



**Steve Lawson**

**Rock & Roll Is Dead**

"I'm fucking sick of pub gigs!"

Gem's not happy.

"This is NOT what I signed up for. How come being 'full time in music' means making sixty quid a night playing seventies rock to drunks?"

Meg's not listening.

"I mean, is this what you wanted? Is this what you thought we'd be doing when we started a band? We're one step away from that loser in the jester's outfit playing Lady In Red to farmers that we laughed at when we were at college."

"I need to change my bass strings."

Meg has other things on her mind.

"Great, so from your sixty quid on this gig, twenty's going to go on a new set of strings. That's forty quid. How much did you drink?"

"Two orange juices".

"Well, that's another imaginary four pounds we can pretend we earned. I had five bottles of Becks."

"That'll be why you forgot the bridge on Here Comes The Sun,

then."

"har fucking har".

Things are not good. Drum Monkey is nowhere to be seen.

"Where is he?"

"Where is he ever? Packing up his drums. You think we've got it bad. At least we can use the house amps when they have them. How often have you seen a decent drum kit in a pub?"

But Gem's mind is still on bigger concerns.

"This is shit. I'd be better off working in a record shop. I used to LOVE playing music. Any music. Now I hate the radio, I hate music on TV, and I'm really tired of playing covers gigs. We're not even getting many weddings, so no posh food and drunk bride's maids."

"Like you ever got off with a drunk bride's made when we did do weddings. And record shops don't really exist any more. Which decade are you currently hankering for?"

"None of that is the point."

But it was A point.

"Anyway, we need to do something about this. We've got loads of

half-written songs."

"You can't call my sound-check bass noodlings and your James Taylor-meets-Dave Navarro half-baked guitar ideas '*songs*'."

"No, but the only reason they aren't songs is cos we spend all our practice time working out how to do a cover of 'Dancing Queen' with three musicians and no keyboard player. We just don't have time to do both."

"Gem, music is our day job. This isn't 'living the dream'. It never was. It's just better than McDonalds. Isn't that enough?"

"NO IT FUCKING ISN'T".

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Band practice, 8pm, some sweat-smelling shit-hole underneath a railway arch in North London. late 2009.

"Do we really want to do this anymore?"

Gem's not stopping thinking since the gig at the weekend.

"You still not happy? I thought that was beer-talk at the Walkabout gig."

"No, it was SO not beer-talk. Don't you ever wonder why we do this? What have we bought into? We're playing songs we don't

like, to people who don't care, for landlords who won't pay to get rich off the back of. We make two hundred quid between us, while the bar takes ten grand. If we were making good money, it'd be worth it. But this is so *not* good money."

"Like I said, better than McDonalds?"

"What's with this Micky Ds shit? You're intelligent! You're a bright, clever, attractive, talented woman, playing '*Now That's What I Call MOR*' for sixty-a-night! That's nuts!"

"Drum Monkey, what do you think? You cool with these gigs?"

"Huh? Uhm, I've got another job anyway - I just like playing drums. I make money doing remote sysadmin. You know that."

You know that unison speaking thing people do in films that never happens? It happens.

"No we fucking didn't know!"

Meg carries on.

"I thought we were all doing this full time. Wasn't that the point? When did you start doing the geek stuff?"

Drum Monkey looks up, disinterestedly.

"I've done this all along. Did less of it when we were busy,

more when we weren't. I pay the bills, however I have to pay the bills. And I like sysadmin. It's like Sudoku but with server faults."

"What the fuck? what's that got to do with anything?"

Gem is seriously. Not. Happy.

"Pretty much everything, I guess. I pay the bills doing things I like. One of them is music, the other is mucking about with computers. I'd miss the geek bit if I didn't get to do it. And then I'd be as unhappy as you clearly are, you miserable fuck."

"Thanks, kick a man when he's down..."

"Look, you bought into that whole 'the aim is to be full-time in music' bullshit. I didn't. So I'm doing as much music as you, not pretending it's 'full-time' so I get to do other things I like doing, which pay the bills. So when we do a gig, I'm thinking about grooves and songs and drumming and hanging out with people I like. You're thinking about paying the rent and hoping your car gets through its MOT. I'm not about to swap with you."

Nobody speaks. So Drum Monkey carries on, seeing no reason not to.

"If you hate doing covers gigs for shit money, do something else. Anything. Let's play gigs cos we love them and see what

happens. Go solo for a while. Get a job doing something else - work in that imaginary record store Meg said you were going on about. It doesn't matter. There's nothing in the world that says that being a 'full-time musician' is more important than being happy, useful, friendly or whatever. If being full time is messing you up, just stop. Give up and move forward."

Silence.

"So, are we done? Is the not talking cos you like what I said, or cos you hate me and want me to leave?"

"Oh shut the fuck up, Drum Monkey. I am, truth be told, feeling like a bit of a spaz right now. I would never have put it the way you just did, but I guess I always have thought that being a full-time musician was the aim. If it isn't, I'm not sure what is. I need to think."

Meg is a little more visceral.

"Shall we write something?"

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Gem's story:

Jeff Morris AKA Gem: renamed by younger brother's inability to say Jeff, rescued from a life of tedious Jeffness; above average guitarist, OK singer, unremarkable childhood. Music

meant everything to him from the age of 12 onwards. Gave up on football, Panini Stickers and even non-music TV in order to play guitar. Huge posters of Jim Morrison and Jimi Hendrix in his room, despite never having listened to much of either Jim(i). It's what they represented that was important. Rock and Roll. Not the music, the mythology. That's what had meaning. Made him feel alive. Tragic pointless early deaths due to getting lost in their own patently ridiculous mythology didn't seem to get in the way of that. Problem was, Rock And Roll just meant playing the same lame rock riffs over and over for the first four years of playing. He got good at those, but never wrote a note of music til he was seventeen. Avoided classical guitar lessons. Did AS-level music at school, forced to start composing. Took to it well. Started writing anthemic rock and noise-driven avant-garde, having heard Sonic Youth on the radio. Music school, doing 'rock music', backed off on the avant-garde, fell back into playing rock classics. Bought into the 'dream', had a plan to play covers, keep writing songs and shop a demo around record labels. Got stuck at the playing covers part.

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So, start from scratch.

"Meg, I got your text, nice idea. Let's start from scratch, for a month. We can do the 4 gigs we've got booked in without rehearsing that stuff. Who are we kidding that it needed rehearsing anyway? Instead, let's write some music, and see if



we can remember why we wanted to do this in the first place."

Drum Monkey has also been thinking.

"we need a skills audit".

Blank looks.

"OK, let's assume we write some music. What are we writing it for? Who are we writing it for? We've done too many gigs to not just write for the kinds of places we play if we try and start from a blank slate. That's bullshit. So instead, let's have a look at what we're good at. Not just music - but that as well - and see what that suggests we do."

Meg nods. Gem's forehead puckers up like a toothless granny going in for a kiss.

"Huh? We're a band. A rock band, we write rock songs, how is that so hard?"

Drum Monkey tries - and fails - to hide his exasperation.

"Gem, you bellend, what does that even mean? 'We're a 'rock band'. No, you tool, rock band is a lame-assed game. Rock music is a constraint, a marketing term, and certainly doesn't reflect what any of us listen to. You forget, we're last.fm friends. I know what you listen to, and whether you're listening to all that foreign stuff cos it's cool or cos you

actually like it, I want to know how much of it you can actually play. Hence the skills audit."

Meg, ever the mediator:

"Right, here's what we do: we play now, any old shit, just play, have fun, make a bad noise. Just let off steam. In fact, screw it, I've had a better idea. Pick a band, write it down, swap bands, play in that style, at the same time. See what happens."

Nodding ensues.

Ever wondered what The Reynolds Girls, Commander Cody And His Lost Planet Airmen and Cannibal Corpse sound like simultaneously? Like all the best in-jokes, it remains best unshared. But it's fun. And that is a first.

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Meg's story:

Megan-Grace McKenzie: Always tall, always clever, never remarkable. Never knew her dad, but excellent mum meant pleasant childhood disrupted by irrational desire for anonymity. Playing bass in a band seemed like the perfect anonymous role. Total control: on stage, but unremarkable. Accidentally fell in love with performing music while working on this ill-conceived plan. Did music at college, but only a

year. Dropped out due to lack of money, phobic about debt, worked in Wimpy for two years, before starting this band with Gem. Sees the band as alternative to her Mcjob (insists on claiming she worked for McDonalds as Wimpy is somehow even worse, and she likes the emblematic horror of having had an *actual* McJob). Lateral thinking extends only as far as naming the covers band 'The Reverse' thanks to Gem's name being her name backwards. Such small horizons that she didn't care when the internet revealed at least 3 other bands using the same name. Fair-weather feminist.

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"Right, who's going first?"

Drum Monkey is wasting no time.

"I will - ladies first, 'n' all that. It was fascinating to list what I'm good at. Also felt odd to be doing it with a view to telling you two about it. But what the hell, here it is."

She switches to reading from her list. Not out of necessity, more as a prop, a way of not looking her bandmates in the eye.

"OK, I play bass. Quite well. My timing is good, I can play well enough that we could quite conceivably play without a guitar for a while if Gem broke a string. Thanks to most rock bass lines being piss-easy and me getting bored between gigs, I've got quite good at strumming power chords, so... uhm, Drum

Monkey, is this the kind of thing you were looking for?"

"Yes, I think so - I'm not sure what I thought, it was just a stupid idea..."

"Don't tell me that now, you cock, I spent ages writing this list! Right, I'll forget you said it."

Back to the list.

"So, I'd love to explore what was possible with a three piece band like ours that didn't rely on guitar driving everything."

"Thanks, I'll just fuck off then, shall I?"

"Gem, don't be a tit - she didn't say 'I hate guitars'! You freaked out because someone suggested it was possible to have a band that wasn't all about you and your weedy-stringed penis extension. You're a twat, now shut up and listen. Please".

Gem, too startled to speak. Meg, empowered, talks louder.

"I'm good at drawing..."

"Oh for fuck's sake!"

"Gem! Shut your face, you miserable shit! For God's sake, what is your problem? Just. Fucking. Listen!"

Drum Monkey, listening to himself for a moment realises that he swears in almost every sentence. Makes a mental note to try and swear less. Then posts the mental note to Twitter.

"Can I carry on? You boys finished your shouting? Testosterone is clearly the single most dangerous substance on the planet... Anyway, drawing. I can draw. And I'd love to do some art that went with the music. You can't really do artistic representations of 'Dancing Queen' or 'Town Called Malice', but if we're going to write our own stuff, I'd like to be in charge of artwork."

Drum Monkey's impressed.

"That's a great idea. I wasn't really thinking about skills for the band, or anything like that. More just trying to get us away from being another shitty guitar rock band. But artwork's always handy!"

"So, I play bass, I draw, I'm good with accounts - I had to do the accounts when I worked at McDonalds..."

Mutterings of \*ehem\*Wimpy\*ehem\* come from the two guys, like some burger-obsessed Conservative backbenchers, heckling a dull speech.

Meg ignores them.

"...I had to cash up, total, work out tax - stuff like that.

I'm amazed you've never asked me to help with that stuff for this band, Gem."

"We've never earned enough to need to think about it. All our money gets split between us, or divvied up for petrol based on how far we've driven."

"Yeah, but if we did pay for rehearsal space and supplies out of a band kitty, it'd mean that we didn't have to be paid it, and then wouldn't have to declare it for tax."

"Then who are the bookers going to make cheques out to, spaz?"

"When was the last time we were paid with a cheque? It's all cash in hand, cos half these pubs haven't got a proper license. It's a good job Drum Monkey doesn't have a real name, or they'd know we weren't just a duo..."

Drum Monkey's stopped listening. His mind spinning with ideas sparked off by Meg's list. She's already talking about non-rock music - thank fuck for that! The main enjoyment in playing seventies and eighties cover tunes is nostalgic, so the idea of writing tired derivative nonsense that has none of that nostalgic quality is enough to make him smash up his drums.

"OK, I'll go now - I can play drums, that much you know. But I also play hand percussion. At home, when I can't set up the kit, I play an electronic hand-drum thing, that means I can get a full kit sound at lower volume. I've never brought it to gigs

cos Gem always books shows in pubs with stages and PAs, so I've never needed it. But it could be cool for doing smaller things."

Gem's feeling threatened.

"Hold on: bass chords, electronic percussion - what kind of art-school pretentious shit is this?"

"SHUT UP!"

Drum Monkey is the most animated he's been in years. But this matters. This is important. This is the future.

Gem understands. At least, he understands enough to comply.

"I play drums. I play electronic hand percussion. I also work with computers all day, but know a bit about the internet."

"Everyone knows 'a bit about the internet', loser."

"Gem, please, you think having a 'proper band website' just means having a posh internet address that points to your Myspace page. You are what the guys at work would call a web tard. I'm happy to teach you about the internet, if you want to know, but don't make a nob of yourself by telling me you're a web ninja just cos you can using the internet to book a train ticket to go and see your mum and find porn when you're bored. There's more to the internet than travel and porn."

Meg giggles.

"You know, 'There's More To The Internet Than Travel And Porn' sounds like a fantastic title for a song. What's the acronym? TMTTITTAP - no, that's shit, so there's no band-name in it. But cool for a song. I'm going to write it!"

Drum Monkey is focussed.

"Anyway, I know about the internet. I can do us a proper band website, and get us networked."

"We don't need to be 'networked' all our gigs come through that Myspace page you claim to hate. That's where the kind of venues that book us look."

"Right, and those same venues are the ones booking original bands, are they? Who was the last band you saw on Myspace that got anywhere with their own music by staying on Myspace? Myspace is full of shit bands, writing shit songs, recording them in their shitty bedrooms, putting them online and then spending two years spamming everyone on the whole site trying to build up fifty thousand friends as a replacement for having any fucking talent."

The no swearing thing isn't working out. Leave it til New Year to resolve.



"Look, Gem, Myspace is shit. Yes, everyone's on there, but only because no-one's got the balls to jump. It's bands spamming other bands to listen to them. Everyone's shouting, nobody's listening. It's shit. We need to be in the places where people actually talk. But first, we need some frickin music."

"Did you just say 'frickin'? What the hell kind of word is that? That's a Hill Street Blues kind of word. Don't start using that American shit slang round here. We say fuck, OK?"

"I'm trying to swear less, OK? I don't like sounding like a docker."

Meg's eyes widen.

"I had the same thought! I heard a recording of myself talking after a gig; Julie - *the blonde* as Gem so lovingly refers to her - video'd about forty seconds of us playing, but twenty minutes of us talking after the gig, and I swear all the time! It's horrible. Let's be a no-swearing band!"

"Fuck that. What on earth is happening? First it's '*no guitar driven music*' then it's electronic hand drums or some such bull shit, and now it's no swearing, and '*Myspace is for poofs*'. I think I was happier when we just played Police covers in Walkabout pubs and whinged a bit about the lack of money."

"Gem, shut up. This is a chance for us to do something significant. We don't have to become famous, just feel like we

gave some thought to what we want, and then went for it. We're not kids. We've done enough dream-chasing, and playing covers gigs isn't a stepping stone to anywhere. So, we start to write some music, we think about what WE want from it, and we make it happen. And we do it democratically. So if two-thirds of us want this to be a swearing free band, we'll put a swear box in. You can swear all you like if you're going to pay for it."

Silence. Stunned silence. Gem is truly shocked.

"Uhm, OK. I think. Do you think we should just play and see what happens?"

"No."

Meg seems a little more certain than usual. Not forceful. just confident.

"No, we need to think more. We'll do loads of playing, trust me. But you haven't told us what you're good at."

All (four) eyes in the room are on Gem.

"Well. I play guitar. I obviously do a pretty good impersonation of Andy Summers, Paul Weller, John Lennon and the tiny bloke out of the Stereophonics. But before I met you two I also did a lot of noise stuff. I was listening to loads of John Peel on the radio, which introduced me to Sonic Youth. I spent two years obsessed with Thurston Moore, and through him Elliott

Sharp, Glenn Branca loads of weird noisy stuff. I even bought Lou Reed's Metal Machine Music, which is dreadful. But I was serious about that stuff. I guess music college knocked it out of me: no way I was going to become a session musician playing like that. But I can still do it, still know the territory.

"I've also been listening to and playing along with a lot of Eastern European music lately - Balkan Wedding music, Roma folk music. Really long sprawling melodies in totally effed up time signatures..."

"way to go avoiding the swear-box, my friend..."

Both of them spot the edit. Only Drum Monkey says anything.

Gem carries on regardless.

"My other skill is writing. I've kept a diary for years, and write short stories. I know they're good. I was hugely self-critical for years, but I just got better and better. No-one's been allowed to read them, but they're there."

"You can write, but you don't have a blog about the band? I thought you said you know the internet? It really is transport and porn for you, isn't it? Even Myspace let's you write a blog!"

"Drum Monkey, it's your turn to shut up and listen. My writing up til now has been a personal thing. I was saving it til we

got signed, so I could channel it into songs. But that's not going to happen. We were past that five years ago, and since then we've just done more gigs, the same as the old gigs. Our careers have gone nowhere in the last decade. Does that depress you?"

Meg's too buoyant to be brought down by this.

"No. It doesn't. You know why? Because we're here now. We're talking about making music, making exciting new music, about using our other skills. We're growing up, you spaz. We're ten years late doing it, but we're doing it. Right now that's good enough for me."

And it is.

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Drum Monkey's story:

Trevor Durham McKay, chose Durham as his first name early on, not realising that school kids would find the leap from Durham McKay to Drum Monkey all too easy for a quiet kid that plays drums. Chose drums to drown out shouting, and in lieu of any other exercise. Parents shouted. A lot. Never about anything in particular, just got annoyed by everything. Spent large part of childhood thinking about how the world and people could be better. Got into computers early on, though always regrets not having owned a Sinclair ZX80 or 81, so feels like a late

adopter having first bought a ZX Spectrum 48K. Programmed games, experimented with early bulletin board systems, pre proper-internet in the late eighties/early nineties, is proud that he remembers the web before spam and porn. All three weeks of it. Drums and computing are his 'rocks'. Everything can be explained by one or the other. Drumming, while metric, is also mystical, tribal, visceral, so works in place of any functioning spirituality. After college, realised that the best thing about knowing a bit about computers was the chance to work from home, never wear a suit, and snoop on everyone else's computer stuff. Regularly reads the email of the various companies that hire him. Generally happy.

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Today is D-day. Actually, E-D day. Electronic drums. Drum Monkey turns up to practice with his 'Handsonic' electronic drumming thing.

"Here it is. This is the place where technology, drumming and the need to keep quiet cos the people in the shop downstairs complain when I practice meet. It's a whole lot of fun and I've spent ages tweaking the settings so that it sounds like drums in space."

"Great, so we can finally do a cover of 'Feels Like I'm In Love' by Kelly Marie, complete with Pigeon Street crappy eighties electric drum noises."

"No, Gem, I mean like actual drums, outside of gravity. Surely they'd resonate for longer if there wasn't gravitational pull on the skins forcing them to stop. So I just tweaked the wave forms so they decay based on a different set of energy dispersal algorithms."

"You're shitting me, right?"

"Well, it's not an exact science, clearly, as I don't have a zero gravity chamber, or access to The Shuttle, but it's probably fairly close. And it sounds cool, which I guess is the main thing."

Meg's been thinking about music. A lot. This is the happiest she's been about music in a decade.

"It's the only thing."

"What is?"

"Sounding good. All that other stuff about rocking out, doing gigs, impressing audiences, getting signed. It's all bullshit. Every second of it. All that matters is sounding good. Define good. We can't. So we try to just 'be' good. Can we define someone else's good? No. So we don't bother aiming for that. Good is a feeling, not a number."

"Damn, who invited Germain effing Greer to rehearsals? It's like an episode of The Late Review"

"No. No, it definitely isn't."

Meg is learning that quiet is the new loud. Both in music and talking.

"This isn't about reviews or cool or opinions or trends or fads or anything. It's about us three, loving what we do. Playing the music we can't live without. And that, gentlemen, is not The Stereo-fucking-Phonics. And yes, I'm happy to pay a pound for swearing about them."

Gem and Drum Monkey are quiet. Gem's face blank, Drum Monkey smiling, his eyes wide. He breaks the silence.

"Meg, your enthusiasm is infectious. I've no idea where all that stuff came from, but wherever it came from, you need to stay there, digging up thoughts like that. And, you should start a blog - if I'm not jumping the gun, this sounds like the kind of thing that needs documenting. Even if we eff it up, it'll be a great story."

"Eff what up? What are you two going on about? All we've done is talk about how 'un-rock-and-roll' we're going to be! No-one's said anything remotely constructive."

Meg and Drum Monkey are too far into this to be put off by Gem not getting it. Meg, in quiet storm mode, carries on.

"Breaking the rock and roll myths that have screwed up everything we've done for the last ten years is a big step for me. Without even thinking about it, I assumed that at some point something cool would happen. I quite like playing covers gigs and it was, as I've said before, better than working in McDonalds..."

\*ehem\*Wimpy\*ehem\*

"...but it was never the master plan. The master plan was write songs, get signed, be famous... then what? Sat here as three thirty-five year olds with one proper job between them, that sounds both impossible and probably a load of shit... How much is the fine for saying shit?... If we end up there. I'm just not interested in that any more.

"When Drum Monkey started talking about skills and doing something different, it just made me think. It didn't take much - being bored with gigs is a pretty good start point for trying to think of something else to do - but that stuff I just said about what's important. It *REALLY* feels important. I've no idea where it came from, and I'm clearly not the first person to ever think of it, but it's important. We are important. More important than the success or failure of whatever music we end up making. So let's stop arsing around and do something we care about. If that means we get day jobs in order to leave evenings free to play good music instead of mind-numbing audio-turds for drunk Australians, all well and good."



She stops. No one speaks. It doesn't feel like the end, but she's got no more to say. Neither bloke has the balls to finish it for her. So they sit in quiet. If thoughts were worth money, they'd have all just paid their rent. But they aren't, so they are skint. Except Drum Monkey. But he's not sharing. Not yet.

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Text Messages:

**“DM - Sry U didn't get to try out ur 80s drum thing at practice. How about practice @ my house? Meg”**

**“Thx Meg. Practice at ur house? No drums, just the Handsonic? How's Gem going 2 react?”**

**“Who cares? Quiet practice would be gr8. Handthing can go thru my stereo. Gem can use my practice amp”**

**“Gem, pratice, my house, Thurs. DM bringing eighties handjob thing wi him. Use my amp”**

**“OK, sounds cool. I'll bring the Pod”**

**“Pod? Can you record on ur iPod?”**

**“Not iPod, spaz, Guitar pod. Loads of classic guitar sounds, in a**

**massive bean”**

**“No idea what yr talking about. Just be there, with guitar. No more txts, run out til I get mor credit”**

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Meg’s flat, Brixton, shared with late-working middle manager from department store in central London. Makes early evening practice possible.

“Right, Drum Monkey, have you worked out how to plug your handjob into the stereo?”

“Of course, it’s just phono in - I’ve got phono outs on my HandSONIC. I’m in. Can you turn the stereo on?”

“Done. Gem, what are you up to?”

“Nothing, I’m all plugged in and ready to go.”

“Then why aren’t you playing interminable rock riffage like you’re desperate to be in Whitesnake?”

“rock riffage is no fun at this volume. Let’s see what happens when we all play.”

Silence. Followed by giggles.

"This, my friends, is the future. Drum Monkey, why didn't we think of this before?"

"Because drums make noise... wasn't that a Suzanne Vega album?"

"No, that's Blood Makes Noise, and it's a song not an album. But yes, drums do make noise. Anyway, your handjob had better be quieter. Is it working?"

Half-decent conga noises emit from the stereo. Meg and Gem smile. Gem joins in, with some kind of faux-sitar sound.

"uhm, Gem..."

Sitar stops.

"Wait! Before you start, we said this was about what each of us wants to do, coming together to make good music. Right now, I want to try sitar. So shut the eff up."

"Fine. Carry on."

Sitar starts. Sitar plus congas is an odd cultural mix. Meg wonders what to do. Working out the key is easy. Gem always improvises in E. Play E. Two Es. E chord? what the hell...

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What passes for rehearsal stops abruptly when Meg's flatmate

arrives home. Not cos she cares, but because the spell is broken.

"You three look embarrassed. What on earth have you been doing?"

"Just jamming, nothing weird"

Nervous laughter.

"It sounded good from outside. Not that I could hear much. But it was good."

"Really? Thanks!"

Gem is, for the first time in his life, genuinely grateful for someone else's musical input. Normally, compliments are weighed up for their likelihood at being followed by some kind of physical intimacy with the complimenter, despite them never resulting in anything. This time, it was just a surprise that the noise they were making connected outside of the trance.

"Anyone want coffee?"

Three yesses. Flatmate moves to kitchen.

"Wow. That was fun."

Meg breaks the silence. And smiles. Not usual at rehearsals.

Normally relief is as good as they manage.

"What the hell was it?"

"Doesn't matter. It was good. Well, it was heading in the direction of good. And that's a good direction to be heading. We need to do more."

"Tomorrow?"

"Hmm, Possible. Yes, eff it, let's do it."

"Uhm, are you lot as excited as me? I'm well aware it might turn out that what we're doing is self-indulgent wanky shit. But that was like an audible enema."

"Ewww! Horrible choice of phrase!"

Meg observes. Correctly, I think most people would agree.

"whatevs. It felt great. Normally I get an adrenaline rush from playing loud. No need there. That was just fun. But freeing fun, not fun because we were playing to rules."

Meg's now frowning.

"What's with the over-analysis? don't get ahead of yourself, or us. It was cool, we'll play again tomorrow. We haven't reinvented the whole world of rock and roll..."

"Rock And Roll Is Dead!"

Gem is on a roll. An inexplicable roll. Clearly the jam connected.

"It's dead. Dead for me, anyway. At least, as a constraint. We can do what the fuck... sorry, eff... we like. Play anything. If we want to rock out we can. But only because we want to."

"Now you're sounding like Billie Piper. "Cos We Want To". "

Drum Monkey's impersonation is terrible, but the joke carries.

Time to think. To plan.

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Watching a band discover that everything they've ever thought about being in a band is balls is a pretty fascinating process. Everything from body language to chord progressions gets thrown up in the air. The purpose of playing is just as much up for discussion as the order in which notes appear, or whether electronic tabla noises are an acceptable substitute for a drum kit, or indeed an improvement.

"We need a new name."

Meg, being the originator of the old name - The Reverse - feels

qualified to be the first to suggest it's dismissal.

"Anyone got any ideas?"

"I've been thinking about this."

There's a lot more that Gem's been thinking about besides. He's all about the thinking.

"After college, I went through a stage of reading the books I was supposed to read, and going to the theatre. Largely I was just being a pretentious twat, but some of it stuck. One bit I loved was Brecht."

"The Threepenny Opera dude?"

Drum Monkey joins in, finding a foothold in the conversation. Wise man.

"That's him! He had this theory, all about separating the audience from the work, not letting them suspend disbelief."

"Verfremdungseffekt, which, according to wikipedia, 'prevents the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer'. "

"what, you've got the internet on your phone??"

Gem is a little behind on technology.

"Yes, and so have you, you moron. It's just easier to Google on an iPhone. And I can use Twitter, I can even record our rehearsals. It's pretty cool."

"Anyway, yes, Verfremdungseffekt is what I had in mind. It'd make an awesome band name. No-one would be able to say it, we'd have to keep reminding them, which is no bad thing."

"How is people not remembering your band name a good thing?"

Meg's lateral thinking gap again...

"It just means we get to keep saying it. So when people do remember it, they talk about it. Well, that's my made up psychological reasoning anyway. Whatever. It's a cool name, with a cool story, and it makes us sound cool. That's three cools for a band with a drummer playing an electronic handjob. I think we take what we can get."

Laughs all round.

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Verfremdungseffekt's first practice with a name. Everyone's a bit nervous in case it's rubbish. Yesterday felt good. Could be a one-off. Start by talking.



"How was work, Drum Monkey?"

"Huh? You've never asked me about work. Ever. What the eff?"

"It's weird. Playing music we're all writing together makes everything mean more. Oh God, I sound like a hippy. But, do you know what I mean?"

"Sadly, yes. Sadly because it means I sound like an effing hippy as well."

Three-way laughter.

"You really want to know how work was? It was great, for the first time in ages, I fixed a corrupted database on a server - someone's Wordpress install went tits up - but I was grinning from ear to ear. Guess I was less happy playing covers that I thought."

Gem is concerned. Feeling the need to back-peddle a little.

"Uhm, I think we need to stop talking about this. We're sounding like some cultish bunch of mentalists, 'saved by the awesome power of music'. Yeah, whatever, it's great. We're having fun, making a good noise. Let's not get carried away. It may well be that no-one else likes it at all."

"We need to record some of it, so we can listen back."

Meg isn't letting go of it that easily.

"If we record it, we can get away from any idea that playing it is just 'self indulgent', though it strikes me that what we're doing is looking to see how being self-indulgent could make us better. Being audience-indulgent and booker-indulgent just resulted in us sounding like a run of the mill shit-on-a-stick covers band. We were one step above being a tribute band."

"Hang on, that's a bit strong - we were good. We *ARE* good! OK, so we were always playing 'other people's music' but some of those songs are great, some of them are the songs that made us want to be musicians in the first place. I know I said 'rock and roll is dead', but I was getting a little carried away. Even if it is dead, it made a big impression on me during its lifetime. All we've discovered is that there's more to music than that. There's more to self expression than that, and that the dreams we had of 'making it' were a) hollow and pointless and b) certainly not achievable by playing weddings. So we're jamming, we're excited, and we'll probably find a balance somewhere in the middle. It's all good."

"did you just say 'It's all good'? Can you ease up on the Kid 'n' Play films? They clearly aren't good for you."

"Fuck off."

That's another two quid in the swear box for Gem.

