

An Afternoon with Michael from Bipolar Explorer

April 11 2020

(*Sometimes in Dreams*, the band's 8th album, is playing in the background)

Joey You guys are recording your what number album this year?

Michael This is the 9th Bipolar Explorer album, number 9, and it's hard to do both projects at the same time but things do come to us, so we do have the beginnings of the second Tremosphere album as well, which will probably come out next year. But yes, we're doing the Bipolar Explorer record right now.

J That's amazing. So I know Sylvia was up from France and you guys were working on stuff so did she kinda have to turn tail and get the hell out the country type thing?

M She did. She's usually here for longer stays. She was coming over for three weeks and she usually comes for at least that long, sometimes longer, and she was leaving and then coming back at the end of April, just before my birthday, for a few more weeks, to continue some work and then, of course, that's all off, but what happened is that just her regular flight went back like the week before the travel ban so she got back. Thank goodness she's able to be there. Of course, I miss her, but we're able to do some work remotely - I send tracks to her and she sends her parts back - but it's much more easier when we're together. We did record - for Bipolar Explorer she mostly does spoken word, she does spoken word in English and in French, and for Tremosphere she's the lyricist and lead singer- so we were able to do a lot of her parts here but again with Bipolar Explorer it's a little bit easier, because it's spoken word and it's possible for her to record and for me to send her the stuff that I want her to read and then to read it and send it and then I can fly them in the mixes. But Sylvia has two small children, they're 8 and 12 - I think that's ok to reveal (*laughs*), it's a drag that she's not here but she'd be out of her mind if she'd been... "*You can't fly to France*", "*what about my kids?!*" So it's rough but it could be worse.

J I was actually listening to Tremosphere before I popped on here, I loved that, man.

M Thanks, man. Thank you

J I love both of your projects. Bipolar Explorer will always have a special spot for me because, I remember, back in Christmas, I did that Christmas episode, *Til Morning is Nigh*, and then I lost all that when Anchor decided to screw me over. Then you were gracious enough to send me a copy of *Sometimes in Dreams*, and that's just ... both these albums to me, and I know it's an older album in comparison...

M They both came out in 2018!
(*laughs*)

J (*I'm good then*) both these albums to me are just absolutely masterpieces.

M Thank you, thank you so much

J I'm gonna post, when I do the show notes or whatever, I'll make sure I post the documentary you guys made for *Til Morning is Nigh* because I think that people will get a lot out of it.

M Thank you. That was really fun to do.

J I'm glad you recommended that to me, because I watched it the night before the show went live for that, and I was like wow, it brings a whole new understanding of what you guys are doing, and that's what I like to try to reveal on these things where I'm talking to the people that make the music.

M Thank you so much. We were so incredibly thrilled that you did that broadcast of the entire album (*Til Morning is Nigh*), because both *Til Morning is Nigh* and *Sometimes in Dreams*, for people who don't know, were conceived as gapless albums. They are like a continuous flow of music and spoken word and songs and this atmospheric thing to us. *Sometimes in Dreams* is a double disc, so it sorts of happens twice. It was great, because *Til Morning is Nigh* is almost, and someone did sort of call it "like a radio broadcast walking to you in the middle of the night as you lay half asleep in bed", in this dreamy way to actually hear – it was kinda a hope of ours that someone would at some point broadcast *Til Morning is Nigh* in its sequence and entirety, so when you did that we were very excited. It's really meant to be heard, I mean you can have a favorite song and there are all indexed so you can go right to your favorite song and listen to it if you want, but it's really cool to hear the whole thing in the way we conceived it, we think, which is lay it all out and let it fly.

J Certainly, and I completely, I 100% agree with you. When I listened to it, at least, I still have, I still haven't fucking cracked this thing open (*Til Morning is Nigh CD*), Michael, since you sent it to me, I have not opened it but I did open *Sometimes in Dreams* last night and I got this on.

M Yeah, that isn't shrink wrap! It's that like little thing, the sleeve you put vinyl in ... but whatever you preference is...

