like: "I dunno why we're doing this anymore". It was just naturally the end.

https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/apr/05/understand-on-the-90s-punk-scene-that-shunned-them

Phil Howes: I shot this photo of John when I was 19. It was THE photo that gave me the confidence in my ability with a camera, and I wouldn't have shot it if he wasn't playing. I didn't know John before this, he came up to me in the Sunrooms (obviously!) a few days after the gig and invited me round to his, to show him the photos. At this point, Understand already had brilliant shots, for their record, taken in Slick 50's by Steve Gullick, and yet John wanted to see mine? At the time John played a real Gibson Les Paul through a proper Marshall stack! Being a little gear nerd I was stoked at the chance of seeing the real deal up close and personal. I went to John's flat and he gave me the tour, it was minimal and stylish, but there was a distinct lack of the guitar and amp (or any guitar for that matter!). When I quizzed him on this, he simply turned away and disinterestedly replied "oh, they're in a lock up, at the rehearsal space" suddenly the atmosphere in the room changed, John span around and excitingly thrust an object towards me, with full joy and a grin on his face proclaimed "but... I've just got this Trumpet!!"





21.

Ceiling Sniffing:
1994-98 WOE, FRITZ URSCHITZ AND FINDING HIS OWN THING

John Hannon: At that time, I was at a bit of a crossroads with what I was going to do. I knew that whole major label thing was just nonsense and the idea of the recording studio was just only literally starting to become a feasible possibility which could only have happened if certain fortunate things had fallen into place. But I definitely had an eye on that kind of prize. I started to go to other bands' recording sessions just to be there and pick things up.

It was not having control over the whole process that I found unbearable. You know? You're making a record and you don't have control of the whole process, some other person does, and I wanted to address this. Understand was very much a band that was definitely a hierarchy in many aspects of the way things operated, but creatively we always developed the things together, very democratically. I never felt like it was my music. I was in a band. I didn't really know what I wanted to do myself - but I became more and more aware it wasn't that. I really wanted to be able to control the whole thing. Even if you're playing with other people, a less democratic structure became more appealing.

A big revelation for me was while we were touring with Helmet, and some of the people I met on that journey became very important for me. The guy I met in Berlin who was from Southend was one, and another of them was this guy in Austria - identical age to me and just on his way to becoming a filmmaker. I really hit it off with him and went off to stay with him where he lived and he got a scholarship to study at the International Film School in London. When he produced his first student film he said: "I want you to do the music for it", which was something I'd never really thought of before. Didn't know anything about scoring music to film at all and just followed my instinct. And Rob, from Understand, him and I did it together.

Fritz Urschitz: If I remember correctly Understand were the band before the main act of a concert. In Graz we have an open-air stage called Kasematen, and it's an old open-air theatre on the top of the hill, and my girlfriend and I went there. She was very communicative, and I was much shyer but somehow, she got to talk with someone from Understand and sooner or later we ended up backstage. I can't really remember how, but we ended up backstage, and we started chatting and I started chatting with John and somehow it came to light that they were all vegetarians, and I think they found it hard to find appropriate food in Austria, or in Graz in that case. We like heavy cooking, blablabla. So, I invited them to my home. The whole band came. I think we

John at Mushroom studios, photo by Phil Howes

took two taxis to my home. But I wasn't living alone, I was still living with my mum and my grandmother, and they were very welcoming, and so we were all cooking and sitting together at our dining table. And then we went off to my local inn - it's not called a pub - and there we played snooker, if I remember correctly. They introduced a snooker table and here comes the next disappointment: none of those guys wanted any alcohol and we were all massively into boozing and smoking and so this was a completely new thing. But never mind, we had a very nice evening. And that was the very first encounter. And at the end of the evening, at I think two o'clock in the morning, they went back to their tour bus. So, God knows where they slept but anyway this was the first encounter and then we exchanged addresses.
I think we just got on and it was nothing like: "I'd like to get to know this guy better". It was so innocent in those days. You like each other and it was just exchanging telephone numbers, in those days landline numbers, and stay in contact and that's it. There was nothing of a premeditated artistic collaboration, just friendship, and: "If you're in London give us a call" and: "If you come back to Austria give us a call." That's it. With my then girlfriend, we visited England and went down to Southend. We met with John again and then eventually I was accepted at the film school in London, and I permanently moved to London. We did plenty of short films and of course we eventually came to the format where we needed music and I reconnected with John and, if I remember correctly, at film school he made the music for two of my films, Aberration and Sebastian.

Rob Coleman: There was quite an overlap I suppose, between Understand and Woe. On the Helmet tour we had met this young film director in Graz, in Austria, Fritz Urlitz, and he and John got on well and stayed in touch, corresponding with letters. That was going on. And then one day John and I were in a music shop and looking in this section of ambient/mood music and I said "Have you noticed how it is always the same mood, one of tranquillity and calm weirdness. We should be making bad mood music, music you put on to feel anxious and uncomfortable not tranquil and relaxed, and we started to record things that were just unpleasant. At that time, I didn't really know about bands like Coil or Psychic TV, and didn't realise this was already a well-worn path, thought it was something new. One of the first things was a dripping tap out of time with a clock ticking and a baby crying and it was just awful because all of a sudden, the tap and clock would be in time with each other, and you get a temporary relief and then it would drift apart again. Awful in a good way.

Fritz Urschitz: Maybe he said I'd like to try this out and he would come, I don't know, maybe every second week up to London and he would come and visit me in the film school and maybe I screened - you know what rushes are? It's the material you shoot, and it's not quite edited yet - and maybe he joined one of those sessions. I think he said he would like to try and work with some, let's call them traditional, instruments and then for my fourth term film he came up with this piece of music which required strings, and I can't even remember how we hired the classical musicians but maybe I had some contacts through the Austrian Cultural Forum to classical musicians, and if I remember correctly they then came to his recording studio. It made him very nervous - and me as well - but we just got on with it and there was not that much premeditated. You know how these things are in those days: they go quick and it's just: "Let's just try it."

John Hannon: I never had a problem playing music, but I had this barrier with song writing. It just felt really fake and not the vehicle I wanted to express music. But that was all I knew; the music I had grown up with from my parents and what I'd been exposed to as a teenager one way or another was all song-structured and usually with the vocal. It wasn't as if I didn't know what instrumental music was, that was just imprinted on my brain: this is what you do. So, to actually make music that didn't adhere to this structure and have this kind of time frame or narrative - that the vocal is the focal point - was just this complete revelation and I was like: "Ah, I can do this – I can just make music."

Fritz Urschitz: This is the strange thing because although I am Austrian and not classically musically trained - we learned the notes of music in school but it would be a lie to say I can technically talk about music, I cannot - but somehow John and I always had a good understanding of how to communicate about music and I am very open in what people bring to the films. So he saw the material, I indicated what the topic or theme is and how we should approach the music, then he came up with suggestions and I would say: "Yes,

this I like. We could develop it further in this direction or this direction" and then I think came already the recording, and then it was the editing of the music, and then the editing of the music towards the film and then a sound mix. And this happened all very quickly, if I remember correctly. And I think he came to the dubbing theatre. I can't swear on this, but I think he came to the dubbing theatre, where you mix music, dialogue and atmospheres to one final piece of soundtrack which then runs in parallel to the image. We are still talking analogue days back then, so we literally had a 35mm print and mixed to it all the sound on 35mm strip, so it's all a very bulky procedure. The screening would have been at our film school in Covent Garden, and it would have been in cinema A. Most of the film was set in a prison cell. It's black and white and you've got the guy who contemplates, and he doesn't understand why he is in prison. It's a very experimental film and the music is experimental. You've got drums, you've got strings. It makes more sense if you can listen to it.

Rob Coleman: John was having trumpet lessons, and I started learning the trombone and made a few recordings and then Fritz asked John to do a soundtrack and was making this film on a real budget and wanted some music made and asked John to be involved. Sent over the scenes and moods. We recorded four or five pieces for this film and John loved doing that and most of the recordings ended up on the first Woe album. It was more John's thing, and he got completely involved in that. Must have been about 1996. Understand were still going. I was just happy to be there hanging out.

Jay Thornton: He did a soundtrack to a film. The director was called Fritz. I think he was like Austrian or something. Can't remember the name of the film or the last name of director. He showed some clips from it. He has a cameo in the film. I think it was black and white or something. Someone comes running under a bridge or something and they bump into John and sort of knock him over. But I remember him working on the soundtrack to that film the whole time I was there. I remember Jane saying: "Your friend Fritz called John for the tenth time!" Fritz used to ring all the time "John, I need something changed..."

Rob Coleman: Then Fritz got to make another film and John got to arrange some strings for that. And that was fantastic. Sebastian and... He was in Vienna for a while, recorded in London but stayed there for quite a while working on it. My contribution to that was making a piece of soulless 90s pop for a scene in a porno show cos they had no idea of what that would be like. John did the rest and really enjoyed that. Must have been 96-97.

Fritz Urschitz: On *Sebastian*, which was my graduation film, he actually came to Austria and initially started on the film as the sound recordist. But he hated the whole mechanical structure of film- making so much that he left early! And another guy took over but he then continued to work on the soundtrack and the music and that he really liked. But he really disliked the mechanical structure and logistical madness of a film production. If you have been on a film set you know that it is madness interrupted by terror. All the equipment and everything he really disliked.
The second film was my graduation. We had more freedom. There wasn't a strict timeframe to do it. So, it took quite a while to prepare it and eventually we decided to shoot it in Austria because it was cheaper blablabla and I found my locations and then I said to John: "Come along" and I'll build a sound recording. But, as I said, after two or three days he said: "This is too mad for me, I can't stand this" and he left. But there was no bad feelings or anything. It was just not his thing. But after editing he joined again, and he composed the soundtrack to it. And for this one we had string players at least, not a full orchestra but a violin, viola, cello. My first point of contact was always with John and Rob was always his shadow. He was there, he contributed with music, but I communicated with John.

Fritz Urschitz Sebastian and... *https://www.premiersplans.org/en/film/sebastian-and*

John Hannon: It doesn't need to follow any of these points. Also, the inspiration: you're looking at this image and you're like - it's a very different skill. The sum of the two parts is much greater than you'd imagine. So sometimes you have to pare back a lot more than you would initially than where you're writing, where you weren't just looking at something you're scoring for. So I thought, I can just make music like this. I can just look at a photograph or imagine something, and that was the turning point. That was the turning point. The

things that interest me are the parts of the human experience which you can't explain. I'm not a very gifted person with words. I find it hard to articulate lots of ideas that I have with words, but not with music. Those little crevices of your psyche you kind of can't quite explain, they're the things I am trying to get across with music. And that suddenly happened. A bit of a eureka moment.

Rob Coleman: Woe just became a continuation of that. Soundtrack music with no film. He got some other people involved cos he'd get a lot of people through his studio. They were listening to a lot of jazz. He was into people like Charles Mingus, Archie Shepp, Mathew Shipp, Sonny Rollins.

Charles Mingus: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxz9eZ1Aons*
Archie Shepp: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miO4OMNXSl8*
Mathew Shipp: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpJcHZ8fzBQ*
Sonny Rollins: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxpRNju_Bkw*

Jay Thornton: This was also the period that he had stopped working in the band Understand and started the band Woe. So, I obviously first knew him as a guitarist in an underground rock band and then he's started playing trumpet. He was practising trumpet when I was living with him, and I was like: "John, what are you doing? You don't play trumpet." It sounded terrible, it looked terrible, a battered old thing. But he knew exactly what he was doing. He wanted to play trumpet because he loved jazz as well.

John Hannon: People say - whatever the line is - that most artists just have the one idea they keep repeating, saying the same thing in various ways, is what they say. Personally, whether it's Stand Off or Understand, I can hear the same basic ideas in everything I've done, even though they are on the surface radically different, the sound or the pace is different, I can hear the same musical intervals or timings I have always gravitated towards. Suddenly this whole world was opening up for me, and it felt really liberating because we were not part of any scene at all and we just wanted to digest anything that was new to us at all. It was exciting I was really discovering all these new artists, free jazz and early noise elements and another one of these moments in my life when suddenly this whole world was opening up for me, we were going to all kinds of gigs, just wanting to digest everything from Albert Ayler to Stockhausen, just in a rather naïve way trying to use these ideas.

Albert Ayler Trio - Spiritual Unity *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWsIG5sNq1Q*
Karl Heinz Stockhausen - Gesang der Jüngling: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nffOJXcJCDg*

Fritz Urschitz: For my feature film *Where I Belong*, which was set in the late 50s, and - this is the most amazing thing - he wrote a piece of music for a jive ball scene and it's completely not John's music but he totally got it right and it's a jive, really, and he also wrote the lyrics for it. He recorded this with the band who are then seen in the film, and they are called the Broadcasters. Both pieces of music in the dancehall are John's. He was always my first point of contact and whatever he did with me clicked and the other way around. At the maximum we spent three weeks of lifetime together! We didn't see each other very often but when we saw one another there was no need to warm up the friendship again - it was just as when we had left it, if that makes sense. There is an embedded relationship between film and music, because I don't think that film is, or let's put it that way, pure film has little to do with literature or theatre, it's music in images so everything is like a score. So, back then with John, I couldn't have expressed it that way, the way I do it now but I think that is what he might have related to as well and okay, that they are images even if they don't produce a sound, it's music. I can just initiate things. As I said, I can't theoretically talk about music but whenever I worked with John it was incredibly easy. There was no talking about it, we did it and most of the time it made a perfect match. There was not much adjustment needed. Of course, there was a tweak here and there, but we may even have tweaked the picture to the sound sometimes. It's a back-and-forth process. It was also that we never did a traditional approach, you know: "We want to emphasise this emotion," blablabla, how a classic music composition makes for film, like putting fire on the scene and God's know what. I don't like that, and we never worked liked that all. It was just: "This is the film, maybe we can make some music which just goes along with it and doesn't stand out but can stand out." It was a very free process.

Fritz Urschitz - Where I Belong (2007) ***https://www.imdb.com/de/title/tt2176037/***

Jay Thornton: I used to think: he's working on this European film soundtrack, he's playing in this band Woe, he's learning the trumpet. My God! He used to do all the artwork for Woe. Ink-paintings on card and stuff and emulate that kind of 50s and 60s sort of style. Very stylish and sophisticated but in the same way a bit of a lad. He introduced me to so much music - Fugazi and other underground rock bands, but he also introduced me to Rothko paintings and the artist Morton Feldmann, who used to write music to go with Rothko paintings. John would listen to this kind of stuff in the flat and I would be amazed by it.

Morton Feldman: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZZ0DYIkaP8***

John Hannon: So I suddenly felt purposeful, and confident that I could do that. We started taking on instruments we couldn't even play. I started playing the trumpet. I couldn't play the trumpet. But I was like: "Because I know what I want to do, 100%, it doesn't matter. We'll get there, because I know what it is I want to say." And also, our lack of knowledge about recording didn't matter. We didn't have to know what we were doing because we were in control and we knew how we wanted it to sound and just had to keep going until we got there. Much more headstrong than I probably am now. Even though Understand was ending, I had this new goal, and it was all encompassing. So, I was really very much walking away from the idea of vocal, that was too limited to what you could do, and drumbeat too. You start off with a drumbeat and you close all these doors.

Richie Harwood: When I first met John, he was doing work on that film soundtrack for Fritz. That first meeting with him you got a sense that he was really getting involved with things that were very much separate from that rock Kerrang world of Understand. I guess that that scene that he found in Stoke Newington was perfect for him really cos I think with Understand very quickly he found the scene a bit tiresome maybe even. He would listen to some weird stuff, Cecil Taylor and stuff like that. Stuff that was probably a bit too far over the line for me. I remember him going to see that guy Jandek. He's a guy who has released about 50 or 60 records and up until fairly recently nobody knew who he really was. I think Upset the Rhythm brought him over to do a gig from America and John saying. I think they'd gone up to the show in Edinburgh or Glasgow and the way John described it, he played the piano like someone who has never touched one before, quite atonal. And this went on for like the next two hours. This guy just hammering away at a piano. And at the end of it was this like standing ovation but it was more out of relief than appreciation! As an emotional release.

Jandek: Oops! All Jandek Kaos89.3 ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nTUjX9ePf0***

Walter Schreifels: He struck me as especially - as he like went from this person who was into this sort of music scene that was happening at this time, this trend in music that we were both a part of, or responding to, you know? Understand breaks up and musically he really just changed. He didn't even really wanna play guitar and was such a cool guitar player. He wanted to play trumpet. He really went on his own path. Where he had been part of this group, this wave, that we were a part of, he didn't want to be part of a wave anymore, that's how I perceived it. I think he really committed to his own artistic path.



22.

Reason Gets Paid Back:
WOE, SOME RECORDS AND RIVAL SCHOOLS TOUR

Jay Thornton: This was when he started Woe and people were saying. “What the hell is this band, John?” Maybe not to his face but people were asking: “What the hell is this project?” He’s playing trumpet all wonky, dirges, avant-garde. And in Southend there were no bands like that. But he knew what he was doing. And Woe became Liberez and he had a trajectory and knew exactly what he was doing from the mid- to late-90s and he kept on that trajectory and was a massive success on that scene. You would go to Woe gigs, his friend Pete was on drums, his friend Mick Caine joined on saxophone and the bassist was Kev Hutchins. A four- or five-piece. And they would put on gigs in Southend I would go to. You’d have the local underground rock bands and then Woe would come on and blow everyone’s mind: “What the hell is this music that you are doing John? It’s drone, there’s no melody, no singing? “John didn’t know how to play trumpet then.

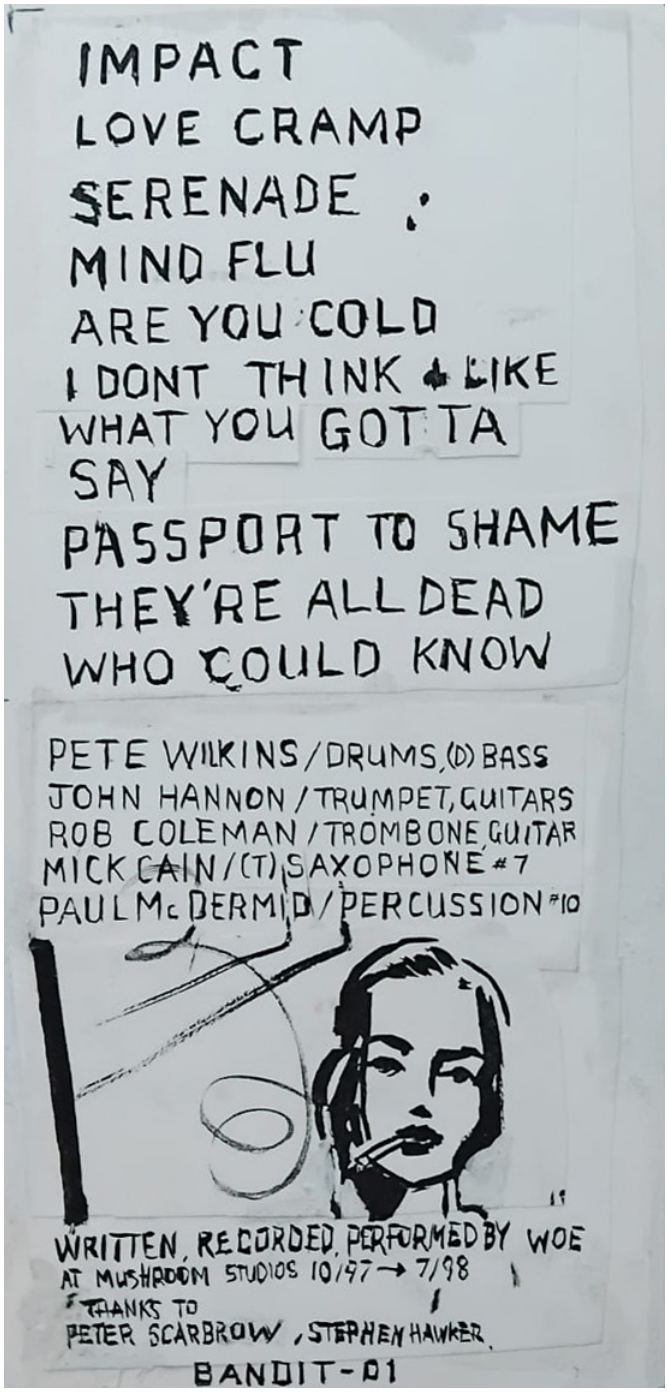
Pippa Wragg: Understand played at the Cavern several times, 1990s late 90s, Woe I think three times it might be, and then Liberez He wanted to be the only person who had played in all four corners of the Cavern! Understand played on the stage, one Woe show was in that corner, another Woe show was over there and the last time he played it was at the very back by the mixing desk. So on the same side as the stage but at the back. So no lighting. You can kind of see him but it’s quite dark. I can’t say much about it because I was always dealing with things around the performance during the shows, but I loved it when they came down. They were always supporting someone bigger, so busy shows but I was working. I have always worked the shows that I have booked here and I would have been the person dealing with everything, coming and going during the gig. And then the Woe shows. One time they came down to play on my birthday and I remember I upset him because we were sitting and having a massive chat and all of a sudden he looked at his watch and said: “Oh, we’re playing now” and I said: “Oh, don’t bother” cos I was enjoying the conversation and was thinking that I’d rather chat, and he went: “What? I ‘ve come all the way down here to play a show and you say don’t bother?!” I mean obviously he was amused too but...I loved Woe and especially when they played with this light show where the lights were shining up at them from the floor and it looked really weird and they would play on the floor.

Kev Hutchins: I didn’t have anything to do with the first recording Woe did. John and Pete had basically done that themselves from what I could gather. Rob was one of those names who had played on the first album.

Woe, Reasons Get Paid Back artwork by John

When John had started at Mushroom studio, I sort of lost contact. Well, just went to see Understand still. But then Understand had stopped and I settled down a bit with my girlfriend in a flat, had a mortgage to pay, then there's all this stuff you can't do anymore, can't do bands anymore or whatever. John just phoned me up one day out of the blue "Do you wanna come down? I've done this recording and I wanna get a band together. Do some gigs." I was like "Okay." I didn't realise at the time he had already tried someone else, another Kev, Kev Guy, that he had contacted before me who had turned him down! That's exactly it: "I need someone to play bass, I'll give Kev a call. Oh, that Kev can't do it, I'll try the other one!" There were a few guys actually that John called in to help doing the album stuff but as he was trying to formulate it as a band, mostly it was just me, Pete, John and Mick. Paul came down once and played some bongos.

Rob Coleman: So, Woe were, for a long time, John and Pete and Kevin, a good bass player, and Mick and three or four others, as far I remember. I only got to play with them live because they needed another guitarist for the guitar parts that John had recorded and couldn't do both live, and he concentrated on trumpet and noises. Mick the saxophonist was in a Bowie covers band, very accomplished but up for anything, and that was great because you can scratch around as a bad guitar player (not that John was a bad player, but you can be) but once you get into brass instruments you have to be good otherwise it's just unbearable. So, Mick was a great saxophone player but otherwise open to things that John was interested in pursuing. And then they would go and do shows. He was completely unaware of things that were considered cool or not cool, so he'd be doing a soundcheck with some of these hipster bands and there would be Mick very seriously and unironically playing something like Baker Street. And everyone would be killing themselves laughing because they thought he was being ironic - it could be Careless Whispers or something - and Mick was completely unaware of that. And John and Pete would be: "Oooh, you can't do that!".



Woe, They're all Dead artwork by John

Kev Hutchins: Going into that, I had no idea really of what they were trying to do. It was instrumental soundtrack sort of music. That's what it felt like to me. Obviously, John and Pete were super positive about it. Pete is just the funniest person to be around anyway. That same day I went down, Mick came down, met him and we just started jamming really and because we had the recording studio there we could just rehearse, and play and John would be constantly recording stuff. That really was how it started from there. I didn't really have any expectations of what it was gonna eventually become. As far as I was aware it was always going to be just playing and practising and writing some songs. All stuff that John had obviously come up with but it's funny because as those songs started to evolve, Pete has obviously got a huge idea about the direction and music and sound. Even if at the time he wasn't the most competent player, his ideas with John, they were both equally influential in driving that thing.

Richie Harwood: Pete was always a bit of an enigma. I remember on that Rival Schools tour, I remember sort of getting into things like K Records, all those sorts of

Olympia Washington kind of indie bands and that really pricked Pete's ears up cos he is really a kind of authority on all that stuff. Very supportive: "Let me know what you're interested in, I'll lend you anything." If he got a sense that people were into that kind of music, there was no snobbery about it, they were like very encouraging. I always thought Pete was a really hilarious guy. They clearly both had an encyclopedic knowledge of underground music, I suppose, and I think it's always interesting when you see people who know each other really well, they have a kind of short-hand communication that almost excludes you a little bit. You don't get the reference points. But it seemed like Woe, cos Kev Hutchins was the bass player in that band and Mike was saxophone, but it was definitely Pete and John's band. It almost seemed like Kev and Mike were there to play their instruments, but Pete and John were the ones directing it.

Kev Hutchins: Pete and John were always together and Pete's got the memory for all of this stuff. Even though friendships become something else over a period, at that time they were incredibly good friends. To be honest. I can't give John all the credit because Pete had such an idea of sounds that in his mind sounded right. Him and John were such a total - just a pair really, I thought, and just incredible friends. But he was so enthusiastic, Pete, despite what he lacked musically. Like me really. I mean I only started playing bass because John picked up his bass and said: "You have it, I don't want it anymore." I never learned how to play the thing, ever. Never had a lesson, never sat down, and that probably shows actually on some of the recordings! I really didn't have an idea of what they were trying to do or what sound they were trying to do, but I genuinely enjoyed playing the music and being in the band. That was some of the funniest things. I remember like playing a couple of times, and John would play a riff or something that he and Pete had come up with, and I'd just think of something, and he said to me a couple of times: "It's funny, how you come up with that. That's kind of what I was hearing in my head before you played it." You do tune into certain things sometimes in a certain situation. Even though I'd like have no idea what they were really trying to get to, I could find myself there sometimes. In the early days we were trying to replicate the songs on the album but then John being John, being full of ideas, it would all start to change, and we'd just record all the time, and he'd just pick and choose. And eventually we worked out a few songs that we could actually play and the idea of playing live came about.

Rob Coleman: The thing I liked about playing with John and Pete was that, even though they were doing something incredibly cool and interesting and John was incredibly driven by it all, and they were actually seriously down to earth about doing what they were doing, neither of them had the ability to take themselves very seriously, or they certainly weren't pretentiously precious about it. In a recording session, they were just as amused by what they were doing as anyone. Going to see them, it was evident that they were enjoying what they were doing as much as the people who had come to see them, or as surprised as much as anybody by the things they were doing. Really into it, really excited and equally as amused as anyone who was there. And they were definitely under no illusions about their own popularity either. Which was, they would almost subconsciously go out of their way to alienate their audience. A good gig for them was to start off with a full room and end up with an empty one. They felt like they'd done their job properly. They would be very excited about playing on some kind of council estate in the Czech Republic, bleak beyond bleak: "This is where our music makes the most sense." They also thrived on not being like other bands they could be on the bill with, who could be very pretentious about what they were doing, getting up their own arses, the complete opposite of that. They liked it that people thought that they weren't taking it very seriously when they did, and that they were almost mistrusted about their attitude: "How dare you be normal in here?" Maybe part of being from Southend. You might think that you're being special as an artistic type in Southend, but when you go elsewhere you are never going to be more than an Essex prole. And they were definitely quite happy about that. Like the Dr Feelgood of the avant-garde.

Luke Younger: When I first met John I met Pete too of course, at gigs. They were an amusing pair in the sense of Pete would be a tougher nut to crack at first than John, who was a lot more friendly. Pete seemed to be a lot more cynical. Once you got Pete going, he was incredibly funny. And they had a funny dynamic cos Pete knew exactly how to wind John up. They were very funny to be around.

Astrud Steehouder: John was literally one of the most funny people I ever met in my life. And him and Pete together were like off the charts. I think one of the first things Pete said to me was: "Are you really that short? I thought you were standing in a hole!" I don't think you can tell the true story of John Hannon without Pete. It became very clear how deep their friendship was and that's a rare gift, to have that in your life. They were truly inseparable. After the practices, Pete would often be there afterwards. Pete's knowledge of music is amazing, and their collective knowledge is unbelievable, and I feel privileged to have known them both. There's the passion they both had, the collective passion and drive in seeking new stuff, especially.

Lee Hall: John and Pete were tied to the hip and I loved that. We used to go to All Tommorow's Parties at Cambersands, an alternative festival back in the day, early 2000s. Pete used to go there, and I would go there with that lot and Pete was there, just bump into him. It was really cool you know. They knew what music I liked, and they would ask me if I'd got their new single and it was just really nice, just bump into them in Southend and I was like: "I love you guys." I'm a lot younger than them and just thought they were cool.

Astrud Steehouder: They were very independent thinkers, very creative, seekers of purist art essentially. They had that awareness. Yet there was never any indication of leaving Southend either, and moving up to London. More like: "What would you want to do that for?" There is a key to that, there is definitely a key. I am interested in origins of people and how it informs what they become. I was brought up on big council estates in London where it's very bleak and the music has that kind of element of bleakness. You're moving through it, you're getting out, but there's a strange romance to it.

David Vick: At that time, whenever John would get in touch, or me with him, about going to see or hear something it was a given thing that Pete Wilkins would be along too. Two sides of the same coin. The singular 'we'. For me that was at least half the entertainment of the night, having a beer with those two. Talk about the odd couple: John the sunbeam and Pete the dark shadow, like a 70s sitcom, the old married couple who finish each other's sentences and whenever you say something significant about anything, especially music, would exchange a glance and a nod. Both of them completely obsessive about what they were doing and totally unselfconscious about it. I was always a bit embarrassed about my obsessions with music and art and stuff and worried about boring people with it, but they just seemed to assume that this was what it was. It's like - what else is there?

John Hannon (Mute Publishing press release): Initially we were into 1970s film soundtracks, the writing of Hubert Selby and Steven Jesse Bernstein, Free and Cool Jazz. It was all quite U.S. focused. That would change later. I wouldn't expect anyone else to hear all those references or relate this music to that time or place - just a young person absorbing a lot of different stuff. Some of it I like, some of it I don't. Some is a bit cringe, some of it is too self-referential. Listening back, perhaps the main musical influences are obvious and don't really warrant mentioning.

David Vick: Woe was right up my street in that form at the time. Where I was at too. It had a spirit about it I completely recognised. A really eclectic bunch of influences as far as genres go but all had this thing in common – like-minded artists coming from different places and an Expressionist aesthetic you might call it. Call it garageband jazz or post-bop punk. Those literary influences and filmic too. I'd just done an essay at uni on The Man With the Golden Arm as the first use of jazz in a soundtrack, but you could throw in Orson Welles' Touch of Evil and the film version of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf too as far as that goes. So not at all 90s, more 50s, beatnik even! Although you do see that elsewhere too in that period, come to think of it. There was another band who I'd stumbled across doing something similar, Bablicon, a bit before. American (I think), straight out of music school, and John Lurie's Lounge Lizards, James White and the Blacks of course. Yes, No Wave jazz. I was so happy. I'd come to the right place. Not original of course, what is anymore? But very sincere and somewhere good on the way to the next station. Which they were.

Kev Hutchins: It's funny. My idea of playing in bands had always been a rock band, a hardcore band, that energy. When we were playing, I just didn't really think about it becoming an album but before we knew it, we had all these songs. John had been in contact with Walter Schreifels, I think, and then it was "They wanna

put the record out." Wow, that's crazy. All of that stuff was driven by those guys. It was a bit of a shame really cos they went to New York to sign the deal and I didn't go.

Walter Schreifels: I put a Woe record out on Some records. a record label I ran with Dan Siedler, who is also in Rival Schools, and Matt Pinkers, who is a music business guy and friend of ours. Yeah, we were believers. We just thought it was cool. We wanted to get them - they were a tough sell but the record was awesome. The kind of music that is meant to challenge you in some ways. They had sort of inverted goals. Like when I first met John it was: "How do we build this out? How can we self-implode this business?" With Woe it was more the anti-statement. But done with panache and style and flair, you know what I mean? But, yes, they were very content with alienating people from it. I found what they were doing to be very cool and very interesting. It was just that they were putting themselves into some sort of scene that is not for them, if you know what I mean. There was some sort of magical parallel universe where this was what music had led to but it was not in the reality that we were all living in at that time. It's close to... yes! But you can't really wrap your arms around it.



John, Jay and Kev in New York

Jay Thornton: One day, John said: "My friend who lives in Manhattan wants to release a record on this label, the second record by Woe. I want to go over to Manhattan and sign some documents," Bearing in mind this is pre-internet, and you had to physically sign things, but also, he wanted to go on holiday to New York, and he said to me: "Do you want to go with me?" Do I want to go to New York City with John Hannon when I am 20 years old and hang out with him while he's signing a record deal? Yes! He then asked his friend Mick Caine, the saxophonist in Woe, as another representative of the band, to go with him and then he said: "Do you want to bring another friend?" and I said: "Yeah. I'm gonna bring Kev Guy." We're gonna be four buddies, hanging out in Manhattan with John Hannon. Yes! So this was in about 1999 and an amazing formative experience. I had my 21st birthday in the hotel that John booked for us. When we got there, we said: "Oh my God, John has booked the Chelsea Hotel!" I didn't know anything, but John knew about stuff. I was a teenage twinky from Canvey Island who didn't know anything about anything. Once I realised where we were and started looking it up, I thought: "Oh my God, we are in the Chelsea Hotel. This is where Nancy Spungeon and Sid Vicious and Bob Dylan and all the others stayed, worked, wrote songs and books about, and this was in the 90s when it was still cool and famous people still lived there, and you could live there as well as just stay there. I remember waking up on my 21st birthday in Manhattan in the Chelsea Hotel. John Hannon and been over the road with Kev Guy to buy me a coffee cake. John was singing 'Happy Birthday to you'. Just amazing.

We arrived at night. I remember, being in the taxi, John was a bit disappointed because they had updated all the yellow taxis and he wanted an old 70s taxi like in the film Taxi Driver! They had just updated them. Rudi Giuliano had become the mayor, and he was the one who started cracking down on Manhattan and turning it from a gritty, roots kind of place to what it is now, which is a bit of a tourist theme park. But there were still cool places around. It was just the beginning of that change. We got there at night, got out of the car and we were walking down the street jet-lagged and suddenly someone shouts out: "John!" He turned round and there was a girl sitting in a cafe saying: "John Hannon, how're you doing?" What are the chances? You've just got there, walking down the street and someone knows you! And she said: "Do you and your friends want to go to a Halloween party?" Cos it was Halloween that night. As he was chatting to this girl, a huge group of people on roller skates came past, all wearing fancy dress. I remember being up there in this apartment, me, Kev, Mick and John, jet-lagged, in an apartment with about a hundred New York people all wearing fancy dress, but not us, and we four Brits, jet-lagged in the corner going:" This is mental! What is going on?" And this only happens because you're with John Hannon and he knows everyone. It wouldn't have happened on my own.



John, Jay and Kev in New York

And eventually he went to his friend's office to sign. It was called Some Records. It was owned by Walter Schreifels, then of Rival Schools, formerly of Quicksand which had split up, and his new band was called Rival Schools United by Fate, a new band with a really long name, and he wanted to put out the new Woe record. We met Walter at the office. I didn't really know who he was, but Kev Guy was a big fan of Quicksand and he was like: "We're meeting the singer of Quicksand!" As we were sitting in the office while John was talking to Walter, a man in blue overalls came into the office and chatted with Walter Schreifels and then he left and I asked: "Who was that? Was that the plumber?" And he said: "No, that was the son of Charles Mingus!" He was also on Some records. Eddie Mingus maybe? Walter said: "We've got a couple of gigs coming up. Do want to go and see this band Aerotype 11 who are on the label?" Playing at Browns, a really seminal venue. It's closed now. So, we went to this gig. I'm just turned 21, in Manhattan with John Hannon, meeting Walter Schreifels, legendary Quicksand singer, the son of Charlie Mingus and watching Aerotype 11 playing at Browns. Fifteen years later and I am playing in a band which support Aerotype 11. I said to the singer: "I don't know if you remember but we saw you at Browns in Manhattan in 1999 with Walter Schreifels." It blew his mind.
Then, on one of the last days of that holiday, we went to a gig at CBGBs, which is also no longer there anymore, and I didn't really know about it then but now I know how lucky I was to be there and see a gig at this legendary place before it closed down forever - Doglegs or Dogpants or something, who were absolutely terrible, and John and Mick and Kev and I were pissing our pants at how terrible they were!

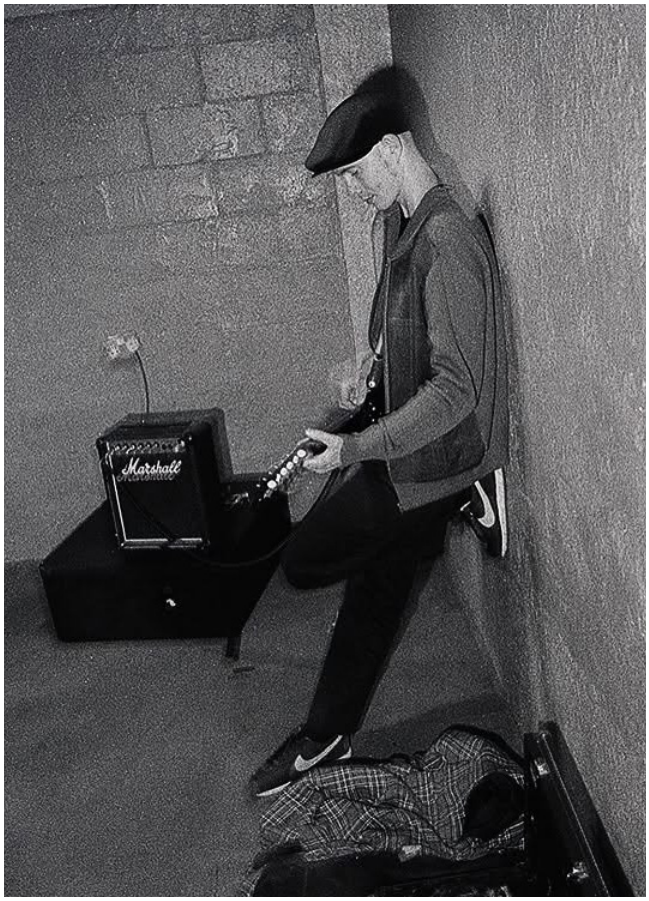
Kev Hutchins: At the time, when Walter created this band, Rival Schools, obviously he had done Quicksand, he actually phoned John up and said: "I'm doing this band, I want you to play guitar in it", and John turned him down! He said: "No I'm doing this new thing, Woe." That blew my mind! "You turned down what?! Turned down playing guitar with Walter? To do this?" But it wasn't to do this, it was to do his thing. That still seems crazy to me! But I think he was just done with it. He wanted to move on. New chapter. And he never went back to playing that style of music.

Walter Schreifels: But then in the 2000s when I was starting a new band, which was at that time Rival Schools, I asked John to join that band. I thought John was the coolest guitar player doing really cool interesting things, he had great taste. And I just thought - I had a great drummer, a great bass player, I could do my thing, and I thought with him we could something really special. I think he entertained it. We had a major label contract. we could have moved him to New York and paid his rent and all that kind of stuff, and it was down for him to do it. I think he entertained it but ultimately, he was: "It's not for me. I can't do all that crap. I'm focused on the things I wanna do." He wanted to do Woe. He wanted to focus on his studio. he had lost that desire to be in the, you know, sort of like game of trying to get a song in the charts, try to be popular. I don't think that was what he wanted to do. It's not that that was his story but that was the gist I got from him. So I was: "Oh well, godammit!" Whatever. You never ask then you never know.

Kev Hutchins: Then on the back of that came the idea of playing live and John wanted to do some shows. But we'd play and rehearse and come back the next week and there was something on and you'd ask: "What's that?" and John'd say: "It's what we were playing last week," and you'd say: "No it's not! It didn't sound anything like that!" He would just sit with it and add things to it and all of a sudden it had spiralled. I didn't think there were any songs on that album that we could have played live really! So many instrumental tracks in the sound - we can't do it as a four-piece thing!

