

**the // skyway **
the replacements mailing list

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DON'T ASK WHY

Wow, it has been a while since you've gotten this. Here's why!

About five years ago, I decided to figure out a way to get off the corporate treadmill. Even though it'd paid for a lot of *stuff* – guitars, record releases, rock tours, parrots, Greek lessons, lessons to be a scuba instructor and even a transfer to live in Switzerland for half a decade – eventually I thought, what's the point? So I crammed everything into becoming an international school teacher (all while working a mid-level manager job at a corporation, in a foreign country) – and somehow, it worked. And so, now, I live on the Mediterranean island of Malta. I get paid in sunshine, but I'm makin' memories. Hurrah! So now I spent all my weeknights and weekends grading and trying to figure out what magic you can put together to entertain a roomful of 16 year olds. So if it's been years, I apologize.

About fourteen years ago, I was a camp counselor for a summer next to a beautiful, crystal lake in Vermont. And in this placid, idyllic wonderland were a bunch of out of control kids in my cabin. And once during cabin clean-up time, I played a 1984 Replacements concert tape on the stereo and one of the campers - an insouciant 15 year old named Jake - made one of my favorite reactions to first hearing the band: "What is this drunk shit!"

And a couple months ago, I received a letter from Jake, who is living in Memphis and playing in a band:

"You were right about the Replacements. I was the music coordinator for two summers back at camp, I had the kids play 'Bastards of Young' and 'Unsatisfied.' You would have been so proud. There is something insanely real about 15 year olds singing those songs. And one of those summers, right after the session ended, I went to see Westerberg when he was doing that solo tour in 2001. It was one of the most amazing shows I have ever seen. I'm not sure if you realize how obsessed I became with that band. So it all just goes back around. Now I too travel in vans with dudes and sleep on floors."

So a lot has changed about the internet since the Skyway started. First, rather than being able to reprint articles in these issues, internet 'content' is now used to sell advertising – which means I'll get angry letters (from authors, and maybe even lawyers) if I reprint entire articles and interviews in here. So now, when I find something in a newspaper or other source, I'll put some good quotes and a link to the full version on the original site.

Second, I'm not a remarkable graphic designer, so I am putting everything into this single file and seeing how well this format works. Enjoy. If you love the half-assed manner of what the band this is about, hopefully you can appreciate the ridiculousness of sending out a PDF in ~~2010~~ 2011.

And it won't be years before another issue, promise!

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THE REPLACEMENTS

- *Magnet* had a great story on **the rise of the Minneapolis scene in the 80's**. You should read the whole thing, but here are some of the most revealing parts.

<http://www.magnetmagazine.com/2005/06/12/a-tale-of-twin-cities-husker-du-the-replacements-and-the-rise-and-fall-of-the-80s-minneapolis-scene/>

Hill: The day the band came to meet prospective producers for *Pleased To Meet Me*, they arrived at our office, each of them looking like the Scarecrow from *The Wizard Of Oz*. Their sleeves were stuffed with straw and the discarded black carbons from old-fashioned credit-card receipts. They found the stuff in a box on the street. They went into our video lounge, locked the door and smeared the carbon ink all over the walls and threw the straw around. They broke all the LPs I had given them of the producers who were coming to see them. I got so pissed off, I locked the door of my office and wouldn't talk to them.

Westerberg: During the *All Shook Down* tour, Tommy got as drunk as possible every night as a final "fuck you." There was one final moment that, if they ever make a Replacements movie, should be depicted. It was in Holland, and the promoter came in with the poster for the gig. It was a big picture of me, and it said, "Paul Westerberg And The Replacements." Tommy grabbed it and ripped it up, and that was the end of the Replacements.

Stinson: I still get people coming up to me and going, "Man, I saw you guys. You guys were so fucked up that you barely played your set, and it was the best show I ever saw." That always bums me out, because I really want people coming up to me going, "I saw you guys play, and when you did 'Bastards Of Young,' it fucking thrilled me to the bone." Nobody ever talks about the songs. I think Paul is an amazing fucking songwriter. I think the Replacements are as much about the songs as the drunken bullshit. That's kind of a bummer legacy. I'd rather have people listen to the record and realize that's what it was about. I've got no regrets about it. It's just like, "Damn! What about that one song that we did?"

