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We Get Letters!!!

Lloyd Penney

Dear Chris:

Here comes a loc out of the blue, for a fanzine I wasn't sure you were still putting out, namely Claims Department. I have issue 22, and while it isn't exactly on a topic I like or know much about, I will try a loc anyway, and see how I do.

I'm getting that response a lot. I think I may have turned James Bacon into a Murderino...

Jack the Ripper has almost become a literary trope, added into a plot to see if our sleuth, or kindly bumbler, or starship crew can figure out who he was, and why he did what he did, and is he perhaps still doing it? The Zodiac deaths really didn't affect me being this far away, but given how many school shootings there's been lately, I am not too inclined to find out more about Zodiac.

I'm one of those folks who when he hears someone say "No one is calling to take away your guns..." and I always go "Speak for yourself!"

I have been thinking of trying a steampunk zine of my own. There's plenty of steampunk groups in this area,

so perhaps I could ask for submissions of articles and artwork and photos. They might like this old idea, or they may blow it off. It's worth a shot. As far as I can tell, Exhibition Hall is the only steampunk zine still going.

If you do it, I'm there! I might even be willing to do a short film review series!

There are times when the right circumstances, when they all come together at the right place and time, create monsters like Jack and Zodiac. We help to create our monsters by making murder romantic and adventurous to a degree. And, I hate to say it, the American culture of self-assurance by having to have at least one gun at hand, to defend yourself against similar self-assured people with guns, just makes the odds of another monster coming about in American society fairly low. It will happen, and it's just a matter of when. Then again, no one needs to wait for another Zodiac for schools to be shot up, and children lose their lives.

There's a lot of great podcasts that deal with that very concept. It's much easier to hang a set of fears on an unseen monster than it is on someone who looks like that guy you see every morning at the 7-11. Guns are the Albatross around the neck of the American Experiment.

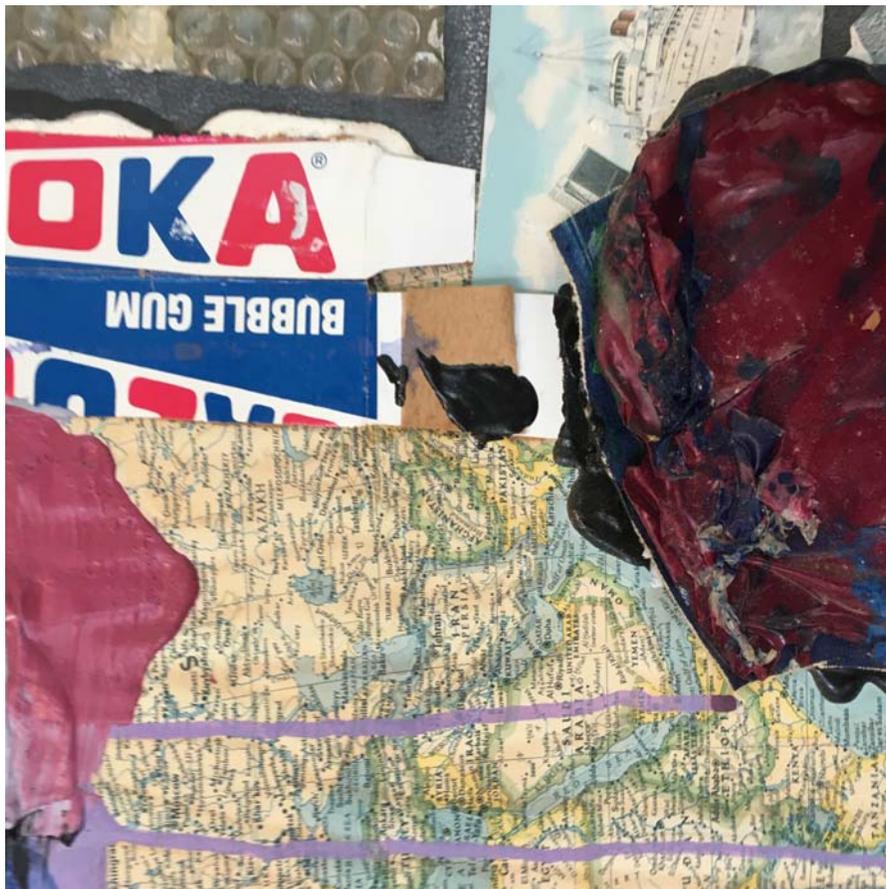
I can't write any more on this kind of subject; it's too depressing, especially after finding out that the Orange Fool has used notes to sound sincere, and falls for the old idea that to prevent mass murder in American schools, the teachers should be armed. Where do the guns end? Where does the fascination end? Probably only with the death of a major politician's loved one, and perhaps not even then.