Gem's ten favourite albums, in no particular order:

- Pink Floyd: Dark Side Of The Moon
- Whitesnake: Ready 'n' Willing (though he won't ever admit to this one)
- Pearl Jam - Ten
- King's X - Gretchen Goes To Nebraska (he tells everyone he meets about it, doing more harm than good to the reputation of the band)
- The Strokes - Is This It (hated them, then listened to them, begrudgingly loved them)
- Prefab Sprout - from Langely Park To Memphis (pure nostalgia)
- Metallica - The Black Album (talks about it just to tell people how bad they've been ever since)
- Oasis - Definitely Maybe (between Blur and Oasis there was no choice - Rock 'n' Roll mythology vs faux cockney cynicism. Cigarettes and Alcohol beat dirty pigeons and porklife.)
- Guns 'n' Roses - Appetite For Destruction (bought the same week as the Prefab Sprout album. A very different kind of nostalgia, though he now publically claims that Slash plays out of tune, having heard someone clever say it in an interview once)
- Sonic Youth - Daydream Nation (loved the band, or at least the idea of band. This album endures, still sounds awesome.)

If he was allowed eleven, it would be Talking Timbuktu by Ali Farka Touré and Ry Cooder. But he isn't.

-----o0o-----

Jam #2, Wednesday, 6pm, Meg's flat, flatmate still at work.

"Cool, you ditched the sitar sound!"

Meg's feeling feisty.

"What, so I can't have more than one sound? Piss off. I'm finally getting to explore what this box of noises will do beyond 'Boogie Triaxis' and 'Vox AC30'. This is meant to be a Rickenbacker 12 string through a Roland Jazz Chorus. No idea what that amp is, but I like the sound."

"It sounds like The Byrds, which is no bad thing. So to contrast it, tonight, Matthew, I'm going to be Flea."

"On no, not loads of slap bass, please."

"Now it's your turn to piss off. If you can be a sixties psychedelic guitar noodler, i can be a naked bloke with a sock on his cock slapping a bass while hanging upside down. Except I'm a fully clothed girl, sitting down. But the slap part still stands. Open your ears, you loser."

"OK, let's just play, shall we?"

Drum Monkey steps into the diplomatic loafers.

It's true that "Eight Miles High" mixed with zero-gravity tabla mixed with Meg's slap bass meanderings (which end up more Primus than the Chilis, but still sound cool) is a lot better than it sounds. All three are smiling, and this time Meg's recording it on her phone, for later listening.

Listening. Later.

"Wow. Y'know. Just, wow"

"Wow what? Wow good? Wow terrible?"

"Wow unexpected. That sounds like a song. Do you think we should write some words to it?"

"We could. I'm glad that it morphed into a chord progression. Just when the droning stuff was getting a little too much like some Austin Powers drug-trip parody."

"Yeah, that was me - I read an article online about bass notes not having to fit the chords on top, but instead redefining them. Amazing stuff."

"You Googled how to write basslines? How long did you do at music college??"

"A year less than you, tit-face. And I didn't really listen. I was turned off by the enforced piano lessons. If I could've learnt harmony on bass, I'm sure I'd have understood it better,

but those eff-wits made us play keyboards."

"I know, I was there."

"Anyway, there's loads of great stuff online. I found a whole thread on a discussion forum about chords and bass notes - a lot of it was bollocks, some of it I already knew, but a couple of the posts were fantastic. Way easier to find it there than buying books!"

"Well, I don't care where you found it. It worked, was cool, sounded good, even with you slapping. Just kidding!"

The glancing blow to Gem's head is slightly harder than intended, but is ignored, true intention noted.

Drum Monkey's excited too.

"Seems like adding a kick drum and a closed hi-hat to a tabla sound set worked great. I'm having fun with this. Not sure how to zero-gravity the hi-hat. Would it change?"

"Who effing cares!! It sounds good, just leave it. It's fine!"

"Woah! I'm only asking, just thinking out loud, I thought we were all about sharing ideas now."

"Yeah, sorry, I'm just used to crapping on every bit of geeky bollocks you come out with. Old habits die hard."

Gem makes mental note to be nicer to Drum Monkey, but not so nice as he actually notices a change.

Drum Monkey changes tack.

"Guys - in the gender neutral sense - this is way too interesting for us to just launch it on the world in 6 month's time. We need to start talking about it now."

Meg doesn't get it.

"We are talking about it. Now."

"No, outside of us. We need to talk about it online. That's how promo works these days. You just talk about shit you find interesting, and people who like those things will find you."

Gem steps in.

" 'If you tweet them, they will come'?"

"How do you know about Twitter?"

"I read about it in London Lite. Sounds like a load of people talking about trivial bullshit. Tell me I'm wrong."

"Of course you're wrong. It's a load of people of varying levels of interestingness talking about the things that

interest them. Find the ones who are interesting to you and hey presto, instant interestingness-filter."

"How long have you been on it?"

"Not long, but I'm already getting chatting to some people who are interested in the band. I don't know how they found me. Must've been searching for drummers or something."

Gem's less than interested.

"Sounds like bollocks. But I should sort us out a Myspace page. Especially as we now have a recording."

"You want to put what I recorded on my phone on the internet? Are you nuts?"

"Why is that nuts?"

Allegiances switch, Drum Monkey backs Gem.

"Sounds like a great idea to me - I wouldn't release it on CD, or charge for it, but as an example of where we're going, it's fun. It's pretty clear that it's a jam, but it's a cool sound, the quality is better than most of the live stuff that's on YouTube, just cos we're playing quietly enough not to overload the mics. I think we should do it. But please, not fucking Myspace."



"Two quid"

"Sorry, OK, look, I'll set us up with a website. I've got a mate that can host it, or I can put it on one of the servers at work. We can embed the music properly, not look like tits, and not have crappy Myspace ads all over it. No-one ever looks at the band Myspace page anyway. We just get spammers and other bands asking us to listen to them, without explaining why. Myspace is full of shit. Let's avoid it."

Meg's impressed.

"OK, I'm up for this Twitter thing - where do I sign up?"

"Got a computer? Let's do it!"

"Right, what's your username going to be?"

"Something to do with the band - Verfremdungseffekt is a bit long, but what's the translation? The Distance Effect? OK, I'll be TheDistanceMeg. That's cryptic enough. Makes me sound exotic."

"OK, try that. Need a picture too."

"I've got one. It's not me, but it's a cool girl playing bass. Let's chop her head off so I don't get sued!..."

...Right, I'm on. Talk to me, Drum Monkey!"

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Tweets:

[TheDistanceMeg](#): Just joined twitter. Learning how it works... Hellooo world. LOL. uhm, if I sound like a spaz, blame **Drum\_Monkey\_** :p  
33 minutes ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): Please welcome [@TheDistanceMeg](#) to twitter - treat her gently, she's a bit of a WebTard. :) Good job she's a killer bassist!  
31 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) Oi, cheeky! I'm not a webtard, it's just that Twitter takes a bit of getting used to... But you're right about my bass playing  
28 minutes ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): [@TheDistanceMeg](#) It's like SMS, but to lots of people. Glad to see you've discovered the reply button. Good work. ;)   
26 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) of course I found the reply thing. You're sat here showing it to me. :p Gem's bored. We should rehearse. lol  
25 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

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Meg's favourite records:

- The Jam - Greatest Hits
- Duran Duran - Seven And The Ragged Tiger (knows Rio is a better album, but this has better memories)
- The Pixies - Doolittle ('Sargeant Pepper for late eighties indie kids' - she heard someone say it, now

quotes it all the time)

- Red Hot Chili Peppers - Blood Sugar Sex Magick (embarrassed that she'd been singing along with it for 2 years before she noticed just how horrible the lyrics are. Didn't listen for the next 2 years, then started listening again, but won't sing along. Still loves it secretly)
- PJ Harvey - Dry (Polly Harvey is her secret heroine)
- Tracy Chapman - Crossroads (her mum's favourite record, still awesome.)
- Carpenters - Greatest Hits (childhood fave, forgotten for 15 years, rediscovered when they became cool again. Favourite iPod music on buses)
- Steve Lawson - Grace And Gratitude (solo bass player, first heard at a trade show in the late nineties, sounds like Sigur Ros at times so is almost cool. Plays it to friends but never tells them it's a solo bass player)
- Orbital - Snivilization (rave-years throw-back)
- Miles Davis - Kind Of Blue (Drum Monkey played it to her, loved it from the first time she heard it)

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More Tweets:

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) R we rehearsing again tonight? flatmate always works late, so it's OK if we want 2 :p

12 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey](#): [@TheDistanceMeg](#) I'm happy to play more. Gem clearly won't be doing anything

else, so we might as well :) might bring "real" hi-hat :)))

9 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) hahaha :))) Yes, Gem won't be doing anything. I'll txt him.

We shld get him on twitter. It's koool! \*\*\*excited face\*\*\*

4 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

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3rd Verfremdungseffekt rehearsal. Meg almost knows how to spell

the band name now. Drum Monkey has a real hi-hat with him as well, for added expressiveness. Apparently.

"Drum Monkey, why not just get a bass drum on your back, a harmonica and some cymbals between your knees, and become some kind of future-geek one man band?"

"Har har. Though, that would mean I could get rid of you. Meg and I could become a funkier version of the White Stripes."

Rule of musicians #1 - if you want to start an argument, bring up The White Stripes, The Darkness, Jim Morrison or Kraftwerk. Everyone has an opinion.

"My grandmother coughing up her emphysema-ridden lungs is funkier than the White Stripes. Makes me want to scream "Get some drum lessons, you loser!!"

Meg defends her name-sake.

"That's a bit harsh - isn't it supposed to be part of the sound?"

"What the sound of an autistic three-year-old smashing up a drum kit? Great 'gimmick'. Actually learning to play drums: now there's a radical thought!"

Drum Monkey's intrigued, as usual.

"So, are you arguing that the White Stripes would be a better band with, say, Dave Weckl, or Steve Smith on drums? That some super-skilled wanky-jazz fusion drummer would improve the music just because they were 'technically' better?"

Gem slows down. Thankfully.

"Well, no, I guess not. But there's a balance. Basic control is a prerequisite to playing an instrument."

"How do you know she's not exercising control to sound like that?"

"If she is, she's doing an awesome controlled impersonation of someone who can't play drums. It sounds like a clumsy drunk baking a cake in a particularly echoey kitchen."

Meg laughs, against her better judgement, then explains.

"That's funny. Wrong, very wrong. But funny. Carry on."

But everyone's tired of The White Stripes and wants to move on. Meg plays the bass-line from Seven Nation Army - noting the irony in a bass-less band writing iconic bass-lines.

"OK, who's got lyrics?"

Gem looks around for an answer. Meg looks down, Drum Monkey looks incredulous.

"Yes, I've written loads of lyrics. I spent all day yesterday writing them. All about space drums and server maintenance. Yes, I have five albums worth of songs written. We're going to be huge."

Gem starts, like he just woke up.

"New rule. No-one mention being huge, getting signed, being famous. Every time one of us even jokes about it, it sounds more ridiculous than the last. Is it just me, or is the music industry fucked? I was reading in the paper - one of the shitty free papers"

"Two quid"

"Huh? No, FREE papers"

"Two quid for saying shitty"

"Shitty's not a two quid word. fifty p at most."

"OK, fifty p. Move on."

"I was reading in the free paper about record companies wanting to sue musicians for downloading music off the internet and I thought 'way to go alienating all your fans, wankers!' Why would they do that? I mean, it's not actually 'stealing' cos there isn't a 'thing' to steal, right?"

Drum Monkey smiles, the conversation having inadvertently stumbled into his geek-strewn territory.

"The theft is supposedly of intellectual property, not physical stuff. They 'own' the copyright - literally the right to copy stuff. You copy it, you're breaking that law. Makes sense if you work in publishing where all your money comes from copyright. If you're a musician, it's clearly bollocks - can we make an exception for the word bollocks? it's way to expressive to be expunged."

"Agreed"

"Yes, agreed"

"if you're a musician like us, what we need is an audience. Suing an audience that doesn't exist is insane. Make it as easy as possible for people to hear you, then get to know them. Once your audience gets too big to know them all, worry about that then. Record labels are like Ladbrooks, only you just lend them money to gamble with, and they keep your winnings, and charge you again when they lose. That, my friends, is bollocks."

Gem's impressed.

"When did you think that up? I mean, it's obvious now you say it, but when do you find time to think of that?"

"Someone sent me some links on Twitter. There are loads of musicians on there talking about this stuff. It's easier for me to follow the conversation cos we aren't trying to pimp our music yet. Some of the people on there are worse than spammers for talking about themselves. Eff me!"

Gem's been reading the free papers again.

"Are you still on about Twitter? I concede there might be some cool people on there, but a load of weirdos as well. I don't want them turning up at my house stealing my guitars."

"You've only got one guitar worth stealing, and you live in a flat not a house. But your point is still balls. Your address isn't on there. It's less dangerous than going to the pub and someone following you home. When was the last time someone stalked you after a gig in a pub? That'll be 'never'. You're not interesting enough to be stalked. Seriously, stop reading free newspapers. It's an insult to the trees that died for them to exist. Quick rule of thumb - if a newspaper thinks it's front page news when a famous woman starts wearing glasses, it's time to stick a molotov through their office windows. Viva la revolution."

Drum Monkey, slightly embarrassed at his own hyperbole, tries to hold his stare. Fails. Gem notices.

"That, my dear percussive simian friend, is bollocks. You're not about to set fire to anyone's offices. You'll just tell



your freaky geeky loser friends on Twitter about it. Now shut up, and play your handjob. And hi-hat. Meg, is there enough space on your phone to record today's practice as well?"

Meg smiles.

"Of course, it's got 8gig of memory. I could film it as well, if my living room wasn't such a rubbish backdrop for a video. We'll have to think about that."

"We could go back into a rehearsal room just to film it, and then use real drums as well."

"Good plan. Right, can you remember what you were playing over that decending slap bass line I did yesterday? We'll do the droning E thing for a bit, and then I'll go into that. Join in."

And they do. And it's good. And they smile. And the recording is half-decent. And things are looking up.

-----o0o-----

Tweets:

[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): [@TheDistanceMeg](#) laydee, you were awesome tonight! Loved the descending bassline on that new tune. It's really coming together!  
15 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

TheDistanceMeg: @Drum\_Monkey\_ aww, thanx man! I'm really digging your space drums 2!  
Hi-hat worked well 2. \*\*\*excited face\*\*\*

Drum\_Monkey\_: @TheDistanceMeg I got some awesome advice today, via Direct Message, from @mysongotheday – will send it over!

12 minutes ago from TweetDeck in reply to TheDistanceMeg

Drum\_Monkey\_: @TheDistanceMeg we're not in the place where we need to do it yet, but was all about flyers, so you could do the artwork! yay!

12 minutes ago from TweetDeck in reply to TheDistanceMeg [Reply](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) cool! Would luv 2 do some flyer design. I guess we've got 4 songs nearly done. Need words now. Must try and write sum! :)))

7 minutes ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) have U noticed that now we rehearse @ my house, none of us are drinking beers when we play. Wonder if thats why we're better!!

5 minutes ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): [@TheDistanceMeg](#) I never really drank much - my timing goes to shit if I drink and play. But Gem's definitely better without booze! heee!

3 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

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Lunch-time, Drum Monkey has a slow day at work, so meets fellow geek Linus (known as Unix) for lunch. Can't stop talking about the band.

"This is SO much fun, Unix. I used to say that drumming was what I did because I didn't want to die playing MUD and talking shit about Firefly on IRC. Now it's way cooler than that. I even talk about it on Twitter, and have met a load of other musicians on there. Tweeting "played in the Dog and Duck,

Police songs went down well" always seemed like a shitty thing to say. "had an awesome jam with the new improv band, wish you could hear it, hope to have something online for you lovely tweeters to listen to soon. yay!" is way cooler.

"Though it would be 6 characters too long for a tweet, allowing for normal use of spaces."

Drum Monkey's train of thought is derailed by this insane fact.

"What? How the hell did you work that out??"

"It's a weird skill I have - I can count characters in what people say. Of course, I could be making it up, and you'd have to type it into your iPhone in order to prove it. But it has been tested. A lot. It's what we do in the office when we get bored."

"Wow. Seriously. Wow. In the seventies you'd probably have your own TV series by now. Any other crazy mental skills that you've failed to tell me about before? Just in case you're reading my mind or staring at my balls through my trousers."

"Ewww! Where the hell did that idea come from? No, I can do letter-counts on people talking, and have perfect pitch. You tend to talk in A Flat, or thereabouts."

"I talk in A Flat? That's incredible. I tuned my space drums tabla set the other day, and centred it around E Flat, which

would be the fifth of the key of A flat. Do I talk major or minor?"

"Neither, it's not distinct enough for that, your natural cadence comes to rest on an A Flat. But yes, that does make sense of you feeling at home with an E flat on your space drums, whatever they may be."

"It's my electronic hand-drum - I've tweaked all the sounds so that they emulate the way drum skins would sound in zero gravity."

"Awesome."

Unix is impressed. His face shows no change.

"So what's this new band of yours called?"

"Verfremdungseffekt."

"Ah, Brecht's 'distance effect'. Great name for a band. Are you deconstructing the marketing in line with that?"

"We haven't really got that far. Though I did get some amazing advice about guerilla flyering via Twitter today. Some stranger DM'd me some suggestions - look."

-----o0o-----

## Twitter Direct Messages:

**mysongotheday:** Gonna try this in several DMs so as not to clog up stream for others. To get people talking about the band before you start gigging:

**mysongotheday:** Guerrilla-ish campaign. Create flyers that only say "WTF is Verfremdungseffekt?" & leave in pubs, coffee houses, music stores, restrooms etc

**mysongotheday:** After an amount of time, follow w/more flyers w/promo pic that doesn't show faces & "This is Verfremdungseffekt" & distribute similarly.

**mysongotheday:** Follow w/similar flyers including web info. Finally, include gig dates. You should have something lined up by then.

-----o0o-----

"She's got some great ideas."

Unix is again impressed. He's also intrigued. Above-average rock classics was never something that interested him, but Verfremdungseffekt are interesting. Whether or not they're any good is a whole other, but not one that matters right now. The idea of the band is great, it's a story, it's a bit nuts, and it has the potential to be awful as well as fantastic. And schadenfreude is a pretty good fall-back as a reward for bothering to investigate a band.

"Durham, tell me more about the music."

Geeks tend to call Drum Monkey Durham. At least, though who didn't know him at school or college.

"Uhm, it's tough to describe at the moment. Not cos it's so 'unique' but just because we've only got four bits of music that ever get repeated, and they aren't really representative of anything other than our desire to not be a tedious rock band. There's some fake sitar in there, lots of space drums, slap bass. It's kind of Ravi Shankar jamming with Primus remixed by Aziz Ibrahim. In fact, Aziz is probably the closest musical vibe - I saw him once, with the rhythm section from The Smiths, at the Borderline in London. Was awesome. We're like that, but with space drums, and more slap."

"In case you hadn't noticed, I wasn't there, neither have I heard of Aziz. I will Google him though, thanks for the tip-off. I think you need to start on those flyers."

-----o0o-----

Rehearsal, back at the sweaty hell-hole, North London.

"Why did we book this place again? If this is a one off, couldn't we have got to Terminal or somewhere nice?"

"Piss off, Drum Monkey, we've got no money. 'We' being Meg and I. You're doing OK with your geeky whatever-it-is-you-do."

"You could've asked me. For a one-off, I'm happy to pay. I'm really enjoying this band, let's not waste it on a sweat-box where we can hear Keane wannabes next door."

"Great, this is the perfect time to tell us that."

"Sorry, I didn't want to mess this up. Let's play."

Gem's suddenly not in the mood. He thinks, 'like getting off with a woman who suddenly coughs phlegm in your face' by decides to keep his inner monologue very inner.

"Let's talk. What's this about you getting advice on Twitter?"

"Ah yes, a woman from America suggested we do cryptic flyers. My mate Unix agrees. He commented that it's more important, at this stage, to be interesting than it is to be any good. And cryptic flyers make us interesting."

Meg's a little wary.

"Hang on, didn't Dave Matthews try that a few years back, with all that 'who is Dave Matthews?' bollocks? "we don't give a fuck" was the resounding response, and his label wasted a whole load of money on it.."

"...And I bet he had to pay for it."

Gem has been Googling the terms of recording contracts, and gradually making himself feel more and more stupid for not knowing this stuff earlier.

Drum Monkey, ever wise, explains.

"Of course he had to pay for it. That's how recording and publishing advances work. The label gives you money to make a record, spends money on promoting it and marketing it, gives a thousand copies of it away to their friends in radio and magazines who sell it on Ebay, then they recoup everything, including the cost of the CDs they give to their media chums, from the artist. And charge them a fee. It's like being mugged, then kicked in the jewels as an afterthought."

Meg feels defensive. She's played on two records that got released, and is proud of them.

"That might be how major labels work, but it's not how independents do it. I played on some stuff by The Squid Kidneys that would never have been released without their label paying for it. They spent about five grand on it, and put ads in Vox and Mojo. I don't think the band made any money from the label, but they get to buy the CDs to sell at gigs."

"Great if you're a lazy bastard who can't be bothered to learn how to make records."

Drum Monkey's been playing with music software since he was ten. Having grown up with it, he thinks everyone can do it. But at least he knows that a record can be made for next to nothing. And the sound of the recordings on Meg's phone suggest it's going to get even easier and cheaper very soon.



Drum Monkey's favourite albums:

- Rush - Exit Stage Left (drummer cliché, to worship Rush, but he makes no apology for loving it, weird Ayn Rand influenced lyrics notwithstanding)
- Meshuggah - Obzen (great music to work to, apparently)
- Brian Eno - Ambient 1: Music For Airports (ditto, though how there can be any similarity between the two is best left to a systems administrator...)
- Clatter - Monarch (bass and drum duo, Rush influenced, indie, awesome)
- Morphine - Cure For Pain ( he says: "how to out-Tom-Waits a Tom Waits fan - introduce them to Morphine")
- Godspeed You! Black Emperor - Lift Your Skinny Fists Like Antennas To Heaven (post-rock, apparently)
- The Pixies - Surfer Rosa (a regular argument with Meg over which is the best Pixies album. Smart answer: all of them)
- Robert Mitchell 3io - The Greater Good (knows nothing about jazz, but heard this on Giles Peterson's show on the radio, and fell in love with it, especially the drumming, naturally)
- Velvet Underground - Velvet Underground And Nico (claimed to love it for years before he heard it, just cos it sounded cool. Surprised when he did here it that it blew his mind. Shambolic and awesome. Mo Tucker became as big an influence as Neil Peart.)
- Pet Shop Boys - Please (laughs along when Gem says it

sounds like ringtones, but listening to it on his own makes him cry like an X-Factor runner-up, and he has no idea why)

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Practice back at Meg's flat, for the fourth time. Starts with good intentions. Drum Monkey introduces some new music.

"Remember that album I was raving about after Giles Peterson played it? The jazz one."

"Robert Mitchum?"

"Mitchell, actually - Robert Mitchum's an actor, and probably dead. Robert Mitchell's a piano player. With a trio, spelt 3 - I - O. Anyway, let's have a listen, and see if we can play some jazz. Would be interesting to see what we do with it."

Robert Mitchell's The Greater Good plays over Meg's stereo. It's awesome. Exquisite piano, stretchy supportive athletic bass lines and effortlessly contemporary drumming that plots the connection between jazz and electronica perfectly.

Sadly, the music it 'inspires' is total crap. No new ideas, confidence dented.

"Gem, I don't think you're supposed to play rock bar chords in jazz"

"Piss off! it wasn't my fault. None of us know enough about jazz. Your drums sounded like a bontempi keyboard you dickhead. We were like that Fast Show 'jazz club' sketch. Shall we stick to what we do best?"

Meg, once again, the pragmatist.

"I think the start point was a little unfair. Clearly those blokes on the iPod REALLY know jazz. Remember at college them talking about music as a language? They speak the language."

"Actually, most of the stuff I remember from college that isn't strictly about shredding on guitar is how to get a gig in the West End playing in a theatre pit."

"You went to the wrong classes, clearly. Anyway, jazz isn't our language. I think what we're doing already has some of the spirit of jazz about it, we're just not 'jazz' jazz. Gem, you just tried too hard to play piano chords on guitar. Play what you know best. Do what you do, you're good at it. Drum Monkey, all that ting ting ta-ting stuff sounds like balls on that electric handjob thing. Stick with the sounds it does best. Your space drums are really original. Sometimes, being 'a bit shit' is God's way of telling you what you're good at."

"thanks for the greetings card philosophy, Meg..."

"You know what I mean."

And they did. It was fine. Being crap is OK. It's just a bad noise and it stops when you stop. They had stopped.

"Coffee Time."

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Over coffee, the funny side is seen.

"Right, let's not play any more bad notes. Agreed?"

"Ha! I once heard a bloke doing a music workshop say the only rule was 'if it sounds good play it again, if it doesn't, don't' - we got through quite a few of the ones we're not supposed to repeat!"

Drum Monkey thinks calling it quits is wise.

"Shall we work on something else tonight? The website? Some flyers? Lyrics?"

Gem, startled.

"There's no WAY I'm co-writing lyrics from scratch with you two!"

"Huh?"

Times two.

"I have to write bad lyrics then remove the clichés. It's how I do it. I write bad lyrics that say what I want to say, then edit out all the references to 'baby' and 'rockin' out' or whatever other nonsense I put in. It's just how I do it."

"OK, OK, relax. Chillax. Do whatever the fuck it takes to stop you freaking out at every suggestion!"

Drum Monkey notes his own reaction. The less rock and roll the music becomes, the less he puts up with any behaviour that can only be mitigated by the right of "creative people" to be a pain in the arse. Bollocks to that. Thus goes his logic.

The problem with an inner monologue is what happens when someone else is meant to understand and respond to it. The 'inner' part becomes an obstacle.

"Uhm, now it's my turn for a 'huh?'-moment? Where did that come from."

Time to externalise. Fortunately, Drum Monkey, the self analytical type, explains.

Gem stops. Then talks. softly.

"I'm learning to reflect."

The others wait.

"I'm learning to reflect, which is about as un-rock and roll a thing as I've ever said. I don't know if it's connected with the musical change - I'm inclined to think its a coincidence, given that we're not in the middle of some cheesy slice of post-modern contemporary fiction where every single fucking thing has loads of significance. But whatever is causing it, it's weird. It's also embarrassing to realise what a tit I've been for a long time. And if you ever repeat any of this, I'll bury your body with those of your closest relatives and favourite pets."

More silence, broken by Meg.

"Dude, my lips are sealed. Seriously, this is big stuff. I've known you for, what, 18 years? I've spent most of the time putting up with you being what amounts to a fairly crap rock star wannabe. Don't get me wrong, I like you and found your failed attempts to shag any of my friends who turned up to gigs more hilarious and tragic than annoying, but I didn't think you'd ever grow out of it. I'm not sure what to do with this information."

Meg smiles. The right smile. It works.

"Ha! I know, I can be a tit. And I'd still probably act like I want to shag most of your friends, or at least date them first. I never could get the hang of the shagging people you've just met thing. You being straight was such a waste, given how hot all your mates are. But anyway, playing guitar clearly isn't

such a sexy thing when you're thirty-five as it was when we were twenty-two. Part of me feels like Sammy in the wedding singer..."

"Played by Allen Covert"

"yeah, whatever, anyway, he suddenly realised that being a forty year old trying to be Fonzie is ridiculous. I'm hardly trying to be Fonzie, but I do still have a Hendrix poster on my wall, and don't even like Hendrix's guitar playing. Time to move on."

Everyone's thinking. Nobody's talking. Pause. Gem:

"Damn, this is really odd. I'm not given to self-reflection, and I'm not having a crisis. But I feel a bit like I've been in a play for a long time and it's hard to shake the character. Even playing covers in pubs was enough to feed the idea that we were part of the rock world, rather than part of the beer-selling world."

Meg snaps back to reality.

"And on that note, we have got a gig on Saturday. Fox and Firkin. Shouldn't we run through Here Comes The Sun? At least do the bit in 7/4..."

And they do. And it's good. And something is different. Freer. The pressure's off. It feels good. (They knew that it would.)

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"Drum Monkey, you need to explain something to me. I keep getting followed by people I don't know on Twitter. Any idea why?"

Lunch: Drum Monkey, Meg, coffee, overpriced sandwiches.

"Uhm, cos they found you, duh!"

"Yes, how did they find me. And why are you talking like Alicia Silverstone in Clueless?"

"Ah, was watching Hannah Montana last night. Torrented it, to see if it was possible for an adult to watch it and not feel like a grubby paedo. It isn't, by the way. Sadly, the California mall-chick speak is infectious."

"California? Surely Bill Ray Cyrus - and therefor his daughter, Miley - isn't from California? Nashville would be my guess. Or Alabama. Texas maybe.

"Let's ask Twitter."

A flurry of mobile phone fumbleage.

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Tweets:



[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): Any idea where Billy Ray Cyrus is from? I'll explain later... :)))

about 7 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) wants to know where Billy Ray/Miley Cyrus is from. He thinks California. Clearly very wrong. Looooser.

about 7 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[StevenGuerrero](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) I think he's from the moon.

about 7 hours ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): [@StevenGuerrero](#) har har! I guess he could be. He's a scary man. Wikipedia says he was born in Kentucky, but hails from Nashville...

about 7 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[StevenGuerrero](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) We all know you can't trust Wikipedia. That should read, born on the moon, but hails from whence the Mole People live.

about 7 hours ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

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"Anyway, that's not the point. What we were talking about? Ah, Twitter - your followers. Yeah, I had a look. A lot of them are following me too. Must be music people. Some on there just follow all the musicians they can find. Others might be geek friends of mine. I had a follower last night who said he'd heard about 'my band'... slightly worried about which version of the band he's heard about!"

"He'd heard about 'your band'?? I wonder where from. Maybe your mate Unix is talking about it. He seemed into the idea."