- *Magnet* magazine also gave their opinion on **the most overrated** ("Can't Hardly Wait"?) **and underrated** ("Satellite"! "Nowhere is My Home"! **Replacements songs**.

<http://www.magnetmagazine.com/2009/02/17/the-overunder-the-replacements/>

- But they still love the band and give **My Noise** writer **George Pelecanos** a chance to say a few words about one of his most favorite bands in the world.

<http://www.magnetmagazine.com/2002/08/16/my-noise-novelist-george-pelecanos-stands-up-for-the-replacements%E2%80%99-falling-down/>

- If you have never seen the Replacements when they were on **Saturday Night Live in January 1986**, don't look on youtube where it has been pulled. Luckily, you can still educate people on what unedited chaos and mayhem on live national television look like here.

http://redredwineonasunday.blogspot.com/2009/11/replacements-banned-from-saturday-night_28.html

- *Gibson Guitars* has an incredible article about **the recording of *Pleased to Meet Me***. <http://www.gibson.com/en-us/Lifestyle/Features/torn-and-frayed-the-story-of/>

Jim Dickinson: "Westerberg has been mad at me for years for saying this," Dickinson recalls, "but he's by far the most sensitive of any of those post-punk artists who I worked with. What he gave me on the microphone is amazing. He just reached inside and pulled it out. At the end of 'The Ledge,' he's literally weeping. That's a live vocal and a live guitar."

"Still, on the day I was to do the horns for 'Can't Hardly Wait,' they left town. That's the way Westerberg handled it. But it was the strings they really hated. The thing is, he was going for Big Star, and I was going all the way back to the Box Tops. I really felt the strings had to be there, or we weren't going to say it all, or we weren't going to make the whole statement. Later Westerberg did warm up to the horns, but to this day I don't think he's forgiven me for the strings."

- Jim Connelly has been a Replacements fan and a music writer since the band's early days. In his blog, he has a wonderful article-length entry of ***Why The Replacements Saved My Life***. Below is an excerpt, but his blog goes on to describe the 21 best Replacements songs (as he wrote on this list many years ago) and review each album. <http://medialoper.com/why-the-replacements-saved-my-life/>



People often stop me on the street, and ask me this question: "Jim," they ask me, "what is it like to be a Replacements fan?" Well, let me tell you . . .

In the most recent of **Rolling Stone** magazine's forty zillion 40th Anniversary Editions, they had a section called "The Indie Rock Universe: An Illustrated Guide."

This so-called "Guide" was essentially a gussied-up list of Indie Rock bands, broken into incredibly arbitrary distinctions surrounding the "Universe" theme. One of the sections was called "Ancestral Planets" — the pioneers of Indie Rock if you will — and it listed a bunch of worthies and honorables: Nirvana, Pixies, The Smiths, Hüsker Dü etc. These are some of my all-time favorites, and certainly worthy of inclusion on any list of great rock of any stripe.

Conspicuous by their absence: The Replacements. Whether it was an oversight or on purpose, it almost immediately jumped out at me, and ironically, this was a few pages away from where Billie Joe Armstrong was talking about how much he was influenced by "Answering Machine."

This is what it's like to be a Replacements fan.

To me, The Replacements were the absolutely perfect combination of balls, brains and heart — but the world at large never seemed to get what was perfectly obvious to those of us who loved every fucked-up moment that they were around.

It's hard for me to know for sure anymore, but when all is said and done, they might — might — end up having been my all-time favorite rock and roll band. Their best songs are as good as anybody's ever.

- If you never saw Jim Walsh's book ***All Over But the Shouting***, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* covered an excerpt with quotes from Peter Jesperson, Pete Buck, and Bob Stinson. <http://www.startribune.com/entertainment/music/11518071.html>

[Pete] Buck: The thing I remember most about Bob [Stinson] is that he didn't know the names of the songs. Paul would just say, "The fast one," or "The sorta fast one," or "The one that goes like this, Bob," and with the other guys he'd call out the [song] titles. But Bob would just rip into 'em. It was like this little thing they had between themselves.