Understandable. I'm fascinated by the concept, and the amount of impact Zodiac (and Jack the Ripper) had on me consciousness as a kid meant I would never be able to ignore it when I start writing a lot.

Sorry to be a downer...my new job was billed as part-time, and the first three months were really full-time, but now, I am lucky to get 8 to 10 hours in a two-week pay period, so once again, the job hunt goes on. I have a Skype interview on Friday. Take care, and hug Vanessa and the kids for us.

Power to ya, Lloyd! The Boys are calling "Papa! Papa!" which means I need to put on more music on their iPhone!

Yours, Lloyd Penney.





My Day With Mark Mothersbaugh

My job has perks. The biggest? The people I get to meet. Whether its filmmakers doing incredible stuff with graphics, or computer artists, I'm always super-lucky in who I get to hang with. In mid-2017, I set out for a goal of interviewing four computer music pioneers, and while I didn't hit the goal, I got two of the most interesting people I could have imagined. The first was David Cope, designer of the EMI and Emily Howell computer music generation system. The second, and the one that had me living the dream, was getting to go to LA and interview the lead singer of DEVO: Mark Mothersbaugh.

I woke up at 3am, kissed my beautiful wife goodbye, set up every episode of Karina Longworth's masterpiece Charles Manson's Hollywood on Apple Podcasts, and hopped in the car. If you haven't listened to the podcast, it's one of the best things going. The look at Hollywood in the 1960s, about Dennis Wilson, Kenneth Anger, Sharon Tate, Roman Polanski, Jay Seebing, and many many more stories. It's an incredibly deep dive into the last days of the free-wheeling LA scene of the 1960s.

I didn't even have a cup of coffee, because I wanted to make it to Buellton before I had to stop. That is not an easy task! I hopped in and drove, heading through the Santa Cruz mountains, into the coastal foothill, which were the color of a television tuned to a station showing nothing but beige. It was kinda dull, broken up by periodic vineyards, or cattle. There were even a few Llamas out by Salinas. I made it to gas-up in Buellton, home of Split Pea Anderson's, but only grabbed a Snickers bar, two big bottles of water, and a thing of beef jerky. Breakfast of Champions! Driving, driving, driving. I stopped in Santa Barbara, picked up a lovely Taco Bell breakfast, it was only about 7:30, and just kept on driving. I managed to make it through Ventura before there was any real traffic, and I knew exactly how to skirt it. I ended up the Hollywood hills after a while, which is twisty and lovely driving. I worked my way down and found myself right across the street from Matato Musika.

To describe the building, you either have to think of the Great Western Forum in LA, supposedly designed by the same dude, or think of a short cake box. It's Mid-Century Modern at its best... in vivid green! It's a flat round building, and the minute I drove by it, three hours early, I knew EXACTLY where to go! I parked across the street and made the most of my time.

I went to Coffee Bean.



The Coffee Bean has one drink that I love – The Blended White Chocolate Mocha. It's the kind of sweet that reminds you of the effects of sugar on long-term health, but also makes you completely not care by being so amazingly tasty. I grabbed a seat, saw a couple of actors I recognized from bit parts on TV shows, and simply sat out on the outside deck, looking over Sunset Blvd., watching the people walk, the thousands of cars, the rush towards Beverly Hills. I checked my eMail, played some Angry Birds, wrote a bit of my Zodiac issue, and just drank. It was pretty amazingly sloth, but at the same time, it kept me focused on the fact that I would be meeting one of my heroes.

Mark Mothersbaugh co-founded DEVO, one of my all-time favorite bands.



He wrote the music for Doctor Detroit, for The Life Aquatic, for The Royal Tennenbaums, for Rugrats, and for the Lego Movie. He'd done so many different scores that it was impossible to listen to them all in preparation for my Oral History with him, but I did discover something – his art. Mark Mothersbaugh has been a helluva painter, and his recent sound art/sculptural works, Orchestrions, are masterful! I had spent two full weeks researching everything I could find about Mark, watching dozens of interviews, reading massive numbers of interviews and two different biographies, and every single DEVO song ever released. ALL OF THEM!!!