J I know, I know, I have it displayed proudly in my room here with the pictures you sent me and that sort of stays. The artwork for *Til Morning is Nigh*, I think, is absolutely beautiful

M Thank you. I saw that, I think we had begun, I was looking -we love working with artists- this is a guy named Ľudovít Kochol, we talk about this a little in part six of the documentary. I just found that image online and then I had to find out a little bit about this man, and then wrote to the National Slovak Gallery. They told me more about him and they also gave us the rights to the image for free, they just ask can you shoot us a couple of CDs. They were super cool about everything, but it was really interesting to learn about this man because he was a stonemason, he didn't consider himself to be a classical painter but he created these incredibly beautiful and just shockingly emotional paintings, and his work is considered primitivist but it's just freaking gorgeous and very moving, and also, for people who haven't seen or know this yet, it's this scene of a shepherd in a meadow, and his sheep all around him and there's this angel, who very much looks like Summer, who is there and ascending, and blessing him, and he's hugging her to him, "please, don't leave me". It's such a

beautiful image and it's based on a story from The Bible called "*Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*" but it's not like, they're not in the ring, and it's not violent, it's just this like this blessing, and it's just filled with longing and hope and we were so knocked out by it and the generosity of the folks from the gallery. I'm really glad you like it, because it was very important to us.

J In the way that you describe it I understand the obvious meaning for you, we don't have to get into that, if you don't want to.

M No, I'm happy to discuss any of that if you want.

J I would love to, for those who don't know obviously, it's a very personal image and when I saw that's what I thought, this looks exactly like Summer. I can only imagine what it meant to you. You, and that's also mentioned in the documentary, were hit by car

M Yeah, almost two years ago now, it was the day before my birthday, and I was out for a run, as I described, you know. Usually I run by the river, but to get to the river you have to walk across a few blocks west of here, I was crossing 12th Ave, and I woke up in the emergency room. They said "you got hit by a car!", and I was like "*What? Where? How? When was this?*" because I thought, right where I got hit is where 12th Ave, just before it becomes the Westside Highway, so it's sort of like a six-lane highway, becoming a highway up like two blocks later but people start speeding up. There's a median and my memory was that I had crossed in the crosswalk all the way to the median to wait through the traffic coming from the other way but apparently that's not what happened. So I woke up in the ER, I had a broken shoulder, and really badly injured legs, I was in the hospital for a couple of weeks and then the day they released me I had a pulmonary embolism and collapsed on the sidewalk.

Sylvia was there, and she started shouting for someone to help. Basically what was happening is that I had been released and she was trying to hail a cab so we could go home – had I got in a cab I'd be dead, you know. So they took me just right back in. My heart stopped for ten minutes. Sylvia immediately texted Summer's dad, who is a doctor, and he knew what it was. He knew it was a pulmonary embolism, he said that immediately, so she was able to tell the EMTs, and they took me in, and my heart stopped for ten minutes and that's almost always fatal, or even in the rare instances where it's not fatal you are never the same, and incredibly I came through all of that. Here I am. We had just begun making the record (*Til Morning is Nigh*), and my more lasting injuries -not nearly as dramatic as your heart stopping- were the super injured legs and the broken left shoulder, like a really really bad break. But I was like « *I have to make this album* » so I tried to figure out a way to play guitar not standing, seated, and I had very little range of motion. But I started doing the basic tracks like that, and bring the mic down, so I could do the reference vocal and the first guitar, and just begin work on it and when I was finally able to go to physical therapy, when they first looked at me they said "*it's really good that you were so freaking stubborn, that you insisted on trying to play guitar because it actually helped improve your range of motion, you've got several months of arduous months in here but it's really good that you insisted on playing guitar cause it's helped.*"

"*goddammit we're releasing an album this year!*"

J So how long was your physiotherapy for that?

M It was eleven months. We put out both *Til Morning is Nigh* and the first Tremosphere album in that amount of time.

J That's crazy productivity for anyone! Never mind being hit by a car, and having a pulmonary embolism. Hats off to you, that's crazy!

M Thanks, brother.

J How far are you into the new album now?

M We're pretty deep. All the basic tracks are done, and it's going through and doing further overdubs and fixes. We're not really into the mixing stage yet, I do rough mixes of everything but I'm sort of still assembling stuff and doing further overdubs and tracking. And then, in the end, it will be like listening to everything that we have, figuring out the sequence, and is everything going on the album. I'm almost positive it's going to be a double album, our 3rd double album I think, and I'm generally of the mind that like, whatever you got, unless it's not good, you don't like it, is to put it out, because a record is, you know, a "record" of that particular period of time in your creativity when everything was coming together, and it's all valid and part of what that is. So I'm a bit of a completist in that sense. I think that we'll put the whole thing out, and it is an amalgam of all of those things that the band has sort of embraced in the last four or five records. There's a spoken word component with, you know, sort of ambient guitar underscoring, both in English and French, there are more experimental music pieces including some with a base of field recordings, and then guitar and synthesizer, and other things going on, and then things that will be more considered sort of like straight up dreampop, shoegaze compositions. It just sort is the amalgam of all three of those elements coming together in our music and that's what's going on with our music right now.

