

"I remember everything as if it happened years ago..." -Robyn Hitchcock

arch 2008 marks the 10th anniversary of the major label (re)release of the first Harvey Danger album, Where Have All the Merrymakers Gone?, which launched us on our bizarre and short-lived ride through the wacky world of popular culture, the twilight of alternative rock, the fickle nature of MTV and radio heavy rotation, the agony and the ecstasy of eight-month-long intercontinental tours, and the we-might-as-well-call-it-what-it-is-ness of one-hit wonderdom. Though it was often a frustrating time for us as individuals and as a group scrambling to grasp our various identities, it was nonetheless a memorable one, and it did properly change our lives—if not the history of pop music—in ways both profound and mundane. This is not the place to list them (though I reckon it is the time), but if you ask us, you may discover we are more voluble on the subject than you may expect.

Since our reformation in 2004, we've all been enjoying the band much more than we did when it was a job. That's why we felt it was finally appropriate to celebrate the anniversary of our semi-professional debut rather than make excuses for or try to run screaming from it. But rather than focusing solely on that one album (and, inevitably, the one song it's best known for spawning), it seemed essential to include the music we've made subsequently in the retrospective. Some of that music was consciously a reaction against the almost literally unrepeatable success of the first record. Most of it was simply an attempt to push against the often unfathomable, defining momentum (or was it inertia?) of Merrymakers, to move on from it, to try something else, to keep on keeping on like a bird that flew, as a wise man one sang. The brutal experience of our "difficult" second album, King James Version (2000), effectively broke the band up. The incalculable success of our third, Little By Little...(2005/6), reignited our desire to keep it going. What had changed was everything. But the songs remained the same, as it were. Looking back, we discovered a body of work worth evaluating, and an audience—bless every one of you—that has stuck around through all of it or joined midstream. This has resulted in vastly different listener relationships with each album. In our travels we've

learned that plenty of people who love album 1 have no idea that albums 2 or 3 even exist, while the cult of album 2 remains devout in its refutation of album 1 and its devotees, and many of album 3's proponents never deigned to listen to the first 2 records because they were busy plotting the download revolution. And so forth. (Me, I like 'em all, and I speak for all of us.)

One thing is certain: We occupy a singular space in the world of music, equal parts unknown, forgotten, and beloved, a band with a truly unlikely history and a present tense that feels all the more promising for its absolute uncertainty. I can say without hesitation that it has never been more purely enjoyable to be a member of Harvey Danger than it feels today. And for the first time I can remember, I'm genuinely excited—as opposed to anxious or scared or seething with rage—about tomorrow. And all this arose from a record we made for about \$3,000 in about 12 days spread out over about a year at a studio in Fremont best known for having once been the birthplace of grunge. Thanks, John.

And so, the Triple Door shows. The idea is to play all three albums all the way through, plus B-sides, deep cuts, and a few unreleased songs besides. We split it up into two nights for obvious reasons—both because 40+ songs in a single show wouldn't be fun for anyone, and also because certain thematic elements pertain to the different set lists. We've done our best to prepare the album versions of the songs, with requisite guest performers holding down the strings, horns, backing vocals, and other assorted trickery. Some of these songs are staples that have been performed at nearly every show since they were written. Others haven't been played since the day they were recorded. Some have gone through radical rearrangements through the years, been abandoned, discarded, rescued, forgotten, remembered, re-forgotten. It's a big undertaking that involves no shortage of introspection. The rehearsal process has been like a Proust novel. With distortion pedals. And joy! Though we're obviously aiming for glorious spectacle here, the core of the event is as simple as can be: This is our best music, presented directly and honestly in the hopes that it still means as much to you after all these years as it does to us.

Thanks for listening.

Sean



Where Have All the Merrymakers Gone?

- 1 Carlotta Valdez
- 2 Flagpole Sitta
- 3 Woolly Muffler
- 4 Private Helicopter
- 5 Problems and Bigger Ones
- 6 Jack the Lion
- 7 Old Hat
- 8 Terminal Annex
- 9 Wrecking Ball
- 10 Radio Silence

4 & 8 recorded 3/96

2, 3 & 9 recorded 6/96

1, 5, 6, 7 & 10 recorded 2/97 at John & Stu's Place, Seattle, WA

Released 7/97, Arena Rock Recording Company

Re-released 3/98, Slash/London Produced by **John Goodmanson**

SEAN: The words to "Carlotta Valdez" (which, as assiduous HD trainspotters have noted, should actually be spelled "Carlotta Valdes," according to the source material) arose during an afternoon screening of the 1996 re-release of *Vertigo* (not my favorite Hitchcock), and the song was finished that very same night. The title of "Flagpole Sitta" was a malformed attempt at referencing Pavement and NWA in one fell swoop—if we'd only called it "Tm Not Sick (But

