1. Could you tell us a bit about your musical histories? Did the musical tastes gel immediately in your earlier bands together or did it develop over time? What were the bands like that predated the Garbage and the Flowers? Does anything you recorded around the time of ‘The Sweet Nuthins still exist? If it does, do you think it would ever see the light of day?

When I met Helen, we were both in our last year of high school. She taught me how to skip school. I’d catch a bus out to Khandallah where she lived - high up in the mountain suburbs that surround Wellington – feeling sheepish in my school uniform. Helen would put her school uniform on and go out in the morning with her school bag and then wait in a side alley beside her house for her parents to go out to work. Then we’d meet up at her place and listen to records. We both liked The Velvet Underground though I was more pro-active in searching out for their records in the “import bins” of the local record stores or UK mail order catalogues. I especially remember her playing me the early REM records which I tolerated. And bits of classical music by composers like Bach that she liked. I probably played her a lot of New Order’s *Power Corruption & Lies* and other Joy Division stuff which I had been a big fan of going back a few years by then. Our musical taste was pretty similar, all the touchstones of indie music that we picked up listening to the local student radio station Radio Active and what we gleaned from copies of NME and Melody Maker which we’d scour in newsagents or libraries for the latest info. The Birthday Party, Roland S. Howard and Lydia Lunch’s *Some Velvet Morning* EP, The Gobetweens’ *Cattle and Cane* Helen loved especially, The Saints, British punk rock like Wire and a bit of Pistols, of course, Blondie, The Ramones and New York Dolls, The Stooges were huge, all the stuff that would soon be coined “alternative music” by the press. In the weekends when her parents were home, Helen would lock her bedroom door and we’d kiss while Sweet Jane blared on her stereo until her mother would come knocking on the door. For us like a lot of other New Zealand teenagers at the time Dunedin – a small town in the South Island – was as important a cultural centre as New York or anywhere. We were both serious acolytes of Flying Nun: The Chills’ *Pink Frost* 7”(which was like a holy relic, you’d meet other kids from school on their way to and from buying it from the record store on the day it came out ), The Verlaines’ *Death and The Maiden*, The Stones EP, anything and everything by The Clean or The Great Unwashed, Chris Knox and The Tall Dwarfs, The Bats’ first EP *By Night*, the incredible *Other’s Way/Anyone Else Would* double A-side by The Doublehappies, the heavenly, guitar chiming first album *Send You* by Sneaky Feelings and The Rip’s first EP *In A Holy Place* which was where Helen and I first encountered Alastair Galbraith. Alastair was the only Flying Nun rock star that we eventually got to know a little bit and he twisted the arm of Twisted Village to release our first 7” record in the USA.

HELEN: I think my younger brother got me into Radio Active. Andrew was more into fast punk like Flipper and Husker Du but we liked lots of the same things. I had heard the VU a few times, but didn’t know it was them, I had an impression of this European romantic sinuously beautiful thing. (Probably Black Angel’s Death Song). I didn’t like them at first, it took a while to get with the microtones, but we did have pretty identical tastes, me and Yuri. I was more crazy about Bob Dylan than Yuri. I fell deeply for Bob – like no other.

Yuri gave me The Bangles’ Going Down To Liverpool/ Dover Beach 7’ inch, for my birthday not long after we met. I was impressed how they took the poem Dover Beach by Matthew Arnold and captured its lonely mood and tried to copy the curling style of Susanna Hoffs’ singing. They were Big Star nerds too. I thought they were glamourous and wore the best clothes.

We would meet at Wellington Public Library, now an Art Gallery, on its long front lawns, described in beautiful prose by Jean Watson in The Balloon Watchers. Kids went there to study under the stairs and just hang out. It had alcoves and places to hide. You could thank the WPL librarians for some of the TGATF sound. We borrowed obscure tapes of Northern Indian Carnatic Music, Sufi Music. Free jazz records. Libraries were a big part of the culture in Wellington. I used to listen to our four track recordings for hours at there, under the big soft headphones in one of the listening booths when I was planning our compilations. The equipment they had was high quality and it was peaceful. There was a library in each small suburb of Wellington, linked by windy roads. There were more libraries than sports fields. We had a great local library in Khandallah in an art deco building and the small and intellectual Slavic librarian used to suggest books for me and try to deter me from reading Vogue. Now Google is our librarian and we have everything at our fingertips.

YURI: I’d started trying to put original songs together before I met Helen, thinking that I was following the one rule set by punk rock: enthusiasm is everything and method nothing. I’ve never had much patience with practicing music so for me the only chance I had to play was to make up my own songs which I couldn’t, by definition, stuff up. I remember my father getting really infuriated with me, coming down to my bedroom where I was bashing away on an acoustic guitar, grabbing it out of my hands so he could tune the strings. My father was no musician – though he had been forced by his mother as a young boy back in the USSR to learn to play the violin – but he taught me the important, singular lesson that you have to tune an instrument before you can actually play any chords on it properly. *Or do you?*

Helen had come from a different place having had a lot of classical music training on the viola. When we met she was even in the National Youth Orchestra. But she was a bit lazy like me too, I think, so sometimes she had to improvise her part in the orchestra.