"But he hasn't heard us yet! Would anyone really talk about a band they hadn't heard?"

"Yeah, of course. We used to do it all the time before the internet - there'd be some band written about in Sounds or NME, and I'd stick pictures of them on my wall and write their name on my school books if they sounded cool. It was often months later that I heard the music. I remember being SO disappointed when I eventually heard Kenickie. Coolest band in the world until they played a note... I wonder what they're doing now."

On her phone, she googles: Top hit is <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenickie> - Meg chuckles, and tweets the link. She's getting the hang of this, and getting braver.

Drum Monkey saves his response til she's stopped tweeting. He smiles, noting she looks like like a kid who's just been handed a PSP for the first time.

"Wow, I can't imagine ever doing that, but I guess some people do. So maybe it was Unix. Fuck knows."

Two quid, says Meg's inner monologue, involuntarily. Then remembers all the other fucks that day.

"Have we given up on the no-swearing thing? Our language has gone downhill, and the box is still pretty much empty..."

"Ha! I'd kind of forgotten about that. We do swear less, though. So I guess it worked!"

"I guess so. So, anyway, how do we get a buzz going about the band? You're the internet wizard."

"Yeah, but I don't work in marketing."

"Marketing strategy is bullshit, if you ask me. Fuck marketing."

She pauses, savouring the right to swear without lining the pockets of some nameless charity. Continues:

"What makes you want to talk about a band? How many of your friends are in bands? Which ones do you talk about?"

"Good question. Who do I talk about, besides Rush? Uhm, Clatter! I love them, and no-one really knows who they are. One of the blokes at that vanity publishing firm I was doing tech support for got really into them when I was playing their music in the office, but that was just through listening to them, not through me talking about them per se."

"OK, here we go, let's try talking about Clatter on Twitter. They're on there. If we talk about them, and see what people respond to, we'll see what we can try for ourselves."

"Sounds great."

Twittering commences.

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Tweets:

[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): Introducing [@TheDistanceMeg](#) to the awesomeness of [@clatter](#). She's hooked. :) <http://bit.ly/3eITVU> (expand)  
about 1 hour ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): RT [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): Introducing [@TheDistanceMeg](#) to the awesomeness of [@clatter](#). She's hooked. :) <http://bit.ly/3eITVU> (expand) <<<the videos GR8!  
about 1 hour ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): Wow, was just reminded of Kenickie by a conversation with [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) - <http://bit.ly/Rh83l> (expand) - tag=nostalgia (is that how you do it?)

[MikeKSmith](#): [@TheDistanceMeg](#) If you're on a Mac try "Alt-3". If you're using Windoze machine then try in the bottom right hand corner.  
about 1 hour ago from *Twitterrific* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@MikeKSmith](#) ahh, do I actually type the 'hash' symbol? I can't find it. Thought that was done by twitter. Duh!!! sorrreeeeeeee  
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[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@MikeKSmith](#) uhm, let's try it - ### - yay found it!! [#thankyouMikeKSmith](#) how's that? :)))  
about 1 hour ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[MikeKSmith](#): [@TheDistanceMeg](#) BTW don't know if [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) has mentioned it yet, but have you seen Posterous? It's teh awesome. DEAD easy to blog.  
about 1 hour ago from *Twitterrific* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@MikeKSmith](#) blog? eeeee! I'm not sure I'm ready 4 that. Will ask

[@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) he is the geek in teh band. LOLS!

about 1 hour ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[MikeKSmith](#): [@TheDistanceMeg](#) Also - you should try out some desktop apps like TweetDeck.

Helps keep your contacts and tweets organised.

about 1 hour ago from *Twitterrific* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@MikeKSmith](#) heeha! Look! I'm on tweetdeck! @ Drum Monkey told me all about

that 1 straight away. But it confuses me, so I use the net 2!

about 1 hour ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[MikeKSmith](#): [@TheDistanceMeg](#) Well, "blog" in the loosest sense. It's a cool way to keep track of

any neat things you find online. You just email stuff.

about 1 hour ago from *Twitterrific* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

-----o0o-----

Saturday, band practice, Terminal studios, London. paid for by Drum Monkey. Meg's yet to show up.

"Eff me."

Gem's impressed.

"This place is awesome."

"It ought to be for what it cost! Happy to pay for it, but we can't make a habit of this!"

"Ha! It's awesome. I wonder where Meg is. Let's get set up anyway."

"I'm already nearly finished, in case you hadn't noticed. The in-house drums here are better than mine, so I'm playing those instead. Just getting the space drums wired up."

"I'm loving the space drums! I really wasn't convinced when we started messing around at Megs. It felt like just that - messing around. But removing volume and massive amounts of distortion from the music making equation has given me so many more options. I'm looking forward to combining those options with some big distortion today though. Been working on some cool post-rock noises. My listening is broadening a lot thanks to Spotify. Just keep searching on all the bands that I'd heard were 'cool' through the years, but hadn't ever heard. Realised I really missed out by not hearing My Bloody Valentine at college, and Godspeed You! Black Emperor."

"I've told you about Godspeed loads of times, you bellend!"

"Yes, but you like Rush. Ergo, your opinion on music is worthless. Thanks to you liking Godspeed before me, I may consider you more worthy of listening to in future. But not much."

"Have a listen to this - it's a duo called Clatter, from the States. Meg and I have been pimping them on Twitter. Just experimenting with using Twitter to spread the word about music. Meg loves them too."

Clatter comes on the (rather amazing) studio PA. A massive

sound for two people. Gem overlooks the overt progress of the music and can't help but be impressed.

"That's a duo? What the fuck?? How does two people make that kind of noise?"

"There's loads of their stuff on Youtube, I'll send you some links. She's got three bass amps, clean, dirty and effected. It's mind-boggling. Apparently they toured in the UK. No idea if they brought all that shit with them, but they can't have got close to making any money if they did!"

"Bang goes my theory that women can't rock."

"You call that a 'theory'? Are you serious? Have you never heard Juliana Hatfield, Kristin Hersh, Kim Gordon, Kim Deal..."

"OK, ok, I know. There are some who can, but they're the exceptions."

"Gem, you're a cock. What on earth are you talking about? Just how many exceptions do you need before you realise that most music is crap. Most men can't 'rock' - whatever the fuck 'rocking' has got to do with anything. Making great music is really difficult. You choose to look at the things you like as representative of something or other, but actually, all good music is an exception to a rule. The rule is, *'it's impossible to make awesome music'*. Fortunately there are so many people trying to make awesome music that a nought-point-one percent

suckage fail-rate is enough to produce a thousand life times worth of incredible life-changing music. The numbers still don't suggest that either 'men' or 'women' are innately good at rock. The dick-heads that write music magazines are innately good at treating women who write meaningful music as some kind of curiosity, as though having tits and playing guitar are meant to be mutually exclusive, and somehow women doing anything other than just looking 'hot' is an act of uber-feminism. So someone like Tori Amos gets labeled a 'control freak' because she knows what she wants. She's not allowed to be artist, writer and producer. She's treated as a lunatic because she has ideas. How fucked up is that? Women are 'allowed' to sing, play piano, and be sexy. Anything else and they're nuts. It's utter shit, and you've bought into it. You tool."

Drum Monkey is breathing hard. That was exhilarating. Wow. How long has that been brewing? God knows. But it felt really good.

Gem is silent. And confused. Way too many sacred cows have been slaughtered in the last week. He opens his mouth to speak, without any idea what's going to come out.

"The music industry is like the fucking Truman Show."

That's a start. Sentences fall out like disconnected shards of thought snatched from a conspiracy theory chat-room.

"It is. This entire world of comfort and promise and myth and



legend and bullshit is spun ... And we buy into it ... And the main actors sometimes die defending the myth ... The product placement is insane ... The energy spent perpetuating it is unmeasurable ... almost everyone loses ... "

"Everyone loses."

Drum Monkey gets it. He follows the metaphor. It works.

"Absolutely everyone loses. Because the wins are money and fame. Neither of which are a measure of anything 'good'. Or 'useful'. Or even 'human'. Both are attritious. Destructive..."

Drum Monkey slows to haiku. Continues.

"There's no measure of what anything means ... If it makes money it's good ... Even if it loses more money than it makes ... Even if the patently ridiculous mythology of it all engulfs the musicians ... look at Amy Winehouse - every time she went into rehab, or court, or was in a fight, her label ran adverts for her album. If she dies they've got blood on their hands."

Gem hurts. It's too much. He hits the stop button.

"That's all true. But most of it's just fun. We're artists, we need to worry about this stuff. But it can't be as bad as that. It can't. What about all the great music."

Drum Monkey isn't letting go.

"Statistics. Good music sells as well as bad music. There's no way of mapping quality to sales. That's all about marketability. So some great music sells, which means we're OK with it. It's still that 0.1 percent of music that's good, inside or outside of 'the industry'. It's coincidence that the good stuff got signed."

Gem's found his 'in'.

"That's not true. Even with all the effed-up-ness of the industry, there are a lot of people who work in it because they love music. They are there because the myth means something to them. Myths don't have to be true to create meaning..."

Gem stops mid-stream, wondering where this stuff is coming from. Then he remembers. At college, listening to the New Fast Automatic Daffodils song 'Man Without Qualities', going to the library to research the book trilogy of the same name, and the subsequent mind-expansion.

Meg arrives.

"What have I missed? Haven't you guys started recording anything yet?"

-----o0o-----

## Typical week in the life of Meg:

Makes a lot of her money from non-music: helping friends out, Decorating, moving house, occasional shifts in a couple of boutique shops, a bookshop and a market stall... Usually a couple of days a week are taken up just trying to do the extra stuff that pays the bills. Spends more time than you'd imagine playing bass, though feels constantly guilty that her 'practice schedule' isn't regimented enough. None of her friends outside of the band are musicians, so doesn't have anyone to bounce musicological ideas off. Spends a lot of time thinking about getting better at music, but is completely un-self-aware, so has no idea that her own pragmatically derived methods are actually brilliant. Everything she's done musically that didn't involve learning rock covers has prepared her for playing in *Verfremdungseffekt*, despite her not knowing it. Her musical restlessness will be their strongest asset as time goes on. Also unwittingly, stress inspires her. Used to watch a lot of daytime TV, but the feeling of frustration-bordering-on-panic at not being able to do anything to help the massively fucked up people on Springer-esque air-your-dirty-laundry human-train-wreck shows led to her seriously think about getting counselling herself. Instead, started working one day a week in Oxfam, out of guilt at having watched fragile people melt down but failing to help. Since the start of *Verfremdungseffekt* (all of one week ago), has spent days on end on the internet researching 'music'. Avoiding anything stylistic. Wanting to understand what Drum Monkey referred to as 'meta-music'. The *Why* as much as the *What* and *How*. It occupies most of her

thoughts. Something nagging in her head makes it feel like it needs unlocking.

-----o0o-----

Coffee Shop, Brixton, Meg plus Joolz - friend from Oxfam. Deeply worthy student with little clue about anything, hence self-conscious name-spelling, worn on a home-made bracelet to reinforce the point. Strong laudable desire to help, no capacity for understanding why or how. Hence, Oxfam job. Accidentally part of the solution.

"Joolz, what music do you listen to?"

"Mainly chart stuff, why?"

"What does that mean?"

"Chart stuff? Uhm, stuff that's in the charts, probably. Sorry, was that a trick question?"

"No, think about it, I asked you what music you listen to, not where it comes from. You said 'stuff that's in the charts' - that's a differentiation based on popularity, or successful marketing, not anything that's to do with 'you'. You work in Oxfam, do you ever buy CDs in there?"

"Oh yes, I've had some great stuff from here!"

Daylight.

"Oh yes? What?"

"Some great chart compilations. Now That's What I Call Music. I got a Ministry Of Sound one last week, but only liked the hits on it. Some of it was stuff from clubs that I didn't know. And The Best Of Blondie."

Midnight.

"So 'good' is things you know?"

"Well, I have to hear it a few times to get it. I did buy a Doves album in the shop. I heard one of their songs on The OC. The album was good."

Another chink of light in the darkness.

"So the TV soundtrack introduced you to the band, you bought the album, and then got into it?"

"I guess so, what's this got to do with anything? Are your band going to be in the charts?"

"Ha ha! No! Never. That's brilliant!"

"Why wouldn't you want to be in the charts?"

"It's not that I wouldn't want to, or that I would want to, just that 'charts' aren't a measure of anything. The biggest frustration of playing in a pub band was that songs were liked based on how well known they were, not on how 'good' the song was, how well we played it, or even how well it fit with the moment. Playing 'Brown Eyed Girl' at a wedding for the sixtieth time gets pretty tired. It's not a good song at all..."

"I LOVE Brown Eyed Girl! It always gets me dancing."

"Ah, sorry, didn't mean to dismiss your favourite music"

"It's fine. I'm not sure I understand what you're talking about when you talk about music anyway. I just like some songs, and I hear them on the radio. I don't feel the need to 'find' good music, it's just there. But you're into music. Music is your thing. At home, I mostly watch TV anyway. Music on TV is normally rubbish though. X-Factor is horrible. I don't like TV that just sets out to make people look stupid. I do like Will Young though. He's amazing."

Meg tries to hide her smirk. Succeeds. Joolz continues.

"I like hearing other music. I really like that stuff you play that sounds like whale-music whenever we get together at your house"

"Uhm, Steve Lawson?"

"Dunno, you never said who it was, it was just really soothing. Made me feel like I was in a really cool eighties film. But I can't imagine putting it on at home."

"Why not, don't you want home to be a cool eighties film too?"

Meg, again trying not to sound forceful or annoyed. The Steve Lawson CD is her one bit of 'quiet activism', and bass geekery. A solo bass album that she never told anyone was just a bass player. She even sometimes copies it for friends just to stop them buying it and finding out what the instrumentation is. Meg plays it every time her non-music friends comes round. One day, she'll take them all to a gig.

"I just don't listen to music the way you do. I put on music that I want to dance and sing to. And that's the stuff that's in the charts. Normally, I just put the radio on. But sometimes if I'm getting ready to go out, I'll choose music that makes me really want to dance!"

Meg cuts her losses. She feels alone. None of her usual crowd are going to understand *Verfremdungseffekt*. They watch TV, listen to Radio 1, and are happy with the mediocre consensus of mainstream lowest common denominator entertainment. X-Factor, she thinks, is driven by the same self-satisfaction and *Schadenfreude* that makes Jeremy Kyle so painful to watch. Desperate people, who want fame above all else, singing marginally better than your average homeless drunk, being hung drawn and quartered by the media. The ones who do porn seem to

be the most honest. They stop pretending there's any dignity in the search for fame-at-any-cost.

Meg: playing music that matters, working in Oxfam, helping people out so she can pay the bills, living with a friend who cuts her slack on her rent and is out all the time so her having a tiny room doesn't matter. She feels lucky, and her head is full of stars. Maybe she's nothing but stars. Maybe Moby was right, and we're all made of stars.

-----o0o-----

"I can't believe what just happened!"

Practice, Megs flat, and one seriously excited Drum Monkey.

"You know that band I keep going on about?"

"Clatter? Yes. We know them. And like them. We're sold."

"Shut up Gem, yes them. Well, Meg and I had a go at posting about them on Twitter to see how good it was as a forum for spreading the word about music - seeing if we could do it for another band, to see if anyone else would be able to do it for us."

"And they just got signed?"

"Gem, please, shut the fuck up. No they didn't get signed."



Thank God. They just sent me a message asking me to be their drum tech for a European tour!"

"What? Now you're shitting me. Why would they do that?"

"Because I posted on Twitter about them."

"It's called tweeting - even I know that, and I'm not on your stupid nerds' chatroom"

"I know, it just sounds stupid. I'm OK with 'posted on Twitter', OK? Anyway, stop messing things up, you miserable bastard! They asked me to tour with them."

"Are they paying?"

"Paying? Why would I want to be paid to tour with my favourite band?"

"Hold on, until last week, Rush were your favourite band. Clatter were 'one of your favourite bands', what changed?"

"Rush didn't ask me to go on tour with them."

"Good point, well made."

"Look, it might not happen. They've only been to Europe once before. Who knows if they'll even come back. They're not exactly huge. But they are awesome, and just by telling people

about them, they got in touch. That wouldn't have happened before now. OK, they're just two normal people from the middle of America, making mind-blowingly awesome music, but I'm still a fan, and if I can get some drum tips from Joe while helping him set up his massive kit, that's a fair swap."

"Sounds great. Good call."

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Drum Monkey's Tweets:

[Drum Monkey](#) : Introducing [@TheDistanceMeg](#) to the awesomeness of [@clatter](#). She's hooked. :) <http://bit.ly/3e1TVU> ([expand](#))  
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[TheDistanceMeg](#): RT [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) : Introducing [@TheDistanceMeg](#) to the awesomeness of [@clatter](#). She's hooked. :) <http://bit.ly/3e1TVU> ([expand](#)) <<<the videos GR8!  
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[Drum Monkey](#) : Telling Gem all about how awesome [@clatter](#) are. He can't believe it's just two people. Need to send him some youtube links :)  
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[Drum Monkey](#) : Did any of you listen to [@clatter](#)? I recommended them the other day. I love them - what do you think? <http://bit.ly/pugdQ> ([expand](#))  
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[TheHuxCapacitor](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) Having listened to **Clatter**, I'm wondering if you have any dEUS in your collection or are they maybe not art rock enough? ;)  
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[TheHuxCapacitor](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) IRC eh? quite the techie So, are you equally as technical with your drumming as [@clatter](#) are with theirs. Tight, like a tiger.  
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[clatter](#): Contemplating a Europe tour next summer...maybe [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) would be a drum roadie?  
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[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): [@clatter](#) WOW! I would so do it! and for free. Are you serious?? HA! Just wait til I tell Gem. He'll eat all his 'twitter is shit' nonsense!  
2 days ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[clatter](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) Would Gem & Meg be willing to let you be gone? We could use your computer expertise, too! Don't want to create band troubles.  
1 day ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): [@clatter](#) I'm sure they'd be fine. They'd have to be! :) I told them & they can't believe that twitter put me in touch with my fave band :)  
about 23 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[clatter](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) Ah, the magic of the internets. Sort of like MySpace - we love MySpace, don't you? ;)  
about 21 hours ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): [@clatter](#) WTF? seriously? I mean, yeah, I've met some cool musicians through MySpace but the platform really sucks. Wait, are you kidding??  
about 20 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

-----o0o-----

## Meg's Tweets:

TheDistanceMeg feeling rather alone. Luv the guys in the band, but outside, no1 gets how special playing music U care about is. Help me out, twitta! LOLS

2 days ago from web

KvN\_Montgomery @TheDistanceMeg Find their creative outlet and try to explain your creativity in terms of their creativity.

2 days ago from TwitterGadget

TheDistanceMeg @KvN\_Montgomery wow, thanks. I think that's a bit clever for me. and her. LOLS. Will think about it. eek!

2 days ago from web

jesstherese @TheDistanceMeg ok. Have you guys considered outsourcing your admin? le finding a manager for tcb?

2 days ago from Tweetie

Kalyr @TheDistanceMeg "Here, listen to \*this\*", and play them something awesome.

2 days ago from Echofon

TheDistanceMeg @jesstherese heee! we don't have enuf 2 do for a manager. This music isn't going 2 make us money yet. Still doing pub gigs for ££ :)))

2 days ago from web

TheDistanceMeg @jesstherese I think @drum\_monkey\_ thinks we can do most of our promo on the internet. Like here on twitta! coolz :)))

2 days ago from web

TheDistanceMeg @Kalyr I don't think she cares enuf to listen. I don't mind what she listens 2, just seems a waste of music 2 judge it by the charts!!!!

2 days ago from web

jesstherese @TheDistanceMeg @drum\_monkey\_ has some great ideas. Managers aren't only motivated by £ though :)

2 days ago from Tweetie

mysongotheday @TheDistanceMeg The charts are for people/sheep (sheeple?) who need to be told what they like.

2 days ago from web

TheDistanceMeg @mysongotheday I know!! I tried 2 explain that 2 her, but it was like trying to type words into a calculator. LOLS

2 days ago from web

mysongotheday @TheDistanceMeg Art (music) is about honesty. If you're not being honest in what you create, it will be empty, soulless, & unfulfilling.

2 days ago from web

mysongotheday @TheDistanceMeg Some people need to be told what to think or they won't think at all (& perhaps they shouldnt').

2 days ago from web

TheDistanceMeg @mysongotheday see! you get it! what can't my stooooopid friends?? Thanks for understanding!!!

2 days ago from web

TheDistanceMeg @KvN\_Montgomery that might work -- just find some music that means something 2 her. Might scare her too though! heee! :)))

2 days ago from web

-----o0o-----

"Do we need a plan?"

Band meeting. Coffee shop upstairs at Foyles, Charing Cross Road, London. 7pm, Wednesday. Meg's been thinking.

"A plan?"

"Yeah, some kind of idea of what it is we're trying to do. I'm not certain we do, but if we don't have a plan, I'd like that to be part of the plan, if you know what I mean."

Gem laughs. Drum Monkey nods and picks up the thread.

"That's a great observation. I like the idea of progressive aimlessness. Maybe we should give it a name - Proactive Serendipity, or something like that."

Gem's doing that wide-eyed Gem thing.

"Where do you come up with this shit from? I mean, it's awesome, I just have no idea where these phrases and terms come from! Do you sit at home thinking them up when you should be fixing websites, or whatever it is you do?"

"Not really. It's just, y'know, talking. I like words. Words don't just describe things, they shape them. That's why Meg's idea of having a plan to have no plan is such an important one. It's the description that helps us - and anyone else odd enough to be interested in what we're up to - to understand what's going on, as it goes on."

"...and by anyone 'odd enough to be interested', I guess you mean the freaks and weirdos you two are chatting with on Twitter?"

Meg picks up the ball.

"And you know they're freaks and weirdos how, exactly? Gem, I know you're struggling to get your head about this whole 'no longer trying to be superstars' thing, but just because someone wants to chat on the internet, it makes them neither a freak nor a weirdo. We've been getting some really good advice, some support and not a small amount of interest in the band. And remember, this is for a band that has precisely no music online, and not even a website. All we've got is us on Twitter! It doesn't mean we're going to sell records or even that the people who are interested are going to like what they hear, but we've got people wanting to hear us. I read someone say that people don't find you online because you're good, they find you because you're interesting, and apparently Twitter finds Drum Monkey and I interesting. So, in short, shut the fuck up."

Drum Monkey remembers where he's heard that quote before,

"Ah, that's what Unix said when I spoke to him - clearly you and he are reading the same music business thinkers. Not sure where he got it from, but it makes sense. Hasn't it always been like that? Writing about music has never been a good way of conveying what the music sounds like, unless it's hopelessly derivative. I guess if you were describing Bush you could say

'sounds like a marketing executive's idea of what Nirvana sound like', but really, reviews, interviews and articles in magazines were always about being interesting."

Drum Monkey sees some connections forming between his day-brain and his night-brain, and chases the strand,

"From a tech point of view, there are relevant concepts - you can't 'search' for music on the internet. You can search for the words that are used to label and describe music. You don't search for music on YouTube, you search for videos that have the same name as the song you're looking for, and hope there's enough data there to tell you which one is the right one before you have to listen. Sometimes you guess wrong and end up listening to the wrong song, or the wrong version of a song. Sometimes that's a good thing, if you get to hear a funny cover version or a great song that happens to have the same title as the song you were looking for. But for most of the time, you look for the right words, you find the right words, you click on it, it plays, you're satisfied. How does that translate to new music, where the words aren't even there? How do we find new music? How does new music become known music? Or maybe not even new music - there's such a vast amount of un-listened-to old music out there. Maybe we should stop playing and just become archivists of old music, digging it up and putting it on bit torrent for people to find. Like some kind of internet Alan Lomax."

"Alan Lomax?"



"Yeah, he documented American folk songs and unrecorded spirituals in the first half of the last century."

"Ahh, the guy that Moby sampled?"

"Well, Moby sampled the songs he recorded, if you want to be pedantic, but yes, that guy. Anyway, we're not about to do that, largely because we all enjoy playing music to people, and music isn't just 'music'."

"Music isn't music?"

Gem interrupts with an incredulous snort. Again, unable to just listen.

"Gem, how old are you? You have the listening capacity of a 12 year old. You're used to having all the ideas - in a rock band set-up, you're the guitar player and singer, therefor the one who gets to call the shots, be upfront, and generally prance about like they own the place. That, clearly, is balls. We're not there anymore, and even if we were, we're not talking about that part of what we do. If you're not sure where I'm going with an idea, just shut up and listen some more. Seriously, I don't mind explaining myself when I don't make sense, but let me finish a fucking sentence. It's like dealing with the IT people in government. I did a job for some government department or other and the kind of stupid asinine questions I kept getting asked made you wonder how the UK was even still

above water, let alone a vaguely functional economy..."

Deep breath.

"So anyway, music isn't just 'music'..."

Drum Monkey does air quotes, a little piece of him dies inside.

"There's music and there's *my* music. Two very different things. I don't love music, I love *my* music. The music that soundtracks my life, the stuff that makes me want to get out of bed in the morning or blow up banks, or go out and get drunk and shag anyone who walks in. That's *my* music. Music doesn't do that. Just about any music has the potential to be *my* music, all it needs is context. And narrative."

Drum Monkey gives Gem the 'see?' look. Gem sees.

"OK, I apologise, that does make sense. It's pretentious waffling bollocks, but it makes sense."

Drum Monkey knows hurt pride when he sees it, and takes the condescension as a compliment.

Meg's inspired.

"I've never thought about *My* music before now. I'll need to think about this some more. It's got massive amounts of potential as a way of thinking about why we could be important

to people."

Drum Monkey can see the idea getting derailed.

"It's more about what's important to us. To me. The music we play has to mean something to us for it to have any chance of meaning anything to anyone else. Energy dissipates from its source. It's why the machine of the music industry props itself up with mythology. It's what you do when a band doesn't even believe in their own corporate stadium-obsessed blunt-edged crass nonsense. You inject a load of made up mythology - dreamt up by the press department at the label - to try and make the music more interesting than it is. How often does great music by boring people make it through the machine? It doesn't. If the world of labels and music magazines is to be believed, great music is only made by fucked up, drugged out, weird, iconoclastic, reclusive, destructive, sex-obsessed geniuses. But that's clearly total shit. Much of that music is actually played by people for whom music is a day job. Session players, studio musicians - so much of the classic rock and roll canon was played by people who learned to read music, who played in orchestras, who spend most of their time playing film soundtracks and TV themes. Without them, it'd all sound like arse. Why? Because mashed up people may have cool ideas, but it takes functioning, talented, together, artisans to bring it to life."

Gem waits for the pause. Long enough? Yep.

"And this has what to do with anything?"

"It has everything to do with what music means. Or at least, what it doesn't mean. We - meaning us, the little people, the normal people who play music cos we love it - are made to feel inadequate as musicians because our lives aren't exciting enough. Because we don't self-harm like Iggy Pop, or abuse groupies like Led Zeppelin, or do drugs like Guns 'n' Roses. But the fact of the matter is that half of them don't do what's written about them, and the ones who do are often killing themselves. And few things are less interesting than a corpse."

Gem thinks to mention Keith Richards, but Drum Monkey knows it's coming,

"And everyone mentions fucking Keith Richards. Why isn't he dead? He's either lucky, lying, or there's more than one of him. Either way, his is clearly not a model that anyone else is successfully emulating, and him being alive is no way of measuring whether or not he's happy, well adjusted, helpful, kind... all the things we actually value in the people around us. It's endemic in our culture. We think that what we need is excitement. We think it cos we're told it. But actually, we need meaning, and purpose. Excitement feels meaningful. It feels meaningful because it puts all the onus back on us. It's about how we feel, not who we are, what we do, or what other people mean to us. It simplifies everything. People are either fun and exciting to be around, or they're out of here. But it's temporary, and it certainly doesn't fix anything. And the music

industry allows people to prolong the lie, to pretend that their own excitingness means anything."

Drum Monkey's feeling breathless again. Not sure where to stop, the thoughts keep tumbling like error messages in a PHP feedback loop.

"But it's worse than just being a lie. It robs them - and us - of what really matters. Connection. Connecting our own story with the music, then connecting our audience to it by inviting them into the story. When the surrogate connection is built on a lie, you end up robbing your audience of the real thing. Mythology is Methadone."

And with that he stops, nor sure if 'mythology is methadone' is genius or insane hyperbole.

Gem and Meg are stunned, both in awe of Drum Monkey, but both with differing levels of the nagging feeling that it might all be total shit. Meg's willing to take the risk.

"Ok, so let's make music that means something. To us. And then talk about it. That sounds pretty simple. It sounds like a 'no plan plan' to me. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

"I'm in."

Gem adds the last two words, reluctantly, but feels excited at the thought of being part of something. Maybe pursuing meaning has its own excitement anyway. Thoughts of cake and eating it meld into imaginary new musics, spiralling out of their much-loved jam sessions. Maybe it was time to put some of this music out there.

-----o0o-----

Guitar shop, Denmark Street, London, Thursday 3pm. Barney, a college friend of Gem's works there.

"Gem! Damn, great to see you. You always were my favourite of the guitar players from college!"

"Ha-ha! That's very nice of you to say. So, what you been up to?"

"Aside from working in the shop? Well, I've been touring a lot in the Far East."

"Really? Wow, that's amazing. With the same band?"

"Yeah, it's been fun. One of our songs ended up on an advert in Japan and broke pretty big over there. We do loads of festival dates, and have toured there two or three times a year for the last 3 years, playing some pretty huge venues."

"Damn, that really is living the dream."

"Well, it would be if we were making any money. It pays so badly. We've sold just under a million records there, but the second album hasn't recouped, and tour costs have gone way up."

"Hold on, you've sold a *million* records and you're skint? How the fuck does that work? Even if they were being sold for a fiver each, that's five million quid gross. How are you not minted?"