Walter Schreifels: After that, as the band started to get going, on our first tour, we reached out to John and asked his band to open for us, which was Woe. An instrumental band, pretty avant-garde, jazz influenced.

John played trumpet and he was absolutely a novice at trumpet, but it did not stop him at all! And he was amazing. Not that I have such an ear for trumpet but in the sense that he just did it his way, he did it with passion. You know the way some people, whatever they do, it translates from their aesthetic, their sense of taste and it doesn't matter if they are 'good' at it - it works. They just have a way of doing it. John was like that. And I'm just talking about things, that John had a sense of pretence. I think art should have a level of pretence; it's performance so you want to play with that. So, they would do things like have a show that's completely in the dark, the audience and the band is playing completely in pitch black and that was the kind of stuff that Woe was into, so it was no wonder that he didn't want to be in Rival Schools! It's just not where his head was at, no matter what it was.



Woe Rehearsal, photo by Phil Howes

Richie: And then about six months later Kev Guy gave me a call, cos he was in a band called Stands To Reason, a Southend hardcore-ish sort of band. So, I joined that band and then within a couple of months we were on tour with a band called Rival Schools, which was Walter Schreifel's band, and that was with Woe. I think we did about seven or eight shows around the UK, Leeds, Manchester, Brighton or what have you, and then for me that was huge cos as a kid of 15, 16-years old I was obsessed with bands like Quicksand and so being a 19-year-old sitting in a transit van next to Walter. I remember those guys coming to my parents' house quite early in the morning cos we were using my drum kit for the tour. And John was really excited cos my mum lives near the airport, behind The Bell pub on the corner. Her house has still got the original art deco windows, the lead piping. I remember being quite weirded out cos John was quite excited about that!


Woe Rehearsal, photo by Phil Howes

Kev Hutchins: The first gigs we were playing were basically with Rival Schools, Walter Schreifel's band, Rival Schools United by Fate was what they were called. This was the guy who owned the record label that signed us for Some records, with his new band. He was in a band called Quicksand. So, he was bringing his new thing over, Rival Schools. And John was like: "Yeah, we're gonna do a tour." I was "What?!" We ended up playing Leeds, Exeter, Brighton, there was a few stops. I think it was five gigs in a row. Got a minibus. These guys all in the van. We're doing a mini tour! People are actually gonna come and see us play! Off the back of, obviously, John and Understand and Quicksand, who loads of people loved. Another band we took along was Stands to Reason. So, we got these two guitar, emo, hardcore or whatever you wannna call them, bands and us.

Walter Schreifels: But we took them on our first tour in the UK. I don't know if we made it to Europe, but we played quite a few dates in the UK and it was just awesome and John was very much the leader of that band, and the other members were supercool and fun. And it was just hilarious. John would give these little speeches - cos we were all travelling in the same van - and at the end of the night John would relate everything that had happened. We've done the show, packed up the thing and travelling back to the hotel and John would summate with one of those Peaky Blinder flat caps on and he looked like such a character and make these like really eloquent speeches: "Well boys, this happened, then the other thing happened, so we saw a little trouble there but we got through it. And a special mention to so-and-so for doing such-and-such." I'm not doing it justice but with just the right sprinkle of being funny and being real, and we'd all look forward to it every night. He was a special guy, you know what I mean, in all these different ways. That tour was probably the last period of time that I like hung with him, steadily, and over the years I'd see him now and again when I'd go to Southend.

Kev Hutchins: And we're not playing on the stage! We get to these shows and it's: "Where are we going to set up? We've gotta do a soundcheck." "Oh, we're not playing on the stage," this is John, "We're playing on the floor." "What? What do you mean we're not playing on the stage?" "Yeah, we're just going over there in the corner." So that's what we'd do. We'd set up in the corner of a room and it's all of a sudden, y'know just coming through our amps, no PA, no nothing! And this was just John. He wanted to be separate I suppose from that idea of a band: you have to play on a stage, you have to soundcheck, you have to do this and you're going on then, y'know. I couldn't believe it at the time: "There's gonna be people standing there! Whaddya mean, just set up on the floor? There's not even a plug!" John's like: "It'll be fine." So that's what we did. People were surprised - a band making this noise over there in the corner of the room somewhere. And this isn't a support act, y'know? But it's funny.

Richie: Woe would always play on the floor, that was one thing. That band Stands to Reason was a bog-standard hardcore band-by-numbers kind of thing and of course Rival Schools were great, a really great band, and Woe were really great and really interesting, so I was a bit embarrassed about being in the band I was in. So, Woe would always play on the floor. People were really into it. I think people were into having a band that was really quite different, and Mike was a really great sax player, really vibey. Woe had a real groove to it and people would be really into it. We played Manchester, we played Leeds, we played in Brighton, which I've still got the flyer for. We also must have done the Robert Peel in Kingston which was a really well-known place for those kinds of shows. One thing that I remember about that tour was that I realised how freakishly strong John was. We did a gig in Leeds, and you had to load in going up these steel staircases and I remember John sticking two cabs ones under each arm and just hoiking it up the stairs, cos he looked tall and skinny but he kind of wasn't. He was a big broad guy. I remember being surprised about how strong he was. I would say that John was definitely running that tour - him and Pete - so I think they must have put that tour together for Walter I suspect. They were behind the logistics, driving the van and all that. They had a good network of people from the Understand days and probably everybody was really excited to see what Walter was doing next. Quicksand had split up a couple of years before and they were really good shows. All jammed packed, tiny venues. They were called Rival Schools United by Fate at that stage, hadn't slimmed the name down then.

Stands to Reason: *https://detonaterecords.bandcamp.com/album/swords-into-ploughshares*

Kev Hutchins: Yeah, people were into it. You didn't think people weren't paying attention. There were people talking, obviously, cos you are literally on the floor. And you haven't got that sound from a PA where all of a sudden the sound takes over. We didn't have that. But, looking back now, I wish I could have seen that! Must have been amazing! There were a couple of dates when we didn't play so well. We were under-rehearsed, or Pete was a bit nervous. I remember one time, I don't know what he was playing but it wasn't what we were playing! Walter noticed! It was Pete's first proper thing. He did have another band earlier. I saw a photo. That's how they met, I think, through Pete's first band. There was a gig at some youth arts centre or something in Southend. We were doing this kind of jazz, I dunno what you'd call it, soundscape music but we were on the same bill as these rock bands and you've got this crowd that were there to see that, haven't come to see us. Like Public Image if you like. They would have these punks come to see them, expecting to see Johnny Rotten. All standing there spitting at him still, not expecting it to be what it is.



Woe gig flyer by John

Walter Schreifels: It was great because he was just poking your expectations, you know what I mean? That's what I saw. We were not going to play on the floor cos it didn't make sense for us to do it, and it was this kind of weird instrumental band. If you were going to see Rival Schools at this time, the reason people were going was maybe it's just a show in town, or you're a fan of this cultural thing that I was a part of, so you're expectations are not this. But when you show up there and there's a band playing on the floor and they are instrumental and there's a saxophone and a trumpet and this kind of motley crew that was Woe, it fucks with your expectations, makes it more special and entertaining. It's art and it's playing with that and John never missed an opportunity to do stuff like that and it was actually never motivated by: "Oh, this is going to catapult us into some sort of popularity, and we're gonna be famous because of this." No, not at all. It was just 'Let's do this because you're not supposed to do this." I mean they wouldn't be the first band to play on the floor but in the circumstance that we were doing it it was - I just thought they were really cool. I think they made us look cool. We played the Cavern in Exeter, Southampton Joiners maybe. Such a fun thing to do and really formative for us for sure.

Tim Holehouse: I saw Understand on that Helmet tour and saw John but didn't know him, and didn't realise when I saw Woe that it was the same John and put the two together. So, yeah, I saw Understand on that tour and remember liking them and Helmet were great. I think it was at the Pyramids in Portsmouth. I'm guessing '99 was the first time I saw Woe, '98 maybe. I was in an instrumental band myself called Shima**,** a God Speed You Black Emperor- type band. My introduction to John is through the Cavern in Exeter. I knew Understand and I knew John was in Understand but I think this was before he did the Kids Near Water record, which was the first thing I'd ever heard him produce. I was working at the Cavern run by Pippa Wragg, one of John's very best friends, also a dear friend of mine, and she said: "Oh we've got this band next week, (I think it was James Parker's band Yeast), "and you will love the support, it's a band called Woe, they do that instrumental stuff that you love." I went along and she was bang on; I was blown away by it. I went over and chatted to John and bought a CD, think I might have been the only person who bought a CD that night. Woe opened and they were fantastic. John was playing guitar and then he switched to trumpet. I'd never seen anyone do that before. I was in my early twenties, just down at university. "Oh, you're brilliant!" chatting away to John thinking: this guy really gets it, he's into similar music to me, likes a bit of everything, kind of more into experimental stuff. Got the Woe CD home, listened to it, just couldn't turn it off. And the recording was incredible. A few months later, my friends, Kids Near Water, did their first EP and recorded with John and I was: "This sounds amazing, who did this?" I'm looking and it's John Hannon. "Wasn't that the guy from Woe?" cos John had also recorded that which sounded fantastic. "I need to work with this guy!" It actually was a few years before I ended up working with him. I joined a hardcore band and we didn't use John although I always threw it in. They grumbled that they didn't wanna leave London to record: "All the way to Rayleigh? It's too far."

Luke Younger: I first met John in London in very early 2001. Basically, we had a mutual friend who introduced us because he knew I had been a fan of Understand as teenager because, by a complete coincidence, they were the first band I ever saw live. I had been taken to a gig, and they were the support band. It was Dog Eats Dog and they were the touring support. So I met him through a friend, and I was trying to organise a one-day festival at this pub in Hackney. It was around the time that John was doing Woe, and my friend was like:

"Why don't you get Woe to play? I'll introduce you to John" So he did. I was pretty young at that time, 17, and basically this band formed just because we all met at gigs and we all kind of like knew each other. I knew the drummer and the singer and both the drummer and the singer kind of knew each other independently, so we had that kind of triangle and then someone was like: "Oh, I've got a mate who can play bass, or a mate who can play keyboards or whatever and it was like a synth punk band I guess, which was what we were trying to do. And the gig that I organised was pretty diverse in the sense that it was a lot of people who had been in bands who were playing at around the time of the Understand days, like Bob Tilton. Neil from Bob Tilton and Simon were doing a band called Walls of Grease. So, it was my idea to kind of link all these people from bands who had been doing stuff a few years before but also some newer contemporary bands from the time, like that guy who is really famous now, Frank Turner, pop punk singer songwriter now. He ended up playing at this show with his band of the time. So stuff like that. So quite a few kind of funny people at this pub in Hackney, The Golden Shoe. A Jamaican pub on an estate in Homerton. It's not there anymore. But they let us like set up a vocal PA in the corner and we just basically made a racket from about midday until closing time at night. Woe ended playing this gig and at this gig I was playing in a band with James Blackshaw and our other friend Tom Hurst who has also recorded a lot with John. So we ended up playing our first gig with Woe at this festival and John saw us play and was like: "I really liked that. If you ever wanna do some recording, you can come down to my studio and I'll record you for free." And we were like: "Brilliant. That sounds really good." So we did that and then got to know John pretty well from then on.

Kevin Hutchins: John played guitar in Woe. We went through a few different stages. After the first record we were just finding different kinds of sounds, also quite punk sounds going on, John playing guitar, a lot more heavy. I don't know if that was off the back of him and Pete going to All Tomorrow's Parties and seeing a couple of the bands that were playing at the time. We were a rehearsed band though. A couple of times we tried to do an improvised set and I don't think we were all on that level. But that wasn't us. I can imagine people coming to see us might have thought that. It was so loose. But that was how it was meant to sound

Dave Nevard: I remember John more for Woe and Liberez. I don't what it was called – avant-garde or No Wave, I dunno. You couldn't define the first album. Reason Pays Back it was called. That is still fantastic. I really don't know the initial impetus that Woe was about. Mick, who ran the practise room behind No Recording, he was the saxophonist. There was Pete, we did have a few other people. There was a mixture of musicians who came and went but I think because of that he wasn't pigeon-holed into that 'we can only do this kind of music because we've got this type of people' because he would have almost anyone up with him doing the record, you know, with whatever instrument they've got. He did two or three albums with Woe and I honestly don't know why he changed it and got a new line-up and started Liberez. I don't if that was a few of the members kind of faded out or something. Pete Wilkins' drumkit was the most bizarre, stripped-down thing I've ever seen. Half of it was electric and he had a flatpack kickdrum that was about three inches deep and he had one of those Alexis trigger pads and a couple of other bits and you'd look at it and think "What the hell is that! What are you gonna do with that?" cos I play the drums as well, not so much these days. But once the music starts you go: "Oh right, brilliant".

Luke Younger: I really liked Woe cos they had a very one-off sound for the time, and they never really fitted in anywhere. You could probably say the same thing about Liberez but perhaps by that time there was slightly more of a context for them to fit into. But Woe were really one-off. They were like this weird, jazz-inspired noise-rock band playing on bills with like punk and hardcore bands. What they were really trying to do didn't really fit in with where they were being presented, and that was really appealing to me. And also, I really liked their record as well. They did an album on Walter Schreifels's label which I thought was pretty good. Hearing that was what got me to ask them to play that gig. I can't remember when I first saw them, but I definitely saw them a lot of times over the years. And the last time I saw them they were a five piece and a lot heavier and a lot noisier and what they were trying to do do seemed to click more, you know? They really improved as a band but then it seemed to end just after that. That's the difference between Woe and Liberez is that Liberez was a very owned, I dunno, those records are just very precise and well put together, whereas Woe was more of this evolving thing that was always different every time you saw them. There were some gigs, a couple of shows I saw, where there wasn't even a bass drum, John was playing trumpet and that guy Mick was playing saxophone and Pete just playing cymbals. They were always a different prospect live.



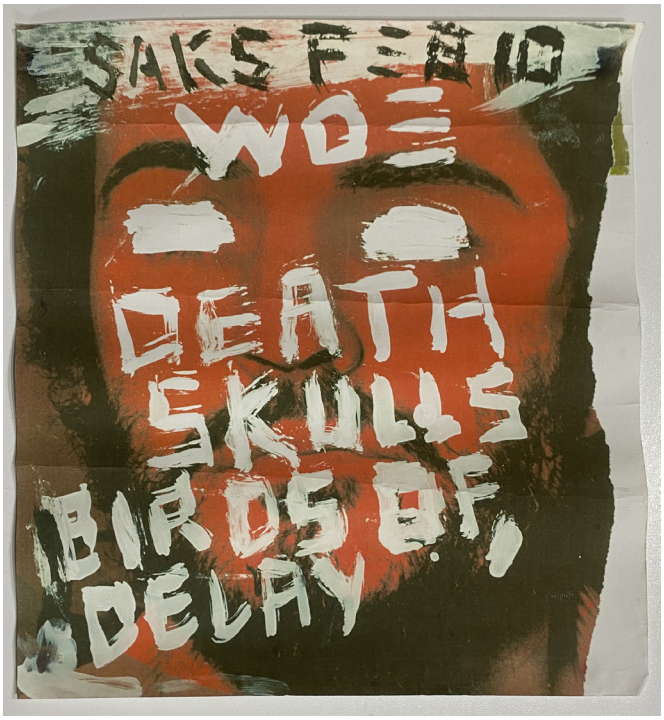
Woe, photo by Steve Hawker

They confused a lot of people because, as I was saying, they didn't really have a reference point or a particular context for that kind music, and that is something in the nature of punk and hardcore music where if there is something that doesn't exist within that narrow kind of point of reference, that framework, people tend to be incredibly confused. I didn't really see any kind of reaction to that but I had a similar situation. I had a noise band called Birds of Delay which came after the band John recorded, The !Lights! Alive!, and we did play in Southend with Woe, actually. I think the bouncer took particular exception to our set and when Woe came on he just walked out completely disgusted.

Tim Holehouse: I put Woe on at the Swan in Tottenham and also at 213 Gallery in Hackney and Pete was freaking about weird ley lines. He was having a moment, and I was "What are you talking about Pete?" I put them on a few times.

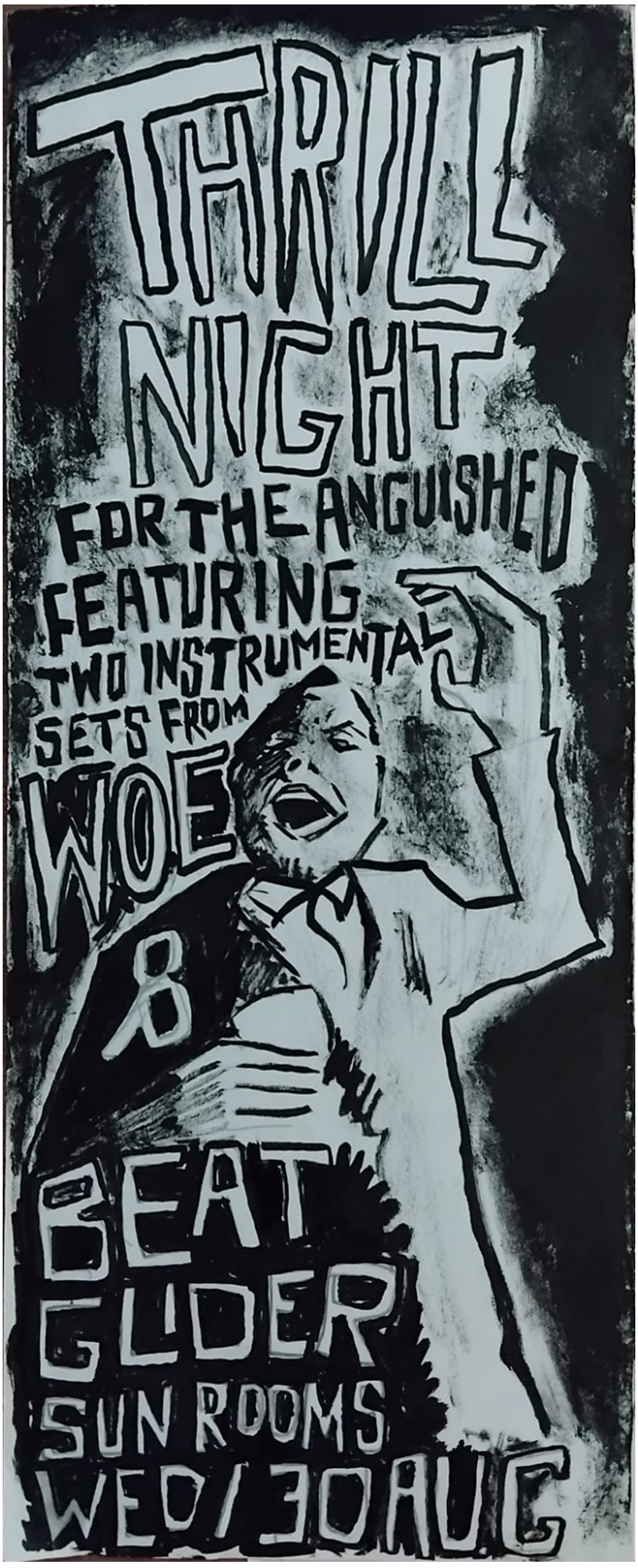
Aaron Shrimpton: I don't know how I heard Woe, but I remember knowing that John had a level of talent and understanding that was bigger than most, an understanding of bands that most people didn't and quiet confidence about that as well. I remember saying to him: "It would be really cool to film your band," because I had started making music videos for people with a really crappy little DV camera, and I have somewhere a really mini DV of Woe doing a set upstairs at the Sunrooms. They needed somewhere to play and, cos I was the barman there, let them use the place upstairs and they performed and all the guys downstairs there, who were into like reggae and Bob Dylan, whatever, went: "Yeah thanks for that!" All they could hear was this kind of reverberated wailing like moving through the building. It was a new experience for me as well. and knowing what John was like, he was: "That was shit. Let's forget that" cos one bit wasn't quite right. A one tune set, kind of thing. "Scrap that".

Nikki Nailbomb: Because we had so much in common and were always nattering, we used to hang out at the same places in town. You'd always see him at the Sunrooms or the Railway or the Alex and John would be: "Oi, Nailbomb!" But me and Mad John both got on with him and he liked Deathskulls. He'd bang on about us, but he wasn't so bothered with the rest of the hardcore scene. He'd moved on. I remember he put a show on down at Saks basement in Southend, and he was always asking us to play. He put us as the headliners, Deathskulls, and Woe was in the middle, and this band called Birds of Delay. We didn't know what was happening! It was like two Casio keyboards, just pressing keys going through delay pedals. John used to love that noise stuff and we were like: "What's all this then?" So, yeah, he opened our eyes to a lot of stuff. And it was a really busy night. I know it was on a Tuesday night cos Southend United were playing against our rivals Colchester United and it was a cup game and I was missing that playing this gig.



Woe/Death Skulls/Birds of Delay flyer by John

James Blackshaw: Back in the noughties I had a little mail order for CDRs and tapes and took a few things off John and did a few reviews. I always found John's stuff interesting, and it changed a lot and he'd played things he'd been working on. I always felt that Woe was sort of a take on like Pete Brötzmann-inspired improvised jazz, punk and noise and then, it was quite odd and abstract pieces.



Thrill Night flyer by John

Lee Hall: Woe were really cool. We played with them a few times. A No Wave band. Not like Sonic Youth. I was really into Sonic Youth back then, but it was through Woe that I got into No Wave. Very energetic, very raw, had a bit more melody than Liberez. Liberez just went off on one. But more structured. I loved Pete's drumming, and I loved John's guitar-ing. They were just sold on me. It was just cool and for us to get that seven-inch with them was just unreal. We done a seven inch. Have you heard of a Leeds online record store called Norman Records? They did a bunch of split seven-inches and my friend Adam, who's the keyboarder in Beatglider, he arranged that, and he left it to us to decide which song it was and John gave us a load of songs and we chose Coming Straight Down and I loved it when I heard it, and I was a big fan of Woe from then on. They really didn't care about it! I was like: "We've gotta do this" And they were too cool then. I said: "Can I have one of your songs?" and they said: "You can have that one, we don't like that one. You can have that one." I said: "I love that one, that's my favourite!" And I'm really happy we did that.

Matt Randall: We formed a band called Beatglider, this must have been around the time...around 96/97, so it must have been around the time John had just started No, and we went down to record some demos and he played trumpet on a track for us - he must have just started playing trumpet at that point. We put a single out and he came to Leicester with us to record, and then we got signed and we had a similar sort of thing to John: we went to America, didn't quite work out, and we played a few gigs, John came and played trumpet with us at a few gigs. I remember a gig at the Toothbrush where we played with him, and we never used tuners and John came in on the trumpet in a totally different key to us! He laughed at that: "You've got to get tuners". Then we had a major label and went to America to record it and then we came back and did the third album with John, which got put out a few years later. And then we put this single out with Woe, I found it today actually, Beat Glider / Woe 7 inch. The Woe track is fantastic actually - our track is awful - so that maybe was just after

Understand wasn't it. I must've seen Woe play, that was with Kev Hutchins and Mick wasn't it, but I don't remember. And then after that, then it was Liberez wasn't it, after Woe? I don't think we played with Woe because Woe was quite a short-lived thing,

Davy, Paul and Jim: There was a photo that came up online a little while ago of Woe playing at Sunrooms and it was really funny picking people out from different bands who were there. There's Jay from Cable next to us, Ben from the Samurai next to us, Stu Clapp from Light of the Morning, Sam from Get Cape was there apparently, all the people from bands in Southend at that time crammed into the Sunrooms watching Woe. I remember that gig. I remember it clearly as well. You could only fit about 15 people in there couldn't you. It was a crap room to play a gig in, but I'd do anything to go to a gig there now. I remember also another gig that was probably Woe at Saks Underground which was also not the best venue but were we playing? I think we were playing. It was Woe, Cable and us. What a privilege to have played that! It was funny cos John turned up and we said: "Oh, we'll move our backline now so you can set up", and John went: "No. no, we'll just set up here." And it was where people were meant to be standing, and he was like: "We're gonna set up here." What, you're not gonna set up on the stage?" "No, no we'll just set up here." And they just set up next to the bar in the corner. They didn't care. And it was brilliant. It really did create an atmosphere, and I was saying to Davy last week. They had this massive skull. All the lights were off, and this massive skull would just flash every now and again, like a strobe., and then just the basic instruments. It was bracing. It was brilliant. It was just three-piece. Bass, John playing a bit of guitar and other various instruments and Mick on the saxophone and drummer, Pete. He used to deliberately not put a carpet under his kit so they would move around, the kick drum would just move constantly and the chaos was right up his street. One of the funniest ones seeing Woe - Paul, you must have come with me to this actually - was when they played in Westcliff and they had that big velvet curtain and the MC would introduce the bands and they were halfway through the set and the guy started talking: "Got these local lads from Southend" the curtain parts and they're halfway through their first song. "I'm not quite sure what's going on: I think this is Woe." They were great. "Don't need a stage. Don't need a singer. Don't need any of that." Brilliant. Just get going

Woe: *https://woemusic3.bandcamp.com/album/reason-gets-paid-back*



Woe at Sunrooms, photo by Phil Howes



23.

Staircase:
WOE INTO LIBEREZ I

John Hannon: We were calling ourselves Liberez a long time before we released any recordings under that name. The first line up was basically the same as Woe, friends of ours who lived locally. I've always approached music, playing with other people, as 'who's around?' I'm not searching for: "I want this specific instrument, or this particular person." We'll work with who is available, what are the things that work. We'll work with what we can rather than worry about what we can't - what are the attributes that work well between the four people who are in the room, whoever it happens to be.

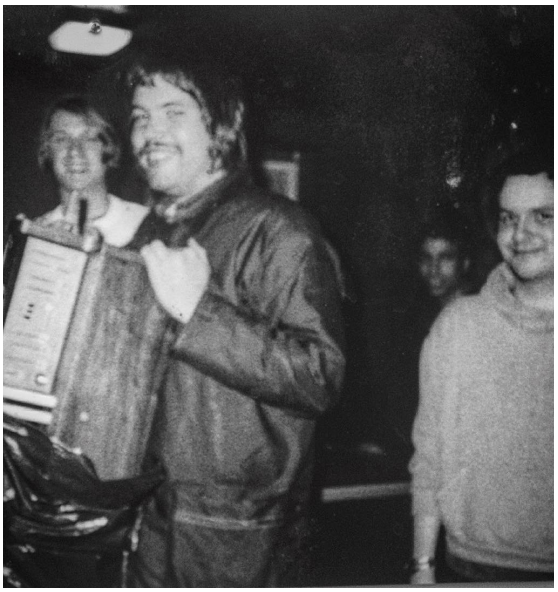
Kev Hutchins: All of a sudden, we were Liberez and not Woe anymore. One day John came in and said: "We're not doing Woe anymore, we're called Liberez" and this was the time when he started coming in with all different kinds of ideas, so when he came in with the speaker cone, and I'm playing that all of a sudden. I mean some of the gigs, oh my God. I mean we played this gig and the guy running it was into really arty sort of stuff, like poetry going on, he'd run these nights. Pete told me a story about him, that John asked him how he would recognise this guy and Pete said: "You'll recognise him cos he's got a cabbage on his head." He had these cabbage oven gloves and was walking around with them on his head.
So, we'd play these shows, not just the shows with other bands but other kinds of gigs, more theatrical style, I guess. Happenings, that's the word, isn't it? We played on a boat once, that was floating on the Thames. People reading out the names of tube stations, sort of thing. And John was really into that sort of thing. We played a few places where it didn't go down so well. We played a gig in Kingston, I think, when we got glassed. John had been talking to the sound guy, and he said it was one of the loudest things he has ever created. But basically, we had this sound going. I was playing this kind of sample thing - it was so loud people were covering their ears. I turned around and next thing I know, this guy jumps up on stage with a pint, flipping the bird at us all. Then glass came onto the stage. Hit Mick. He got cut. He walked off. And I just thought 'Jesus' and on the way home I was thinking: "I don't wanna do that again." John and Pete thought it was great! "I'd rather have that reaction than no reaction." Well, that's one way of putting it but, God, it wasn't great. I mean a lot of it was just a lot of feedback and really trying to create a horrendous noise. A noise that sounds good on a record but when you are getting it live - ear-splitting.
We played a church once. I remember on the way there was a wheelchair just careering down the middle of the road in an ungentrified part of London. So, we were playing this show and everyone in front of us was instrumental, quite chilled. At the time we had just got another guitarist called Paul Spragget but we called him Spragè. We sounded so loud and there wasn't really anyone watching and just after one of the songs

Liberez artwork by John

finished I saw this guy walking up to me and I thought: "What's he want?" and said: "Is there any way you could turn it down a little bit? We've got the nuns next door and they're gonna come in in a minute and complain." And I thought: "How do you turn down a drumkit?" and we didn't anyway. But short sets! Lucky to get more than 20, 25 minutes. One gig we did in Leicester Square and John's idea was: "We're not gonna play any of the songs, we're just gonna play this one thing for about 20 minutes." It was basically just this one looping riff, and it just went on and on and on. And I was: "I'm not sure if we can play that one thing for 20 minutes" and John said "Course we can!" So that's what we did. Dunno what people would have thought of that. The idea is that it changes the more it goes round. Whether or not it did, I don't know! I read a review of it, and someone said at first it was all right but then after about 10 minutes it started to spin their head out!

John Hannon: We had quite a few years of experimentation with the four guys who had been in Woe, and I don't think they'd mind me saying that they weren't sitting round and digesting the same things that me and Pete - that we kind of did together - were. I loved where they come from but they kind of got bored, the saxophonist and bass player, just travelling a long way to play to no one kind of loses its appeal after a while. I'd be happy to do that forever, but I've become more mindful of that when I work with people, to try and be aware that when people donate their time to help you creatively it's a really generous thing and to be respectful, try to make it as painless and rewarding as possible, and that is quite difficult to do with what's possible, limited money and resources. So they got a bit bored and irritated.

Kev Hutchins: Liberez at the time was still the same people but what happened was that there was a gig in Paris that John had booked and I couldn't get the time off work to do it, not long after the recordings we were doing, and basically John, Pete and Mick said: "Well, we're still gonna do it." And after that, really, I stopped getting asked to practise. It was never like: "Oh, we don't want you to play anymore" but I was struggling with a lot of the ideas, maybe, cos it was so fractured. Playing with Woe was very different to playing in Liberez, and maybe I wasn't so embracing of some of those ideas. Looking back on it now, that's how it feels to me anyway. But the fact that they could go ahead anyway. That kind of pushed the band more into that direction, I think. They really wanted to split away from the traditional set up of guitar, bass, drums. John started playing violin a lot more. And a lot of the more arty happenings and shows I wasn't as into as Pete and John. Those two were just in a different world sometimes. Either you were in it or you weren't. No animosity at all. Just one of those things. Being in that band and hanging out with those guys was just such a good time. I don't think we ever had an argument. We were just laughing most of the time.



The! Lights! Alive! at NO Recording

John Hannon: A band called The! Lights! Alive!, which was James Blackshaw, who has become a quite famous guitarist later 2000s, and Luke Younger, who does Helm and runs Altar records, Tom Hurst, who went on to do Designer Wave. This one band. They came to the studio, which was a really important thing I did, and opened the door to what I'm doing now, and Tom (Scott) was part of that. Badens was on Kingsland Road and behind it in a not strictly legal setting, industrial-purpose units and these people had converted them, Lots of people living there - Rory in Test Icicles - all musicians, lived in this space.

Tom James Scott: I'd heard about John before I met him. Friends knew him and were using his studio. Everyone referred to him as John Hannon, which I assumed was just to differentiate from all the other Johns, but as the years went by it became clear there was more to it than that. Everyone spoke really highly of him, and a mate who lived in the flat above mine in Dalston was distributing a Liberez CD release. I don't think I ever heard it at that time, but I can remember seeing a few boxes lying around and hearing a lot of enthusiasm for someone named John Hannon who had a recording studio in Essex. This was in 2005. The flat I lived in was shared with three others and there were three friends living directly above, so it always felt like one shared space. I can't remember exactly what brought John round, but it was no doubt to help with

something music related. Whoever he was due to meet wasn't there, so I let him in, and it was just the two of us in the kitchen. I made him tea, and he sat on the grotty sofa that frequently became a bed. I think we were both a bit nervy and he looked like he felt a bit awkward. There'd been that much talk about him that it felt like meeting a famous person. I remember thinking he looked really cool but conversation was brief and it wasn't long before he went off and did whatever it was he was there to do. I'd see him at gigs periodically after that and nearly always had a chat with him. I decided to book myself in at No to try out a few ideas and see what kind of sound I could expect to get.
John was really supportive, and I always felt after the first session I did with him that he'd realised I wasn't that confident doing this on my own and needed a bit of feedback. Mark was into what we'd done so we continued with the record and at some point during that time John invited me along to a Liberez rehearsal to meet Pete and try out a few ideas. They'd recently let Kev and Mick go and seemed to be trying to push their music in a slightly different direction. I got on with both of them really well and at least 75% of the time at the studio was spent telling funny stories and listening to music. It's probably an exaggeration, but it feels like nearly every time I went to rehearsal, I left with a pen drive or a CD full of mp3's, after having arrived with the same to share with everyone else. Pete used to make "killer comps" for everyone (and to play in his car) and we all started making them and gifting them to each other. The music we made in Liberez was dark and intense but the atmosphere at the studio wasn't at all. John and Pete always jokingly referred to what we were doing as 'chavant garde'.

John Hannon: Tom came too, really loves Morton Feldman and operates on a completely different level to me, moves and thinks very slowly, makes music I never could because in the time it takes, I would be having a million ideas. His personality is the music he makes, I was really into what he was doing, and he needed to get out of London and he moved to Southend and him and Nina were these two personalities with attributes which were very foreign to me and I really admired and I wanted to bring this all together.

Tom James Scott: In 2009 I found myself out of work and newly single and John offered me a room in his flat in Southend. I lived there for the best part of a year, and John and Pete helped me out so much during that time. It helped being nearer to the studio and we could discuss ideas and try things out in our living room, which John called 'The Explorer's Lounge' as it was decorated with things he'd bought while he was away travelling. I think a big part of the attraction of being in a band for John was that it was another reason to visit different places and meet people. He was always offering to play for free and would often cover a lot of the expenses himself if that meant we were able to do it. That was quite a strange and unsettled period in my life, but I've got a lot of good memories of that flat. John would invite people over often and cook dinner for everyone. Mutual friends who were using the studio would stay over, rather than staying at the studio itself (as people often did).



Liberez, photo by Mikael Gregorsky

Iñigo Ugarteburu: I don't know when I recorded my first solo record, between 2010 and 2011, I'm pretty sure. So that's when I met him and he was incredibly helpful during the whole process. I met Liberez because there were a few times when, after recording, Liberez would come and rehearse: Pete and Nina and Tom Scott, he plays guitar incredibly well and he was playing guitar in Liberez as well.

Tim Holehouse: I was playing around that scene and certainly came to see Liberez a few times and put them on as well. Around the early 2000s I put them on a boat on the Thames. I'd been putting on hardcore shows, and it felt that I'd like to put on an experimental show and some friends of mine had this boat they said I could use. And then I put them on once at the Windmill in Brixton, must have been 2007 and I think I had Liberez, myself and Attack Vipers – a hardcore band from Portsmouth.

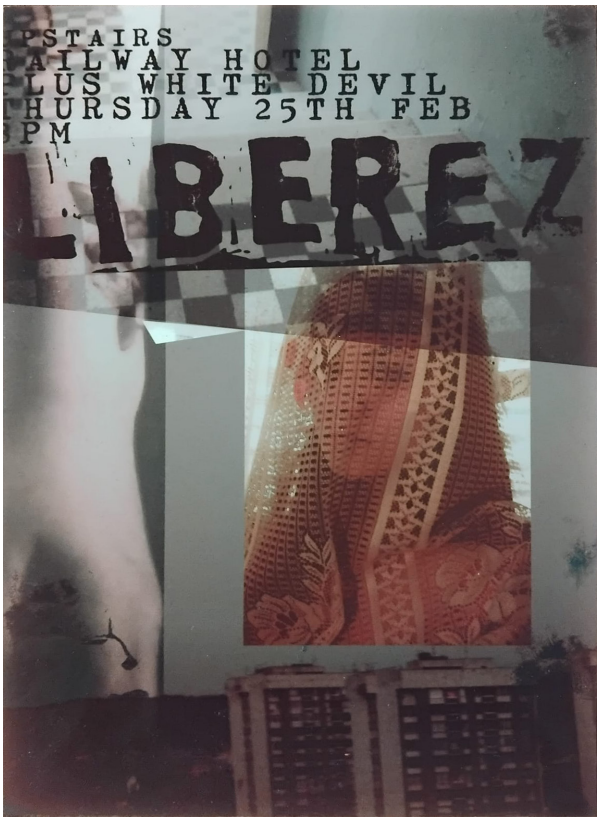


John at the Thames boat gig, photo by Tim Holehouse

James Blackshaw: I saw Liberez a couple of times, would have liked to have seen them more really, but living in Hastings it wasn't always possible to get up to town much. I knew Pete and Tom Scott too.

Iñigo Ugarteburu: In that time, I stayed at John's once and they were living together in Southend and Tom would spend the whole day with a guitar in his hands playing non-stop. They went somewhere in Europe to play, and Peter couldn't go because, I don't know, and because I did a little bit of percussion on my record - I am not a drummer - John said would you come and play with us? And I said: "No way am I going to do that. I love the project but..." And John was: "But it is so easy and it's just these rhythms." I don't know what they ended up doing!

Luke Younger: Ten years down the line, after just being friends and having him record bands and stuff that I'd been involved in, I ended up releasing some early music of Liberez on my label that I had started up in 2010. It ended up three albums of Liberez that I ended up releasing. Something like that.



Liberez flyer by John

Tom James Scott: Nina wasn't there initially but John was friends with her through his ex, Kirstie, and was trying to coax her into getting involved. In the beginning it was through tape recordings of her voice. We performed a few times as a trio and played back the voice recordings on a sampler. All the work we were doing at that time became 'The Letter' (released on Luke Younger's Alter label in 2011), but before that even came out Nina started coming along to the studio more regularly and we began working on what became 'Sane Men Surround' (released in 2013 on Russell Walker's Savoury Days label, and later as a CD on Alter).

John Hannon: It was a going back to the idea of vocal, how powerful it could be. I wasn't as fearful of the idea of the song and vocals. And I'd met Nina, who was the vocalist in Liberez at that time, and she was the just the person I'd been looking for. She was completely naïve and fearless when it came to making music and lots of ideas, not musical but about life, and expressing yourself and I was just taking in this stuff, and we were putting it together. Became the first Liberez record.

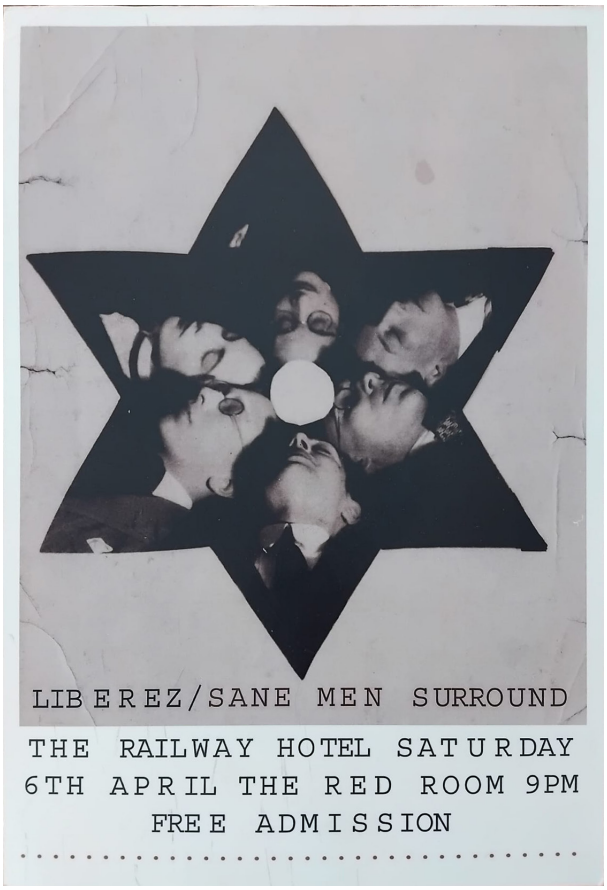
Liberez: *https://liberez.bandcamp.com/album/the-letter-3*

Astrud Steehouder: I think partly because we were really slow at working, it meant that we went to NO frequently over a space of time and developed like a really good friendship with John. Pete would come to the studio after we'd finished recording, so we got to know Pete, and, oddly enough, Nina. We were walking down the road in Southend, maybe after a gig or something, and John referred to someone and I don't know

what they called her but it made me think: "I think I know this person" because I had known Nina since I was about 16 but hadn't seen her for, like, years. She went to sixth-form college with another of my good friends that I haven't seen since I was about 14, but I hadn't stayed in touch. And it turned out it was the same person, and she had just started working with them, with Liberez. But it was very experimental use of the idea, the construct of the band, her doing some kind of fragmented vocal with projections and things. Tom Scott was in the band as well. I think it was a four-piece at that time. So, they were just formulating stuff and we were just, as a group, we had known Nina for a long time. Jess had known Nina as well and we were just really interested by their approach because it was really radical and super interesting and all the ideas that fed into it so. I ended up working with Nina really closely on another project for a number of years. So there was something about that kind of energy which was really important to us as a collective and me as an individual, that exchange of ideas that was quite apart from anything else that was going on. And the fact that Liberez were touring around in different parts of Europe but it was like off the beaten track and that was of interest, certainly for John, because it was venues that for other people would be just not known. He had these connections which were different to other pathways that other people would tour.