I'm Not Well)" we'd all be billionaires!; line one references "Scotty's Lament" by my high school heroes The Connells (we opened for them in 1996 at the Backstage, they were unmoved by this tribute); "fingertips" line is about someone specific; chorus lyric (made up in studio) unconsciously references "Amplitude" by college heroes Guy'ner, cf. "I'm not healthy, I'm not ill" (singer, an acquaintance, shamed me for it in front of Brownie's in NYC, later phoned to apologize at behest of his wife/bandmate, who said "it's not that original, anyway"); there are seven unpublished verses to this song, most in the spirit (if not the league) of Cole Porter's "dirty" verses to "You're the Top." A dear college friend, now a world-class journalist, once presumed (mistakenly, though she may as well have been right) that "Woolly Muffler" was about her and was kind of all "nice try. dude," about it; the "labored expat fantasy" sequence began life in a very old song called "Ignore Me"; both songs from the largely unconvincing you-don't-loveme-so-I-don't-care school; I really love the denseness of the guitar when the song gets loud, an outgrowth, if I'm not much mistaken, of Jeff's secret desire to be in a My Bloody Valentine tribute guitarchestra. Well I remember all four of us listening back to the rough mix of "Private Helicopter" on the cassette deck of Jeff's Volvo, coming home from John & Stu's Place, listening again and again and again, probably for an hour, maybe more, just as the sky was beginning to lighten, absolutely stunned at how shockingly awesome it was, how massive sounding, the first experience of hearing ourselves transformed by recording into something bigger than we could have imagined, certain that the song was a work of genius (ah, youth), certain we were going to be discovered as a result of it, which in a way we were; the weirdest part was getting out of the car in the silent suburban neighborhood and seeing smoke rising from the three bags of vard waste awaiting curbside pick-up, like they were on the verge of combustion; we would grow to hate this song on tour; we like it again now. "Problems and Bigger Ones" is one of two songs on the LP whose lyrics always felt unfinished to me; partly I blame Evan for encouraging me to go ahead and follow my misbegotten ambition to make the song into a centuries-spanning tale of bootlegging and abandonment, almost none of which theme survives in any discernible way; original chorus opener was "you follow the rolling road," which sounded too heroic or classic rock to the lads, hence the alternate existing lines, but "from damage to damn control" never quite felt right to me (though I love "forswear what you undergo"); happy about the Dylan reference, largely because it came before my Dylan deep dive a year or two later; song remains powerful to me, sometimes hard to sing because it's so emotional, the urgency of the guitar and bass in the second verse and outro are undeniable-close as HD ever got to '90s-style emo. Speaking of hard to sing, "Jack the Lion," one of only a few completely true story songs we ever did; written organically in the living room of the second HD house, in South Wedgwood (as opposed to Ravenna), with dim lights, and a cardboard box for drums, as I recall, just after I got back from a long weekend in actual Pleasant Valley, in actual upstate NY, where I visited my actual dying grandfather, with his actual strong hands, and was urged by everyone there to actually come see him again and I never had the chance. "Old Hat" was the first good song we ever wrote, after about two years of near (and broad) misses, and the first time I ever tried to reconcile the fact that being in love felt better than singing about not being loved; had to change a (bad) line (to a better one) after the girl I'd been seeing when we wrote it turned out not to be so lovable after all; Abby Grush's joyous, out-of-nowhere countermelody on the bridge is probably my proudest musical moment on the record; for reasons that defy reason, we never played "Old Hat" even once during all our Merrymakers touring; infuriating! "Terminal Annex": unfinished lyric #2, but also the second example of hearing how John Goodmanson's wizardry transformed the sound of our basement fantasy into a pop-rock colossus, another long night in Jeff's car with a cassette; also defensible on the grounds of the "overflowing cup" line, maybe my favorite couplet on the record, and Aaron's revving motorcycle bass solo. "Wrecking Ball," our first convincing "serious" song, based on a combination of Thomas Wolfe, Thomas Mann, and a heroic dose of native alienation; I was thrilled that Jeff was coaxed into playing the fiddle across one of Aaron's signature bass leads, elsewise the lyric might have dragged the song into an inescapable juvenility; instead, it sounds to me like a perfect evocation of what it felt like to be 22 and lost, far from home. I came home from my first trip abroad to find the instrumental track to "Radio Silence" all ready and waiting for words and a melody; I saw on the back page of Rolling Stone that Fiona Apple had been reduced to talking about being a rape victim in a 50-word blurb that accompanied news of how well her first record was selling and was duly inspired; the time glitch before the bass solo is my fault, as I thought it would be funny to do some human beatboxing during my scratch vocals;

it would've been funnier if it hadn't been a beat-and-a-half behind and thrown off the real drummer; still and all, my vote for the best all around song on the record, and my favorite HD song ever to play live; "Wrecking Ball" was supposed to close the album, but the label insisted on this one; painful though it is to admit: they were right.

AARON: It took us about a week to record the last five songs for *Merrymakers*. At that point, we knew (finally!) that we really were making an honest-to-god full-length album, to be released by Greg Glover's Arena Rock Recording Company. I vividly remember how very, very tired I was that week. I was pulling espresso at 5:30 a.m., on a bus across town to the studio at noon, recording until the middle of the night, and back home just in time to catch a few hours of sleep and do it all again. Some nights I would actually fall asleep on the couch directly behind Jeff's amp while he was recording heroically loud guitar tracks.

Unfortunately, I've forgotten more than I remember about the three sessions that became our first album, but these are a few of the things that stick with me... "Carlotta Valdez": Sean let out triumphant/relieved "Yes!" at the end of the keeper take (you can hear it on the record). We were pretty inexperienced in the studio, to say the least, and had the weight of time and money (both in short supply) on our shoulders. That moment always reminds me of the uniquely satisfying feeling of getting something exactly right, right when we needed to. "Flagpole": By contrast, I think it took us nine nerve-wracking takes, punctuated by smoke breaks and walks around the block, to get this one right. In retrospect, I guess it was worth it. "Woolly Muffler": Jeff and I sat in

front of a single stereo mic with two acoustic guitars to record a backing track for the opening verses. "Problems and Bigger Ones": This was the first song of ours I heard on the radio, on KCMU, while making TONS of Jell-O for a party at the Wedgwood house. Don't ask, "Jack the Lion": I don't think the potential of this song was fully realized until much later, when we played a slower, piano-driven version at our "reunion" show in 2004. That was a very emotional moment. It was an unusually mature, personal song for us in 1996, and I think the alternative rock treatment did it a bit of a disservice. It's fun to play, though. Also, the hand claps seemed like a good idea at the time. "Old Hat": This and the original version of "Carjack Fever," which was written at the same time, were our first legitimately good songs. Sean's nascent talent for coming up with amazing harmonies and backing vocal parts is highlighted. "Terminal Annex": I think we were all mesmerized by the Echoplex tape delay, which was responsible for the guitar sound in the verses. "Wrecking Ball": We listened to this many times in Jeff's room in the Wedgwood house after we got home from the studio. It was jaw-droppingly amazing to hear that sound coming from our band. "Radio Silence": This was the first of many times we've all stood around a mic doing group backing vocals, which is always a good time.

JEFF: Where Have All the Merrymakers Gone? still remains my favorite album, though our best songs all lie elsewhere. The sense of joy and lack of self-consciousness captured on these 42 minutes always makes me happy when I listen to it.

It's an album that we made mostly for ourselves, since there was no expectation that many others

would hear it (when it first came out, selling even a couple thousand copies seemed like a huge success).

Listening to it now, there are some good choices, some bad choices, some rookie choices, and some surprisingly mature choices. Of course we were convinced they were all good choices at the time (well, except maybe the guitar solos).

"Flagpole Sitta": I have to admit I never "got" this song. I just wanted to write a song with a bouncy rhythm like "Viewmaster" by the band Eric's Trip. The signature drum roll at the start was a last-minute idea we came up with right before we were to record it. We only ever meant that recording to be a demo, but fate had different plans...