- Crawdaddy magazine interviewed Jim Walsh on **what it was like to write the book *All Over But The Shouting***. <http://www.crawdaddy.com/index.php/2007/12/05/author-jim-walsh-on-his-friends-the-replacements/>

He admits, "It was kind of daunting to do this project, it stopped many writers. There was fear of the band, and fear that they wouldn't get it right and be laughed at by all the smart Replacement fans—who are the smartest, most persnickety, demanding fans of all. But you start getting older, and friends of mine started dying, and maybe important stories weren't going to get laid down if I waited any longer. It's like you're in the middle of your life and you've lived these stories—and I lived it."

- **Diablo Cody**, the author of the movie *Juno*, summarized the Replacements perfectly in a review for the book:

"Whether you were there when it all went down or just wish you'd been, this account of the 'Mats' enduring chokehold on music history is as ragged as a punk's pedicure, as bittersweet as an illicit pot brownie, and so pure it floats to the top of the rock-lit heap. Immeasurably more transporting than an ordinary memoir, Jim Walsh's book is a poetic toast to a band so effusively careless that everyone who saw them instantly cared. If you've ever fallen in love with 'that song,' followed your favorite band from the VFW hall to the arena tour, or felt a Frankenstein-like primal spark at the sound of an opening riff, you'll get it. At turns wounded and joyful, the communion of voices brought together in *The Replacements: All Over But the Shouting* chimes like a Strat and builds like a heartbeat."

- *Slate* did a story on Let It Be's 25th (!) anniversary. <http://www.slate.com/id/2238832/>

"Who, sifting through the gem box of *Let It Be*, would ever argue it was the byproduct of anarchy, clown pants, and a case of beer for breakfast? Oh, right. The Replacements did."

- **The Onion AV Club has a fun quiz about Let It Be.**

<http://www.avclub.com/twincities/articles/answering-machine-the-let-it-be-anniversary-quiz,35243/>

2. Before deciding to call the album *Let It Be* as a way of taunting Beatles fan Jespersen, which two of the following titles did the band consider?

- A. *Get A Soft On*
- B. *Let It Bleed*
- C. *Closer Than You Know*
- D. *Kind Of A Sewer*

- **The New York Times archive has a review of when the Replacements played the Beacon Theater on July 25, 1987, the night before they played the Ritz.**

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B0DE2D9133DF935A15754C0A961948260&scp=16&sq=the+replacements+westerberg>

“Chris Mars, the drummer, kicked up a propulsive backbeat, and Tommy Stinson, on bass, nailed down the beat even as he clowned around on stage. Slim Dunlap, on lead guitar, stood on the sidelines and played with amused competence as Mr. Westerberg shouted and staggered (and, for one encore, inhaled helium between verses, making his voice small and squeaky).”

- **Bob W. wrote in and related a story of how he first heard the Replacements on the old late night network video music show *Night Flight*.**

“The Replacements were on the show and they were asked whether the song ‘The Ledge’ was about any of their own thoughts of suicide or anything. Paul (I think it was Paul) laughed and said something like, ‘No, that’s not what it’s about at all!’ Then the band played The Ledge.”

- **If you’re headed to Minneapolis, be sure to check out all the Replacements’ related places such as the Bob Stinson memorial bench and the *Let It Be* house on Bryant St. at the **Mats Virtual Tour**.** <http://members.bitstream.net/bradyh/mats/matstour.html>

- **Kirstin Deason: “I WILL DARE”**

I heard it sometime in late late 1984 on our local college radio.

I LOVED it.

I was in high school and feeling like I had to go along with everyone else’s views; this song and the rest of the songs that station played let me rebel in my own way.

The title says it all

tonight.

- Limewire has an **interview with Peter Jesperson** about the Minneapolis music scene then and now. <http://blog.limewire.com/posts/52170-qa-with-ex-replacements-manager-peter-jesperson/>
- **Teenage Kicks** also has a huge, three part interview with Jesperson about the Replacements and the selection of the bonus material on the recent reissues. <http://teenkicks.blogspot.com/2008/04/peter-jesperson-interview-recap.html>

TK: The Replacements went through a remarkable progression, from “Dope Smoking Moron” (from *Stink*) to “Within Your Reach” (Hootenanny) in a span of just twelve months. What was the song where you knew the band was something special?