HELEN: Yeah, it was especially Mahler and Wagner (so hard), I would mime some of the notes with my bow. Violists were in short supply, somehow, I got away with it because the parts for violas are usually hidden in the middle of the harmony in orchestral writing, till the 20th century.

YURI: That she even managed to half get away with that only demonstrates what an amazing musician she’s always been. She can improvise with real soul and melodic richness which is a rare quality, I think, in the improv fields which has a tendency to pomposity and suffers a bit from the “Emperor’s New Clothes” type syndrome. But, anyway, what she hadn’t dared to try until she met me was to write a song so when I played her some of my paltry attempts I was instantly showered with lavish praise which went a long way in giving me the confidence to carry on with it. And then she was so good at finding the right harmonies to back up my simple musical ideas and as she is quite the wordsmith herself we have ended up collaborating on a few pretty good tunes over the years. *Cinnamon Sea*, which is going to be our new mini-album, I think contains some of our best work in terms of song writing so I really hope that it can be released soon.

We went through a few band names when it was just me and Helen: The Falling Spikes (which was what The Velvet Underground were first called), The McDaniel Sisters (a cross between The Brothers Gorgonzola and Bo Diddley’s real name, Ellas McDaniel), The Orange Orbs (with our friend Paul Williamson) and The Sweet Nuthins, among others. We put together a few tape albums for our own amusement including one called *Ivory Girl* by The Sweet Nuthins. I doubt any of it will ever see the light of day though there is one song that comes to mind – *Don’t Get Taken For A Ride* which was written and played entirely by Helen – which would definitely be worth digging up one day.

HELEN: The Orange Orbs and Falling Spikes were jammy, The Sweet Nuthins did lots of ballads and had a music box feel. They did the arpeggio songs - Lisa, Counting Stars, Sandy Skies. The first bands sounded nice and the songs were good but there wasn’t much chemistry till Paul came along, and the other members of TGATF Mark I.

There was also a joke bluesman (Blind Boy Furry Johnson) and the Yahoody Manoohan Orchestra. Those guys never got round to recording anything, but had cassette art created for them.

From Paul Williamson of the Orange Orbs we learnt A D G D, he taught us bar chords. Just enough for me to tag along with song writing in TGATF.

We must have been serious because Yuri did dish washing and bought a chic black Ibanez and I saved up to buy (new ) Old Pinky, another solid body, by cleaning in the Uni holidays at the American Embassy in Thorndon. We were escorted around the desks by GIs, one called typically ‘Joe’, who was sleazy and called me ‘Miss America’. Once I moved a piece of paper and he pulled his gun. I almost died for rock n’ roll.

At uni, we took weird drugs at parties like, Baxters Lung Preserver - an ancient NZ liquid cough medicine that contained opiates immortalized in song by Anri Tist Ke on ‘Ados Silicon Sealant’. I had a swig and recall seeing a massive black serpent writhing across the walls at my first flat at Grove Rd. Its gleaming girth took up most of the wall. New Zealand wasn’t quite modern then in 1987! Our bands weren’t ‘psychedelic’ at the time but we were never going to be prosaic.

We were on the edges of the Wellington Free Jazz scene even though we didn’t know it. A trombone player I had a crush on called Carl (before I met Yuri) was at Wellington Polytech with one of my best friends Claudia I’d been in a string quartet with. He was in the jazz stream, he also played with Bill Direen and probably Stuart Porter. We thought of Bill Direen as our Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht rolled into one. We were probably one party away from meeting them. It seemed everyone was in a band. Even my cousin Russell was in a punk band called the Irritants. And my brother was in Acid Reign and later the Avil Retards

My musical history before meeting Yuri is kind of long. I learnt violin from age 8 but lost interest by 11. I remember being very little and thinking every time you put on a record, tiny people had to gather round a microphone, like a ‘40s one, and perform for you. Grandma said I had perfect pitch for singing. Sharon O’ Neill was my first live concert. I loved the atmospheres in her songs, especially ‘Asian Paradise’, steamy and dreamy. My father took us to see her at the SoundShell in Mt Maungauni, NZ’s version of the Gold Coast – we had a bach there. It looked like a Flintstones drive-in - the stage was a huge cement seashell.

 I was obsessed with reading and books in my teens, along with music.

My father sang light opera in his younger days so he was pretty musical. I remember going with my father and brother to Johnsonville Mall in the next suburb north on pay day Friday, where he bought a tape cassette player and the Beatles’ 1962-1966 tape. Those simple things cost lot of money in those days, New Zealand had trade embargos and everything was so expensive. It was a like a Soviet-bloc country economically, pre Rogernomics but we didn’t know that. My cousins in Hamilton (upper North Island) had lots of great records. Like the Jam’s ‘That’s Entertainment’. I liked the melancholy, and listened in the carpeted lounge with Uncle Johns’ deep-sea diving bounty for company– corals, shells, a strangely life-like conga eel.