J I'd love to hear how do you find inspiration for all this, like you're sitting around, playing on your guitar, and you think I'm gonna have some French spoken word here, I'm gonna have some normal spoken word here, that's not something you hear a lot of, you know what I mean?

M Yeah. I think a few things. One is, I talk a little bit about this in the documentary, we've had a long evolution from being sort of a more traditional indie rock band, you know, kind of shoegaze-y indie rock band, to being a little more of the post-rock experimental thing, which is included in the incorporation of the spoken word, but you know the backing too, we listen to a lot of things like, you know, that are more in that world. Like right now, I'm really obsessed with Yann Novak, and Stars of the Lid, which is something we listen to like endlessly, it doesn't always, I think, reflect itself in our music, but it's what we listen to all the time so it's in our consciousness in a big way. The spoken word just sort of started with... our second album, some people were interested in seeing what that would be like as an installation piece that maybe had a performance aspect that included telling the story, and I began to write some of that stuff almost as if it might be a theatre piece and then it seemed to me that it would be much more interesting as spoken word. When I began to do that, it began to open up other stuff. We did this album just prior to that, I was listening a lot to Laurie Anderson's album (*Heart of a Dog*) of the time, she always uses a lot of spoken word with underscoring, it really seemed like that was really Kismet-ic, we're thinking at the same time of this art that we really admired was putting out an album that was pretty much like, oh right, we're on the right track. So we did this record, that was largely based on these chants that are from a French meditation thing called Taizé, which is actually based on the town that it's from, we did this record called *Electric Hymnal* which had our versions, the shoegaze-y versions of these chants, which sounds really bizarre (*laughs*), and that included spoken word and then that led to us continuing, to me writing poems to be used on *Dream Together*, some of which had underscoring,

and then we really went for it on *Sometimes in Dreams* which has this very big spoken word component, that sort of evolved through the whole thing.

And the other thing, just to talk about briefly because we touched down on it, is that Bipolar Explorer was started with my late girlfriend, Summer Serafin. She was the band's co-vocalist with me and I wrote songs for her, and we worked together, and we were working on - there had been one Bipolar Explorer record before Summer joined the band, and it was sort of a more of a traditional indie rock thing, and then she joined the band, she brought a lot of things to the table, in terms of the music she was listening to, which was really kind of epic and sweeping and emotional, and it really brought that to our sound a lot. We shared a lot of things - and we were working on an EP to put out, and she had laid down all of her vocals, and we were getting into the overdub stage, and... she died, tragically. She died of a tragic accident, she was just 31 years old, and that just... broke me. I couldn't do anything, for months and months. Then a friend of mine, I didn't know what I was going to do at all, came over and said do you wanna jam? He called me up actually, and I said sure but I didn't really want to see anybody or anything, he kinda insist on coming over and brought some coffee and his guitar, and we just started playing through some of the Bipolar Explorer songs, the new ones that were going on the EP, and he just insisted on coming, everyday, or like twice a week. Once he did that, I just started writing new songs and that's when we put together *Of Loss and Loss*, which was our first double album. So the beginnings of what was meant to be an EP with Summer became very much about her.