"It's nearly impossible to make money from music now, with all the piracy that goes on. Our record label reckon there are between 5 and 10 million illegal copies of our album downloaded off the internet."

Gem's mind is whirring. The last week of chats with Drum Monkey have all hit him in the face at once, like being punched with a fist of words.

"So, let's get this straight; your records have grossed five-possibly-ten million quid, you've got upwards of six-possibly-eleven-million-fans who are actually listening to you, playing to thousands of people a night across Asia, and you're skint? Have you phoned the police?"

"What, Sting? Why would I do that?"

"No, the actual police - you've clearly been mugged. Robbed. Burgled. Swindled. I'll ask it again - how the fuck are you not minted? Do you own the rights to nothing that you do?"

"Well, I'm the co-writer on most of it, but our label put in a clause to the contract that make the costs recoupable from writer's royalties as well. It's not usual, but they offered us a much bigger advance as a result. It all goes through their publishing company as well. They're being great to us."

Gem's boiling.

"How can they be being great to you if you've got ten million fans and no money? Are you insane?? You should be a millionaire just on merch sales. Who handles your merch in Japan?"

"The label contracted an outside company to do it. Most of the profits go back into the costs of the tour, they told us."

"Why the hell don't ticket sales cover the cost of touring? If you're huge in Japan, surely you're selling out venues?"

"Yeah, but publicity costs are pretty massive - promo over there costs a lot. Then there's hotels, tour bus, flights, catering, staff, back-line, staging... It all adds up."

Gem feels like he's going to pass out. Rock And Roll is not only dead, its corpse is on fire.

"Barney, I can't believe this. The greatest success story of anyone we were at college with, and you tell it like its failure. Let me tell you, it's not your failure. No band with



ten million fans is a failure. Your label have failed you. They've sold you a lie that you need to be bigger. They never allowed you to think of being sustainable, because then you'd be making money too. As long as they kept you in debt, they could just keep raking it in. You, my friend are fucked. How many records to go on your contract?"

"We just signed for another four albums. I'm not sure what you're talking about. We're just trying to be a success, and we would be if it wasn't for people downloading our stuff off Bit Torrent. It's terrible."

Gem slows, quietens. Inner stillness.

"No. It's not terrible. The terrible thing here is that you've been lied to and robbed, and you think your fans are to blame. That my friend is heartbreaking. See you around."

Gem leaves.

-----o0o-----

Gem's Week.

Gem spends an inordinate amount of time panicking about what he hasn't done. His online time is rarely spent doing anything useful, switching from news to guitar review sites to youtube to porn, with occasional forays into Myspace to accept friend-requests and listen to appalling American rock bands. Also

frequents Friends Reunited, hoping to see college friends who are doing worse than him, but then feeling guilty when they are. Guitar practice is largely from magazines. Learning songs, copping licks, going over and over the backing tracks on the cover CDs, perfecting styles he'll never get to perform. If ever he was given the chance, he's a pretty fab Chicago Blues guitarist, but neither looks nor talks like one. Since the beginning of *Verfremdungseffekt*, he's been experimenting with an acoustic lap steel guitar he borrowed from the shop Barney works at, but now feels obliged to give it back, after their last conversation. He's also been programming sounds. Getting gigs is another source of anxiety, and about once every three weeks he plucks up the courage to phone one of the five booking agents that regularly book The Reverse, and is always stunned with relief when they get a string of gigs booked in. It's getting harder to do since the change in the band: covers are no longer the focus, so booking gigs playing them is tough - just putting on enough of a front to make it sound like he still wants the gigs. Still, he knows that on their worst day, The Reverse are better than most of the covers bands around, so feels safe that they'll do a good job regardless. For money - and he's never told the others about this - he teaches, two afternoons a week. He has six students, one of who is a fairly wealthy wine importer who pays him to play rock classics while wine-dude fumbles along through his eye-wateringly expensive kit, and when it goes well, rewards him with wine as well as money. Can't quite bring himself to work out what proportion of his money is from teaching and what from gigging, as he's self-definition as a 'full time gigging pro' would take a dent. This

week he's decided to sort out the Verfremdungseffekt Myspace page. Should be interesting.

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"Do you remember Barney from college?"

Gem meets Meg upstairs at Foyles, the nearest coffee shop to the insane conversation he had with Barney not 40 minutes ago.

"Guitarist Barney? Yeah. Isn't he touring with a band?"

"Yes. And working in one of the shops round the corner."

"On Denmark Street? Really? Let's go see him. Wait, why the hell is he working in a guitar shop if he's touring with his band?"

"I did just go and see him. You won't believe this. His band have sold a million records in Japan. They're playing to thousands of people a night, have millions of fans, and a track on an advert. They're HUGE."

"That's awesome! Wow! Surely that makes him the biggest success of all the people on our year at college?"

"Meg, he's skint. He HAS to work in the shop for money."

Meg goes quiet. Trying to compute. Nope, no calculation fits.

"Skint? How?"

And Gem recounts the full story. Meg starts to cry. It's too much. The last great myth of the industry has been trashed. Even success isn't success. The winners have lost. And some bastard in an office somewhere is getting minted while the musicians are sold ever-more elaborate bullshit stories about what they need to do to *really* be a success. Meg is livid.

"Fuck those fucking bastards."

Gem just nods. His sadness fades at having shared the story with Meg. They look at each other. Gem speaks.

"We've already won. We haven't played a gig, we haven't recorded a note and we've already won. We're playing because we love it. We're never going to go into debt to do it. We're not going to wait for anyone else to like it to validate it. We could be shit and still win."

Gem starts to feel dizzy. Meg brings it down to earth.

"Gem, if that's the case, what are we striving for? Don't we need something to chase, to motivate us? Something to aim for?"

"Uh, wasn't it you talking about the no-plan plan? This is part of that. We don't need 'targets'. We need to commit to making music that means something to us. Drum Monkey really amazed me

last night. His little rant about meaning. He's clearly been thinking about this stuff a lot. And he's right. I've never felt more proud of any music than I do in the moment when the three of us are playing. It's not like it's the greatest music ever, it's just that it's ours. We play it because we want it to exist. We don't call it anything, we don't try to squeeze it into a marketing box. And if you think about the kinds of things we've played over the last week or so, it's stylistically all over the place, but mostly it sounds like a mixture of the music we love listening to. It sounds like songs, it's atmospheric, it's occasionally anthemic. It's cool. I'd listen to us."

Meg giggles.

"So would I."

-----o0o-----

Band meeting, Meg's flat. No instruments are present.

"I've sorted out our Myspace page."

Gem announces it, and pulls it up on Meg's computer. Drum Monkey tries to hide his sneer.

"Wow, you did a lot to the design. Oh no, my mistake. You've done nothing. Just a few words. What are we supposed to do with that? We haven't got any music to put on it. Gem, it's a bit

shit."

"Every band has to be on MySpace - you keep going on about this new music environment stuff, where bands talk to their fans. MySpace is about talking to your fans."

Drum Monkey tries tact.

"Er, would you really describe much of what you do on MySpace as 'conversation'? The usual interaction is friend-request, followed by accept, followed by a wall message saying 'hey thanks for the add, check us out and buy our shit' along with a massive embedded flashing picture. And that's it. Nothing else. Unless you reply with the same lame-assed nonsense. If you've got fifty thousand fans, you might get a promoter or two interested in booking you for a gig, on the understanding that you'll get paid when you've sold at least fifty tickets. Other than that? Nothing."

"So Twitter's better, eh? Loads of computer nerds talking about their breakfast."

Meg steps in.

"Gem, quit with the 'breakfast on Twitter' meme - it's rubbish. It's never been like that. And if the people on there are nerds, they are nerds who seem disproportionately interested in music. Just about every tweet I've had sent to me on there has been about music. Gear advice, people wanting to hear us, to

hear how the rehearsals are going. Loads of great actual conversation about making music. I wasn't sold. Not like Drum Monkey, but I am now. I love it. There are some really smart people on there, and you get to talk to your favourite musicians too. Look at Drum Monkey and that band Clatter."

"Ah yes, Clatter, what's happening between you and them?"

"They're still talking about touring, and want some help. But they do seem to like Myspace too. Just a shame we'd never have got to talk to them if it'd been up to Myspace."

"'WE' haven't talked to them. You have. Thank God - I don't want to go volunteering as road crew for some other band."

"Fine, don't, but don't complain about the outcome of my conversations - that's like saying coffee shops are a bad idea because of the things other people talk about in them. You sound like an arse."

"OK, OK, Twitter's cool. I get it. I'm still not getting on there, but I understand why you dig it. We still need a Myspace page. Every band needs a Myspace page."

"OK, you do the Myspace thing, but believe me, it's going to be tough to get anyone interested in what we're up to there with some music or a blog - are you going to blog there?"

"What would I blog about? I haven't got anything to say in a

blog. Blogs are for losers."

"How can 'words on the internet that you can subscribe to' be 'for losers'? Don't be a fucktard Gem. Yes, most blogs are rubbish, like most music, remember? Doesn't mean all of them are. Be interesting. If most of them are dull, that means you'll stand out with your sparkling wit and entertaining banter. I still wouldn't do it on MySpace, or I'd at least cross post it to Posterous."

"What the hell's Posterous? Sounds Pre-Posterous!"

"Wow, that makes you about the, ooh, three millionth person to make that joke! Posterous is just another blog. I was reading about it online the other day. The only thing that's different is you start the blog and post to it by email, not on the web. So it's just like emailing interesting stuff to people who want to read it. Maybe we should start a band blog."

"Now that's not a bad idea - between the three of us, I'm sure we could post some interesting stuff."

Meg's still thinking about recordings.

"When are we going to put some music online? We ought to put up those tracks we recorded on my phone."

Drum Monkey's thinking too. Only he has other ideas.



"Have you listened to those tracks?"

Two yesses.

"Do they make you feel the way playing it made you feel?"

Gem furrows his brow.

"No, but why should they?"

Gem explains.

"When we're playing - improvising - it's about more than just the noises that come out. There's the sense that anything can happen. We're really stretching what we're capable of, and the music sometimes drifts really close to falling apart. If you're here listening to us, it's awesome. On record, without that knowledge, it might not work so well."

Meg understands.

"That's true! I did wonder when I was listening back to it what others would make of it. I mean, it sounds good, but it doesn't give the sense of what we're doing, and why it matters."

Drum Monkey's grateful.

"Thanks, that's exactly what I'm getting at. So, what I suggest is that we don't record. Well, we can record, just not make any

of it available. Not just yet. Instead, we should look for cool, small places to play. Unusual places, places where people aren't expecting to hear improvised music, and where us playing can be an 'event', not just another band. Let's face it, most of the people we know wouldn't go out looking for improvised music, but they do watch films, so they do understand instrumental music and its role soundtracking events..."

"Aha! That's exactly what I told my friend who said she only listens to 'the charts' - she gets film music, just can't see why she'd listen any other time. A gig in a weird place may well be the best thing we could do to help her understand it!"

"OK, that's settled then, if you're into it, Gem?"

"Sounds like a cool idea. A weird idea. But cool."

-----o0o-----

"Miles wants to book us for a gig!"

"Who's Miles?"

Meg's excited. Gem's confused.

"Miles in the bookshop in Camberwell - I work there occasionally, if he's short of staff. I told him about Verfremdungseffekt, and he loves the idea of us playing in the shop. Says he'll pay us a hundred quid too!! He's going to open

the shop and the coffee shop after hours, put bean-bags on the floor, set us up in the Childrens books section, and let us get on with it. I said we'd sort out PA, cos we don't really need one. We can just use what we use here to practice! How great is that?"

Gem's no longer confused. He's sold.

"It's amazing! I can't believe we're going to get to play our crazy improv music to an audience. And get paid for it. I mean, a hundred quid would be a massive insult for a pub gig, but for Miles - whoever he is - to put that money in, is outstanding."

"You know Miles - he came to a lot of our gigs a while back, when I first started working there."

"The guy with the long hair that fancied you and followed us around for a while??"

Meg blushes.

"Yes, him. He's not like that any more. We sorted that out. He's got a girlfriend now. There's no weirdness in the shop, he just likes the idea of the band. I didn't even offer to play him any of the recording on my phone, after what we said last night. Just described it and asked him to trust me. He did!"

Meg pauses to tweet the news about the gig.

"Hadn't we better tell Drum Monkey before you tell the rest of the world?"

"Ah, yes. Uhm, too late."

-----o0o-----

Tweets:

[@TheDistanceMeg](#): I'm so excited!! It looks like we might have our 1st gig! In a bookshop! Paid!  
Ha! It's nuts. More info soooooon :)))  
40 minutes ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[Drum Monkey](#): RT [@TheDistanceMeg](#): I'm so excited!! It looks like we might have our 1st gig! In a bookshop! Paid! Ha! It's nuts. More info soooooon :)))  
40 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[Drum Monkey](#): ...that last tweet was the first I've heard about a gig - [@TheDistanceMeg](#), be nice to tell me before announcing it on twitter!!  
39 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum Monkey](#) ah, sorreeee about that! Yeah, Miles in the bookshop wants us 2 play there. How kool is that?? :)))  
23 minutes ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum Monkey](#): [@TheDistanceMeg](#) that is GREAT news! Is that the shop you work in sometimes? Cool space! Where are you now?  
21 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum Monkey](#) Gem and I are in Foyles - want 2 come down? I just told him, even he's excited :)))  
20 minutes ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

-----o0o-----

Drum Monkey joins them in Foyles.

"So, a gig? That's amazing!"

"Yeah, it's Miles in the book-shop - I told him about the band, he bought it and is offering us a hundred quid."

"We're getting paid?? That's incredible."

"I know! We need to sort out a day. I'd suggest doing it on a week night, early in the week - we don't want to be up against big gigs for our first show. And if we do it earlier rather than later, people can get home easily. Gigs are always on too late."

"Meg, you've clearly given this some thought!"

Gem's impressed.

"Yeah, as soon as Miles said he was into it, the ideas started flowing. We'll do three or four short sets, so people don't get tired of it, and Miles has plenty of time to make back his money on coffee and books."

Gem starts.

"Wow, I thought we'd done all the 'transformation' stuff. But this is genuinely the first time we've ever had a conversation

about making sure the venue owner has time to make money. I mean, we always care about doing a good job - it's how we get paid - but I've never given a shit about how much beer they sell. In fact, I usually resent it, cos most of them are bastards."

He pauses.

"Are we turning into hippies?"

Drum Monkey laughs.

"Fuck no. Why do musicians think that 'being nice' is a bad thing? It's even worse when the media and audiences play along with it. 'it's amazing, I can't believe he spoke to me when I told him how great his band are' - what kind of antisocial freak wouldn't talk to you when you've just told them they're awesome??? Why are musicians who behave normally considered amazing. It's like we've all been given a license to behave like shit-heads, and when we choose not to do it, we're doing a great service to the world. Yet more utter bollocks."

Drum Monkey's turn to pause. He turns down the volume on his rant and speaks in more measured, broken sentences.

"This whole band project is making me see things in such a different light. It's like the zeal of the convert. But I feel like it's all so obvious and I'm embarrassed we've not seen it before. I mean, I never wanted to be a 'rock star'. At least,

not like you, Gem. But I don't think I ever saw 'making it' as a bad thing. I've really changed in terms of what I think of as success. It's weird."

Gem's thinking too.

"I'm not sure that 'making it' is bad, but there does appear to be a whole load of the baggage that goes with being a 'successful band' that is pretty horrible. I'm just looking forward to an improvised gig in a bookshop. That's radical enough for me for now. Who's turn is it to buy coffee?"

-----o0o-----

Band practice. Meg's house. Flat mate away for the weekend. All day practice forced into half day practice by the usual inane hold-ups. Traffic, Drum Monkey's techie work, waiting in for an Amazon delivery...

"Right, just before we start playing, Miles wants to know if a week on Monday is good with you two? He reckons he can fill the shop at one week's notice, given that you can't really get more than about twenty-five or thirty people in there anyway! He's going to do tickets, but not charge. Doesn't want us to have any pressure."

"Why would we feel pressure if people are paying to see us?"

"I don't know, I guess he treating it as though we've never

done a gig before."

Drum Monkey placates.

"Well, I understand what he's saying, as I haven't played a gig of all original material in almost a decade, and never a gig without a set list!"

Gem acquiesces.

"Good point, well made. Fair enough, that is a bit of a change from the norm, but it's still a gig, playing music we're good at. I'm less nervous about this than about a gig where we've got a set list. I read a really smart thing on the internet the other day about improvised music - this guy was saying that if you're playing written songs, the big question in your head is 'is it right?' - you need to get the notes in the right order above all else, so if you happen to make a mistake that's better than the original, you miss it cos it's not right. With improvised music, you're asking a different question. There is no 'right', cos it's never existed before, so instead you ask, 'is it good?' and play in the moment to make it good. Which even allows you not to play, if what's happening is already as good as it gets."

Drum Monkey and Meg are stunned. Drum Monkey needs clarification.

"Hang on, you just admitted that it's OK for you NOT to play."



Are you unwell? You dissing the record industry makes sense, but you're still an ego-maniac. What the hell happened to make you think like this?"

Meg spots Drum Monkey baiting Gem, tries to cut it off.

"Let's not argue about it now, guys - Gem it's a great idea, let's see how it effects the way we play together. I'll definitely keep it in mind. I just love playing with you both cos I trust you - the nearest I've ever come to improvising before is song-writing, which is basically slow improv, but I always feel really self-conscious about my ideas. With you two I don't, I just play and try and sound good.... so I guess I'm doing it already!"

Gem's attention is diverted.

"Great! Trust is another thing the guy on the web was talking about. It's a big part of making it work. Maybe it's why we sound so good."

"Let's let the book shop people be the judge of that!"

Drum Monkey tries to lighten the conversation. But Gem's on a roll.

"No. Let's not. Let's decide to play the music we love, and let them enjoy it if they want to. We'll give them permission to join us on our musical journey, but if they don't dig it,

that's also their choice, and it doesn't change what it means to us. We need to play for ourselves."

Meg's just excited about the gig.

"Yeah! Let's just play. It's going to be amazing. Now, can we all do a week on Monday? Miles has to do the posters."

"I'm free."

"I am too."

Sorted.

They practice. It's good. They're getting more adventurous. More 'mistakes' - some of which are way better than they could have played intentionally - more smiles, more moments of wow. This has purpose and meaning. It feels like the sound of living.

-----o0o-----

Monday morning. One week before the book shop gig. Gem is practicing. His phone rings.

"Gem?"

"Yes"

"It's Barney"

"Barney! Good to hear from you - how's tricks? You in the shop or off on tour?"

"Yes, I mean, both - in the shop now, but off on tour in about a month. Starting rehearsals next week. Which is what I'm calling about."

"Ah, you need to lap steel back? I can drop it in later."

"No, not that - hold onto it, we're not about to sell it. No, what I'm calling about is a bit bigger than that. The label think we need to fill out our live sound a bit - with the sales on the second album being down on the first, they think we should beef up the live show, go all out. They want us to get a second guitar player, and I've suggested you."

Silence. Gem's heart is racing.

"Seriously? You want me to come on tour?"

"Yes, don't even think about answering me now. Meet me at the shop at 5.30, that's when I finish. We'll go and get a coffee and talk it over."

"OK, see you later."

Gem feels sick. Excitement, fear, vertigo. He feels dizzy, like

the sofa he's sat on just rotated through ninety degrees and he's suspended from it over a pit, refusing to fall but feeling gravity's pull on every cell in his body. This is it. This is 'the break'. The one that shouldn't exist. It's also everything he's been railing against since the start of Verfremdungseffekt. His body spins back upright in his head. This isn't 'it'. If this is it, then Verfremdungseffekt was a fraud, a fake, a spectre, a joke... But this is meant to be 'it'. Can they both be it? Is it possible to have two its? Is music like relationships, where more than one at a time is too much? Or is it just a job - go and do it for a couple of weeks, come back and do the other thing. Surely that'll work. Go off, earn some money, see the world, rock out, come home, improvise. Yes, try that.

-----o0o-----

Coffee, Cafe in Foyles, safe territory for Gem. Barney explains.

"We've got twenty-five gigs booked in a month, with ten days of rehearsals at Terminal before that."

"Ah, I've been to Terminal before - we rehearsed there a few weeks back."

"Your covers band rehearsed at Terminal???"

"No, well, the same musicians, but we've got an improv line up

now, called Verfremdungseffekt. That's the focus of our music, though we're still doing the covers gigs for money. We've got a covers gig tomorrow, as it happens. First one for over a week. But yeah, the improv band is our focus. We've got a gig next Monday, in a book shop."

"That'll work, we start rehearsals on Tuesday, so you'll still be able to do your gig. What the hell do you mean by an improv band, though? You mean jazz - standards and that?"

"No, improv as in not writing anything, just playing, and seeing what happens. No songs, no set style."

"Seriously? You do that on stage? Surely it sounds like shit most of the time, no?"

Gem decides that sarcasm is the better part of valor...

"Wow, thanks for that - your belief in us is amazing. No, it's not shit. In fact, it's never shit. At its worst, it's better than ninety percent of the originals bands I've been in. And at it's best, it feels like the reason that guitars and basses were invented."

Barney's irritated.

"Right, great, whatever. Sounds amazing. Anyway, are you in?"

"I think so - what does it pay?"

"Ah, shit, yes, I hadn't mentioned that - it's seven hundred quid a week for the rehearsals, and thirteen hundred a week for the tour, plus twenty quid a day PDs. No difference between gig days and travel days."

Gem coughs, tries to stifle his amazement. This is what you get for touring with a band that's struggling for cash?? that's insane. He decides to play it cool.

"That'll work, I guess. Thanks. Let me get my diary and put in the dates."

Gem writes down the dates of the rehearsals and the tour. This means the end of Verfremdungseffekt for a couple of months. When should he tell Meg and Drum Monkey? Ah, it doesn't matter. For now, he's got a fucking tour, in Japan and Korea, getting paid insane money, with an old college mate. This was all kinds of wonderful. The time to worry about the improvisers was later. He could talk to them about it at tomorrow night's covers gig. Ah, yes, the covers gigs. They'll have to stop too. Meg'll make no money for two months... That would take some explaining.

-----o0o-----

Setting up for the The Reverse gig on Tuesday.

"Guys, I've got some great news to tell you that'll effect the

next couple of months of music making."

Gem, grinning from ear to ear. Meg and Drum Monkey baffled.

"Oh yes?"

"You remember Barney from college?"

"The same Barney from college you said was in the world's shittiest record deal last week?"

"Er, yes, the same one. Well, his band are going back out on tour in a few weeks, but need an extra guitarist. And have asked me!"

Drum Monkey doesn't miss a beat.

"Ha! That's hilarious! What did he say when you laughed in his face."

Gem's thrown.

"Er. Uhm. I didn't."

Pause.

"I said yes."

Meg's heart's in her mouth.

"You said yes? Yes to touring with a band you said last week should be calling the police and reporting their record label for theft? Are you insane?"

"Look, let's do this gig, and then I'll explain. I'm still here for next Monday's gig."

Drum Monkey, trying to stay calm. Failing.

"No, let's not do this fucking gig first. Let's talk now. If we're ten minutes late starting, no-one will mind. This, after all, is rock and roll. That thing we all decided was a sham about ten days ago. The thing we were moving away from into the music that we were, how did you put it? ah, yes, 'born to play'."

"Look, Verfremdungseffekt is still my priority. I'm not about to get sucked into some corporate rock world and spend the rest of my life touring. This is a good chance to see what it's like, play guitar in a band, help out an old college friend, and make some money."

"Money? I thought you said they were skint? How long is the tour for?"

"It's really well paid, and it means I can give you something, Meg, towards the money we'll lose on The Reverse gigs while I'm away."



"That *awfully* nice of you."

Snide. She hears herself as she says it. Hates her own ingratitude.

"Look, I really want to see what it's like, I'm flattered to have been asked, rehearsals start next Tuesday, so I can still do Monday's gig."

"And what happens if the gig is awesome? You're still going to go off and play rock stars? What if their tour goes well? You get booked up again, go off, do more of it? And then what? At what point do you decide enough's enough? When you're too burnt out to do more? When they fire you? When you've got 'enough' money? That - if they'll have you - is years away, not weeks. We haven't got years. Meg needs to be making a living - a living that at least partly relied on you. You say that Verfremdungseffekt is your priority, but you're shitting royally on at least one of its members. I mean, I'm upset, and saddened that you didn't at least talk to us before accepting, but Meg's really in the shitter."

Meg feels defensive.

"Well, I've got other things to do, musically and work-wise. I don't need you, or this band. I like this band. I like playing music with you. I think Verfremdungseffekt is fun, it's special. I want to make it into 'a thing'. A 'something'. But

maybe that won't happen now. Look, we've got a gig to do. Let's go and do it. We'll sort this out later."

And they do the gig. And they rock. By numbers. And they try so hard not to sound jaded. And Drum Monkey tries to focus on the stories he's read about the tension in The Police, especially when The Reverse are playing the Police songs in their set. But it doesn't help. And the drunks that are listening don't notice the jadedity. And they head home. Not talking about it later.

-----o0o-----

Tweets:

[Drum Monkey](#) : shit. Shitty shit. You won't believe this. Not sure if I can even say it here. Anyway.  
Screw Gem. thanks for breaking the band. :(  
about 3 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) how crap was that last night? I can't believe it. I'm livid. :((((  
about 3 hours ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum Monkey](#) : [@TheDistanceMeg](#) yeah, it's crap, huh? Wonder if we should just keep playing as a duo for now... {jk!!}  
about 2 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) let's see how the gig goes, but that's an idea worth thinking about. Could be rubbish tho! :))))  
about 2 hours ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum Monkey](#) : [@TheDistanceMeg](#) ...we thought the trio was probably going to be rubbish too.  
Actually, we didn't think it'd be anything. So let's not think!

-----o0o-----

Meg and Drum Monkey meet for coffee, lunch time Wednesday. Both still rather muted.

"Well, that was weird."

"Yup, tough to play drums after a conversation like that. I tried to channel my frustration into my playing, like all those stories of Sting and Stuart Copeland fighting, but it didn't work. I just couldn't be arsed. Guess we did OK though."

"I don't really care whether we did OK or not, to be honest. I just wanted to get it sorted. I mean, I can see why he'd want the money, it's not like we're raking it in. Did he tell you how much he was getting?"

"Something about it being about a grand a week. For which we'd need to do four weddings..."

"And a funeral?"

"Yeah, funny ...but we haven't done any wedding gigs in months. Just Walkabout pubs, which are hardly big money gigs."

"No, but we do OK. We get by. Though did you know Gem was teaching guitar?"

"Of course I knew - for some reason he doesn't want to know, but I've known for months. I walked past his place what must've been not long after he started. Saw him teaching in his front room. Good on him. It's a great thing to do. His own '*rock 'n' roll legend-in-the-making*' myth is taking him a while to deconstruct. And this tour isn't going to help with that. You realise he's going to be unbearable when he gets back?"

"If it gets that far - he might lose the gig before he even gets it. I've seen that happen before. Another guy I was at college with got hired for some big pop gig based on a recommendation, but was just too flakey at rehearsals and was sacked before the first week was out. Shame."

"Wow, that's rough. I can't imagine that happening to Gem - he's not about to turn up stoned, his gear works, he can play that kind of stuff standing on his head, and he'll probably look great on stage... hey, I wonder if he'll have to lie about his age. I bet the rest of the band are!"

"Back to the point in hand, what the hell are we going to do? We've got Monday's gig, then nothing - not The Reverse gigs, not Verfremdungseffekt gigs... Were you serious on Twitter about trying it as a duo??"

"I don't know. It might work. Given that the trio only started cos we decided to jam as an alternative to playing covers - we didn't start it as a band. Maybe we should do the same with the duo. See what happens. It might work."

"Tell you what, I've been meaning to get a loop pedal for ages, we could try that."

"One of those long delay things that KT Tunstall uses?"

"Yup, that's where I saw it. Her on Jools Holland a few years back. Seen loads of people doing it since then. Imogen Heap does some amazing a capella stuff like that. And has a cellist with dreads that opens for her who loops her cello. Can't remember her name, but she's amazing. I'll find her on YouTube and send you the link."

"Is it Zoe Keating?"

"That's her! How do you know who she is??"

"She's got like a million followers on Twitter or something. I saw a link to an interview with her on the NPR website. Was fascinating. She's a computer nerd too, which always helps."

"So, we could do something like that!"

"Yeah, right, cos obviously Zoe hasn't spend YEARS perfecting her looping skills..."

"I don't mean exactly like that. I'm sure what she does is insanely difficult, though she makes it look easy on YouTube. Nah, I just mean layered bass."

Lightbulb moment for Meg.

"Duh! There's that solo bassist I listen to as well - Steve Lawson - I forget his stuff is all looping cos I don't really listen to it for the cleverness. It's just gorgeous relaxing music. But his stuff is all looping bass as well. I'm sure there's bits of that I could do."

"Yeah, but that'd be playing tunes, and would go against the whole idea of Verfremdungseffekt. Let's not let Gem ruin the idea as well as the line-up. Get the pedal, but don't go learning tunes. Especially not ones by another bass player!"

"Good point. OK, I think I know someone who can lend me one. Or I'll ask on Twitter and see what happens."

Drum Monkey laughs.

"So you're hooked on Twitter then? Told you it was fun."

"I love it. I'm sure there's a capacity for attracting nutters on it, but so far everyone I've come across has been really interesting and helpful. I've had loads of great advice."

And things are looking up for the duo.

-----o0o-----

Gem sits at home learning songs. Barney emails him the MP3s, and some notes on the parts. Tells him not to be too worried, learn the shape of the songs, the changes, and get some ideas for the guitar sounds, and they'll work it out in practice.

Meg calls round. Wanting peace.