I picked up viola at secondary school as all my new friends were classical musical nerds and I didn’t want to miss out on all the music groups - baroque orchestras, string quartets, choirs.

Our music master Mr Dobson and the Head Mistress at Wellington Girls College were crazy to win all the regional music comps so subsidized lessons from NZSO tutors, in the labyrinth of rooms under the assembly room stage. My friend Claudia got tutored on the timpani, I wish I’d done that. We had the lessons in our lunch hours. If we were doing well academically, the teachers gave us time out of class to practise. It didn’t occur to me to write songs, that was something that happened in another world. I liked naff bands like U2 and Big Country, Simple Minds till sixth form (Year 11). My parents’ records – the Christmas Concerto by Corelli, Limbo Rock, The Kingston Trio.

I never had good intonation on the viola, not for want of trying - I practised A LOT. Which was excruciating for my parents, luckily my singing is better so that’s a relief.

 I’m best on drums. I had an almighty fight with the engineers AND LOST to get the viola turned down when we were mixing, Eyes Rind, to this day it still irks me.

I really preferred music theory and did written exams at the uni to grade 7, sitting in a classroom on a Saturday morning. I had a little red book called The Rudiments and Theory of Music I learnt from. It has all the basics for composing and arranging, - there are rules for classical music. And then you can be a music stylist. You can go much higher than I did. And do your ‘letters’ ATCL, like a degree. All those jazzbos like Ornette Coleman know this stuff inside out. Music camps. School music tours. I did a lot of listening to the radio in bed. I remember the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy serial vividly. All sorts of weird stuff on 2ZM, which had a pretty interesting playlist - like Holger Czukay’s post Can group Snake Charmer who I found my way into via The Edge from U2. It was ‘oingo boingo” and featured slap bass. I still think Eno’s production on The Unforgettable Fire has some of the best production you’re likely to hear on a rock group. I think I told Yuri that in our first discussion – he eviscerated me. He was a good debater.

When I started listening with Yuri to records, I became more interested in how music was made up, constructed – ‘cause he’d get to me explain what the chords were. After being indoctrinated with music theory and learning to read it, I kind of ‘see music’ in patterns. I think he listens more for atmosphere, emotion.

Lugging the viola in a case the size of a baby coffin up to the Polytechnic to my second teacher, almost knocking people out getting out the bus door. There I learnt about ‘just intonation’, a method of fingering where you listen for overtones to signal you’re in tune. He was the leader of The Wellington Symphony and had studied this technique in Czechoslovakia. He had diagrams and charts and an American wife. I would go up into far South Karori when the semester was over and laboriously go through my pieces. It was like the Wild West. No houses beyond his street, just empty hills and the next stop was windswept Makara Beach where me and my brother saw apples bobbing in the surf. My first teacher lived in Khandallah, where my family lived. I had lessons on a Saturday afternoon and then remember rolling down hills that linked to the Karori range with another little girl after them. (a la Chris Lilly). One time I’d eaten sausages that day and almost threw them up.

My last two years at school, I did what lots of teens do and wagged school, listening to records. The year before, School Certificate, had been so intense, I needed a break. By the 7th form, (Year 12) it was two or three days a week, zoning out. I got put on daily report for a while. It was good to meet Yuri as most of my friends were very academic, winning all the school prizes, and didn’t approve of my behaviour, there was a sense of shame. They also didn’t share my taste. I used to go to gigs by myself, quaking with fear, at Victoria Uni Student Union Hall, for bands I loved like The Church, and the Clean. Dad would pick me up afterwards. When I met Yuri, I finally had someone to go to gigs with.

Out 7th form workload, some of the arts subjects, were at the level of 3rd year university. Same for Yuri. The teachers were preparing us for Scholarship Exams, the equivalent of French Baccalaureate. And we had 2 sets of exams, Bursary and Scholarship. I had recurring dreams for 10-15 years about re sitting them. It was always some subject like Maths or Economics that I had to cram in one night the whole syllabus –which was pretty much like the reality. We did do cool stuff like the Odyssey of Homer in Latin though for which I am forever grateful. That was a great subject. Anyway, that’s a bit of tangent but by the time we met each other we were so over the enormous pressure of exams, and essays, it made both of us sick. Getting on buses and wandering freely, going to gigs, being lost in this ever expanding world of rock n’ roll, was such a release.

Yuri’s family was much stricter than mine, First generation immigrant stuff. Mine might not have cared even if they had found out I was wagging.

I was also sent to Speech and Drama till my last year at school. Private classes where you learnt poems by heart and practised reading aloud. A bit like old-fashioned elocution lessons. I read the White Goddess by Richard Graves, whose premise was poetry was a magical language and there was a true poetry with ritualistic function. The monsters on the Stoned Rehearsal cover know about that. Influential Book. Poetry was highly esteemed in my family.

