

Just About an Interview

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Kurt Buss

The assignment came over my desk and landed in my lap like a hand grenade – PFFUDDD! – near exploding my bowels with the percussion of its impact.

Buss, the memo read. We need something light and local for this issue. All these articles on Central America might up and revolt people. We need something breathin' of like an' beauty an' freshness to contrast these stories of bleak inhumanity an' the inexcusable activities of Capitalism in the Banana Basket..."

The memo went on, but I needed to read no further, knowing full well its wicked, commanding course. I knew the assignment editor's order as soon as the messenger boy delivered the note, sliding it o'er my barren desk with a sardonic flick of the wrist and flashing a cheeky grin as he watched me receive it with terror-raged eyes, shuddering.

"HERE," he quipped impishly. "He said get right on it." I watched the boy's face break into a saucy smirk, betraying the fact that he had read the memo. He knew, then, my fate. My terror.

He knew, and it gave him devilish delight to divulge it to me. I urged to throttle the sprite on the spot, but resisted.

The assignment, as it had been rumored me in the newsroom the past few weeks, was to capture that elusive animal who stalks unabashed the balky forests of Milwaukee's music world. The assignment, was to capture on mere magnetic tape the matter who is the man who stands steadfast alone as the kingpin of local music publications. The assignment: Get the Shurilla interview.

Mark Shurilla, Editor-in-Chief of *Express* magazine, is known not only for running Milwaukee's longest-breathing free paper, but for being that being who boldly brought powerpunkpolka to the mad screaming hungry consciousness of the world. A musical magician of prophetic form, Shurilla is the engine 'neath the slow, subtle unraveling of new music form as powerpunkpolka rears its horny head: the monster of pure musical energy.

Dramatically, Shurilla is a rogue impresario the likes of Frankie Yankovich as he leads his band, the Blackholes, through such thumping numbers as "Blitzkrieg over Kenosha" – fans writhing havoc at his feet. Not unlike Shurilla is it to add slight nuances to the traditional demeanor of rock and roll bands, making the appearance of the Blackholes on stage an apprehensible event always worth the risk.

"Tell him thanks," I instructed the squirt as he strutted back to the assignment editor, who was no doubt reeling with pleasure in the plush denim décor of his penthouse office suite, guffawing laboriously on a soggy cigar and wheezing sweaty smoke from his pasty jowls with odd, abandoned delight.

Shurilla. They call him Dog. Hundreds have played in his band. Millions have read his paper. But no one has captured the cosmic obscurity that lurks elusive behind those rose colored spectacles.

I phoned *Express*. The phone rang. Someone answered it.

“Express.”

“Mark?”

“Is that you, boy?”

“Mark...? My name is Buss. I’m with the Shepherd.”

“What’s up guy?”

“I need to interview you.”

“D’ya love it?”

“We need something breathing of life and beauty and freshness to contr-“

“Oh, one of those realities.”

“-to contrast the inexcusable ac-...huh?”

“It’s like missing the extra point after tying the game late in the fourth quarter...the fans are screaming for blood so you give ‘em the ol’ Statue of Liberty play and drop-kick the ball from the 10-yard line...”

“It’s like the first time you try to leave the outer atmosphere and all the gases are burning all around you...you go for the limit and BLAM!...you rebound off the backboard and fall back to Earth.”

“It’s, yeah...somthin’ like that. You think I could meet you somewhere soon? For a interview?”

“I don’t see why not.”

“Could you do it, uh, tonight?”

“Sure. Why not.”

“How ‘bout Gordon Park (Pub) around 10:30?”

“Gordon Park? Yeah, they hammer the hits there.”

“So, you’ll do it?”

“D’ya love it?”

“Yeah, I...”

“Gotta go. The fans are screaming outside. Must be the home team back from their Universal Tour.”

“Yeah, it must be the ho-“click: And he was gone.

“Damn,” I thought. “How am I going to interview this guy? I don’t know that much about the local music industry, or even if there is a local music industry. What am I going to ask him?”

Actually, I anguished the answers I imagined he would afford more, much more than my own questioning discord.

I began to drink. Hard. Fast.

When I arrived at the rendezvous, half an hour late, with a twelve year old cassette recorder ill-fitting in my hands (like someone's dead cat borne front door by stranger) I immediately began to slosh about looking for a place to plug in, scarcely noticing the small crowd gathered all around, and only with difficulty acknowledging Shurilla.

"Hi 'ere. Sorry I'so ...late. (Hic!) Bud-Ican'fin'a...placet'plugin."

"I think there's an electrical outlet over here," came a chorus of voices all at once. I looked around me and noticed many familiar faces: My managing editor. My roommate. Various friends and acquaintances. And some unfamiliar faces: Tommy Blood of Belladonna, and some drunk, little leprechaun whose name I keep forgetting.

"Hi guysh," I said as I slouched into a stool. "Howshitgoin?" Mild chortles rippled about, dotted by an occasional, subdued snort of reserved revelry. It was obvious that someone was reaping some satisfaction from the interview already. I knew not who, though, for I was still suffering greatly, plagued with technical difficulties and wondering if I'd remembered a tape.

"Maybeishgo'...badduries?" I thought as someone found an outlet, assisting me with the cord and sliding in a cassette. "Thanksbuddy," I said to whomever it was. "Thanksabunsh."

Well, the actual details beyond that remain a bit cloudy. But I do remember waking about noon the next day, half naked on my stereo: with one hand snared in the mouth of the cassette deck and the other hand wrapped snugly 'round a moist, blue cassette tape.

What was on the tape testified that I had indeed conducted an interview, for I recognized not only the voice of Shurilla but that of my own. However, the conversation was not quite what I had expected. It seemed cogent. Serious. Almost professional. Sterile.

I learned, as I guess I had really known all along, that there is a local music industry. Sharks are out there scouting talent, and some local acts get the backing to be produced. Milwaukee has recording studios and even a local recording label. There are even a handful of acts that have gone national in the last decade or so, though our city fosters renowned musicians with about the same frequency it produces great sculptors, painters or poets. There are a few, of course, but it is a number befitting the Midwest's cultural morass.

But, what the hell, eh? We'll always be the bowling capital of the world. And that's okay, ainna?"