

Claims Department ~ February 2023

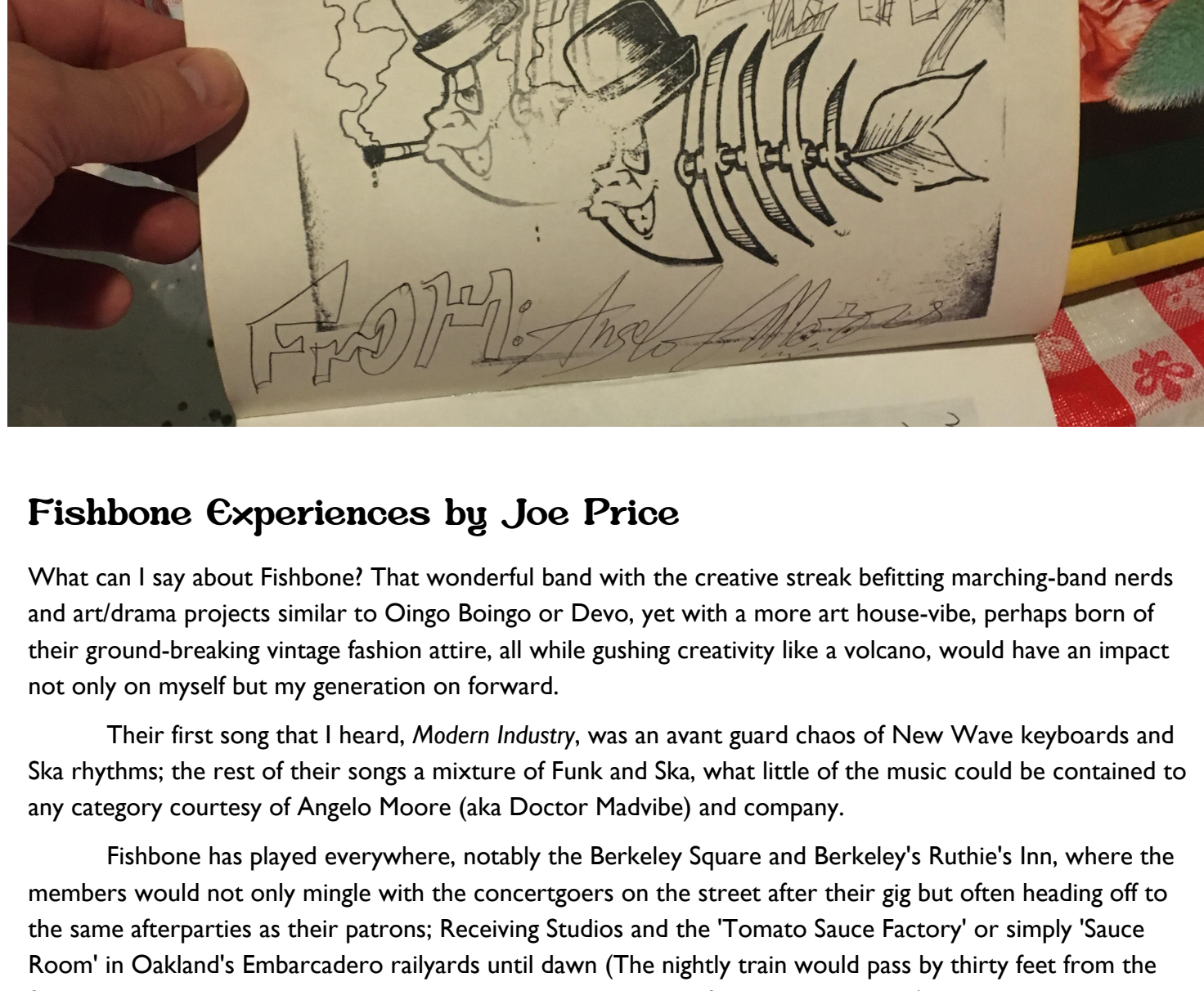
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Fishbone

I must have seen that at least a dozen times. I saw 'em at the Edge in Palo Alto as one of my first shows after I could drive. I saw 'em as a part of Lollapalooza in 1993. I saw 'em in Boston with The Bosstones and Skankin' Pickle. I saw 'em in Providence with Perfect Thyroid, in LA with Hepcat, in Sacramento with Let's Go Bowling, and on and on. They are, without question, the finest life act I've ever seen.

