

REBELLIOUS JUKEBOX

There are three guys in a rehearsal room – a guitarist, a bassist and a drummer. The guitarist has a plan, a dream, he's got the songs and he's got the look. The guitarist and the drummer are old friends but the bassist is playing with them for the first time. The atmosphere is awkward, because the first rehearsal is like an audition for everybody involved. The guitarist talks the bassist through one of his songs, the chords, the structure. The bass playing is tentative at first, but pretty soon he gets it and starts working it. He's good – very good. The guitarist nods his head to indicate changes, verse, chorus, middle eight, break; the common language of rock and roll. The bassist is completely on it, in fact he's all over the song. The drummer is impressed, but the guitarist looks concerned. Now the bassist thinks there's something wrong. Look, he says, give me the guitar for a minute and I'll show you. The bassist takes the guitar. He's a good guitar player, in fact he's a fantastic guitar player, in a different league from the original guitarist, who follows on the bass with a blank expression. The song is transformed. The guitar line gets more and more flashy and expressive, but something is missing. The guitarist-turned-bassist looks at the floor as he plays. He's lost an unspoken contest. His dream falls apart before his eyes.

This is, more or less, what happens in Dave Allen's beautifully realised film *New Wave of New Wave*, and it's a perfect example of the way he works. The film is named after the short-lived mid-90s UK revival of the sound of '79, a collection of soon-to-be forgotten copyists and bandwagon jumpers – Shed 7 now best known for turning their biggest hit into a jingle for a mobile phone shop – trailing in the wake of Oasis and Blur, but the low key, realist approach has something in common with the other, the original New Wave of French film-making. Allen is the guitarist, his erstwhile collaborator Ross Sinclair plays drums and Micz Flor shows off his skills as the invading bassist. The performers act so natural you could easily mistake the scene for a documentary, and this is important because a lot of what happens in the film happens in the playing, in what the playing expresses and in the non-verbal communication between the band. It's the rock and roll dream – which is the American dream of the poor kid from the wrong side of the tracks making it big all mixed up with the underground dream of no compromise – in reverse, the story of a hundred thousand rehearsal rooms from Berlin to Birmingham to San Francisco. But rock and roll isn't a metaphor here, it's the scene, the arena, and what's at stake is everything – passion versus proficiency, the underground versus the mainstream. The certain knowledge every guitarist has that they can do it – heck, anyone can play what Ronnie Wood plays – versus the realisation that, precisely because this last assertion is absolutely true, they're up against everybody and they don't have a chance.



New Wave of New Wave, 1996

Rock and roll is more than a culture, it's a mythos. For an artist of Allen's generation it was never the new, new thing. It was already written into history, growing roots back into the Mississippi blues even as it was being reinvented as an experimental, revolutionary force. For the last forty years, rock and roll has led a double life as both the future and the past of music. It was commercial and mass-market from the start – the sight of bands thanking their managers and multinational media-corporate record labels at meaningless black-tie award ceremonies is not a betrayal, but an inevitable outcome – but at the same time, it gave the underground access to the mechanisms of mass-distribution and created some beautiful paradoxes. Patti Smith on international radio screaming that she was gonna to live 'outside of society' on *Rock and Roll Nigger*, John Lydon lambasting EMI to the tune of *Roadrunner*, Rage Against the Machine on heavy rotation on MTV.

Now everything is changing again. Recording technology, and the vinyl record in particular, made it possible for international music superstars to be created – for the Delta blues to be 'discovered', for rock and roll to exist. Now, at least if you have an internet connection, which puts you in the same minority of the world that can afford TV and hi-fi and rock and roll, you can download digital copies of music by almost anyone from almost anywhere. The whole rock and roll system of stardom, of triumph over adversity, of paying your dues and then selling out, should be in trouble – but against the odds, the dream survives and multiplies. From bedroom techno-terrorists to hard-house entrepreneurs, schizophrenically caught between rebellion and escapism, between the past and the future, we're still working through the social and economic structures created by analogue technology, in which the now-contradictory concept of the original recording remains the major currency.