PJ: I think it happened several times, but the song where I really knew this was a monumental situation was when Paul handed me the tape of “You’re Getting Married.” It cemented everything I thought and hoped was true about this band and this artist. I thought these guys are so amazing, and then he gave me that song, and my brain couldn’t even comprehend how great that song was. And we get to put that on the *Stink* reissue. When I put the tracks out there, I practically held my breath for a couple of weeks waiting to find out if Paul was gonna allow that one to see the light of day. It’s one of those things that’s very personal, very raw and yet it’s one of the greatest things he ever did both in terms of composition and in terms of performance. When he green-lighted that, I might have screamed out loud. That was the one. To me, it’s the holy grail of unreleased Paul Westerberg songs.

- One of my favorite new bands, **The Cribs**, recorded a faithful **cover of Bastards of Young** as the b-side of their *I’m a Realist 7”* on Wichita Records. (The band currently has Johnny Marr of the Smiths on guitar as well, although this was recorded before he joined the band.) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjqKtbu-txA>
- While there is no replacing the original, **Against Me!**’s version of **Bastards of Young** is full of fire as well. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8s11kejkoM&feature=related>
- There’s an interesting **cover of “Swinging Party”** by a UK synth band called Kindness. <http://pitchfork.com/forkcast/13268-swinging-party-replacements-cover/>
- In Minneapolis, sadly the venerable and hallowed **Uptown Bar closed its doors**. http://www.startribune.com/entertainment/music/66980232.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQDUoaEyqyP4O:DW3ckUID3aPc:_Yyc:aUncaec8O7EyUsl

- If you are looking to spend 5 minutes on the internet that will turn into 2 hours, you can tell the rest of the world what a Replacements song means to you at **songmeanings.com**. <http://www.songmeanings.net/artist/view/songs/7471/>
- And if you are looking for other ways to distract yourself at work and reduce the GDP of whatever country you are living in, you can check out the **Pandora channel for The Replacements** while on the clock. <http://www.pandora.com/?sc=sh2738566>
- **Raymond Jepson** wrote to say that in Canada, **“Kiss Me on the Bus” is for real**. <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/02/16/calgary-bus.html>
- If you are ever planning on writing a doctoral thesis on the Replacements, here are the two links you should use: **The Replacements Bible** and a link to the Goldmine article of **the history of the Replacements, Brats in Babylon**.
http://www.angelfire.com/mac/replacementsbible/The_Replacements_Bible_v1.4.pdf
<http://www.22designs.com/foshaytower2/articles/goldmine.html>

PAUL WESTERBERG

- A new, semi-limited edition **Paul Westerberg 7”** of "This Machine" and "Foolish Hand Shake" by 'Mr. F'. The first pressing sold out quickly, but the second edition is out now. <http://www.nimbitmusic.com/mrf>
- Paul Westerberg's local *Star Tribune* ran a story on his **50th birthday**. <http://www.startribune.com/opinion/commentary/80369912.html>

“By the band's third and fourth albums, he was throwing off evocative tales of heartbreak, pain and confusion at a level that most bands would be lucky to stumble upon once in a career. Commercially, the Replacements mostly went nowhere, but you have to remember, this was the decade of Phil Collins.”
- *Magnet* magazine rates the **five over- and under-rated songs Paul has written** since 1991. <http://www.magnetmagazine.com/2010/06/15/the-overunder-paul-westerberg/>

“Not only is ‘World Class Fad’ the most Replacements-y rocker (in quality and in spirit) on *14 Songs*. . . ‘World Class Fad,’ video and all, should’ve been the hit Westerberg’s never had.”

- I don't really know if they were in the same room or just on a conference call, but somehow SPIN compiled a **joint interview between Paul Westerberg and Billie Joe of Green Day**. <http://www.spin.com/articles/billie-joe-armstrong-meets-paul-westerberg>

“ARMSTRONG: My kid's 15 now; Replacements albums are the first things he reaches for. And my sister brought me to see you at the Fillmore, I think in 1987. You guys were wearing all plaid....

WESTERBERG: That could have been any night, really.”