1. In a number of places you’ve mentioned a band you used to know and play with called The Brothers Gorgonzola that you described as’ Wellingtons Rolling Stones. Do any of their recordings exist? they’re virtually non-existent in the online realm today.

I’m really glad that you’ve asked us about this. The Brothers Gorgonzola were a band fed on the fresh entrails of the original Wellington punk rock scene with its gritty skinhead/art rock/ avant garde jazz inflections. We were too young to play with them nor to witness the late 70s/early 80s scene that the Gorgonzolas must have emerged out of as teenage fans of bands like Shoes This High and Fishschool. A guy I knew who led a small mod revival scene in Wellington replete with long green parkas but no mopeds and who knew what a huge, proselytizing Velvet Underground fanatic I was, one day in 1986 told me that if I liked the VU I should definitely check out The Brothers Gorgonzola. After that I started noticing the Gorgonzolas’ little black and white photocopied posters pasted around down proclaiming to be “the best band in world” and when I went with Helen to one of their gigs at a venue called Thistle Hall we soon found ourselves in drunken, blissful, totally jangly heaven. After that Dunedin didn’t matter so much anymore. We’d spot Francis or Paul or John or the other various members of the Gorgonzolas around town – or else their cool, proto-grungy friends that were always at their shows with them and were fantastic musicians in their own right like Merlene Chambers or Jessica Walker (of Shoes This High, Fishschool, Sparky’s Magic Baton and later The Electrick Church, also sister of Jane Walker who had been in Toy Love and could be seen around town sporting a faux leopard skin coat such as the time we saw her at the Nico gig at the St James Theatre) – and we’d literally follow them up and down Cuba Street and then later when we’d meet up we’d exchange notes about our exciting experiences that day stalking The Brothers Gorgonzola. Gradually they all began noticing us as we were always at their gigs, standing apart from their gang, probably looking a lot more young and innocent than a lot of the rest of their clientele, some of whom were genuinely scary, criminal-looking skinheads that were always a feature of life on the inner city streets of Wellington in the 1980s. Once we heard that Francis Tunnicliffe the singer and Paul the bass player were having a garage sale and we went along, rifled through their stuff in their lounge room and basically refused to leave, hanging around for hours really quite starstruck. Helen eventually proudly walked away with Francis’ famous semi-acoustic guitar that we’d seen him so often sport on stage, crudely yet wonderfully painted in bright yellow (which Warren Lasky later and much to Helen’s disgust scraped off to reveal the original sunburst design) and I with the cherished memory of Paul telling me how he couldn’t listen to any other record at the time than The Stooges first album. That sort of thing meant an awful lot to me back then: finding connections and resonances between me and people and things that I liked. Like, after I had begun delving into country music stuff like Hank Williams and Johnny Cash for song writing inspiration, I was thrilled to lay my hands on a rarely seen Dutch documentary on The Stooges in which Iggy Pop candidly talked about how he based the chords of *No Fun* upon Cash’s signature *I Walk The Line*. Knowing that made me so happy and justified my own take on music. Or – in a different but similar way – like when I was 17 and poring through books on rock music in the bookshops downtown for information about my heroes and I found out that Lou Reed and Jonathan Richman and Iggy Pop were all Jewish like me (although Iggy only via his adopted parents, the Osterburgs.) Or better still when I read in one of those books that Lou Reed actually went to university like I was going to and that Iggy must have been smart as a kid cos he was chosen to do the valedictory speech for his graduating year at high school. I must have sensed then that rock’n’roll music was essentially working class and not an art form that necessarily belonged to middle class, educated types so that made me – whom my parents were gearing up for a brilliant university career – a bit of an outsider.

The Brothers Gorgonzola were the first band that I heard someone criticise for not being *tight* enough. Which turned out to be wrong, actually, as when we got to know them a little it turned out that they practised a lot, even all the time really as for a while they were one of those bands that basically lived in the same house together like The Beatles did in the *Hard Day’s Night* movie. In fact, they were so tight that they could afford to be loose on stage and that was what was so good about them. You would go to their gigs and of course you’d recognise each song but it wasn’t like they went through exactly the same paces exactly the same way each time they performed them. But that’s not how a lot of people like their music – they want to hear the song they heard and liked on the radio reproduced exactly the same way live. And that’s fair enough. Sometimes it’s just one particular hook, one particular sound that catches people’s attention and emotional engagement with a piece of music and that’s what they’re waiting to hear … on repeat. Nevertheless, The Brothers Gorgonzola weren’t like that, their songs were *concepts* not particular arrangements. In that way their approach was close to jazz which is a ream that seems to run through a lot of Wellington music and this allowed their songs to reach for a certain emotional and musical peak each time they were performed. *Marshall Speakers* was one of our favourites in their set, a sort of a paean to rock’n’roll, building slowly but inevitably up against a backdrop of heavy, descending chords – a semitone down, a tone down, another tone down to reach the bottom and then the distorted guitar chords hauled you breathlessly right back up to the top again only to start the descent down time after time just like your uncle Sisyphus – while Francis seemed to improvise a lament to love gained then lost: *I’ve got a stack of Marshall speakers…*I was amused and gratified to realise that this was basically the same chord progression that Mick Jagger and Keith Richards had used when they penned the lovely and sad *As Tears Go By* which Marianne Faithful around the same time in the mid ‘80s reprised in a similarly Gothic way to the Gorgonzolas take on those same melancholily descending guitar chord intervals.