And that is where the project has continued, the songs are of, for, and about her. She's always on the albums because I have tons of her isolated vocal tracks, so I take stuff and edit things, and fly her voice in, and either add it to a track that I'm already working on or *that* will be the basis of the track that I then write the song for. Summer remains a crucial part of the band's sound, as well as the music being very much for, and about her. And so, the initial question that you asked, what inspires you to do that, that is it. It is so very much for her, and that is an endless amount of inspiration. My love and loss. My belief, maybe people get in and out, like is this guy super religious or something? I think when things like this happen to you, it makes you really question your beliefs, and I think that the way that we talk about spirituality and whatever, we just use the words we have, you know, what we got, 'cause we can't really articulate what it is, this unknowable thing, but odd things, crazy things, happen, you're visited in dreams by things, often our music comes from dreams, you wake up and you're like oh my god, that's a song, and it's not anybody else's song, it's being given to me right now: get it done. Things happen that really seem to indicate there's a hellava lot more going on than we know about and part of it is, I think also when you suffered such a great loss, it's impossible for you to sort of go on without thinking like, this isn't over, and even science tells us that energy, which is like what are we more than that, what's created can only change form, it can't be destroyed so like, what is that, and we'll find out. It's not for everybody, some people are like very clearly "*I don't believe in God, I don't believe in anything, you live, you live you die, you die and that's it*", and part of it is this incredible longing. You never get over something like this, you know, the grief that you carry with you, but I think it changes you, and you come to think about what you believe in and also what you need to believe, honestly, and that's not wrong, I don't think, and that very much informs the work, this sense of longing, and also this sense of gratitude, you know. Summer used to like to say that she found me, *I've been found by her*, and it's one of the great blessings of my life. The other one being Sylvia, incredibly, entering our lives too. She's very very close to Summer's parents, who adore her, and that's just like equally, how the hell does that happen, from the other side of the world. It's pretty special. Despite all of the things you're really injured by, broken by, there are so many things to be grateful for, you know. I have a mixture of all of that, I think. *(laughs)*

J Absolutely. Right, right. That's beautiful. I completely agree with you, that people are pretty cut and dry, they're either, you know, you live, you die, they don't wanna think about everything in between, there could be so much more to that, I think as humans like you said, the incredible longing, there has to be something more. Myself, I'm personally not like a religious person, but I believe in energy and everything like that, so to me that makes completely sense, you really hit home there with me. I just think it's so beautiful how you're honoring her with everything that you do, and I know that you'll obviously continue to do that, like you said it's a never-ending source of inspiration and of course it's not something that will ever go away and I can't help but think that she's the reason why, you know, she kinda took care of you with the pulmonary embolism, for sure. I fully believe that.

M Absolutely. The new record is called *Deux Anges*, which is two angels, and they're kinda on either side of the divide, one is certainly Summer, I think she's sorta like "*you're not done yet, you've got more work to do, more albums please, keep writing, go back!*", and the other is the earthly angel of Sylvia who was physically there, and saved my life, you know. So that's a very literal interpretation of it, and I've given it away! (*laughs*)

I do really believe that I've been blessed on either sides of the divide by these two extraordinary women. No question about that.

J I'll have to agree with you, man.

So back when it all sort of began, how did you and Summer meet? Were you in the same circles...?

M It's really weird, you know. Summer was a singer and an actress, and she had studied in Britain, she's from California, and then came to New York and lived about three blocks from where I live, we never met each other in the year she was here! Summer had type-1 diabetes from the age of 5, and so she'd always thought she wouldn't live long, she didn't think she would live into her twenties, and so she had this enormous sense of her own mortality and this enormous sense of let's do it now. The year before I met her... her brother died, inexplicably, he was just 35, he had like, I always think of it as the kind of thing that happened to Joe Strummer, just like suddenly his heart popped, he was perfectly healthy, and Jesse was even younger than Joe, that was a shattering event for her and for her family who were always worried they were gonna lose her.

Then she had a double organ transplant, she was going into kidney failure. One of the reasons she left New York and went back to California was because of her health. She had this double organ transplant, which was amazing and saved and changed her life, six months before I met her. She was in the healthiest place in her life, I mean there were things that she had to do, she had to take immunosuppressants, she was worried that there would be problems, but there were never complications with that. She was working in California, and I went out, a friend of mine was running a theater company out there, in San Francisco, and I went out to do some work. I was writing a play, I was a playwright - not anymore but I used to write plays. They were doing a workshop of a play of mine and I met her. We started to work together, and I was felled immediately by this incredible woman. I had this band, and she was like super interested cause she'd never been in a band, and she was a brilliant singer, and we just started sharing music and writing together and doing stuff, and that's how it started, us working together in the theater and her coming on board with the group, and then things really changed musically because my life changed hugely. Just our influence on each other musically and we just had a thousand plans, and things we were gonna do, we did get to do a lot of them because Summer was like let's go *now*. We traveled, somebody else would be yes, some day, but she was like *now!* So we did and I'm grateful for that.