"Private Helicopter": It's arguably the most important recording we ever did; you can divide the band eras into pre- and post- "Private Helicopter." When we got back from the studio we could hardly believe it was us on that recording. Even though we got home from that day in the studio in the wee hours of the morning, I set the cassette player to auto-reverse, put on headphones and stayed up for a couple more hours marvelling at how much like a real band we sounded until I drifted off into sleep. It remains the best \$200 we ever spent.

"Old Hat": In the first band house (the one pictured on the cover of the album) we built a practice space in the basement. I remember coming downstairs one of the days right after we'd finished putting in carpet and finishing the drywall and Aaron and Evan had come up with what seemed like thirty different parts which ended up as this song. (For the record: The magical distorted bass sound is a Rickenbacker bass through a "classic" Rat pedal into a SWR Workingman's 15).

"Wrecking Ball": Probably my favorite track on this album, I still like it as much now as I did back then (except I can see my old teacher cringing at my poor intonation on violin).

"Radio Silence": This is the one that got away—and then came back. We'd written a song (to our credit, I think) that was simply a bit beyond what we were capable of delivering in the studio when we went to record it. Years ago I studied with a violin teacher that would, after you learned a piece inside and out, have you put it aside for a year or so, and then re-visit it later. You'd come back and it'd seem to be entirely different, not a reflection of the music but a way to mark your own evolution as a musician.

In the last couple years this has come to be one of our stronger pieces – different from the original recording, but a better manifestation of the song. I'd like to think that somewhere Ms. Pressley is smiling.

EVAN: Can I just say it? This album is obviously a complete mess by a bunch of rank amateurs. Hallelujah! If that's not a reason to love Where Have All the Merrymakers Gone?, I don't know what is. When I hear this record—when I pull it from the screenprinted sleeve even-I am overwhelmed with the actual factual humanness of the whole thing. To me, it literally sounds like four friends thrilled to be writing songs together; without grime or preciousness or, above all, apathy, this album is one of the least pretentious recordings I've ever heard. It was meant to disappear into the cutout bins of Cellophane Square and Orpheum Records along with everyone else's very best efforts. It was meant to satisfy us: In my mind, it was an analog to our work at the UW Daily, to articles Sean was writing for the Stranger and I

was writing for the *Rocket*, the posters Aaron and I were making at BLT, the crazy weekly challenges for Jeff at the *International Examiner*, the photos Chuck Robertson took of everyone, the "inquiries" at Richard Hugo House, the plays Sean would slip out of the band to work on, the articles by Brian Goedde and Nathan Thornburgh and all our friends, movies and readings at the Little Theater, a round of drinks at the Jade Pagoda, pinball at the Princess Market with Brad. We made a thing, see, but we were making all these other things, and we had no idea which ones would stick around.

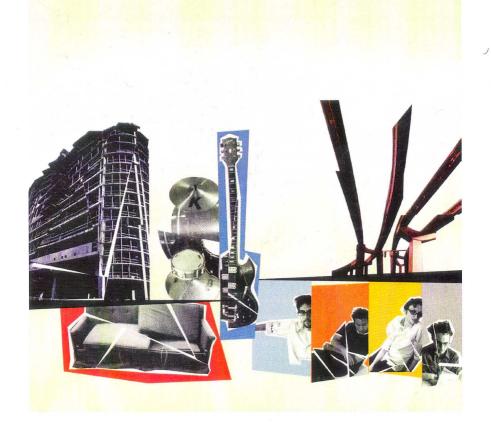
I could talk for hours about the '90s and its deadly ironic spiral; I certainly did then. But I think playing this album does a better job. I know, it's so uncool for me as co-writer to say, but screw it: I think "Flagpole Sitta" is an absolutely pitch-perfect artifact of the time and place in which it was written. Contradictory, guarded, intimate, sneering, cheering, feeding back, bouncing forward: I think people heard it and understood its realness instantly and intuitively. The fact that it was never meant to be an anthem for anyone only makes it better.

The surprise is that the rest of the album is just as revealing, in a different way. The drumming is...well, it's charming in its way. It definitely sounds like a guy sitting behind a drummet, playing to tape; there's nothing pro or pre-fab about it. The songs are shaped like R.E.M. songs, in that they build tidy stages for Sean's lyrics, melodies and harmonies. They sound like Olympia sounded, without the ingrown cool, in that they're completely self-determined. They're funny: did he just say, "All I ever wanted to be was a woolly muffler on your naked neck"? They're beautiful--"disembodied ringlets from hair that looked like

yours" is beautiful; the feedback on "Jack the Lion" is beautiful. The bass plays distorted lead for most of the songs, even though every engineer I've ever worked with explains how distorting a bass SEEMS like a good idea but it's a bad idea. This album rests our case. Thanks, John!

I think that my favorite song on Merrymakers is "Old Hat"; nothing else sounds so much like the pure joy of figuring out how to write a song. It makes me wish that "Love Bug," our first real song, had made it on the Little By Little... B-sides list. Every time I hear "Private Helicopter" I think two things. One is that I declined a trip to Rome that year because I was so excited about writing that song; the other is that I've always counted myself as the "former best friend." Whenever I hear, "I miss talking to you, buhbuht you never draw me out, so..." it makes me want to grab my own self by the scruff of the neck and shake. Actually, there are a lot of scruffs I'd grab if I could, and I think I might just tell them this:

Ten years from now, you still won't believe it's happening. \blacksquare



King James Version

1 Meetings with Remarkable Men (Show Me the Hero)

2 Humility on Parade

3 Why I'm Lonely

4 Sad Sweetheart of the Rodeo

5 You Miss the Point Completely I Get the Point Exactly

6 Authenticity

7 (Theme From) Carjack Fever

8 Pike St./Park Slope

9 This is the Thrilling Conversation You've Been Waiting For10 Loyalty Bldg.

11 Underground12 The Same as Being in Love

Recorded in 1999 at Bearsville Studios (Woodstock, NY), Bear Creek (Woodinville, WA), and John & Stu's 1, 2 & 10 recorded 10/99 at John & Stu's Released 9/00, London/Sire Produced by **John Goodmanson**