Liberez performing. John and Nina



Liberez flyer by John

Derek Walmsley: Around the turn of the 2010s, underground music in the UK started to rethink its relationship with that most familiar of modern music ideas, the rock band. The old model of a group of people touring around to promote a recording started to fall away as money made from albums dissipated, and the pressure musicians were experiencing when renting homes in congested cities ramped up. It was in this context that John's group Liberez, a quartet with Nina Bosnic, Tom James Scott and Pete Wilkins, caught my ear. Their album ***Sane Men Surround*** seemed to redefine the idea of what a group of musicians could do. Rather than having one group of musicians as a rhythm section, and another playing on top of it, all of the musicians seemed to float in their roles. I was never clear who was playing what, or what instruments were involved. Background became foreground and vice versa. In a Liberez article I wrote for The Wire in 2013, Nina gave a sense of just how fluid their way of making music could be when she told me: "John read a poem I wrote and asked if he could use it and my voice in Liberez. We were in a cafe in Soho at the time and I went into the toilets and recorded my voice reading the poem." At that time, small gestures like this, where people's small-scale creativity could break the familiar patterns of how rock musicians worked, was timely and deeply inspiring. Hannon himself ran his studio in Southend, NO Recording, and there was a sense with Liberez that they were rethinking how rock groups sounded and what they could do. John Hannon and Scott were multi-instrumentalists so could not be easily

identified with one approach to music making, so every song you heard was a voyage of discovery. Perhaps Liberez evaded themselves as this line-up of the group only lasted a year or two. But in a time where we needed new ideas of what rock music could do, they evaded all stereotypes. For many young musicians, myself included at one point, the reason to be in a band was to see what it could do, and what you could do in collaboration with your peers. You started a journey together not knowing where it would lead. Liberez seemed to embody John Hannon's creative spirit and it was a privilege to follow his journey with that band.

Liberez *https://liberez.bandcamp.com/album/sane-men-surround*

Tom James Scott: I can't remember openly discussing ideas or making a firm plan for where we wanted to be musically, but we seemed to have a shared sense of what worked and what didn't. Nipping things in the bud if it got too jam-like or if it started to feel clichéd. John always had some initial idea to get us started. A rhythm pattern or a group of sounds that we could all play around with until something felt good. I felt like I was helping John and Pete realise their vision but not in a way where I was being told what to do or what to play. John was really encouraging and when he was into something I was doing, he'd tell me to keep doing it, and we nearly always agreed.

John Hannon (in The Wire magazine 350 April 2013): We're usually happiest when we get to a point when we are not really doing anything, but the music is playing itself. As an engineer I observe the breadth of techniques used by other musicians, together with their intentions and how they choose to define themselves, which is why I can recognise that this is not how we work. What we are looking for is buried in the art of playing. Being able to dissect this and reveal a hidden meaning keeps us sensing that we are following a progression.

David Vick: At this time, they were both constantly on the lookout for new sources of creative inspiration, really. I was going to a lot of theatre cos drama appreciation was one of the things I was teaching in Adult Ed and I was paid to go to plays with a bunch of theatre enthusiasts (seriously, couldn't believe it myself!) and teaching myself drama crit in the process. So I had my ear to the ground in that area and John, of course, was completely on the telegraph line for musical things. He and Pete were just up for anything in that direction of more avant-garde drama productions, Kirstie, too of course in that period, as well and, either just with him or them both, we were getting to things like Pinter's adaptation of Joyce's Exiles or a dramatisation of Kafka's The Monkey or an adaptation of the novel A Prayer for the Dying by what's his name, he wrote it as a novel, As I lay Dying! Faulkner. Young Vic or Southward Playhouse. Places like that. They'd get very excited about a particular lighting effect or sound effect of some kind and the next time you saw Liberez play you might notice a little new incorporation and it was: "Oh, yeah, know where that comes from." What do they say? Talent borrows, genius steals, or something. It was actually very exciting for me to have a stageside view, sort of thing, of that process. An onsite performance of Macbeth literally on the Southbank, outdoors there. Wasn't much good actually. Polish theatre company. Pretty mundane performance of Waiting for Godot with those two old hands, Patrick Star Wars and whatshisname who did the Richard III film. But generally anything that was going we could both do was the rule, and for the chat afterwards as much as the performance. Good times.



Liberez, All Tense Now Lax, album artwork

Michael Kasparis: So it started out as a kind of working thing in the studio and John was always working on Liberez stuff and he put the first stuff out on Luke Younger's label and then he sent me a recording and I loved it, and so I put out All Tense Now Lax and also played with him and Liberez

with my solo project, supporting them on a couple of gigs. Putting out All Tense Now Lax was just a kind of natural progression of recording with him really. I can't remember but I think there was a couple of people that I released who had worked with John. When I first started working with John, I wasn't running the label, and it started during the period I was recording with him. So he was kind of around with the beginning of the label. I was with him and he played me a few bits of what would become All Tense Now Lax. I was blown away and asked to hear more, and he sent me some and I just asked if he had a home for it. He was like: "No, not yet" and I said: "Well, if you're open to it, I'd love to work on it." So, it was just a really natural progression. The label that I run doesn't specialise in experimental or abstract music or anything, but it was just something that I really believed a lot in and wanted to be involved in. So we put it out and there was a really great reaction, critical appraisal. Didn't sell that well. But that's not why we do it! I was really proud of that record. He sent me some different tracks as a kind of taster - would've been 2015/16 or something. I can't remember exactly the process of how we did it. Because he was an audio engineer, he wasn't the sort of person to send demos. He sent finished product, processed stuff. So, he just sent me the record, and we discussed how he wanted it presented. Design wise he had a hand in that as well and I think from memory, Tom James Scott, who was in the band at the time, I think he might have helped do the artwork. John didn't master it. I think we got someone else to master it. It's good to have an outsider work on it. Then it came out and they played some gigs supporting it and it ended up on a few interview lists and then John kind of moved on, which was what you do.

Liberez: ***https://liberez.bandcamp.com/album/all-tense-now-lax-2***

Luke Younger: Can't remember when I first saw Liberez. The first version with Pete, Nina and Tom, I saw in 2011 somewhere in London. Some friends of ours had a house on Dalston Lane that used to do a lot of gigs, 113 Dalston Lane it was called, it could have been there. That would have been Shakeeb and Lawrence from Cleckhuddersfax who would have organised that. Played in the dark with a projector flashing occasional images.

Cleckhuddersfax: ***https://cleckhuddersfax.bandcamp.com/album/spen-beck***

Astrud Steehouder: So, it was a very important time and, just as a person, with John, we used to go to shows and stuff with him and Pete and often Nina. Where was the place? 113 I think it was called. A house in Dalston Lane. They used to host gigs there, which just seems such a weird thing to do now. The way Dalston has changed. Then it was: "Oh, let's go to a gig at the house" - this detached house in Dalston. It was always a good crew and really interesting bands. And there was still ATP and Upset the Rhythm had been going since then. We all really warmed to that - I guess we were all quite fascinated by John's knowledge and his insight and the visual element was super strong as well. The visual identity. Obviously, NO Recordings was a depiction of that. But in the era of, I guess, personality-led stuff, it was the absolute antithesis of that. And I still find that it is is really hard to get that right. Not that that was what John was trying to do. It's just really hard to present something that has a really strong identity with imagery that is not necessarily consistent, has no depiction of individuals as such...? It's like a continuous lineage of symbolic purism. I found it fascinating.

Tom James Scott: May 2010 I was offered some work in London so decided to make the move back. I was spending a lot of time there anyway, and a lot of time travelling home on that last train from Liverpool Street, so it made sense. That incarnation of Liberez continued until 2013 when I took a job in my hometown in the Northwest. John was keen to make what we were doing less reliant on pre-recorded material and loops so, unfortunately, I had to leave the band. I remember him saying the door was always open and I'd always hoped one day we'd live near enough to each other to work together again more regularly. Sadly, that line up folded a year or so after I left but John always invited me to contribute something to each record that followed and I stayed close with all three of them.

John Hannon: Tom had a deep calling to go back where he came from in Barrow and needed to stay there, family-related, and set up his own record label and has made many brilliant records. So, we became a three piece.

Matt Reay: Liberez for me started end of 2014. So, by then I knew John more and I had arranged a gig with that line up. It was near Manor House in this big office building and there was this one floor where people were living, almost like a squat but it wasn't. People were paying rent. This huge floor with a big space in the middle. They had a house party and asked us to play, and I asked John to play and we had projections going and things like that. We'd seen Liberez play a few times. So, yeah, going from John recording us we started going towards being a bit more like friends and playing with Liberez, with Pete and Nina. Tom Scott had moved by then, so it's that period after Tom. I met Pete a couple of times. We did the gig, and we also went to the festival in Leigh-on-Sea that we would go to, and I met Pete there but as I started to get to know Pete, you know, that's when the break up happened so I didn't know Nina either. Rayographs were the band that I heard and so I found John, cos that's where they had recorded. And that's how Sylvia knows John cos Sylvia was friends with Astrud and John knew Astrud cos they would go and record their album there and Astrud is friends with Nina I think. They went on to form Paper Dollhouse.



Liberez performing at Manor House

Paper Dollhouse: *https://paperdollhouse.bandcamp.com/track/swans*

Astrud Steehouder: And Pete and Nina, by virtue of their relationship, would have had much different, closer alignments and stuff. And with Liberez it was always a shape-shifting thing. From outside it seemed that things were guided but it was a shape-shifting band depending on the characters (of the members) and what they brought to it. It was facilitated through the lens of their individual energy and style and interests. And also knowing and seeing Pete and obviously - he is a drummer in various different groups, including the Wolfhounds, and it's much more traditional drumming I guess - so it was very interesting to see the more cyclical drumming with pads. And obviously I've worked closely with Nina. To be honest, I wouldn't reduce anything down in that band. It's impossible. I wouldn't dare either because it would not honour what that band was about, to try and reduce it in any way.

David Vick: John let me know that Liberez would be playing in Amsterdam as part of a short tour in Europe, and I could make that one. I ended up staying at Jane's with them and went to the venue in the afternoon with John and Pete to help with the set up. It was in an abandoned church out by the main canal and a venue called Delicatessen, if I remember correctly. Pretty amazing brute architecture building that was now derelict, the pews stripped out, had been a homeless shelter, puddles of water inside from leaks but with an amazing acoustic. As the evening came on, people started arriving and by the time the music started there were quite a few there. It was several bands in the line-up but as each band finished their followers left! By the time Liberez were on it was just me, John's sister and her partner Tim, and the organisers. I can only say it is still one of the best performances I have experienced and I've done a few. The atmosphere was absolutely made for the sound they were making and the waves of sound reverberating around this space was like being in the eye of a storm or something, Nina kneeling at the nave, slide show on the wall, Pete head down over his kit and John wandering about with his violin. John was a bit downcast as we travelled back to Jane's. They could pack all their kit into a wheelie suitcase, dragging it through the rainy streets, but I don't think he was ever satisfied. That's what drove him on, I guess. Back at Jane's, I remember the three of them sitting on the couch, Pete's poisonous diatribe about one of the other artists on the bill, Nina's disconcerting stares and us all discussing the whole celebrity child abuse revelations that were coming out at the time while Jane's making the tea and toast, and then having to leave early the next morning for a birthday celebration at home. It was the last time I saw them all together.

Liberez 'ACAB' Live at Kulter, Sint Josephkerk, Amsterdam Nov 2013
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMACvH2l8lY

Jane Hannon: I can't remember the year that John parted ways with Pete and Nina but it must've been around 2013/14. I was living in Amsterdam. John called me one night, he was in Geneva playing with Liberez and the band had split just after their gig. I helped him to get out of Geneva and he came to Amsterdam to stay with me. John put music before everything – it always came first – so he was devastated when they split. There was no side to John, and because he was so authentically himself at all times, he could be quite naïve and innocent when it came to reading other people. I would often tease him that he had an incredibly high tolerance for nitwits. He was interested in people and he could take a lot of shit if he thought that the music would ultimately benefit. I remember walking down the Keizersgracht with him in Amsterdam and saying to him that Liberez didn't have to end then. It shouldn't end if he didn't want it to. I suggested to him that it could evolve into something else, a new line up, surely there were other people that he would like to work with? A few days later he called me and said that he'd approached a few people and they had all said yes! He was so surprised, surprised that people would jump at the chance of working with him. That was very John – he'd get knocked on his arse by something, but give him a few days, and he would be up and running again, a head full of new ideas.

David Vick: As far as what was behind the breakup, the way John put it to me was of a betrayal of the artistic relationship, a broken agreement, and I could relate to that in terms of his commitment to what he did. I was pretty much in awe of that, so if there was something else at stake, I prefer that story. It wasn't my business anyway. It was hard to imagine how things would go on with Liberez, having only known it in that form and the organic way it had become what it was. It couldn't be the same any other way. And that was okay. Rip it up and start again.



Pete, John and Nina in Geneva



24.

Forget So That You May Be Forgotten: 2013-2020 LIBEREZ II

John Hannon: So I had to start again, but I wasn't finished with the music I wanted to make, and I was really fortunate running a recording studio for so long now. Working in a studio you get to encounter brilliant people all the time. One of them I knew if I ever needed a percussionist again I'd have him, Matthew, and Iñigo, a guy from the Basque country who made a record with me off the back of me recording James Blackshaw, and Sylvia was a friend of a friend and had the 12/8 structure of flamenco. There was no way to try and recreate what had happened in the previous format of Liberez because that was based on their way of operating, so tied up with the members' personalities it would have been impossible.

Matt Reay: So, at the beginning it was me and John, and he said he knew Iñigo through recording him at the studio, then we had a rehearsal and then, yeah, Sylvia came through Astrud. Apart from Sylvia, we knew John but came from different places. John just sent me a message on Facebook: "Pete and Nina are no longer in the band, would you be interested?" I sort of jumped at the chance cos I really liked what they were doing and, to be honest, I was quite flattered that he asked me. It didn't seem like he would.

Astrud Steehouder: Obviously I know Sylvia too and have for a long time. I kind of introduced them because it was at a time when the band was transitioning into something different. I think I met up with John at about that time and he told me that he had been listening to a lot of flamenco rhythms specifically, and Sylvia had had a background in flamenco dancing and guitar, and I could see that this could be a good connection for them musically. So, Sylvia was in the next incarnation but very different sounding. I don't know any of the other musicians. My connection with the band was more when it was Nina and Pete and John and Tom. Tom's an amazing person as well and a really lovely guy.

Sylvia Saunders: In the first place, I'd heard about him a lot. An old friend of mine, Astrud Steehouder- I'd been a friend of that lot since I was 19. She formed a band later called the Rayographs and now has Paper Dollhouse. Astrud recorded with Rayographs with John, and he obviously made a big impression on her and Amy, the drummer: "He's so cool, he's so funny". How they were really getting on. I went with Astrud to see Liberez because her good friend Nina was in that and a couple of years later, he just gets in touch: "My friend Astrud says that you have got some kind of a flamenco background, Hungarian folk background and that you

play guitar, sing a bit. Can we meet?" And I said to Astrud: "What's this?" and she said "Oh, that's John, he's wicked. He's looking to reform the band, and he specifically wants some flamenco influence and he's really interested, with his violin right now, in eastern European or central European music, gypsy music, all that kind of stuff. And it just felt so obvious to say: "Oh Sylvia, get in touch with her." Cos my mum is Hungarian, and I've done lots of Hungarian songs cos I was in a band ages ago, kind of went around collecting all these Hungarian songs, loosely, cos the border's changed in that area, Transylvania and all that. And I've lived in Seville. That was where I thought I might as well have some flamenco lessons. I was into it, you know, and I transferred all of that to guitar. So, I'm into flamenco, spent a good amount of time, you know, getting nerdy about flamenco. So, Astrud just said to John: "Oh my God, what a weird combination of things - but that is actually describing Sylvia right now." So that's how we met. So, it was through Astrud and also Jay, who's in a band - he's like a childhood friend, younger than John. So, it was always like, I'd see John, see Jay, and it was also: "How is he?" I was like the link who knew each other even though they didn't see each other anymore. But he used to live with John in Southend at Ravens Court and then he went with John to New York.

Iñigo Ugartburu: But we stayed in touch and very often we would go and see gigs at Cafe Oto and I remember, I think at the last Peter Brötzmann concert, he played at Oto and John was there and he said: "I am about to release the new Liberez but I'm looking for some band members. I'm with no band at the moment, would you be up for it?" And I was like: "Yes, for sure, I would love to do that." But at the time I was not playing or anything. And that is when I met Matt, and at that point John was talking to someone called Sylvia who could play a little flamenco guitar. She was someone who was very creative and could be interested in joining, and we all joined around the same time. And then we played together for about three years.

Sylvia Saunders: So he just came over. Came over, had a chat, really chilled, very chilled, talked in very general terms about what he wanted to get in the band. He was kind of selling it well, you know - there were going to be gigs, band is known cos it's been going for a while now. Vaguely talked about Hungarian music and we just hung out for a bit and he's so easy to get on with, very sweet and nice, got that typical Essex socialness, you know? Cos I work in Essex a couple of days, everyone's just like that. Kind of person - go down the pub, talk to everyone, talk about anything, be funny, get on with everyone. He really had that. Which I really appreciate, you know, because there's a lot of people in the south of England, very cold and chilling. So, he was a bit of a breath of fresh air, you know? Actually, a really lovely, warm, funny person. So, I was kind of up for it, even though I listened to them and thought: "Oh, I have heard that band. Bit weird but it's great: flashing lights, didn't really know what was going on but fine. Sure. You know? Give it a go." And then he came over again to chat and stuff, and I met Matt and Inigo and that was it.



Liberez John and Sylvia

Michael Kasparis: John was kind of the ringleader of his band. He did most of the music himself and then he had collaborators who came in. More of a band to begin with and then became something more of just getting these talented people to come in and help out. And John always worked with a lot of different people, like Iñigo who was the guitarist, and I think he was working with a flamenco dancer as well. It was a creative thing that was constantly evolving with John at the centre of it. His vision for Liberez was so sort of single-minded and auterish, sort-of-thing.

Matt Reay: So, at the beginning, there was just talk of just sharing ideas about different books or photos that I liked. Iñigo and John had probably more input. Iñigo is like an encyclopaedia of music, and John is the same. I mean, I like music as well, but what they could keep in their head! They would have a lot of musical references while I'm more into animation and film. So, for me and John, it was more about the visual aspect of what we could do. So, we would share a lot of things like photos, more visual art kind of stuff, it was always sort of bouncing around ideas. Right from the beginning the way John wrote songs for Liberez, his approach to it, was that it doesn't necessarily have to start with a bit of music, it could be like a photograph or a book or a film, almost like you're soundtracking. What mood or atmosphere that photo had, or whatever impression that made on you, he was trying to recreate.



Photo by John that formed the focal point for the song and video for Cellophane Window

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efTWyVEZwnw



Liberez performing at New River Studios. John and Sylvia. Photo by Matt Cargill.

Sylvia Saunders: We went over to New River Studios with - what was her name? - Marion, who's a musician and in a band with my drum teacher, and she's stopped now (after a falling out with the owner) but it's a really cool venue called New River Studios which - based on her musical interests - built up into a bit of a scene. London these days, there are fewer and fewer places that are not just for posturing around. They exist but less and less good venues, and they also have practice studios there, pretty shitty ones, terrible speakers, terrible everything, but we went there and that's where it all started with Matt, Inigo, John and I. He gave me a microphone. He had the idea that the female in the band does sensual type vocals and I was like: "No, I'm not gonna take that role!" Doing some kind of feminine vocals, the feminine touch in the band - that's what it felt like. Like Nina maybe. I don't know. I'd been to one gig of theirs, but I didn't remember that much.

Matt Reay: At the beginning John already had like quite a lot of demos and knew stuff that he wanted to do and had all the old Liberez stuff, so we learnt some of those songs. But for the new album, John already had skeletons of those new songs as demos. He would bring samples and I would lay them on to the laptop, and he definitely had a plan of how it was going to move forward. Very influenced, especially for that one, flamenco based. That influenced the musical progressions that he made and sometimes he would have like a loop playing and it was definitely a reductive process. He would have this loop playing and we would play little bits over it. Quite often he would, the thing that we had started from, this central loop, he wanted to take away, so that would leave a lot of space. We'd start with something quite full; you internalise it, hear the structure of the song in your head and then he would take it away or lessen, or chop bits out of it away, and then it would disappear. So, you'd have this space and then you'd put in something more and then step back. We did lots of rehearsals just getting that together.

At the beginning it was very John-led. he would have a very clear idea of what it was going to be and then he'd look to Inigo to do certain kind of textures. He had a pedal board that he had mounted, amassed over time. Sylvia plays flamenco guitar. So, he'd lean on us for different aspects of what he wanted in the music. So, he definitely knew what he was doing and would orchestrate us all together. And then over time we became more comfortable with each other and for the next album John wanted, he was thinking to bring in elements of tango. But it was quite open. Like before he had almost full songs, but this time it felt like you could bring a bit more to it, he hadn't a plan for it yet, it was more collaborative.

Sylvia Saunders: There were moments like: "I want it to be more percussive". At the beginning it was guitar and voice and a lot of percussive stuff, with the voice as well, but clapping and percussive instruments, and then later on, piano came in, and then we changed where we rehearsed to Red Church Street recording studio. Absolutely crazy in a great way. This guy Fred - who we fell out with a couple of times. Mad as a hatter. But he had a piano, an old baby grand. John brought a keyboard, Orson's keyboard, Amy's son's keyboard. I did some stuff on that and there was a really great gig at Café Oto where they had a nice grand piano, so I could play on that. So it really did change a lot. And, actually, the album we were starting to work on before lockdown, he wanted to bring in sort of tango ideas, you know, in a very disjointed way, a John way. And he had ideas about more prescribed parts, grooves and lines that he wanted me to bring out on the piano and there was gonna be much more piano, in fact. But the album's got quite a lot of piano on it, more piano than guitar on it, I think.

Matt Reay: He would send me all kinds of stuff, like a documentary set in Africa where they had - I don't know if it was a ceremonial thing - a crowded room with just one light and someone was clapping and the light was shooting this massive shadow on the walls and he was fixed on this idea of how we should involve lights in the show when we played and things like that. And it sparked creative ideas. We got this box that we could plug into. What we eventually had was that my drumkit was very small, a snare and a tom and a cymbal but I also had samples that John would create, and I would trigger those samples, and they would go into this box and would trigger a light so you had this visual accompaniment to the music. So sometimes if I hit a pad, a light would go off - sometimes it would be like a sequence, like a light pattern - and that would be related to a loop that was going, something like that. It described whatever music was going on. It had this kind of ceremonial, sort of tribe-like, almost religious, continuous rhythm and it occurred to me that that is what he wanted from Liberez: a very hypnotic, pulsing kind of mood, creating a kind of collective experience - which I found funny because John hated that! If there was any kind of whiff of it - we played a gig in Brighton where there was a performance piece where they wanted crowd participation, everyone doing the same sort of thing, and John was not into that at all, he was really against that. But especially with Liberez, he was trying to invoke that - maybe as a kind of opposition or something. So, I would say that the visual aspect of the performance was just as important as the music - creating this one feeling with the environment and the music he created. So, yeah, the light was a really big thing and that was our main way of changing the atmosphere of whatever venue we were in.

Iñigo Ugarteburu: It was 10 or 11 years of friendship, on and off, cos it was always music. First we were involved mainly on my stuff, and he would get involved as if it was his stuff. And I tried to do the same when we were playing in Liberez. I didn't have enough to create the stuff which would suit the Liberez sound and he gave me a little pedal and he said: "Try with this to get the sound." It was like a fuzz pedal that you turn it on and everything would be like lo-fi radio kind of sound and then I got really into buying pedals and putting everything through that. In the end I was using the baklama to capture the sound of the band. The learning experience was fantastic for me and I was loving it.



John with Iñigo's setup
Photo by Iñigo Ugarteburu

Sylvia Saunders: John was really easy to banter with, easy for everyone to just be yourself and say whatever you're thinking. It never felt like he was the boss, although he obviously was, cos he like organised the gigs, essentially the music, cos he had figured it all out quite conceptually. But it never felt like that. It felt like he was just letting us all be. I love improvising and I was just playing, you know, just playing in a band without having a part. Some parts emerged from us doing that a lot. I really, really appreciated that to this day. That's how I would be if I was leading a band: just let everybody, everything just slowly unfold, be patient. You don't wanna jump to: "We've got to have answers now". He gave it, like, over a year, really, or more. It was letting it happen. He said what he thought, like: "I thought that was a bit..."but you didn't feel like there was some

value judgement going on. It was: “Can we just try that again?” The only time he really got pissed off was when something technically stopped working. He had a clear idea as well of what kind of sound he wanted, but also not rigid. Very open to me, Matt and Iñigo inputting as well. Let it happen and if it flopped, well, we could find out for ourselves. He didn’t feel rigid at any point even though he did have his vision. So, all of those things, you know?

Iñigo Ugarteburu: At the same time, we were all trying to do different things in different ways. I was basically playing a baklama, a Greek instrument, which John suggested because at that time he was trying to bring in elements of rembetika into the music and obviously violin is one of the instruments, baklama is another one, a small bazouki, then the percussion, piano. We were looking into some of the core things of rembetika and then twisting it completely, something closer to noise, electronic music, but when you listen to the record there is a lot of rembetika in it. We worked very hard, had a break, worked hard again, introduced the double bass, took the songs to a different place, in a completely different direction. It was very cool to be honest but then this guy left and then we had to relearn and did many covers of the same ideas. And then, after recording, John, as an engineer, he would spend many days and months editing and placing something in the right place and mixing it and we were very happy with it.

Sylvia Saunders: I was really into the big sounds that he was making, dub-like, very visceral sounds that he wanted to create in a room to vibrate out to a crowd. And he could really get that right too, being a sound engineer. He knew how to achieve what he really, really wanted and could twiddle himself to make sure it happened. He was extremely competent with the technical side of it.
Musically, what I got from it: the percussive elements, bending a note and bringing it back in, disrupting a beat, with percussion or voice, a different time, disrupting a steady beat and I realised how enjoyable I found doing that. The big epic sound, trying out a little more going down the electronic route, inspired to learn drum kit. And I guess, as I say, the approach, patient, just felt - no ego, very allowing, except at the same time maintaining something quite clearly.



John and Iñigo
Photo by Matthew Reay

Iñigo Ugarteburu: There is one moment that I think it is important to talk about because John never did anything in music to please anyone but himself and I really admire that. That’s how I approach music too. It was so easy to be part of Liberez. It was his project. But at the same time, he was always asking for your opinion and getting everybody involved in the process of making the songs, but it was his project. And I don’t say that in a negative way, the complete opposite, and we all knew that and we all respected that. Actually, we maybe sometimes respected that too much, y’know: “Is this what you want. We will try to do what you want”, cos I had my own projects, Matt had his own thing, Sylvia was doing many other things, and this was a very easy and fun thing to do for all of us.

Sylvia Saunders: It was really nice to slip into that, also with, you know Matt and Iñigo, we didn’t really mix with each other, it wasn’t like: “Let’s get together and be mates” or anything like that, but we really got on with each other so well, you know, as a four. Something about it - he’d thought about it perfectly, I think. All of the vibes were right. Or maybe it was instinctive. Didn’t have to think about it! Don’t get a mortgage, just trust in keep renting the studio, everything will be fine.

Iñigo Ugarteburu: And then we ended up recording the album. It took us a long time because there was no real pressure and we would play whenever we could and we were not rehearsing very often. There was a time when we were rehearsing maybe once a week. He would commute to London from Southend because Sylva, Matt and myself were based in London. For him, that was a big change because his usual rehearsing place was the studio. "Come to London." And we were always playing in different places. There was a few places that we liked, and we would always play there. New River studios was a place we ended up playing more often I guess, don't remember the names of the others, the last place we were at frequently was a recording studio in Hackney that wasn't very busy and it was just great. The sound was good and we ended up doing some of the recording there. At this place and at John's.



Recording at NO, John, Matt and Sylvia
Photo by Iñigo Ugarteburu

Matt Reay: Cos the other thing that was important was that we could just travel. Everything had to be like a really minimal set up, put in a suitcase. John said that all these bands would come in and talk about like travelling to Europe and he said: "I wanna do that! Why can't I do that?" John had a set up that was violin and pedals, the drumkit was very small, the laptop triggering stuff, so we could put everything into a suitcase, travel around playing these like venues similar to the one we played in London but like Switzerland, Belgium, or whatever. So the light thing was perfect really. Sometimes we had one big light, like a builder's floodlight, and it could be really strong throwing pulses at the crowd, quite aggressive as well as sometimes the music could be. Amazing gigs. But it was just about pulling it off each time, as an experience.

Iñigo Ugarteburu: We did loads of gigs. Well, loads for me! We played abroad a lot because John loved going abroad and playing abroad, and seeing new places and seeing new people and learning about new cultures. And he was all about that and was so passionate about what he was doing that he would always find, you know, little communities that would be into, let's say, electronic music or electro-acoustic music, and we played at a few festivals and a few little concerts, nothing major but always a great experience.

Luke Younger: Another thing that John didn't really help himself with was like he'd have these insane ideas about wanting to play in, like, Lithuania or somewhere like that. And he'd say: "Do you know anyone out there who could like organise a gig?". And I was like: "I don't know if there IS anyone like that out there!" But he would always somehow manage to find one person and he'd pay everyone to go out and play a one-off show in like Vilnius or somewhere with like one noise guy who turned out be a massive alcoholic or something, and there's two people at the gig and the PA doesn't work. You know, walking into these chaotic situations constantly but I think a part of this was that John really did enjoy chaos. He liked watching all that stuff unfold cos it would give him another story to tell at the end of it. He did things in that sense that I never would have done, just because he wanted to do it. Kind of great in its way.

Matt Reay: John also took us to some amazing gigs, cos he knew so many people and wherever we played he had some sort of connection there. We played in Switzerland at Cave 12, an incredible venue, a converted car park. They've isolated the space, it's like acoustically perfect, designed for live music. My experience up to that point was doing gigs in London, basically, and you're just another face in the crowd, really. You don't get any special treatment, you don't feel like anybody is particularly pleased that you're there. You're just going through the mill, aren't you? But playing in Europe they would like make us home-cooked meals, and in somewhere like Cave 12 you could tell that they really wanted to get the sound right: "You guys got everything that you need?" And there was this guy saying: "Oh, maybe you could have another mic here?" and – something which I had never experienced before. Cared enough to, you know, put a bit of themselves into it and get it right, and as soon as someone does that you just relax because you don't feel like you're under time pressure or wasting someone's time. "Come on hurry up we've got the other band coming in!"

Sylvia Saunders: As soon as I was involved it was like: "Yes! I'm going to be in this big sound bubble, and I basically get to improvise and play. And everything that we had agreed to do in rehearsals. Yes! But also, if I wanna do something else, I can." It felt like fun to me. And also, because John built a lot of sounds that were pre-recorded and Matt as well and they were triggered by the pedals, so it wasn't just the sound of four people playing live, all this other stuff. I felt very much enveloped and held within this thing to move quite freely. It felt very relaxing. I'm not very tecky, things I play are more acoustic. I mean I plug in my guitar, but I barely touch computers. So all the technical stuff was taken care of, mainly Matt and John. I felt I was trusted. Had one bit of feedback in Salerno in Italy! I always looked forward to it.

Matt Reay: It was always a little bit fraught. The laptop we were using was old - was it gonna load? There was no battery, so it had to be plugged in. If I turned it on at soundcheck we did everything not to move it because everything was reliant on this laptop for the whole backing. John would be quite tense, to be honest, quite nervous about all this kind of stuff because a lot of our sound was dependent on a tone, it wasn't chord progressions or anything, it was all about sound- the sound had to have a certain feeling to it. So it was dependent of the laptop working, samples and so on. We went to Italy and one of the bulbs went in the set up that we had, so the guys there took me off down the street to a hardware store for this particular kind of lightbulb and we got it. Always things like that - pedal not working and John needs that pedal for a sound. We'd always bring it all together in the end and it was fine, but it could be very tense at times. Soundcheck was, always- We had to run through quite a lot of stuff, you know getting all the levels right and everything, so we'd feel happy. But once we were on stage it all sort of flowed.

Luke Younger: The second version of Liberez I saw at Café Oto supporting someone, and it was packed. They sounded really good and I remember thinking that it was probably the strongest I'd ever heard them sound live. It was always hit and miss, and if it missed John would always say it was the worst thing ever, and there were so many variables for Liberez to sound good live. I mean, John was playing the violin and only recently got the hang of it not feeding back constantly a few years into playing live with it. So there were always little things like that that could, you know, throw the set, depending on the day, you know. But that Café Oto show was definitely the strongest and most un-haphazard they had sounded. And I remember John saying afterwards that he hated it! He was very picky about playing live. Somebody who was eager to play live as much as he was, I don't think he enjoyed it that much with Liberez cos it always seemed like such a struggle.

Pippa Wragg: The best time I saw Liberez was at The Cube in Bristol, actually. Me and a couple of friends went up. It's an old cinema and an arts space, sort of thing, still play films but put gigs on there and Liberez were brilliant. They had this lighting which was synchronised to the beat and that was the best show I saw him do, I think, in terms of really feeling transported visually as well as by the sound as well.

Sylvia Saunders: Oh yeah, loads fun. Cos us four, this motley crew: Iñigo, posh boy, had very particular ideas: "It's like this, not that!" and "I'm not sleeping there!" Always collecting more pedals, very particular about sound as well. And then Matt, extremely gentle guy from south London, me and John. Travelling around together was actually hilarious. I was the one who spoke to everyone, you know. They're being awkward, I'll talk to anyone. We just had a laugh. I just remember laughing together. John saying anecdotes about things that happened, someone he just met on the train, something he'd witnessed. Just hilarious. Something his dad did or said. Absolutely pissing ourselves. Lots of that back-and-forth banter. More between Matt and John and Inigo, the nerdy chats, talk about bands and stuff. I'm more like the 'seen a lot of things, can never remember the names of people' as a disciple person. Always a great organiser. Nearly all of the gigs we did, John was approached to do, and the organisers were always really up for it, very welcoming. Never a bad experience.

Matt Reay: It was great to play with John and Sylvia and Iñigo, really nice, and it wasn't improvised, but some sections could be longer sometimes or shorter and it was free flowing and we tried to move away from, like earlier on I was a bit more reliant on loops. So, I'd have to be in sync with stuff that we were playing. Frustrating at times because it's more like staying on the beat rather than your feeling, you get taken by it but then you realise you have to stay on the loop that you are playing. But later on, we moved away from

that, and it was more about just triggering stuff, relied less and less on loops and things like that, and then we played better together, could play off each other and stuff. We were invited to a film festival in Belgium. Each act had a silent film to soundtrack, got it in advance and it was in a church on this big screen, and we were playing in front of it.



Art Cinema OFFoff Film Festival in Gent, Belgium
Photo by John Hannon

Iñigo Ugarteburu: But live, I think, is what we were most happy with because we rehearsed a lot in those years and you could tell. We could work on ideas and improve these ideas as a band and there were days when the sound wasn't good but there were days if it was good, everyone could sense that. I remember two gigs that we played in Italy, in Napoli and somewhere else and from there we catched the train to Geneva, I think, to play at the Cave 12, was the name of the place. It's a place where whoever plays at the Alter plays there. It's one of the European venues where this kind of scene takes place. We played a good gig there, the sound is insane: it's in a parking space, everything is muted, there is nothing, like a dead room and it sounds big. I was so sick, I had some kind of flu or something and I was drinking tea all the time and we went to the airport the next day and it was just John and me because Matt and Sylvia, they took different flights or something and I remember that for the first time I saw John super-proud of what he had accomplished and he said: "I think this is it. For the first time in a long time, I think that finally we get to a place that I have been trying to get to for a long time." It was so nice to hear him say that because it would never be perfect for him, for any of us, I think.

Liberez: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQEzyI2m7E0*

Matt Reay: But even in England we played better gigs because of the people John knew. We played some great gigs in Bristol. We played with Pete Brötzmann, who was one of John's heroes. But he looks so unapproachable that no one went up to speak to him, even though John would go on about how that album - when he was younger - really influenced him. But no one would approach him because he looked so stand-offish! Another gig we played in Bristol was in this, like, theatre and it was a big space and they'd set it up - it wasn't just us, there were quite a few different bands but they had spots all around which were different stages and you'd play one or two songs and then the next stage would start playing and the crowd would move to that, a bit like Jools Holland but without Jools Holland. John knew a lot of people who were doing great things. We benefitted from that by just going along with John and he would get us into these gigs that we were playing. So, all that was really good and that offset the kind of fraughtness of trying to scurry everything together and make sure it happened.

Iñigo Ugarteburu: So when it comes to music, it's a pain in the ass. The smallest detail needs to be retouched or something, John is like that. Even if the music may not sound like it, the attention to detail. It was nice to hear him say that and it was one of our last gigs, I think. I don't think we played many more after that. We recorded the album after that and we started working on, yeah, cos we said: "It's time to move on." We'd been working on the same songs for quite some time and the thing this time around was tango. And we worked on a couple of ideas, and we also played in a festival in Belgium and had to put the music to a film. It was good, insane. It was really well run, the festival, and from there, I think, one or two of the pieces from there ended up on the record, I think. We were starting to work on a lot of these things and then the pandemic took place and then I was doing a soundtrack during the pandemic, and I was asking John to help me and he couldn't. He catched Covid. Then he did a few things, but he wasn't feeling great. And one of the last things he did was he sent me a few tracks for the soundtrack. It is for a Netflix series called The Time It Takes. And that is the last time I talked to him. He was like: "Do whatever you want, use whatever you need."

Matt Reay: So, we were playing with John, in 2017 and then it sort of tailed off anyway and John started doing solo stuff and I had two young kids so I eased off a bit. I know he was keen to start doing more of his own stuff and doing gigs because we were doing other things, but I know he did wanna come back to us. At one time I said: "Are you just tired of having to arrange, you know, us!" Cos he would arrange all of the rehearsals and also, he would travel up to London. So he put a lot into making Liberez work with us cos we were, you know, London, him coming up on the train from Essex, so I thought that he had got a bit tired of all that. But I don't think he did. He just had this endless energy for making music and also with different people, liked trying different things. I think it was just a different phase and then he would have come back to doing Liberez again. But it didn't come to anything, cos by that time John had started doing his solo stuff. He'd play a few gigs solo, and he was recording it as well. He had these solo songs he really wanted to get down and he was recording, and it seemed like he'd come to the end of that just before he died.

Liberez. *https://liberez.bandcamp.com/album/way-through-vulnerability*



Liberez at Cafe Oto



25.