"Gem, I'm really pleased for you. Honest. I do think the timing is shitty, and I'm surprised you took it given what you've said over the last couple of weeks - especially what you said to Barney in the shop! - but if you want to do it, and are as excited as you seem, then I'm pleased for you. It really would be a good time to start a blog though. A great way of keeping a tour diary, and adding some value to your being in the band in terms of promo."

"That's a great idea! I bet they aren't doing any of that stuff. Their website is all wizzy graphics and music that auto-plays. I hate that, I so rarely want to hear music from a website straight away!"

"Ah, such is the lunacy of record label budgets. You know that. If they can charge the band for a twenty grand website, they will. Drum Monkey was telling me what some of the projects his mates who work in music web design cost. The outside companies are making a fortune. The in-house guys are on peanuts, but they still charge the bands a fortune for their services. It's insane."

"OK, I need to not be thinking about how fucked up the industry is right now. I know it is. I don't need to keep being reminded! I'll definitely set up a blog. You two should do a Verfremdungseffekt blog while I'm away..."

Meg looks down at her feet.

"Yeah, I guess we will."

Pause. Gem knows there's more.

"We're going to try playing as a duo."

"Huh? Just bass and drums? That'll be shit!"

"Wow, first you run away, then try and tell us we can't keep playing. Why not just break my fingers to make sure, you arse."

"That's not what I meant. I'm sorry. It's just... bass and drums? Nothing else? Won't it be kinda thin-sounding?"

"Yeah, right, cos no-one's ever played chords on a bass. I'm going to get one of those loop pedals that KT Tunstall uses, so I can play more than one part. We'll see how it goes. Remember, this band didn't start with a plan either. In fact, we agreed to pro-actively have no plan. This is part of that non-plan. Deal with it."

"Meg, I'm sorry, I really hope the duo thing works great. I'll



be back in a month or so, and we can do more gigs. I'm really committed to Verfremdungseffekt. Seriously."

Meg snorts.

"I am! I couldn't pass this up, can't you see that? Hopefully, I'll be able to talk about the band, get some money together so I can take more time over the band when I get back."

"Gem, you still haven't answered what you'll do if they offer you a more permanent position. No, don't bother answering now. You can't. You're stuck. Either you don't do the gig and you tell yourself you missed your big break, or you do it and leave us in the shit. Go, do it. Have fun, make some money, behave like a retarded seventeen year old. Just don't come back telling me that suddenly all this rock and roll touring shit is worth anything. Because it isn't. I don't want it. I'm not jealous, I'm pissed off."

Meg breaks off, realising she's answering questions Gem's not asking. He looks down at his feet. Guilt wells up in her tear-ducts.

"Do it! I know you have to! It's fine. Go. We'll have fun as a duo. You never know we might not need you by the time we get back."

Gem twitches. Enough to give away that she's just hit on his secret fear. That he's the one missing out... Catch 22.

-----o0o-----

Text Messages:

**“Met wiv Gem. Talked about the tour. Told him I was fine wiv it. Hope he’s not 2 upset”**

**“Glad you talked. I hope its shit, TBH. Seems like he talked crap for 2 wks, now we see what he rly thinks.”**

**“Thats not fair. He meant it, Im sure, but this is wot hes always wanted. Rock And Roll!”**

**“Yes, but rock & roll is dead. We all know that.”**

**“this is 2 tricky 2 talk about in SMS. Lets meet L8R. x”**

**“K x”**

-----o0o-----

“Do you really think he’s scared that he’ll be the one missing out?”

Lunch time, Thursday, back at the same coffee-shop. Meg fills Drum Monkey in on the conversation with Gem.

"He certainly looked like it. You should've seen him jump when I joked that we might not need him. He was trying to put me off the idea of the duo. Fucking idiot."

"Ha! Actually, that just makes me want to make it work more. Rub his stupid big-touring face in it. I can see the money being attractive, but surely the nonsense of touring in a situation as screwed up as that isn't worth it? It's like a twenty four hour-a-day day-job, that stops you from playing the music you like, and makes you feel guilty if you think it's crap because so many musicians see it as the pinnacle of success. Bollocks is it. That's why so many band's second album is all about the mundanity of touring. Either that or about a load of rock 'n' roll bullshit that would result in them either being dead or in rehab... the convincing ones are the ones who do end up in rehab!"

Meg can feel Drum Monkey winding up into another rant. She sits back, ready to listen.

"Of course, statistically speaking, Gem is now a lottery winner. He's 'made it' - assuming they don't sack him during rehearsals..."

"They aren't going to do that, you can drop that from your schadenfreude lunch-list, you sicko"

"OK, he's made it then, but he's still not going to be happy. I know it. I know him. His mythology is all about not making it.

Actually doing a big tour, getting bored out of his tiny gourd on a bus full of people who are contractually tied to this life for the next four or five years and so are still trying to 'live the dream' just to convince themselves there's a dream to live. It's going to be horrible. Have you spoken to Barney lately? He's so conflicted it's like he's bi-polar. Half of him is lost in his broken rock 'n' roll fantasies, and half is utterly dejected that it hasn't turned out how he planned. But that disillusionment is what the record label are feeding off. They keep the band in debt by spending more money on getting them closer to a dream that they could quite happily be in the middle of if some fucker would stop paying so much for hotels and advertising."

Drum Monkey's on a roll. Again. He needs to start a blog, he thinks. He's right.

"I once saw a documentary about Ron Jeremy."

Meg grimaces.

"Eww, The porn star?"

"Yeah, him. It was trying to be all serious, not salacious. Pretty tricky when you're talking about an ugly fat bloke who has group-sex on camera for a living. Anyway, throughout the documentary, he was asked numerous times about his happiness. Every single time he referred to what other people thought of him. He tried to equate being envied by American frat-boys -

who see date-rape as an alternative to a night watching telly - with his own happiness. 'Of course I'm happy - just see how many people envy me'. He never once talked about feeling fulfilled. He hinted at regret that his career meant that he had never had a long term stable relationship. He talked a lot about starting out wanting to be a straight actor - he wanted to do Shakespeare, and without having to gang bang the Merry Wives Of Windsor. He was, by any measure of success or happiness or contentedness an utter failure. Right at the top of his profession and utterly broken. A tragic shell of a man, more proud of a four second cameo in a hollywood shoot-em-up than of endless hours of pointless sex with hollow-eyed, pneumatic porn-barbies. That's the rock and roll myth. He wanted to be an actor. Half the fuck-ups at the top of the music world wanted to be musicians. I remember seeing Nik Kershaw on Trisha once,"

"Ooh, internal monologue-failure! You just admitted to watching Trisha!"

Meg tries to lighten the tone. It works.

"Ah, shit, yes. Promise you won't tell anyone. Ha! Anyway, Nik came out with this great phrase. The theme of the show was 'I want to be famous... at any cost!' or some shit like that, and he looked baffled and saddened by the litany of human disasters that stumbled empty-headed across the stage and said 'fame is the downside to success. I wanted the respect of my peers, I wanted to be seen as a good musician. Fame wasn't a part of

that, it just made normal life difficult'. Or words to that effect. Gem had the chance, as we do, to leave all that crap behind before we ever got into it. The Reverse never turning into a 'proper' rock band is probably the best thing that's ever happened to any of us. But instead he secretly still believes that he'll be a 'proper' rock star. That he'll be the inspirational one, the one that everyone looks up to. He'll be the Brad Pitt of music - the megastar with the human touch. But he won't. He's a fucking session guitarist. He's not joining the band. And instead of seeing how cool that is - no contract, no nonsense, no need to buy into the fairy-tale - he'll just feel bad that he's on the outside of it."

Meg sees an in. A place to contribute.

"You know who's got this right? Hugh McDonald."

"Who the hell is Hugh McDonald?"

"He's the bass player with Bon Jovi."

"How have Bon Jovi got anything right? don't be stupid."

"Let me finish, rant-boy. He's the bass player with Bon Jovi, but he's not 'in' Bon Jovi. He's a session player. I read an interview years ago that said that he's played every note on every Bon Jovi record, even when that other guy with the shit hair was still in the band. He was playing with Bon Jovi before the band existed! But Jon assembled a band of his mates when he

finally put it together. And Hugh wasn't part of that rock 'n' roll club. But when shit-hair-dude quit, Hugh was brought in, knew the songs, knew the band, and gets paid really well. There's no weight of expectation on him, no need to do interviews if he doesn't want to, no promo duties beyond playing bass. He gets to play, then go home to a fairly normal life. Well, if earning that kind of money can be considered normal!"

"That's a great example. I'll Google him later. I'm still not sure I'd want to have to tour the world with that bunch of poodle-haired dick-heads, but if he gets on with them, it sounds ideal."

"From what I remember of the interview, he seems really chilled and happy. It didn't sound like he was peddling some bogus party line, and I think he said he missed getting to play with such a big variety of artists, but that it felt like a fair swap. Sounds good to me."

"Well, best case scenario, Gem realises that while he's still in rehearsals, before they get to Japan, but I'm not banking on it. He's way too gullible. Like I said, this is everything he'd ever wanted until two weeks ago. That kind of desperation doesn't go down without a fight."

"We'll see."

They will.

-----o0o-----

Monday, 6pm. Miles' bookshop has just closed.

"We're setting up in the children's books section?"

"Yup, I thought that would make for a pretty rock and roll backdrop."

Miles is happy, relaxed and looking forward to the gig.

"So, you guys want to do three sets?"

"We can do four if you think it'll help you sell more coffee."

Meg hears herself, sounding way too eager to please. Blushes. He's her boss. Too weird.

"I'm sure I'll sell enough coffee. Just relax. Three sets will be fine. What time do you want the doors open?"

"We should be set up and soundchecked in about fifteen minutes, but just in case, let's say 6.40 doors, and we'll start playing just after 7?"

"Sounds great."

Drum Monkey is setting up Meg's stereo. Sounds perfect for



practice, no reason to change it for the gig. He laughs to himself. SO much easier than setting up a kit. He could get used to this.

"OK, I'm all set. That took a cozy seven minutes."

"Better than a kit, eh?"

"Yeah, and that practice amp beats dragging your bass-stack in here too!"

"True."

Everyone is smiling. Gem's still not arrived. Drum Monkey's worried.

"Any idea where he is?"

"Don't worry, we said we'd be here just after six. It's only just after six. It feels more critical cos you're already set up, but as you said, it took you seven minutes. Relax."

"OK, but if he's not here by twenty past, we should make plans to play as a duo. Have you got the loop pedal with you?"

"Yeah, since yesterday? Of course not. It takes a little longer than that for me to buy equipment, given that I've got precious little money as it is. I need to find one cheaply online if I can. But we could still play as a duo if he doesn't show up."

Listen."

Drum Monkey listens, hears nothing but the faint thrum of traffic outside and Miles rustling a packet of coffee.

"What am I listening for?"

"Nothing."

"OK, good, cos that's what I hear. Pretty much nothing."

"Exactly"

"Right, thanks there, the Tao Te Ching, how about explaining this before I assume you're on mushrooms and cancel the gig due to a no-show and a stoned bassist?"

"Why do men always jump to the conclusion that if they don't understand something that a woman says straight away, then clearly it's her not making sense, rather than them being too fucking impatient to wait for the explanation? Anyway, yes, you were listening for silence. With a venue this quiet, we can get away with playing some really sparse music. It'll be wonderful. We just need to not start with a bang. Ease ourselves into it. It'll be cool."

She frowns at being drawn against her will into the consideration.

"Anyway, Gem'll be here. Stop planning for something that's not going to happen. Damn, you're a pessimist."

But Drum Monkey is still considering Meg's accusation about men not listening. It strikes close to home.

-----o0o-----

6.35pm.

"Wow, I really thought he'd show up. What a shitty thing to do on our first gig. He's not answering his phone either. When was Gem last late for a gig? I can't remember."

"He's a rock star now, no need to bother with bookshop gigs. So much for his protestations that this is his priority. Bastard."

"Well, we'll just play as a duo, it'll be fine."

"It'll be fun. I'll still hate him, but we'll have fun. I should soundcheck some pitched sounds. I've got a sample set for a Hang Pan. What's the best key for you for improv?"

"Any key you want - if I need open strings I've got a capo."

"Capo? On bass? Isn't that actually illegal."

"Says the nerd playing zero-gravity drums. If anything's illegal it's you getting all Deep Space Nine with your drum

programming, you geeky bastard."

Drum Monkey laughs. She's right. Nothing in this band conforms to any rules. They can do what they like. His whole body relaxes at the knowledge of total freedom.

"OK, I'll go with E, cos that's your lowest string, right?"

"Wow, a drummer who knows what the strings are on a bass, wonders will never cease."

Meg's playful banter tips over into spite. Drum Monkey hears it in her voice. Changes tack.

"I love playing with you, Meg. Seriously, I love your lack of preconceived ideas about what we should do. It's really freeing. I'm looking forward to the gig."

Meg stops, his candidness brings her up short.

"Yeah, me too. Sorry if I sounded pissed off. It's Gem."

"I know. Let's just play. It'll be fun."

-----o0o-----

7pm. Still no Gem.

Thirty-odd book-loving curiosity-driven musical

experientialists are sitting on bean bags. Smiling. With coffee. And books. Meg and Drum Monkey start. Slowly. Tentatively. A gentle tabla(-in-space) rhythm. A low, incessant, melodic bass-line. Bass repeats, tabla explores. Bass crawls, climbs, weaves, always questioning, never arriving. A low droning E, the rhythm punctuated by higher register fragments of melodies almost recognised. Ten minutes. The audience, mostly with closed eyes, nod, hum, read, rest, murmuring approval. Meg stops. Drum Monkey continues, changing time signature, reveling in the freedom of having no-one following his lead. The music is loose, gentle, unfinished, familiar, playful. Five minutes. Meg joins back in, changes scale, to something proto-middle-eastern. Improvises a long, meandering melody. Cadences tumble and fall, sometimes familiar but always unpredictable. Rhythmic cues are reached for and missed. The resulting mis-match is charming and unexpected. Meg smiles. Drum Monkey smiles. The audience feels friendly, welcoming, buoying them on generous waves of nods and ahhs. Fifteen minutes. Meg gets braver. Mixes techniques, changes rhythms, floats across the rhythmic underscore of Drum Monkey's zero-gravity pitter-patter. They stop. Silence, for a moment. Then applause. Lots of applause. Smiles. Generous laughter. And deep sighs of relief.

-----o0o-----

7.40. Gem walks in.

"Nice of you to join us."

"OK, save the sarcasm til you hear why I'm late. Barney sent four new songs to learn. Their manager wants them to do cover versions in the set, to appeal to more casual fans. He thinks the word will spread as they play them."

"Alright, so you were learning songs for your 'other band'. We don't care."

Drum Monkey puts air-quotes around other band, catches sight of himself in a mirror on the wall of the book-shop and vows never to do that smug face again.

"No, I was learning those all day, then had my bike stolen when I went out to buy a memory stick to put all the songs on."

"Ah, shit, that's not good. I'm sorry to hear that... wait, why did you need a memory stick for the songs? You've got an iPod."

"Yeah, but my iPod Scrobbles to last.fm, and the manager is REALLY funny about the names of the new songs and covers ending up on the internet."

"So turn Scrobbling off. What the fuck? How did you last a decade in a band with me and still do dumb shit like that?"

"Whatever. I've spent the last hour and a half filing a police report on the bike, then getting the bus here. But I'm here. Do people mind that we're starting late."

Meg steps forward.

"We've started."

"What?"

"We've already played about thirty-five minutes of duo stuff. It went down really well. Now go and set up."

Gem's face is unreadable. His brain is oscillating from jealousy to anger to fear to indignance to sadness to hither-to unnamed emotions that he can't keep track of.

"Right, I will. Seems like a nice crowd."

"They're lovely! They gave us loads of applause, as well as encouragement when we were playing. It was clear they were actually listening. I even made them laugh with a bastardised quote from 'Sunshine Of Your Love' in the middle of a Turkish sounding improvised melody."

"Ha! I'd love to hear that!"

Gem lightens.

"Well, I think I recorded it - I set my phone up to, anyway."

Gem puts his amp down, takes the bag off his shoulder, pulls

out the Pod and his new pedal board.

Drum Monkey jolts.

"Woah! What's with the space station MIA on the floor? Fuck me, that's a big pedal board!"

"Yeah, I needed something fast for the tour, this was the only one I could get that did what I needed it to do. Nice to have two expression pedals though - means I don't have to keep stopping to change sounds with my hands."

"Ah, those bits when you stop are my favourite bits!"

"Fuck off."

"Ooh, touchy! I'm kidding. Just set up. Let's see what you can do with the Millennium Falcon under your tootsies."

Gem wonders why Drum Monkey's sounding so playful. Drum Monkey is reveling in the freedom of playing whatever the hell he likes. Finding the book shop audience more inspiring than daunting. The whole feeling of 'playing' - really playing, as though music was a big game, and everyone in the room had helped write the rules. Which were non-rules, more injunctions to explore. Like his teenage years playing Dungeons And Dragons but without the overwhelming feeling that the people he was playing with were the world's least cool people. Ever.



8pm. Music starts again. Drum Monkey begins with the Hang Pan sound. Then stops. They played in E for the whole of the last set. Need to start somewhere else. Switches deftly to congas and begins a gentle pan-African rhythm, with elements from a lot of different African musics, all filtered through his prog-loving English ears. Meg smiles, and joins in, relishing the prospect of Gem's presence allowing her to retreat into groove playing for at least a while. She mutes the strings and mistakes the African rhythm for it's younger sibling, Reggae. No matter, it works. She and Drum Monkey dig in deep. Smiling. Gem readies himself, three times, hitting a chord or a note with the volume off as though about to fade in. But... nothing. Meg looks up. Gem's crying. He looks down at his pedals, avoiding her gaze. No-one else sees. He coughs, wipes his eyes, and starts. A slow skank. intentionally tripping the rhythm over itself. Sliding the chord in and out of consonance, toying with deep dissonance in a way that makes his heart race. The audience once again rest easy in their bean-bags, nodding and humming their approval. The groove deepens, spreads out, stretches out like the savanna photos on the cover of the children's encyclopedia behind Meg's head. Gem's eyes are closed and reddened. His playing is loose in all the right ways. He playfully quotes Steel Pulse, to the recognition of the sole reggae aficionado in the room. Twenty minutes. Without the hypnotic rhythm, this would've been awful. They walk a musical tight rope, getting close to exhausting an idea before morphing into another groove, chord, progression, sound-scape.

From Reggae they drift through deep funk and out into a soundscape that owed more to Drum Monkey's zero-gravity ideas than to any one musical idiom. A soundscape at once familiar in its harmony but utterly new in its construction and context. Stop. Applause. Relief. And Gem heads outside to cry more.

-----o0o-----

10.45pm. The bean-bag book-worms have all left. Miles is clearing away cups and cashing up the till. Verfremdungseffekt look at each other. Meg is bouncing up and down excited. Drum Monkey's smiling. Gem looks withdrawn and knows it. He pre-empts the questioning.

"It was amazing to play with you two. Awesome, in fact. The rehearsals at Meg's were cool enough, but tonight you were both so on it!"

Drum Monkey isn't letting him get away with it, but his own excitement muddies the sentiment with sing-song speech.

"Your mouth is speaking, but your eyes tell a different storeeeee. What's the deal? Sad you're going to miss more gigs like this while playing ghetto superstars in Japan? Awww, my heart bleeds!"

Meg steps in.

"Drum Monkey, piss off, don't be so fucking petty. That was an

amazing gig. Everything about it - from the duo set to the end - was what I've always wanted to do without even knowing it. So don't fuck it up by falling out with Gem now."

"Uh, I am here, Meg. I can stand up for myself."

"Yeah, but I don't want you to. I don't want you two scoring stupid pointless points off each other tonight. Sometimes you're both almost cool enough to be honorary women. But at times like this, you're pathetic testosterone-laden dick-heads, who really need to know when to shut the fuck up. OK?"

Drum Monkey and Gem nod. They know when they're beat. And she's right. Of course.

"Gem, it was great playing with you. I hope you come back to do more soon. But I'm glad we got to play as a duo too. We're going to have to keep that going while you're away."

Miles is listening in.

"Who's going away? Gem? Aww, shit, I was hoping to book you again. Are you two happy to play as a duo? In two weeks?"

Gem's eyes widen, his lips move but no sound comes out. He knows he's lost. He knows he can't pull out of the tour, but that this is way more important. This is medicine. This is church. What was that Faithless line?

"This is where I heal my hurts."

-----oOo-----

Tweets:

[Drum Monkey](#): well, that went well! More news soon. Right now, it's [#relief](#) :)

5 days ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[Drum Monkey](#): [@jesstherese](#) hey! did you enjoy the gig? Lovely to meet you! :)

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[jesstherese](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) I did, thanks - you looked like you were digging it too. Wasn't sure what to expect!

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[Drum Monkey](#): for those that missed the gig, Gem eventually turned up. Late. Glad he did, but the duo set went down REALLY well :)

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[guitartim](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) I'd be concerned, mate. Sounds like Meg might be turning into something like that solo bass dude she listens to. Then what?

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[Drum Monkey](#): [@guitartim](#) nah, the gig was amazing. No fear of her getting all floaty and new age on me. Way too feisty!

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[guitartim](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) Well, I hope for your sake you're right, but let's face it, you didn't foresee Gem heading off to go shredding in Asia, eh?

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[Drum Monkey](#): [@guitartim](#) where did you hear about that??? Is there a press release online? I

didn't even know it was public!

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[guitartim](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) I'm assuming you're talking about Gem's gig rather than

[@looperlative](#)'s LP2 (which [@TheDistanceMeg](#) will no doubt want)?

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[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): [@guitartim](#) yeah the gig. What the hell's a looperlative?

Actually, don't answer,

there's google for that...I'll get back to U with an answer

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[guitartim](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) The gig... no I don't think there's anything formally out about the tour,

but, let's just say I keep my ear to the ground...

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[guitartim](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) ...I know a few people and there's more-than-rumours out there. Don't

expect record co's & tour agents to keep secrets!

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-----o0o-----

Tuesday, for Gem, it's first day of rehearsals with eNaNoTangent. He frowns, wondering why he's never noticed what an awful band name that was before. Hears his ringtone.

"It's Meg, just thought I'd call to wish you all the best for the first rehearsal. Not that you'll need luck, you'll be great. But still."

"Meg, what do you think of the name eNaNoTangent?"

"It's awful, always has been. Why? The name of the band you're

touring with doesn't matter - a lot of great music has happened via bands with awful names. Prefab Sprout for example. Awesome music, fist-chewingly self-conscious teenage rubbish name. Barney and the others probably thought eNaNoTangent was funny. Isn't enano Spanish for midget?"

"No idea. I'd just not really thought about it til now. It's just when you say it 'yeah, I'm off on tour with eNaNoTangent', I feel like a bit of a tit."

"Band names are all rubbish, really. Word magazine did a list a while back of the best and worst. You could easily have swapped them over, and the complaints wouldn't have been any different. A good band name is the name of a band we like. If the band are crap, their name is shit. End of."

"Thanks, that helps."

"You are going to be blogging about this aren't you? Seriously, I need to follow your progress!"

"Well, yes, I am going to blog about it, but it's hardly going to be honest, is it? I can't write 'stuck in Japan, surrounded by arrogant regressives who believe their own press being sycophantically ego-fellated by their Japanese record company reps'."

Meg yelps with delight.

"You can! Oh go on! Sure, you'll get thrown out, but it'll be awesome!"

"No!"

Gem's scared at the thought. He doesn't want anything else to go wrong. After the gig, he already feels like he's made the wrong choice.

"Look, I'll email you and Drum Monkey daily updates, and blog the public stuff. Don't worry, when the weird shit happens, I'll let you know."

"Cool! I'll look forward to it. Oh, and if you end up shagging any Japanese fan-girls, be sensible. You don't need paternity cases following you around the world..."

Gem coughs. He'd honestly not even thought about groupies. After all this time, despite years of chasing Meg's friends, the potential reality of it strikes him as tragic. His heart sinks.

"Oh shit. They're going to be shagging groupies?"

"Of course! For fuck's sake, it's rock and roll. You signed on the line. You don't have to yourself, but it's going to be going on. Losers."

Gem's heart sinks deeper. In his teens, he read Hammer Of The

Gods and No-one Gets Out Of Here Alive. The rock and roll mythology of both Led Zeppelin and Jim Morrison left him flushed with anticipation of the day when he could take part in legendary bacchanalian drink, drug and sex fests, women throwing themselves at him to meet his every need. It only took one serious girlfriend to make him deeply uncomfortable with the idea that anyone could treat another person like that. Especially when the only attractions were fame, money and questionable talent. OK, so Led Zeppelin were awesome, but Jim Morrison wrote third-rate sixth-form poetry and his band didn't have a bass player. Awful. His rock and roll ambitions since then had been all about fame and adulation for his music, and perhaps in his more willful moments for first class plane travel, limos, dinner with other rock stars, late night jams with Lenny Kravitz and Steve Tyler... But fucking anonymous women? He'd seen hangers-on and trophy girlfriends dripping off the arms of be-wigged aging rockers at music equipment trade shows and once laughed out loud at one punk legend with a page-three wannabe draped over his fur-clad arm. Tragic. Beyond tragic. The kind of thing there ought to be a campaign against, to out them as frauds and fuck-ups. Facebook groups that name and shame sightings of has-been musicians and their fake-tanned, pneumatic entourage. But now he was a part of it. On tour, with a teen-humping rock and roll myth-machine. This was a far cry from chatting up brides maids on wedding gigs when you're the singer with a band that have just played an appalling version of Marvin Gaye's Let's Get It On as the first dance, to a room full of elderly relatives. In that situation, the bride's maid is a bigger star than the band. This is going



to be tough.

-----o0o-----

Tuesday lunchtime. Coffee shop. Meg and Drum Monkey still grinning.

"I spoke to Gem this morning."

"Did he sound excited?"

"Not really. First he was worried that eNaNoTangent was a terrible name for a band..."

"...it is. It's awful."

"I know, but no need to make him feel even worse about it. Second, he appeared to not have even considered the idea of groupies throwing themselves at the band."

"Ha! Was he over the moon when you reminded him he'd actually get laid on tour?"

"No, quite the opposite. He sounded mortified."

"He what?"

"He did, sounded like it was the worst news he'd had in ages. Perhaps the chasing bridesmaids at wedding gigs was all bravado

after all..."

"Wow. He really has grown up. Perhaps too much."

"What? Not wanting to shag women he doesn't now who only want to cos he's in a band is boring now?"

"Well, yeah, it is."

"I'm going to find the loo - that gives you 5 minutes to consider why that particular opinion renders every thought you may have on anything unworthy of consideration."

Drum Monkey's eyes follow Meg out the door. Fucking feminists. Girls want to get laid too. And female rock stars shag male groupies. Wasn't it L7 who humped a fan as the prize in a competition? Crassness has no gender-bias. People who are famous enjoy the perks of fame. People who aren't get to dream a little by shagging their heroes. Or at least, the gorgeous ones do. Drum Monkey remembers the stories of Frank Zappa's band. The 'shark' incident. His train of thought slows to a crawl. Thinking of his own rant about statistical exceptions to rules, he considers the weighting of male to female groupie-fucking Rock Stars. It's pretty overwhelming. Women trying to counter the heinous behaviour of men by being equally horrible seems like bad psychology. Certainly doesn't work when trying to model good behaviour... Life online has taught him that battling trolls just feeds them. Like-for-like is pretty much always a bad plan. He remembers hearing a song at college that

made him laugh - You Suck by the Yeastie Girls - it was considered 'cool' cos they did it with leftie poster-commies Consolidated, but the idea of fighting misogyny with it's equal opposite always felt clumsy. No moral high ground taken there. Anyway, Meg was right, and his five minutes were up.

"Yeah, sorry, it's cool of him to think like that. I was just fucking around."

"In your dreams."

"Ha!"

They leave.

-----o0o-----

eNaNoTangent Rehearsals. Day One. Tour production crew flunky approaches Gem.

"Gem, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Ah, great to meet you. I'm Terry. I've got a few bits of paper for you to sign before you start work with the band."

"Bits of paper?"

Terry makes the whole process sound like involuntary organ donation.

"Yes, just an NDA, some contractual stuff."

"NDA? Non Disclosure Agreement, right?"

"Indeed - it's just in case you decide to sell a story about the band. Actually, it's more of a Shared Revenue document. You can sell a story if you want, but all revenue from the story will have to be split with the label."

Gem is stunned.

"So what you're saying is that you don't care if I 'kiss and tell' so long as the label profits from it? Wow, that's pretty screwed up."

"It's pretty much standard procedure now. You know that anyone who gets through to the final of X-Factor has to agree to Simon Cowell getting a percentage of their income from 'entertainment' for life? I guess it's like that - we give you the chance to get the story, we make some of the money from it. After all, there's no such thing as bad publicity, so it's not like we wouldn't want you dishing dirt on the band."

Gem has heard enough.

"OK, just give me it. I'll sign."

Beyond creepy. Not a great start.

The band arrive. Equipment is set up, in a circle. Gem is handed two guitars.

"You'll need to play these."

"Oh, thanks, but it's fine, I've got my own."

"Ah, yeah, well the band have got a deal with Dean Guitars that means that both you and Barney will play their guitars on stage and TV. If you do any recording, or a radio session, you can play what you like. On stage, you play these. Let me know if you need them setting up."

This is all getting too weird. Gem hates Dean Guitars, and feels a pang of embarrassment that until about a year ago, he had a Dean poster on his wall - some out-of-work porn star holding a 'Vendetta' guitar.

Blushing and light-headed from the culture shock weirdness of it all, Gem heads for the door. NDAs? Crap guitars? He feels more embarrassment for thinking it would be just like any normal band rehearsal scenario. Feeling like an amateur. Needs fresh air.

Ten minutes.

"Gem? You're needed. You ready to go?"

His equipment isn't set up. He rushes back inside.

Oh yes it is. Everything plugged in and ready to go. Dean Guitars and everything.

"Uh."

Barney laughs.

"That's Mike. He's your tech."