J That's amazing, the driving force for sure...

You said you were a playwright, that makes sense with some of your videos on YouTube, did you design those and come up with the whole concepts for those?

M Yeah, I've done a lot of that stuff. There's a ton of videos, we started out just shooting stuff in the more traditional like music video sense, you know, you're playing guitar and you're doing this, you're singing to camera, or it's a live-shot overhead of me at the mic but then later it began to be this more conceptual thing. If you look now there's lots of silent movie footage, atmospheric stuff, things we found in the public domain, and assembling that more than the live-action stuff, that creates this mood and this ambiance. Part of that was - we just keep finding these things to be true - you have ideas to do things and you want to collaborate with people -and I love collaborating with people, but you find like everybody's on their own time frame and they've got their own things so you've got to learn how to do it yourself. So in the same way that I think many of us now, you know when we began our careers as musicians you rent a studio, you go in, you got 48 hours to do the whole thing cause that's as much money as you have, and eventually it's like you know what, I'm gonna do this at home. You learn how to record, you learn how to mix, you learn how to do the artwork, and what we really want, and I still hope that we will do because we love working with visual artists, is that with *Sometimes in Dreams* we really wanted to do this as an installation piece, which is where the whole spoken word started to come from, adding that element, and then we just did the album in that way, it is what it is. It gives you everything that you have, aside for the visual aspect of it - although we included this 36 -page booklet with the CD, that sort of then hints at that visual thing would be. We thought one of the ways of doing this sort of art installation piece, which could be anywhere and could be anything, was the use of video. And we just started to use things that were of our aesthetic and that were available to us because they were in the public domain, and sometimes -Sylvia has a great, great visual sense, particularly with the Tremosphere videos, she's shot a lot of that, the Bipolar Explorer stuff is more my culling from the internet archive things to use and putting that together, and lot of the Tremosphere stuff is simply stuff that Sylvia shot, as she did shoot beautifully the documentary. That's all of her cinematography, that's her.

J Yeah, she did an excellent job on that, for sure.

M She's a wonderful photographer and writer, and she's started to make short films now, as well. She's a super talented lady.

J I'll keep my eyes open for that.

M Sylvia Solanas - if there's anybody out there who wants to look up her work.

J ...Yes: Sylvia Solanas

You guys are both such incredible talents, you can really hear it in the music, the artistry, the work, and the care, and also the inspiration, the love and the pain you put into everything. It's unreal, man. I always say all the time that I get a lot of great bands, sending me music and stuff like that, I don't necessary make such a deep connection, you know what I mean, but with this I feel like, you know, I love it. I don't know what else to say, Michael, I love this, so much, it's so beautiful.

M Thank you. I think the nature of it is so personal, because I've had a lot of other projects and it's gratifying when people liked it, but it's always a limited audience, it's a kind of a niche project in a

way, but I think that the people that it hits, because of its source and ... the people that it's resonant with, it's really resonant with. We hear from people how they're moved by that, it is incredibly gratifying because it's not out of any ambition, it's totally to serve this very personal thing. When it connects with other it's super gratifying.

J That's right! I was gonna say that you're not doing this to have any sort of like commercial value, or necessarily win over an audience or anything like that, this is what you have to do yourself and if people get swept up it's great and if not it's not gonna stop you from creating this beautiful...

M We'll do another one, next year! *(laughs)*

J Maybe next time, yeah. *(laughs)*

Certainly, that's wonderful.

I'm just happy to have this, I just look at it all the time, in my little studio here, it's nice for me. You sent me a new song, again, and I'm really grateful for that, I loved that, that was called *eleven:eleven*, correct?