What's Mine Is Mine:
2000S-2020S NO RECORDINGS AND EAST LONDON

NO Recording studios *https://vimeo.com/82332513*

John Hannon: After several years of knocking around on our own and discovering the free music scene in London and just seeing all kinds of things, through the studio I met James Blackshaw and Luke Younger, and the little scene that suddenly started in Dalston in the early 2000s centred around Baden's Boudoir venue, an underground basement kind of place. All these kids ten years younger than me started gravitating towards this venue; loads of creative, exciting people. And suddenly, I felt the vibe that I felt when I first got into the hardcore scene, when I was really energised by these people and the music they were making. There were bands forming every few weeks and splitting up a few weeks later and that became for me: "I wanna record this music", and the only way I was going to be able to do this was if I just said: "I will record you at the studio for nothing" because this was music I was interested in recording more than the bands I was working with.

James Blackshaw: I was a member of a band called The! Lights! Alive! and it was a bit of a joke to call a band that, cos it was a kind of snotty, sort of arty punkrock band. I think I'd maybe just turned twenty and I was the singer in that band, to use the term singer loosely - more shouting, and yelping and screaming - and it was, like, a five-piece and I think we only played about 5 or 6 shows. I'd be surprised if it was as many as ten, and mostly in London at places like Upstairs at the Garage. This is back in 2000 or so, 1999 even, and I don't even really know the hows or wherefores of it. A member of that band, Luke Younger, he recorded with John quite a few times as well. His solo project is called Helm, and he was in a band called the Birds of Delay after that. I think he knew of John from Understand but, to get to the long and short of it, basically John saw our band and it was pretty messy and chaotic and we probably looked quite odd, a strange group of people to be making music, and it was kind of different to a lot of other stuff that was going on in that sort of punk scene. Didn't quite fit in. And I think John kind of liked it and thought it was fun and saw something interesting. He offered for us to come and record at NO Recording studios for a day for free, wanting to document it. And I think John did a fair bit of that actually. Not all the time, but when he thought it was kind of interesting to him and thinking that they didn't have the means to do something otherwise So: "Just come for a day and we'll do something." And we did. We probably split up about three months later, but we recorded about four or five songs, if I remember rightly, and it was done pretty much live with everyone playing in the same room together, and I did the vocals separately. And that was probably the first time.

John at NO, photo and following studio photos by Matthew Reay



Flyers pinned up at NO

Luke Younger: So we went down and were all really excited about it, especially me, cos this was my first experience of recording in what seemed to me to be as a proper studio. At the time he was struggling to get in bands that he really wanted to work with, bands that he found interesting. He was recording a lot of like post-hardcore bands and local emo and pop-punk bands and stuff like that. Might have been friends of his but wasn't the kind of music that he was interested in listening to. Might have seen us as young: "Doing something I kind of like", and it was his kind of attempt to try and like nurture something or get some more like-minded things coming his way.

Michael Kasparis: Basically, in every generation of people who have moved to London - and a lot of people I knew were people like me who were recent transplants to London - a lot of people from Leeds and the North generally. A lot of people seemed to hang out together. A lot of others from London were in the scene as well. There was a very specific time and place of youngish people making music, and John seemed to be the kind of person who unwittingly kind of recorded a lot of that stuff.

Luke Younger: Cos in fact he credits that session that he did with us. Many of our friends who went on to play in bands - pretty much all of the bands that we went on to join and our friends - pretty much all went to record with him, because we recommended him as someone to work with. So I think that a lot of records were made as a result of that session. Our band was called The! Lights! Alive! Then from that came James Blackshaw, who played with us. Through James, you had Heather Leigh Murry who made a couple of records with John. Then there was Tom Hurst who was in The! Lights! Alive! who went on to form Klecks Halifax and recorded with John. And then the two brothers who played in that band had a couple of bands who recorded with him. So it was kind of a network of different bands and people ended up going down there. We all just got on really well with John from the start. When he saw us playing, I think he understood it.

James Blackshaw: *https://jamesblackshaw.bandcamp.com/*
Heather Leigh Murray: *https://heatherleigh.bandcamp.com/*
Tom Hurst: *https://tomhurst.bandcamp.com/music*

Michael Kasparis: I first met John in the mid-2000s. I moved to London from Glasgow in 2004 or something and I started a band with some friends, and through that network of musicians, a friend of ours had found this recording studio in Raleigh and they were: "It's this great place with this guy there who really gets what we're trying to do - and he's pretty reasonable". So with my first band in London, called Please - a trio, two guitars and drums, vaguely psychedelic, elements of noise rock and 60s psychedelia - I think the drummer in that band, Shakeeb Abu Hamden, had a friend who was in a another band, Klecks, and I think someone who was in that band had recorded with John already. We were then: "Let's give it a shot".

Astrud Steehouder: I can't remember exactly when I first met him. I've been brought up in and around London and it would probably have been going to gigs in London. I don't remember exactly how we got in touch, but we were looking for someone to record with, and a few people had recommended him, and it was probably via Upset the Rhythm shows, something like that, in London.

James Blackshaw: I hadn't really met John properly before that, so going out to the studio in Rayleigh was really my first time of meeting him and spending time with him. At that point I had been in a couple of different bands, and I actually had recorded in studios before and never been in super high-end studios, some on the surface a level a bit fancier than others. I don't remember having any preconceptions of John's, but it really was in the middle of nowhere.

Tim Keech: I struggle to put a date on it but think it was around 2005-2006. I'd seen John around some of the places we used to go - Sunrooms, Saks - but then finally got to meet him properly when I was playing in a band called the Hillmisters with Matt Randall and my friend Lee Hall and Paul Noble. At the time, they were three members of the band Beatglider. Beatglider did a lot of recordings with John, did a split single with John's band Woe and we went to the studio cos we'd been doing our band and started to record there with him - an album called Fractal Safari Eyes. That was probably the first time I got to meet John and go to NO Recording Studio, and he became a lifelong friend, a friendship that developed as we developed as people and we matured as people and our music tastes matured and changed.

Beatglider: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LELdHJ65wc8*
Hillmisters: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QezKPFSi5ME*



NO mannequin

Michael Kasparis: I mean, John was doing stuff before I started speaking to him, but the first recording session I did with him was 2005 or 2006, something like that. He'd have been involved with a lot of those people beforehand and then he became a lot more popular and got work with people doing stuff that he personally had a lot more affinity with. I don't know if you've spoken to James Blackshaw, but John did a lot of recording with him and he was quite popular in that avant-folk scene. So, the people I knew made records but were probably a bit more lower-tier in terms of fame or whatever and then as he progressed he would take on these bigger jobs. But that's the thing, because he would record anyone who wanted to record. He'd worked with a couple of people from the Feelgoods, the bass player in the Blockheads, and the way he would talk about these celebrities was just the same was as anyone else. The funniest anecdote was about - and if you haven't heard about her, you should look her up - working with someone called Icy Spicy Leoncie. You'd call her an outsider artist I guess. She seemed like a total polymath, I guess, and she would make all the instrumental tracks of all these songs and then come in to record them with John and he'd do them as best he could. She's an extremely larger-than-life character who wrote all these songs about shagging, basically. One song called Sexy World, and it was basically - not disparaging anyone - the most un-John music you can think of: very tropical disco, mostly played on presets on a Hammond organ and her with this amazing voice singing. She was great but most of her lyrics were about sex, and he'd tell us these stories about her basically coming in and her shouting at him and telling him what to do and all he had to do was just press record. But he would also say that she was amazing and he just had to do a job and he did it. And the next session he'd be doing some doom folk thing with some guy.

IcySpicyLeoncie: *https://www.youtube.com/@IcySpicyLeoncie*

Dave Burke: I met John for the first time at NO Recording studio in, I'm guessing in 2006, I think. I was in a little local band, and it was my first experience of recording. So we rocked up at No Recording Studios and I found myself in John's studio and it was the beginning of that relationship really. It just evolved over time to being something quite significant to me. John was very polite and kind and generous, but I think he rightly thought we were idiots. We were in a band called Mefist and one of the then-guitarists, Peter Hawkins, knew John well from Southend and the local scene. He was in a band called Yer Crap that was at the time led by a guy called Gunther, a German guy who had come to Southend; descended on the scene and wanted to be a rockstar, and he started this kind of surreal, madcap performance band called Yer Crap which evolved into collaborations with various bands including Mefist with Peter. That's where I came into that world and John's sphere of influence. We were idiots at that point, really. He was just ever so patient, and in spite of now knowing what he would have made of us, he was endlessly supportive and helpful and positive and was clearly just enjoying the process. I think there was a sense with John that he was a kind of educator while he

worked, so he might not have set out to be like that but it was inevitable that he would end up explaining quite a lot about what you were doing, the contexts in which it existed, and he would be able to cross-reference what you were doing with the history of popular music often. So he was very, very formative, if that is the right expression, in the kind of music that we went on to make with Eight Rounds Rapid. I think he would have described himself as a studio engineer, but he was a producer.

Eight Rounds Rapid: *https://eightroundsrapid.bandcamp.com/music*


NO vocal booth

James Blackshaw: It was always funny with John in that respect, because, especially when he first took up violin, he really became quite good and was doing what he wanted to do with it and more. I did say to him a few times: "If you hear anything where you think you'd like to come in on it then say" but he never took me up on it. But I think John had a weird, I dunno, I think it was a respect thing where he didn't want to impose too much. So he never played on any of my records, but we had the kind of working relationship where for sure I would be recording and I'd say to him: "What do you think of this part. Do you think it is working?" and he would say this, that or the other and as time went on he would say: "What about this?" or "Did you think of trying that?" So there are definitely things on those albums that have stemmed from an idea that John has had and we've rolled with it, and some things didn't stick but others that did. It was very collaborative working with him on those albums, and I didn't kind of see John as 'my engineer' or anything like that. And I think John was happy, once we had everything recorded, to have me a big part of mixing it. It really felt like we worked together on stuff in that way, albeit that I had written the songs myself, John always felt like a huge part of that process.

Michael Kasparis: So we recorded this EP with John, and we all hit it off immediately. And from that moment on until I left London, he would always be the first port of call to record with. I think I made three records with him. One with that band, then in a hardcore band called The Lowest Form - that had the longest association with John - and in that band was Luke Younger, who made most of his solo records with John. Luke also runs Altar Records who did a lot with John, and I run Nightschool Records and so John would do a lot of mastering for me and stuff. The drummer in that band is a guy called Paco who runs Lavido Es Un Muss, which is one of the best-known British punk labels, and so a lot of his bands would then go on to record with John. So, it was kind of like that snowball effect and a working relationship which then developed more into a friendship, where if he was in Glasgow (cos I left London) I'd meet up with him and he would come to gigs in London before I left, so we would hang out then.

The Lowest Form: *https://ironlungrecords.bandcamp.com/album/negative-ecstasy-lp-lungs-049*
Night School Records: *https://nightschoolrecords.com/*
Lavido Es Un Muss: *https://lavidaesunmus.bandcamp.com/*

Astrud Steehouder: So, I was playing in a band with my two friends, Amy Hurst and Jess Tierney, I guess 2007 or 2008, and we had a three-piece band, the Rayographs, and we had been gigging around London developing our sound, I guess. We always found it quite difficult to place what we were doing, and we just found that John got what we were about. I mean, the kind of music we did, people sort of either got it or they didn't at all. Don't know if I had ever met him before but we had been in touch, probably just getting an idea about the recording, who he had recorded with, rates, the process. We were playing in London, and he came to see us play and that struck me because I thought (he must be) someone who is really interested in the sound that someone wants to present and it's preparation but it's a very passionate type of preparation, someone that really invests in what they are doing.

The Rayographs: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uxn7FLS3J6A*

Matt Randall: He always had attention to detail because when we first went in as Beat Glider we were obsessed with Sonic Youth, Sebadoh, Pavement and all these bands and he had a load of Sonic Youth albums out on the side that he'd been listening to before we went in, and we were in like our early 20's then, you know and he was learning as well, but he was obviously listening to these records thinking this is what they want to do.



NO studio wall

Davy, Paul and Jim: He had the references. If you said you'd like it a bit more like that band, whoever, he'd get it. He'd know it and help you to get it as well. I did have a two hour conversation with John once when I asked him if he could make my guitar sound more boxy and he didn't know what boxy was and I couldn't describe it to him and the next time I recorded with him he said: "Let's make that sound a bit more boxy" and I thought: "What?? And it did! He had found out what I meant and made it happen. Don't know what it was now.

James Blackshaw: And I think I just felt immediately, especially being one-on-one with John. I remember liking John a lot but not having got to know him particularly well from the time I had recorded with him before, just seen him around and chatted with him a little bit, but getting to know him better I just found that he immediately put me at ease, you know. He was just a really friendly guy but not immediately the most chatty. It would take a little bit to know him and then - I mean he is very chatty and he liked to have a gossip and talk about books he was reading, films he was watching, music he was listening to and I think that became a big part of our friendship as well, eventually, although the seeds of that were there in the first session we did. I just felt really comfortable with him, I didn't feel like I was in a studio. I did - and I still do - the minute you set me down in front of a mic, get performer anxiety: "I've got to get everything right" but it was just "We'll just play and we can figure things out from there sort of thing" and I just felt immediately at ease with him.

Tom James Scott: Recording solo in a studio can feel quite pressured, but John was really relaxed and we spoke a lot about music. We seemed to connect through a shared love of people like Morton Feldman, Angus Maclise, John Cale, and bands like Mars and DNA. Around this time, I'd met Mark Morris who ran Bo'Weavil. He'd shown an interest in what I was doing and asked me to send him some music (I'd previously sent him something from that first recording session with John, but Mark had deemed it "too minimal"). I remember calling John while I was on my lunch break at work and he offered to record me for free to get some ideas down. John was so generous with his time and I felt awkward accepting, but I took him up on the offer with the hope that if Mark wanted to release something then the label might be able to pay for any additional studio time. We spent a day together recording the songs I'd played at the gig at the LSE Library where I met Mark.

Tim Holehouse: We played with Woe again and I got chatting with John at a gig at the Golden Shoe in Homerton. And I said to him "Now I know you've got a studio, and I will at one point in my life come and record with you because you're brilliant" And of course John played it all down. I think I put them on a couple of times before I actually got to record with them. I was a big fan of Woe. And that was it: I was more a fan of his music before I got to record with him. My sludge metal band I did after Soon the Darkness, we did this 16-minute song. I got free rein. The band basically indulged me. I was like "I've got this 16-minute-long song. It's gonna have synthesizers and samplers and double drums, I know just the guy" and we went to John and it sounds incredible. Still to this day my favourite thing that band ever did. Then the second album they didn't use John even though I suggested it. Kind of a thorn in the side of the band and it kind of fell apart in the studios. Weirdly enough, the guitarist, Donny, who'd gone along with the others saying we should record with the guy who did the first album, he did his next band with John as well, which said a lot really.

James Blackshaw: I think, one of the things John did really well was that he didn't, like, necessarily bring preconceptions of how something should be recorded/ produced/ engineered and came, in my case, with a sonic sort of acoustic ear to actually listen to sound, I think, and that was something he got right away. I



Liberez artwork at NO

remember when we set up for the very first recording, he set up a bunch of mics around the room as well as one or two on the guitar. And I think it was almost by accident, cos I think it was something he'd been using for what was called Woe at that point, which became Liberez. He'd reverse engineered a sub-woofer of an amp to be used as a microphone and it picked up a lot of sub-frequencies and things. So, he set that up in front of me too. "I mean, why not? We've got it here, maybe it'll do something interesting." And from that first recording and even from there, I think he got what I was trying to do. He got a lot of the kind of drone elements of my music and what I was trying to do with that, the repetition and the drone, the kind of minimalist elements. We both had this kind of idea of how it should sound.

Astrud Steehouder: This is another kind of intersection, I guess. The way I could describe it is: on a basic level we were recording in a three-piece band that was kind of psychedelic-sounding rock but with post-punk elements if you are going to reduce it down. But then he really encouraged us to play around with just different techniques and rhythms, just the way he was recording stuff, that really helped what we were trying to get to. So, we sort of did that and the recording of the album. I think partly because we were really slow at working. It took a lot more organisation, let's say, to make things happen. And John would say: 'Oh this band recorded everything in the same day' and we were like: "Oh, we're not that band, clearly!"

James Blackshaw: And the ability I think as well, John was into a lot of music and a lot of experimental music and that kind of lined up well with what I was listening to as well. And I didn't feel kind of dumb or silly just trying weird things in the studio and go "What about if we did this?" Things like bowing a cymbal with a violin bow literally doing that for 15 minutes. John was open to that and interested in those kinds of things: "What could we get out of this? Would it sound interesting to do?" Whereas other people, like the guy I mentioned earlier in London, would be: "What the fuck are you doing? Think you're gonna make it into the Top 10 with this, son?"

Davy, Paul and Jim: We did that first recording with him and then we ended up going to a different studio. I think we'd heard other people's recordings that somehow sounded kind of more polished. Then we started to feel that we sounded pretty big in our own right, and we'd got a lot better. But what those recordings were lacking was that I think they really didn't sound like us, they were overproduced. I think John just had this thing where he would make us sound like us. There was also a period at that time when sounding a bit more lo-fi was good, and you'd definitely get that with John, and part of that was the equipment he had at his disposal, but it was a more enjoyable experience, doing it with him. He really cared about it and he'd always encourage you in the right ways. One thing it would never be with John was cheesy, ever. He would never let that happen. It always had that right side of corners or edge. He would never let it go down a certain kind of road, you know, because it could. When we went to Studio Adelaide, for example, there was plenty of Edam going down.

Tim Holehouse: Solowise, I did my first record on four-track cos I wasn't really planning on being a solo artist, but someone wanted to put out something by me so I did it on a four-track. I spent about thirty pounds on it and a bottle of vodka. With my second record I wanted to do something more orchestral, which was trying to run before I could walk. I needed to do it with somebody I thought I could trust, and I thought: "I can trust John" and he did a really good job on it, although I really was trying to run before I could walk. Then I did a third record and definitely went with John, and that one really made my sound and really kickstarted my career and John's fingerprints are all over it. There's a track called Broken Bones where the drummer had a snare and a kick drum and all the rest of it is him kicking the door, the dustbin, smashing a bottle. Classic John of: "Oh, let's just try something". I'll always remember that - the "Let's just try something" John - and nine times out of ten it was absolute pure gold, and the record would never have sounded half as good

without it. So, over the years I have used some other studios, but I always went back to John and so I've done quite a few records with him.

Tim Holehouse: *https://timholehouse.bandcamp.com/*

Rob Scillitoe: Then I joined the Hillmisters. Over the next ten or fifteen years really. Now and again we'd be in there recording things and then the Hillmisters made a note that we started recording there in 2007. I got to know them because I married Lee's sister and they were in Beatglider, recorded with John. So, I got to know them and they were doing this new thing. I already knew John because I'd recorded with him.

Roy Thirlwell: So, we met in 2010, and it was all through the studio. We booked in, cos one of our friends - I think it was Matt Randall from Plantman, cos John had worked with Beatglider a lot, Matt's previous band, and he played trumpet at some of their gigs. We were at the stage where we had been playing for a while and wanted to record some stuff, and we were looking for a studio to do that and the studio we had used before had closed down and it was suggested we try No. Initially, he had so many people coming through the door he wasn't so engaged. He was just doing what he was paid for. Over the next couple of years, he became more engaged. He was the kind of person who you thought: "I'd like to know him a bit more, like to find out about him, be in his orbit." We were in a situation in the band where we had incrementally got worse and being so close to it, didn't see that. The drummer in particular wasn't very good and John kind of crossed the line and told me, or someone: "I don't think that drummer is right for you" which is a big thing to say but very welcome, y'know? Had to be said and we acted on that and kept the music and added new drums and through that project we got to know each other better. Incrementally we became more friendly and booked more time in the studio. Ridiculously cheap prices. I don't think he ever increased his prices at all. I just had immense respect for him as someone who could do something he was obviously really into and could pay himself to do it, which is so hard to do.

Rob Scillitoe: A couple of years later I started to work for Mute Songs, the music publisher. I kind of fell into it from liking music, not knowing what I wanted to do as a job and having qualifications in maths and music and thinking that I vaguely wanted to get into music, and as it turned out the admin and accounting side of music worked. I was with EMI music publishing for 10 or 12 years and then I moved from there to Mute. It is associated with the Mute record label. It's dealing with the songwriting while the record company is looking after the recordings, and Mute was the record label. We're just concerned with the people who write the songs. Sometimes it would happen that Mute would have an artist whose music we were the publishers for but not necessarily. We were Nick Cave's publishers for a long time. John was actually quite a big fan of the artists who were on Mute like Crime and the City Solution. We had that in common.

Crime and the City Solution: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrMRks07XyY*



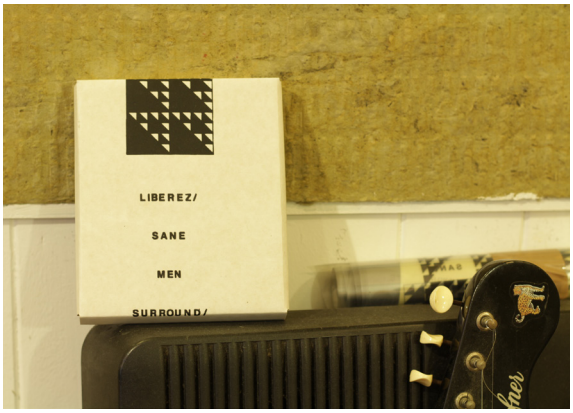
John at NO, photo credit unknown

John and I got to talking a bit more about the kind of music we liked and then I got to know a bit about what he was doing with Liberez and - working for a publisher which favoured experimental kind of music - it seemed like a good idea to talk about publishing them and we signed John for his songwriting. John was great. He'd had a few people in his studio he introduced us to them, their songwriting, so he was almost like a local A&R for those bands. He introduced us to James Blackshaw, who recorded with John a few times, and another artist called Helm, Luke Younger, who runs the Alter label. He then went on to introduce us to another artist called Carol Alforno who we signed. John also suggested we talk to Paper Dollhouse. It all kind of spread out and John and I tried to work together. I suggested a couple of artists who might

want to record with John, like Charlie Cunningham who recorded a couple of early EP and album tracks there. There was a nice few things we worked together on. Those were good times. This was me abusing my role as a copyright and royalties administrator for a publishing music company and imposing some of my tastes and my associations onto the publishing company rosta. Mute Song as a publishing company are quite open to suggestion. There isn't such a thing as strictly an A&R person or department or policy, it's quite open to ideas. One of the things a publisher is expected to do for the musicians they represent. When we first talked to John about publishing we thought that he wouldn't be really interested in his music being used for anything beyond what he had intended for it, the art of the thing it was supposed to be, but he softened that view a bit and he saw the value of the music as a transport for something else. Particularly the album, All Tense, Now Lax, there are a few tracks that are so disturbing and dark they lend themselves to visual situations. It doesn't happen very often, and this was a rare chance that somebody had come across this music and wanted to use it but that's still pending. It would be a really nice thing.

Heather Leigh: The first time I remember meeting John - trying to think what year this was - between 2009 and 2011 - was in Glasgow. At that time my husband and I ran a record shop called Volcanic Tongue and it ran from 2005 to 2015 and we put on a couple of musical festivals, one called Subcurrents and another in Sterling, and we were also partly involved with what was then called Install Festival and is now morphed into an organisation called Arika. I think I may have briefly met him even earlier at one of the early Subcurrent festivals and these were festivals when there were not many bringing over experimental artists from the world really. Cue Glasgow and these festivals became this incredible meeting place for just about everyone you can think of in underground music from the States, from Japan, from Europe. So, John came up for a concert at the CCA in Glasgow and it was a concert with Jandek. This was very early. Jandek did his first concert in Glasgow and then he came back to do this solo piano piece and then he was joined by Richard Youngs on bass and Alex Nielson on drums. It was quite an intense solo performance. The first part was a very intense vocal and piano solo, and I also played on the bill. My husband at that time had a duo. KG Heino played solo and Mike Hatters and Alien also played. So I have a distinct memory of John because I thought: "That guy looks like a young Jandek", because he had on his hat, he looked like he was bald underneath, I couldn't tell, and I just remember thinking: "Wow, it's quite remarkable how he looks like Jandek", and he just had an aura about him. With these kinds of thing it is always interesting to look back, and I can't say I had an inkling of "this guy is going to be important to my life" or "something more will happen" but you know - when someone just draws your attention and then they become this person who is on your periphery. I think in that capacity and that concert we probably just acknowledged each other. I don't remember having a big conversation or anything like that, but he was certainly aware of Volcanic Tongue, he was certainly aware of the music that was happening, and I know we talked about it later, and he said that it was a really transformative show for him and the whole experience of those festivals. I can't remember if he came to all of them, but I felt like I was seeing him around, you know.

Iñigo Ugarteburu: I played with John in Liberez for 3-4 years, but I started my relationship with John years before that. I am Spanish. I moved to the UK sixteen years ago, to London, about 2007, I guess. That's when I was looking to record my first solo album. I used to play in a band called Café Teatro in Spain. When I moved here, I stopped playing for a bit. Then I realised I wanted to keep playing and I started to think about what should I do. Solo music for me was - music was only relevant for me when I was playing with my group of friends, who were the band members of Café Teatro who were friends before band mates, and to me playing music was more about spending time with friends. So that's why I came here thinking: "I'm not gonna play. Who am I going to play with?"



Liberez, Sane Men Surround tape

And then I started playing solo and then, when I had a bunch of songs I wanted to record them, and I wasn't sure if I was going to record them in Spain or in London, and then I started looking through records that I liked in terms of acoustic recordings made in London or in the area. And there is this

guy, maybe you know him, James Blackshaw. I saw that all his records were recorded by the same guy, John Hannon, so I reached out to him, and we met and had a coffee. We met at Cafe Nero on Tottenham Court Road, the least appealing place, I would say. "Let's meet at Café Nero to listen to some demos!" I think it was mini-discs, probably. And I was like: "Can you listen to this?" giving him the headphones and he was basically listening to it, and I could sense that he was like: "What is this?" But he was too polite to say, and said: "It's okay, we can work on this." I think he might have thought: 'Usually these people come to my studio, and he wants to talk to me about the project before even recording?' But I really wanted to hear his opinion because of the sound of the records he'd done - they were amazing. I was like: this guy is a professional, and I never considered myself a professional. But I wanted to take a very professional approach to my first solo record, and he was just super polite and quiet. Everything I would say, he would say yes to. And I saw him in the hat and the - you know - John-look, and I thought: "Yes, this is the guy I was expecting to meet" and it was a very easy conversation, maybe an hour, and soon after that I went to the studio, No Recordings and he was: "You can sleep here, you can stay here", it was like: 'Whatever works for you.'

Heather Leigh: So that was my strong memory of him then and then when I was thinking about doing another record. I had this release I, Animal and then I was doing quite intensive touring. I started collaborating with a saxophonist, Peter Brötzmann, who sadly died last year, and I knew that I wanted to do another solo record and John was just on my radar. Maybe particularly because of Luke Younger as well - he might have given me a recommendation: "What do you think about working with this guy?" because my thing is that I don't like working in traditional studios. I find it quite stifling in a way and I wanted something that was gonna be chilled out and the person was going to be chilled out. Luckily, I was with Editions Mego and they were prepared to pay for studio time and so I went down and stayed in Southend for a week. It all came together too because my friend Lucy Allen had a place in Southend at the time, so I was able to stay with her. She knew John too. John was quite shy and even though they were both in Southend I don't think they had ever hung out together. But then they became more friendly, as she would come to the studio while I was recording, and my husband David was there as well.

Heather Leigh / Peter Brötzmann: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huLTNg8A5P8&t=36s*

Astrud Steehouder: Basically, I was playing guitar in that band and doing vocals. It was interesting to hear how other bands had recorded, just live takes and things like that. Other bands worked much more with manipulating the sounds, so it seemed like a very broad approach, which was really great for us. At the time, in London especially, this is just at the tail end of when there was this prevailing glossy kind of indie stuff that was just everywhere, and we didn't want that sound at all. So we were kind of having to seek out something different and knowing about Steve Albini style of recording - I can see a lineage there for sure. So, I think that really appealed to us more than like: "Let's book a studio somewhere in central London".

Michael Kasparis: Every time I was there, there were rehearsal studios in the back of No and his studio was literally in a barn on a farm, and to get to the studio you went past the farm shop and you'd walk through these stables, and there would be horseshit everywhere and horses like milling about. To get there without a car, you'd have to get the train to Raleigh and then a 30 quid taxi the rest of the way, and you'd be in the middle of nowhere. And it's not even that far from London, right, an hour or something? But for Londoners, it felt like you were really in the countryside. And if you were there slightly early you'd be waiting and John'd come cycling in, and he had this massive, really heavy, like 1920s Dutch bike, and he's a tall guy anyway and he'd come gliding in looking like an apparition from 1920 with his hat and stuff. So it was always such a fun, lovely place to record.



NO Recording sign, photo by We Are Cats

Davy, Paul and Jim: He had a lot of artwork and magazines and stuff at the studio, just around. A collection of things: posters of old gigs, really interesting stuff. He definitely had a style about the studio. Later on, after the initial recordings, I mean we did a bunch of stuff with him, but later on The Hamsters had the room out the back of his studio and we were on at him for years to get their stuff out of there and let us use it, and eventually he let us in there. We had that room for probably ten years and were probably down there three nights a week, and then loading and unloading over the weekends. You'd go in and there'd just be bands, random people, just asleep on the floor, on the couch. We'd be coming in at two o'clock in the morning and there'd be bands that had come from all over the country - or outside the country - to record with John. They'd be crashed out or playing PlayStation in the kitchen area. We'd be rocking up at three o'clock in the morning and it was like shining a torch at cats, all these blinking eyes shining back at you. "Oh look: John's got a band staying over." Scare the life out of them. Thought someone was breaking in, didn't they. We should have written down the names of all the bands that slept on our couch. We just didn't. It was just too late. We'd just be stepping over them with our amps and stuff. Just driven back from Manchester or somewhere. Had enough. Get in, get out. You never knew that it's important, do you?



Gig flyers at NO

Michelle Bappoo: But I think it was back in around 2017, cos I'd been in other bands before but had a 10-year break - maternity leave - round 2006 I re-met Roy Thirlwell. We knew each other when we were 18, He was in a band, I was in a band in the Southend scene and I think it was when we met a guy called Leyton Jennings and he introduced us to Matt Randall, Plantman and all that, and we didn't have anywhere to record, just been recording at Roy's, home recording. Through Matt and listening to Plantman music, he introduced us to John cos that was where he had recorded. So we went there. I'd often pop in if I was working on something or just to be there - just a great place to sit and listen and be inspired and get ideas and have a laugh about some things as well. So that was Art Group, started 2013 and finished 2014. And I returned with Melody Group when Roy needed someone to play, which was fairly sporadic, but if he was working on stuff I'd drop in. You got the impression with whatever he was recording John would throw his heart and soul into it, even if it wasn't his type of music. He would find the beauty in it, find the good in it with doing the sound live as well. You were always grateful that there was someone there who was on your side! So patient. Some of the other sound guys were not so patient. Get cross with you really.

Heather Leigh: His studio - it was such a tip! I said to him: "I wish I could afford to buy you a new bathroom" and he would just laugh. I would say: "What has happened under this roof! These stained couches, I can't breathe properly!" It was really unbelievable. But it was also what I was looking for too. I didn't want a perfect, pristine atmosphere. And he was just so interesting and easy to work with. He would just do little things with the sound, little intros or outros that were very subtle. It was very much me and my recording and his input was - he was there but he didn't force anything, even make any suggestions; he would just try things during the recording and I would be: "Oh, woah, that's amazing. I wouldn't have thought of that." I just felt he was very intuitive with the process, and also such a pleasant guy, really sweet. At first he was a little shy with me, but even just sitting in the cubicle there with all the posters in the wall and I think one of the posters was for Jandek at that concert in Glasgow, and we got into a discussion about that and remembering then and then another significant - that whole scene there. This was like a running joke with David and I. In the little complex where the studio was, there were other businesses and a farm shop and the guy there was a little old-fashioned and I said to John: "Oh, I've had some funny interactions with him getting lunch." And he said: "Oh my, just last week I had this punk band in with a really cute female singer who was also a really radical feminist, and we went in there to get some lunch and this guy was so smitten. As soon as they walked in, he just said: "First question: Love the legs!" and she said: "That's not a question."

Lee Hall: I had a funny way of recording things, and he got used to it in the end. He used to take the mickey

out of it, but he said: "You do things quite chaotically." We're very spontaneous, we go in there with a half-written song and just add bits and I come out with ideas that I think of at the time and he goes: "What?" And just laughs at it and says: "Go on then!" Take the mickey out of me. But he used to do it with the other guys as well. "Lee's on one." But I loved recording with John, loved it. I would only do music because I was excited about going back into the studio with John. I can't find anyone now. Me, Matt, Tim, Rob, we all loved going down to the studio to record with him. Just a lovely experience anyway, cos we were all his friends. Just easy going and he knows us. It was lovely. He made me and Matt get back together. We didn't do anything for seven years and down the Railway, John kept saying to me: "You and Matt have got to get back together" and he'd say the same to Matt and then we did. We recorded as Ghostmusic and it wouldn't have happened without him. John came on tour with us and did the sound. We played all the Rough Trades. We went to Nottingham. There would be two people in the audience. We went to Bristol and there was about 4 people in the audience. He was still there, doing the job, just getting on with it. We used to laugh about it. We did the London one and it was packed.

Ghostmusic: *https://open.spotify.com/intl-de/album/6EF7G2cByVvrzKdJ4XOEDh*

Heather Leigh: I found him very gracious and there was something like that with the sound too. It kind of had this finesse that there was something so subtle that you couldn't quite put our finger on anything, which to me is a real gifted engineer. Like when I did I, Animal and I did it in this kind of farmhouse that another friend, who unfortunately died this year, died in his sleep, 49, and with that recording it was another guy, Joe Gubay, and he had this insane studio set up in his house, another time that I spent like a week there and it was special thing but he was a bit more like. I was using the pedal steel and this particular Ibanez pink analogue delay that I have always loved and he's: "Oh, I'm really not liking this high pitched sound I'm hearing" and I'm: "Well, I like it!" a bit of a battle with this sound and with that record, whereas with John I didn't have to tell him what to do, he just did it. He just had this understanding. He just had this kind of light touch in a way where even when he was doing a lot but there was a lightness to it where you didn't really feel like he was putting himself in the record.

Michelle Bappoo: I've lived in Southend all my life. never moved away. So that scene started with me back when I was 15 years old, a very long time ago. 1984. But it's always been, for me, rich. Everyone's a musician! I always used to go to the gigs. I would have met Roy. Certainly seen his band a bit later than that! About 18 I started. He was in the Windmills. I started a band called Wednesday's Child. It was an all-girls band, so we got a lot of gigs! You get to know all the musicians in Southend. And years ago, Southend was known for blues, maybe, so I forget the name of the place but every time you went in there it would be a band playing twelve-bar blues. So, when I discovered down in Shoebury, The Warehouse, and there were girls, with guitars! And they weren't playing blues! Perky indie pop! You had the two things going on side by side. The Feelgoods had a bar, didn't they, over on Canvey Island - the Feelgood Bar. So we used to play there quite a lot. But there was always this kind of alternative music scene in Southend and a lot of women getting involved as well, which was great. Wednesday's Child for ages, then changed to Marnie, after the Hitchcock film. That was recorded in a different studio before we met John, with Grant Mathews. That took us round the country playing lots of gigs. Brought out some singles and Roman Jugg produced them for us. He played keyboards in the band.

Astrud Steehouder: And John was like so super respectful. There was no assumption. Seems weird to say now - but at that time, being a group of all women, there was a lot of immediate judgement, a lot of assumption. We didn't get any of that from John at all. I have to say that things are very different now, thankfully. We've gone through many advents, but at the time it was stark: "Are you the singer? "I mean, I still get that now, but it was really strong. Despite the hardcore scene being pretty much almost entirely men, this depiction of men in rooms, which we did discuss at various different points, John was obviously very respectful. And maybe I was more alert to these kinds of judgements at the time. I think there was a more binary attitude to things in general. So that wasn't really great when we were trying to explore different ways to use sound and ways to break the mould. We were no way super abstract but the kind of abstraction we were looking for - I think John really helped to bring that out. It allowed us to hear what we were doing in recording and - this is what happens with a lot of groups - you hear what you are doing in the recording and then you can employ

that back live and it's an endless kind of thing. So by the time we ended as a band there were definitely more abstract leanings in the group which satisfied our taste a bit more, I think.

Michelle Hurst: He would call me up at the studio and say: "Look I've got a quiet night why don't you come over?" and I would hang out there. But then my sister has an incredible voice and genuinely would go around karoake bars but had never done like a proper gig, but she really wanted to do some recordings of herself, so I linked those two up. So my sister and I went over there and he was gracious enough to allow her to record some songs which are still in the family now. We played it at my nan's funeral. So we spent an evening in the studio and it was funny cos he had this table where he had all the artists sign when they did a recording there, big people, small people, whatever and my sister put her signature and put a big heart around it and I was like: "Oh my God!". Having to find it in all the darkened ways and having to navigate round, and it was all so cosy. He's got his little kettle as well, tea, and got us some cake to have with the tea and I think my sister had bought something to drink for a bit of Dutch courage. It wasn't like his flat cos his flat was really well put together, it was more ramshackle there with the couch. Bit cold but really interesting. He just sat there, so skilled, and having polite conversation, not just - he was obviously concentrating but even when he was editing. When I was there he just seemed to be in flow, you know, in flow with the people, in flow with the music and what he was doing, just a really easy experience. My sister loved it. He's just so gentle and skilled and in a non-obnoxious way. I was very aware of the calibre of musician that he is and the musicians that he works with and I was like "Oh my God, my sister's coming here just to sing a couple of covers, for God's sake". But he was so wonderful with her, just lovely. She did a cover of Angel from the City of Angels soundtrack from the 90s with Meg Ryan with a backing track.



Matt Randall at NO, photo by Michelle Bappoo

Matt Randall: This is my favourite memory of John. My son Oliver was doing his GCSEs and he had to record a piece of music and he just had to record a piece of crappy modern music that he had to play, and they couldn't get it right. They sat there in the control room and John was at the desk, and in the end John said: "Don't worry about this, I can fix this", and he glued two pieces together and they ended up getting an A for it. It was a totally different experience to be down there with John in that situation, rather than doing my own stuff. He's really good with kids. He had a nephew as well. He was just so cheeky, a real sense of fun.

Michelle Bappoo: Must have been about 2014 I think, myself, Roy, Justin Hazeldean and I think Paul Noble played the drums and we made a record called Objet under the name of Artgruppe. So that was the first time I met John, and we did it a few hours at a time, maybe one whole day. We were just so grateful to have found a studio. The place where we had recorded before was very poppy, or rock, and I just remember the banter, the stories, people who were mutual friends who had recorded there. Probably more talking than actually recording a lot of the time! There were quite a few local characters who had recorded there, and he would play us bits and pieces of other people's recordings - that was amazing. Something to aspire to, But, yeah, he seemed to get the music. Came up with very good, pertinent ideas that I'd have never thought of. Back in those days you'd have to record over and over again and he said: "No, no, I'll just cut and paste" and you'd go off and he'd just make it sound lovely. Especially with Cable Car. He very much gave me the ideas. I wasn't very confident doing this at all. I'd asked friends if they'd play on it. Going through a phase when lots of friends seemed to be making solo albums and I was: "Oh I'd like to make a solo album". I'd been in Melody Gruppe for years, just literally turning up and playing a bit of rhythm guitar, doing some backing vocals, no pressure, but in that time I'd continued writing songs. The Artgruppe fizzled out after that record came out on Jigsaw records, so I had this idea to make a solo album. So I asked Matt Randall

and Rob Scillitoe, Chris Richardson played drums, not thinking that they'd say yes, and they all said yes. So, then it was: "I've gotta do this now!"