"Thanks Mike."

"Don't get into thanking me. It's my job. Just tell me what you want doing, and I'll do it. Good to meet you."

Bewilderment. Everything You've Heard Is Wrong.

Gem tries to stay calm.

The drummers starts to play the rhythm from one of the band's songs. Gem recognises it and joins in. The rest of the band smile. And nod approvingly. The song unfolds, jamming on the chords til Barney's vocal signals the beginning of the verse. They play. And play well. More smiles. Gem relaxes. Finally.

-----o0o-----

Tweets:

[eph\\_brinkley](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) thanks for the follow. when are you next up? how's it all going?

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[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) : [@eph\\_brinkley](#) it's a bit weird at the moment, with Gem being away (well, in rehearsals), but we've got some duo gigs coming up!

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[clatter](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) You're in a duo now? Hey, maybe your band would want to play with us

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-----o0o-----

9pm. Home. Gem's phone rings.

"Well? How was it?"

"Meg! Fucking weird."

"Really? How?"

"Firstly, I got hit with a pile of contractual stuff - can you believe that if I sell a story on the band to the press afterwards, I'm not contractually bound to give the record label 50%?"

"What? That's not legally binding, surely? Especially as no-one in this country would give a shit, so it'd have to stand up in



a Japanese or Korean court of law. I'm guessing there was no reference to territorial jurisdiction in the contract?"

"Territorial jurisdiction? Are you making this shit up?"

"Uhm, I possibly made that term up, but the idea is solid, surely - you can't sign a legal contract in one country that doesn't say where else it has any meaning, or any reference to what happens when the terms of the contract contravene local laws."

pause.

"Meg? You still there?"

"uh, yeah. It's just that I've watched a lot of rogue trader-type documentaries on daytime TV. You learn this shit there."

"Anyway, I've no idea what it said, I just signed it."

Meg's voice trebles in volume and doubles in pitch.

"You did what??"

"I just signed it. The guy from the label told me what it said."

"Do you remember nothing from college music biz classes? Never sign anything without a lawyer looking at it. You're in the

Union, you could've got one of their guys to look it over for you, for free!"

"I 'was' in the Union. I let it lapse last year."

"Really? What the hell did you expect would happen if a promoter decided not to pay us again? They'd help cos you used to be a member?"

"Let's not talk unions now, Meg."

"I just can't believe you signed a legal contract without at least reading the whole thing. You're insane."

"OK, I'm insane. Can I tell you about the rest of the day now?"

"Of course!"

"Right, so the next bit of weirdness is that they tell me I have to play Dean Guitars..."

"...you have to buy a new guitar??"

"No, they gave me two to play! Horrible, they are. But apparently the band have a deal. So I get some piece of shit heavy metal guitar to play."

"I thought you liked Dean. You used to have that Dean poster, with the porno woman on it..."

"Yes, yes, well I don't now. Anyway. My tech set them up for me, and restrung them and they're passable."

"your 'tech'?"

"Indeed. I have a guitar tech. Or bitch, as I like to think of him. He also set up all my gear for me. And got it right. It's amazing."

"That's pretty weird. Cool-weird. Did you do any playing, or was it all weird twilight-zone rock star contractual crazy mentalist stuff?"

"Of course we played - we did about 5 songs. I completely cocked up one of them, largely because I thought it was a different song. They've got about four songs that start exactly the same way. It's like the legend of the Whitesnake album that got as far as the mix stage before they realised every song was in A. Only this lot didn't realise, so didn't do the edit."

"Wow, that gives me some hope when we play two or three improves in the same key on a Verfremdungseffekt gig."

Gem goes quiet. He's intentionally avoided thinking or talking about the band all day, trying to not dwell on the previous night's amazing gig. It feels like falling in love, he thinks, when you're already committed elsewhere. The pull, the draw, the addictive quality. Actually, it's like falling in love with

the seventies-dressing, maths-addicted girl at school that looked like a poster-child for Sci-fi convention family tickets. How on earth would he explain to anyone other than Meg and Drum Monkey why playing weird, quiet, improvised music in a bookshop to nerdy intellectuals on bean-bags was WAY more attractive a proposition than signing strange contracts and touring with a band who were big in Japan.

Gem snaps back to the conversation.

"Gem? Gem? Ah shit, I think the reception's gone."

"No! I'm here! Sorry, was just distracted. Anyway, yes, last night's gig. That was fun!"

"Did you hear that Miles wants us to do a duo gig there in two weeks?"

"I heard him mention it, has he booked you?"

"yes!"

Gem's heart sinks.

"Great!"

Abject failure at hiding the disappointment in his voice.

-----o0o-----

Gem's blog:

## My First Blog Post

**Hi, I'm Gem. I play guitar, and I've just started rehearsals with eNaNoTangent.** They're big news in Japan, and I'm joining them on rhythm guitar for their next tour.

I also play in a band called Verfremdungseffekt - an awesome improv trio, who will be playing as a duo while I'm away, but who I'll be rejoining when this rock and roll jaunt is over.

I'll try and tell you a bit about rehearsals as they go along.

**The first day was great** - a bit of time getting set up and meeting everyone, then we started playing through songs. The band were set up in a circle - there's no actual stage-type playing til week 2 of rehearsals, then we do what's called a 'production rehearsal' with the lights and video and everything. It looks like it's going to be a pretty big production.

Anyway, I'll keep you posted as I go along - feel free to comment on anything below, and ask questions if you like!

Cheers,

Gem

Filed under // [enanotangent](#) [verfremdungseffekt](#)

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"I'm so sorry I couldn't make it to your gig, Meg."

Joolz sounds genuinely sorry.

"I was planning to come, but time got away from me. I had to lock up the shop, and there were some late donations that I had to tidy away, and then I needed to get something to eat cos I was starving, by that time it was about 6 o'clock, and then on my way out of Progreso some guy stopped me to try and sell me a bike..."

"A bike? What kind of bike?"

"A bike, you know a bicycle. It was a red mountain bike, if you must know."

"Really? This wasn't as early as you said though, was it, this was more like seven o'clock."

Joolz blushes.

"Uhm, yeah, how did you know?"

"Cos that was Gem's bike! He had it stolen when he went out to buy a memory stick to put some songs on for... whatever, he had his bike stolen."

"Wow, that's rotten."

She remembers being rumbled.

"So, I did go out for food, was going to get a snack and head straight to the gig, but I ran into Mike in the Progreso and we talked for longer than I'd planned."

"Mike?"

"Haven't I told you about Mike? I've been sort of seeing him for a couple of weeks. Well, by 'seeing' him, I just mean we've had coffee when I leave the shop. Twice. He comes in there all the time to buy old records. Most of the stuff he picks I've never heard of. But he works in music. He's a guitar technician or something. Tours with a lot of quite bit bands."

Meg's only half listening, still thinking about poor Gem losing his bike.

"So the reason we were talking for so long is that he's going off on tour in a couple of weeks, to Japan."

Meg is now listening. Intently.

"Japan?"

"Yeah, with some band that are doing quite well out there. He said the name but I can't remember. Some weird made up word. Sounded like a Hobbit name or something."

"It wasn't eNaNoTangent, by any chance, was it?"

"Yes! How on earth did you know that? That's really weird."

"Cos that's the band that Gem is going off to play guitar with. That's the band whose songs Gem was going to buy the memory stick for when he had his bike stolen, which you were offered when you left Progreso after talking to one of the guitar techs on the same tour as him!"

"What are the chances...?"

"And you were almost right with the Hobbit thing. eNano is spanish for midget..."

"Weird. Well, Mike started work on it today. Says the band are pretty good, but a bit predictable. Though judging by some of the whacky stuff he buys in Oxfam, his taste is not a particularly accurate measure of what's 'normal'. He bought eight of those weird seventies Top Of The Pops albums the other day. Eight!"

Joolz' train of thought tails off, like she's searching for something. And finds it.

"Oh! After we last spoke, I Googled the soothing film music guy you always play."

Meg's eyes widen

"Steve Lawson?"



"Yes! And I bought one of his albums on iTunes. The latest one. You never told me he was a bass player! I'd never have guessed."

"You'd also never have listened to him if I'd said that."

"Of course I would - you were playing it. I couldn't have just turned your stereo off because the idea of a bass player playing solo sounds silly. I liked it. Why do you think I'm so closed minded about music? I'm not at all, I just don't feel the need to go looking for it all the time. The music I like usually finds me. I've got pretty mainstream taste. But sometimes I surprise myself, and listening to that album surprised me. I put it on in the bath."

Meg smiles. A genuine, deep, unconflicted smile. Like finding out that the secret she was keeping wasn't a secret after all. She'd been outed as a solo-bass music-pimp, and the target of her pimpage was OK with it, despite her feeling like she was doing the musical match-making equivalent setting up a straight guy with a pre-op tranny.

"I'm really glad you like it."

"I do. It's not going to replace Lady GaGa as my Friday night getting ready to go out music, but for relaxing in the bath after a tough day, it works."

And that's good enough for Meg. Job done.

-----o0o-----

"I spoke to Miles. He's serious about the duo show."

Foyles Coffee shop, lunch time Wednesday.

"Great! So we're on for a week and a half's time? Monday again? That's going to be fun. And a challenge. Doing half an hour of cool duo stuff is one thing. Playing for nearly two hours is quite another. I think we should both do little solo spots too."

"Like you did in the last one? Great, but let's not make anything too formal. The improv format is working. If we start arranging things too tightly, we'll mess it up."

"Fair enough. I'm just nervous about playing that long without Gem. Or anyone else playing melody. We're a good groove team. Oh, did you get that loop pedal? We should definitely try and practice a couple of times with it before we do a gig using it."

"Yeah, I ordered it online - Miles fronted me a couple of week's pay so I could get it in time for the next gig. Will be here in the next day or two."

"Excellent. I'm looking forward to trying it out. You do

realise that as a bass and drum duo, we can basically do what the hell we like?"

"Of course we can."

"No, I mean even more so than before. There's something really liberating in how people perceive limitations. It's like computer games. They've actually got, on the whole, less playable the better the technology gets. A whole load of people still believe that the Sega Megadrive is the best game-play platform out there. Why? Because the game play was awesome. The animation was blocky, the sound mostly terrible, but the interaction between controller and object wasn't hindered by the need to harness massive amounts of processing power to morph one high definition three dimensional camera angle to another. It was all two dimensions, and within the constraints of the screen, you could often do anything. With just enough fake gravity to make it interesting. Do you remember playing Sonic The Hedgehog? Yeah, so the little fox thing that followed him around was basically a shitty little kid trailing his every move, but the game play was awesome."

"The little fox thing? You mean Miles Prower? Commonly referred to as 'Tails'. Yes, I know him. Yes, I loved playing Sonic. And watching the cartoon on Saturday mornings."

Drum Monkey is stunned. Impressed, and stunned.

"You were a gamer?"

"Not really. Just Sonic, and NBA - I loved all the cheats in the basketball game - I used to set it up to so that one team player was Bill Clinton and the other was George Clinton."

"Ha-ha! I didn't know that cheat. Shit, something about computers and games that you know that I don't. That's a turn up."

"I don't really talk about it like you do cos I wasn't 'into it' into it. I just enjoyed playing it. And we had a Megadrive in halls at college, and in the first shared house I was in after that. Both times, it was a great way to kill time but not spend money I didn't have on going out with my heavily indebted drunken house-mates. Why the fuck were you talking about Sonic."

"Game play. Game play stems from knowing your limitations. The tighter the framework, the better the tactile response, because you're not subservient to anyone's notion of how the peripheral elements should behave. So if you're playing Grand Theft Auto, you expect the camera angles to be right, the shootings to be realistic, the car wrecks to look, sound and feel like car wrecks. You're a hostage to reality, even if it's an alternate reality. There was no reality to Sonic, because it was too basic - too limited - to imply a reality. So those limitations let the developers run wild. Because with greater limitations come lower expectations."

Drum Monkey stops. Where was he going with this? Land the plane.

"And it's the same with our duo. The limitations are pretty huge, with just electronic drums and bass. People's perception of what we should do is going to be way off from what we're actually going to do. Did you see the reaction at the gig? For the trio set, we had moments of pretty ecstatic euphoria, but with the duo set there was delight and surprise. You don't get that with guitars."

Meg's non-plussed.

"Ecstatic euphoria? Hardly. We blissed out some bookish hippies. They loved it, but I'm not sure I'd call their reaction euphoric."

Drum Monkey's irritated.

"Whatever the fuck you want to call it. The important distinction is between their natural reaction to the music in the second half, and their unexpected delight that we were capable of beautiful music in the first half. We won twice - we surprised them and we entertained them. Their only expectation was that it wouldn't be very good. Fortunately, no-one turned up expecting to see the duo, so they only had about two minutes in which to drum up ghoulish visions in their book-fed imaginations about just how terrible a bass and drums duo could be. But they were all surprised that we did what we did. And

what we did wasn't that adventurous. It was good, but we played it pretty safe. With your loop pedal we can get more out there. We can try some other things out."

"Such as?"

"Have you ever heard of Oblique Strategies?"

"Would those be strategies that are oblique?"

"Har har. It's a system that was developed by Brian Eno, where you write down instructions on cards and pull them out at random in order to feed ideas into your creative process, to get past blockages, or just break down predictable repetition. They say things like 'do the reverse', or 'be loud' or whatever. I don't know what they say. But we could have a go at word compositions."

"Is that just writing lyrics?"

Drum Monkey begins to actually sound irritated. Audibly so.

"Why would I call 'writing lyrics' 'word compositions'? Just what kind of Thetan level 3 Nerd do you think I am? Listen, by word compositions, I mean we describe all the elements of the music that aren't musical - so we give ourselves roles, or we play particular emotions, or we have abstract themes to develop, or we have certain mechanical concepts written out."

"Conduction!"

"What?"

"Conduction. That's what it's called. Well, no, not what you're talking about. But when someone does it from the front, and has hand signals for everything other than the notes and strict rhythm. It was developed by a bloke called Butch Morris. I saw a group of british improv musicians playing with him, uhm, conductioning in the late nineties on a tour."

Meg pauses, noting she's getting excited about a gig she complained about for weeks after at the time...

"Actually, it was a bit of a racket, but I loved the idea. Shall we develop hand signals as well?"

"I've no idea. We could give it a go."

Both are smiling. Both have ideas.

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[Drum Monkey](#) : Mad conversation with [@TheDistanceMeg](#) at lunch.  
Meg, do you want to try a duo  
arrangement of this? <http://bit.ly/62Z0BF> (expand) :)  
about 10 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

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Thursday 9.30pm. Meg calls round to see Gem. Knock knock. No

answer. She calls him. He's on his way home. She waits. He arrives.

"Wow, did you start late today, or have you really been at rehearsals for eleven hours?"

"It was a long one. We spent two hours this morning with Mike trying to programme my Pod to sound like the rhythm guitar on the record for two of the singles. Only problem is, they were recorded on a Strat with single coil pick-ups, and in order for it to look right, they want me to play this Dean guitar with humbuckers that sounds more like a Les Paul. So they're fighting a losing battle, but still won't let me play the Strat on any of the songs! Two fucking hours tweaking 'amp simulation' settings to fit a square peg in a round hole. I told them they'd need some kind of modeling system with a hex pickup to make it work, but no-one was listening. At this stage, I feel like a backing track with a heartbeat. It was also suggested today that I get my haircut to fit in. And I saw someone earlier that was pointed out to me as being the 'wardrobe mistress'. Like I can't pick out my own clothes. This is more like being in a West End show than a rock band."

Meg tries not to hide the 'I told you so' script that is slowly appearing across her face like some kind of CGI henna tattoo.

"Wow, that's rough. Hopefully it's just teething troubles at the beginning of rehearsals. Come on, you've watched those Police concert videos enough times to know that all kinds of



crap goes on backstage, but when they get on stage, it's just music."

"I'm not sure it's ever 'just music' in this world, Meg. Seriously, everything so far has been about looking right, hitting a market, meeting a demographic... The guys in the band seem to be more inspired by being told their projected sales figures than by playing great music. The music feels like a vehicle for fame, or sales, or something other than itself. Fuck, listen to me, I'm sounding like Dewey Finn..."

" 'Give up, just quit, because in this life, you can't win. Yeah, you can try, but in the end you're just gonna lose, big time, because the world is run by the Man. The Man, oh, you don't know the Man? He's everywhere. In the White House... down the hall... Ms. Mullins, she's the Man. And the Man ruined the ozone, he's burning down the Amazon, and he kidnapped Shamu and put her in a chlorine tank! And there used to be a way to stick it to the Man. It was called rock 'n roll, but guess what, oh no, the Man ruined that, too, with a little thing called MTV! So don't waste your time trying to make anything cool or pure or awesome 'cause the Man is just gonna call you a fat washed up loser and crush your soul. So do yourselves a favor and just GIVE UP!' "

Gem is silent. Meg is grinning.

"Wow, Meg, you learned that entire speech?"

"What can I say, it summed up pretty much everything that's wrong with the music industry, though I had to Google Shamu to find out that he's a killer whale."

"Wow, can you write it down for me in case things get too bad at rehearsals tomorrow? I could use it to lighten the air a little. Though what I really wanted to do today was scream at the record company twat, Terry, when he was going on about 'projected sales figures' and ask him to bring out some *actual* sales figures..."

The presence of air-quotes around "actual" let Meg know just how stressed Gem is.

"...but it's not my band. I keep telling myself it's not my band. I can't even choose my own guitar tech - I mean, Mike's nice enough and everything..."

"Mike? Mike's *your* tech?"

Meg remembers the conversation with Joolz.

"Yeah, he was 'assigned' to me. I guess he's just part of some job-lot road crew they picked up from a tour company. He did a good set-up on the Deans, but had no idea how to programme the Pod today."

Meg goes quiet. Tries not to smile. She's going to be hearing two very different versions of the tour. Three, if you count

Gem's blog.

"I saw you started your blog - great idea!"

"Yeah, except there's no way I can be honest in it. It might constitute 'selling a story' and then the label will invent some imaginary sum of money that I'm supposed to have made from it, stick some hot-shot lawyer on me and get back all the money they paid me."

"Gem, that's not going to happen, you sound like a mad conspiracy theorist."

"Very little that's happening in rehearsals is undermining my conspiracy theory. Barney and the rest of the band are in this little cocoon where the label feed them information that makes them feel like they are special and are 'going to be huge' if only they do x y and z. But nobody ever says 'you guys are massive, relax, it's all cool'. There's always more pressure, more made up shit to try and get them to strive further and inevitably to OK more expense that the label can take out of their advance for the album, that's already over budget, apparently. They really do have the shittiest deal ever. They make the Stone Roses look like Ani DiFranco. I can't believe that a bunch of guys in their 30s would have bought into all this crap."

"Well, let's home you're imagining things. After all, you're in a completely alien environment. The Tokyo enormodome is not the

Walkabout in Shepherd's Bush, even if the set list we play there would fit... it'd just be the original artists playing it."

Laughs from them both.

"And anyway, you'll still get to play some great venues, see a bit of the far east, hang out with some cool people, sleep on a tour bus, fly in a private plane."

"steady-on, they aren't that big!"

"Ok, maybe not the private plane. Actually, that'll be a blessing, at least as far as your carbon footprint is concerned. Did you read what George Monbiot wrote about Chris Martin?"

But Gem isn't listening. He's tired and all talked out.

"OK, I'm off, get some sleep, and call me if it gets too much. You'll be fine."

And Meg leaves, realising half way up the street that they didn't speak once about actually rehearsing any songs.

-----o0o-----

Gem's blog Part 2:

## Rehearsals day 2

Hello to all my readers!

The second day of rehearsals was a lot of fun! Still getting to know the crew. There are a LOT of people involved in getting a show like this together - techs, record company people, even a wardrobe mistress! It's a big machine, but a well-oiled machine that's for sure. The rest of the band just seem raring to go, to get out and play some shows. It's exciting.

**I'm really glad I did my homework** - I've got the songs pretty much down as they are on the album, and there don't seem to be that many changes so far.

We spent quite a while today working on getting sounds right. It's the kind of thing that you need to focus on on a tour like this. Professionalism means filling in that last 5% that would get missed on a smaller gig. Get the details right and make sure everyone who comes to the show has the gig of their life.

**The guys in the band are great** - I'd met them all before, but only knew Barney well. The rest of them are making me feel really welcome, which is cool.

However, it was a really long day and I need to get some sleep. I'll write more tomorrow.

Til then, keep practicing those scales! Ha!

cheers

Gem

Filed under // [enanotangent](#) [verfremdungseffekt](#)

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Rehearsal, Meg's flat. Meg sets up her looping pedal. Drum Monkey is writing on cards.

"OK, let's think, what kind of structures could we use for these bits of music?"

"Uhm, I could loop a drone, just a single note, with no rhythm, then play other long slow notes against it to shift the harmony, while you improvise with your space-tabla sound?"

"Sounds like a good start. How shall I write it? "Drone, shifting harmony, Tabla Improv" - try and keep it simple, or a little statement about what we're doing?"

"I think simple is probably better, leave lots of room for interpretation and deviation. We don't want to get stuck with these descriptions, trying to second-guess what we meant by them."

"True. That's very well put. I could've said it."

Laughs.

"Yeah, it all comes back to that 'is it right vs is it good' thing that Gem was talking about having read on the net. I thought about that a lot. Very astute stuff. Especially for Gem! We want things that helps us to be more good, to filter our thought process and - pseudos corner alert - improvisational methodology, to make better music."

"Improvisational Methodology? Where the hell did you get that phrase from. Please tell me you didn't just make it up, or I might have to worship you."

"Sadly not, I ended up trawling Google for thinking about improvisation after us talking about Conduction yesterday. Loads of great ideas there, and I ordered a couple of books too."

"Wow, you're getting serious about all of this!"

"Of course I am, aren't you? We've spent over a decade playing in utterly run of the mill covers bands, where the glass ceiling is set at 'being a good covers band' - that's it, there's nowhere to go. I'm sure we all feel pretty stupid about thinking there was some path from that to proper music - OK, you don't mister parallel careers - Gem and I certainly do, but the truth is that we've not got the chance to do something important. Musically, artistically, culturally important. I'm thirty-five, and those kind of things matter now. The feeling that we don't have to sell records to be significant is a massive weight off my shoulders. Not having to be measured in any way, just getting all the obstacles to it being *our* music out of the way. Surely that's something that makes you want to get serious?"

"Yeah, though I've always been serious about this - to quote Michael Franti, 'I am deadly serious about us having fun' - I

was serious about being the best covers band we could be, I'm serious about being the best sysadmin I can be, and I want my space drums to be the best sounds I can possibly come up with. I don't have to be better than anyone else - that competitive shit died in me a long time ago - but I do have to be the best I can be. If I feel like I'm slacking, I either move up a gear or stop. Life's too short for half measures."

"Really? Cos that sounds like bullshit to me. Have you been watching amateur self-help gurus on youtube? I mean, the idea sounds right, but the way you say it sounds sort-of ridiculous."

"Fuck off. I read a lot of books about this when I realised that my competitive streak was killing me. A) Because I was always thinking about it, and B) because I was playing computer games for twenty-two hours at a time with no food and only drinking Coke. So it was literally killing me. I went cold turkey for a while, and read a lot about sorting myself out."

"When was this? I don't remember."

"Of course you don't. I didn't talk about it. And it was the late nineties, so the bulk of it was before we really started playing together. It wasn't as big a deal as it sounds - it's not like I went into rehab. I just spotted that it wasn't doing me any good, and that these occasional mammoth gaming sessions were a danger to my health. It's not like I stopped going to work or washing. OK, actually I did stop washing for a while,



but that was just one week of World Of Warcraft obsession that ended when I realised that the people I was playing against really wanted to be called 'Quorthon, Lord Of The Underworld' rather than Kenneth or Bernard or whatever. I was into the computing side of it, the competition, but they were living in the fantasy of it, and that seemed considerably more tragic. Had I ended up in a gaming session with a load of geeks, it might have killed me."

"Piss off."

"Seriously! Well, OK, not killed me, but I could've stayed there for longer. Whatever, how did we even get talking about this?"

"Improvisation - I was reading about it, you were telling me that you're always dedicated one hundred and ten percent to whatever you do, like some kind of pasty-nerd version of Lance Armstrong."

"Fuck you."

Laughs. Time for coffee.

-----o0o-----

Still rehearsing in Meg's flat.

"OK, we still need to decide on some more of these formats for

improvisation."

"Right, what was the first one again?"

"The piece of paper says '*Drone, Shifting Harmony, Tabla Improv*'. Is that OK?"

"Yup, sounds good to me. OK, next one is based on a thing we did at one of the early rehearsals, but with Hang instead of tabla. So, it'd be starting with a percussive rhythm on the bass, that gets looped, I then play a groove to it, and you play an evolving melodic pattern using the Hang drum. After a bit, I'll loop the groove and join you for melodic fun."

"Sounds like fun. How do I write it?"

"Uhm, try 'looped bass-percussion' - hyphenate bass percussion so we know that they're linked - 'bass free groove', hang drum melody'... er, we need a symbol for a length of time?"

"How about I write five, ten, fifteen with a slash between each one, in brackets. just so we don't feel like we need to play for a fixed amount of time?"

"Yeah, if you're happy to play everything in multiples of five minutes. It's going to get really shitty if we run out of ideas at five minutes and fifteen seconds. That's four minutes and forty-five seconds of total balls."

"Yup, hash-balls."

"What-balls?"

"Hash-balls - I follow this guy on Twitter, he's @ihatemornings, and he uses the hashtag '#balls' all the time. I always say it to myself as 'hash-balls'."

"Ha! I've done that with people's names - I was thinking about that band you like, trying to remember their name, and thought 'ah, yes, they're At-Clatter'!"

"Right, let's stop before anyone hears us and phones the authorities. We sound mental enough as it is, listing *'things to do when we improvise'*."

"Yeah, because of course, you, Drum Monkey, could never be seen to be being a geek! If you were any more geeky you'd have a broken video camera mounted on your shoulder and be calling yourself Zaphod, the last cyborg left at the end of an intergalactic war, and claiming that your aviator shades have computer screens projected onto the inside, like Terminator. Or was it Predator?"

"No, in Predator it was the monster that had the night vision goggles. Terminator was Arnie as the cyborg. Anyway, fuck off. I was never interested in the William Gibson cyborg thing. Working with computers is interesting enough without trying to become one. I don't want computers that hook into my brain, I

just want interfaces that make sense for the task they're designed for. The fact that all we have so far are keyboards, mice, joysticks and touch-screens is nuts. I mean, there are data-gloves. And I guess Jean Michelle Jarre's MIDI laser-harp is a kind of computer interface, but they're hardly well developed beyond the 'cool gimmick' stage. We've scarcely begun to scratch the surface of tactile interfaces and wearable technology, so why bother with implants and alien probes?"

"It doesn't take much to set you off, does it? You really do have a long-winded opinion on anything geeky."

Drum Monkey sports a look half way between hurt and irritated.

"Aw, dude, I didn't mean to upset you. It's kind of endearing. It's you. I love the way you see the world through maths and percussion."

Drum Monkey's eyes widen.

"Do I?"

"Of course! Most of your solutions to things have some kind of statistical angle to them, and your own solution when things go tits up is to play. Or combine the two and create space drums. Percussive algorithms - that must've been like the world's greatest geek porn for you!"

He cracks a smile. She's broken the freeze.

"Ha! Yeah, I guess so. I do like the certainty of statistics, but science has so many limitations when it comes to how we feel and how we relate to each other. Drums make more sense there. They're sensual. Visceral. Dare I say it, spiritual."

"You can say spiritual all you like round here - I'm a hopeful agnostic and flatmate is a fair-weather God-botherer. Works for us."

"I didn't mean religious. I meant spiritual. Beyond science. Deeper than numbers and graphs. I love it when soulful ideas break down my own rationalist crypto-fundamentalism. I'm almost as annoyed by scientific fundamentalists as I am by Jesus-freaks. The idea that science or computing or 'rational thought' has all the answers is great until you get your heartbroken, or feel yourself compelled to help someone with no advantage to yourself, or see years and years of serendipity piling up in your journal and wonder what the fuck you did to get so lucky. It may well be that spirituality just means 'the innate-yet-corruptable disposition of humanity towards doing good'."

"Aslan."

"Huh?"

"Aslan. I always liked the idea that he was powerful but had an achilles heel - like superman but without the leotard. That he

would disappear for ages, but return eventually."

"You do know that The Lion The Witch And The Wardrobe was one big Jesus-fest of an allegory?"

"Yeah, but it's hidden enough that you don't have to think about it. Don't go messing with my mystical version of Aslan. You'll be the first person ever to kill a Lion by throwing him to the Christians!"

Drum Monkey notices the time.

"This is all fascinating, but we're not getting any more cards done. Shall we just sort it out on Twitter. Or blog about it. We need to start a blog. I can't believe Gem beat us to the blogging thing. Though he's not very good at it. All that 'Hello to all my readers' stuff makes him sound like sodding Roland Rat."

Meg laughs. And laughs. After the near-miss of talking about spirituality and cyborgs, she needs something to lighten the mood. Roland Rat does the trick.

"OK, we'll start the blog. Do we label our posts as us individually or just blog as a 'band'?"

"Label them, it'll help keep it personal not corporate. I hate band websites that are all written in the third person when you know very well that the keyboard player did it as a project in

his web design night class."

"OK, we'll do it. Tomorrow."

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Drum Monkey's Improv Inspiration Spotify Playlist for Meg:

Anouar Brahem: Thimar

David Torn: Prezens

Art Lande: Rubisa Patrol

Paul Bley: Fragments

Bill Frisell: In Line

Shubha Mudgal: Best Of Shubha Mudgal

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Drum Monkey's first blog post:

## Improvisation Inspiration.

Welcome to the all new shiny Verfremdungseffekt blog. We're an improvised music duo, that used to be a trio, and will probably be a trio again in the not-too-distant future.