I decided to take a walk up Sunset, towards Beverly Hills, and then back on the opposite side of the street. I walked past stores that wouldn't open until Noon, but then I saw a narrow alleyway between two shops. There was a sign with a finger pointing through the alley. It read simply "Mystery Pier Book"

I had to go.

Harvey Jason, actor and bookseller, specializes in providing exquisite conditions editions of books, mostly signed, and each one with a story. He had tons of Philip K. Dick, and Zelazny, and Vonnegut (including a signed first edition of Slapstick that was signed "to Phil, Kurt" I have no idea who Phil was, but if I knew a Phil who loved Vonnegut, I'd have bought it for him.

If I also had an extra two grand.

The place is amazing, but it's Harvey himself who is the treasure. You might know him from the second Jurassic Park film. He's been in other stuff, but he's amazingly knowledgeable, charming, and funny. We made jokes about the Asbestos edition of Fahrenheit 451, and talked about screenplays.

The best thing he had in the shop was a signed air sickness bag from TWA. It was signed by a certain Martin Luther King. It was incredible and he had put together a display with a ticket from the film and a photo of the plane that was flying that route. It was nice, and at 5K, it was a fair price!

I spent at least an hour chatting with him, and he gave me a bag and a shirt! I was quite happy!!!

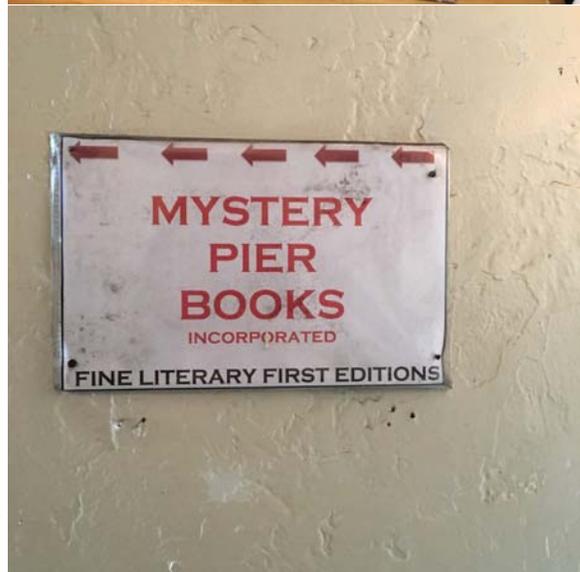
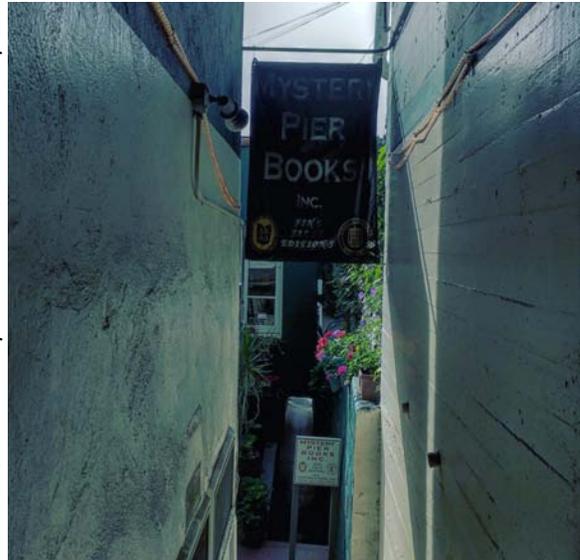
I walked back to my car, dropped my stuff off, and then walked across the street to Mutato Musika, where we were interviewing Mark in his studio. I had seen dozens of photos, but the place was so much cooler. I walked up to the door, ready to ring the bell when out from behind the door jumped...

Mark Mothersbaugh.

"Wah!" he yelled.

That was how I met one of the men whose music had defined so much of my Middle and High School years. Jumping out from behind a door in a Mid-Century Modern building. It was PERFECT!

The interior of Mutato Musika is amazing. There are tons of classic keyboards. Guitars, art pieces, and photos. I tried not to wander off, be-



cause I was so sure I would find something incredibly interesting and forget all about the Oral History. I had taken a chance about reaching out to him, and almost a year later, I made it happen. I then had to convince my boss that Mark was a good Oral History candidate. The latter was the harder task. I had to defend the idea of interviewing a rock star, and at one point, I was wondering if it was gonna happen. Eventually, I managed to push it through, especially after I told our AV head about it and he was psyched!