Michelle Bappoo: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5ewgNwXtoI*

Michael Kasparis: Hanging out with John was always great but probably my favourite thing with him was the atmosphere of recording. The kind of pressure-cooker thing of it kind of gives you the best experience of someone. Because you are there, like, 16 hours a day, you go through the different peaks and troughs of being like really excited, and then you're tired and pissed off and then giddy and then by the end of it you're just sort of exhausted but also elated. And he was so kind of stoic in a way. You could be like climbing up the wall and he would still be like: "Yep, okay", like a rock. It would have to be really bad for him to admit that he was feeling tired or something. Just a totally dependable rock of a person. To this day, he's still my most favourite person to record with and I've recorded with quite a few. As an engineer he was always like extremely welcoming and generous and never judgemental and I think he dealt with a lot of people who weren't used to that environment and he was really great at putting people at ease. A few of my friends who are in bands regularly had their first ever recording session with John, and always came away saying that he made them feel like they belonged there, and what they were doing was what they should be doing. And that's not the experience that a lot of people have when they're recording music as beginners. There can be a kind of snobby, macho element to it and John's whole life seemed to be antithetical to that, which was really amazing.

Pippa Wragg: As a recording engineer you couldn't have had anyone better. You could have had someone with more equipment or a bigger desk, all that kind of thing, but as a person recording you, you couldn't have anybody better. When I was there with the Cut Ups, John from the Cut Ups had recorded there before, the others in the band hadn't. They were very aware of who John was, but going into a bit of an unknown. Well, immediately they got there, they absolutely loved him as soon as he opened his mouth. Then Rez, the drummer, he's been in a few bands, he's a good drummer, done loads of stuff, he was recording his drums the next day, he was up first, and we were sitting around waiting and then John said: "Okay, that's it mate, you're done." And he was like: "What?" And John said: "You're done. You've done all the songs." And he said: "No. I haven't." But he had, and afterwards he said: "It was so painless, such a painless experience. I thought we had only just started." It was the best experience he'd ever had in a studio. He'd always associated recording as easily the most laborious, intense, boring, gruelling experience, and as far as he was concerned, they'd just got started and it was all done. That was because John made the experience enjoyable, like you weren't really working. One of the ways he did that was you'd do a bit and then he'd say: "Did I ever tell you about..." and start into some massive story or he'd say: "Have you ever thought about..." and before you knew it everyone was just chatting away and then you'd do a bit more, then a bit more chit-chat, and so on. So the whole thing felt much more like you were just there having a chat with someone and then you'd walk away and have a whole album. Like: "How did we do that?" And it sounding really good, you know? He was really good with ideas, so many extra bits. Recording with the Cut Ups, his chair swings around and he says: "This song is just screaming for hand-claps:" Getting us to do strange things like the drummer playing a cymbal with a violin bow. Making some strange noises. This is for a punk band you know? Throwing in lots of really good ideas that we would never, ever have thought of ourselves. And putting in bits of trumpet, bits of violin, you know. He was really generous with how he would add to what you were doing. He didn't care about being credited or left off altogether. He just enjoyed the process and being involved in it.

Roy Thirlwell: I don't know when John started, but in the ten years I spent with him in the studio he definitely developed in skills. He was great at the start but just got better. My solo band is MelodieGroup. I was in a band at school, in the same way as Understand, but playing jangly, indie music. That stopped after a while and then I went onto other things, came back and we reformed. As far as John and our band is concerned, he was initially engineer and then as time went on he couldn't help himself and got more and more involved. When you're turning up and using the studio more and more, it's almost inevitable that something is growing, and he'd come up with suggestions. He had his little tricks; he could nudge you into a different direction. The beautiful thing was you'd get close to finishing a song and you're thinking it needs something more here or there, he could just pick up the trumpet or pick up the violin and give it just that extra thing that you needed.

And he was a matchmaker as well. He could suggest people you could work with purely through being who he was. He could suggest someone who could play something for you on this track, get them in, arrange it and we'd do it. The last record that we finished was just an absolute joy and John made it so. It was my solo record, and I said it many times cos I was very grateful to him. It may as well have been a collaboration between us and I think that eventually we would have collaborated in a more overt fashion, and I know others where it's the same. It took three and half years to make the record and, in the process, it was almost as if, by the end of it, we were in a completely different place. But the beauty of it, as the record was finished, and it did get pressed up and released, that John was so behind it and involved and believed in it. And I can say proudly that it's a great record because I got so many people in to work on it that I am just a small part of it. What's kind of heartbreaking is the first song comes in and John's trumpet after about 30 seconds, and I couldn't listen to the record for about six months after his passing.



Roy Thirlwell at NO, photo by Michelle Bappoo

MelodieGroup: *https://melodiegroup.bandcamp.com/album/being-nothingness*

Michelle Bappoo: So my friend Diana Collier was in a group called The Owl Service. I sang a track on one of them and she and her husband were a big part of putting on the Leigh Folk Festival, and she recorded a solo album with John and I got to hear snippets of it and it was so beautiful, so haunting: "Wow, how is he getting that sort of sound?" And it was off the back of that which inspired me, and me going in with an acoustic guitar and being so nervous and John being very reassuring: "No, we can do this." We just got the guide tracks down and sending them to the musicians and he said: "Record it as a live thing." And then I just put the vocals on, the other guitars and bits and pieces and that was nice cos I could just go back in on my own or with one of the other musicians and I think because John worked with them all individually anyway, Matt, Rob and Roy so they all just got on and it was almost like it took off and they made it happen. They'd all recorded there over the years, Matt and Rob, and his production on this album, Cable Car, is just beautiful. Couldn't have got that sound anywhere else! And since then, haven't really found anywhere else. It's not the same. Just doesn't feel right. But cos he did say you've got to finish this, and I've been working on this at home, I have to go on. Cos he'd be cross. Call me a nitwit!

Dave Burke: I don't think his studio really changed over all those years since 2006 until the last time with John, which I guess would have been 2019 cos of Covid. So that spans the whole period. I spent hundreds of hours over there. Spent time there memorably in 2013 with Wilco Johnson overseeing one of our recording sessions. I know John used to record with Wilco and his bands and he actually did, I seem to remember, round about that time a collaboration to put on a performance in the Kursaal which was based around Dr Feelgood. It was sort of a re-imagining of some of those songs. I know that Wilco really respected John and had a lot of time for him, and I know that at one point he gave John a lot of the Dr Feelgood material that hadn't been released, on cassettes, and John was in the process of remastering them. His recording techniques evolved over the time that I knew him. He was constantly seeking out new ways to improve that aspect of things, on a real budget, as as well. That needs to be emphasised as well. No one was really helping him with equipment or anything like that. He was doing everything on such a budget. I don't know how he managed to do it really. It was an incredible achievement. All of the local music scene's recordings are a testament to him. His vision.

Heather Leigh: There was a sort of way that he worked that he didn't seem to overthink it. He just got into the grit of what had to be done and finding solutions and not even really; you know I was so focused on getting these songs done in what I thought was their first state and what I really liked. He was doing these subtle things with the recordings, but he wasn't talking to me about it, or asking me about it: "Should we try this?" He would just do it, and he was in this kind of flow state where he was pulling things in and out recording-wise. I felt like he was working with the subtleties of the sound, layering it. It made it more psychedelic. He

was using different techniques with my voice. One thing I haven't done which could be interesting to do, cos I remember Luke Younger made a comment about it. He said: "I could listen to a record, and I could tell that John had something to do with that record." Of course I listened to that record, and I don't have that objectivity, but it could be interesting to listen back to some of the records he worked and think: "Oh yes, I recognise that."

Matt Randall: I think I've recorded about eleven albums with John over the years, in various bands, and I've probably spent more time at NO with John, apart from my wife and my family, than with anyone else, absolute hours and hours on end., but then really after that in 2010 I'd been recording as Plant Man, four albums and I've recorded them all with John so I've spent hours, you know I'd go there every week maybe once a week, four hours a night, pick him up – the routine was always the same you know, you'd go down there, he'd make you a coffee and he'd always say - he'd always call me Matthew - and he'd spin round on his chair, rub his hands together and then say: "What are we doing today then Matthew?" When I used to record, I don't know which mic he used, but he had a mic that he called the 'Matt Mic', I don't know what it was now – I wish I'd bothered to ask him. I don't know what it was but John had quite a collection of mics.

Rob Scillitoe: He was always very accommodating. He kind of knew what you were trying to achieve and would suggest ways to get you there without imposing in any way. It was very instinctive I think, recording with him, for sure. The thing I would always tell anybody was that if you were in the middle of recording and you stopped and you had to do a bit over again and ask him if he could go back to that bit, he would immediately know what you meant. It was obvious to him what you were talking about. "That bit where..." and you'd wave your arms vaguely about and he would go back to exactly that spot and start the recording from that point. Very telepathic. He always knew what you were trying to get to. When I think about him having to listen to us for 10 hours through a day, and then again after we had left. Make it sound good! With the Hillmisters we'd be there at 7 o'clock and we'd all assume we'd be there until midnight, and the poor chap probably just wanted to go home! He never made that apparent, so I guess he must have been up for it.

Matt Randall: I think we drove him mad, he was so patient with us. We'd get to the end of an album and say: "Oh can we just change the bass sound?" on the whole album! And you'd just think: "Agh, do you realise what I've got to do to do that?" Because we didn't really have any musical language. So: " Can you make us sound like monks?" or something, and he'd have to try and translate what, you know, and he always did it. He was brilliant but he had to be very patient with us.

Diana Collier: As you know, the music scene in Southend is quite vibrant and I would often see John out at gigs. He would often be doing the sound. I have a recollection of him cycling around the town on his bike and I would see him about and think he looked cool, and then one time I was doing a gig, and he was standing at the back and I thought: "I really hope that man likes what I'm doing cos he looks so cool!" That's just the way it is in Southend. You end up meeting everybody. But I'm not quite sure how I met him. It just sort of emerged somehow. I wanted to do some recording of my own. I had always done recording with other people, or as part of a band that was led by someone else. The main thing I had been doing had stopped and I thought: "Well, I'm going to do something on my own." I was talking to John about it and he said: "Well I've got this spare laptop, and I can help you set it up at home and show you how to do it. He was just so keen to encourage me, and he was really lovely. There was a lot of generosity there and obviously he had his No Recordings studio. In the end, I thought: "I'm a bit of a duffer with all that so I'll just go to John and do it properly." So I got to know him a lot more when I recorded my album with him. I'd never written my own stuff, and I'd never made a track or anything like that, so he was so enabling. He knew what was inside me and how to get it out and I completely trusted his ears 100%.

Pippa Wragg: I think his way of dealing with people was how at ease he could make you. A recording studio can be a very scary place, and boring as well, and he just took all of that away. And I think that was just a natural thing that was just him, and you can't really learn to be that person. Of course you can get better at recording thing and get more experience at that, try out different stuff and learn different things, but in terms of who he was and why he was doing it – absolutely genuine, his motives so pure. That kind of thing you can't learn apart from growing up and the values that are given to you.



Home studio setup, photo by John

John Hannon (The Wire 440 October 2020):
Forward planning has never been a personal forte, so when Boris Johnson announced a full lockdown in the UK in late March 2020, I remember feeling unjustly proud that I'd had the foresight to relocate the mixing and mastering part of my studio to my home. Not being able to drive, this took a certain amount of organisation and the kind help of my friends. That last day consisted of frantically packing everything I thought might need. In hindsight, I'd left it to the last second - in denial no doubt.

The planned recording jobs had one by one all cancelled in the previous weeks. Many people had hung on desperately to the idea that that they would still be able to squeeze themselves in before the inevitable. Organising four adults into a room at the same time is never easy, so this didn't surprise me.

I think I just assumed that if we went into lockdown situation, the studio would most likely end. I would obey my usual instinct to hang in there until the bitter end and go down with the sinking ship. Running a small studio is a precarious vocation where disaster looms around every corner. You do eventually get used to it.

In February, I remember a feeling of dread that I had so many time-sensitive deadlines to and there wasn't going to be enough time to finish any of them. Delivering jobs on time is something that I pride myself on. But it slowly dawned on me: I now had time to finish not only the most urgent jobs, but almost everything on my hard drive. Despite the pandemic and possibly the end of my studio, in the short term there was an immediate sense of relief.

I changed my morning bike ride from a morning fight with the rush hour traffic to a leisurely cruise along Southend seafront. I got up earlier because I was no longer working late evenings. Working from home with only the cat to disturb me felt,well, too easy, like an early retirement.

Unexpectedly, new remote jobs were turning up. There were lockdown records that needed mixing, and mastering requests from other countries no doubt dealing better with their own local pandemic. And then a noticeable wave of nostalgia seemed to sweep across the minds of many old friends stuck at home: delving through old memory boxes and photo albums, reevaluating the music made one, two or three decades ago. When the world stops, I guess you ask questions: what really matters? For many, it turns out, those bands and projects abandoned as meaningless folly - too expensive or too costly - were important after all. There were lots of old cassettes and DAT tapes asking to be digitised. The studio is a good conduit for this kind of connectivity, and I've always enjoyed playing my part.

As lockdown relaxed, the calls started coming in - not necessarily to make an immediate booking, but to ask if it would be possible soon. I became aware that the studio represents many things to people I work with. Just knowing it is there is important to them psychologically.

Personally I was in no rush. I liked my new work life but the day came when I had to go back to the studio to survey the situation - I'd heard from the landlord, so I knew it was basically intact. The studio is approaching its 30th birthday and I have been there since 1996. The longest I've ever been away is a month, so I was expecting to feel strange on my return. But it felt as if I had left only on the day before, apart from noticing that the place was in dire need of a facelift. It's easy not to notice the weeds growing up around you when you're endlessly busy.

So now I'm back, very scaled down, and I'm working with a maximum of two people at a time. I appreciate I have been lucky. If the pandemic had hit ten years ago, I doubt I would have survived. The remote nature of much of my work has saved me.

Despite the tragedy and the inevitable financial uncertainty, I feel positive about my own personal lockdown



John at his desk in the revamped studio

experience. The chance to step back and reevaluate the role and functionality of the studio has been invaluable to me - just simple things like having time to fix broken equipment, decorate and reconnect with the person who built the studio. I always feel the role of documenting music is important but having that reflected back and confirmed so strongly has been uplifting. I may even have a party for the studio's 30th.

Tim Keech: I remember saying to someone: "He's such an heroic figure, someone should make a documentary about John." Seeing him riding down the road to the studio on his bike and him doing that journey every day from Southend to help others that were just trying to make music, good music, even stuff that he didn't really like. He's created a real legacy of work from just the ones I know of. His production work was just getting better and better. There's a celebration of a great life but the great tragedy is that he was on the cusp of a breakthrough. I mean 'making it' what does it mean? I know it didn't mean anything to John but he was on the cusp of doing some amazing gigs which people would have absolutely loved. So that's where he was at the time and it was very exciting to be part of. And no one deserved it more than him cos of all the help he had given others, the commitment to his music and that of others in the scene.



26.

Way Through Vulnerability: JOHN HANNON ON HIS OWN

Lee Hall: He started playing violin, didn't he. I thought he was a brilliant guitarist, but he stopped that and started playing violin. And then he done this show out in Rettendon, playing his violin in an old army shed. That's really cool. I got lots of pictures of that somewhere.

Michael Kasparis: When you saw him playing electric violin live, it was almost quite magical. Sort of directing with his body. I never saw Understand but I can sort of see how it would work cos he was this sort of figurehead. Off-stage he was like the least person you would expect to be this sort of character but on-stage he just had this presence. John was an audio engineer but behind the scenes there would always be some kind of drama with soundchecks and gear and because the specifics of playing electrified violin through effects pedals, which was what John did, there would always be some sketch before the gig, and then the gig would happen and it would be, to the audience at least, like perfect, and he would be - he was also a bit of a perfectionist with his own stuff - he'd be like: "Oh I dunno, I dunno." Being self-effacing again.

John Hannon: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZ-3VsoYFE8***



John and Heather playing live, photo credit unknown

Heather Leigh: And in the live thing he was just really easy to travel with and I think a little grateful too cos we really did play some pretty cool gigs. He was able to socialise with people he didn't know in some situations and I could tell it just made him so happy. He really liked being around people who were artists and musicians and he would really light up in situations like that, really light up in situations where he felt he could just relax and be himself and I think he liked - and I did too - those duo shows, even though I knew it wasn't really gonna work long term. And with the music and sonically he was really adding this drone aspect to the music in these layers. What I was really wanting at that time to boost the sound with these layers. No dramas, no conflicts, no fights, he was just really easy going with it all. Just really pleasant. I wasn't close with John but there is a connection that will never really leave me with those records, just the

Main photo, John playing solo, photo by Gary Franklin

kind of person he was you know. Even visually I can really still see him in my mind in that hat. And tall. I'm really tall and he was one of the few people who was actually taller than me!

Dave Nevard: He was very adaptive with things, John. He done a lot of solo gigs. Saying that there is nowhere to play now, actually we've got a very cool little café bar on the seafront called 21, that's quite an alternative place. The woman who runs that champions a lot of alternative arts, which is cool. I remember seeing him do a gig there. He had a sort of effects pedal board and his violin, and it was bordering on ambient drone rather than any sort of violin work. Very inventive with the stuff he used to do. He did a performance piece once. A couple of local artists had this secret show going on called Un-hyphen. They'd drop the location the night before. No advertising just the website and you'd go there. It was some little mad thing, and it would be different every time and he did one of those. It was out there in the middle of Christ-knows-where. We had to drive out into the country, cross a field and go into a World War Two bunker. It was John the whole time. You didn't see his face, he had his back to us, playing this violin piece and we were just stood around that, totally silent, mesmerised. Wow. There wasn't even a sort of "Well done, John!" at the end. That was that. A performance piece. He never stopped creating, that bloke. He was incredible.

John Hannon: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YZEGzKM930***

Tim Keech: And then you also lost an artist that you really respected. I'd seen Liberez. I don't think I ever saw Understand. I was a little bit younger than John and the Understand lot so I was a bit young to be of a gig-going age. Liberez were absolutely awesome and who else was making music like that at the time? Mavericks. And all John-led of course. And then towards the later years I remember having conversations with him at No studio and, as it is when you're in a band, sometimes life-stuff happens with other band members and it's harder to get them together and because John didn't have kids and those commitments he was able to go to Europe whenever he wanted really. He was getting great gig offers, getting good press in The Wire, and his track record was fantastic, a compelling artist. He started finding it difficult to get Liberez out there. He started doing things on his own, playing the violin with effects pedals and he initially had this real - I remember his first gig and him saying how nervous he was about it. He wasn't confident, which I was really surprised about. He worked and worked and worked in the studio when other people weren't there, and having the time to work on it, and going to see him at the second ever gig doing the solo violin stuff, second or third, got the video footage of it. It was stunning and good as it was, I remember just feeling, like others who knew John, this is actual self-realisation and you can take this wherever you want to go now. All you need is your violin in your backpack, your pedals and you're free now. I thought that was just going to grow and grow and I think he would have done amazingly well with that. And then he was in the position where if someone offered him a gig anywhere - and he was in such a great network with respect from other musicians and with people putting on cool nights – he could just go, put his violin and pedals in a backpack. I was so pleased to see that. Someone like John deserved that – that freedom. He was absolutely there on a platform with the years he'd been doing music and helping everybody else, all the personal and artistic development he had now, he was at the point where he could just go and do it and it would just keep growing and growing, I was convinced. Cos he was stunning on that cheap little violin and those effects could sound like Pharaoh Sanders. It was free form, it was deep, it was emotional, it was avant garde, ambient. Then not long after that Covid happened and then the unthinkable when he died.

Jane Hannon: I remember when he started to explore the idea of performing on his own. It made so much sense. He didn't have to rely on anyone else, just himself. It felt like a really logical next step for him. There was such a contrast within him – John the person and John the performer. I loved that about him. The last time I saw John play was at a solo gig in Brighton. It must've been in 2019. I live in Shoreham by Sea, just outside of Brighton, so he came and spent the day with me and my son George, then played the gig and then headed off to his next destination. The show was amazing, he was just so bloody cool and so talented. Standing in the middle of this pub with a circle of people surrounding him doing his thing. He just kept getting better and better as a performer. I remember arranging to meet him when he arrived. It was in the morning, and I was going to be at a toddler group with George in this old church hall. Lots of grubby toys, terrible coffee and a load of bored mums. I said I'd meet him somewhere else, as I imagined it wouldn't appeal to him, but

he insisted on meeting me there. I remember looking up and seeing him standing in the doorway to the church hall. He was trying to figure out how to open the child safety gate on the door, gave up, and just stepped over it with his long legs. He made a beeline for George, scooped him and gave him a big hug. He was Uncle Pop to my son and George adored him. He sent a ripple through the toddler group that day and captured the attention of all the women. The next week all the mums were asking me who the really cool man was in the hat.



John and George, photo by Jane Hannon

Davy, Paul and Jim: I would have loved for him to do our sound playing live but he didn't do any of that when we were about, but later on I saw him do loads of stuff, particularly at the Railway. He started doing a portable recording thing at one point. They borrowed a portable interface off me at one time and - I don't know if it was at a church or somewhere - started to do live or mobile recording. I remember him saying that he was gonna rent out his studio, so he wasn't the engineer there and get out and about doing some stuff as well. That was probably the next progression really. We were talking about the thing around the recording rather than the recording itself and the live stuff, the portable stuff is in the moment isn't it. It's got to be difficult being in the same place all the time. Although you know the room and you know everything that you've got, you must think it might be interesting to try something out somewhere else. He's learnt that instrument as such so he wants to go somewhere else.



John's solo dates

Pippa Wragg: John did a solo thing here as well which I think might be the last show he ever did. Basically, he played here in February 2020, stayed at my house, left the next day and then I never saw him again. In March we went into lockdown and he died in 2021. It's possible he snuck in a couple of shows between but I don't know. But the last he played here was the last time I saw him. And we've actually got a video of that.

Matt Randall: I remember seeing his solo performance in 2020, it must've been in the December I think. It was the best thing I'd ever seen him do. He looked really confident as well. He was always very shy John, wasn't he, but really confident in what he was doing. You could see he was going onto the next thing. John was just a force wasn't he, he was totally in the music when he played, right from the very beginning, a real quiet confidence in what he was doing. I just felt like he came alive with the solo thing, I saw him on his own and it was like, right, that is what he's meant to be doing.



27.

Here Is The Proof:
JOHN HANNON AS SUCH

The story teller

Luke Younger: He was very easy to work with, and he was just such a brilliant storyteller and that was always one of the best things about working with John. You knew, for a couple of days, you knew you would hear him talking about ridiculous things that had happened at a gig in Durham ten years ago, or, someone just ridiculous he had just recorded a couple of weeks ago that he just found to be like the funniest thing ever. When you were sat in the control room saw and his chair spin round you knew there was gonna be a good story coming.

Ed Wenn:As you know, going to see a band is probably the situation least conducive to having a conversation, everyone's talking all the time, and then they have to play. So you never get to have a proper conversation. But then we'd make up for it going to the studio and he'd just spend the whole time telling stories really, and you'd take a break to record some music! And that was when I first became aware of John as someone with an absolutely fantastic sense of humour. The thing I liked about it, right, is I love things that are kind of quietly funny, just because they are ridiculous, not the obvious comedy but where a slight remark, the funny story with the weird twist to it, their view on it and I found that my and John's sense of humour was completely aligned. He loved the clever little observation that would put you on the floor. The situation was really quite funny and then he'd go: "And the funny thing is...blablabla" Funny stories about, I dunno, Wilco Johnson or someone - affectionate stories - and often the funny thing was about the chicken wrappers on the floor or something, not necessarily that he was giving him an orange gun or something - the really slightly eccentric thing that he'd picked up on. And that was fantastic. So we'd get together and trade stories and he'd keep me up with what Rob was up to and the rest of the guys in the band, cos they all had interesting lives as well, doing lots of funny things.

John in New York 1991, photo credit unknown

Davy, Paul and Jim: He might play you something he had recorded with someone and have a laugh about it but he was never horrible about it, taking the piss. He'd just be: "Have you heard this, it's well funny." It was always funny for different reasons, not for musical reasons. It was funny for something that was surrounding the recording, and this is what I think is important. It's not necessarily the sound of something, it's what's surrounding it. That's the thing. And I think that's it: because there's really only one reason to make music and if you don't get that then you can't really do it. If you're going to be creative you have to understand that it's not really what you're hearing, it's not how good you are, it's how you create an atmosphere, how you make someone feel. The story surrounding something. Like he told me the story about that Bad Brains recording when the singer got arrested. I don't know nothing about Bad Brains, the history of the music. I like listening to some things but I either like it or I don't, and I don't look into it. He told me that the guy was in prison, and he recorded his vocals via the phone and that's really interesting. Does the quality sound good? No, it brings something different to that record. And he played it. And knowing that, if I heard that and didn't know about it I would think: that's a weird choice why did they do that? It sounds shit! But if you know the background it's actually really cool. It changes things and I think that's what it was mostly about. The surroundings, not what's in front of you. And I think that's important.

Matt Randall: You'd get a run-down of what he'd done in the day, have a coffee, and a lot of it was just gossip, John just loved gossipping and he had all these people going into the studio, so John just knew everything that was going on and he knew what everyone was up to. I got to the point where I got to find out what everyone else was doing through John.

Michael Kasparis: I mean everyone's different but also he was such a great raconteur. Even if he wasn't talking about himself he was really great at talking about all his experiences with other people but still being really generous about them, never mean about anyone. Generously spirited. And he could tell you all these stories. I mean the people using his studio would be coming from all over, far and wide, different kinds of music, different kinds of people, and every time you'd go to record he'd have a different bank of stories about different people he had been recording with that were like really off-the-wall. But he would never do this in a mean way, in fact he would quite often be the butt of the joke. So, part of the appeal of going to see him was that you'd come away not only with a record you were really happy with but also all these amazing stories he'd kind of accumulated. Which is kind of funny because, like, I don't know if you ever experienced him like that but he was kind of socially awkward in a way until he got into his groove and then he was like so fucking funny. Took him a little while to get going. He almost had this kind of sheen of like impeccable manners (and he would probably hate to be talked about like this) like a classic gentleman - always really composed but had this sense of humour which managed to be wicked but not wicked towards anyone in particular.

Lee Hall: John was so good at telling stories. You'd be in the studio and it was just 'story time with John'. He loved the local gossip.

Tim Keech: One of the hundred anecdotes that John would tell when you saw him at the studio or just out and about was when Wilco was there recording with his mate and John started tidying up some of the rubbish that was was lying about and all of the sudden Wilco says: "Have you tidied something up John?" and was obviously in a bit of a panic. "Yeah, yeah" says John. "There was just some bits of paper lying about." "Where'd you put it, where'd you put it?" says Wilco jumping up. Obviously some of his special sauce and then him and his mate are going through the bin!"

Roy Thirwell: As we came to know each other the stories would come out. The thing about John was, he talked a lot, loved to gossip. The friendliest, kindest gossip, not nasty, not trying to undermine anyone. He just delighted in other people's characters, and he would share that. He called people nitwits. He didn't swear - effing and jeffing he called it - beautifully held back his disdain, you trusted it more. There was no lack of control in what he did. And when he told you stories, the gossip and the nitwits, he'd be a nitwit himself sometimes. He didn't put himself on a higher plane, he was down there doing the stupid stuff as much as anyone else. For instance, Peter Spaghetti. There was a sternness and a seriousness about John which wasn't

there once you got to know him. So he was running about on his bicycle one day as a kid, not even in double figures, in Hockley where he grew up. He met this group of kids, three or four, and they are just talking in that defensive, sizing-each-other-up sort of thing and they said to him: "So what's your name then?" and he said that he tried to to think of the the most sophisticated, suave name and said: "Peter Spaghetti."

Davy, Paul and Jim: We were pisstakers, as a group. We still are! I think John loved it, but we were always winding him up in the studio. It was funny. But he told us some brilliant stories too. He told us one about the guy who booked an hour. I can't remember what kind of music it was. I think it was garage? But it wasn't the type, what his style was but he played it to us and it was absolutely brilliant. The guy was a DJ and he only needed an hour. John was crying with laughter when he played it back. Not because of the music but because of the person who had recorded it, and what he was asking him for on the phone, that was the funniest bit and John was absolutely in stitches because of what he had asked him for. He had loads of stories like that. He even had someone call him and ask him if he could put these recordings together. His wife was cheating on him and he wanted it as evidence.

Ed Wenn: One of the great things was that John could be spectacularly indiscrete but in a way that you would never – he would tell you stories about bands he'd worked with but he would either not mention the name if he thought you knew them, or he'd tell you who they were if they were some random band you would never come across, your paths would never cross, you know? And then he'd tell you these really affectionate stories about bands he knew. The band I'm with at the moment, Dealing with Damage, the other guitar player Andy Myers, was in a band called Jerrybuilt back in the '90s, and I think they played with Understand a lot, and things like that. So Andy was going to record with John quite a lot in the 90s and 2000s. So when he joined the band and we were going to John's to record, there were three times as many stories. We all got on and I didn't know about his and John's relationship, and he didn't know about mine and we all met up and swapped loads of stories. Absolutely brilliant.

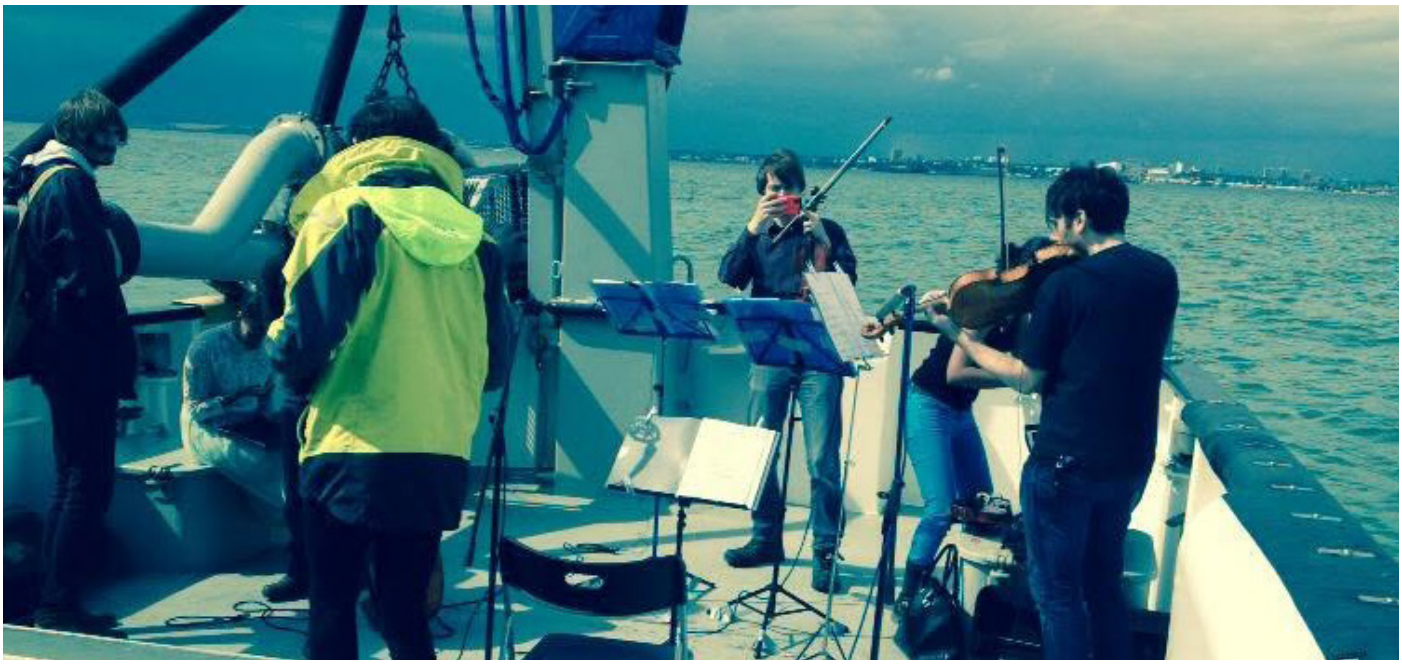
Larry Hibbitt: I remember John having a very lovely mannerism about him. He was very mild-mannered. You never felt like you were working with him - it felt like fun. Recording sessions always felt like a conversation and in the process of that conversation you ended up making a song. And he always had a story. And he was quite fresh off the back of all that Understand stuff where they had been doing things like supporting Pantera, stuff which wasn't them cos they were a post-hardcore band. They were one of those bands in the 90s who got signed on the back of grunge I guess, post-hardcore, and most record labels didn't know what the fuck to do with them. And that was about the time when they would have collided with the nu-metal explosion and they probably ended up playing with a lot of inappropriate nu-metal bands. So there were funny stories about them clashing with worlds they'd just been through.

Tim Holehouse: And then it was a lot of time just sitting around, drinking coffee and having a chat before it'd be: "Let's see what we can do" and he was, I think, only half-charging me for some of the days cos we'd been gossiping so much: "I don't think I can really charge you for a full day I mean we've spent like three hours just catching up!" or let me run over by an hour. I mean, certainly when the work needed to be done, it was done. It wasn't just slacking.

Ross Baker: He would entertain the fact that kids like me would want to come and talk to him about all the stories that he had, and what made it more comical really, was that the hardcore stories that he had were brilliant. He'd come out with all of these stories you know, about his time in New York, about Walter in Quicksand, how he asked him to join, the guitarist had a heroin problem, and they were looking for a replacement. For me all of these stories were mind blowing, but John in his humble way, was bored with them. It would entertain others but in his world, he'd moved on musically and was looking at different genres and different avenues. He was very good with words.

Davy, Paul and Jim: I would say that John was quite a reserved character, you sort of had to warm him up: he would be quite reserved for the first couple of hours but then he would loosen up and the stories would start coming out. which was quite good. He'd have his stories. I was the drummer and you'd get in and start setting

up and, mic-ing the kit up, that's when you'd always get that bit of time with him and you'd get all these, he'd really open up and come up with all these stories. I remember him kind of taking the piss out of himself. Can't remember who it was but I remember he was recording a band at NO Recordings and he always had this chair. Everything was kind of awkwardly set up in this kind of weird... nothing seemed like it was quite functioning. And he used to have this chair, like a kind of Mastermind chair. He used to lean right back in his Mastermind chair like that and he had this band in and they had a really attractive girl and he was in there and trying to chat her up a little bit, and he's leaning back and everything and he ended up leaning back too far and went into a roll and ended up at the door! And that must have been so awkward and just having to carry on. And because he was so awkward as well. But he found it really funny. And he'd just tell you stories like that and then get back to it. He would talk about recordings, funny people he had had in, but he would never actually play you any recordings unless you really, really, over days - days - you had to encourage him to. And then eventually he might break and show you a bit of it.



Location recording on the Thames Estuary, photo by John Hannon

DIY guy

Jay Thornton: John would always talk to me and say: "I don't know what I'm doing, Jay.". At the time I was wanting to do art, and I was working in this stupid DIY shop with Kev Guy and I wanted to do music and do art. And John was like: "Jay, just do it. Get an instrument, get some paper and a pen, just start it." He would say that all the time and that was how he lived. He would pick up a trumpet and just start playing. "I don't know how to play the trumpet. I'm no Miles Davis. I'm not going to trumpet school for two years; I'm not going to learn musical theory. I have an idea and I just want to do it. I'm just going to do it." He was punk and, looking back at it, you know, that is so cool. And he was always so supportive and positive about it too: "Jay, if you want do it, just do it. Don't worry about if you know how to do it, that rubbish, just do whatever you want to do". And that's what he did.

Davy, Paul and Jim: I think for John, because he could play guitar obviously really well, that was boring for him. Too easy, yeah. Not so much that but I think the beauty of it for him was the naivety of not necessarily being able to play something that well and I used to think, well, something like the violin or the saxophone or the piano, the numerous things, the trumpet or whatever, he would try and play all of them, probably not to a technically high standard but he would make a noise out of them and to him that was exciting. I think he enjoyed just the randomness of what might come out of it and then something that gets lost a bit. I think about trying out another instrument, buy a piano or something, but then I think that if I do that then I won't play so much guitar and I haven't got as far with that as I want to but maybe I should do a John and just do it. Give it a go just to see what happens. If you like the sound of it, give it a go. I forgot he played trumpet. Just picked it up and almost immediately went out and started playing it to loads of people!

Jay Thornton: I would be watching these guys play gigs, record, do cool stuff and I was always an onlooker. They were always very welcoming and friendly to me, but I would often be watching them at gigs and there was one time - I can't remember when, why or how - but John said to me and Kev: "Do you wanna do a little side project?" There was a dub DJ called Jah Shaka. He used to do a night in Southend at the Palace Hotel in the basement ballroom, back in the 90s, used to do a dub reggae night and I would have been in my late teens and we'd go there and it was thick smoke and Jah Shaka would play this insanely heavy dub reggae. John Hannon was definitely there with us a few times. So John, Kev and I at least once went to No Recordings to do a little dub reggae project. It is recorded. I have no idea where it is. And that was the one time in the 90s when I was drawn in : "Oh, maybe we could do some music. " I think Diary of a Madman was what we called it. And then, later on, just before I moved to Brighton, John said: "Jay, come to No Recording studio and let's just record you. Just do something. Just do something." This is another important part of what John did for me. And I was: "I don't know what to do, John." And he said: "Jay, just go into the recording studio. Just play something, sing something, bash something." I think he just set up a beat, a crunchy beat, I started shouting and singing some random things, bashing some bits, and he sampled it and cut it all up and at the end of that day we had a song. Bearing in mind I had never done anything like that before. He just did it it because he had spare time and he wanted to work with me. Why would he want to work with me? That shows how cool John Hannon was. I called it Now I'm Lost. I've got that recording somewhere. These little snippets of how John used to try and draw me out which is so cool, looking back at it. Later I moved to Brighton, I'd been in a little mini band and which didn't last very long, with these two brothers - Shinri - and they were also in a band called Junk Boy and this was a kind of side project. And then I was in Mllion Dead and then Man Ray Sky. I've been in about a million other bands and always singing. John really pressed the button first. The difference was when I met a lot of the guys in Brighton, they were trained musicians. They had gone to Guildford School of Music or the Brighton School of Music, so that was different from the Southend crew who were punks really, self-taught.

Davy, Paul and Jim: It was all about the overall sound of something. I remember once I got to the studio - this was a lot later - got to the studio early for a rehearsal and he made me sit in the studio with him and we listened to a high-pitched frequency, just one note, for about 15 minutes and I looked at him and he was just sitting in his chair and he just rocks in his chair and I'm going: "John, really mate, this is torture." And says: "Just wait, just wait." And I say: "Okay." And it went on and on and on. I thought: "This is just horrendous." and when the music finally came on he just looked at me and he burst our laughing and he said: "The reason for that is that when it's finished you get this feeling of euphoria!" And I think that's the point: the point is that he knew really early on that it wasn't just about just what you were listening to, it wasn't about how good you were as a musician, it wasn't about your overall feeling of it, and that's not easy to learn or understand. You even know that or you don't. Some people go for perfection, and some people go for the overall feeling, and he had that. That's really encouraging when you're young as well because you realise you don't have to be the perfect musician to make something meaningful, right? You always felt comfortable recording with the guy. I never thought about John's abilities as a musician because he would never impose that on you. He was really supportive, really. Even if you didn't think you'd played something quite well he would find the good parts in it. He would, even if you did a take that was kind of sloppy, he would encourage you to keep it.

Larry Hibbitt: I've had good experiences with a major label, I've had bad ones, but I think ultimately John is right. If you want to hang out with people you like and laugh your arse off and make good music, you generally have to stick with people who don't want to be signed to major labels for it to be that wholesome, fun experience. I think the bands I know that are most successful surviving being in majors are the ones that still operate a very DIY ethic all the way through, no matter how big they get. They basically still do things their way and basically just use their record label as a bank. But you need confidence and experience to do that, confidence especially, and I can completely appreciate how John felt about being on a major and I really felt the same way. We had a good idea of the producer we wanted, Dave Sardin, because we liked his records. We didn't need the record label to make that decision and we tried to use them as little as possible, to be honest, which was partly down to Tank's guidance. But it's very difficult if you aren't watertight and have all your ducks in a row at the same time. If you have to rely on them, then you're in trouble.



The influencer

Matt Randall: He always gave you confidence. I'd go in there sometimes and he'd say something like: "I like your socks Matt" and you'd feel great and you'd think I'll wear those socks every time I go out now! He sort of gave you that, he always made you feel great. I think the last text I got from him was about, probably three weeks before, and he said he was working with someone called Andrew Moore, and he said to me: "Matt I know you might be busy but I think you'd be great playing guitar on this" and if John asked you it was just like rocket fuel - you would want to do it. With anyone else you might be thinking: "How can I get out of this?" But with John you always, you know, you'd want to do it, you'd want to please him as well.