SEAN: "Meetings With Remarkable Men" was a last-minute title change that no one in the band has ever once used to discuss the song, me included; after months of dour, slow, chorusless half-songs, we wrote this one in a burst and the album felt finished, focused, fun; Kip Winger was reportedly not

amused. "Humility on Parade" was a title for two years before it became a song, originally intended as a commentary on our almost apologetic version of the hit record conquest mentality; again with the time-travel theme, the Civil War as filtered through Before and After Science, always with an eye toward feeling circumspect about the idea of projecting confidence, about confidence itself, and the notion that there's always someone better and stronger than you projecting that same confidence—exactly my state of mind during our corporate era. I remember the first time we ever played "Why I'm Lonely," looking at the person I wrote it about (same person most of KJV is about) at the Breakroom in 1997, opening for the first of many Posies reunions, and it seemed like we had broken through to a whole new language; lyrical references: St. Leonard Cohen, Inavat Khan ("independence and indifference..."). I've always felt a little guilty about the chorus of "Sad Sweetheart," given its Western theme, since not one person in the band is interested in that iconography; I had been listening to the Byrds and watching Nicholas Ray and thought there might be a girl stuck in a bad relationship and a boring job who might turn to those things for escape; I was also listening to Edith Frost's first album, "Calling Over Time," a lot, and that's why I named her Edith; I really, truly love the video for this song; still don't get the intro, though. "You Miss the Point Completely, I Get the Point Exactly," notable for its long title, and the weird coda at the end, one of the few instances I can recall of the four of us really enjoying working together and having fun on the record; love the Rhodes that drives the song; "kid in a carpet store" was me, being taken shopping by my maternal grandmother, a

woman who REALLY took her time selecting remnants; "windstorm" is a Seattle-specifc reference to Windstorm '95, a notorious all-night local news nonevent (original line: "you're the one who makes the mainstream flow," but I chickened out); lyrics spell out my exact state of mind at the time: paranoid, accusatory, self-righteous, but fully certain that my observations are not only objective, but universal; good times! Still bummed about "Authenticity": we all thought it would be a good single, I miss the long intro, LOVE Grant-Lee Phillips's harmonies, regret not adding horns, still a gem live. "Carjack" was an attempt to write aggressively noisy, new wave rock; song dates back to '96 (radically different version), but wasn't finished till Bearsville, where the quiet, pretty part that precedes each chorus arrived at the eleventh hour in a jubilant, birth-like moment, allowing the words to become a more cinematic narrative, like a three-minute road film; can't decide about "the moon is a toenail," but I think I'm ok with it; screamed parts over the bass solo are all places I lived as a kid; good screaming. "Pike Street" was an obvious departure, attempted arrangements included the whole band, but it just worked better with piano and later cello; Jeff was reluctant to play piano, and we're all happy he relented; another true story, though not one that happened to any of us-it was based on a document that made the rounds of local newspapers detailing the futile (and bitter) efforts of a Seattle movie theater owner to close the Pike Street Cinema and open one in NYC; I remember being struck by how he blamed the cities for the failure of his businesses, as though they owed him something; I remember also finding it touching, since running a small independent moviehouse has always been one of my quiet dreams; wish I had changed the Morrissev quote to "debate it when our friends become successful," as I have since done for live shows; many people's favorite HD song, and definitely in my top 5. "(This Is the) Thrilling Conversation (You've Been Waiting For)," another massive title, another case of lyrical importantitis, built on the trusty AAAA rhyme scheme; LOVE the distorted bassline, love the second set of "ation" rhymes, culminating in "tintinnabulation" (and a little ringing on the cymbals to underline it), and love the Stringfellow/Gibbard Beach Boys harmonies; label president derided song for being "too clever by half, like XTC" (specifically "Respectable Street"), which sounded like victory to me. "Loyalty Bldg." is our only stoner jam and is very long, but charming—we had a LOT of fun that night; it's a real building in downtown Portland; lyrics reference several headlines from Irish newspapers. and other random tangents ("Esther Forbes, meet Howard Fast"); best tambourine performance of my life, which is saying something. I only wish you could hear the original version of "Underground," as performed by This Busy Monster, if only to see how radically the song was transformed by our slavish interest in Radiohead; inspired by Death Cab's inclusion of a Revolutionary Hydra song on their first album, we wanted to acknowledge Bellingham, and our friendship with TBM, with whom we played many weird shows with on the way to the middle, and to reach for a dark, expansive dynamic that we'd been trying to get at with our own songs (cf. "Defrocked"), and which was suggested by Christopher Possanza's malevolent-but-vulnerable songwriting; re-writing "Underground" felt like a more original gesture somehow, a hybridization of things we liked, and

things we could do; this is beyond question the most powerful recording we ever made, and the hardest and most satisfying to play live. "The Same as Being in Love" began life as the the middle section of a never-released song called "You Look So Happy" (the word "love" is intact on that version; still don't understand that choice) and the back half of a medley whose front half became "Thrilling Conversation"; for all that, I feel that the song is a perfect, concise statement of the incremental stages heartbreak, culminating in the line that feels the most like something I would write that I ever wrote— "attraction-introspection-diction predilection" is a lot of showy rhubarb in one sense, but it also defines the emotional tumult of my adolescence and twenties; looking back through the binoculars of my 30s, I feel deep conflict about the times chronicled on the first two HD records, and the ideas we all had about everything, but at least when I listen back, I can hear with absolute certainly that we meant it all, and that's worth a lot.

AARON: King James Version is a great album. I've felt that way ever since June of 1999, when we sat down at the Village Recorder in LA, having just finished the first "final" mix of the album, and listened to the whole thing from start to finish. Considering everything we'd gone through to get to that point, and (especially) everything that was still to come, it was a pretty amazing evening.

I seem to recall that we went into the recording of *KJV* (after completing a handful of demos at John & Stu's) optimistic and excited, if a bit weary from a year of touring, and all that came with it. This was what we'd been waiting for, after all; one of the main

reasons we wanted to be on a major label in the first place. We wanted to make a real album. A big album, in a big studio. An album that sounded the way we sounded in our heads. An album that was paid for by $somebody\ else$.

And we did it. Sort of.

We had our share of difficulties in the studio, owing partly to the fact that we were each starting to develop opinions, methods, and tastes that didn't necessarily fit together. The making of Merrymakers had been completely, necessarily collaborative. None of us knew what the hell we were doing, so we were dependent upon being greater than the sum of our parts. KJV sounds to me like a band trying to figure out which way it was headed, and discovering that it was headed in four different directions at once. In a good way, most of the time. The real fun got started during the mixing (especially the second round) and subsequent label difficulties, but that's a very, very long story, and, as Kurt Cobain said, "That legendary divorce is such a bore."