- Gorman Bechard is almost finished with ***Color Me Obsessed***, a movie about the fans of **the Replacements**. You can read about the making of it in his journal. <http://www.guywithtypewriter.com/>

- Paul Westerberg gave his own statement about the **loss of Alex Chilton**. <http://pitchfork.com/news/38220-artists-and-friends-react-to-the-death-of-alex-chilton/>

"In my opinion, Alex was the most talented triple threat musician out of Memphis — and that's saying a ton. His versatility at soulful singing, pop rock songwriting, master of the folk idiom, and his delving into the avant garde, goes without equal. He was also a hell of a guitar player and a great guy."

- Paul wrote **an epitaph for Alex Chilton** for the New York Times as well. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/21/opinion/21westerberg.html?_r=2&scp=1&sq=westerberg&st=cse

"How does one react to the death of one's mentor?"

- Paul's words were reprinted in *Entertainment Weekly* along with those of some other 'Mats lovers. <http://music-mix.ew.com/2010/03/18/alex-chilton-paul-westerberg-patterson-hood-craig-finn/>
- Ada Calhoun of *Nerve* wrote a great diatribe on **"The Sex Appeal of Paul Westerberg"**. <http://www.nerve.com/screeningroom/music/paulwesterberg/>

“*Playboy* once asked Westerberg if he could account for his sex appeal. He replied: ‘No. I can't explain the appeal other than I'm an odd mixture of bad boy masculinity and I have a real soft spot for women. I had three sisters, so I grew up knowing what girls liked and what they didn't, just by them coming home after their dates. I guess I've learned to respect women, maybe more than some guys. I don't know other than that. I haven't a clue.’”

- On September 22, 2007, **Paul Westerberg played a solo show to only about 150 people** in First Ave.'s main room in Minneapolis. Here's a review of that night written by **Dave Wrzos**.

One Night With Paul Westerberg

Try and try as I did to win tickets to the "invite only" Paul Westerberg show at First Ave, I came up short. It wasn't until about four days before the show that I received probably the best voice mail ever. In very broken static, I could make out that my friend Jade was trying to tell me something. I understood the words "going to be your new favorite person," "Paul Westerberg," "extra ticket." I listened to the message over and over, trying to decipher its code all the while cursing my damaged hearing. The skinny was that Jade was now working for the City Pages, where she was able to get her hands on two tickets to the show. Knowing my sick obsession with the 'Mats, she decided to take me.

As we got to First Ave, I was surprised at how short the line was. Even when the doors opened, only about 60 people were waiting out front. I was glad the four kids behind us had won tickets off the radio but had never actually heard of Mr. Westerberg, so they sold their tickets to a couple looking to get in.

Folding chairs had been placed on the dance floor of the main room while several small tables sat in the upper level. Jade and I were able to snake a few seats just a couple of rows back. Giddiness began to set in as I realized I would be no more than 15 feet away from Paul the whole time.

Paul had not been on stage for roughly 3 years (other than a quick stop to play one over song at a radio show where his wife was being interviewed) so it seemed odd that he would do an interview show rather than a full out concert. I had no idea how long he would play for or how long the night would actually go.

Paul walked on stage alone and began to play "Let the Bad Times Roll." Having never actually seen him in person, I had no idea what to do. I sat star struck like a high school girl meeting one of the Beatles. All I could do was smile like an idiot, and try and take everything in.

The interview portion began directly after. The rest of the night would be a combination of interview and music, swapping back and forth. Warren Zanes of the Del Fuegos was able to win over the crowds trust and explain why he was chosen to interview Paul. He shared stories of being on tour with the Replacements, waking up on the Stinsons' floor (my old floor) and having Bob freak him out (Zanes was asleep and Bob was sitting on a chair in the living room, just staring at Zanes while he slept, drinking a beer. When Zanes finally woke up, Bob asked him for a ride downtown. Zanes said he had no idea how long Bob had been just sitting there, but he was polite enough to wait for Zanes to wake before asking him for a ride. The next night Zanes slept in the van and let the roadie crash on the Stinson's floor).

The interview spanned all of Paul's 25+ year career. Stories ranged from Paul getting busted by Chris when Peter Jaspersen tried to get him to secretly record a solo album for the first time, to the fact that he found it hard to put a guitar on again after having a child. Here's some great facts from the interview:

- Paul stated that the reason "Pleased to Meet Me" rocked was because Chris Mars's bass drum was sampled. They would wait for him to hit one measure right, and then loop it. "Chris was great at the snare and hi-hat, but not so much at the kick."