Our guitarist, Gem Morris, is currently rehearsing with eNaNoTangent, before heading off to Japan for a tour. He's got a blog too, all about the tour - see <http://gemjapan.posterous.com/> for more on that!

Anyway, a few things you should know about the band. I'm Drum Monkey, the drummer. In this band I play a Roland Handsonic: [picture here]

...it's an electronic percussion instrument, but I've reprogrammed all the sounds I use to emulate how a drum would sound being played in zero gravity. It's just a thing.

The other member is Meg McKenzie - she's a bassist, and as of a couple of days ago, a 'looper' too. We're playing as a duo while Gem's away on tour, so watch out for gig news.

One thing I should point out up front - we haven't got any recordings. Well, we have but we're not putting anything out there to be listening to for a while. Kinda like The Bays did at first... We're interested in how our music develops live, and don't want people to come with expectations based on MP3s. Does that make sense? I hope so.

Anyway, Meg and I will be blogging here for a bit.

Here's the first thing I've got for you - I just did Meg a Spotify playlist of music that should inspire her to the heights of improvisational genius. It's all music I found by surfing around the web looking at answers to the same question - what music inspires you to improvise? Some great albums in there - have a listen if you've got Spotify, by clicking this link.

If you haven't got spotify, here's the list of albums included in the playlist:

Anouar Brahem: Thimar (plays Oud, I think, this is with Dave Holland on bass as well)

David Torn: Prezents (amazing improv guitar player - does a lot of processed live looping, hence the inclusion for Meg)

Art Lande: Rubisa Patrol (with Mark Isham on trumpet - if I could add any instrument to Verfremdungseffekt, it'd be trumpet...)

Paul Bley: Fragments (pretty weird stuff, but beautiful)

Bill Frisell: In Line (another american guitar player, in a duo with a bassist)

Shubha Mudgal: Best Of Shubha Mudgal (an indian singer - this is definitely not Bollywood.



Really beautiful, and a totally different improvised music tradition...)

Enjoy that lot! Let me know what you think of them in the comments, or on twitter...

ah, Twitter! Yes, we're on there - I'm @[drum\\_monkey](#) and Meg is @[thedistancemeg](#) - I'm sure she'll explain her username in a blog post soon...

cheers, **Drum Monkey**

Filed under // [enanotangent](#) [handsonic](#) [improvisation](#) [music](#) [verfremdungseffekt](#)

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Meg's first blog post:

## Meg explains Verfremdungseffekt

**Hey! I'm Meg.** I guess you've read what **Drum Monkey** said about me being in the same band as him. He's fab. Love him to bits. Really. Anyway, let me tell you a bit about this band. It was a **trio**, it's now a **duo**, and who knows what in the future. We used to be a covers band. Well, technically we *\*are\** still a covers band, but I'm not going to tell you what that's called, cos I don't really want you coming to see us play! *hehehehe*.

This band - **Verfremdungseffekt** - is much more interesting. It's also a little bit weird, and a challenge to explain. But I'll try, just for you. Seeing as how you asked so nicely.

**The name - that's from Brecht.** As in Berthold Brecht, the playwright. He had this thing he called '*The Distancing Effect*' - trying to make sure the

audience stay sort of dispassionate about the theatre, as a way of them being more engaged. For us, it started as a cool name, but makes sense, because we'll never be doing flashy gigs with lights and stages - it's the wrong music, and we don't want to. We want to put it in different contexts, and take our improvised music into cool places. **Our first gig was in a bookshop.** Looks like our second one will be too! *hehehehe*.

So that's why my twitter name is **TheDistanceMeg** - from the Distancing Effect. I know, it's not a great name, but all the ones I wanted were taken...

So, we *improvise*, we don't *record*, Drum Monkey plays space drums and I loop my bass. Gem plays guitar with us when he's not playing rock stars in Japan.

As you'll have seen in Drum Monkey's first post, he did me a lovely **Spotify** play list of great music to inspire me to improvise. Please make any suggestions you have have for that in the comments at the bottom :))))

**Filed under** // [drum monkey](#) [meg](#) [music](#) [verfremdungseffekt](#)

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Gem's blog part 3:

## Rehearsal blog, day 3

Hey all! Thanks for reading thus far...

**Rehearsals day 3 was where we started to really get into it.** We took two of the most complicated songs and started to rework them. I'd learned the parts from the forthcoming CD (that's why I can't tell you the song-names, cos they haven't been announced yet!) but the band had learned them as a quartet, so we took some time to rejig the parts, work out the right combination of guitar sounds, then program the effects units and preamps for the quickest changes.

I've got a great tech working with me on all that stuff, so it doesn't take as long as it might, but there's still a lot of programming to do!

**So we worked on the intros, the solos and the outro to those two songs** - the parts I knew, but the arrangement was new. None of it was that tricky, but I had to concentrate! The other guys mostly picked it up pretty quickly. There's a fair amount of sitting around at rehearsals, so I spend as much time as I can making sure I've got everything down pat. There's no room for sluggishness on a gig like this!

Well, I need to sleep before tomorrow - this rehearsal schedule is pretty intense, but I thought I'd point you to a band the bassist in eNaNoTangent pointed me to - called Hope And Social. Said he heard them in a gig in Stockwell - nice stuff!

<http://hopeandsocial.bandcamp.com/album/songs-from-the-bar-of-lost-souls>

**Filed under** // [bandcamp](#) [enanotangent](#) [guitar](#) [hope and social](#) [music](#)

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"I saw your blog, sounds like rehearsals are going better."

Drum Monkey phones Gem. First time since the gig.

"Ha! Don't believe everything you read. Those two songs took fucking ages, for no good reason. The first one, the bassist just couldn't remember to stop in the right place. We must've spent forty minutes trying to get him to stop right! Then, half way through the afternoon, the drummer heads off for a 'smoke break' and comes back baked out of his mind. It wouldn't bother

me, but he's probably the best musician in the band. I think his dad was in some band in the 60s, and he's inherited this idea that music is best played stoned. His playing this afternoon was proof that it might have *sounded* better to him when stoned, but it was a fucking mess to anyone who wasn't wasted. And what did the crew and label guys do? Nothing. Just kept on picking up the cymbals he knocked over, and his drum tech didn't even call him out for spending 20 minutes trying to tune the skins on his toms a fifth apart because he once read that Rikki-fucking-Rocket from Poison did it! How old does that make these guys sound? In interviews, I'm sure he goes on about how awesome The Arctic Monkeys and Muse are, but here he is, baked off his gourd, tuning his drums like the bell-end from Poison and twirling his sticks like Tommy sodding Lee! It's insane."

Drum Monkey is trying really hard not to laugh. Just hearing the names Rikki Rocket and Tommy Lee is enough to bring him to tears.

"Are you serious? That's quality sit-com material! You're being paid to be a part of this? It doesn't get much more awesome than that."

Silence.

"Meg and I are working on some ideas for 'guided improvisation'."

"Guided? What like some kind of hypnosis? Who's being guided? That's a bit weird."

"No, the guiding part just means we have a description of what it is we intend to do - kind of compositional form without the notes to tie it down."

"Wow..."

Pause.

"...I'm not sure what I think of that. I look forward to trying it out when I get back."

"We're trying to get some more duo shows."

"Can't you wait til we're a trio again?"

"Gem, piss off. You're off playing in your celebrity Poison tribute band, and we're supposed to wait for you? Balls. We're making some great noises as a duo, and we're happy for you to come and play with us again when you're back. But you might not be back. Are you really going to turn down another tour off the back of this one if it comes up?"

"The way things are going, I might not be around for this tour. It's insane. I know these songs better than they do, but they keep trying to find things to pick fault with in my playing. And each time, it's things they asked for, or it's a problem

with the sound that me playing this piece of shit guitar is causing. I'm doing my job, and it's making them look stupid."

Another pause.

"It's not all bad. I'm having some fun with Barney, and he keeps complimenting me on my playing. I'm deliberately not showing him his own parts, even when he gets them wrong. Never upstage the talent and all that, even when he's the guy you shared a house with at college and forced to play Bach two-part inventions when all he wanted to do was get stoned. That's pretty weird to think of, him wanting to steal all my guitar ideas at college, and now him being the one in the successful band."

"Successful? Dude, don't forget the conversation you told us you had with him in the shop. You said that the situation he described was some kind of million-selling slave plantation deal. It sounded awful, and certainly didn't fit any definition I had in my mind of 'successful'."

"Yeah, there is that - it's weird being in the middle of the trappings of it, cos there is so much money being spent! The rehearsal studio is massive, there's a catering team, all the techs. The wardrobe mistress is there and hasn't done anything! Clearly she's getting paid to stand around waiting to tell us what trousers to wear when we get to that bit of the practice..."

"Ah yes, Meg told me about the wardrobe mistress. I thought one of you was winding me up!"

"Nope, she's real alright. And she's paid to be there. The basic cost of rehearsals, not including the band's retainer, must be about four grand a day! We could've booked and executed a month-long tour on the budget they're spending on a day! It's insane."

"Wow, I didn't get any of that from your blog!"

"Yeah, I think the label have a team of people checking Google for mentions of the band, so I want to keep them happy for now. I seriously may quit before the tour, but I want to keep my options open."

"Quit? You sounded before like they might chuck you out, but I thought you were just being a drama-queen. You'd quit?"

"I really don't know. Japan is awfully tempting, but playing this stuff with a stoned drummer is a tough way to get to see the world."

"Wow, I hope you make the right call, whichever way it goes."

"Thanks. Anyway, I need some sleep, we'll talk again soon. Say hi to Meg from me."

"I will, sleep well. Bye."

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## Tweets:

[Drum\\_Monkey](#) : Trying to sort out some oblique strategy-type cards 4 the next improv gig. 1st one

is 'Drone, shifting harmony, Tabla Improv'. Suggestions?

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheHuxCapacitor](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) got an iPhone? Need Eno's Oblique Strategies? There's an

app for that. Suggestion: An angular shift, not transition, not section

1 day ago from *Echofon* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[guitartim](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) "atonal metal shredding" :-)

1 day ago from *Tweetie* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[guitartim](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) hey, I'd love to hear your stuff. If you've recorded anything, try putting

it up on audioboo: supereasy to use, great advert!

1 day ago from *Tweetie* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey](#) : [@TheHuxCapacitor](#) thanks! We wanted them slightly less oblique than Eno. More

like this - <http://bit.ly/62Z0BF> (expand) :)

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey](#) : [@guitartim](#) ha! Atonal Metal Shredding with

[@TheDistanceMeg](#) and I? That's

clearly not going to happen :)

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey](#) : [@guitartim](#) hey! Thanks for the interest. We've decided not to make any

recordings available for a while. We're live-only for now. Sorreee!

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey](#) : hey, [@TheDistanceMeg](#) I just did you an improv inspiration playlist on Spotify.



Enjoy :) <http://bit.ly/8hj3of> (expand)

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[MikeKSmith](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) Oblique-ish Strategies? Slightly off-center strategies? Non obvious strategies? "Get out of rut free" cards?

1 day ago from *web* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) wow! That playlist is fab! thanx so much. Where did U find it all? That's not your usual listening fayre... :))))

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): going 2 be spending some quality time with this spotify playlist of improv goodness from [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) <http://bit.ly/8hj3of> (expand) :))))

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheHuxCapacitor](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#) Ha, that's brilliant. Bet that system takes a while before it becomes muscle memory.

1 day ago from *Seismic* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): [@MikeKSmith](#) Yeah, all of that! [@thedistancemeg](#) has all kinds of cool ideas for structured improv. Who knew? :)))

1 day ago from *Gravity* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): We've finally got a blog! Yay! Check out the Verfremdungseffekt blog at - <http://verfremdungseffekt.posterous.com/improvisation-inspiration>

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[TheDistanceMeg](#): RT [@Drum\\_Monkey\\_](#): We've finally got a blog! Yay! Check out the Verfremdungseffekt blog at - <http://verfremdungseffekt.posterous.com>

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): ...guess I'd better start writing things 4 the blog then. What do U want me 2 write about?? :))))

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): OK, I'm going 2 try writing a blog. Be nice... here goes... :oO

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) how do I do all that clever bolded up text and stuff that you did in ur blog? I want that 2!!

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey](#): [@TheDistanceMeg](#) OK, when you're emailing your blog post to Posterous, just highlight the text and make it bold there. no need for code!

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): YAYAYAY! My first ever blog post - <http://bit.ly/6CBlae> (expand) - plz give me nice comments :)))

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey](#): RT [@TheDistanceMeg](#): YAYAYAY! My first ever blog post - <http://bit.ly/6CBlae>

(expand) - plz give me nice comments [excellent work, my funky friend!]

1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey](#): Looks like Gem's been updating his blog - sounds like rehearsals are going well -

<http://gemjapan.posterous.com/>

about 2 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

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"I don't know why you won't let people hear the recordings of your band. It'd make it much easier for me to get people along to the next show."

The Bookshop. Meg's working. Or trying to. Miles is asking questions. Meg explains.

"None of the recordings we have do the music justice. And how

can you possibly do justice to music that doesn't exist yet? The recordings only tell people what we did last time. That creates a false expectation, and also means they're listening without context. The bookshop was as much an instrument at the last gig as the bass and space-drums."

Meg smiles to herself, making a mental note of that last line about the shop being an instrument. Must use it again.

"Yeah, but that's not what people expect is it? They'll be confused."

"You know, a huge percentage of teenage boys have their sexual awakening via hardcore porn these days."

Miles stops in his tracks.

"On the internet. Their first experience of sex, of nudity, even, is seeing gang bangs and violent porn on the internet. When they eventually get in relationships, a section of them are going to expect that their girlfriend is desperate to have three guys with abnormally large penises simulate gang-raping her. They'll expect that you can pull up alongside a 'hot' woman in the street, offer her money and have her get in a car and blow the four guys in the car while a fifth one films it. They're going to be deeply, deeply confused when they discover that women are three-dimensional human beings, rather than pneumatic sluts with a voracious appetite for violent, web-cast sex. For the ones who watch that stuff the most, their

expectation will be pretty firmly entrenched, so much so that they end up at best losing an otherwise promising relationship due to making insane sexual suggestions, or worse they'll commit rape and think they were justified because they 'misread the signals'. Meeting people's expectations can sometimes be disastrous."

Miles is wide-eyed.

"So you're comparing music-fans wanting to know what they're getting themselves into with teenage porn-addicted date-rapists discovering their girlfriends aren't cum-hungry sluts the hard way? Meg, that's without doubt the most disturbing thing I've ever heard you come out with."

"But the point still stands - the way people consume media destroys their perception of what's real, what's important, and pandering to it screws it up. Meeting those expectations ruins the sense of place that's so important to live music, especially live music that's not in a normal venue. We're not just improvising, we're soundtracking the shop. The only legitimate use I can imagine for a recording of us playing in your shop would be for you to play it in the shop, as ambient music. But if we did that, you'd have to sign a contract promising to never tell anyone what it was."

Meg's grinning again now. Mike is still feeling queasy from her bizarre choice of analogy. She sees it.

"Look, this shit is serious. No, of course someone hearing our music wouldn't be like being raped. That's obviously not what I'm saying. Neither do I think the people that want to hear what we sound like before we play are equivalent to deviant teenage sexual predators. The point is more about the cumulative effect of meeting expectations through the media. Remember TV in the 70s? There was racially dubious comedy on prime-time Saturday night family shows. Jim Davidson being a racist, sexist shithead validated all the racist sexist shitheads that went around telling those jokes as a way of entrenching intolerance and prejudice in their work-place and their communities. It took riots to make people really address it. There's a line in an Indigo Girls song, where she sings 'every five years or so I look back on my life and I have a good laugh'. I do that. But every decade or so I also look back at the culture I live in and I grimace. I'm stunned by the things we've allowed to happen. I'm stunned by the stupid nonsense we deemed offensive, I'm stunned that being gay was seen as a shocking thing. I'm saddened that it took us til this century to allow civil partnerships, I laugh incredulously that the first gay relationship I was ever aware of was Barry and Colin on Eastenders which was for six months referred to as East-Benders by some of the kids at school and even the maths teacher at my school laughed at it. No-one corrected them, chastised them. Things don't change by leaving them. They change by people being disruptive, refusing to meet expectations, marching, protesting and talking about this stuff."

Meg's getting excited. Miles is reeling. She continues.

"I was speaking to Gem the other night. Getting a glimpse behind the curtain of a big tour like that was scary. It sounds like a wasteful, creativity-free disaster of a set-up. No-one's there to play music, to love music, to see music change people. They're all there because some record company idiot has told them that they need to do more, sell more, tour more to sell more records in order to be a success. And it's bullshit. It's lies and it's evil."

"It's not evil, Meg! It's a business like any other. I sell books. I sell them to people who care, who like to shop locally, who like the atmosphere, who appreciate the free coffee and the chat in here. There's a community. But you know what? I still buy books on Amazon, when they're on there but my supplier can't get them as cheap. I know authors who buy their own books on Amazon because they're cheaper there than the 'artist's discount' their publisher offers them. It works. It's macro, faceless, algorithm-driven big box sales, and it's driven a lot of people out of business who tried to compete, but those of us who were smart didn't try. We just did something else, lowered our overheads as much as possible, worked out what we needed to sell to stay in business and made the most of the advantages of being small and local. So I have the community notice board, the book group, the free coffee for my regulars. I end up being unofficial counsellor to a handful of my customers who find that this is the best place in the world to talk about problems. To be surrounded by ten thousand

trees-worth of solutions. All the answers are already here, in this shop, and yet they talk to me about their problems. And I rarely recommend books for them. Sometimes I might send someone home with my dog-eared copy of *The Road Less Travelled*, or even a book of Martin Luther King speeches for some inspiration. But I do it knowing that helping them is more important than selling to them, while also knowing that helping them is the best possible business move. It's a real win-win situation, and I don't need to sell *Girls Gone Wild* DVDs and shitty *Zoo* and *Nuts* magazines to teenage boys in order to stay afloat. There's no porn in my business. No-one's being date-raped in my shop, metaphorically or otherwise."

Silence.

"Sorry, that didn't really work as an ending... I just tried to tie it back in with your initial point. There's no expectation of what a local bookshop should be like any more. Hence the reason my regulars will turn up to see you three play weird improvised music. Fuck it, I'm in. Let's not give them what they want. We'll give them what they need instead."

"Miles..."

"I'm serious! I've talked myself into agreeing with you. The conversations I'll have about why no-one can hear you will be fascinating anyway - I'm imagining them already. I promise not to compare you to porn, though. That's really not a good subject for analogy."

"But it works!"

Meg is insistent.

"Meg, it works, but it's still horrible. Go home early, think of a new metaphor. I'm genuinely inspired by how strongly you feel about this. I love being in a position to support you, and to be honest, finding thirty or forty people mental enough to come and listen to Durham and his space-drums isn't that hard round here. You should see the weird list of books we've got on back-order."

"I've seen it. I put most of them in. Remember, I work here."

"Yeah, sorry. I get a bit detached sometimes. You know all this shit. Why am I telling you?"

"No, no, it's good. I like hearing this stuff. It's all food for thought. I'm really new to this music-as-counter-culture stuff but I've been feeling it for ages. I mean, I like playing the songs we do in The Reverse, but only because so much of it is the music we've grown up with, so it's fun to revisit those times in my life with a bass in my hands. But that wasn't why I took up bass. I didn't know this was either, but it just feels right. I feel like I was born to improvise, but had it robbed from me at college by being told that improvisation was synonymous with either crappy bluesy guitar solos in overly long seventies rock songs, or playing over jazz changes. This



is really freeing. It fits."

"That's great, Meg. Really great. Go on, go home. Go practice."

She goes.

-----o0o-----

Meg's Spotify 'Inspiration List'

Talvin Singh - One

The Orb - Blue Room

Miles Davis - All Blues

Bobby McFerrin - Blackbird

Steve Reich/Pat Metheny - Electric Counterpoint

The Cure - A Forest

Clatter - Nighttime

Herbie Hancock - Chameleon

Talk Talk - Desire

David Sylvian - Mother And Child

Steve Lawson - Exit Sandman

Jeff Schmidt - Until You Don't

Imogen Heap - Half Life

-----o0o-----

Tweets:

[TheDistanceMeg](#): I REALLY love working in the bookshop. I know, I'm a musician, and I would love 2 do it full time, but my job rocks. :))))

about 15 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) I've been playing with Spotify! Just putting the finishing touches 2 a playlist 4 U :))))

38 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey](#): [@TheDistanceMeg](#) get you! You'll be coding PHP and doing database maintenance in no time ;)

34 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) here's my Spotify playlist. I put it on the Verfremdungseffekt blog! <http://bit.ly/5YxvdG> ([expand](#)) :))))

2 minutes ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#) · [Show Conversation](#)

[Drum\\_Monkey](#): RT [@TheDistanceMeg](#): [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) here's my Spotify playlist. I put it on the Verfremdungseffekt blog! <http://bit.ly/5YxvdG> ([expand](#)) :))))

half a minute ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

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Meg's Blog post:

## Meg's Spotify Playlist!

Hello again!

Inspired by Drum Monkey's awesome collection of weird improvised stuff for me to listen to, I've been sorting out a Spotify playlist. It took me a little while to work out how to do it, just because it's easier than you'd think. It's just like iTunes - search for the songs ---> drag them into a playlist ---> copy the internet address of the list ---> away you go! It's amazing :)))

Anyway, here's my 'Inspiration List' - not much of it is improvised, as until about three weeks ago, I didn't know that I loved improvised music! How stupid is that?? Anywayyyyyyy, here's a list of things that sound

like the music I want to improvise. Some are floaty, some are rhythmic, some  
blend music from around  
the world. Some of it sounds like drum monkey on space-drums, and a few little  
bits sounds a bit like me  
on bass, but only because I do a bad impersonation of some of my heroes.

[click here to get the playlist](#) - if you've got Spotify.

If you haven't, here's the list of songs -

**Talvin Singh - One** (this one's spesh for Drum Monkey - lots of tabla and electronics!)

**The Orb - Blue Room** (remember dancing to this in chill-out rooms at college :))

**Miles Davis - All Blues** (Drum Monkey played me this. I love it. Great bass-line. Might see  
if I can loop it!)

**Bobby McFerrin - Blackbird** (this is one voice, no overdubs. Live. So inspiring)

**Steve Reich/Pat Metheny - Electric Counterpoint** (the one thing I heard in music at  
school that I still love -  
and it's like looping!!)

**The Cure - A Forest** (electronic drums and repetitive driving bass? How can that not  
inspire us? :)))

**Clatter - Nighttime** (Drum Monkey's favourite band, just bass and drums YAYYYYYY)

**Herbie Hancock - Chameleon** (funkyyyy)

**Talk Talk - Desire** (this is the sound inside my head. I want to sound like this...)

**David Sylvian - Mother And Child** (...and this)

**Steve Lawson - Exit Sandman** (I might do a cover of this, it sounds quite easy :)))

**Jeff Schmidt - Until You Don't** (found this on youtube looking for solo bass - wow)

**Imogen Heap - Half Life** (she's my herooooooo)

I'll write more soon - pleeeze add your suggestions for great inspiring songs to the  
comments. And if you want, add a link to them on the internet! Welcome to the future!  
heeeee!

**LUV MEG x**

Filed under // [improvisation](#) [inspiration](#) [music](#) [playlist](#) [spotify](#) [verfremdungseffekt](#)

-----o0o-----

"I loved your playlist!"

Meg's flat, Drum Monkey round for a practice.

"Ha! Thanks! That was a lot of fun. I felt a bit of a spaz for taking so long to work out how to put tracks into a playlist. What an amazing system! Making compilation tapes used to be a massive hassle."

"Yeah, but that hassle made it really mean something if someone did you a tape - I used to cut out words and pictures from magazines to make tape covers. It was the acceptable face of what Americans called 'scrap-booking' - doing a collage to represent the music. It took fucking ages, but the sense of satisfaction at the end was amazing."

"Scrap-booking?? There's a verb 'to scrap-book'? Americans are officially really fucked up. I used to do tape covers too, but it was normally just a picture of a hot guy cut out of an advert in Elle, and then some curly handwriting for the track list. I gave my first boyfriend a tape full of Duran and Jam tunes."

Meg starts to laugh. A lot.

"Wow, I just had a flashback to how meaningful it felt to put Echo Beach on there - that was MY song, and he'd never heard

it. I felt like I was introducing him to something vital, something that would improve his life."

"It probably did. Seriously. How can anyone's life not be better with the addition of Echo Beach."

"You love that song too? That's great!"

"Of course I do. All sentient beings love it. Those that don't are pretending to be sentient. Come the Fem-bot take-over of the world, it'll be way we'll sort out real women from the cyborgs - play them Echo Beach and see if they grin and dance uncontrollably. Those will be the real people."

"That makes me feel much better about what happened next."

pause. Quiet voice.

"I left him for not getting it."

Drum Monkey guffaws. With delight.

"You did? You're my hero! I mean, I once refused a date with a girl who'd just told me how great Windows 98 was in a web-design class where she was refusing to write code and instead trying to use the 'export to web' function in Word. But I've never actually ended a relationship for reasons of musical incompatibility. That's awesome. I love you. Seriously, I'm officially in love with you."

Drum Monkey's still laughing. Meg feels a flutter. That's the first time anyone's said 'I love you' to her in ages. Even as a joke. Shut it out.

"It was doomed anyway. By that point he was listening to Bros. Sure, he claimed to dig the Cure, but got annoyed when I played the gloomy early stuff. He didn't realise just how radical a move it was for a band with a massive goth following to release a song like Love Cats. He just thought it was a cool jazzy pop song. When someone misses the point that much, it's time to say goodbye."

"Yeah, that is weird. For a bunch of goths, the Cure certainly played a lot of happy songs."

Hobby-horse time.

"The Cure aren't goths. Never have been."

"What? Of course they're goths. They're the uber-goths."

"Oh for fuck's sake, no they aren't! Goth bands are The Nephilim, The Mission, Ghost Dance... Look, I was a goth, I loved the Cure, but even then I knew that they were a lot bigger than their goth following wanted them to be. They are, if you ask me, the biggest band ever to have never compromised on their own agenda. The fact that Love Cats was such a radical move says that. They were trying to piss off their miserable

fans. That's genius! It's also a huge inspiration for me with Verfremdungseffekt."

"What? You want us to sound like the Cure, or to piss off goths?"

"Neither, you idiot. I had this big chat yesterday with Miles about meeting people's expectations. He wanted a recording to play to people who might come to our next gig."

"And you told him to piss off, I hope."

"Of course I did. But it took me ages to explain to him why, and involved me turning the conversation to the subject of teenage boys who think that all sex is like internet porn."

"Fuck, that's a really scary thought. Imagine what that would do to your idea of your first girlfriend. So much for wondering what colour her bra is. That's not really going to mean much if you think she wants to be double-teamed by your mates while you watch."

"That's pretty much what I said! Ha! Miles thought I was being a sicko, but the point was just that their expectation being fucked up was good enough reason to never ever confirm it by behaving in the way they expect."

"That's a seriously great analogy. You're a genius. A rather twisted genius - I'm not even going to imagine what made you

think of hardcore porn as analogous to mainstream music consumption patterns. Actually, I saw about ten minutes of X-Factor last week. There's my answer."

Laughter. Lots of it. And understanding. Lots of it. Then practice. Meg's looping ideas are getting better and she's starting to use the delay sounds in her pedal too. They experiment with the hand-written improv cards:

*"chromatic out of time high bass, cymbals with reverb, bass ballad tune"*

*"Hang drum solo, bass plays kick drum sound. Loop kick drum, 2 or 3 notes repeated"*

*"solo bass, all double stops"*

*"snare and hi-hat variations in prime number sequences, shifting bass drone"*

*"country music"*

*"start angry, seek resolution, calm"*

The last one is particularly good. Which gets Meg thinking.

"Maybe we should write more abstract ones."

"That gets us back into the territory of Eno's Oblique Strategies"



"And that's a bad thing?"

"Not at all, just working out what's going on."

"I had a look at the Eno stuff on the web. We need to write our own - a lot of his have nothing to do with improvising."

"I think that's the idea, the 'oblique' bit in the name."

"Then maybe we need somewhere between oblique and concrete. Liquid strategies."

"Improv Lube"

"ewww, that's horrible."

laughter.

"OK, how about Fluid Frameworks."

"That's great. That's what we do. We play Fluid Frameworks."

"Cool, I'll try and come up with some for the blog. You can do the same."

"This is fun."

"I'd better go - do you want to call Gem first?"

"Uh, better check his blog first, and see how he got on today."

"Nah, his blog is just a litany of bullshit - the conversation I had with him on the phone the other night contradicted just about everything on his blog. Apparently the drummer's a stoner and can't play once he's wasted."

"And Gem's surprised by this? Shit, I thought I was the naive girl of the band. He's getting paid to do the thing he claims to love. Do you think we've ruined him? Like having a really gorgeous, sensitive boyfriend that for some logistical reason doesn't work out but makes your standards way too high for anyone else?"

"I don't think Gem's looking for a boyfriend..."

"Har har, no that was *my* brain talking. For him, it'd be a girl. Why am I even explaining this? It doesn't matter. He really wants to play with us, he's just inhaling the noxious fumes of his rock and roll dreams going up in smoke. They're meant to smell like joss-sticks but instead are like a shit-heap that's spontaneously combusting."

"Wow, get you with the poetry this evening - I'd better leave and let you start working on those fluid frameworks while your brain is still hallucinating all this cool shit. Lunch tomorrow?"

"Cool."

Exit Drum Monkey by the front door.

-----o0o-----

Meg's notebook:

*list of possible Fluid Frameworks:*

- ~~Music to make you hungry~~
- ~~Breaking up in Algeria music~~
- Music for dawn.
- Autumn, the sun goes down.
- The drums are restless, the bass is a calming influence.
- Aslan is on the move.