With the possible exception of Mr. Bungle, they are also the band that succeeds at the highest level in the most genres. Their ska songs are as tip-top as their thrash songs. Their funk and their soul hold up just as well as their reggae and their punk. The songs are world-class, and the performances are without parallel.

I'm lucky to be joined by Joe Price, a magnificent human being, with his thoughts. It would also be inappropriate to not mention Leon 'Stubs' Tucker, whose enthusiasm for Fishbone brought me further into them! Also, he is just great to go to shows with!



Fishbone Experiences by Joe Price

What can I say about Fishbone? That wonderful band with the creative streak befitting marching-band nerds and art/drama projects similar to Oingo Boingo or Devo, yet with a more art house-vibe, perhaps born of their ground-breaking vintage fashion attire, all while gushing creativity like a volcano, would have an impact not only on myself but my generation on forward.

Their first song that I heard, *Modern Industry*, was an avant guard chaos of New Wave keyboards and Ska rhythms; the rest of their songs a mixture of Funk and Ska, what little of the music could be contained to any category courtesy of Angelo Moore (aka Doctor Madvibe) and company.

Fishbone had played everywhere, notably the Berkeley Square and Ruthie's Inn, where the members would not only mingle with the concertgoers on the street after their gig but often heading off to the same afterparties as their patrons; Receiving Studios and the 'Tomato Sauce Factory' or simply 'Sauce Room' in Oakland's Embarcadero railyards until dawn (The nightly train would pass by thirty feet from the front door, the engineer greeting us with their horn while we gifted them with beer).

Probably the most memorable of their shows was at 19 Broadway in Fairfax, where I worked under a boss who was an old friend of mine from both the Berkeley Square's New Wave era and from Swing shows in San Francisco. He knew many of the old cutting-edge New Wave acts and frequently booked them at 19 Broadway.

Fishbone was no exception. While my boss and I ran the Polynesian lounge portion of the club, the opening acts had come and gone rather late. According to CA law, bars and clubs had to be closed and vacated by 2:00am or very expensive liquor licenses were in jeopardy.

So of course, Fishbone, led by Angelo Moore and his very large saxophone, ascended the stage right at 2:01am. The doors were locked; no one could enter or leave as we were now a 'private party'. Fishbone held court for 90 minutes of break-neck paced music and showmanship. Amazingly, no one got naked aside from going shirtless (The heat was unbearable within the venue). The place was packed with jumping, bouncing patrons who were so occupied by the music that there were no security issues to speak of (We had stopped serving alcohol at 1:45am).

At the end of the show, the concert goers were all too exhausted, too exhilarated (and too sober) to stick around so the venue was soon vacated. After immediate cleaning of the bar and unpacking of equipment, I ventured upstairs to an apartment where I frequently slept before my next early morning shift maintaining the club; I conveniently forgot that the apartment also served as a 'green room' for bands to clean up, grab food and convalesce before heading off.

In the front parlor the piano found voice at the hands of Angelo Moore and other musicians taking turns on the ivory along with loud conversation. At this point it was reported that one of their entourage, Pastor Dre, had left for his hotel earlier but may have been stopped by the police. Not knowing his fate, the band tried to trace him down by calling local police departments or even his cell phone. I never learned what happened but the band remained upstairs.