- Paul felt the song "Within Your Reach" was the first chink in the bands armor. It was a transition to

more emotional song writing. Bob hated the song so much that, when played live, he would usually just let his guitar feedback, leaving it strapped on and plugged in as he went to the bar to get another round.

- Paul felt the best production they ever had was on "Don't Tell a Soul" before the studio messed with the mixes. They needed a hit being in a sink or swim situation and Sire wanted more instruments added to "I'll Be You." Instead of messing with the mix, they sped the recording up a bit and the studio loved it.

- Paul was asked to pick four songs that he felt represented great production and writing. Those four were The Beatles' "Hello Goodbye," Jackson 5's "I Want You Back," Jimmy Reed's "You Got Me Running," and The Rolling Stone's "Tumbling Dice." I think the image I will hold with me forever from this night is that of Paul, hiding behind his round dark sunglasses, picking up his acoustic with a smoke hangin from his lips, and jamming on the riff to "I Want You Back."

- As Tori Hunter played possibly one of his last home games as a Twin a few blocks away, Paul said he was ready to go "down there and start throwing bricks," a reference to the fact that Hunter may leave his home team for more money.

- Paul played two unreleased songs. One was a new tune inspired by the divorce of one of his son's friends. The parents decided to tell the boy about their split at the last basketball game of the season. Paul said that he went home and wrote about how he thought the child felt. The song's name was "Everyone's Stupid." The other song was an unrecorded 'Mats song called "Make The Best Of Me." The rest of the band dismissed it as "too spiritual" for the Replacements. Imagine "Unsatisfied" meets "Lush and Green" on a twelve string acoustic.

- The topic of writing for other artists was brought up. Zanes said he thought the reason many of Paul's songs aren't used by the artists that request them was because there is something in Paul's voice that can't be duplicated. Paul went on to say that when recording and writing a song for the Goo Goo Dolls, he mispronounced a word. And "Johnny [the singer of the Goo Goo Dolls], God bless him, also mispronounced the word on his recording."

- Paul said he thinks the rumors that float around about him are hilarious but that he never goes on the internet and has no idea what people are saying about him. After injuring his hand last December, a good friend asked his wife "How's Paul? I heard he cut his foot off."

-Before playing "Make the Best of Me," Paul took a look at his set list asking outloud, "well what's after this one... oh that blows too." Turns out he was speaking of "What a Day For a Night."

- In typical Westerberg fashion, Paul forgot the words to the third verse in "It's a Wonderful Lie" and had to make one up. Afterwards, he looked at the lyrics which were taped to the back of his guitar asking "which one did I forget? Oh I got 'em all, just not in order."

For the last 20 minutes or so, Zanes left the stage and told Paul to just go wild. He opened up the "closing set" with "World Class Fad." He came out for only one encore ("Skyway"), then told everyone to go home, he was done.

set list:

Let the Bad Times Roll
It's a Wonderful Lie
Everyone's Stupid
Lush & Green
Make the Best of Me

What a Day for a Night
World Class Fad
Dyslexic Heart
Can't Hardly Wait
Skyway

- Writegrrrl.com has a story from a Westerberg solo show in 2002 and a fully transcribed interview after the show.

<http://www.writegrrrl.com/westerbergstory.htm> and http://www.writegrrrl.com/paul_qanda.html

"I certainly sought solace in my records," he says. "(But) I'll never be Bob Dylan, I'll never be Keith Richards, I'll never be Pete Townshend and I don't give two shits about any of the other guys who sound like me."

- For all things Paul Westerberg, check out <http://www.paulwesterberg.com>.

TOMMY STINSON

- Tommy Stinson just released a free MP3 of his new song "One Man Mutiny". There is a video of some guys recording the song in the lobby of a hotel in Belgium or somewhere. <http://tommystinson.com>
- There is an interview with Tommy talking about his new lease on life and his auction for Haiti with Minnesota public radio. http://minnesota.publicradio.org/collections/special/columns/music_blog/archive/2010/08/tommy_stinson_t.shtml
- Tommy had lots of funny stories about The Replacements and Alex Chilton too. <http://blogs.philadelphiaweekly.com/music/2010/03/22/mmm-exclusive-the-replacements-and-guns-n-roses-tommy-stinson-talks-to-us-about-alex-chilton/>

Do you specifically remember writing that song?