We settled into his studio and chatted for a while, he showed me a couple of things, including a Ondioline keyboard, one of a dozen in the world, that had once been part of Pink Floyd's kit. It would have been used in the period they made the one Floyd album I don't completely hate – Dark Side of the Moon. He had guitars, and pieces of circuit-bent toys that he and his brother had made into new and exciting instruments. There were also dozens of art notebooks that Mark drew in every day. There was also ½ of the largest natural ruby ever found beneath his console.

As we started to go through the gear to start the recording, it turned out that we had lost a piece to the camera. That meant we had to make a run to a depot to rent it. That meant delay, and I was left with Mark Mothersbaugh, the co-founder of DEVO, for almost an hour. It was great, as we just chatted about music and about art. He asked about my kids! I told him the story of the time Benji was running around the living room screaming “I'm Mr. Kamakazi! Mr. DNA!” after we had been listening to DEVO all day as I prepped for the oral history. It was a lot of fun, and he was just such a nice guy!

We finally got set-up, and started recording. The Oral History went really well! It ran for about an hour, and we covered the early years of DEVO, his movie work, his thoughts on technology in music, and his love of objects. Then we went into the art portion, and we talked about how the computer changed his art practice. We wrapped up, tons of great stories (and you can view the entire thing on YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfeLBV3J6NI>) and it's a wonderful moment in my career.

But it was about to get better!

Mark creates these gigantic music thingees called Orchestrions. They're about 7 feet tall, kinda look like Daleks, and are covered in birdcalls and whistles. There's a bellows, and a MIDI controller, and they're these pneumatic music machines, ultimately expressions of sound art, that play together. There was one, full of cow-calls, that lived in this doghouse like enclosure.

Now, we were looking at these in this small little storage room, but there were so many things. He had set-up a full four-unit version of the MUSE, a music generation system designed by the great



Marvin Minsky! There was a box full of old masks. They were the masks that Mark wore as Booji boy in concerts back in the 1970s! There were old keyboards, stacks of records, tour posters, and costumes! It was amazing.

Mark had several other Orchestrions in another warehouse, so we went there, 30 minutes in LA rush-hour traffic. This warehouse was almost as miraculous! Mark had pulled out a Fairlight CMI computer keyboard system, which they had tried to get working. There was a car, well two cars which had been melded into a single car, which was just the front ends of them both.

Here, the Orchestrions were loud, booming, and they interfaced with this 1920s sort of bell-based device. Mark gave us a 20 minute performance of the devices, which is always a wonderful thing, when you have a 20 minute private performance.

All in all, it was a pretty amazing afternoon. I was in the heart of all the greatest tacos places in Southern California, and as I drove up the coast on Highway 1, I was confronted with the need to enjoy something lovely and tacos are always my go to.

And, somehow, I ended up at a Taco Bell, just up the road from Malibu. Again, for four tacos, and a Coke.

Go figure.

I drove all the way up to Los Osos, where a woman had about 30 years worth of material from her late husband that needed a new home. She wanted to give a lot of it to the Museum, but there was so much, we figured it would be worth my time to drive up and take a look. There was a lot of good stuff, but most of it was stuff we already had, save for a pretty extensive collection of Alpha Micro stuff, including items that were used in the Environmental Impact Study for the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plants! It was awesome!

The most awesome thing was a three inch stack of green bar tractor-feed paper. It was a directory print-out, listing every file on the server, an old BBS. It was a porn BBS, in fact. This is the only time I've ever encountered this kind of material, and it's fascinating not only because it's a list of porn or all-kinds, but it documents an important transition of file types in the days before JPGs were dominant and the GIF (pronounced like the peanut butter!) was the primary traded image. There was also a list of users, and the domains from which they uploaded, which mostly features Universities, but also places like Apollo Computer, the LA Times, and most interestingly, the Department of Defense!







This is Claims Department!

Written and photographed by Christopher J Garcia

Written at my place in Boulder Creek, CA, between May 9th and May 20th, 2018, while I was taking care of Vanessa while she recuperated from her mastectomy, and the Boys while they turned 3 years old. They ate Chocolate Cupcakes, filled with Blackberry Jam, with a Blackberry Cream Cheese frosting. This issue is dedicated to the memory of Milt Stevens, my friend who I would spend hours talking fan history with.

Comments? Garcia@computerhistory.org