M Yeah, while we're in the middle of doing *Deux Anges* we had two quick side-projects things, they're Bipolar Explorer tracks, but WFMU, which is this wonderful radio station in New Jersey, they're freeform, they're completely listener-supported, they take no corporate or governmental funding, and they've been around since 1969, there are a brilliant eclectic radio station that plays everything, and the radio personalities are super different one from another, we've learned, we've heard so much great music and been influenced by that for ages, and they started to really embrace us about four or five albums ago. We listen to them constantly, and *Sometimes in Dreams* got to number 19 on their album charts, well I was actually in the hospital when the music director let me know, I was like "*I got hit by a car but this is really good news, thanks, man!*" *(laughs)* But they do, like public radio stations need to do, a fundraiser once a year, in the spring, and they just completed it, and one of the things that the DJs do is when you pledge to their show you get a special "premium", they say, like a gift, for doing whatever - and people do tee-shirts, they do mix CDs of stuff like that, all kinds of other things, and one of the DJs who's been a super big friend of ours, Carol Crow, who has a Sunday show called *Serious Moonlight Sonatas*, asked a few artists if they would compose and record an original piece, only for her show, to put on her CD, that incorporated spoken word and then underscoring. Of course, that's right up our alley, so we did a track, that I think eventually we'll release, but after the premium has been sent out and people have it, and the other thing that we did, the one that we sent you, *eleven:eleven*, is another really super interesting project, it's in the UK, it's called *The Dark Outside*, and it's this Scottish gentleman who has been doing this for about, I think this was the seventh year, the way it usually is it's 24 hour broadcast, of stuff that has never been heard before, never released, and a lot of it is experimental music, field recordings, it's really eclectic and wonderful, and usually what he does is he gets a license so he's able to broadcast for that day, for the 24+hours and they go to a remote location, last year was in Waltham Forest in London, and broadcast and you can only hear it if you're within distance of the transmitter, there is no online thing, there was nothing, but it was super interesting, Portishead is one of the people, lots of people doing this, famous, non-famous, but just really love the idea. We did it last year, and this year it was coming around and he was doing it a bit earlier, it was going to part of the Aerial Festival, and of course with the quarantine they canceled it, but then he was like what would people think if I did this online, if we did an online broadcast with no track list so you gotta know what it is you just got to listen, we'll tweet a little bit and say like "*coming up this hour blah blah blah*", but no track list, no archive, and would people be into that? Everybody was like

fuck yes, let's get it up! He did it last weekend (April 4), they played us in the middle of this broadcast, we were super psyched when it came on, Sylvia was listening in France, I'm listening in New York, it was great, there were so many great things! So, that is done and then he was like "*put your music out there if you want to*" so we did. Yesterday we released that track that was part of The Dark Outside, it's called *eleven:eleven*.

J That is fantastic, I love this
Like I said I can't get enough of your music, anytime

M Thank you

J You mentioned Portishead and that's awesome because honestly they are one of my favorite bands, when you were growing up and you decided to start playing guitar, who were some of the bands that you were listening to, who kinda inspired you to pick up an instrument?

M I think that, less of this you may hear, if you go through the entire Bipolar Explorer catalogue - if you care to - you'll hear some of this stuff, but it's moved into another, I still love these people that I'm going to mention, but it has moved into a more experimental, post-rock, dreampop, shoegazey place because of just the things I've been turned on to for a bunch years and the kinda stuff we listen to all the time. But I think that like a lot of people it was punk rock, you know. And I spent some formative years in D.C., and working the door at the Wilson Center, where Ian MacKaye played with his different projects, and Food For Thought was still around in those days, which for people who don't know is this vegetarian restaurant where like Embrace began, they just cleared some of the tables out and people would come and fucking play their first shows in there. D.C. was an incredible vibrant scene. And then all of those people of that 80s underground era, the Minneapolis bands - Husker Du, huge, huge fans of Husker Du, and The Replacements were a big deal for me forever - love Paul Westerberg - REM, and then later... and all the great Brit bands, obviously, Sex Pistols, The Clash - and eventually I started hearing the more, in the realm of My Bloody Valentine, and Slowdive. And a band that remains hugely influential to us, through all of these yours and through all our incarnations is Low. I'd be remiss and I'm not often remiss about this, 'cause we talk about them all the time, we absolutely love Low, I think they're an incredible band, making incredible music for 30 years, and they are in the same way like Ian, they are people who do it right, in terms of their integrity. Ya know? I've met Alan, he's a really, really cool, incredibly generous guy. And they really come from a super real place, in addition to just making beautiful, interesting, unique music and being hugely influential to us, they're just really, really, really good people. And that is not a small thing. Ya know? We really admire them hugely.

J That's awesome. I love that. You said you were a doorman, I spent many years as a doorman as well at one of those concert bars, so - respect. Respect!