I wish that The Garbage and The Flowers had practiced as much as the Gorgonzolas did. That would be my ideal and I think we really could have reached for the stars if we had. It was just that we always had trouble getting together for rehearsals and so we ended up *de facto* practising on stage which is an entirely different and much scarier proposition, the primal fear and necessity of which has, unfortunately, never left me.

There are a couple of tracks by The Brothers Gorgonzola floating around the net, one from a compilation LP and another from a double A side single they once made with a much less exciting band. They were poorly documented like a lot of Wellington underground music. I wish I had taken better care of their live cassettes which they sold locally and which were testament to their true, raw power. I hope Torben Tilly still has them.

HELEN: There was a peculiar dance their acolytes did where you waggled your wing (arm) like a chicken and ran up to the stage and back. Which we really got into and practised at home to their tapes. Everyone did it, it was quite a scene. People rushed to the front when they started. Getting obliterated. They were really rhythmic and did stuff like rumbas with rock n’roll themes. “Alcohol!” was one song that sticks in my head. They were our band, not some blow-ins from Dunedin, and we would spot them around town, carrying guitar cases. Far more raggedy than we ever looked and much much older.

But they weren’t that much. You know how when you’re 18? People even 2 years older look so mature. They were kind of the poster band for ‘dropping out’, they really lived it. I remember feeling embarrassed telling them I was at uni, too straight by far. Now in my old age, I love being a square.

I used to catch Kevin Hawkins, the guitarist from Shoes This High, playing around town, usually under the moniker of Screamin ‘ K. Hawkins. He made a young, Velvet Underground maniac like me salivate, watching him perform to perfection a beautiful, acoustic version of *Ocean* in a small vegan café in lower Cuba Street. Or in full electric mode in a hole in the wall, short-lived construction site venue called Kill City on Perret’s Corner, riffing on a section from *Sister Ray*, singing “Whip it on me Jim, whip it on me Jim, whip it on me Jim” and bringing out all of the psychosexual energy implicit in Lou Reed’s lines so brilliantly and so violently. He was an amazing guitarist and one of New Zealand’s greatest punk rockers. I used to see him walking up and down Cuba St all the time and he seemed like a gentle soul, stopping to talk to my friend Daniel about how he had just realised he was gay. Looking wan and pallid in his light brown suede jacket. Sadly, not long after this time, he passed away from liver disease in his hometown of Masterton, I think. That was an occupational hazard for musicians in Wellington back then, liver disease. All the best ones were slowly going yellow. You have to check out a Kevin Hawkins track on a very early Flying Nun live compilation LP called The Last Rumba which chronicled the last night of the famous venue in Auckland. Kevin plays another George Henderson penned number called *Song with No Future*, this time referencing the closing refrain of *God Save The Queen* and ending up beating The Sex Pistols at their own, nihilistic, anthemic game.

1. You described ‘The Spirit Dog Hotel’ as the physical and spiritual base for the Garbage and the Flowers. What significance did the spirit dog hotel have on the formation of the band?

YURI: The Spirit Dog Hotel was an old fibro shack hidden in the bush on the hill in Roseneath high above the cold waters of Wellington Harbour. A little cable car took you up the steep slope from the sea and onto the craggy little path that led to the Hotel, under windswept native coastal foliage from whose dark corners little goblins would leer as Helen and I returned from days out taking acid, careering through the streets and botanical gardens of the city. I lived there with my best friend, Daniel McLaren, in the days when Helen, Paul Yates and I formed The Garbage and The Flowers.

I jammed there for the first time with Paul and Bryn Tilly when we put a song together called “Sweet Nicki” and Paul and I sussed each other’s guitar styles out and realised we could really play well together. I wrote “Carousel” there on Daniel’s tanpura which his girlfriend’s dad had brought back from India and whose four droning strings Daniel had tuned to the basic octave, fourth and fifth intervals which I used on that song. I was proud that I did little to determine the musical structure of that song other than take that giant gourd of an instrument down from the wall where it was hanging and pluck the strings in order. I thought that it was a bit like Found Art. Later with Helen we recorded the version that we would release on our first single, on Daniel’s Fostex 4-Track cassette recorder. We knew we’d made something special and that night the ghosts of the house seemed to demand payback for the favour they allowed, making Helen moan and toss about so much in her sleep that I ended up cursing and shouting at them to leave her alone. (Daniel later told me how he would make a point of always welcoming the spirits of the house in whenever he’d come home and, at night, bright rays of light would flash from corner to corner in the room where he slept.) We heard stories that someone had murdered their lover in that house. That might explain why it had been left so dilapidated and undeveloped over the years. We wrote many of our first batch of TGATF songs there, like “Nothing Going Down At All” with Paul. Songs seemed to come naturally to us there.