Tim Keech: After Covid and John going, I had this idea of putting my own night on, inspired by John, because he was so integral to bringing interesting music to Southend and there's a night now called Tea and Oranges which is put on in Southend and it's gone really well. That is something that directly happened out of John no longer being there. The idea that people really need to be doing stuff for things to happen. Him running a recording studio, putting nights on and being a sound engineer - when people like that disappear there is a void and me and my mate Micky G, living on a boat in Camden at the time, started a night up and its going strong and that was totally inspired by what John used to do.

Davy, Paul and Jim: One of the things John said was he told us that our bass player, Kev Friedrich, was the best he'd ever met. I don't know if Kev knows this. He put him forward. There was a bit of supergroup of someone from A, someone from Reasons and they were looking for a bass player and John had put our guy forward, but he he never did it. He would put us forward. Someone came to see us, an A&R guy who I speak to now and again now, who came to us. I think he was at Mushroom at the time, and he just got in touch with us randomly which would have been off the back of Hundred Reasons's success, would have spoken to John and asked who else he was working with.

Jay Thornton: In the mid-2000s, I eventually left Southend and went to live in Brighton, and we stayed in touch but I didn't see him as often for obvious reasons. I then formed a band called Who Owns Death TV with the remnants of a band called Million Dead. They were very popular in the UK in the early 2000s. They had quite a big fan base to my annoyance, cos when we did our first run of shows, I was the singer and all these Million Dead fans would come and watch us, and they were; "Whose this guy singing!" And Frank Turner, who was the singer, came to one of my gigs and stood right in front of me watching. Bearing in mind, when I lived with him in the 90s in Essex, I was not a musician, what was amazing was to come back ten years later and say to John: "I'm a musician now, hello! I can do these things as well. " Obviously not quite to the

New York crew, photo by James Reddick

level of John but it was amazing reconnecting with him. I was in a band called Man Ray Sky and finally got my act together and recorded a full album in Norway, finished it, mixed it, printed it on vinyl and one of my favourite memories is sending a copy on coloured vinyl to John. He was the first person I sent it to. Because I had grown up with him as a teenager, the amazing John Hannon who had been on all of these records, been signed, recorded a million bands, eventually he had MY album and he sent a lovely message saying: "Sounds really good, you did a really good job with it" - almost like a father or something, like a big brother. And I was so proud that I could do that, and he saw my trajectory. Means a lot to me.

Who Owns Death TV: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4E8q5EcIiBk*
Man Ray Sky: *https://manraysky.bandcamp.com/album/coreless*

Lee Hall: Obviously Understand. I see them a few times and he had such a cool charisma on stage, he just looked really good. Cos he's really cool and I'm six-foot-four and John's six-foot-four and I just loved it. That's when I first thought: "Oh my God, he's a dude!" There's not many people in Southend you look up to, you know? I liked Understand but I wasn't fully like a fan. The first time we met he was in Understand and he went on tour to America, and he said he met Thurston Moore, and I was like "Oh my God!" That was really cool for me, and he knew that as well. I remember where we were when he said that to me. They looked a lot alike playing guitar. I like tall men playing guitar. It's cool! He was in another band after called Woe and I really liked that band. And he was good friends with Pete. And they were two guys who just used to walk around everywhere in Southend. And I just used to love them, you just looked up to them. "They are cool, they're into good music." And I always used to chat to Pete and John about town. They were into the same kind of music as us, experimental, a little bit. I would be at a gig, like I was at Comic Gang, and you'd be chatting to someone and they'd say: "Where you from?" and I'd say "Southend' and they'd say: "Oh, do you know John Hannon!" That happened a lot. I think the alternative scene is quite small, so everyone knows each other, kind of thing, and it's just lovely. And everyone speaks fond of him. Everyone loves him. He knew the girls out of Comic Gang, and he was very modest about it. I said: "I can't believe it!" He used to record Country Teasers, Scottish band, really good, I love 'em. And then apparently the guy from the band, Ben Waller, recorded some stuff at No Recording. He's had so many good bands in there.

Ross Baker: But the point I'm really making is, I hadn't really spoken to John in any capacity for at least, gosh, maybe 10 years, and during lockdown I found myself in this situation where I went down to No Recordings, after I'd been interviewed by Andy Baz and I said: "John, I've got all of these tapes, and most of them we recorded with you 25 years earlier", and I said: "I feel foolish coming to see you, I don't know if this is a midlife crisis. I haven't been involved in bands for 20 years but I think because I've got time on my hands and for my own sanity can we look at these old tapes, can we remaster them, can we do anything with them, can you give me any advice?" – and ah gosh, he was, it just took me back, it took me back to 20 years before when we were in the studio with him – here I am a guy in his mid-forties with two kids and a job, and I still love music and I still take it very seriously, but I hadn't been in a band environment or a studio for years and John was just his usual inspiring and open and honest self. He kindly remastered all of these dodgy tapes that enabled me to kind of, and this is all because I had time during lockdown like a lot of people, I started a micro record label off the back of this and that had been a dream of mine for years. I found myself at the backend of lockdown thinking: "How has this all happened?" I'm releasing all these 7-inchers by bands in Southend that nobody really cares about, apart from me and a handful of people, each 20-30 copies, but the point is that John was just so important to that.

Tim Holehouse: And he was just so much more into what he was doing now, Liberez, and playing the latest thing, they were doing at the end of the session or first thing in the morning: "Listen, we've just done this new thing. Let me play it to you. Oh yeah, we're just doing this." Always wanting to show me what he was doing now. I respected that, I really liked that. I went from liking Woe to liking Liberez: "Oh this is awesome; you've gone even further with it." My tastes have certainly gone more leftfield over the years. It was really up my street and his music journey sort of morphed into. We were both avid readers of the Wire. There was always a copy laying around at the studio and he even got in the Wire finally! That was so nice. I even followed John on his musical journey, having seen Understand and then Woe and then recording with him

and putting Liberez on a couple of times. Classic John saying "Why are you putting my band on? Nobody likes us!" and I was: "I like you!" And we kind of bonded over that thing of having been offered bigger things but turned them down to do our own things, and both happy in our obscurity. That's why he was the perfect producer for me, cos I'm just making the records that I wanna make and John did the same thing. It was a good match. It always felt like he spurred me on to be the best that I could be and I learnt so much from him, especially recording tricks. I record myself now and I always think: "What would John do here?"

Aaron Shrimpton: Maybe six or seven years had passed. Incrementally I was gravitating towards people with quite extreme, avant-garde tastes. They were not always to my taste but I always felt it was important to have that in my palette so that you don't get homogenised in your own thing. Me, somebody who left school with two GCSEs, bumbled my way into BTEC photography and then a diploma and then I went to uni. Uni was really overwhelming, really difficult and I didn't get a single B or C until my final year. Into my final year and I thought: "Fuck it, I'm gonna do the most experimental thing I can do but always justify it with the means of education. Give them everything they need, all the research, and I got top marks in my class by 15%. And there were a number of people, John and others, who had a massive impact on me. You don't realise it until later. John would probably feel really uncomfortable with me saying that to him, but it just dawned on me.

Tim Keech: Someone who's got such a legacy in different areas and in people's lives, different circles and different scenes. I know he's still held in high reverence with the UK hardcore people. I was never part of that scene and John would tell me how these people are still really into that scene, and he wasn't bragging or anything, just mentioning it and how he found it odd. Then you heard him doing that podcast and the excitement of the people about talking to this guy who was part of this band which were so integral to the British hardcore scene and just honoured to be in his presence. For me it was a whole different thing to what I knew him for. He'd gone through these different incarnations of musical outfits and it's really important that he was in touch with so many different scenes. That thing of seeing John at the back of the room at any gig in Southend, that could be replicated in some specific venues in London and maybe in Europe as well where.

Ed Wenn: And I used to go and hang out with him and Jane living together in a flat in Southend a few times. So I did hang out with John a bit socially as well around that time. So I really started to connect with him, then, rather than someone who was just, to be brutally frank, useful to me. He was someone that I really liked hanging out with and absolutely respected because the more I hung out with him the more I appreciated his resourcefulness and his approach to making music and stuff like that. How it went from someone that I was like: "He'll probably cut me a deal cos he used to like my old band" to someone I wanted to impress when I went to the studio, cos this guy has got something going on and I'd want him to go: "Oh, I like that song. It's pretty good." It very quickly turned into that.

Michelle Bappoo: Obviously, it was gonna be done with John because I was very unconfident and he did have the way of giving me confidence: "No this is good, you can do this. People have obviously agreed to play on it!" cos I'd literally just sent them all acoustic tracks, and I wrote everything in this book, sort of kept an eye on the dates we were there and what we did on those dates. Started in February 2017, every Friday, then into 2018 and 2019, and Covid and finally I think John rang me and said: "You've really got to finish this!" He snapped at me. He was totally placid and so, so patient, cos I'm: "Oh, I just can't do it! This is awful!" So, I kept leaving it, putting it off cos I didn't know how to finish it. So, I think it was during the lockdown, I think, and he said: "I'm working from home and I'm gonna master this and get them done" and the last date I've got of going in was August 2020. I'm so glad he did that cos I needed a kick up the backside to get it done.



Lost in music

Jane Hannon: Remembering about being at home alone as a kid and how I used to get really freaked out about that. And when we were that age when he was 14, and he was old enough and I wasn't old enough to be left on my own, even when John was there and I wasn't alone, I would still get freaked out and I would ring my mum at a restaurant and they'd have to come home and I was thinking about why I was like that when John was still there and the reason was: he was so crap! He was so distracted constantly by music that I think I used to think that someone could come in here, put a sack over me, bludgeon me to death and he wouldn't even notice because he'd be so in-the-zone.

David Vick: He'd be constantly letting you know about gigs: Dead C, Chris Corsano, Get Hustle, The Make Up - what a band - Charles Gayle, Monieke Darge, people I'd never heard of. I don't know how he got the time or the money to get about so much! Most of the time I was too hooked up with work or the kids but now and again. I remember one with - who was it? Charlemagne Palestine, bashing a piano. I got him to go to Lydia Lunch at the Garage. John didn't like her much actually. Our very first gig together was Archie Shepp at the Southbank. '96 must have been. A trio. Crotchety drummer. John came up with Pete, and I also invited my oldest friend from Southend, Joseph, who came up on the train. They went home together in Pete's car. Would have loved to have been a fly on the wall for that one. Can't really think of two people less alike!

Matt Randall: Because I think he became, because I always thought of John as this incredibly experimental artist, but as he got older he was far more open. I know him and Roy were talking about writing the most cheesiest pop song in the world and they were going to do it, and you know if you had an idea John was always like "Lets do it. We can do that." He was far more open to more commercial music as he got older y'know, which I think he always was but I'd never really seen that side of him. The original view I had of John was far different by the end, he was far more of a normal guy than I thought he was I guess, just a lovely human being.

John Hannon (Mute Publishing press release): By my mid-twenties, I discovered I enjoyed my own company and spent free time venturing out of an evening solo. On your own you go and leave as you please, see and do what you want - and what I wanted to do was interact with as much music as possible. That period of time, Southend was a floor space war for the various monthly club nights in the venues of Saks, Sunrooms and a few other basements of now forgotten scenes. In my memory they were all very busy - a one-in, one out scenario. Northern Soul and Mod, Rare Groove and Funk, Dub Reggae, Drum'n'Bass, the odd Jungle night and Hip Hop were the main variants, and then there were people who played a bit of all of the above. Jah Shaka would regularly visit the then beautifully decrepit Palace Ballroom. Those Shaka nights more than any of the others were the most affecting. I knew absolutely nothing about Dub. For me it was like a secret upside-

John at Above All show, Saks, Southend. Photo by Phil Howes

down world. All the energy was in the bottom frequencies; everyone would behave in a reverent and subdued way. Yes, they were stoned but people were often stoned and didn't act like this. It was more like attending a religious recital - a long way from the kinetic energy of a punk gig. I would also watch the last remaining guard of Southend jazz musicians on a Sunday at Churchills and sit in on the Jazz Orchestra rehearsals at Brocketts. It seemed that if you just opened your door with no preconceptions there was a wealth of music locally. I drifted in and out of these clubs, attended everything. I wasn't a part of any one group but got to know lots of different people. I wasn't the only solo weirdo either. There were many other solitary souls doing exactly the same thing.
Obviously, there was music, the booze and whatever else, but the main impulse driving all these events seems forgotten and antiquated now. It was to dance - mostly in hot, sweaty tiny rooms with no ventilation in a haze of cigarette smoke. The concept was entirely foreign to me. I understood jumping off a stage into a mosh pit. Here at least you had to try and move your body rhythmically to the music. To me, this was and still is embarrassing. But as it turned out, no one else cared. Everyone was drunk or high, and I was mostly likely the only sober person in the room. This wasn't a time to stroke your chin or cerebrally digest but to literally absorb. Watching someone dance well to the syncopation of Drum and Bass or Northern Soul teaches you a lot about rhythm. As does zoning out to a James Brown jam. I wasn't socialising - this was more of a personal education.

Ross Baker: So my social circle of friends around that time would go to hardcore gigs, local rock gigs and all the rest of it, a lot of my friends and my brother were into hip hop and dance, dub and reggae and there was a big reggae sound system scene here in Southend. It was interesting because John kind of turned into this social butterfly in Southend. He had his roots in what he grew up in but you could clearly see that he was trying to kind of break out musically, this would've been '94/'96, just other influences, other music, other creative people, and obviously he went on to do Woe, Liberez and all that stuff which is obviously quite a departure from Understand, and him as a character he just had that authenticity, you know?

Davy, Paul and Jim: One of things about him was that he would always play something really interesting or really odd when you'd be just setting up or hanging around. There was always something really strange that he had been listening to. His musical taste really was unusual.

Matt Randall: I loved spending time with him in the studio and a lot of the time we probably didn't make a lot of music, we were just chatting about – I mean, when I first met him he turned me onto so much stuff, things like Funhouse and things that I'd never heard, when I was sort of 20 years old, that he was all over, and all that stuff I didn't know about. Every time I left the studio he'd burn me a CD of something and go home with a load of stuff, or films he'd recommend, always searching out music. He didn't want to hear things he'd already heard, he was always searching out something new wasn't he, John.

David Vick: Of course, John would be constantly plying you with new music which was a complete godsend for me, not having the time or resources to go after it like I used to. Totally dependent on him usually, and there would be a fistful of stuff everytime we met up. Totally grateful for that still and some of it my favourites of all time, especially the world music stuff and then Rollin in the Ruins and Brain Bombs. Robert Ashley. I was talking to him about Fiery Furnaces and immediately he's sending me Robert Ashley! Ah, yes, I thought. He was way too in touch for me to be able to surprise him most of the time but I remember turning him onto Popol Vuh and this amazing Alice Coltrane-inspired Berlin-Sydney group Hammeriver I'd heard on the Radio 3 jazz show. It was always a moment if you got him with something he hadn't heard before. Oh yes, what was that Afrikaans rap thing in the late 2010s, Die Antwoord? I only came across it cos a friend of mine, Patrick, in South Africa, mentioned it when we were talking about different varieties of English and the Afrikaans version (sort of) and sent a video to John. About a year later, John tells me that it's Pete and Rob's new favourite band of the moment, so that was a bit of coup, albeit completely fortuitous. I turned him onto one of Tex Perkin's many side projects too, Thug from the 80s Melbourne scene, which he enjoyed. Oh that's right, speaking of Tex Perkins, then the Beasts of Bourbon played in London for the first time for ever. It must have been 2008 cos it was almost exactly 20 years since I'd seen them last in Melbourne. But he didn't make it.

Iñigo Ugarteburu: During the sessions, because we were both music nerds, let's say, we clicked very quickly and

our recording sessions were, I would say, 70% talking and 30% recording, if that! And then we became friends and it took quite a while for us to record a record because we were just talking, listening to music in the studio and then: "Okay, let's so some recording!" When I first met John, I was mainly doing like American folk guitar and this was after a period of listening to drone music, electro-acoustic music, minimalist 20th century music, something very different from what I was trying to accomplish with my guitar. Without losing a lot time, I was really listening to folk music regardless of the place at that point in time, and I think John was in a similar place where he was buying Songlines and we would talk about some of the tracks in the magazine, the music and the production and from there we would go to, I dunno, Jon Thorne or Morten Feldmann or Phil Niblock, back and forth between this traditional music and contemporary classical music and then electronic music and back to the folk music and I remember we would share so many tracks, so many MP3s, and he would go through the hard drive and it was: "You've got to listen to this. Do you know this?" And I didn't. And I would go through my Ipod or whatever. I remember the first time he played Liberez to me. We ended up playing that song live because I loved it so much, Exercise Restraint. I was doing my stuff in the studio, and he plays this track and I was like: "This is amazing!" cos it had all the things we were talking about. That traditional folk element that we were talking about, it has a lot of electro-acoustic music and the pure electronic and industrial and noise. And I said: "You need to meet these guys called Akauzazte from the Basque country, You guys need to play together." And he tried to play with them. He tried to get them to London. And I said: "Good luck. They have never left the Basque country. Maybe outside the Basque country a couple of times in 20-odd years."

Aaron Shrimpton: So I was just out of college. John was that unassuming character in the bar. He was never drunk. He was always there. Kirstie was a partner of his. I don't know how I knew that he listened to sort of avant-garde stuff and my musical spheres were changing. I was really into Tom Waits and drum and bass and a real eclectic mix and started getting The Wire and broadening my horizons a bit. You find people that you need to find in some moments and I kind of knew John had that kind of taste for whatever reason, and he kind of steered me in certain directions and I always felt I could talk to him about stuff like that. When you get interested in art and the avant garde, you need people to reference off, I guess, because it becomes quite a small group trying to diversify your interests and stay true to them, and John seemed like he was in it and didn't give a fuck, and I always felt that was really impressive. There were a lot of people starting to bubble up who were interested in that kind of stuff, but from a fashion point-of-view. John didn't ever give me that kind of impression whatsoever.

Astrud Steehouder: And I think one of the sort of lock-and-key things for us was that because we knew that he got it. He was able to reflect back to us the sort of music that was in the canon that we hadn't heard yet, which was super important to our experience and education and development of sound. People like that I came to know about definitely through John. It very much struck me that he was completely committed to interrogating sounds and just a complete purist in vision, absolute complete purist. And the kind of stuff he was into, while everyone has someone that they follow, these people were not artists that were known to me, people like Michael Gira, Swans, Tony Conrad, people like that. At that time, I didn't know about these kind of people. He was a very individual person.

Tony Conrad: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTr_YmwicwY***
Michael Gira: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qDq9eGUmMI***



Essex man

Walter Schreifels: I mean he wasn't like a jokerman, you know, but a very funny and hyper-Southend English person! Notwithstanding what you might say about what's corny about Essex or something, I think he understood what the arguments against the area were and I think he could find the fun in that and the truth in it. He would never sell it out, if you know what I mean. Although he played with a lot of pretence and he did a lot of pretentious things, he was a real dude, a real salt-of-the-earth person. This is that duality that we are talking about. He could make fun of Essex, and he gets it but he's very continental in his tastes and avant-garde and all that kind of stuff but he's still straight, tried and true Essex, kind of like a Wilco Johnson type of guy - spiritually connected to that part of the country and that tradition or whatever. He would tell me how his parents were Cockneys who had moved out to Essex, after the war or something, this migration to the suburbs, with a pride in that he had his roots in London, but I think he was just really connected to the land, Southend Estuary, as an artist, like Wilco Johnson. He just really reminded me of that: these amazing, creative, innovative guys, that you're gonna be sitting next to at the pub or hanging out on the high street, going to pick up some crisps at Sainsburys. Don't wanna say high-low brow or something but in a class sense he could float through all these different things and always maintain his integrity.

Matt Randall: I think the last time I saw him he was on his bike, because I'm a gardener by trade so I'd always see him riding his bike when I was at jobs, and he had a new coat and I said: "Nice coat!" and he said "It's ASOS mate!", because he could do quite a blokey thing John. A proper geezer at times.

Jay Thornton: He was so sophisticated, but he was also a bit of an Essex lad as well, on the sly, had really strong ideas and an ethos about creativity and playing in a wacky noise band in Southend in the late 90s, playing trumpet when he couldn't. He had a fearlessness to him whilst also being a real creature of habit and living in the same building, working in the same building., working at the same place, living in the same city for 30 years. Absolutely fearless, doing exactly what he wanted to do. And he could have been a big-headed idiot, could have looked down his nose at everyone but he wasn't. He invited people like me into his social life and tried to gently get me doing stuff. You don't meet people like that very often. Of course he had sides to him. I maybe saw a lot more personal side to him than others. I wasn't around him all the time, but I was around him at important times. He and I shared a very close relationship. I think I was like a little brother to him. That's how it felt to me. When I met John, I was still a teenager and he was 20 or 21. When you are in those teenage years and you are 15 or 16 and someone is four or five years older than you, and they have already been signed to Sony and it's: "Wow." And I was really quite shy back then. He was always like that. He's one of those people who never really changed. Lots of us wax and wane, we are into things and then we're into other things. He was one of those people who has always been a fully-formed John Hannon.

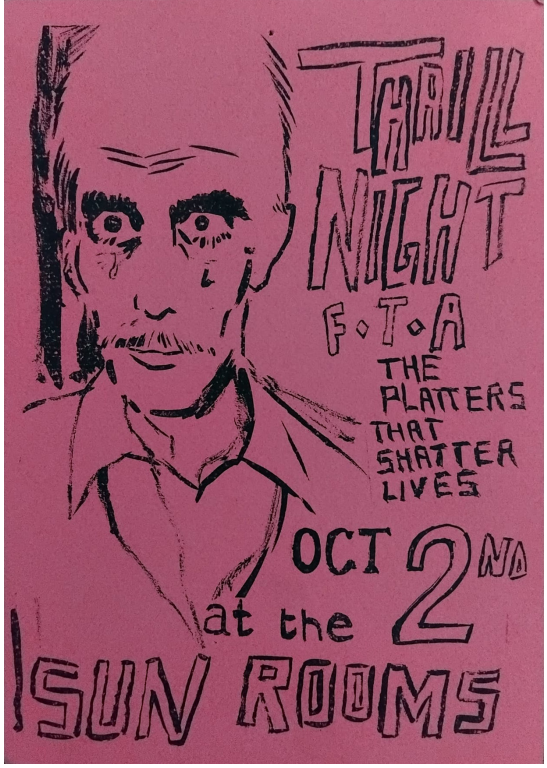
Liberez Dr Feelgood flyer, artwork by John

David Vick: When I was growing up there in the 1970s, Southend was a complete dump. Nothing to do, violent, boring, close-minded. You got chased down the street for looking different. I mean, it's not untypical is it, to hate the place you grow up in and can't wait to get away as soon as you can. You hate yourself and everything you associate with what you have grown up with. Misanthropy begins at home, and all that. So twenty years later, in the late 90s I've met John and we're hanging out together and it was just a given thing for me that anyone who lived in Southend would hate it too, and once or twice I'd say as much and very quickly learnt how different John felt about the place! "That's my people you're talking about". And, to be fair, it was a different place by then and I don't feel like that now, at all. But that is partly down to him, I must say. And I really feel that the difference today is at least partly down to what him and that little gang achieved with what they did. The Understand lot and then when he's doing those nights with Pete and then Amy and all. There's definitely that kind of legacy, as well as him making me see the place through different eyes. Bless him. Like Walter said: there should be a bloody plaque up in the high street commemorating his influence. I mean, if they name a whole train after Wilco, they could stick up a plaque for John. Personally, I'd have a statue of him. Replace that Queen Victoria thing on the cliffs. Lest We Forget J.H.

Jay Thornton: I remember a few discussions we had about this. You realise - he never left Southend. I left Southend. Loads of that crowd left Southend. He never did. And when I met him, he was an engineer at Mushroom which became No Recordings studio and in that period, the owner of Mushroom left it and said: "Do you want to buy it from me John?" And I remember him scrambling around trying to get some money to purchase this business which then became NO Recordings. But he never left that building. He was in that studio for 25, 30 years. And once he was in this place at Ravens Court with me, he never left that place, as far as I know. Maybe towards the end but he was in that place for 15-20 years. And he lived in that place, he lived in Southend, he worked at NO Recordings in Hullbridge and that was John. He was a creature of habit, and when we first moved into that flat together, he was very discombobulated. I had never seen that in John before. That might explain why he was always a big fish in a small pond when I lived there. And after I had left Southend, whenever I would talk to John or think about him, I would say to him: "Why are you still in Southend? It's such a small backwards place." Certainly in those days it was. Cos I went down to Brighton and in those days Brighton was a massive place with a really big music scene, right next to London, in comparison to Southend-on-Sea. "Why are you still in that place?" But John loved his habits, that's why he stayed there.

Davy, Paul and Jim: He was like a New Yorker in deepest, darkest Hullbridge. He was known in New York, of course. I remember the first time I went - and I was tapping him up cos I had this notion that he knew New York - so I was tapping him up, saying: "Where should I be going?" and things. And when I went to some of the galleries, they had his artwork up, his ink drawings, and I was telling him about that and he was like: "Oh, cool". And he knew people too. He'd come back and you'd ask: "Oh, how was your trip?" And he'd have this ridiculous story about someone from Bad Brains or something and you'd be: "What?? How do you do know these people?" I mean there was that time that Walter Schreifels phoned him, and we were recording and John answered it and said: "Oh hi, Wally." And I just had to leave the control room. I couldn't believe it. He was so non-phased about it. "Oh yeah, it's just Walter." Oh, alright. It was to him! He moved in those circles. He knew those people. It all added to his mystique. Because he knew all these different things about art and stuff, had this artistic way about him.

Jane Hannon: There was a time when John wanted to move to London and then that was replaced with moving to Barcelona, he even learnt Spanish and I think he was pretty serious about it. He was extremely curious and adventurous and went on some amazing trips around Europe – often on his own, and the stories he would come back with! He was a bloody nightmare – always getting himself into the most ridiculous situations. His latest venture was to move out to Norfolk with Amy. He really liked it out there – that's what they were working towards when he died. He was also learning to sail and had started driving lessons again. He passed his test when he was 17 but he only drove for a few weeks. He never thought he should have passed his test so he just stopped driving – very John Hannon. He was definitely ready to leave Southend, I think it had lost its charm for him a long time ago and it became a lot rougher in later years. I really worried about him living there. John was a magnificent and statuesque figure and he always stood out but I did worry about him standing out to the wrong type of people.



Pillar of the community

John Hannon (Mute Publishing press release): Innocently I tried to create my own monthly night. It was called Thrill Night for the Anguished, and it ran for a few years on week nights. I handmade the fliers, we booked a few bands and played the music we were listening to: No Wave, Free Jazz, Noise and experimental Punk. The Sunrooms were kind enough to lend the upstairs and use of the PA and turntables. When Woe played, people were supportive and came, though when we just played the records, nobody attended. My friend and co-DJ loved the idea that everyone hated our version - that we were apart from and, in a deluded way, superior. I probably agreed at the time to console myself. The truth was I wanted the heat and excitement of the other nights I was attending. Naïvely thinking that I could generate that when we lacked the basic creative skills and savvy to recreate that hive-mind experience.

Lee Hall: John was always putting gigs on in Southend. This thing was called Thrill Night. We played, loads of people played. He was the first one in Southend really to put different gigs on for me, more local. So we had the Esplanade in the 90s, people from overseas coming over, but he put on local bands, sort of avant garde, that wouldn't get many gigs. So he did a thing called Thrill Night at the Sunrooms, put many gigs on, played with his own bands in so many different places. John's the pioneer of putting gigs on around here and it's just so cool that he was so into it and there's no one like him. My friend Tim's putting gigs on now, and I used to put gigs on at the Railway and stuff. It was just great that he was pioneering the local talent.

Tim Keech: And then of course he also put on lots of really good gigs. So he did the Hallo You nights. I'm sure you've heard about those. Put some really important events on in Southend and he was also this kind of altruistic kind of character, not self-serving but helping the wider cause. He'd always be doing sound for events, some of them he didn't even get paid. Should've been but didn't. But he was always there, a constant presence. Hard to say when they actually started. Three or four nights a year. Not sure when that started and if that was different from what he was doing with his girlfriend Amy. He would book these interesting artists to come down to Southend, anyone who was interested in music that below surface level music something interesting and different and engaging.

Rob Scillitoe: It's still felt around here. So many people relied on John and took it for granted that he would be there when they wanted to do something. Tim and Matt and Lee have all done things with John. Matt did all the Plantman recordings. Sounds selfish but it's made it very difficult, if not impossible, to replace him. If you'd done it with him, it was almost, by default, worth it. If he'd put up with it then it must have been alright. For the Leigh Folk Festival, it would be John telling me he'd got hold of a bouzouki player from Mongolia

Thrill Night flyer, artwork by John

who was staying at his or something, that kind of thing! Or all the times we gave him a hard time doing the sound at the Railway. Did the sound for quite a few gigs where I was playing, or someone else, cos that was a horrendous place to have to do the sound in. The mics would all go missing or everything would be broken. He'd battle away and sellotape a few things together to make it work and get everyone through it. You'd know it would be okay if he was doing the sound. Taken for granted, again, taken for granted. He grumbled and you never knew how seriously he was grumbling, whether he was enjoying it or not. Must have enjoyed it a little bit at least.

Matt Randall: He's just such an encouraging person, I think anyone who creates or makes things always has that thing of is it worthy – what you're doing – and John always made you feel that everything you were doing was worthwhile. It's important to make things and archive, I think a lot of people locally have really missed that, that central figure. I used to feel sorry for him, because he always used to go to gigs on his own John, he never drunk really, so by the end of the night he always had people who'd had far too much to drink, swilling in his ear, but he was always gracious about it but, he just wanted to soak everything up, John, he was like a sponge, he always wanted to learn.

Michelle Bappoo: So, The Shrimpers Club, Blue Boar, Saks and the Sunrooms, it was always a rich music scene but later on, when we'd met John and later Amy, it all kind of revolved around the Railway Hotel in Scratton Road. There was a group called Scratton Road! John always did the sound there for gigs. We were so lucky that he would always say yes. Then him and Amy started putting on Hello You. It was great. You'd go there and know everyone. They were so good at marketing and advertising, you just had to go cos you'd been drip fed with music and visuals for weeks before on social media. Pretty much all Facebook. I don't think they used Instagram. And being friends as well, there'd be evenings at Amy's as well. It was a scene, and good quality of music.

Michael Kasparis: And he also put me on when he and Amy were putting gigs on in Southend before Covid. So they put on this big multi-media event in a place in Southend in an old water pump station. He had me play and a couple of other friends. Just one of the funniest nights ever. There was maybe 30 or 40 people there. I guess if you are a regular gig-goer in Southend, it was just the best collection of freaks I'd ever seen and at the end, after the gig, everybody who had been there was back at Amy's place. I was staying over and at 3 o'clock in the morning it felt like every crazy person in Southend was there in Amy's living room! One of the best gig experiences I've ever had. John was there but he was trying to get everyone to be kind of a bit quiet because Amy's son was asleep but he was having a good time himself. Might even have allowed himself a couple of beers as well. Just a brilliant postcard of what his life in Southend would have been like, surrounding himself with all the most brilliant and creative and way-out people that he could find and then him always in the middle of it and at the same time being so self-effacing and quiet as well.



Michael Kasparis performing at Hello You night, photo by Kelly Buckley

Matt Randall: He would have played on all of our records, there was a little group of us. That was the other thing – John was going to put out a compilation called Jangle Town, which was a little clique of us, which we all kind of played in the same ball park musically , we've all recorded with John, there's probably about 20 of us in bands, and John had given me the job of track listing together, and this is just before he died, I'd given him the track listing and Ewan was going to do the artwork, it was just to archive that little corner he was recording and we must finish that, we just haven't – it was so soon to him going I suppose that we haven't picked up again, it was kind of there you know, we were meeting up around his house and putting it all together. He's a real key part of Southend music, and he was really big on archiving stuff John, as he got older he was actually getting more nostalgic about things he'd done you know, posting old stuff on Facebook, John

would always be I'm playing this, there and then and a time and date, but he started referencing the past you know, which I think he was softening in that respect you know.

Tim Keech: He didn't judge people and saw angles in people that other people might write off. He'd be intrigued by that. So there was this guy, M, a messer: troubled, kicked out of pubs all over Southend, knives on him, teeth missing, might have been on crack, might have been on heroin, most people would be: "How can I end this conversation?" if they got into one with him, the guy was a walking wreck and barred from everywhere, and we had known him for years and he would busk on the street with a harmonica and you'd see him on the street, but at the essence of it a very sweet and sensitive guy and maybe with personality disorder issues, addiction issues, but you can only test people's patience so often before it's: "I'm not gonna invest anymore energy in you", but John decided he wanted to record him in this kind of outsider artist thing, bring him under his wing. So there was a night on which John had something to do with, playing or doing sound or something and John had booked him to play which was going to be M's first ever gig. M was a huge Royal Trux fan and loved experimental music, Sonic Youth, interesting guy who made art and stuff like that and you saw him at the top of the stairs coming down, guitar on his back with a look on his face of such pride: "Yeah, I'm here to play a gig, I'm a musician, I gonna play my first every gig", rushed for it, shoulders back, head up, I'm here, I'm gonna do this, gonna smash It. M being M, he'd bought a beer with him and this afflicted him his whole life. Confrontation would just seek him out, can't mitigate or navigate those dynamics. The bouncers came up and, quite reasonable at first: "Look mate you've got a beer, can't come in here with that" and anyone else is: "Don't want any trouble, here for my big chance" but Miles goes from being this proud, coming in for his big night – and it might have been great, might have been a terrible mess but it would have been good anyway – ends up being dragged out of the gig! But nobody else would have given him that chance except John, and he ended up giving him studio time and he was running round saying: "I've made an album" with these CDs. It was just noise and then nothing, not great, but his, and it was special. And this was John: "Can I get this person to create something that he always wanted to create?"

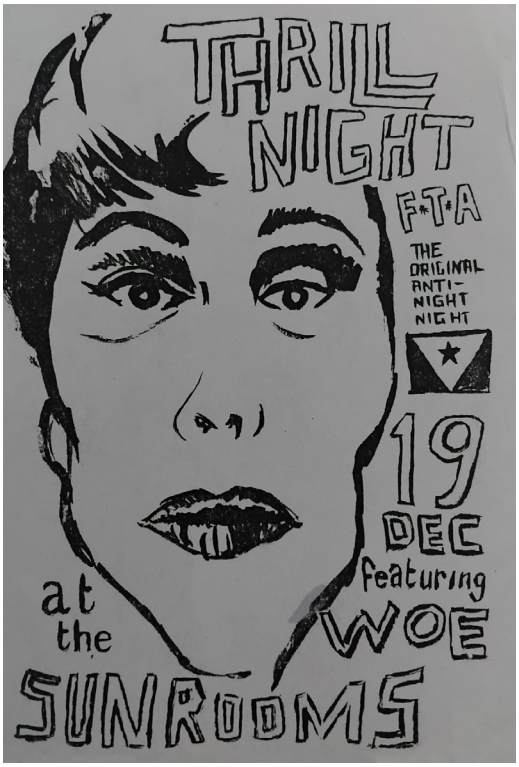
Roy Thirlwell: The idea with this M. guy was that John was convinced that he had a genius album in him so he got M. to the studio for free and got him to record songs. The problem with this arrangement was that every time M. came in he wanted to record the same song in a different way, so John didn't get very far with that idea. But it was a good idea, kind of outsider art really. He knew M. was never going to ring him up and pay for a session, so the only way he was going to get it out of him was to do it for free.

Lee Hall: John tried to get me and M together. I didn't know if it was an insult actually!

Aaron Shrimpton: But whenever we saw each we always stopped and had a conversation and really nice chats about stuff and I remember having really good conversations with him. I really didn't know what I was doing. I realised how John had set up this life for himself. He could record bands, make himself a bit of money to give himself the freedom and the space to create what he wanted to create. He wasn't selling out or any of those kind of things, he was also in this community, recording emerging bands, bands that he was interested in as well, giving bands from the surrounding areas the space to think a bit differently, not overproducing them, giving them the space to do what they wanted to, being around him and his tastes would really have rubbed off on them.

Dave Burke: My perception of most of the music in Southend involving him in it, he was the producer of that music and quite significantly affected the way those bands sounded. So his influence has just been total really. All the bands I know locally would say the same, it's not just me. He would happily turn almost anyone's music into something that was listenable. Very often you would turn up at his studio with incomplete ideas and he would complete those ideas for you. So he really buoyed up the whole Southend music scene. It's not as if there were loads of 'Johns' in the area. He wasn't just another guy recording people's demos. It was far more significant than that. You formed a relationship with him, and we were all much richer for that. And I think over time he became more loyal to those people as well. He would want the best for you and would be helpful in all different kinds of ways. He would introduce you to people regularly. he constantly had ideas for bands on the backburner and would be thinking about creative collaborations and he might place people together. Lots

of people from the Railway that he knew, he would be thinking about those things. He wanted to do a thing called Cigarette that was a long-term aim to get some troubled individuals in the same room, not because they were great musicians but because of the sort of mayhem it would create.



Thrill Night flyer, artwork by John

Roy Thirlwell: As far as his stature in the community goes, even at my age it can still be quite factional. People don't talk to other people. We don't concentrate enough on the fact that we are all just trying to make music rather than beating each other up or doing something bad. It's more: 'I don't like that style of music you play, so I don't think you're worth talking to'. He connected so many of us and the Hello You nights that he ran, other gigs that he promoted, he was just always - he would take ideas and make them real. I had this half-baked idea that I wanted to do a kind of guitar orchestra, going back to that sort No Wave Glenn Branca sort of thing, perhaps all playing one note of a chord each instead of all five together. It didn't really work but for about six months we met at the Fisherman's Chapel, sometimes four or five of us, sometime eight or nine trying to make it work, all revolving around Terry Riley's 'In C', but only guitars and not orchestral instruments like in the original, with the music tabbed for guitars. So, we're sitting in a caff and saying, I'd really like to try this guitar orchestra thing and then we're meeting up and we're doing it and that's John: facilitating things and making them happen. He wanted to do a band which had all the most obnoxious people that he knew in the Southend community. Obnoxious and infuriating. People that he'd had to work with that he had in mind. Some I knew and some I didn't know. People that he had had in the studio, why he would want to have them in that situation, I don't know, and it never actually came off the ground, but it shows the kind of ideas he had. The other thing he always wanted to do was a band called Soundcheck, where the band goes onstage for twenty minutes and that's their set. The idea is living. "Whether people like it or not, we've done that now, we've accomplished that."

Dave Burke: I just remember the hundreds of cassettes and CDs that were up on the shelves in the studio of all the bands that he had recorded, going back 20 years, and what all those bands went on to do.I know there were lots of plans to collate that stuff into something significant. I don't know what's happened with that but I know there were some local people who were going to be involved in making some sort of book about the local scene. He would have been really excited to have seen that. Get a sense of the breadth of everything. It's kind of like the roots and branches of this kind of tree of the local scene and many of them still out there on some kind of journey somewhere he helped on their way. It's quite a legacy, isn't it? It should be recognised in some way. I think musicians tend to need to be thinking about what they are doing first and foremost. Again, it kind of highlights John's generosity that he valued other people's projects as highly as his own, really, and that's quite unusual in itself. We tend to be rather more selfish. His work ethos was quite unusual in that it he wasn't really driven by money. It was art for art's sake all the time, it seemed to me.

Tim Keech: But our relationship through his recording studio was, I think that was what hit people in Southend so hard. I think you don't truly appreciate people until they are gone sometimes. John was a heroic figure really because he actually sacrificed so much. He would give such a lot to people, musicians, creatives. He was never money-oriented, so his studio costs were ridiculously low, you know? Anyone could access it. He wasn't driven by money but the projects themselves and helping people develop their music and their art. That was a noble quality about John. You've lost someone not only as an artist but as someone who helps other artists as a producer and engineer, as a creative partner when you're in the studio with him. That studio was a safe space for many people who would probably admit that when they had that intimate relationship with John at the studio, it was almost like therapy because you would go there to get your music out, express yourself, and John and the conversations with John was also part of that process, and people just realised that

when he went, and his passing was devastating.