The important thing is the songs. My favorites, if I had to pick (it's not easy): "Why I'm Lonely," "Loyalty Bldg.," and "Underground." "Humility" would make the list if we had played it the way we do today, which totally kicks ass, if I do say so myself. My not-so-favorites: "Sad Sweetheart" (just never did it for me) and "Thrilling Coversation" (boring to play on the bass, which is totally my fault).

I'll leave the song-by-song analysis to the other guys, because if I even started to go down that road... Oy.

JEFF: Something Aaron, Evan, (even Sean) and I had always talked excitedly about in signing with a major

label was the prospect of an "equipment advance." In those days it was standard practice for labels to set aside separate funds specifically for new instruments, amplifiers, cases, etc. for the band. Over the years we'd seen and heard of others, having signed label deals, showing up at shows with new instruments and amps. Now it was our turn!

When we got our advance it was split four ways (of course), and then came the glorious day to go on our shopping spree: cases for Evan (no more having to carry his hardware in a case meant for golf clubs), a new bass rig for Aaron, a Hammond portable organ for Sean.

And for me? I had no idea.

I had loved the idea of the equipment advance. But I had never actually thought through what I wanted. I was not a guitar player, but rather a guy who played guitar in a band. I remember being in the music store on Second Avenue with John Goodmanson, suddenly realizing I didn't know what I wanted, or what to get, and feeling very much like an impostor. I knew I should probably get a nice amplifier, and another guitar.

For the guitar I picked a sparkly blue ESP semihollowbody guitar. Hollowbody-style guitars have a piercing clean sound, sharp attack, little sustain — perfect for the jazzy line-player who lives mostly halfway up the fretboard on the top three strings, churning out runs and solos. In short, pretty much a perfect guitar for everything I was NOT. But I didn't know any better, and everyone loved the sparkly blue finish.

On tour it quickly became apparent that the new toy served to do nothing but diminish the things that I did well, while emphasizing everything I was no good at: lines I played sounded dry and stilted; the slightest slip-up in hand position seemed to silence any tone coming out of the instrument. Some nights it was the audio equivalent of watching a beginner driving a stick-shift car—a lurch forward, a bit of settling down, then suddenly an odd sound, grinding to a halt before launching forward again.

After the first tour I relegated it to backup status, and subsequently it was demoted to backup-backup status, and then finally it was used as the second guitarist's backup guitar. It currently sits at home, unused (email me if you're interested in purchasing a sparkly blue Schecter).

The amplifier? I selected a Vox AC-30 based on remembering that it sounded good on a live session of "Angel of Harlem" in the movie $Rattle\ and\ Hum$ (recently I went back and realized it was actually a Fender Twin – whoops). There was initially nothing too remarkable about it – I ran it alongside my main amplifier rig. After a while, like the guitar, I left it at home, the other half of my \$4,000 mistake.

That is, until a couple years ago, when repairs to other amps necessitated its use solo. And I finally understood why these amps were prized. It was like driving a performance car—the immediate response, the ability to communicate nuance that other amps would run right over.

So maybe we did know what we were doing back then—it just took a few years longer than expected to figure it out.

EVAN: Here's the thing: "Authenticity" should have been on the radio, and that's that. By the time Harvey Danger was making *King James Version*, we were in a bizarre and rarified world in which we could actually think about people hearing our songs.

I'd hear what we were doing and think about LA, or about our manager's reaction. That wasn't what we wanted to be thinking about--not while writing, for crying out loud!--but it was impossible to opt out of. Forward!

Nothing could have been more different from our first record. I think that undigestible fact nearly killed us. How do you stay authentic within an inherently inauthentic reality? Our first album was based on a relationship we had to each other, to our instruments, and to our community that was no longer true; if we weren't going to fake it, what the hell were we going to do?

The answer is King James Version, which sounds surprisingly awesome to me now. Once again, John Goodmanson was our center, helping us through the doubt and—let me be frank--terror. We practiced at his studio and got mixdowns of our work at the end of the day; there's really nothing more decadent than that. John was made of equal parts smoke, diet Coke, and the sweetest laughter you ever heard from a guy in a ponytail. Having recorded another few albums since then, I feel now that KJV is really about John taking care of us. Because of John, we were able to create imaginary new selves who could write new songs for a new album.

The first "Carjack Fever" made me dance in the rain outside our house. It started life as a slow and stately thing whose chorus was, "Hey hey hey hey hey hey hey heyayayy..." and it made me glad to be alive, and I jumped up and down on the sidewalk and sang my joy to all Ravenna.

The album version of "Carjack Fever" was, I think, the last song we recorded. John and I filled my snare drum with pocket change. Sean played his

Cru-Mar organ to death, and I still miss that thing's sound. The feedback feels wild and we wrote the new "choruses" right there in the studio. It sounds to me like we'd finally figured out something we'd been missing for months--something about looseness.

"Loyalty Bldg" does the same, but gets there via the organ, the silly little drum fills that still make me happy, and the secret sound of Sean knocking an empty water bottle against a music stand. Everything is structured, and all the big sounds are in place, and it sounds more like a "real" record than Merrymakers, but happily the corners are still filled with with the junk of our lives.

"Humility" was my furthest accomplishment on drums at the time, and it still sounds the most like the drumming I do now. "Underground" is the direct result of the one successful party Harvey Danger ever threw, when we had This Busy Monster play in our basement. I remember walking down the steep wooden stairs and getting my face blown off by their song. Later, when we were doing our version, I couldn't get the sound of the banjo out of my head; having my dad play banjo on our record is one of the moments I'm proudest of in music. Marc Olsen was a hero of mine, and he played on our record too. These, these are the benefits.

Ultimately, King James Version doesn't sound like a record full of hit songs; neither does it sound like kids in a basement practice space. It sounds almost imaginary. It WAS mostly imaginary. We found some sliver of space between our old authenticity and our new "Authenticity," made possible (for me) by keeping in mind one ironclad rule of life, hollered by Sean at the end of "Show Me the Hero": "JUST BECAUSE IT'S META DOESN'T MAKE IT ANY BETTA!"



Little By Little...