The Spirit Dog Hotel was home to another band called Anri Tist Ke. When we were at high school Daniel had a synth band with Bryn Tilly called The God, heavily influenced by The Human League and early Heaven 17. Andrew Foster (who would later as a Radio New Zealand award-winning producer discover Flight of the Concords!) and I decided to form a rival band, Antichrist, which Daniel promptly joined and later Bryn too after we had rearranged the letters of the band name and added others to rebadge ourselves as Anri Tist Ke. A lot of the stuff on The Deep Niche comes from when Helen came on the scene and both Anri Tist Ke and early The Garbage and The Flowers were playing and recording a lot at the Spirit Dog Hotel. “Crocodile Tears” appeared on mix tapes produced by both bands and remains a bone of contention between them.

HELEN: Walking to the Spirit Dog Hotel late at night, Yuri named the band. Me, him and Paul were coming back from town in 100 mile-an-hour winds, I remember clinging to lampposts at Roseneath shops before we could finally cross the road. It wasn’t unusual in Wellington, these big fronts coming off Cook Strait. It was inspiring being so high above Harbour, it was inspiring going to The Spirit Dog. I got paranoid thinking ‘The Garbage’ was a reference to my messiness.

The track to the Spirit Dog often got muddy and my most persistent memory is of tying grey plastic bags around some black lace up suede shoes I’d stolen from my mother and sliding around. They never got ruined but later got stolen from Bats Theatre back stage during our 3-day ‘residency’ in the Fashion Festival.

I think Carousel was composed a few days before I rocked up and Yuri played it to me over the phone? I wrote some lyrics for last two verses and a bit of a chorus going down from Khandallah on a steep bush track which ended up at the wharves. I caught a Sunday bus up to Roseneath with my notebook. Yeah, we knew we were onto a good thing, it all just flowed so naturally. That night I thought we shared the same dream and Yuri thought so too. Daniel coming for us with axe! Then we got up and played our guitars. We were sort of riding the tail of a couple of not so great trips. I’m glad something came out of it. It was beautiful there with all the tangled trees.

We were a bit hippy-istic and Yuri and Daniel especially used to talk about auras. “He’s got quite an aura.” “His aura has completely changed.” As if it was in their faces, like a traffic light change. But they always ended up taking the piss and Paul had a great sense of irony. We mostly sat on the floor to play. Paul would kneel with his pedals.

There was a band room set-up in the lounge and we would all share instruments. Sometimes Paul and Yuri would manipulate each other’s pedals if we were recording tracks. Playful!

I really like the 4-track recordings we did there best. The sounds were all mashed up. Sometimes if we needed more tracks , the boys would use the complicated system of ‘bouncing’ when mixing live. I do like the distortion, it’s the oil in the painting, and helps everything bleed together.

When TGATF got going and I was the main drummer for a while, I used to get there early to the Spirit Dog and practice along to the drum parts on Bob Dylan’s first three electric records for hours. ‘Queen Jane Approximately’ was my big template, the loping drums, oh, and to Schoolly D. It was really nice of Daniel to let me do that. He was usually painting in his room, redoing antique maps of New Zealand in water colours, this strange job he had for an antique dealer while I binged and bonged.

I didn’t really do any writing on my own till I started keeping a diary, and we needed lyrics for TGATF songs. Kristen got me onto it, from Entlang and Dress. She’s a great writer and has a dense imagistic style. She was often at the Spirit Dog, and played in Bolo Bolo with Bill Direen. She would leave scraps of paper around with poems on them, which I admired.

When we were playing and recording a lot there, I started hearing music in my dreams. It seemed really unnatural and truly psychedelic, nothing human.

1. Other than Leonard Cohen and the Velvet Underground. What else did you draw inspiration from in your songwriting process?

Dunedin, The Dunedin Sound, was really a dream to me. I don’t have an insight into what it was like in reality. Radio with Pictures used to be the only good thing about Sunday nights back then in NZ. It was like a much cooler, alternative Countdown and was hosted by a sardonic chick called Karyn Hay. In 1981 I became aware of rap music thanks to that show, sitting on the couch watching “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five with my father too, standing with his hands in his pockets in front of the TV the way he used to, as equally engrossed as I was seeing something so completely new for the first time. Later in 1983 when I was 15 they played an old segment from the punk rock era where I first laid eyes and ears upon Chris Knox. It was just a few seconds of The Enemy playing in a small venue in Dunedin but to me it was like seeing The Beatles in The Cavern. Chris Knox was snarling and growling and pushing his mohawk-crowned, beak-nosed face right up against the TV camera, singing the most mesmerising, slowly drawn out and impassioned melody that I’d ever heard while the shadowy, thin duke figures of Alec Bathgate, Mick Dooley and Mick Dawson played through the glorious three chord structure of “Pull Down The Shades” in that inimitable slow punk groove of theirs, as heavy and deliberate as a tractor, the sound that must have 5 or 6 years earlier also entranced Peter Gutteridge, the Kilgour brothers and Martin Phillips as well as all those other teenagers that would go on to become the main bulwark of Flying Nun. It’s interesting to listen to old live recordings of The Enemy from 1977 and 1978 – and there’s a bunch of them that you can dig up on the internet now – and hear what is basically that same poppy Dunedin guitar sound already there, pretty much fully grown, beneath the punky distortion.