Diana Collier: Another thing that shows John's generosity was that he would always be going out doing sound for gigs. A friend of mine, Emma Lamb, she had a night with a guy called Richard Thompson, that was called Culture as a Dare. They used to put on outsider music and things like that. It was going for about 15 years; they had their last gig this year. They put on all sorts of people, so many different genres, the most eccentric outsider music, people making music out of houseplants and weird electronics, the whole gamut really at the Fisherman's Chapel, the Lamb and Lion or the Moonraker. Emma recorded with John in a band called Lost Harbours.

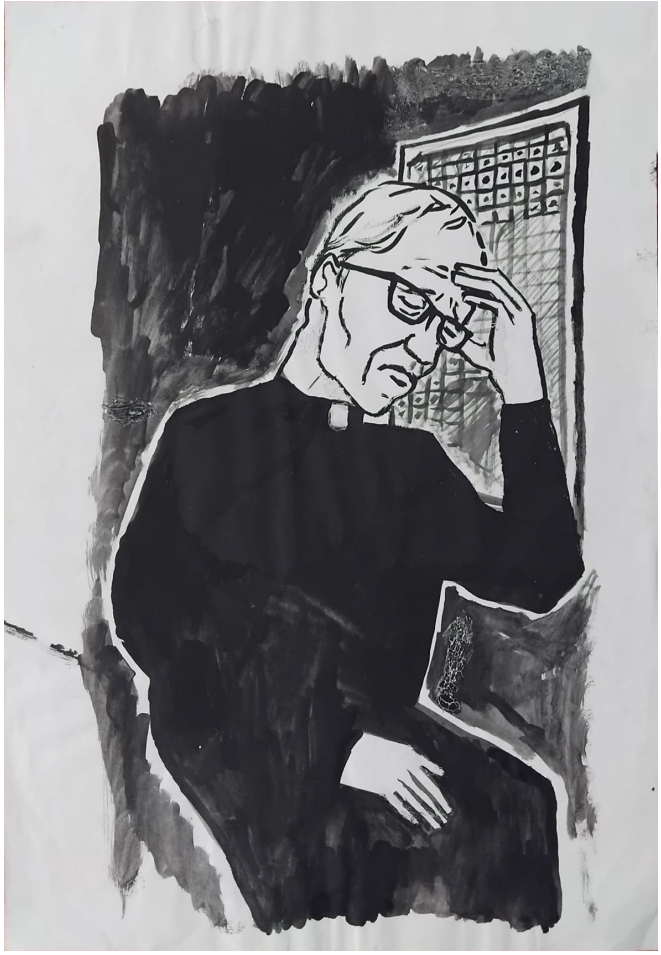
Culture as a Dare: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2xCk5tUPPA*

Lee Hall: I used to put gigs on at the Railway and John used to do the sound. We had Silver Apples. I started working with another group called Culture as a Dare, so I'd do gigs through that, and I would say: "I'm only gonna do that if John's doing the sound!" That was like 2010, 2011. We put a few bands on from San Franscisco. I loved the Railway. It was a real hub for everyone, but Dave and Fi were a bit of a nightmare I must admit. You'd have to go up there and say: "Where's the mic?" You'd have to hunt the whole place through to find a mic. It was just chaos! But it was great. I'd just email the bands from the back of the LP, that's how it started for me. The first band I put on kind of thing was Sick Alps from SF. There was a bit of a scene going on. The Dead C.'s, garage, indy, DIY noise. So I just emailed them and on the strength of that I started getting contacts with promotors. And then they used to email me and I could choose what I liked. And I would only put on bands that I liked. So it was:" Can I put that band on, or that band on?" The Mentals, Nods, Holy Wave, John had loads of contacts in London. He used to put on Hudderfax a lot and Tom Scott, folk guy. He was connected with so many people in London. It's quite easy really cos they really run themselves. As long they turn up! And John would always be there doing the sound.

Sic Alps: *https://sicalps.bandcamp.com/album/shes-on-top*
The Dead C: *https://languagerecordings.bandcamp.com/album/horror-stories*
The Mentals: *https://thementals1.bandcamp.com/track/cassette-loop-yesterday-tomorrow*
Nods: *https://thenods.bandcamp.com/album/the-nods*
Holy Wave: *https://holywave.bandcamp.com/album/studio-22-singles-and-b-sides*

Davy, Paul and Jim: I wonder if he ever realised. He probably didn't realise, I mean, I don't know if there was, I suppose because I was just growing up as the studio was taking off and it always seems like, looking back, that was a really important time in your life and it seems like everything that was around at that time was really important, but it does seem like there was some quite important and influential bands happening at that time and there was always a common denominator and that common denominator was John. And there isn't anybody else like that. There can't be because if you're all connected by this one place which you all go to, there's that one person. That makes him kind of unique. In addition to the fact that he was a brilliant individual which makes it even better. He was kind of the centre point for all the different bands that were doing stuff. And there were so many of us. I mean there was a lot of us. So many bands and so many recordings of his. Cars as Weapons, Nasty Bastard, Death Skulls, Copperpot Journals, Kids Near Water, When Animals Attack, Cable.

Nasty Bastard: *https://nastybastardebd.bandcamp.com/album/crash-bang-wallop*
Copperpot Journals: *https://thecopperpotjournals.bandcamp.com/album/pilots*
Kids Near Water: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mGewLg1qNo*
When Animals Attack: *https://whenanimalsattack.bandcamp.com/album/new-demos*



The Artist

Jane Hannon: He was always really good at art- that was his passion before music. He just used to draw a lot. My dad liked to draw, and my dad liked to play music, but John surpassed him in both those areas like within seconds, it was almost embarrassing. My dad had a sketchbook that he kept, and he always assured me that they were excellent, and John just had that knack. He did art at school. He was always doing caricatures of all of the teachers at school, and he got into so much trouble for it. We were living together and talking, and the phone rang and I answered it and it was only a short conversation, but when it was finished, he had drawn me in biro. And whenever he wrote you a message there would always be a little picture with it. Incredibly talented. When we were living together and we never had any money, I would always say at Christmas: "Do me a picture", or "Frame me one of your pictures". He did a Graphic Design HND and got a first for it, but he got more into music then. He had been thinking that graphic design was going to be his thing but then the record deal happened and that changed things. For the first album cover and singles and posters, he always did his own artwork and as we got older he got into painting. His tastes would change.

Tim Keech: The last time I was in the studio, I'd been doing some home recordings and I went in and said to John that I just wanted to master something, my home recordings – more cerebral, experimental stuff. John hears this and says: "This is really good stuff, Tim. Why don't you do some of it live?" And I'm a bit taken aback. "Oh, this is just stuff I've experimented with at home, the freedom of doing it by yourself." And John said: "Why don't we try making some of this in the studio?" And it was so tragic that I had just started to make use of his studio as an instrument, rather than going in there with things ready to record, and we made this album that John played on too, clarinet and violin and piano. It was just at the point where I felt that I had matured as an artist and being able to use the studio as an instrument and not just a place to record in with instruments and that was a beautiful experience, and I knew that was something that I was going to be back every year to do. Like other people in Southend – like my mate, Matt, Roy – going back every year and it was something cyclical that they just had to do. I knew that I would do this with John, as well as recording with a band there too, and I knew this was a new way of working with John that was wonderful, a new direction and I would do with this John, a brand-new way for me of working with John in the studio. He was a great clarinet player, a great bass player, guitarist, violin player of course, percussionist and he always had ideas and input.

Artwork by John

Always. One of my biggest regrets was that I didn't ask him to do something earlier – like the girl you like that you never ask to go out with.

Davy, Paul and Jim: When we were recording with him, I always used to like his appetite for just doing something different. So you'd have your standardised two guitars, drum and bass vocal and the rest of it, whatever, and he was always trying to find a different kind of sound, use a different pedal or something and he was really almost embarrassed or something, or he'd come across a bit embarrassed, that his band was so generic to him, Understand, and he was very much into that experimental thing with Woe and Liberez and things like that. You could tell that if he could ever bring something to it, the recording, he would love it, grab it with two hands, pick up this pedal or want to mess about with that, reversing something or whatever. I always used to like those kinds of times when he'd get stuck into it and you'd see his eyes sort of light up. Cos I think it could have been quite a challenging job. It sounds like a dream job, being an engineer, but you've gotta make ends meet and you've got some bands that you really aren't into, and you've got to put up with it. It's a challenge, you know?

Michelle Hurst: I saw him prepare for a performance once which sticks in my mind. I didn't actually go to the performance, and I only saw it through his mind and what he was explaining, saw the photos afterwards and sort of linked them together. He was doing a sort of installation piece that was somewhere, I think in a gallery or something. If I find the photo I will know where it was. He had this piece that he had written on his violin, fiddle. It was kind of a hospital theme and he wanted to create not just the sound of a hospital but also the smell and the lightings he was preparing and he was testing like surgical spirit smell in a bucket and try and waft it round and see what would work to give them the four or five dimensional or two dimensional experience. I remember him preparing for that and just seeing the kind of consideration and again the gentle, humble exploration he was going through just to do that. I think when people pass away people only think of the good but with him, he genuinely was.

Dave Burke: I saw him in one of the early iterations of Liberez about ten years ago. John was very interested in staging and art, directing the way that the performance would look and questioning what it meant to stand on stage and perform, that transactional thing of being in front of an audience, that you present yourself and what that actually means was something he would think long and hard about. It's interesting to watch any band really, what it is they are trying to say about themselves in the way they present. The basic bass, guitar, drums set up and the chatty singer, whatever it might be. We would always interrogate that. I think that the way I present myself when I'm on stage is kind of influenced by that kind of understanding. It's significant. The way he would dress the stage, for performances. There might be sheets up so that you couldn't see all the performers, shadows, tons of atmosphere. So when I first saw them upstairs at the Railway, very carefully curated.

Rob Scillitoe: A few years ago the company decided that we should try to reproduce the sound of Royal Trux for commercial purposes, and I think we got a bit too much carried away with enjoying the sounds we were hearing on the record that we re-created it a bit too accurately and defeated the whole object. That was a lot of fun though. John was really putting his ear to work out how they got their sound, their techniques, which I think he found interesting and it was a good sound.



John's laptop troubles, photo by Heather Leigh

Heather Leigh: I mean, I knew he was really struggling financially, keeping that going and everything was falling apart, not so much at the studio but for instance at one of the first gigs we were playing in a place in Todmorden called the Golden Lion. It has quite a reputation. We played a show there, but his laptop totally crapped out before the show was

gonna start and he was like: "Oh shit!" And this was actually the first time I did the material all on my own and then I realised: "Oh, this is actually working better!" But I remember that night, gee he was so sad and embarrassed, and he didn't want me to pay him, but I was: "No, sorry, you are definitely not not getting paid just because your laptop crapped out. Shit happens" cos he had travelled up and everything.

David Vick: Apart from the fact that I was really busy trying to get my life together and becoming a teacher and at the same time the boys being born and dragged up, so having nothing like the amount of time I would have wanted to be out and about with John (and my social life comprised of little else, frankly, at that time) it was John always taking off to exotic places, chasing up some music he was investigating, rembetika or flamenco or sufi or something of the like in Greece or Spain or Marrekesh or somewhere, or checking out Bosnia or Lithuania. Budapest to catch some romany music, or in France that big festival at Sainte Marie de la mer, Krakow to search for some mazurka and visiting Auschwitz while he was there, the Celtic-influenced culture in Santiago de conpostela. He was in Latvia and Estonia, invited by a friend who moved out there. I think he did a solo show there. I don't know how he did it on that budget but he certainly knew what he wanted to spend it on. Totally committed culture tourist. Archivist more like. Reminded me of the Joe Strummer or Henry Rollins mentality, using the touring situation to go out with a notebook and camera where ever they landed. Getting songs out of it as well, likely or not. Another reason, apart from the obvious, why his parting was such a blow was I had been really looking forward to going with him when I started to stop working. Not that it wasn't on the cards a few times, walking on the Rhine or sailing over to the North German coast or joining him in Marseille were all spoken about at some stage or another.

Tim Keech: He loved going abroad on his own, exploring cities on his own, the musical or cultural voyeur with the camera, come back with all these photos and he got such an energy from doing that and picking up on different musical styles from doing that from going to eastern Europe. He comes back and it was: "Have you seen this?" and "I just wandered into this, uncovered this", and this would infuse his work.

Michelle Hurst: He'd go off on these trips and take all this incredible photography and tell these stories. He'd go somewhere, off on these missions to photograph flamenco dancers and record their music cos he was so interested in that music and their history and culture. And he'd just go off and it was about him experiencing it and recording it. It wasn't about anything else. No ego to it. That's sort of struck out with me.

Tim Keech: In the last couple of years, I remember him saying to me that him and Amy had just decided to just say "Yes" to everything, and in this mindset to do as much as possible with other people. He loved and appreciated and was fascinated by people with different outlooks, not just artistic outlooks but people with quirks in their personality, who did things differently. He was kind of intrigued by that and respected that, people who saw things from different perspectives and was very fascinated by people who saw things from quite extreme perspectives, and working with people who had artistic ideas and aspirations and helping them to pull them out and allowing people to release it.

Heather Leigh: Liberez was great. The last time I remember was in Bristol. Peter Brötzmann and I did a duo, and they supported and they were great. I thought it was a really interesting mixture of drone and folk melody and the Eastern European aspect. They were unique. There was nothing really quite like them. Even then there was quite a strong UK underground, but it was noise-based or kind of post-Fluxus, and I felt that that group had something that was quite separate, and I felt that way about John in general, that he always had a sense of... he was entrenched. Look at all the albums that he recorded. He was recording a lot of experimental musicians, but he was kind of outside of it too. I always thought that he had this interesting place where he was just doing his own thing. Which I always respect and I am attracted to, and that was an aspect of my working with him. It's an aspect of my own work that I have never slotted into a scene in that way. That can leave a lot of freedom, and I think that in the recording with him as well, making the album with him, that nothing was standard in a way.

Dave Burke: He was an artist in that way, really, of being quite confrontational in his approach and difficult, and I think his music overtime evolved into being increasingly challenging but at the same time beautiful.

There was more elegance and creativity in what was going on over time, despite the sort of spiky nature as it might be seen from the outside, there was a real journey - an awful word but in this case a real journey, and it was heading somewhere increasingly personal over time. You couldn't really pigeonhole where he was at, considering his roots and the kind of garage stuff he came from. That was really something from his past and he never got stuck in that culture. He was always shifting forward and always so knowledgeable about everything. He could place everything in context, and his understanding of the different protagonists within the different musical genres and films was second to none. More so than anyone one else I have ever met, anyway, who claims to be knowledgeable in that world. He really did know that stuff, and he knew that stuff because he was passionate about it. And he was constantly developing that understanding.

Aaron Shrimpton: Then I remember coming back from uni and bumping into him and asking John: "Can I make a music video to one of your tracks?" and he gave me this CD and I made like a portrait of myself - I was into photography and moving image - and I made this kind of like intense portrait and I used my own face. It wasn't meant to be about me per se - probably a bit shy and I just didn't have the confidence to ask someone else - and I made this intense portrait and shared it on Myspace and I got lots of real interest and comments. But as you know, make any video to music, the music is probably the thing that people are registering to. And I remember showing it to John and, I dunno, he didn't really know what to say. It was a bit experimental and all that and he didn't say anything, and when I look back, I think he probably didn't like it and didn't know what to say, but John being John he was very polite about it all. I remember bumping into - can't remember her name, quite short, black hair, went out with her for quite a while, was that Kirstie? - and I remember, I had just fragments which I recorded and kind of made a loop, So I kind of added to the music in the video and he obviously didn't like that bit, me adapting the music, 22-year-old, ad-libbing bits from his music, because she politely said to me: "Why did you do that to John's music?!"

Pippa Wragg: But one thing that John told me was, how he really saw his job which was that he felt he was more of a documenter of what a band was doing. He was just making the record that was making them into something. People came to him and he just captured where they were at that point, and so that bands that came over and over, these were snapshots of a band's development or journey. He recorded more of a document of what the band were making. Most people who recorded bands would see themselves as creative, and he obviously was very creative but he must have not been that aware of that. It was totally natural to him and he wasn't aware of that. It was like: "No, they just come to me and I record it." The way he should say: "Yeah, that's good that's good – but I think you've got a better one." And you're thinking: "Oh that's good." Then later you're thinking: "Oh no, actually he thought it wasn't!"

John Hannon (emails): Not sure if you remember me talking ages and ages ago about making a short film, liberez-related, where i wanted the music and action to be combined. Kind of like if the orchestra were in shot of a film? Anyway i never really came up with the right idea or it just never felt real enough for us to pull off but i think we may have started the process with some film makers we know. When we played in Lithuania, we played this really amazingly depressing place called Jonava. After the gig, which was in a community, center we were invited to this high rise block party. I assumed it was a squat as it had no running water but turns out it wasn't. Anyway all the Lithuanians do this thing where they sit in a circle with one giant bottle of lemonade and another one of cheapo vodka. They pass both bottles around like pass the parcel and you're meant to swig out of both bottles as everyone gets shit faced. There's also this tradition in Lithuania called Sutartines which is this singing game. it's very much like the children's song London's Burning with overlapping lyrics and melodies. Anyway, the idea is to kind of recreate this with our numerous London Lithuanian friends in a kind of retarded Liberez way with us actually playing in the room but more as if we were the soundtrack than some kind of performance. Early stages but i'm quite excited about it.
Not sure if i mentioned this but next Saturday I'm part of this installation. I've been paired up in this sculpture artist called Lisa Selby. We've been asked to collaborate on this installation in a second world war pill-box in rural Rettendon. I've included the flyer. I really like her work and she works with very domestic materials like wall paper, illuminated washing up liquid. Cut a long story short - i've been to a few of these music art collabs organised by the same people and they've been pretty lame so i was keen to do something different. She had a strong idea of what she wanted to do so i decided to go with her. She was also keen for me to play

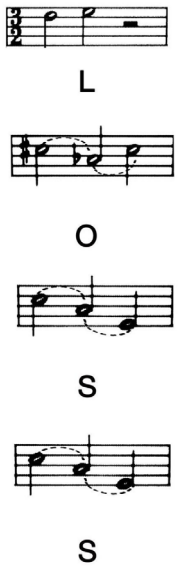


John performing in Rettenden, photos by Un3 Joe and Charlotte

the violin live. Asking her about her work she said the overriding emotion/inspiration is loss. I kept coming back to this. I really wanted to not do anything connected with the emotional attachment to what the word meant, so decided i'd just try and play the word musically. By which i mean just how the letters look in a kind of sculptural way. The L being 2 sounds sounds the O being a circular tone etc. I have to perform this on Saturday. I'm pretty nervous about it because it's quite tricky. I've demo'd an abbreviated version of it which i've included in a link. It's about 30 mins long in the recording but will be double that on the day. It's very slow. The first 8 mins are just the L then 8 mins followed by the O. By the end you hear the whole word and it slowly turns into a piece of music. I'm working on a notation of the music which i've included. It's not actually correct yet but the artist doesn't want it included anyway ha ha. I'm kind of on my own on this one as nobody seems to like the idea. I'll be keen to know if you think it works..obviously its hard to say as it's only a small part of a much larger piece of work and her sculpture is great.

Also have been working with this artist who had this show at the Serpentine. I got to do the sound design. I also got a credit as composer...which wasn't strictly true ha ha but what the hell. The artist is George Henry Longly. It was a catwalk show that he recreated...wasn't really my thing but was a lot of fun. Ha ha well I wrote and made the music but it was it was very much under the artists direction. We only had 3 hours total and he said he wanted it to sound like a (in my opinion) very cheesy fragrance ad.

Next week my sea faring dreams may come true as i'm recording a string quartet plus opera singer on a cockle boat out on the Estuary. It's a piece of artwork that i'm just working on from a technical point of view but should be good fun...can't wait.



Score for Lisa Selby Scultpture



The Musician

Ross Baker: This is just a tiny sound bite, but my brother was heavily involved in late 90's/early 00's, he was on the periphery of it, but there was a UK hip hop scene, this guy called Skinny Man, I think this was where John was just keeping his blinkers completely open and long story short, he ended up playing bass on this remix that my brother was mixing. I'm not a hip hop fan but somewhere out there there's this Skinny Man 12" with a B side remix of John Hannon's bass playing on it. I'm sure that's one of many examples of his far-reaching ways. Just that whole attitude he had where he was just an individual, but he would share those views and opinions he had, certainly of music in terms of how you produce.

Tim Holehouse: I was a fan of what John did. Not just the recording but I really like the music he made, and I was a big fan. So humble and he would bat it away, but I was like: "I really like what you do." A very talented musician, taught himself the violin, trumpet, a guitar player by trade, could play the drums, pick up some weird instrument like a marimba and start playing it. You'd go in on a break, and he'd be bashing away at it. I would be "You are so talented, mate" and he would make nothing of it.

Heather Leigh: Then I just got a sense of how much he was working with so many different kinds of music. I had the impression that he was some kind of folkist in this sort of experimental world, but I soon saw how entrenched he was in this, and he'd been doing it for a while. So, we did the album and then we did some live work together because he did some strings and added some beats that I thought would work really well with me live. At this time, I was just doing solo singing with the pedal steel and I wanted another element, you know. And we had a nice time.

Davy, Paul and Jim: Oh yeah. I mean I never really thought about it. But probably because you're a guitarist and so is he, but I didn't really think about his guitar playing. Retrospectively I probably should have been. I suppose the moment he clicked to me once was when I was playing something and he said: "I need to have a look at your guitar:" And then he more or less stripped it to pieces, completely re-set it up and I was thinking: "This guy knows a bit more than I expected." He actually put all of my intonation back. And I was thinking: "Hang on a second." Then I was a bit nervous, cos I was thinking: "Hold on, I don't know how to do any of this. I didn't know what these things did and he put it all back and said: "Now we're ready." And I thought: "Here we go!"

Michelle Bappoo: February 2017 it started, and all I've got is that on this day John played the claves. He'd say: "This is good but maybe you need a different sound or texture" cos I literally just had my acoustic guitar and the songs, so he would add embellishments, things like the claves, violin, harmonica, and to

John performing, photo credit unknown

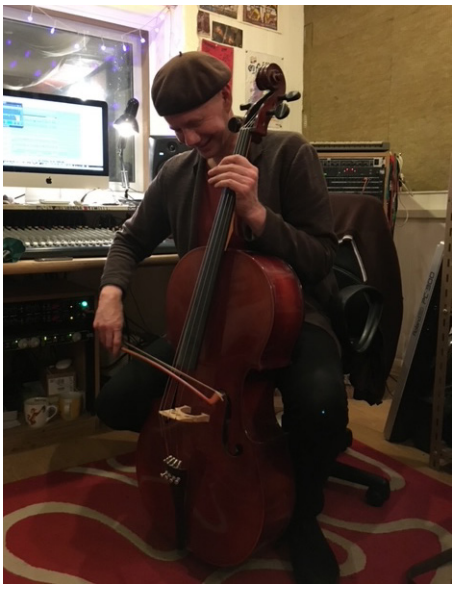
the arrangements I think as well. Something I wasn't very confident with. He'd say: "You could extend the middle eight or do something with the introduction." If it was up to me, I think all of the songs would start and finish the same! Having only ever played on other people's stuff, I'd never had to arrange my own things.

Matt Randall: He believed in the theory side of the music as well, didn't he. He was always saying to me: "You're doing a lot of these things, but it would be worth having lessons in piano, or you know any instrument you don't play, so you can work out why you're doing it, you know," I still haven't done it but I do intend to. He was always trying things out, he was always messing around with equipment wasn't he, like keyboards and clocks and things, if he could adapt that, you know use that in a song he'd love it, a bit of kit that he had or bought or something. He was definitely more accepting of melody as well, there was a time when he almost steered away from it, there was far more melody creeping into his music as well.

James Blackshaw: It's funny because John was one of the least pretentious people I've met, and he'd be quite happy to talk about what he was trying to do but I think that in some ways he wasn't overly conceptualising it himself. He'd get quite obsessed with a certain thing and it could be anything from, like, some quite obscure regional folk music that sounded odd to him or different, or it could be a speech pattern or weird social tricks that he'd found or was playing with, and it would form the basis of whatever he was doing with whoever he was doing it with. Obviously, the violin became for him like a tool, like he'd got a bit jaded with guitar, and it wasn't doing sonically for him what he wanted to do with music and for while he was just working with sound and manipulating them and he found with violin he had another tool he could use in that sense. It changed so much in that time, and it seemed to me that he was getting more and more... not confident because I think he was never not confident, but he was so not pushy to the extent that he was quite laid back. He was super involved in what he did, very serious about what he did, but he wasn't particularly interested in like pushing it on people. But later on, as far I know, he becomes more confident to say: "I'm doing this. Are you interested in having it on your label? Could we play a show?" And it felt like he was doing more, sadly, before he passed away.

Tim Holehouse: Me and John did some jazzy stuff together as well which was something I hadn't really explored. John just encouraged me. Even on one of the tracks on Oddeven is when I had a lick and he said why don't you just play it like this, and it all sounds a bit lounge jazz or something. I even gave him a writing credit on it and he kept saying: "You didn't need to do that" or more "Don't give me a writing credit, I didn't write I just showed you a chord!" Humble as he was.

Davy, Paul and Jim: I think the reason I really didn't worry about my guitar playing was because that he seemed to pick up almost any instrument and just have a go at it. I mean, I wouldn't say he was the best violinist in the world, but he did make it sound pretty good. He just had no fear, he just played it. We used to describe how we wrote songs as in colours or animals, and I think Hannon had a way of playing, whether it was, I mean, I very rarely saw him play guitar, but it might be just something like a piano. I remember that he got a piano in the studio, in the live room, and we were like: "Can you play?" and he was: "Not really." And it was one of the scenarios that you know that if you nag him enough, he would eventually play something. So we're like badgering him, saying "Go on John, play a bit of piano, go on". "No, no, I'm not gonna do it." Then as he was walking past, he literally played like four or five notes, like a jazz chord, and it was like colours had just come out of this piano. And it was almost like: "Shut up. Leave me alone." I think he was a very musical guy, and I never saw him play guitar, not in person, apart from that time he sorted my guitar out, and then he played a few chords on it and gave it back to me and it was a bit like in Back to the Future where Marty McFly snaps that kid's thing off and uses it as a hoverboard and then he gives it back to him. It was a bit like that. He gave the guitar back and I was looking at it like it was a different sort of thing: "It doesn't do that when I use it! Hold on a second - sounds completely different!"



John at NO, photo by Michelle Bappoo



John Hannon as such

Davy, Paul and Jim: The coffee was always in the freezer, by the way. He had his filter coffee that he had in the freezer, always. Only person I know who used to do that. I did learn how to make a coffee press work from John. I had no idea how to make a coffee. Bearing in mind that he was such a placid guy, I do remember him losing his shit once because someone put boiling water on the coffee. He was like: "Noooooooo!" Unleashed the demon.

Matt Randall: John was a bit of a control freak as well, he wanted everything right, he totally believed in people sharing ideas but he had very fixed ideas about how he wanted to sound. I remember going in the studio and him spending hours over getting a drone or a sort of bass, he became obsessed. With a lot of those Liberez records, there's real layer of bass underneath it all, like a rumble you know.

Tim Keech: There was Culture is a Dare which John would often do the sound for before he started doing Hello You. One of the most famous nights was with Calvin Johnson from Beat Happening at the Fisherman's Chapel, a legendary night and in the typical lo-fi fashion. Calvin was going to stay at Amy and John's house and apparently Calvin and John's relationship was a strange one in that he rubbed up against John and John would always roll his eyes about it when you asked him about It. But it was an amazing night cos Calvin's a great artist. There was a funny dynamic going on that day. It was the other side of John. With John, with all the great network that he had, the amazing talent that he had, musicality and all the people that loved him, there was a side of him that was socially very awkward, which is of course true of most artists and people who are very expressive, the talent he had. I think there was a perfect coming together of this with Calvin and different from what people would have thought it would have been, like a beautiful meeting of minds - it was sort of more of a collision.

Calvin Johnson: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJprQ90pw0s*

Matt Reay: I saw John getting frustrated but never losing it, even when people lost it with him. We started rehearsing at Red Church studios, and Fred was the guy there. We'd been rehearsing there for a long time and, for whatever reason, I don't know if it was a miscommunication, he went properly off at all of us. For some reason he thought we'd pushed him too far and exhausted his generosity and taken the piss, basically, and he got really aggressive. John didn't blow off or anything but over time we came back together, and it all worked out. I think John could mediate those kinds of tensions. There was one gig, which was a really

Photo by Jane Hannon

weird gig. There was a different expectation. We were there to play our music, and it was someone off in the distance that didn't like it. We were making such a big noise, and this was only the soundcheck. He came in screaming at us, really annoyed. But John wasn't like that. You've sort of lost, in a way, and I don't think that was possible for John. But he would get impatient. Little things, like us jamming - he hated that, give us five minutes but then get us back on track. He was like that in recording as well. You could definitely tell that John wouldn't tolerate multiple vocal takes. He was of the mind that if you didn't get in the first five then - at least that day - it's not going to change anything, so he would start chopping it all together and control it that way. He wouldn't entertain any of that. He was quite flexible but if something wasn't working, he would wanna move on. "There's no point. If it's not really there, move on." Comes back to that point that whatever is in front of you, you make it work and if it's not working, try a different approach. So he would get impatient with that, and he would redirect in a different kind of direction. And if anyone was like, when we were playing gigs, like wasting time. If anyone was messing about or wasn't focussed you could tell it riled him a bit and he would get a bit uptight. But he would only get tense, a bit short, never lose it. It never even felt like it. Even if people were getting into quite heated political debates or something, he was always sort of above it, heard it all before. Also, I suppose that in the capacity that I knew John, it was always encouraging creatively. For me he was always someone I looked up to who would also sort of allow a space for me to feel like the kind of films and animations I liked really suited what John was doing musically, and this created a great avenue for me to put stuff into the band. He would say: "I'm such a weirdo" I would think: "You're not a weirdo, you're one of the most sociable people I've met. You've got endless stories, you're easy to talk to." But I gather that his impression of himself was that he was this slightly odd, strange character. Which is interesting because he was very confident but then also very unconfident in that way. So it was a strange mix. He liked stuff that was way weirder than stuff I was interested in, so it allowed me to do all this kind of stuff that I wouldn't normally do, I wasn't redirected in a more polished or commercial or palatable way. It was more: "What your doing is great. Just wanna see more of that." That's what it was all about.

Heather Leigh: And in the same with travelling with him, he was so easy going. Having said that he also didn't mince words. There were a few situations where we dealt with like shitty sound guys or shitty booking agents or whatever and he would just be silent or not get involved and then afterwards: "Man, that guy was a fucking dick!" Though he had this soft and gentle aspect you could tell that he was reading everything.

Michael Kasparis: I played with Liberez twice. When I put the album out we did a launch at Cafe Oto and because I was doing the launch they got me to perform too and he was, again, just really accommodating. I mean it was his album launch but, like every other aspect of his life, he was very open to sharing with other people. He almost never emphasised himself or centred himself. It was always about helping other people. That's something that you might always hear about people who have gone now but he really was like that.

Michelle Hurst: We was talking one day over dinner and I was saying this embarrassing story that had happened to me (and I have so many embarrassing stories!) and he listened, and laughed, and then he wanted to share an embarrassing story and whenever I tell this story to anyone else I have to say to them this was not said in a showing-off way, cos he wasn't like that. He genuinely was embarrassed, but I think it is the coolest story I have ever heard in my life. It was the one with Rage Against the Machine. Have you heard this story? I can't believe you haven't heard this story! Well, I'm very honoured to share it. So he tells me he was in London in the 90s and he was in a house gathering with his band and one of the band said: "Oh I've met this really cool bassist who's from America and he wanted to come and jam, and it was: "Yeah, of course." So these American guys came round and they're having a cool time, jamming and hanging out and they said: "Oh we're on The Word tomorrow. Come along, come along" and all the rest of it. And it turned out it was Rage Against the Machine he was drumming with. So that's how they got into The Word and ultimately his embarrassing story was - have you heard this part? Obviously, this is when Rage then became big after they had been on The Word. So, he says: "Come along" and they get into the studio and Rage go on and do Killing in the Name Of or whatever it was, and John is in the crowd and he's just enjoying his life, and he gets crowd surfed along and he gets in shot! And it's one of the iconic things from The Word and it's like -and I think only recently they did a 20th anniversary or something and they showed it - and this is John's big embarrassing thing! This little seventeen-year-old crowd surfing and it's so embarrassing? No, it's really cool! And that is

what's so cool about him. He genuinely thought that was embarrassing and I thought it was the coolest thing I've ever heard in my life. That's him all over, isn't it?

Tim Keech: I recently put out a post saying how much I miss John cos he had such a great bullshit detector. Some of the crap going on in the world just now I would love to get John's take on. He so loved to talk about his perspective, and it was always fascinating and he was always interested in your perspective on things. Just anything - what was going on in the world, social stuff, friends and other people and he was just someone that you really valued, their world view and perspective.

Davy, Paul and Jim: We were youngsters. He was young too, but we were always pushing John too, his character. And his hat was always a feature, and his bike. That bike! We'd be waiting at the studio for him, and you'd always hear him coming on this old-style bike and his bell. But did he ride his bike all the way from Southend? I used to think that. I used to give him a lift home. I'd say: "No, John, it's dark down there. It's January" and take him home and he'd appreciate that. Did that a few times so with the lift home, I spent quite a lot of time with him and oddly, I can't remember a lot of the stories but he was always so pleasant to be around, his whole vibe and everything. I always thought it would be awkward because of his character, but it never was. I mean, he was just a character. I also inherited John's wave. Cos John had a wave that nobody else had but I've got it now. It's this. Not like this or that. Just the flat. A unique dude, man. And always chewing a pen, as well. One of the things I also got from John - and you'll definitely remember this one - was, if he got something for free, he used to say: "Freemans" as in Freemans's catalogue. And I use that still today. If I get something for nothing it's "a Freemans". There was an Indian takeaway that opened on the farm, and we used to get food from there and if we bought him something and didn't ask him for anything for it, he would say: "Freemans", and we would all burst out laughing. And he told me the story was because of the Freeman's catalogue. He used to get his mum to buy him things from the Freeman's catalogue and sometimes it didn't cost anything, and he thought it was called Freemans because it was free. And it wasn't just for things that were free, it was for everything. "Can we make it sound a bit more boxy?" he'd say: "Yeahmans."

Roy Thirlwell: So generous and good natured and he was messed around by a lot of people. There was one guy in particular who booked him three times, never turned up, never paid any money in compensation and John was always: "Well, I just won't deal with him." But there was never any anger in him. or nothing that came out in a violent or aggressive way. There's this guy _____. He's been around since the 80s. He met Johnny Thunders once in the 80s and spent the rest of his life telling everyone about it. He really abused John's good nature in that, at the very least, you'd book a half-session if you couldn't afford much. He'd almost book John by the half-hour! And he was a bit of a technophobe, and he'd get John to burn a load of CDs for him. And, invariably, John wouldn't charge him for it or go knocking on his door saying: "You've gotta pay me for that."

Richie Harwood: John had about six or seven years on me. I grew up in Southend and I was really into playing in bands, started when I was 12 or 13. When you are growing up in Southend and you discovered that there was this local band which was touring and playing with bands that you knew and listened to, like Helmet and Jawbox and all that type of stuff, that kind of seemed almost otherworldly, cos Southend, even though it is close to London, it is really like a working class backwater. So it seemed pretty exciting that there was this band that you were seeing in Kerrang was from Southend. But I was really into bands like Girls Against Boys and the Jesus Lizard and I didn't know John at this time but I was probably about 17, and I'd seen Understand a couple of times at the Esplanade and what have you, and he was quite a distinctive looking fellow, John, very distinctive, and always had the flat cap and what have you. I remember seeing him on Southchurch Road. There used to be a music shop there called Honkytonk which was by the Warrior Square flat which he shared with Jane, and I remember seeing him in the street. I am not a particularly outgoing person but from a musical point of view I was always quite excitable. So I remember sort of doorstopping him in the street and going up to him and introducing myself and I probably just told him that I really liked his band or what have you and then he sort of asked what I was into and I probably said bands like Fugazi and Girls Against Boys and we had a really nice chat. And he said: "Do you want to come up for a cup of tea? I just live over there." Bearing in mind that I would have been about 17 or 18 or something and John's probably about 25. We just

went up to the flat and listened to some different bands that he was into, talked about films, I think we were both into Naked by Mike Leigh and Rumblefish rings a bell, that Francis Ford Coppola movie. So, he sort of turned me onto some good stuff from the off. I think he gave me Woe, maybe their first CD or seven-inch, and that was the kind of stuff that I wanted to be doing. That has always really touched me. I mean if someone came up to me in the street, I might think that was really nice and have a chat for a couple of minutes but that would probably be it. I probably wouldn't think to invite that person into my space. I thought that was quite telling of the kind of person John was.

Lee Hall: You can't beat someone like him giving you a compliment. I always remember it. Always. He said to me - I was in Beatglider and we had a song called Rattlesnake and he didn't have to say this to me, but he said: "Lee, I think that song is the best thing I have recorded so far." And it was really lovely. He didn't have to say that. That kind of made me melt. He might not have meant it, but it worked! He would definitely speak his mind. He would tell me to shut up as well!

Roy Thirlwell: Some of this is hindsight and really just my interpretation of things: there were also phases of no-John. There were times when he was there but really somewhere else. When he would be quite lost, just romantically, again, making himself the butt of the joke, talking about his latest failed date where the woman talked about her boyfriend, texting someone else the whole way through. All this stuff where it was clear from the start that it was doomed. The really nice thing of the eleven or twelve years that I knew John was, that it was always getting better for him. And the last three years I just think he was so happy, and I think he was just so happy with Amy. There was kind of a barrier, a distance, between him and everyone else, and that changed with Amy. He became much more of a sociable person. And Amy has no illusions about this that, for the first six months after they had been put together by, I think it was Elisa, she was just 'this woman I'm kind of seeing' and he'd never say that they were together. And he said right from the start: "Look, we are never going to live together." And eventually it was him suggesting to her that they move in with each other. It was as if the profile he had in his mind was never going to work, and with Amy it just came together.

Heather Leigh: But in that time where we were travelling together, we didn't talk a whole lot about his history. I knew about Amy. I met her once. So I could tell he was very serious about the relationship, being with her and wanting to help with her son, and he just seemed to be a very kind partner, someone that wanted to be in that relationship. He was very honest about that cos I wanted to tour the states and he was: "I can't do that. Not only in terms of work but also not leaving Amy for long like that." He was very clear on his priorities as far as that went.

Davy, Paul and Jim: He would make time for people as well. I would see him around in Southend and always make a point of stop for a chat but I also thought, are we friends or am I just someone who rents the room behind the recording room? But then he would always seek you out and come and say hallo. I think what done me in was, Jimmy and I had gone to Bath to watch the football, a tournament, and there was a pal of ours, one of our only friends who was never in bands but he was bang into his music and John would talk to him for ages, and it was quite a long time after he'd passed and John's name came up in conversation and Steve said: "Well, I never really knew him" and I said: "John said, I know Stevie, he's cool." And I think Steve was a bit taken back. It was a bit of a pin drop moment. Cos while we had him on this kind of pedestal, he always made time to chat with people. Steve was really surprised. Just thought he was some kind of random guy.

Heather Leigh: One of the things he gifted was to my husband, David, in the studio. This book that someone had given to John was this Claudia Roden Jewish cookbook. It is considered an absolute classic. That book has become a staple in our cooking and our diet, David is a master chef, and John could see he was interested in that book and John was like: "Just take it:" And David was like: "Let me buy it." But John was like "No, just take it" and that was so typical. It's not so unusual in that situation when everybody's struggling, myself included, when people are so generous and that John was just like that, just so thoughtful, very sweet and someone that I had imagined that I would always be friends with too, always be in touch with. I wanted nothing but the best for him.