- 1 Wine, Women, and Song
- 2 Cream and Bastards Rise
- 3 Moral Centralia
- 4 Little Round Mirrors
- 5 Happiness Writes White
- 6 War Buddies
- 7 Picture, Picture
- 8 Cool James
- 9 What You Live By
- 10 Diminishing Returns

Recorded 1/05 at Robert Lang Studios, Seattle, WA Released 9/05, Phonographic Re-released 6/06, Kill Rock Stars Produced by **John Goodmanson** and **Steve Fisk**

JEFF: The seed for making what would become Little by Little... was planted in my brain while watching a VH-1 documentary about the making of U2's Joshua Tree. Watching the dynamic between Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, it occurred to me that it would be great to try and get John Goodmanson (who'd produced our previous two albums) and Steve Fisk (who we'd done some weekend recordings with) to work together again; they had done so many years ago but had gone their separate ways since. I'd always assumed that there were going to be a third HD album at some point, if only to get us out of the limbo state everyone was in post-KJV.

"Wine, Women, and Song": Sean asked me to accompany him on a few occasions during the hiatus period (hey, tomato/tomato) for a couple piano/voice appearances; a few times we played some Randy Newman songs. I remember thinking he'd like this one. The guitar bit is a personal favorite, even though it features the only recorded trill I've ever played (or will likely ever play). LBL really started with the recording of the demo for this song.

"Little Round Mirrors": Probably the best thing we've done. Certainly the one I'm proudest of yet. I remember Michael buzzing with excitement after the take; later hearing strains of the rough mix through the floor and thinking, "did we really do that?"

It might seem odd that it wasn't until ten years in that the piano would start to be a dominant instrument in our music, especially given that it's an instrument I've played since I was four. The truth is that it took that long for me to figure out what not to play; rock music is a tricky business at more than four notes at a time. The trick, as they admonish you in writing: Show, don't tell.

AARON: Who would have thought that in 2004 we'd finally figure out how to have fun being in Harvey Danger? It was pretty clear from the moment we finished the demos for "Wine, Women, and Song" and "I Missed It"—ostensibly for a solo project of Sean's—that we were on our way to a full-fledged reunion of the band. The fact that the 10th anniversary of our first show was just a couple months off made the timing perfect. By the time we played that show, we had also finished "War Buddies," "What You Live By," and "Moral Centralia." The rest of the songs came over the next six months or so, many of

them initially sketched out in Sean's apartment and finished off during last-minute cramming sessions in the weeks before the recording. Along the way, we found Michael Welke, whose inclusion would go a long way toward turning us into a real band again.

As rough as "Little Round Mirrors" was the first few times we attempted it as a full band, it was clear that it would become the heart of the record. "What You Live By" is a sentimental favorite of mine, having been written during a difficult time in 2001 when everything seemed to be ending. During recording it became something very different than I would have ever imagined (somehow I always pictured it being played on a beat up old acoustic guitar, sitting on a back porch at dusk), but it's still one of the best things on the album. Michael's rhythmic contributions breathed new life into "Cool James" and "Moral Centralia," two songs that have roots in the olden days. He pretty much pulled that stuff out of his hat minutes before they were recorded. "War Buddies" is a great example of Steve Fisk's influence on the album. Who else would have taken the backing vocal in the last verse and morphed it into the weird electronic, almost string-like sound that sustains to the end of the song? Genius.

In terms of time spent in the studio, the recording of *LBL* was about as bare-bones as the *Merrymakers* sessions. Just over two weeks to record and mix the whole thing, basically. The result is, I think, our most successful attempt at capturing the actual sound of our band at a particular moment in time, and our most cohesive album. Definitely the most purely satisfying, rewarding recording experience we've had. Good job.

SEAN: I hope it goes without saying that the ellipsis is a full-blooded part of the title, and stands for "...the

look of the country changes because of the men we admire," our second Paul Newman-movie-related album title. "Wine, Women & Song" was the one that made me think there was a good reason to be Harvey Danger again-I'd been having occasional peace- and music-making get-togethers with both Aaron and Jeff through the wilderness years of our break-up (no. not hiatus), 2001-2003, with often exciting, but rarely galvanic results; "WWS," born on the black Henry A. Miller rental piano in my apartment living room, felt like a whole new thing for us, something we never could've done before, and something I suddenly, vividly, wanted to do a lot more, hence my prodding of Jeff to play more piano than guitar, hence the dominant sound of what became the album—less volume, less attitude, more space, more ambitious melodies, a totally different dynamic for a totally different band, we hoped (otherwise, why bother?). "Cream and Bastards Rise" (yet ANOTHER reference to Harper, the movie we got the title of Merrymakers from) completely belies everything I just said; a rocker born of the Velvet Underground—the band that gave the incipient HD a common tongue at our first practice attempt in 1993and the realization that most of the rest of the album wasn't very rock; as is usually the case in our rock songs, the bridge is the best bit; lyric is semi-personal but also founded in a serious disgust for the presidential nomination/election process; Rolling Stone said this song was about the music biz. I always think of Al Gore when I sing it. "Moral Centralia" began life near the end of HD v.1, but never came together rhythmically; the jaunty acoustic piano and distorted bass in the instrumental bits became the key, while the lyric walks a delicate line between confession and speculation in exploring the relationship between desire and