*Back home we lie in our beds. Is the day really day? Is the night really night? Won't it please go away?
There is nothing to see so we pull down the shades.*

HELEN: Yuri has always been more punk than me in his influences. I was a bit revolted by Chris Knox and the full punk theatricality. I remember seeing John Cale (the Artificial Intelligence period), at the Electric Ballroom, upstairs on Victoria Street. This great summer, of ’86 when so many amazing acts came through Wellington from overseas – The Go Betweens at the Wellington Festival, Look Blue Go Purple, the Residents, Nico. I remember seeing the Died Pretty posters in Manners Mall, and this virulent rumour swept the town that the front man was Iggy Pop’s son. Incredible. Could it be? We were fresh out of school, had our first jobs and A-Bursaries (like Austudy) and had money to go out with. But anyway, JC played his piano and a few people were heckling good humouredly, which Yuri was really into, and John too. He called back to them. But I was scandalized, this was a genius - playing the piano - an untouchable. How could they! None of this cavorting.

I guess I thought I was still at some string quartet recital, at the Wellington Opera House. My first viola teacher, Mrs Gold, who was the Wellington Chamber Music Society Secretary, got me a job as an usher there, in my mid teens. We had a strict below the knee dress code, I wore a tartan pleated skirt, a baggy pink jumper and my school shoes.

It was a pretty comprehensive classical music education. All the famous quartets in the world played that venue – the Amadeus Quartet, theBorodin Quartet. People who had played together for decades, perfectly and psychically unified. The free schoolgirl labour sat in ‘the Gods’, the vertigninous top floor of the Opera House, and served refreshments at the after concert back stage.

That and going to NZSO concerts, sitting in the cheap seats, hearing the whole Western canon, and drilling myself in remembering long passages of music. I guess I’m always afflicting these classical structures, onto our arrangements – and the pleas for “more arpeggios”, in the songwriting.

YURI: Pretty soon after meeting Helen I started exploring the kind of music that would have inspired my musical heroes like Leonard Cohen and The Velvet Underground, going back into the past rather than hanging out for the Next Big Thing in the present. Just about the last thing me and Helen tried to get into on the basis of a recommendation in the NME was The Jesus And Mary Chain who – like us – used “Uptight: The Velvet Underground Story” by Gerard Malanga and Victor Bockris and all of its beautiful black and white photography by Billy Name – as a kind of bible, certainly a fashion bible and would refuse to go out dressed in anything but black. Though I think they were pretty cool now and have stood the test of time but their debut album I went out and bought the day it was released in 1986 and sold to a second hand record shop the day after. We were looking for something more original by that stage and we found it in the past. Bo Diddley was very important to us and our ideas about getting the right guitar sound. Johnny Cash. Bob Dylan I resisted for a long time because I considered him too commercial but the floodgates opened and I’d listen to all 17 minutes of *Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands* on repeat all night.

I learnt the basic eight bar blues chord progression and then later what I find is its more interesting variation in country music. We were enthralled by the sad legend of Hank Williams and were especially taken by the songs written by his manager, Fred Rose, *Waltz of the Wind* and *No One Will Ever Know*. It was amazing to learn how to put together a few simple chords and produce an effect that sounded universal and timeless.

HELEN: Pre TGATF, we did do a lot of research. At one stage we were even studying ‘50s sheet music, drawing on older things like Broadway hits, mainly for the flavour of the words. There were bins full of it at Slow Boat Records, on Cuba Street, surrounded by op shops where everyone got their clothes. One I’ve still got is ‘Yellow Bird’ that the Mills Brothers sang. Five people wrote it! “Yellow Bird/ High up in Banana Tree/Yellow Bird you sit all alone like me.” It was probably linked to Lou Reed’s youth - maybe he said in interviews that’s what he grew up hearing in New York. We got in pretty deep with the VU, led by the revelations of their influences in the Victor Bockris book. Come to think of it now, the unreleased ‘Yellow Beast’ is probably our unconscious bastardization of Yellow Bird. It certainly has a similar crooning ring to it.

*# I don’t care ‘bout anything at all.*

*Cause I woke up to see a brand-new day.*

*And if you want to hear my voice just call.*

*The sky reflects another broken door.*

*The Yellow Beast polishes his horn.*

*He’s got you on his silver hook.*

*And reads you like an unstitched book.*

*Nothing walks at all. They try to but they only fall*….