Yeah, the sessions were fun. That was a really dark but also a very good time for us. We'd just fired my brother and kinda got past that and picked up Slim Dunlap and went down [to Memphis] with like a bag of... Paul had a handful of already done songs and some shit that needed hashing out and the vibe down there was sort of like sink or swim. We were like, we could keep goin' on and try to find a way to get to where we're trying to go here, or we could just let it go. I think we were pullin' up our bootstraps a little bit on that one and, you know, they were pretty magical sessions, I think. Magic happened out of those sessions, as opposed to *forced* magic. From the moment we walked into the

studio down there, something came out that set the stage for what was to come, and that was that song “Election Day.” That song was fresh off the airplane.

DON'T YOU WISH YOU HAD AN ASSIGNMENT LIKE THIS IN SCHOOL?

Achin' To Be: From Valéry to Westerberg

by Regan Good <rmgood@earthlink.net>

According to a faction of hardcore Replacements fans,¹ 1989's *Don't Tell a Soul*, the band's seventh album, signaled several fatal developments. The cover art, featuring only Westerberg's handsome face, gave advance warning that change was afoot. According to the album notes, Bob Stinson had been officially replaced by Slim Dunlap. A quick listen revealed the vibe had shifted from angsty, shambolic post-punk to classic rock. Worse, to detractors' ears, the album had been rendered moribund by sticky-fingered music-executive overproduction. All of this seemingly indicated a Benedict Arnold-sized betrayal by a band whose raw-but-real ethos was the entire point. But if the untamed spirit of the group had ebbed, it was lost on me, an uncritical newcomer. During my mid '90s sentimental education in all things Replacements, *Don't Tell a Soul* was simply more uncharted territory—a New World rich in strange fowl and foreign fruits. Maybe there weren't as many fat ducks or sweet apples as on *Let it Be* or *Tim* or *Pleased to Meet Me*, but I listened intently, with curiosity and delight, unaware of the album's outsider status. To me, *DTAS* was plenty charming.² It is home, in fact, to one of my top three Replacements' songs: “Achin' to Be.”

¹ Especially those whose who were there from the very beginning with *Sorry Ma, I Forgot to Take Out the Trash* (1981) and *Stink* (1982).

² Moments to love on *DTAS*: On the song “They're Blind” Westerberg croons about not getting what one deserves in life: “They hold you too close to the light/and I see what they only might if they'd learn/but they're letting you burn, 'cause they're blind.” In “I'll Be You,” a couple of adjectives denoting dejection get sorted out regionally: “Lonely, I guess that's where I'm from/If I was from Canada, I best be called lonesome.” There is the serious, sad ballad, “Rock & Roll Ghost,” about a musician friend who died young. The song is home to a gorgeous line about wanting the dead to return (“Be my guest and I will be a host.”). The hilarious “I Won't” is a classic Replacement's wild, smart-ass thumper about not writing back to gushing fans. (“You want me to send a letter or a note, I wo-wo-wo-wo-wo-won't!”) You get a little insight into Westerberg's thinking on socio-economics in “Asking Me Lies.” (“The rich are getting richer; the poor are getting drunk.”) The same song is host to the mystifying lyric: “at a Mexican Bar mitzvah for seven hundred years.”

The song provides a view into Westerberg's linguistic world where words rarely settle on one fixed meaning. In "Achin' to Be," Westerberg unleashes his most ingenious extended double entendre making the verb "to be" work a myriad ways. The most protean of English verbs, here it simultaneously implies the desire to be with someone, an ontological expression of being, as well as more subtle states of being and becoming. "Achin to Be" is a song about a girl, but it is also about making art, and the frustrating, only occasionally galvanizing results of that struggle. In the first verse, we learn the girl in question is an artist, or, rather, *like* one:

*Well, she's kind of like an artist
Sittin' on the floor. Never finishes she abandons
Never tells a soul*