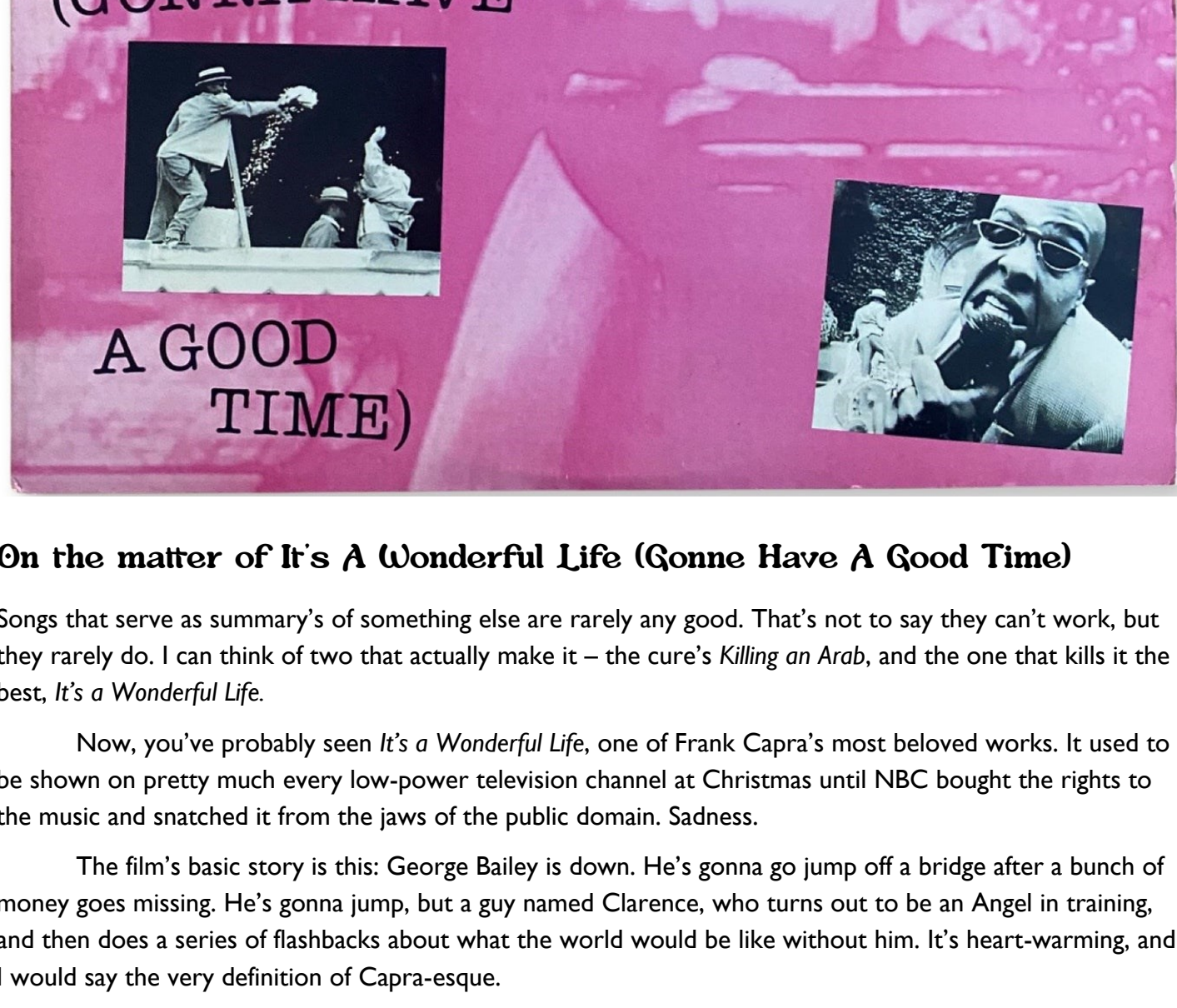
With no groupies or fans to speak of, the band relaxed and blew off steam pretty much by themselves with the occasional club employee dropping in for a moment or two. Knowing sleep was elusive with such a loud party full of band members in the next room, I joined them between piano sets and Pastor Dre updates. At one point, I spoke to Angelo Moore, telling him I was a fan of the band going back to Berkeley, citing the shows at Ruthie's Inn and the Berkeley Square decades prior.

Angelo Moore, and Fishbone for that matter, never gave off any rockstar persona to speak of; they all felt very much like the neighborhood crew that we'd party with back then due to the East Bay being a favorite stopover of theirs. Hence my ease of approaching Dr. Madvibe himself.