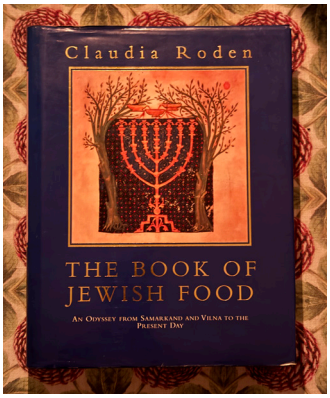


Photo by Heather Leigh

Nikki Nailbomb: We're not like professional or anything, we just know how to play. Like normal, a punk band, you know what I mean? Like my drums never got tuned until we went to John's. I can't tune drums to save me life, and he just used to do it all and that would do me until the next time I was in the studio. And I remember one time we was late to the studio, can't remember why, an hour and a half late and he's in there, and (it's still on my bass drum now) he must have been so bored that he made the word Deathskulls out of duct tape and put it on my bass drum.

Ross Baker: That was the one thing that sticks with me about him was his authenticity. There wasn't anything for show, he was a slightly kooky character but he was genuine and authentic and warm and you know, and I know I'm repeating myself from what I said earlier but it's just - call it serendipity or fate, but I'd done all this stuff in my late teens/early twenties and then you roll forward 20 or 22 years and a pandemic is the thing that spawns this! Obviously, a lot of people had a terrible time through the pandemic but I'm not going to lie to you, that first lockdown for me was pure joy, all the stuff we've spoken about, because that connection back with John and what I've achieved, that wouldn't have happened. I think even around the time that they were Understand and still on East West, when the EP came out, I think I was 16 or 17, having spoken to him during lockdown, he said to me "Ross, I didn't like what we were doing, my musical tastes had already moved."

Tim Holehouse: I went out with Pippa Wragg the other day and we were chatting for ages about John and saying how much of an important person he was in both our lives and even though she was in Exeter and he was in Southend she was probably more in touch with him than I was. Every time we'd catch up it would be fantastic. He was a very special person to me. I am a terrible person at keeping in touch and often I'd be booking the studio just to catch up with John! In fact the recording of No was just catching up during Lockdown and him just saying: "Have you got something on at the moment? Wanna come down to the studio? Let's just try some things." He'd come and see me at the Railway in Southend. I saw drunk John at the Railway one night! I'd played and Wilco Johnson was there buying us all drinks and we got completely smashed. So drunk John, like normal John but even more chatty and funny, arms and legs everywhere.

Roy Thirlwell: John's playful way of talking about things. We'd generally meet at Monty's café and this became The Mountain. We're meeting at the Mountain. Getting out of a taxi the other day and I said: "Do you want cashish?" That was a John word. Little affectations that make the world nicer. And his openness. I saw his music first of all as very abrasive and purposely other, wanting to alienate. But he was always open to hear the stuff I was listening to, what I was doing and why I liked it. He persevered with a couple of things I recommended to him that I liked. This is all in the context of ourselves and our own lives, something that makes sense to me may not make sense to somebody else. We had a thing about naff videos. He loved Carly Simon's 'Why' video and it is quite insane if you see it. She's just behaving very strangely in this video, and it must have been a fifty-dollar-to-make video. She's just in a café and just smiling at people going past and her face contorts. And 'Teardrops' by Womack and Womack, a song that we both love. They're in the studio and there's Womack and Womack being as cool as you like, and this idiot engineer looking at them going: 'Whaddya think? Whaddya think?' And if I found something that tickled him it felt so good: you know, tick one of John's boxes. The 10cc 'Dreadlock Holiday' video. That is pretty bad. We got this little playlist. If we met up, we'd go through the YouTube videos. And the days of John being more sociable and I'd love going round to see him in the garden, making some bruschetta and it was the generosity.

David Vick: And the book exchange thing. That became pretty compulsive with us. I was teaching literary studies so always had something on the go when we'd meet up or email and he was also finding things for me, Another Bloody Love Letter was one, journalist in the 90s in the Balkan war, Anthony Lloyd, he was really in awe of. The last one I was reading when I got the terrible news actually, which was Kurzio Malaparte's Kaputt. But also those modernist classics like Beckett (me) and Canetti (John), Ford Madox Ford (me) To the Lighthouse (him) and stuff. So we both had a thing for that kind of geo-political prose stuff and anything to do with Berlin of course. Berlin Blues (Herr Lehmann in German) by that guy from Element of Crime (me) and the WW 2 work of history Berlin by Anthony Beevor (me) about the fall of Berlin which I had as cassettes, or Fallada's Everyone Dies Alone (me), Isherwood's Goodbye to Berlin (John). I got him into Babylon Berlin and the novels it's based on, the Gereon Rath series by Volker Kutscher. Then that trilogy by Ismael Kadare set in Albania (John) and Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano (John) and Joey Goebel's Torture the Artist

(me) literary stuff we shared. That's not the half of it, you know! He could get through them. A new list with every email.

Matt Randall: I always thought of John as this incredibly experimental artist, but as he got older he was far more open to other things. I know him and Roy were talking about writing the most cheesiest pop song in the world and they were going to do it, and you know if you had an idea John was always like: "Lets do it, we can do that." He was far more open to more commercial music as he got older y' know, which I think he always was but I'd never really seen that side of him. The original view I had of John was far different by the end, he was far more of a normal guy than I thought he was I guess, just a lovely human being. I mean John had no time for bullshit did he, it's one of the things I liked about him, he was very straight in that respect. We had a friend, I won't mention his name, but a local person that came up to John in the pub and said to him I think the studio sounds great but I'm not sure about the drums and John took him really seriously and said: "We'll meet up and have a chat about this", because John always wanted to learn didn't he. So the guy said: "We'll meet up in Dalston", so John got the train up to Dalston to meet him and they got chatting and John said: "So where do you live?", and the guy said: "I live in Southend." So John said: "Then why are we meeting in London then?" This person just thought it was really cool to meet in East London and John had no time for any of that - he was probably the coolest person I ever met.

David Vick: One of my fondest memories for all kinds of reasons is when John came to visit here in Germany. We are on the line between Amsterdam and Berlin, just as you cross the border. So this one time, John had gone to visit Jane in Amsterdam with Amy and said he would have time to take the 3 hour train trip over to us for the evening if they could get the train back in the morning to fly back to Southend. As it happened, that week I was playing in a little concert at a venue nearby the station and, knowing this, I asked him if he could bring his violin and play something. The show was a sort-of 60s style folk evening in front of an audience of about 30-odd other old folky-fans (with the emphasis on 'old', we never know from year to year - it's an annual thing - who's still gonna be around the next year – seriously!) with two friends of mine who played that kind of music back then and we met up regularly to do those kind of tunes. The venue was this little wooden house back a ways from the station so it was all very doable and we were doing a set of tunes, one of which was the traditional 'Wayfaring Stranger' in the manner of the Johnny Cash version on one of those last records he made. We were doing three sets over two weeks and my wife was doing the violin part but couldn't make this evening so it was really cool that John could do it. I mean, it was not at all the sort of thing you would necessarily expect John to want to play or maybe even to know, but after all those violin exams it probably wasn't much of a challenge for him either! But, for me as a weekend-guitarist-who-likes-singing-in-the-bath, as I told Amy, I was more excited about John doing that than anything else about the gig. Which was true.

> *A short remembrance of John Hannon*
> *On 5 May 2021, musician and sound engineer John Hannon died unexpectedly*
> *John was a friend of David Vick, one of the contributors to the local folk concert series: 'Back in the old folky days" and, like David, came from the Thames Estuary town of Southend on Sea.*
> *John played the violin, ran a regionally renowned recording studio "NO RECORDINGS".*
> *And he followed his own vision. This vision brought him back again and again to concert tours in Europe and to performances that were very special and demanding. He was one of the pioneers who combined the violin playing with electronic sound sources. In this way he led his audiences to the most intensive most intense concert experiences. He also perfected this performance more and more in the studio.*
> *His name had a special sound in the scene.*
> *On one of his visits to Germany, David Vick brought him to a folk evening at the Bentwood Studio.*
> *And in the manner of the "Folkies", John Hannon simply played along with some of the songs and brought colour into the live music that is not often heard anymore: improvised, along melody lines and full of melody lines and full of verve.*
> *In our time of supposed perfection in everything, it became clear that the courage to take risks and the love of the intense moment are the way to a new kind of music and love of the intense moment is the path to a passionate life. John lived this path for almost fifty years. May he now rest in peace.*

Tribute to John in LaFamiglia

Tim Keech: And he cut this silhouette – the pork pie hat, a very striking, good-looking guy, very well-dressed, held himself with this particular posture, elegant. It was John. There was no other silhouette in the world that was like it. He was connected to so many different scenes and knew so many different people in Southend and London and in Europe. Anyone who saw that silhouette would say: "That's John." And he was a presence at any gig in Southend, leaning against the bar at any gig that was worth going to. You could always speak to him and it was always comforting, always had kind words. Funny, witty. One of these people you loved to bump into on a night out.

Roy Thirlwell: We would go to the Portugese cafè near Amy's and we would have that sort of mad conversation you have when you meet someone and you get on really well and have those kinds of conversations you couldn't have with anyone else. This is what we are all going to miss, aren't we? He was an idea's man. You're sitting there one day, and he'd say something like: Oh, by the way, just thought I'd let you know - I'm post-opinion now. So, then we'd suffer this for the next couple of years of John giving lots of every opinion under the sun but being post-opinion now, it was: "I just think..."

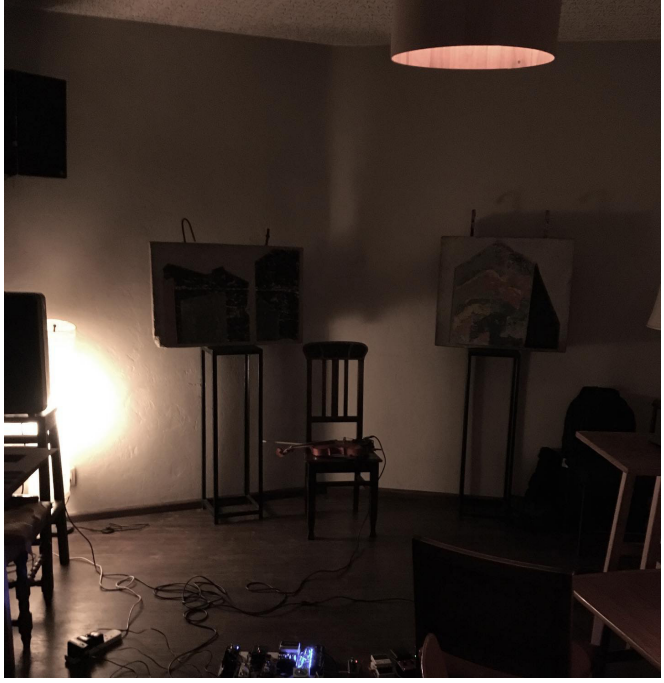
Aaron Shrimpton: It's quite hard to know how to make a film for John because he had such particular tastes and he'd hate anything that felt remotely mawkish, so he's quite a hard person to make something in tribute to, but something needs to be made. I've met a lot of people in music, and I've never met anyone like John. I've met a lot of people in my area and I've never met anyone like John. Times that by the scale of people and I think he's probably unique, you know?

Driftwood: ***https://www.instagram.com/p/DdWTbftCBKK/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&cplk=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==***

Michelle Hurst: I was really young when I first met John, 19, in 2003 or 2004, at the Sunrooms - cool music venue back in the day - and I was there a lot for music things, and he was there by the bar. I never saw him drunk but he would be there by the bar and I don't know how long that went on for, but one day he sparked a conversation, and we just became friends from that, really. And for the first four or five years it was just that - acquaintances who I would see, bump into again and again and we'd speak to each other and it was lovely and warm and then when I was about 25 we became closer, did things together, briefly dated - and even that is hard to understand, the time frame and what went on there either - but we came out of that friends still, and that's kind of a side street really outside of the orbits of what else was going on. But I know lots of his stories and his nature and momentary anecdotal things about him. I always felt he was special and amazing and it's one of those things that you think is going to be around forever. But it just struck how he was one of the most humble, gentle, intelligent, genuine men I have ever known, on reflection. So full of integrity and honesty. He saw me through - and I can't remember if this was before or after we dated but it didn't matter to him, cos he was so big-hearted and genuine - he saw me through a really awful break up but he also wouldn't take sides because we were in the same circles. My ex was a musician and they knew each other. He was just really steadfast, you know?



John at Rettenden, photo by Un3 Joe and Charlotte



28.
John gone

Jay Thornton: He arrived in a very formative time of my life. When someone has had such a formative effect on your life and they die suddenly - because he was really not a drinker, not a smoker, not overweight, really quite healthy, visually. To die suddenly - that's a shock and also to not be able to mourn him and go to the funeral. That has never happened to me before, and it's been a struggle to get over it. It's not like John and I spoke every week. We had sort of drifted apart but we were always close and would always speak a few times a year, but he was always a big presence in my life. And to not be able to mourn him. Every time I think about him, I can't quite fathom the situation. I can't believe he's not there. So, to be able to talk about him to someone and record that is a way to memorialise him, and to sort of have a funeral for him.

Ross Baker: I still live in Southend myself. I've lived in London and my wife and I have travelled around the world a bit, but we came back to Southend. His footprint here is that seismic. He was an underground lynchpin: he had his own studio, did everything his own way, pretty much any band that came through town would have gone through his studio.

Roy Thirlwell: The friendship thing wasn't even something that you thought about much and it was only when he died that I realised how close we were. It wasn't something that either of us were conscious about. It was just so easy. We never had a falling out. We weren't intense because we didn't need to be. Since he's been gone there is just a massive gap. He was such a validator, you know. He made me feel valid in the sense of what I was doing. You know how lonely it is when you're making stuff and it feels like the whole world doesn't care - cos it doesn't! - and you wonder if you are even any good or you're kidding yourself. And it quickly reached the point where I felt that as long as John understood it, that for me was validation. What a strong character, what a brilliant mind he had. His influence was such that I just felt totally validated by him as a musician and everything. I made a lot more sense to myself as a result of working with him. It's like when you split up with someone and you realise that no one else is going to understand me the way they did. You have to grab what you can from situations and with John passing you realise, well I've gotta grow that person in myself.

Lee Hall: Since the death of John, Southend is not the same to me. It's lost its soul. I still find it so weird, his death. He was suffering from heartburn. I Loved him cos he lived here. I'd go out and I was excited cos John was there. I'd be half-cut and I'd annoy him half the time but I'd be: "How you doing? What's going on?" But I'd be excited that he was here or out or whatever. We had a few times when we - cos we had a bit of a funny relationship really, like a marriage - cos we'd both talk to each other like how we wanted. He would say to

John's solo performance setup, photo by John

me: “Oh shut up, Lee, get on with it. Do that!” Sometimes it would affect me if I was feeling sensitive and sometimes it wouldn’t. And at the same time he was really respectful of all my music and the like. My mum and dad lived obviously near the studio so I’d pop over now and again to Rayleigh driving and I’d see him on his bike going down the road and I’d beep and give him a wave. Everyone knew him because of that. He on that old bike.

Heather Leigh: But it really felt like he was still trying to figure things out, how he wanted to spend his time. Did he want to kind of upgrade the studio and so on. And then I felt during the pandemic, pretty early on, even before early 2020, I was recording this album at home, Boomcat Sonata. I don’t if you know this series they did during the pandemic of musicians: “We want you to record something quick and turn it around” and I recorded this album Glory Days and he mastered that, did the first mastering of that for this tape edition and then it was remastered by Rashad Becker for an album. So we were in touch at that point and then I really have the sense - I was really excited for him because there was an energy and a turn where The Wire magazine did a piece on his studio and there was this sort of momentum growing. And then he sent me pictures of his little pandemic set up and it was looking so cosy and I just thought: “Great. John’s really kind of thriving in this weird state of the world. He can just focus on mastering and recording and things.” I was so completely shocked when he died. I had always wondered - we didn’t talk about it and I’m not the kind of person to go into this sort of questions if I don’t feel there’s a kind of openness there, the kind of relationship we had I could have asked anything but I didn’t pry - if he had had a previous illness, cancer, anything like that, that then led to his death in the pandemic. I was never clear on what happened in a way. It was just Jennifer who told me initially and then I just reached out to Luke. So unexpected. What a tragedy. And I still feel that way when I think about him. Then, when he died, I started seeing photos of this band he was in - what were they called? Understand, which I had no clue about and I was like: “Oh wow”. Then got a sense that he was part of this community, the history in Southend, and wished I had had more time to talk to him about all of this.

Roy Thirlwell: And thinking about talking to you has been very therapeutic really, cos over a year has gone by and it feels like there is still a lot to get over. I’ve lost a lot of family and a few friends, but I can’t remember ever feeling like this. I’m about six or seven years older than John, so I never thought that was part of the deal I was going to have to worry about. I thought that would be his problem not mine. And its not nice, but comforting, that so many people were affected. I guess if you’re running a business, you do take on allcomers. But he was so encouraging of everyone and could see something good in everyone that was worth capturing. The people that recommended him to me were always mindful and grateful for what he provided and made sure they didn’t take the piss. I spoke to Matt Randall a few days after and expressed how how disappointed I was that it would no longer be possible to do those things with John now, and he said: „You’ve just got to be grateful for what you could do with him.“ Which is true, and the only way to see it. I was probably involved in about 7 or 8 records with John in that time, which wasn’t bad going. As I said the last one, after we finished and it was out, I thought to myself that if I died tomorrow, it would be okay because of that record, and John absolutely captured what I wanted.

Ross Baker: When I heard about his death I was sobbing. I couldn’t make head nor tail of it. I could never claim to have been really close to him. What had a profound impact on me is that I’d been fortunate, over the previous 6 or 9 months, to reconnect with him and he’d opened the door for something for me and enabled me to live a dream again. It sounds a bit cheesy but it was so true, so when I heard of his passing it just struck me how profound it all was. I think of him as a character, a really unique individual.

Aaron Shrimpton: The reason why me and John were connecting quite a bit around about his passing, which had a strange and really profound effect on me, was because I was using his studio for filming a Levis advert. I got this budget that I’d never had before to do this thing and I thought: “My company’s moving in the right direction and I’m stating to make this money, and hopefully I can do my own short films off the back of these things.” So I went out and saw his studio - what a beautiful, boutique place. It was so him, and so cool. I honestly felt bad that I was gonna use it for this shit commercial thing, bluechip, bullshit company, and it was only for five or six seconds at the end where these guys meet up at the end of a music video. The photographer really loved it, cos we were doing photography as well, and then I got this message and then another message

and we were filming two of these things back to back, and the producer spoke to John during the day, and I don't know, this makes me feel really strange, but I think he might have been one of the last people to ever to speak to him cos John must have passed away two hours before which was really, you know. We just did this really intense moment, and I had to, like, take myself away and just walk for a while. There were all these people and other stuff all going on, models and things going on, and I just thought: "I don't give a fuck, don't care about tomorrow, where the toilets are, all that shit, I'm just going for a walk." I just had this amazing moment, really profound, with this model and he'd lost people that year through Covid and we just chatted. That there was this guy and he made all this stuff and was so true to himself and here I am making this shit and this made me self-reflect a little bit. I have sort of down-tooled since then, got a lot less money but I've made my move towards community art space projects that is still ambitious in some respects, but they all revolve around community and artists within that.

Davy, Paul and Jim: I remember being on the phone to you about when he passed and on that day I was driving somewhere and this lorry pulled out in front of me and it had HANNON on it. It was so weird. I was on the phone to you and I said: "I can't believe this. A lorry's just pulled out and it says HANNON on it! He's watching me!

Diana Collier: I was a bit in awe of him because Liberez to me were amazing. Everyone I have spoken to have said that they really trusted John with their music beyond anyone else. I have actually been very lucky because I'd worked with the person whose band I was in and he was very good with recording. I think I'd been kind of spoiled really and I thought: "I'm not going to be able to replace that". And then John was there, and he was amazing. Perhaps I wouldn't have made an album at all without him. Because I was so in awe of him and I really wanted him to play some violin on one of my tracks and I was a bit scared to ask him. I thought it would be too audacious, and he just said he would, and I gave him the track, and he gave it back and said he'd just done a bit on it and he'd totally Johnified it! it was beyond my wildest imaginings. I actually cried when I got it. I had imagined it being a certain way and when it came back, I had to adjust my idea of what I had thought. I thought he would just add a few overtones, and he made it almost like a Liberez track. On Christmas Day it Happened So I was just overwhelmed by that really, what he did for me. It feels like a gift, that I've got this thing that he did for me. When I did my album launch, which was quite a while after I recorded it. I got cancer in the middle of recording it and then I finished it off after that. And then it was Covid. So it didn't come out for a long time and by which time John had already died. So I kind of did a tribute to him at the launch and played his song that he'd done. I just said that his impact on my life was totally disproportionate to the time I had actually spent with him. I actually didn't spend a lot of my life with him but the impact he had on it was huge.

Diana Collier. ***https://folknotfolkdianacollier.bandcamp.com/***

Matt Randall: I remember Roy saying: "John might not always be here, he might move away." I'm not sure we realised how lucky we were. That year before - I read something into it now - but he gave me a whole hard drive of everything I'd ever done at NO and you start thinking. I mean he had no inkling of being ill or anything, I thought it was a strange thing to do at the time. So I've got about 10 years of stuff on hard drive that I'm so grateful that I've got it, you know. I think he was thinking of moving to Norwich wasn't he. He was paring down the studio, he gave me this old Yamaha sampler and it's got loads of Woe samples on it, so I can't use it. I can't delete anything on it. There are things that I recognise, you know: The relics. Beat Glider, Hillmisters, Ghost Music, loads of stuff.

Ed Wenn: And so when John died, we'd recorded about a third of an album with him a few months before and we'd got a few new songs ready to go in and record them, and we'd got this song we'd been working on that we hadn't really coalesced around this one thing. We hadn't reached the point when we could say: "That's what his song is gonna be." It had the chords and the pieces and when John died I was just watching lots of videos one night I had, like the one with Eight Rounds Rapid where they're in a courtyard outside and he's in the background mooching about with his porkpie hat on, and I think he'd been quite heavily involved and played on their most recent record and stuff, and I suddenly knew what I was gonna do: I was gonna write

a song about John. So Andy and I got together and just remembered all these stories about John. I've posted the lyrics. It's called John's Gone and the basic idea is a kind of a nod to Southend and Eight Rounds Rapid. They have all these characters in their songs and I wanted to put John as a character in a song about him. So we just put every story that John had ever told us into a song. Every line is from a story he'd told us. We just felt that we needed to keep in touch with him somehow.

Standing in the hallway of a block of flats.
Talking to a man in his underpants.
He wants to know what's this all about.
Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.
Situation's getting edgy.
What are we doing here?
There's only so far teenage confidence will take you.
Black Steve living with White Steve. What are the chances?

John's gone. We can't ask John.
We wanted you to record our song, John.
John's gone. Too soon gone.
We wanted you to have this song
From us to you.

Stop the song while I locate my pedal.
Reverse the mix cos my brain's having trouble.
I can't hear my guitar from the place where I'm sitting.
The bickering travellers arrived with no beat.
The bossanova preset got them tapping their feet.
But then they are waking you at 2am checking up on the mix.
Let's make a record.
Let's call our cousin.
Do you do childcare?

With time signatures all over the shop.
And the joy of making music with whatever we've got.
Carving out a way of being unmistakeably you.
Violins and noises like from shortwave radios.
Capturing the essence at No Recording studios.
Spiritual trumpeter to Eight Rounds Rapid.
Understand. Woe, Liberez.

The album's called Used to Daylight about making the most of our time here, sort of thing. We recorded half of it with John and the other half with Pat Collier cos, John had gone by then. So that was really lovely to have to kind of pay tribute to our favourite part of John which was just hanging out with him.

Pippa Wragg: I suppose, technically speaking, like most people, the first time I met John was at a show when Understand came to play at the Cavern in the mid-90s. But I didn't really meet him then at all. Sure, I probably gave him and the rest of them their pizza and chips, told them what time they were on, that kind of chit-chat. But no, the first time I met the actual John Hannon, the John Hannon who went on to become the best friend I ever made and pretty much the centrepiece of my life was a few days later. On the phone. For some reason he'd had to call me up (as he would say). They'd left some equipment behind? I hadn't paid them? Was it about photos? I cannot and never will remember. What I do remember is being on the phone in my old bedroom at my parents' house for about an hour and a half. We just couldn't stop talking. Me and this person I didn't even know. From that point on (except for the slight hiccup when we were enemies for a year), we never did stop talking. There was always something to discuss. I never lived in Southend and John never

lived in Exeter, but the phone calls went on - and they soon turned into visits, those lengthy cross (the whole) country visits. Just to see each other, do funny stuff, eating, cinema, gigs our annual Christmas shopping expedition in London. His gigs at the Cavern continued with Understand, Woe, Liberez, and latterly his solo shows. As soon as I'd been in the studio (initially with Jane and Mark's Gravity bands) I was sending Exeter bands up to record there. For over twenty years every Exeter band worth their salt recorded with John Hannon And loved it. He knew all my friends in Exeter, and I knew all of his in Southend, so, being that we are both such massive chatterboxes (some might say gossips) there was always something going on to discuss. Things to report. Hilarious tales about stupid stuff, serious talks about horrible things, sensible talks about our respective businesses, The Cavern and No, with support and advice flowing each way. We spoke almost every day. If there was ever a gap of more than a couple of days one or other of us would get the text message: "Are you dead?" John would put all of this a lot better than I can because of his incredible ability to articulate the intuitive. But somehow, despite our miles of separation, he and I managed to sustain (what would be for him) a lifelong friendship through our interlocking interests, jobs and social scenes. But mostly through the absolutely unrelenting A-Grade chat.

People will miss John for all sorts of different reasons: his music, his stories, his art, his warmth, his unquestionable taste in things. His helpfulness, and, Of course, I miss all those things too. But what I'd settle for now is just that voice on the end of the phone, anytime of any day. "What you talking 'bout Willis?!"



John on the farm,

Jane Hannon: As John's sister I was charged with the role of telling you all about his childhood. John in his formative years, before you all knew him, some anecdotes and stories from his early life. I've tried to do this and they are stories that ordinarily I would be happy to share but something about sharing them in this format, without John to tell them his way, just doesn't feel right. Since my brother left us there have been several occasions where we have remembered him; whether his funeral, this biography, or gigs in his honour. In all of these situations, when I am making decisions on his behalf, I have my brother in mind. I can see him very clearly. He is looking at me eyebrows raised, eyes wide with a tight lipped smile – a look that directly translates as 'What are you doing Janey?' It is impossible to remember John in a way that he would sanction. He was too cool for all of that, far too modest and ironically he hated being in the spotlight. John was the king of storytelling, so funny and animated, but he could also be very private. You all knew him as a friend, a bandmate, a sound engineer, or that really cool bloke on the bike. To my mum and I he was different. He is my mum's beautiful son and my big brother and I think some things should remain with us. Of course John wasn't perfect, but he was always the best person in the room. I have never tired of talking about my brother – he has always been my favourite topic of conversation, my mum's too. I could wang on about him for hours. He was and always has been incredibly kind and gentle – a thoroughly decent human being. He showed up in the world in the best possible way. There are so many stories and memories that I am so grateful for. There is a giant John Hannon shaped hole in the lives of the people who knew and loved him – he is irreplaceable. His presence is still felt because he was so impactful when he was here. I still cannot believe that I won't see him again. He feels so alive to me that if he was to walk around the corner right now, it wouldn't feel odd at all, it would just be such a huge relief to have him back. He would not approve of this biography but I'm sure he would tolerate it – sorry Johnny, I love thee muchly.

The authors by themselves (unless*):

Ross Baker: Ross Baker is from Southend-on-Sea and was a member of the 1990s post-hardcore band Stands to Reason. Known for energetic performances and thoughtful songwriting, the band blended alternative influences with heartfelt lyrics. John played a pivotal role in helping the band with early demos and, likewise, re-mastering the 'Ideal Recordings EP' some 21 years later in 2020.

Michelle Bappoo*: Local Southend musician who recorded with several different bands at NO Recordings and then her own solo album.

James Blackshaw*: After first meeting John while playing in the band The Lights Alive, South London guitarist James Blackshaw recorded his first 10 albums of acoustic folk and drone music at NO Recordings.

Dave Burke: My name is David Burke. John produced all Southend band Eight Round Rapid's recordings, and I'm the vocalist. He came to Rennes in France as our sound man in 2017 for the Transmusicales festival, and we spent many great times together. I was an occasional roadie for him as well.

Rob Coleman: Rob was instrumental and ever present in the formation, rise and fall of Understand as guitarist and enabler. He went on afterwards to take advantage of the contacts he had made during that time to become an internationally respected lighting designer, most frequently with Iron Maiden but also with Paul Weller, The Tindersticks, and others.

Diana Collier: As a singer with The Owl Service and its offshoot duo Greanvine, I was part of the Southend music scene, mostly as a punter but occasionally as a performer - this where I met John. We became friends and he was a great encouragement to me in my solo music making.

Lee Hall: I'm a musician from the Southend DIY scene, best known for Beatglider, Ghost Music, Hillmisters, and Wobbly Lamps. I've released records, promoted gigs, and worked closely with John Hannon, who produced several of my recordings. John's creativity, generosity, and cool aura were a lasting influence.

Richie Harwood: Richie is a drummer from Southend and now lives in Brighton. He has worked with Sam Duckworth, Walter Scheifels and Steve Albini. He has recently released an album with
Quatermass: *https://linktr.ee/quatermass*

Larry Hibbitt*: former guitarist of 90s hardcore band Jetpack and postpunk band 100 Reasons and now respected record producer.

Tim Holehouse: Tim Holehouse is one of the hardest-working musicians out there. For the past 20 years he has been touring the globe: like a stone gathering no moss has brought influences as varying to his sound today. Breaking the 250-300 gig mark most years, Tim leads somewhat of a nomadic existence, but for all intents and purposes, treats London as his home when not out plying his trade to international and domestic audiences.

Kev Hutchins: I met John at Greensward school in Hockley while playing basketball after school. We reconnected a couple of years later through skateboarding and music, which formed the foundation of our friendship. We shared many great times together through friends, gigs, and bands. In 2000, I joined Woe, which later became Liberez.

Michelle Hurst*: friend of John in Southend during the Woe/Liberez and solo period of his career.

Jane Hannon*: John's sister.

John Hannon*: contributions from the Destroy Before Listening and Then and Now podcasts on Spotify. Many, many thanks to Pete Best and Andy Baz for making these important documents of John Hannon's creativity, productivity and influence available for this oral biography. Their podcast series are an invaluable contribution to the documentation and promotion of contemporary British alternative music culture. You can hear the original podcasts here as well as an archive of many others:

Destroy Before Listening: *https://creators.spotify.com/pod/profile/burn5/episodes/RIP-JOHN-HANNON-repost-of-DBL8-e1i5dnk*
Then and Now: *https://open.spotify.com/episode/2BuGeSwi01ryynEpH1LbKd*

Davy, Paul and Jim: Resin were an alternative rock band that existed between 1997-2006, although they spent the final couple of years operating under the name Shouting At Strangers. As a grungy post-hardcore act, they recorded around nine EPs/singles with John and continued to work with him across their various other projects after disbanding. When the room attached to the Mushroom/No Recording studio became available in 2004, John invited Resin to use the space, which various band members continued to do, as often as three times a week, up until 2014.

Link to recordings *https://resin1.bandcamp.com/album/special-move-ep*

Two of the band recently began writing new music together again and even considered naming the project 'Hannon.' Currently they're still bickering about what it should be called.

Michel Kasparis: Michael Kasparis is a musician based in Glasgow, Scotland. For the past 15 years he's run Night School Records and played music solo and in numerous bands, two of which recorded records with John at NO Recordings. Night School was proud to release the Liberez album All Tense Now Lax in 2015.

Tim Keech: Friend of John's from Southend, recorded various things with him at No from 2007 to 2019 - Hillmisters and the solo stuff and an album of tracks with him in 2018-2019. Never mattered and only have the mixes he burned - can find some of the recordings on my earliest posts on my Insta which is the only place I release music.

The first 12 tracks on here are ones I did at John's: *https://www.instagram.com/timotheevincentkeech*

I loved Liberez and seeing him begin his solo violin thing. It was just getting going when he died. I truly believe he would have gone from strength to strength with that, a sense of self actualisation happening before me. It was clear this was a practical and sustainable new way for John to perform his unique musical ideas and expression.

Heather Leigh*: pedal steel player, singer and componist, she has taken part in noise, vocal acrobatics, slide guitar improvisation and experimental chamber pop. Heather Leigh has been involved with many projects, including Texas experimental improv mainstays Charalambides, Dream/Aktion Unit (a free jazz and improvisational group with Chris Corsano, Paul Flaherty, Thurston Moore, and Count Hejnowski), a duo with free jazz luminary Peter Brötzmann, Taurpis Tula and record label Volcanic Tongue. She recorded the album Throne at NO Recordings and toured with John Hannon as a duo to promote it.

Tony Maddocks*: a founding member of the Hockley Crew and schoolmate of John, accompanied Understand on their rise as fan, friend and roadie. Formed the hardcore band Stand Off which went on to become the still active Above All.

Paul McDirmid: I was near neighbour, fellow Greensward pupil and skateboard buddy of John in schooldays in Hockley. Formed a lounge band with him called The Runts. We never played a gig but had fun preparing to. I was part of the Understand entourage at their gigs and the shows of our favourite bands and admired John from near and far to the end; and still do.

Niki Nailbomb: My names Niki Johnson or to people in the scene I'm known as Niki Nailbomb. I played drums in Hardcore and Punk bands since leaving school really. My previous bands include Deathskulls and Suicide Bid who both recorded with John.

My current bands are UKHC band Mob Handed:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlodUYp1kdk
and Post-Oi! band Nasty Bastard
https://open.spotify.com/intl-de/album/5L3B2MVsVeyvE8Gqos7FaEBastard

Stuart Quinnel: We were school friends from about the age of 13, John lent to me his bass guitar as he wanted to play the guitar. After playing music with John in a few bands which lead into Understand for a few years, then the Wonderstuff for two, I started my journey into the world of the backline technician. Working for bands
such as The Darkness, Muse and Miss Laura Marling. I'm currently the Show Stage Manager for Miss Raye.

Matt Randall: John was a good friend. I worked on many albums at NO between 1997 up to 2020 including Plantman, Beatglider and Ghost Music. I was privileged to watch at close hand John hone and master his love of sound and production with great care and enthusiasm for the art.

Matt Reay: Animator, musician and sound artist based in South East London. I recorded at NO with John in the bands Vets in Hong Kong and Year Abroad. I created animated videos for Liberez and later went on to join Liberez as a drummer and played on Way Through Vulnerability.

Links to the things I make:
https://www.instagram.com/mtreay
https://www.instagram.com/recover_mountain

Liberez videos:
Cellophane Window: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efTWyVEZwnw***
La Cara En La Foto pt1:***https://vimeo.com/289173578?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci***
419 Chop Your $: ***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pz5zzI8djZc***

James Reddick: currently living and working in London as a software engineer. John and I were close friends from 1990-1996, spending many happy times together as part of the 'Hockley Crew' united by a love of music and culture. John was one of the key linchpins in the group, always full of great ideas, energy and enthusiasm. We shared many gigs, parties, rehearsals or just hanging out together. These were the best of times – simple, carefree and full of great friendships and memories.

Sylvia Saunders: A music therapist and multi-instrumentalist who was recruited by John for the second Liberez group and subsequent album.

Walter Scheifels: Walter Scheifels is a musician songwriter person from New York City known for his participation in the hardcore punk genre with bands Gorilla Biscuits, Youth of Today and later with Quicksand and Rival Schools.

Rob Scillitoe*: plays with Southend band, the Hillmisters and recorded with John many times. He was with EMI music publishing for 10 or 12 years and then moved from to Mute Songs, the music publishing company associated with the label. He signed John for his songwriting with Woe and Liberez.

Tom Scott: Tom James Scott is a musician from Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria. He primarily plays guitar and piano, while also employing samplers, keyboards, prepared strings and percussion. Since 2007 he has published solo recordings through a number of labels including Alter, xquisite releases, Students of Decay, Bo'Weavil Recordings and his own Skire imprint.

https://tomjamesscott.bandcamp.com
https://skiremusic.bandcamp.com

Aaron Shrimpton: Aaron Shrimpton is a BAFTA New Talent Award–winning filmmaker, producer/director and editor, and the founder of New Waverley Studios. He won the award for Best Music Video for Astronaut by Yila featuring Scroobius Pip. His work spans narrative drama and documentary, with credits including Mercy (2024), Arcadia Lasts (2022) and Autistic Joy (2024), and documentaries published twice by The Guardian. He is currently Creative Producer on several projects, notably Estuary Dreams, an experimental moving-image workshop programme.

https://www.instagram.com/aaronshrimpton/

Astrud Steehouder: Astrud Steehouder is a musician and artist. She has performed in the Rayographs with Jessamine Tierney and Amy Hurst, in paper Dollhouse with Nina Bosnic, and more recently as Opal X. She has performed and recorded with Daniel O'Sullivan, Asher Levitas, and in NONEXISTENT with Alexander Tucker and Luke Murray.

Roy Thirwell: Roy David Thirlwell lives in Westcliff-on-Sea. He has been making music for over 40 years, and continues to do so, on his own and in collaboration with various talented individuals in various projects. He was confidente and collaborator with John in the last 10 years of his life.

https://melodie.group.bandcamp.-com/
https://www.melodiegroup.co.uk

Jay Thornton: Jay Thornton is musician and artist from Brighton who grew up on Canvey Island. He was friends with John Hannon from his teenage years onwards and lived with him in Southend-on-Sea for a while in 1999. He has been in many bands in Brighton – most notably as vocalist for Man Ray Sky between 2007 and 2018 and Who Owns Death TV featuring ex-members of Million Dead. John Hannon recorded Who Owns Death TV and a 7-inch single was released in 2009.

Iñigo Ugarteburu: a musician and composer whose work is defined by its fluid command of instrumentation and a deep focus on tonality and texture and bridges the gap between folk traditions and minimalist experimentation. In Carcáscara (alongside Fernando Aguirre and Xabier Iriondo), Ugarteburu weaves classical guitars, harmonium, and field recordings into intricate compositions that have earned acclaim from the likes of Boomkat and Soundohm. His earlier work with Café Teatro further established his range, moving through post-rock and experimental jazz landscapes. As a member of Liberez, joined John, Sylvia and Matthew to push the group's sound into new territories on the LP Way Through Vulnerability. His cinematic work is equally collaborative. He composed the soundtracks for the dance film Homing and the Netflix series The Time It Takes (El tiempo que te doy)

Selected Works:
- **Solo (Back & Forth, For The Unknown): released via Talo and Foehn.**
- **Carcáscara (I, II): released via Talo and Hegoak**
- **Café Teatro (s/t, Burga, Sei): released via Talo and Foehn**
- **Film Scores: Homing and The Time It Takes (Netflix)**

Fritz Urschitz*: Austrian feature film director who met John at an Understand gig in Graz and went onto become close friends when he studied film in London. He recruited John to help on the soundtracks of his student films and then his first feature.

David Vick: Teacher in English and History in London and Germany for the last 20 years, otherwise varied career in London, Melbourne and Berlin over too many decades, from cook and roadie to journalist and broadcaster. John and I began a mutual appreciation society in 1996.

Derek Walmsley*: Former editor of The Wire magazine, journalist, musicologist and fan of John and his music.

Pippa Wragg*: Co-owner and manager of The Cavern in Exeter, multi-instrumentalist session musician, member of indie band The Silk Cuts and long-time soul mate of John.

The Cavern Club: ***https://www.songkick.com/venues/1275146-cavern-club***
The Silk Cuts: ***https://silkcuts.bandcamp.com/album/tell-me-its-not-true***

Luke Younger*: a sound artist and experimental musician based in London, working with a vast array of revolving instrumentation and abstract sound sources under the name Helm, recording at NO Recordings with John and solo. He also runs the record label Alter which has released some of the work of Liberez amongst others.

Additional Photos by:

Phil Howes:
https://www.philhowes.co.uk/
https://www.instagram.com/howesphil/

Mikael Gregorsky:
http://mikaelgregorsky.com/

Matt Cargil:
https://www.instagram.com/familydrone/

Werecats
https://www.facebook.com/werecatsband/

Kelly Buckley