It's a loaded initial sketch; maybe she's a poseur, sitting cross-legged on the floor feigning depth? Westerberg suggests that in some areas of her life, she's a quitter. "Never finishes, she abandons." But by reprising the French poet and critic Paul Valéry's famous observation that a poem is "never finished, only abandoned," Westerberg also imbues the girl with a restless, artistic energy. So maybe she's the real deal? He goes on to enumerate her other odd behaviors. She's compared to a movie no one understands: "Well she's sort of like a movie, everyone rushes to see/But no one understands it, sitting in their seats." She's a complex communicator, when she opens her mouth "what comes out's a mystery." She remains inscrutable, no matter how much effort one puts in: "Thought about, not understood." She travels solo to clubs, barely registering in the eyes of other patrons: "People look right through her." Her thoughts are always jumbled or too effete for precise articulation: "She's kind of like a poet/Who finds it hard to speak." Her poems "come so slowly" she never completes them.

The song's cri de coeur is the self-revelatory bridge following the sixth verse where the speaker injects his own misery into the girl's portrait: "I've been achin' for a while my friend/I've been achin' hard for years." The singer is also a metaphysical struggler, a body itching to be more, wanting to be ontologically realized, and in the process, to become a more effortlessly productive artist. Both the singer and the girl are bound up in a state of wanting to become. She's achin' to be an artist, to be understood, (probably to understand herself). He's achin' to figure her out, then he's achin' to be with her. It would be grand if they could ease their aching and couple-up, though love affairs, like poems, often should simply be abandoned. (Neither the singer or the girl are mature enough to know that lovers come and go but your art never leaves you.)

I'm torn about how I feel about this girl because, frankly, she seems a slightly dumb. She's like a poet and she's like an artist, but she's not actually either. Westerberg doesn't seem to think she's very skilled, and he reiterates this point at the end of the song when, we learn, she's given up painting--that is, if she ever held a paintbrush to begin with: "Well she's kind of like an artist/who uses paints no more." He went to see her art and left unmoved: "Well, I saw one of your pictures/There was nothing that I could see." And yet still he wants to be with her because I bet she was super cute: "If no one's on your canvas/then I'm aching...to be." The song ends with their similarities laid out: "She closes her mouth to speak and/closes her eyes to see/Thought about and only loved/She's achin' to be." Adding in a gorgeous growl: "Just like me...."

One of the great things about Westerberg is his ability to be exactly who and what he is (a rock star, an artist, a suburban guy, a husband, a dad) all at the same time. He wears purple velvet jackets and blue-lensed sunglasses (indoors) but he also coaches his son's Little League team. His mature solo albums—now recorded in his near mythic basement home studio in Minneapolis—are studies in raw, extemporaneous, nearly Dada-like chanciness, underscoring the notion of art as never-ending process.³ On the liner-notes of *Stereo/Mono* he writes: "This is Rock n' Roll. Recorded poorly. Played in a hurry. With sweaty hands and unsure reason....Cut mostly in the middle of the night, no effort was made to fix what some may deem as mistakes; tape running out, fluffed lyrics, flat notes, extraneous noises, etc. Many [songs] were written (or born if you will) as the tape rolled. Unprofessional? Perhaps. Real? Unquestionably."

"Achin' to Be"'s obvious subject is lovers angst, but its secret subject is the internal work of the artist. The song speaks to the artist's life-long apprenticeship to doubt. Westerberg knows it is both a struggle and a privilege to create in accordance with one's own aesthetic standards. As Valéry believed (and Westerberg paraphrased), a poem (or a painting or song) is "never finished; only abandoned." Artists and their art are forever in a state of becoming; it's not unlike being blessed with eternal youth. But the kind of youth not wasted on the young. The young songwriter of "Achin' to Be" finally became the fully-formed, complex artist Westerners remain devoted to today. He still aches, but my guess is not as badly.

³ You can see Westerberg teasing out song lyrics from two much-abused pages of chicken-scratch on the *Come Feel Me Tremble* documentary. The final result of that collision of choice and "abandonment" is thrilling.

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"Now more than ever do I realize that I shall never be content with a sedentary life, and that I shall always be haunted by thoughts of a sun-drenched elsewhere."

- Isabelle Eberhardt