Remembering those shows, he gave me a bright smile and a big, sweaty hug, still shirtless and damp from the show, soaking both my cheek and shirt in his exuberance. Dr. Madvibe was apparently equally nostalgic of coming up in the old clubs and shows, giggling hard with newly-minted material for their very first albums.

That is because Fishbone has not forgotten where they have come from; the hard work ethic, the stints with both film and documentary, the constant exposure to a concert-going fan base and the creativity of music and songs that wouldn't be held back at the beginning.

And is unstoppable now.



On the matter of It's a Wonderful Life (Gonna Have A Good Time)

Songs that serve as summary's of something else are rarely any good. That's not to say they can't work, but they rarely do. I can think of two that actually make it -- the cure's *Killing an Arab*, and the one that kills it the best, *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Now, you've probably seen *It's a Wonderful Life*, one of Frank Capra's most beloved works. It used to be shown on pretty much every low-power television channel at Christmas until NBC bought the rights to the music and snatched it from the jaws of the public domain. Sadness.

The film's basic story is this: George Bailey is down. He's gonna go jump off a bridge after a bunch of money goes missing. He's gonna jump, but a guy named Clarence, who turns out to be an Angel in training, and then does a series of flashbacks about what the world would be like without him. It's heart-warming, and I would say the very definition of Capra-esque.

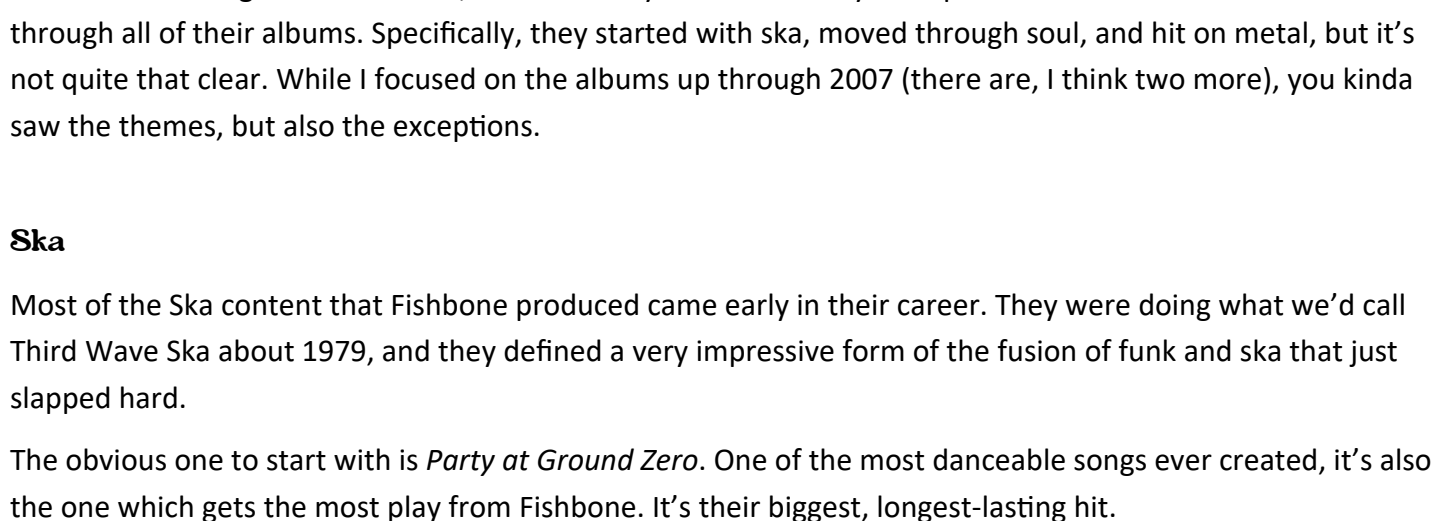
Now, Fishbone did an EP called *It's a Wonderful Life*. That's right, Fishbone did a Christmas album. The four song EP has four of the most impressively 90s Christmas-themed songs. There's the slow R+B tune *Slick Nick (You Devil You)* which is the forerunner for so many bad Santa stories. There's *Just Call Me Scrooge*, which is a lot of fun, but *It's a Wonderful Life* that really slaps.