*(must avoid things that just sound like song-titles)*

- Soundtrack to oblivion

- from space drums to space bass to spacial awareness
- when shit is the new awesome
- ~~music to watch boys by~~ (cliche!!)
- droning on and on. In a good way.
- feminist funk
- old romantic improv - from Duran to Miles in 4 movements
- ...

(running out of ideas. need more before blogging)

-----o0o-----

Gem, back at rehearsal day four. No drummer, so working on guitar and keyboard parts.

"Barney, can I have a word?"

"Uh sure, let's go and get a coffee outside."

Outside.

"Does Derek actually know the keyboard parts? He seems to be really struggling. Can he just not remember what he played on the record?"

Barney laughs.

"He didn't play on the record. He couldn't have played all that! Remember Dave McDonald from college? He's played all the keyboards on our records. Derek does an OK job live. He gets it eventually. Or at least, something close enough that we can fill in the blanks with backing tracks. We haven't done anything with a click yet, have we?"

Gem wonders how he could be unsure about what they'd practiced thus far.

"No we haven't. How did you get from Derek being in the band to hiring Dave? That's a bit weird."

"It's a funny story - Derek was only in the band to start with because he owned a van and a sound-proofed rehearsal space. His parents are loaded and he still lived with them til well after the first album came out. They'd let him convert the garage into a practice space. It saved us a fortune in hiring shitty studios for that. The down-side was we had to have Derek in the band, but he's great fun on tour and we were never a heavy keyboards band. Not til this album anyway. The producer worked on loads of seventies prog albums - that's why it all sounds

lovely and open..."

It doesn't.

"...but it also meant that he wanted loads of classic keyboard sounds on it, and started layering them. Dave had been playing on my demos back when I was thinking of doing this as a solo project. But he was always focussed on being a session musician. This was back in the nineties when we all wanted to be either rock stars or session players. I was the rock star, he was the session guy. We liked our roles, and he arranged parts that Derek could play. This album, it got a bit more tricky. With the producer's encouragement, Dave started to take the piss. You should've seen Derek's face when he heard 'The One To Love'. He nearly shit himself. We'll put most of that on tracks, and he'll play the repeated piano part, which really ought to be the bit on a track, but his organ technique is terrible. I'm going back in."

Gem stays outside. Whatever happened to prioritizing the music? It's not that Derek shouldn't be in the band, but he should get lessons. Get better. Learn. Why would anyone not want to do that. Gem's confused. Pushes it out of his mind. Needs to get through this. Wanders back in singing 'Gotta Get Through This' to himself. Gets look of recognition from the Wardrobe Mistress.

"I toured with the Beddingfields. Both of 'em."

Like Gem gives a shit.

Still no drummer.

-----o0o-----

Meg's house. Duo Verfremdungseffekt practice.

"How did you get on with the Fluid Frameworks, Meg?"

"Pretty good, I had a few cool ideas. Lemme get my notebook."

Peruses notebook...

"haha! I love those! They all sound doable. Or at least, we'll have a go and whatever comes out will surely be interesting, even if it's nothing to do with what we thought it was meant to be."

"You like? That's great. I wasn't sure if they were heading in the right direction, but if they work for you, I'll see if I can come up with some more. How did you get on."

"Ah."

"Ah?"

"Well, I got sidetracked by soundtracks."

"What does that mean?"

"I started thinking about doing improvised soundtracks after someone sent me a link to some stuff about a band called Cipher. They're a duo - bass and sax, I think - cipher dot F nine dot co dot uk is their website. They do soundtracks to old black and white silent films."

"You want us to start playing to film? Doesn't that make the logistics of gigging a little tough? We'd be projecting onto books if we tried that at Monday's gig."

"No. Well, not yet, anyway. So I just thought we should start thinking of some longer form fluid frameworks. Write some stories for films that we then soundtrack. Kind of like the way program music works, but with it improvised."

"Program music? Berlioz?"

"Yeah, and the others - I think wikipedia credits Beethoven with inventing it. Or maybe that was my music teacher at school. Who credited it, not invented it."

Laughs.

"But the idea is that we start to improvise to stories. We can be as controlled or fluid as we want - can be a five-line synopsis, a whole story with signals for scene changes... whatever works for us. We could try actual video, or slide shows at some point, but let's not get ahead of ourselves."

"Sounds amazing. Have you written a story?"



"I've started one. Do you want to hear it?"

"Of course!"

"OK. The idea is basically about earth being discovered from space. So the build up is the approach to earth, followed by entry into the atmosphere and landing. Then discovery. They find nature and then man-made things. Then discover some animals..."

"Sounding a bit San-Saen"

"shut-up, miss I-can-name-three-orchestral-composers. Anyway, they discover some animals and finally humans."

"Sounds great."

"Yeah, but there's a twist. When they find humans, they don't understand the aging process at all. So they decide that all humans start out as severely disabled midgets, but they get better. So instead of the aging process they see us as being in the middle of a healing process. Then they discover old aged people too, and can't work out what the illness is that makes human skin get wrinkled and bodies fail. So they start looking for a cure. They discover that humans are already working on cloning, and assume that the scientists are working on the same project - a way to replicate 'well' humans. AKA adults."

"Wow."

"Wow what?"

"That's fucked up. Babies are just massively disabled midgets? What the hell is wrong with your head?"

Drum Monkey looks concerned. Meg starts laughing.

"Seriously, it's fucking awesome. Really really disturbing but awesome improvisation fodder. We're going to have a whole lot of fun with it, but best not tell the story to any expectant parents. They'd be pretty disturbed to discover that they were about to bring a crippled dwarf into the world. Though, thinking about it, it'd be heartening for them to know that nearly all of them get better with time."

Laughing. Lots of laughing.

"OK, we should try your fluid frameworks today, but next practice, we'll try the space discovery story, yes?"

"Genius."

-----o0o-----

Tweets:

[TheDistanceMeg](#): wow, [@Drum\\_Monkey](#) is a genius. A sick genius. But a genius. U all need 2 hear his story ideas 4 our improv gig. It'll mess U up!  
1 day ago from *TweetDeck* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

[Drum Monkey](#) : [@TheDistanceMeg](#) Ha! Thanks, though I don't think 'sick genius' is going on my twitter bio just yet :)

1 day ago from *Gravity* · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

-----o0o-----

eNaNoTangent Rehearsals Day 6.

"Guys?"

Gem gets the attention of the rest of the band. They're listening.

"I wondered if it might be fun to just do some jamming today. We're getting on really well with the songs, it seems, and I know that I'd benefit from just playing a bit, cutting loose, having some fun. Just for an hour or so."

Blank looks from all. Except the Simon the bassist.

"Actually, that's not a bad idea. What do you want to play? What covers do you know."

Gem laughs.

"What don't I know! I played in a covers band for ten years, and got used to being able to play pretty much anything I've heard more than once. If you just want to play tunes, just start and if I know it, I'll join in. But I was actually

thinking of just, y'know, jamming. Play whatever comes to mind, see what comes out."

A loitering record company flunky steps in.

"Uhm, far be it from me to trample on your creative freedom, but this is a tour rehearsal, not a writing session. That doesn't really need to happen now, there are enough songs. And Gem, this is in no way meant to be a put-down, but at the moment, you're just a session guitarist, probably best to not overstep your position."

Gem frowns.

"I'm sorry, since when did you decide what does or doesn't constitute 'tour rehearsal'? How do you know that us jamming as a band wouldn't be a really useful thing for developing more rapport between us? Imagine that its only purpose is to get me better gelled with the rest of the band, would that be worth it, given that I am doing the tour? Why does improvising need to be seen as writing, rather than just 'playing'? Are you actually a musician? Serious question."

"Well, I played guitar at school, but not to any level of proficiency."

"Right, then can I respectfully suggest that you shut the fuck up until something happens that has *anything at all* to do with your job. What is your job anyway? 'label representative'? What

do you *actually* do?"

"I look after the interests of the label here, after all, we're paying for all this."

"No you aren't."

All eyes are on Gem. Barney speaks.

"Gem, don't start. Seriously, let's not go there. I thought you were just having a bad day when you came in the shop. Leave that outside."

"Barney, I'm happy to leave it outside, but there's no way this muppet can claim that the label are paying for all this. It's a loan. A big ole bank-loan, recoupable against the money raised by your music. Recoupable against future earnings by any of your music. If this tour loses money for the label, that's OK, they'll take it off your next record. Or your solo projects, or whatever other things that have optioned in the contract.

Whether or not you think signing to them and borrowing millions of pounds that you then let them spend on themselves supposedly on your behalf is a whole other question. That's up to you guys - I am, as pointed out, just a session guitarist, and more than happy to be so. But there's no way this flunky can claim that the label he works for is actually paying for any of this. That, my friends, is balls."

Silence. Then flunky speaks.

"I'm sorry that you don't understand the workings of the music industry. The system you're so quick to misrepresent has been responsible for all the great records in the history of rock and roll. Major labels have been the breeding ground for everything that's been successful in music. Name me one multi-million selling indie artist? You..."

Gem jumps in, not missing a beat.

"Ani DiFranco."

"...who?"

"You honestly don't know who Ani DiFranco is? You're shitting me, right? The single most successful independent artist on the planet. She owns Righteous Babe records?"

Blank looks.

"Seriously? You work in the record industry and you don't know who Ani DiFranco is? Look, I've been accused in the past of having a low view of women in music, but even I know that Ani's career is a shining oasis of indie wonderfulness in a desert of slavery-lite contracts and shattered dreams."

Barney steps in.

"Right, we need to get on with some playing. Let's run the

first five songs in the set, back to back, see how we get on.  
OK?"

Fingers are snapped. Musicians are back in the room. Flunky is silenced. But not placated.

They play. Gem's the only one who makes no mistakes. This doesn't go unnoticed.

-----oOo-----

Gem's blog:

## Rehearsal Blog, Day 6.

Hi all! sorry I've been quiet, rehearsals have been so intense I've not had time to blog! **All is going really well, we're powering through the set, getting everything as tight as can be.**

**The last couple of days have been more focussed work on specific tricky bits in songs.** Finding the bits that each musician finds most tough and working it til they nail it. Laborious but the payoff is worth it.

**Today was a lighter day, we focused on the beginning of the set, playing the songs in order 'as live'** - not with any stage stuff or choreography, just getting the songs slick. Slickness is very important in this kind of set-up. Not much room for spontaneity or improvising, but that's the way it works, I guess. Maybe that's just the way arena shows have to be. It's good discipline, that's for sure. If there weren't so many interruptions from

outside the actual band, I think I could really get into the rehearsal process...  
Ah, enough about that.

**Some of you who are fans of the band may be wondering how I, a lesser-known musician, ended up playing with eNaNoTangent.** Well, the short answer is I knew one of the guys in the band. The long answer is, I went to music college with Barney - we used to share a house, practice together, went through a lot of music education together. We've stayed in touch all the way through, so when his arena-sized band needed an extra guitarist, he knew I was up to the job. I didn't need to audition, as such - Barney's word was good enough. The lesson in this for musicians is clearly to meet as many people as possible, and be prepared for any gig that comes along. Which means practice not partying. The partying happens once you're in the band!

...but not during rehearsals, so I'm going to sign off and go to bed, ready for tomorrow - no time off on 'middle Sunday' for this band. Keep going...

Filed under // [enanotangent](#)

-----o0o-----

"Drum Monkey, this is getting really stupid."

Gem calls Drum Monkey, early Sunday morning. Both are surprised.

"Gem, it's 8 o'clock. What the hell's up?"

"This band, that's what's up. Seriously. We had more clue about what music is and what it's for playing in The Reverse. We had more concern for the music, for our own enjoyment, for the



audience. These guys are lost in maintaining their own mythology, playing turgid rock arrangements because some non-musician from the label tells them it's going to work. They've lost it before they've really found it. I can't believe that they consider this to be 'success'. Maybe they don't. Maybe that's what keeps them going, the feeling that they need to get further before considering themselves a success. Whatever, it's insane, and the stoner drummer is a complete dick - why would anyone who plays that well ruin it by getting wasted half way through every day? If he could handle it, I don't care what he does - he can sniff petrol for all I care, but if it fucks up you're playing, give up."

Gem's talking accelerates.

"The keyboard player can't even play properly, hasn't played on any of the records, and certainly wouldn't cut it in a covers band of any kind. He plays the easiest part on each of the songs and the rest are going to be on tracks. Good luck getting stoner-boy to play in time with a click-track when he can't keep time with a bass player. I feel so bad for Barney - the songs could be great. Yesterday I suggested just jamming for a while, hoping that we'd just have a play and they'd get a feel for what can happen when you jam. I thought it would fix them, it felt like it would break the record company spell. I sat there, feeling helpless in the face of a band massively under-achieving by reaching for something they have no control over. Instead of just trying to be good, trying to be amazing, they're trying to be successful. I wanted to tell them what you

said, Drum Monkey, about how impossible it is to be awesome but how we all need to keep trying because nothing else really matters and the trying is where the magic happens in music, but they aren't ready for it. Barney wasn't ready for me telling him about the industry back when I spoke to him in the shop, and the band aren't ready to hear it now. And I'm not sure that I'm ready to go on that journey with them. They just don't think I've got anything to add beyond being a guitar-part-machine. I don't think they'll kick me out - I know what I'm doing and I know these songs better than they do - but I may just have to bail. And that feels terrible. I so wanted to do this. Still want to do this. Just not like this."

Silence.

"Gem. Dude. I don't know what to say. I can't possibly pick through everything you're feeling in order to give you any sensible advice. I really feel for you. I know how much this meant to you to do. But I also know what happened to all three of us in the few weeks running up to this. Meg and I are happy to wait for you to come back - we'll play as a duo but the door is always open to you to come and join back in. This band is as much yours as ours. You know that. But it sounds like you've got a really tough decision to make. My only advice would be to make it as quickly as you reasonably can - as much as the band are clearly a bunch of fuckwits, they obviously need time to get someone else in, or your name is going to be shit to all the musicians we know. Barney knows the people we know, the story will get out. Don't rush into anything, but don't sit on

it too long."

"I think I know what I'm going to do. Thanks for listening. I honestly wish I'd never been offered this. Playing with you and Meg is such fun. Improvising makes me feel way more alive than this shit. Don't get me wrong, I like doing a good job, I love being the best I can be doing whatever it is I do, but this is more like playing musical theatre than Rock and Roll. I feel like an actor in a cliched play about how crap being famous is, with a score of nearly-great songs played by proficient-but-lifeless theatre-pit musicians."

"Have you listened to the soundtrack to Hair or Jesus Christ Superstar lately? Some theatre musicians are awesome."

"Drum Monkey, shut up."

"OK. Talk soon - call me any time, Gem. Hope you get it sorted out."

The phone cuts out.

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Meg's blog post:

## Fluid Frameworks

**OK, so Drum Monkey and I have been working on some ideas for 'guided improv'. We LOVE improvising, but have been looking at a load of**

different ways to inspire different ideas.

The first two things we looked at were:

- **Brian Eno's *Oblique Strategies***, which are a series of random statements, phrases or suggestions that you pick at random and apply to what you're doing.
- **John Zorn's *Cobra composition***, which is a load of instructions for performance, but doesn't tell anyone what notes to play.

Brian Eno is the guy who invented ambient music, and then made records with U2 and James and did a great job on Paul Simon's last album. John Zorn is, from what I've seen on [YouTube](#), an insane sax player. So neither of their ideas seemed best adapted to what we want to do.

So we were talking about it, and realised that what we needed were frameworks to improvise with, and **Drum Monkey decided they should be called 'Fluid Frameworks'**, which is a great name :)))

**Here are a few of the ones I've come up with - just single line inspiration ideas for us to improvise around:**

- Soundtrack to oblivion
- from space drums to space bass to spacial awareness
- when shit is the new awesome
- droning on and on. In a good way.
- feminist funk
- old romantic improv - from Duran to Miles in 4 movements

I've got some others, but this is just a small sample.

**Drum Monkey has got into writing a script for a non-existent film that we're then going to soundtrack.** I'll leave him to blog about that. Suffice to say, it's all kinds of fun, and we'll get back to you with how it

goes. Hopefully we'll try some out at the next bookshop gig.

Bye for nowwwwww,

luv Meg x

Filed under // [brian eno](#) [improvisation](#) [john zorn](#) [music](#) [verfremdungseffekt](#)

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Mike and Joolz meet for lunch.

"So how's rehearsals going?"

"Fine."

"Just fine?"

"Well, the new guitar player that I'm looking after is a bit of a character. He's not actually the new guitar player, just a session player hired in for the tour."

"Gem?"

Mike is shocked.

"How do you know?"

"You knew I knew about Gem - he's the guitar player in Meg out-of-Oxfam's band. I told you about that."

"I'd completely forgotten! Yeah him. He's a great guitar player. Really good. But he doesn't seem to get how this end of the business works. Keeps want to get all *creative*. If he wasn't doing such a great job, they'd have definitely kicked him out by now. The guy from the label is livid."

"Why, what did he do?"

"Gem was shouting at him about how record labels are ripping off bands with crappy loans - a proper crazy rant. He said it like no-one else knew it. He didn't seem to get that the rest of the band were happy with it the way it is. They like having someone else handle the money so they can just play."

"Does the record company guy have anything to do with the music?"

"Yeah, he makes suggestions. He often comments on things that will or won't work in an arena. Things that affect the brand of the band that they might not have spotted."

Joolz looks concerned. She's been listening to Meg for too long to ignore a statement like that.

"The 'brand of the band'? Since when did bands have a brand? I thought you said the label were there to let them focus on making music?"

"They are. He just makes some suggestions. It stops them from

getting all whacky. Remember that American band I told you about that I toured with?"

"The Matthew David Band?"

"Matt David Band, yes. The label rep at their rehearsals was great at toning down their more crazy ideas. They were doing loads of crazy improvising and the drummer was really fiddly. He helped them tone that down a whole lot. They were huge."

"Weren't they huge before? I remember hearing about them from friends in the States in the mid nineties. They were playing arenas before they were even properly signed. And that was when they were doing the fiddly drumming stuff. The people I knew who liked them went off them when they went all stadium rock."

"They don't call it stadium rock for nothing, Joolz - they wrote songs that worked in a stadium, and they ended up playing stadiums. Proper success."

"So playing their own music in arenas wasn't success? I don't know much about the music industry, but I know enough from talking to Meg to know that for those creative-type musicians, just playing the music they love is considered success. To do that and play arenas sounds like a massive success. Why would they need to get some record label bloke to smooth out all that stuff so they can play stadiums?"

Mike is stunned.

"Hang on, you watch X-Factor, what do you know about creativity?"

"When have you ever known me to watch X-Factor? I've never watched anything like that. Actually, I liked the first series of Fame Academy, but only because it seemed to be about real talent. I don't get excited about watching people who can't sing being laughed at. I love pop music. I'm not ashamed of that. But I've spent enough time with people at college, and with Meg, to know that people who are into their music for their own creative needs don't get happier when they have to change that just to meet someone else's idea of success. They don't care about money. They're purer than that."

"Aww, Joolz, that's a really sweet idea, but they are all into the money and fame when it comes along. Even Gem didn't quit after shouting at the record company guy. He went back to playing the parts he was being paid to play. It's all well and good shouting about this stuff, but at the bottom line, they all want to be famous and they all want loads of money. Drugs, women, parties, limos. They fucking love that stuff."

"I don't see that in the ones I talk to. Meg's different. I'm sure that Gem's different too. Maybe he's willing to put up with it in order to do his job. Being a musician paid to play music is just like any other job. Doing creative music because you love it is more like the work Meg and I do in Oxfam. It's volunteer work for the good of others."



"Joolz, sweetheart, that's nuts. Improvisors are the most self-indulgent of musicians. They just play all that weird shit and never think about what their audience actually want to hear. People going to a gig want to hear hits. They want to hear big tunes that remind them of their youth. They want to dance, sing, and come away feeling like they've had a great night out."

"That's not what Meg says at all. That's not why she does gigs in bookshops. You'll have to ask her about it, but their other band was doing all that, in pubs, and getting paid for it. They were paying the bills, playing hits, thinking about entertaining audiences, and she'd rather work in a bookshop and play improvised music. It's not just talk, she's doing it."

"Well, that's really interesting, Joolz, but it's certainly not what most musicians do."

"And most people who work in shops don't volunteer in Oxfam. What kind of a fool do you think I am for doing that?"

"That's not the same, sweetheart."

"You know, I think it is. I think the principle is exactly the same. Mike, you'd better be getting back to it. You're meant to be back for more rehearsal. Do say hi to Gem from me."

Mike leaves.

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Rehearsal day 7. Sunday.

"Gem, can I have a word?"

Record Company Flunky beckons him over.

"Yes?"

"I wanted to have a talk with you about your outburst yesterday."

"My what?"

"Your outburst, when you chose to mis-represent the aims and activities of the label, jeopardizing the ongoing good relationship with the band."

Gem laughs.

"Gem, this is serious."

"No, it's insane. Are you trying to tell me that the money the label have put into this band isn't a loan?"

"I don't want to get into this with you again. It really isn't your place to be questioning the legal relationship between the label and the band. It's a contract, the terms of which were

agreed by lawyers on both sides. We have a 30 year history of supporting great bands and building successful careers in the rock arena."

"How many artists are currently on the label, just out of interest?"

"Including the subsidiaries, we have about a hundred and forty active artists, recording and touring."

"And, again just out of interest, how many of those have recouped on their advance?"

Silence.

"How many?"

"Gem, this really is not a conversation I want to have with you. I wanted to speak to you about the implications of your outburst to your future involvement with the band and by extension this label."

"How many?"

"How many what?"

"How many of the artists have recouped? How many of them are you basically controlling and not paying any royalties to because you've cleverly spent all of the money they make so

that their part of the royalty payment keeps coming back to you?"

"I said I don't want to talk about this."

"And I don't want to talk about whatever bullshit threatening nonsense you're trying to drop on me. However, if you answer my question, I'll talk to you."

"Seven."

"Seven what?"

"Seven acts have recouped."

"What the fuck?? Are you serious?? I was imagining it'd be fifty or sixty, and that would've been disgusting enough. but seven? That makes me wonder why you aren't all in prison. You're running a protection racket, and keeping musicians as indentured slaves, and you can all go fuck yourselves."

"Gem, you are seriously in danger of being removed from this tour. You realise that we are your employer?"

"Employer? What the fuck is this? I was asked by a really old friend to come on tour with his band. I know the songs better than anyone in the band, I learned them, my equipment works, I'm here on time, and unlike certain other musicians, I'm not getting so wasted I can't fucking play for half of every

rehearsal. Do you care? Of course not, cos while he's stoned, you can keep on spending his money, hiring your own staff with their money, wasting cash so they don't end up recouping. A band that have sold a million records but haven't recouped are being raped by their label. You, my friend, are scum."

"I'm afraid I'm going to recommend that you be replaced."

"You're afraid you're going to recommend it?"

Gem is shouting. Everyone is listening.

"Tell you what, why don't I save you the trouble. I'm out of here. You fucking loser. You bottom-feeding, shit-sucking, corporate shill. You've sucked the creative soul out of this band, given them no support in dealing with the bullshit of fame, and led them to believe that a million records is 'on the way to success'. You're insane. And dangerous. And I hope the industry that you represent falls apart, collapses, folds and is completely fucked by the rise of independent artists."

Gem turns to the band.

"Barney, I'm so sorry - you've got some great songs here. Seriously great songs. I love playing them. But you've let this pathetic cock-stain and the slave-label he works for fuck up your music, ruin your motivation and keep you in debt for years. The day you signed to them was the worst day of your life, and you don't even know it. That was the day the music

died. And now, I've finally admitted to myself that I'd rather be playing improvised weird shit to 30 people in a bookshop than pretending to be a teenage rock star fuck up to an arena full of Japanese teenagers listening to great songs ruined by consensus-driven arrangements. If you ever get rid of this label - and I'd suggest you call a lawyer now and work on a get-out clause - give me a call, I'd love to play, write and tour with you. But sort your fucking drummer out so he doesn't bollocks everything up by getting stoned, and get Derek some fucking lessons. Derek, you're shit. Sorry mate, but it's an embarrassment that you haven't bothered to get any better in all your years in this band. Get some lessons. It's not hard. None of those parts are hard. You are just a lazy fuck-up, living some kind of rock star myth that would look embarrassing on a seventeen year old let alone an adult in his mid-thirties. Oh, and your band name? It's fucking ridiculous. I'd be ashamed to play in front of a banner with 'eNaNoTangent' written on it."

Gem walks towards his gear. Derek steps forward but Barney stops him. Gem unplugs his Pod and pedal board, starts to put away his guitar before remembering that it isn't his and clearly isn't worth stealing. He puts the Pod and the pedal board in their bag and leaves.

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"Gem? What on earth are you doing here?"

Meg's flat. It's practice night but Drum Monkey has yet to

arrive.

"I quit."

"You quit what?"

"I quit the gig with eNaNoTangent. Some rancid little scrote from the record label tried to threaten me with some legal bullshit about my saying the band were being screwed by the label. So I told him to go fuck himself and quit. Can you believe that of the one hundred and forty artists on the label, only seven have recouped their advance? How screwed up is that?"

"That's pretty horrific, but from what I've been reading over the last couple of days online, it's not that uncommon."

"Why does anyone put up with it?"

"Gem, for the same reason we wanted it when we were at college, and thought we wanted it for a decade afterwards - fame is really seductive. We get success and fulfillment and fame and money and all the trappings of being on a label confused and completely lose sight of what it is that we love. We forget it's about music, about people and about meaning. As kids, rock and roll has meaning. It's aspirational, it's important and it's a reason to play, to practice. At least it used to be. Now people aspire to winning shitty competitions on the TV. But we were inspired by it. That Hendrix poster you had? That was the

inspiration of Rock And Roll. But for us, Rock and Roll is dead. For an industry that's collapsing, Rock and Roll is dead. But music is very much alive, creativity is very much alive. Everything that's real is still there, it's just easier to get now than ever. Those record company losers are scared because they just aren't needed any more. They've had a fifty year monopoly and it's coming crashing down around their ears. They, in short, are fucked, unless they completely reinvent themselves. And they aren't set up for reinvention. Have you seen the Sony offices in London? It's going to be much easier for them to keep peddling fucking awful reality TV winners and auto-tuned soap stars than it is for them to decentralise their operation, fragment and work out what it is of what they do that's useful."

Gem interrupts

"Where the hell did all this come from?"

"Drum Monkey and I have been talking about this stuff a lot. A lot of this is his ideas with the statistical computer nerd stuff taken out. Mainly cos I don't understand it. But it's worth noting that a lot of what those labels do is useful. They aren't all bastards. Just because the idiot you met on this gig was pond-life. The era of record labels has produced a whole lot of really great music, some of it in spite of the system, but a lot of it fostered by it. Some of it was opportunist, but there have been some amazing people who worked in that world. They aren't all Simon Fucking Cowell."



They both laugh. Drum Monkey arrives.

"Gem what are you doing here?"

"He's quit the band. Talk about it later. Right now we need to play. We need to purge his poor little ears of all the bullshit and rules and lies and crappy stadium rock posturing nonsense that he's been subjected to. This isn't just music right now, it's therapy. If we were still getting paid it'd be occupational therapy, but who gives a shit whether this is our occupation? It's our passion, and that's way, way more important. Gem, I'm so glad you're back."

"So am I. We've got some great ideas for what we're going to do. But how the hell did you end up quitting? Are you sure you quit and weren't fired?"

Gem laughs

"I would've been fired if I hadn't quit at that moment. Or at least, the little shithead from the label would've tried to have me sacked. And the band would probably have gone with him after I said what I thought about the stoner drummer and Derek not being able to play."

"Derek the keyboard player? He's still in the band? Wow. I had no idea. I'd just assumed they got rid of him. Still can't play?"

"He's awful. Proper shit. Like a drunk toddler rolling pastry out on a keyboard."

Pause. Then laughter. And tears. Proper hysterical relief.

"Meg, Drum Monkey, I'm really sorry I messed you guys around. I shouldn't have taken the gig in the first place. I should've trusted you."

"Gem, shut it."

Drum Monkey is insistent.

"Don't start now. You've nothing to apologise for. We'd have done the same. It looked like the chance of a lifetime, and turns out to have been an amazing life lesson. Weird that it came when we were talking about all this stuff, but thank fuck we were so you spotted it and quit. Who did you fall out with? Barney?"

"No, a record company muppet. I'll tell you about it later. I'm sick of talking about it. I just need to play. Get set up, Drum Monkey. You still using those space drum sounds?"

Drum Monkey laughs.

"Yup, it's my thing now. It'll be my ticket to stardom, just you wait and see."

More laughter. Meg speaks.

"Come on, we need to jam. Gem, we've missed you. However, we are still going to do a duo section in the gigs. We've worked too hard on that not to."

"Of course! I don't give a shit if I only play for five minutes in each gig. No, actually, that's balls, I would care, but I'm happy to sit out while you two do your thing. I'm just happy I'm out of that shit. I'll get back to chasing up some gigs for The Reverse too. Seriously, us doing covers gigs has more artistic integrity than those fuckers ruining their songs to appease the Gods of arena rock."

Meg plugs her bass in.

"You know who I blame?"

"No, who?"

"The Man."

Gem laughs.

"Miss Mullins? She's the man."

"Yeah, but let's not give up just yet. There's a few years of great gigs in these washed up old losers yet. Whose turn is it

to start?"

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Gem's blog:

## The Last Post

Hi.

**This blog is going to end pretty much as quickly as it began.** I may continue blogging over at <http://verfremdungseffekt.posterous.com> - that's the band I'll be focussing on from here on in.

**Maybe one day I'll get to tell the full story of what's been happening over the last week.** At the moment, sadly I can't, but I'm back playing with the people I really care about, playing music that moves me. And doing it without any interruptions from The Man.

**Filed under** // [enanotangent](#) [improvisation](#) [music](#) [rock and roll is dead](#) [verfremdungseffekt](#)

The End.

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