narcissism; tried to get the "I'd like to go back 10 years" lines into at least 3 different songs over the years, so pleased they finally worked. "Little Round Mirrors" is the album's apex, certainly one of the top 3 or 4 we ever did; it arose from and is dedicated to people I met while touring in the Long Winters, people whose devout immersion in the culture of music registers both as a kind of schizotypal syndrome, and a lifeline to the people immersed in the other side of the pool; when we finally got the French Horn line ironed out, it felt like we had finally touched the hem of McCartney's garment, if only in my dreams. "Happiness Writes White" succeeds as an utterly sincere, retroactively poignant, depiction of uxoriousness and paean to a 10-year relationship that saw me through my 20s—even though my early 30s saw it disintegrate, the song still rings true; it was written in answer to a challenge from the song's subject (whose name always sounded to me like it should have been sung) to write a simple love song, not another ambivalent one about how complicated emotions can be; I often wonder if she was daring me to do more than just write lyrics; credit to Jeff for knowing what I meant when I said it should sound like The Zombies, and then not making it sound just like The Zombies, and eternal gratitude to Aaron, Jeff, and Michael, too for being willing to stand with me (and not for the first time) while I sing something so richly, indulgently personal. "Picture, Picture": more rock AND more talk! "Cool James" began life as a kind of stomping grunge pop anthem attempt in 1996 before we all became embarrassed by having written something that could be described thus: I love the nervous edge of the new version, the leanness, the harmonies, the Steve Fisk atmosphere, the bass solos (reliably my favorite part of any HD song if I don't mention otherwise), and the "Lawrence of Arabia" line, maybe my favorite HD lyric of all; plus, that's Debussy's "La Mer" sampled (illegally) as the song ends, a little highbrow brushstroke by Mr. Fisk that never fails to delight. Aaron and I wrote "What You Live By" during the wilderness years and performed it several times at little cabaret and club shows that were attended by few; of all the things we tried, that one stuck around; Jeff liked it too, and heard the jazzy piano rhythm that dominates the recorded version; in effect, the recorded version of "Live By" is two songs in one—Aaron's take and Jeff's interpretation; I just like the line about the Marco Polo motel on Hwy 99; I remember playing an early demo of this song to HD's former manager when he asked to hear what I was up to; he heard the words about dying and despair and melting into stagnant puddles and so forth and just laughed, "Not looking to get back on the pop charts, are you?" Well... I love the way "War Buddies" dresses up in the sheep's clothing of political songwriting to chart the limitations of intense friendship—it felt like a big risk to use that language in a discursive way, but the intention is the opposite of flip, so in a way it felt like the risk was the reward (and Evan, who was always the first and most important lyric reader, signed off on it in a really affirming way when I sent him the album, which was a weird experience for him anyway, so it passed the crucial test); this song has come alive in performance, with a groove at the front and a steady drive at the back that testifies to the massive talent and flexibility of Michael Welke on the drums; after two solid years of eggshell walking (not least during the sessions for this album, during which he heard many of the songs for the first time), he has emerged as a full-fledged co-pilot, and rhythmic cap tain of the band, which is the biggest relief of all. The very last recording session we did before we broke up (and I mean right before) was a disaster that left us all reeling; the last song we had written before going in was a huge clusterfuck of unfocused, unfinished Weezerism beset by every member of the band-including Mike Squires and John Roderick, good friends who had been hired to play rhythm guitar and keyboards on tour and who, in the absence of a tour (or any solid leadership) joined in our collective dysfunction with a vengeance-playing overelaborate, undercooked parts that didn't fit together all at the same time, and no one would stand down for the sake of the song, because everyone needed to feel equally important; a perfect illustration of the lack of focus that had overtaken the four of us, none of whom had any desire to chop through the thicket of non-communication, regret, resentment, and torpor that had set in when our label had abandoned King James Version; we played a final show in Portland on April 21, 2001, opening for Hazel and Quasi, two brilliant bands, but nonetheless, first on the bill, after all that. Why bother? Still, I liked the lyrics I'd written to that instrumentally unwieldy final song, and kept them around just in case we ever got around to putting our house in order. Then, when Jeff and I started getting together to write more regularly in 2003, he gave me a really gentle, really simple instrumental (same chords as "Purple Rain," I think) and asked if I thought we could do anything with it; "Diminishing Returns," its melody completely revised, fit perfectly; all that was missing was a bridge, which came along when Aaron joined us, and that fantastic little Grandaddyesque outro; I never meant for the lyrics to mark a theme song for the band, but I have come to think of the song as just that-an admission that the pleasure of making music the way we do far

outweighs the external vicissitudes that define it as a way of making money, a way of getting famous, a way of being cool, a way of being lame, or whatever; the song says that in my mind, we-Jeff, Aaron, and I, and also Evan and also Michael-are bound together by something far stronger than a career: We're bound by a musical interdependence that I can hear on every song on every album we ever made, the very definition of a whole being bigger than the sum of its parts. But also a whole being intimately familiar with the contributions of its parts, so the whole becomes more beautiful when seen from within. If you look at it right. I can't wait to hear that interdependence progress on the music we make in the future. And I like the line about progress being defined by your position the bridge as it burns. Clever.

MICHAEL: An excerpt from the journal I kept during the recording of Little By Little...: "Little Round Mirrors,' what a song. It finally became whole in the studio, two takes before THE take. We had worked on it during rehearsals but I wasn't 100% behind my drumming decisions. What ended up on the record was something I hadn't expected. I want to believe the spontaneity of the song added a character we didn't expect, but who knows..."

Being a part of this record exceeded any expectations I may have had. I had the pleasure of working with some really great people and musicians. How I ended up behind this drum kit, I really can't say.

With that being said, I am reminded of a quote I read while in the studio. Someone questioned Keith Moon regarding his position with the Who after newly joining them. He said, "I was never officially asked to be in the band. They just kept asking what I was doing next Monday."

Rarities, B-sides, and Covers

Ballad of the Tragic Hero (Pity and Fear)

"Flagpole Sitta" B-side, 6/98

SEAN: Another apocryphal title; I made up "Ballad of the Tragic Hero" right at the last minute and we never once used it; lyric inspired (sometimes word for word) by the six months I spent working at the Seattle Weekly in '95-'96, a time when the paper was seen (accurately) as being hopelessly out of touch with the city, unless by "the city" you meant late-middle-aged white folks with wealth beyond the dreams of avarice; I guit and was fired simultaneously; "some touch, some dabble" is lifted from Lou Reed's poem "If Half the World is H20"; "P&F" was very nearly the theme song of the movie Cruel Intentions (originally Cruel Inventions, but the studio was afraid kids would think it was about science), but I was reluctant to change the words and botched the deal; a movie version of the song, contrived after the fact half to please the filmmaker and half to satirize him, exists; it's pretty funny.

AARON: This song, a favorite of mine at the time, sort of fell through the cracks. It had the misfortune of coming along just after we finished *Merrymakers*. It's one of our more obvious Pavement rip-offs—and we were fully aware of that when we wrote it—but it still has a certain charm.

Oh! You Pretty Things

Little Round Mirrors EP, 10/06

I Missed It

Little By Little... bonus disc, 9/05

SEAN: The first song Jeff, Aaron, and I wrote for

HDv.2, aided initially by demo drummer Ira Elliot's Stones-y groove, made me realize I wanted to be a lead singer in a rock band again; it was like a stage of a rocket—we needed it to get flying, but once aloft, found it wasn't quite necessary anymore; we aren't a Stones-y groove kind of band; still, the bridge is killer, as are the various synths on the recording, played by Steve Fisk, Aaron, and me; I also really like the words, especially when I think of good old Joan Fontaine in Letter From an Unknown Woman or Rebecca, never suspecting that she'd turn up as a rhyme in a Harvey Danger B-side.