It's a ska song, one of their fastest, easily a beat or two faster than *Party at Ground Zero*, and it's utterly danceable.

It also, in a little over three minutes, gets the entire concept of *It's a Wonderful Life* across.

The ice was freezin'
My brother almost drowned
I jumped in to save him
On his way, way down
Then it went black and I went in
Oh, what a wonderful life
The angels told me he'd get his wish
All my life was a twisted thing
We gonna have a good life
We gonna have a good life
We gonna have a good life
We gonna have a good life
You better keep on pushin'
No matter how broke you are
'Cause I'm broke down and I'm bankrupt
And you're ready to end it all
We gonna have a good time
Rockin' now to this beat
Just keep rockin' to scoop the pain
Oh, my God, here comes the pain
Angel made me numb
The angel made me void
Got thrown out of the bar
Then I wrecked my car
Got socked in the jaw
Cussed out by my Mama
Someone stole my money
Screamed at by my honey

That's the entire movie's story compressed into a tight, fast, funky, fun song! And that's not the entire song (though really, it's the entire portion of the song) and it's got this vibe that I think makes it one of the very few Christmas songs that doesn't need to be listened to at Christmas. It actually works whenever you put it on, and probably doesn't work as well when you mix it in with your Christmas songs (like that Mariah Carey one, though it would work with *Christmas Wrapping*) but adds flavor to any ska-tinged playlist.



The many genres of Fishbone.

I went back through all the albums, and I basically found that they had sprinkled a lot of different sounds through all of their albums. Specifically, they started with ska, moved through soul, and hit on metal, but it's not quite that clear. While I focused on the albums up through 2007 (there are, I think two more), you kinda saw the themes, but also the exceptions.

Ska

Most of the Ska content that Fishbone produced came early in their career. They were doing what we'd call Third Wave Ska about 1979, and they defined a very impressive form of the fusion of funk and ska that just slapped hard.

Their obvious one to start with is *Party at Ground Zero*. One of the most danceable songs ever created, it's also the one which gets the most play from Fishbone. It's their biggest, longest-lasting hit.

Lynin' Ass Bitch off the same first EP is also certainly in the running, as is *UGLY* and *Skankin' to the Beat*. *Truth and Soul* gives us the excellent, incredibly-upbeat song *Ma and Pa*. It's just a great and fast ska tune that has so much energy.

Housework off of *Truth and Soul* is pretty remarkable, and while their sound evolved away from ska, the wonderful piece *Unyielding Conditioning* off of *Give A Monkey A Brain...* is a good entry.

No, the actual answer to what is the most ska song Fishbone ever did is *Do the Ska* from the *Back to the Beach* film with Frankie and Annette Funicello. It's the single most ska ska song you can possibly do, and it's really entertaining in the film as well.

They also do a cover of *Date Rape*, that is 100% ska fun.

Funk

When Problems Arise has to be in the conversation. It's a beautifully funky song with one of the most complex basslines you'll ever find outside of a ProgRock album. It's also got an incredible music video that includes hula dancers, and the band dancing all sorts of crazy on a completely white, seamless background! There's even an Eddie Hazel-like guitar line that would completely feel at home in an P-Funk record from 1977.

Bonin' in the Boneyard has one of those infectious bass lines that is so funky you can't help but move. It's got wonderful horn lines that just pull you along with the rhythm.

Metal

The first one I'd say fits the metal mode is their cover of *Freddie's Dead*, which is just a great, guitar-driven piece giving us something else they'd done up to that point.

They give us some great thrash metal with *Fight the Youth*. In fact, they open their album *Truth and Soul* with it and it's just about the hardest rock they'd done up until that point. *Behaviour Control Technician* also hits the thrash vibe from the get go, and it feels a lot like what *Faith No More* would be doing just a little later.

Sunless Saturday, also off of *Truth and Soul*, is one of those that you could call a bunch of different things, but it's thrash, or at least thrash-funk like we loved in the early 1990s. Those *Days are Gone* also kinda gets into it, but it's more Weezer-like. It wasn't until 1993 that they really hit it out of the park with two metal songs that are not only undeniably metal, but two very different sub-genres of metal.