MIRRORED AT MEAN MID-POINT AMPLITUDE PEAK/TROUGH COMPOSITION

VIEWING AN EXISTING RECORDED SOUND AS A DIGITAL AUDIO FILE, SET HORIZONTAL UPPER AND LOWER LIMITS ON THE WAVEFORM'S PEAKS AND TROUGHS RESPECTIVELY. THE MANIPULATED WAVEFORM IS CONSTRUCTED USING THE EFFECTIVE AREA ENCLOSED BY THE WAVEFORM AND THESE LIMIT LINES.

INSTEAD OF USING THE VERTICAL MEASUREMENT BETWEEN THE 'ZERO' LINE AND ITS CORRESPONDING POINT IMMEDIATELY ABOVE OR BELOW AS THE AMPLITUDE READING, THE NEW WAVEFORM SHALL REVERSE THE DIRECTION OF THE AMPLITUDE READINGS TO CREATE ITS FORM. THUS FLIPPING EACH PEAK AND TROUGH ON ITS MID-POINT AXIS.

Mirrored at Mean Mid-Point Amplitude Peak/Trough Composition, 2001

Dave Allen's inverted casts of vinyl records are a kind of mini-requiem for this analogue era – for a mechanical, industrial era in which a direct, physical relationship existed between objects and their function that could be made visible and understood. Record-cutting in the old sense, the acetate sense, has already become a black art shrouded in obsolete technology. Cutting rooms look as though they've been recycled from old Soyuz space modules, all bakelite dials and needles, reel to reel tape machines like 1970s sci-fi computers, and the cutting table in the corner is a lathe by any other name. Sound engineering isn't called that for nothing, and this is pure electromechanics, optimum signal-to-noise ratios, multi-band compression. A high signal is still referred to as 'hot', and the carved-out groove of a vinyl record as a medium for the mass dissemination of music is going to seem as quaint and cumbersome as a fairground steam organ in a generation or two.

Seen from this difficult transitional period, the kitsch time of CD scratching and digital photos printed on canvas-textured paper, Allen's work is almost pure pathos. Transformed into sculpture, these cold clear anti-records lament both the silent white space of the gallery that lacks the motive force of rock and roll, and their own status as monuments, classics whose revolutionary power has been subsumed into a middle-aged mainstream culture. They're casts of the space around a song, the cultural space that a record occupies, they're *All that is not 'The Beatles' and therefore not Abbey Road*, a nicely difficult definition given that the Beatles' generation has grown up to shape the world we live in now. The reverse casting process turns the records inside out, recalling the conceptual trick of Manzoni's *Socle du Monde*, with the scary consequence that we are all now trapped inside the *White Album*. Still, I can see a more prosaic potential market for these anti-records as a short-cut way for record collectors to define their taste – I'd certainly rush out and buy *All that is not Depeche Mode's Greatest Hits* and follow it with *Everything but Contemporary Jazz, Vol. 1*.



All that is not 'The Beatles' and therefore not Abbey Road, 2001

Silence features in another of Allen's works at the Showroom, a recording made in the empty *Hansa by the Wall Studios* in Berlin, the studio where Bowie recorded *Heroes* and *Low*. While John Cage's *4'33"* is a performance work – it depends on the expectations of the audience, the background noises in the auditorium, the theatre of the performer raising the lid of the piano and turning the pages of the score – Allen's recording of the silent studio is the conceptual reverse, a no-performance work. Playing the recording back in an art gallery, whose silence is already part of its structure, its aura, only doubles the effect. Lou Reed claimed that his *Metal Machine Music* used nothing but the amplified sounds made by the recording equipment itself. Allen's work is what's left after even the machines have gone home, the non-sound of a space animated only by ghosts. It's a little like visiting a famous grave, or the site of a historic battle. The silence, the headstone, the empty field is almost indistinguishable from a thousand others, but its significance is real. Meaning seems to hang in the air like fog, as though it belongs to this place, this silence, but in fact you brought it with you, for this special occasion.

Dave Allen doesn't exactly make art about music, and he doesn't use music or rock culture to stand in for something else. He makes art that uses the materials and situations of rock and roll to expand its own idea of itself, because that idea is still one of our few remaining concepts of autonomous, rebellious communal activity.