Plague of Locusts

King James Version bonus EP, 9/00

SEAN: The ultimate so close, yet so far song in our catalogue; all lyrics straight from the Bible—where Christians take their cues to celebrate the suffering of non-believers—(except, "hallelujah, it's raining frogs," a reference to Jennifer Holiday, and "from being to nothingness," after Sartre), more great Gibbard/Stringfellow Beach Boys harmonies, and a brass herald worthy of the end times; as a track, it's fantastic, but break it down to its elements and it's almost embarrassing; the same could be said of a lot of rock music, I reckon; at least it's anti-religion.

My Human Interactions

King James Version bonus EP, 9/00

SEAN: The lyric is based on my experience as an extra in a commercial for Wolverine work boots, for which my payment was a pair of said boots (not that awesome) and this song, which was my favorite HD composition when we wrote it, and just never quite came fully alive in the studio; the horns are pretty

great, though; in my mind, the song has become a tribute to supporting performers who give their all even when they know it won't be seen or appreciated—to "bless this fleeting moment" and act/sing/play/dance for the joy of doing it—retroactively dedicated to Margo Lisk, the girl who played the body double for Martha Plimpton in the "Save It For Later" video, who threw herself into a ridiculous dance with 100% commitment, and whose face was never on camera.

The World's Greatest Living Dancer Unreleased, 1996

SEAN: No one who hears this song ever seems to know if the lyric about a small town dancer who becomes arrogant when he gains international fame then falls, literally and metaphorically, from grace, is meant to be funny or serious, and I don't know either; I think the song, however, taken as a whole, is genuinely beautiful and gentle, and if only *King James Version* had had room for another six minute mid-tempo ballad full of cellos, a choir, and hard-to-decode lyrics about things no teenager would ever care about, "TWGLD" would've been right up in there; Ben Gibbard and Allisyn Levy lent vocals to the recording that still give me chills, as do Jeff and Aaron's guitar/bass interplay.

Sometimes You Have to Work on Christmas (Sometimes)

KROQ Christmas compilation, 12/98 Sometimes You Have to Work on Christmas (Sometimes) EP, 11/04

SEAN: I can't believe how well this song turned out, and how much it thrills me every holiday season to hear people tell me it has become a staple of their playlist; born of an assignment to write a song for a charity

CD, the memory of actually working on Christmas at the Varsity Theater (and watching Spike Lee's $Malcolm\ X$ for the 50th time while I did), and the conviction that there just don't seem to be very many good Christmas songs in the world, this one remains one of my proudest moments as a (co-)songwriter.

Incommunicado

Little By Little... bonus disc, 9/05

SEAN: On the original, band-released pressing of *Little By Little...*, the song felt appropriately light on a moody record, but when it came time to re-release on Kill Rock Stars, it began to feel slight; I defend it on the grounds of the vocal interplay between me and Rachel Bowman, and that I always love when Jeff and Aaron switch instruments.

You Look So Happy

Unreleased, 1999 **SEAN:** Never performed once after being rejected for *King James Version* consideration on account, variously, of being "too Weezer" and "too personal" (probably true), and, of course, for having the word

variously, of being "too Weezer" and "too personal" (probably true), and, of course, for having the word "asshole" prominently shouted in the chorus (tried "bastard," it didn't work); I have always secretly cherished this song as a gem that might've been part of KJV, like a lost scene from the Orson Welles cut of The Magnificent Ambersons; we all loved the instrumental parts and the ending—careful listeners will note that the opening lines of "The Same As Being in Love" were cannibalized from the middle section (the word "love" intact on this one, shrewdly), and some may have heard the ending section as its own self-contained snippet, entitled "Being a Brief Note of Apology" on HD bootlegs (and in the film We Go Way Back).

Cold Snap

Little By Little... bonus disc, 9/05

JEFF: The sound or timbre of an instrument often strongly dictates which way a song wants to go, which can be a good thing or a quick route to a generic dead end. The Rhodes electric piano is a distinctive sound, and I'd been curious about it for some time. A friend tipped me off that he'd seen one in good condition at a Lynnwood pawnshop, and after much struggle I loaded it into the trunk of the car and took it to the studio. This was the first of several songs to use it.

SEAN: The most soulful sound we ever achieved, still the song wasn't ready for *King James Version* and didn't feel right on *Little By Little...*; John Roderick's two guitar solos here—one the result of crafty editing by John Goodmanson, the other the result of JR's genuinely inspired touch as a lead guitarist (shades of George Harrison)—make the recording for me.

AARON: One of the best songs we've written, but it's had a troubled history. An early version of it, recorded during the *KJV* sessions, never came together. We revisited it later, when Roderick and Squires were in the band, and made a difficult but entrancing recording of it. We came back to it yet again while recording *LBL*, but it didn't quite hit the mark.

Save It for Later

200 Cigarettes soundtrack, 2/99

SEAN: Recorded for the soundtrack (and closing credits!) of an MTV-produced botch job of an all-star movie called *200 Cigarettes*; MTV asked for us (hard to imagine now, but at the time it seemed pretty logical) to cover a song from 1981-'82, but didn't specify which one, so we submitted ones by Devo, David Bowie, XTC, even Duran Duran; label demanded an

English Beat song we all liked passively, but not loved; nonetheless, the five of us (by then, John Goodmanson was basically George Martin) made something totally unlike everything else we ever did, a total in-studio concoction, the closest we ever came to '60s pop; later found out the label was re-releasing the English Beat catalogue in the U.S., a fact they'd neglected to divulge—one of the shadiest label manipulations we ever met; a semi-hit on TV (great video by Evan Bernard, despite the worst haircut of my life), we never played it live. And the movie sucked.

JEFF: Every musician has his bag of tricks. I'm pretty sure I stole the music box trick in the choruses (one of my favorites) from The Eels. It sounds remarkably upbeat for how downtrodden I remember everyone feeling when we recorded it.

Defrocked

King James Version bonus EP, 9/00

SEAN: Very late one night after an unmemorable HD show, I got mugged a few blocks from the apartment where I lived with Evan. For months after, I had trouble sleeping for more than an hour or two at a time, and my waking thoughts were filled with images of violent retribution and chronic, ungovernable depression. I don't know exactly how this experience translated into the words of this song, but it did, directly, if abstractly; "Defrocked" is a hazy state of the union address from my 23-year-old psyche, accompanied by the most structurally and dynamically ambitious music we had yet made, a major leap forward for us, unreleased because King James Version couldn't contain both it and "Underground"; nevertheless, my favorite Harvey Danger song, lyric, and recording, the true, elusive sound of our soul.