M yeah, yeah, that was great! To get into the Wilson Center it was always five bucks and I remember a friend of mine's band was playing, and he wanted to charge six, and Ian said "*don't do that, none of the kids are gonna pay six dollars to come in it, it's five dollars*", and my buddy was like "*I have to pay other people back for this show, I've got to charge six bucks*". Nobody fucking came in the door! Until he took the price down to five dollars, and then he said to Ian, "*you were right, you were right, you were right*". The Wilson Center. The Wilson Center was just like this rec (recreation) center. I mean in those days - Sylvia and I were talking about this just yesterday - that was an era where, it was still early that people came into

venues and played original music. Ya know? Bars were like for cover bands. It was like *“what are you doing?”* Ya know?

The Ramones, as soon as they left New York, they had to create this...well, they trail-blazed all these places that then just played original music, that everybody then went on that... There was this bible of , ya know - you call this guy in Manchester, and call this guy when you're in Phoenix, and call this guy when you're in Seattle. Because the restaurant or the back of the tattoo parlor closes at night so that you can set up and play music. And that was this whole thing that we kinda take for granted now, but it was like they weren't clubs, you know? And the Wilson Center and Food For Thought were two of these places in D.C. where the owners were super cool and were like *“yeah bring your crazy fucking punk rock group in here and play. It's fine, just take out the garbage at the end and sweep the floor, and we're good.”*

J *“Don't break anything!”*

So are you one these guys when you're writing an album, you already have ideas for the next album after that, or are you just focusing on one right now?

M I'm mostly focusing on this because it's ton of freaking work to do, and then the Tremosphere album after, but it's interesting that you mention that, because sometimes you see something and it gives you an idea, and there's a photographer that I know that I follow on Instagram, and she posted a series of photographs of late, her work is always wonderful, and I was like that's the next album cover, right there. *(laughs)*

J When you guys were active did you play a lot of shows for Bipolar Explorer or are you a strict recording project and that's about it?

M It's become more of a recording project because we haven't found ways to continue... I mean I did so much playing out, I had a band, a punk pop band before Bipolar Explorer, back in the '90s, called Uncle and put out two records, and we played everywhere, we played CB's like 20-30 times, I remember...CBGB's used to be this thing too, where if you were from out of town you'd send in a tape, if you were from New York you had have a live audition, it was on Sunday nights and then later it became Monday nights, that you had to audition. They gave you 25-30 minutes to audition and we went in there with our 35 minute set on a Sunday night at midnight, and we were so excited we played the whole set in 19 minutes. Ya know? Super super fast. And Hilly Crystal who ran CB's, his son was there that night watching everybody and he loved us. And he also said, *“you got one more?”* So we were... *“Uh, can we play that first song again?”* So we did. People used to get all bummed out about CB's, saying like they didn't get paid properly, or they had to wait, usually they had to wait for hours until they went on, they went on late, but they were always super cool to us - they always were great - and they had the best sound system, the best monitoring system in New York, they had these huge fucking monitors, you could hear yourself so well. And the guy who ran their sound there, and I'm really sorry I can't remember his name, just always found the sweet spot in any band, he'd just make a couple of little tweaks and it sounded fucking awesome in that room. Anyway, Uncle played CB's and - all of these, all of these places are gone - Mercury Lounge is still around but Nightingale's and Under Acme was a fucking great room in New York, and then up and down the East Coast, obviously - the Metronome, in Burlington, Vermont, and just all these fantastic places that were - like I was talking about - were just places that opened up, eventually when this sort of trailblazing ensued, and you knew who to call if you were doing a show when you were playing out of town. So, we used to do all of that.