At the same time he uses these ideas to make art that works within another, newer, tradition. It might be another take on the old high culture/low culture divide, except that the take is that there is no high/low divide, there are only insiders and outsiders. Rock and roll is an insiders' culture for outsiders, and access is free and easy. You don't need money and you don't have to go to school – everybody knows it's better if you're poor and you didn't.



Silence Recording, Hansa Studios Berlin, 2001

In a way, rock musicians have a relationship with songs like the one hackers have with software, beyond the obvious parallels of teenage male rebellion. Giant publishing companies like Sony, Warners or Universal own the rights to most of the songs we hear (until 1999, three different companies futilely owned the rights to the rehearsal room classics *Wild Thing*, *Louie Louie* and *Twist and Shout*, which are all pretty much the same song chordwise and learnable even for a beginner in less time than they take to play through), but a good musician can figure out how to play them just by listening to them a few times, and this information is always shared. If it needs to be written down, it's never in traditional musical notation but in a shorthand form – a few chord sequences, with tricky parts or solos occasionally sketched out in guitar tab (tablature: needlessly arcane notation inflicted on guitarists by learn-to-play manuals), timings not supplied – that assumes you already know, because you do know, how it's meant to sound.

Dave Allen has been collecting these home-made scores for years, turning them into magic marker 'paintings' or photocopied books. Visitors to shows of the work are provided with a cheap guitar, a stack of A4 paper and a pen and invited to contribute to the archive, and their interpretations are often both graphically and musically idiosyncratic to the point where they become original compositions. The work celebrates the common ownership of the songs, the fact that they only live because the people who listen to them or play them feel that they, in some way, own them.

SEARCH + DESTROY STOOGES

main refrain is C/F Ab/Db F#B

play these as barred E + A chords at frets 3, 4 and 2. Play x2 as intro. with C/F start

v1. Chords

Ab Db
I'm a street walkin' cheatah with a
F# E
hide full of napalm C/F

I'm a runaway son of a nuclear A-plan

Chorus → C/Bb/Ab/Eb/Bb Hi Eb barred A at 6th fret
I am the world's forgotten boy
the one who searches and destroys

F Ab
Honey you got to help me please
somebody got to save my song Eb
Baby can you play for me

Back to verse chords Ab/Db F#B C/F
Look out honey cos I'm using technology
Ain't got time to make no apology

Chorus → C/Bb/Ab/Eb/Bb
So when you're itchin' in the dead of night
love you in the middle of a firestorm

→ F/Ab/Eb/G I have got to strike a plan
Somebody got to save my soul
Baby can you take my hand

C/Bb/Ab/Eb/Bb I'm the world's forgotten boy } x2
the one who's searchin' to destroy }
Solo

+ repeat v2 + chorus look out honey cos I'm using technology

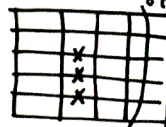
Allen continues to play this three-sided game between art, mass-culture and an idea of the rock and roll underground. He uses the context of the art world to raise serious and important questions about common culture, copyright and the contradictions inherent in the underground dream, and he uses rock and roll to show up some of the art world's isolationist and regressive qualities. Unlike other artists working in a similar area, he never attempts to mythologise himself or his production. What counts is a small battle fought and won, an idea defined against the prevailing tendency, an emotional response that, almost involuntarily, implicates the viewer and makes them aware of their involvement – makes them aware that to be a consumer is to be a participant, and that to be a participant means to share responsibility.

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WHAT DO I GET ?

C/F/G



BUZZCOCKS

Barred A chord
= F
+ 2 frets = G

VI ^C I just want a lover like any other, ^F ^G
^C what do I get?
 I only want a friend who stays to the end,
 fret 11 ^C what do I get?
 CH. ^{G#} ^G ^C what do I get with, what do I get? x 2
 V2. in in distress, I need a cress
 what do I get
 in on the make, I need a break. what do
 I get
 CHORUS ^F I only get sleepless nights ^G C/A#/F/G
 Break
 CHORUS/SOLO - play verse chords.
 repeat break + chorus + 1st verse + chorus
 ENDS ON F/G/BK
 what do I get? No love, No sleep at
 nights, nothing that's nice.