First, there's *Servitude*. It is, as the kids say, hard as fuck. I mean, it's squiddily-deedilly all over the place! It's got blistering fret work, and the kind of lyrics you'd find from the pen of Dave Mustaine back in the 1980s. It's a powerful song, and one of the best they've ever put out on record.

Then, there's *Swim*. It's a sludge metal track, like you might get from The Melvins. It's deep and heavy and thick and perfect for a band that is all about virtuosoism.

A couple of other tracks on *Give A Monkey A Brain...* that hit in the metal mode. *Black Flowers* seems to draw from the same well as the operatic metal we started to get about 1995.

Chim Chim's Bad Ass Revenge, their 1996 album, had *Beergut*,

The 2007 album *Still Stuck in Your Throat* has *Let Dem Ho's Fight*, which is a Nu-Metal song, and it's not bad at all. It does really go along with the stuff that people like Deftone's and Korn were doing at that point.

Punk

The 2007 album *Still Stuck in Your Throat* has *Let Dem Ho's Fight*, which is a Nu-Metal song, and it's not bad at all. It does really go along with the stuff that people like Deftone's and Korn were doing at that point.

Simon Says The Kingpin is an absolute 1977-type punk piece. It's amazing, it's fast, and it's just about my favorite truth song off of *In Your Face*.

Truth and Soul gives us *Subliminal Fascism*, which feels much closer to The Dead Kennedys than anything else I can think of. In fact, it reminds me of acts from the early 1990s like Bad Religion's run at the time.

Give A Monkey A Brain has *The Warmth of Your Breath*, which might be the closest I've ever heard to the punk that DK delivered in their funnier moments when East Bay Ray got his chance to shine. *End the Reign* was drunk two, with a very crunching guitar.

Drunk Skitzo on *Give A Monkey A Brain...* probably counts. It's really short and fast.

Riot is basically a 1979 Los Angeles punk song. It completely reminds me of FEAR and Black Flag.

Reggae

They rarely did straight reggae, at least as far as I'd call it, though I did see them do *Everything'll be All Right* by Bob Marley once. They are a few that I would say tread in that mode. *Cholly*, off of *In Your Face* is one of the most fun of their downbeat pieces. The same album gave us *A Movement in the Night*, which is at least somewhat more in the Jamaican mode.

Pouring Rain has some of the greasiest rhythms you'll ever hear. It's very Kingston 1971, with echo and punctuating horns, but it's got that beat that you can't deny is influenced by Peter Tosh and co.

They All Have Abandoned Their Hopes is reggae, and for ages I used to have it on a mix-tape with Inka Inka and Burning Spear songs.

Chim Chim's Bad Ass Revenge has *In the Cube*, and *Alcoholic*.

Soul

Without question, the finest piece of soul they ever released was *Everyday Sunshine*. It's a beautiful song, but it also hits with a breakdown at the end that just gets everything jouyou and fun.

A bit more down is *Lemon Meringue*, which is nice, and the vocals are what sets it apart. It's a really good one, and I know a lot of folks who would say it was one of their absolute best. I tend to agree.

Southern Rock

Mighty Long Way on *Truth and Soul* feels right a lot more like The Allman Brothers than you'd expect. It's got that southern guitar (and a riff that feels lifted right out of a Skynyrd tune. It's a really fun song. There's a little Chicago to it too.

OK, that's all for this set of five! I really enjoyed all of these, especially getting to re-visit Fiona Apple and Henry Mancini! I listened to a whole lot of La Roux and Tears for Fears too.

Plus, the kids got to hear more Fishbone!

So, I hear you asking in your heads... what's next.

Another five with another re-invention of the layout!

And who are the five?

- The Mighty Mighty Bosstones—Boston's finest ska!
- The Buzzcocks—The UK's finest punk!
- Sleater-Kinney—Grrrrr, Riot Grrll!!!
- John Adams - Contemporary orchestral music that got me into it!
- The Violent Femmes - They say fuck a lot.

Comments? Johnnyeponymous@gmail.com