And then Bipolar Explorer, yeah - for the first couple of records, we played out a lot, we had a really really important show for us, which was - and this is a place that doesn't exist anymore - was the top of the Cooper Square Hotel, which was down by NYU, and way up and it was like with glass windows all the way around with this incredible view of the skyline. We did one of our first shows there with the new sound, with Summer songs. We played up there and that got reviewed by PopMatters. PopMatters was there and they wrote this really great review of it, and that really changed stuff for us. And then when we did *Of Love and Loss*, there was another - these are all fucking gone now! All these great clubs! - there was a place called Zirzamin and it was run by this guy, Jack Martin, who was briefly the second guitarist in the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. He was buddies with Nick for ages and then they decided they would be better as a trio, mutually, Jack left the group to do other stuff but he ran that room and he was a musician, and it was a brilliant, brilliant room. We did our release party there, we played *Of Love and Loss* - which is a double album - we played it twice in its sequence and entirety, and then, actually, Jack did the middle sets between us and that was an incredibly fucking triumphantly great night. Then we continued to play out that whole year, after *Of Loss and Loss*, we played, we really loved playing art galleries. Again, we were trying to find spaces like the old days, like in D.C., of like non-traditional spaces, art galleries, Zirzamin was a great club, and we played out a lot. And then we also did house shows which was super fun. And we used to do them right here. We would do ones, like once a month, we would do a thing we called Couch Concert. We'd make food, like we'd make dinner for everybody, and everybody would eat and have some beers and whatever, and then everybody would come into the front room of the studio, and sit around us, on the couch, and pull up chairs, and sit on the floor right at our feet, and we'd play a show. We'd play - maybe a set, take a break, play another set and then we'd all go up on the roof. We did that for a year, like once a month, it was super fun.

But as it went on - and also just this was a real drag - in New York a lot of great clubs closed, are gone. CB's got bought by some crap and that was done. And Zirzamin where we played this great record release party for *Of Love and Loss*, that was gone. There aren't a ton of fucking places left, anymore. And Maxwell's - which is just so many great shows out in Hoboken at Maxwell's - that place is gone. This idea, our idea was to continue to play art galleries and stuff and then as this idea with the spoken word and the visual thing came together, we thought that's really how we want to do it, and we kinda been set in that, and the exact kind of opportunity that we want has not opened up so we've mostly just been concentrating on we're just going to make records and when the right thing comes along we will. A couple of people have approached us about things, a couple of times, they just didn't feel quite right.

But that's to say, I *did* all of that stuff, man! Ya know? I played in every fucking bar on the East Coast, and some of those gigs were with incredible people and some of it was just a fucking drag! And this stuff is really personal, it just feels like, it's gotta be, it's gotta be *right* or... ya know?

J Yeah, you have to present it right, treat it right. Like you said, with Bipolar Explorer I think an art gallery would be the perfect place for it.

M The thing about Zirzamin that was fucking great, is that they had a music room. Like you would come in, - I think Zirzamin is, Sylvia would know cause she's multilingual, I'm a dumbass American, actually I'm a New Yorker and we don't consider ourselves Americans (*laughs*), but I think Zirzamin is actually Turkish for *underground* or something like that, or basement - but you went down this stairs, there was the bar but if you wanted to hear the music you had to go back, go through a red curtain, and into the music room. So if you wanted, and why not, go to a bar and

shout and talk over each other, that's fine, but if you want to hear the music you gotta go in there and be respectful. That's one of the reasons people wanted to play that room, because it was run by musicians, and they weren't just like background noise to whatever was going on.

I'm gonna come to regret that statement, about New Yorkers not being Americans, aren't I?!
(*more serious tone*) I mean it, with a certain level of levity.

(*laughs*)

J It's the same with people from California I find, Californians, they're not Americans

M It works for both places, I was born there, Summer and I spent so much time there, and Sylvia's been to California of course, several times and loves it, so yeah, ... (snobbish tone) we're the "*coastal elites*", aren't we? That's what they tell us.

J I remember I was working a concert, metal bands, Exhumed was the band, they're from California, I think it was close to winter in Canada, very fucking harsh temperatures, they're outside and talking "*we live in California*", there's like this huge bubble around California, and like "*we really don't know what the hell is out there besides LA*", and here you are, in the middle of nowhere, in Regina, Saskatchewan, and you're freezing your balls off!

M It has to be done!

J Yeah, has to be done, and those guys put on a hell of a show and made a killing at the merch table, and onto the next show the next night!

M Winnipeg - next stop!

J Yes exactly, Regina, Winnipeg, and then on to Ontario!
Well, my friend, it was a pleasure to finally talk to you.

M Likewise, thank you so much

J We will have to do it again, when the album is wrapped up and you're ready to go, and we'll do it again when the new Tremosphere is done, and we'll just do it whenever because I'm always around and this is a great time

M Thank you! We appreciate it, and we're always keen for a chat, so thank you so much

J Thank you so much, and send my best to Sylvia if you're talking to her later.

M Sure will, absolutely will.

J Awesome! Ok my friend, I will talk to you soon, you have a good rest of the day

M Alright, thanks, brother.

J Talk to you, bye bye!