More influences. I bought a book of poetry by Delmore Schwartz and fell in love with his face on the cover. Lou’s lecturer at Syracuse who he said inspired him to write. He wrote the famous short story ‘In Dreams Begin Responsibilities’, philosophical and meditative. It had a kind of esoteric back layer which I really like about Bob Dylan’s lyrics too. I wrote an essay on his work in American Literature 202 and developed a complex about having a small nose. I’m always chuffed if our lyrics can capture a similar enigmatic quality. When the words are symbolic of something else.

Later, when I was living in Sydney with Sara, we got big time into the music of Gram Parsons and his work with The Byrds and Flying Burrito Brothers, his heart-wrenching, honest covers of the old time hits of George Jones, Merle Haggard and The Louvin’ Brothers. Gram kinda taught me that songwriting isn’t the end all and be all, that interpretation matters and most of all that in the end it’s a matter of soul, not anything flashy but honest. Take his version of *Streets of Baltimore* which is a million times better than the original. It’s no surprise that he was studying to be a priest before he became a full time rock’n’roller. From there we discovered Dillard & Clark and what a great, soulful songwriter Gene Clark was too.

Finally, I have to mention that there’s always been a rich ream of Big Star running through The Garbage & The Flowers. Our friend Lasky brought Helen and me copies of their first two albums from one of his record buying trips to Auckland back when we were 19 years of age and I was living on The Terrace above the city in Wellington. I think Alex Chilton’s guitar playing has been a big influence on me.

HELEN: Later in Sydney, we lapped up Bob Dylan’s Chronicles where he gave out secrets like about arranging chords in sequences of odd numbers ... which lead to us arranging ‘Elizabeth’ into five four. So it wasn’t boring.

1. How do you think your individual musical journeys would have unfolded if you hadn’t met?

I don’t think mine would have unfolded at all. I think I’m pretty much a wet rag, musically speaking, without Helen. Even though most of our songs have been kind of engendered by me, I don’t have the killer instinct, the confidence nor the musical chops to finish that much by myself, unfortunately. She’s a great writer, a great inspirer, editor and producer. I’ve always relied upon her right from the very start to let me know if a chord progression, or a particular rhythm or anything really is worthwhile.

On the other hand, I doubt that she would have had much of a musical journey without me, either. But in her case it would have been more a matter of not having enough interest in it. I think she’s always been more of a writer, despite having all that prodigious musical ability. I don’t think I’ve ever been that great a musician *per se*. But then very early on I decided that music was much too important to be left to musicians anyway.

I used to think that Helen and me had stolen Paul away from whatever it was that he was otherwise going to do musically, probably something that was very punk rock. He did later play in a band called Pit Viper when he moved to Auckland, with Rob Lundon and Rosy Parlane, which was very punk and extremely noisy. Paul played with his back to the audience and his guitar right up against the speaker cabinet while Rob was out the front fulfilling his dramatic Pete Townshend moves. They were like what Helen and me first read about The Jesus and Mary Chain and what made them seem so intriguing, that they’d go out on stage and play a wall of distorted guitar sound and then leave after 20 minutes. Except that in Pit Vipers case their wall of noise was a few layers thicker and they were done after about 2 and a half minutes.

HELEN: Who knows? Without Yuri I might have been an unemployed Goth with a few babies – not that there’s anything wrong with that. Probably some sort of writer but very secretive. Musically? If I hadn’t met Yuri, I might have just ended up being in the Victoria University Orchestra, scraping away on my viola, in a different social group entirely.

 I’m not an especially confident person – who is? When I’m having that feeling it always caves in, and I feel awful so anything that takes the attention off me is where I thrive. I’m much more comfortable with song writing, or arranging, that privacy, than performing or practising. He’s a naturally a bit more confident and can finish things so it’s a good combination, me operating on his songs, though sometimes we write half in half, we just sit down and do it. It’s good having 2 lyricists, one can throw in a line that makes all the others more interesting but to the listener it’s seamless. He really cogitates and can slow down and rewrite his lyrics, mine, I just go splat, it’s whatever hits the ground sticks. I always thought he had incredible talent. Maybe it’s the gypsy blood, his maternal grandfather was a gypsy who settled down in the Ukraine.

1. Could you tell us a bit about the music culture you grew up around in Wellington? Was it similar to the South Island’s Flying Nun scene? Did you feel like you were a part of that sound in the south-island?

I was part of the fandom of the South Island sound. We used to learn about music going through the stacks of records that you could borrow from the Wellington Public Library downtown. I heard a lot of stuff like that back then. You could listen to the records on headphones in there or you could actually take the records home with you which is pretty amazing when you think about it now. I borrowed *Boodle Boodle Boodle* by The Clean one day, I must have heard about them at school as their first single actually went to Number 1 in the national singles chart in New Zealand. Anyway, first time listening through I didn’t think much of it, wondered what all the fuss was about. Not sure why I bothered to give it a second go but I did and I don’t know what it was but all of a sudden I was hooked and I was part of that cult from then on.

Later when The Garbage and The Flowers started doing gigs around Wellington in 1991, people used to say that we were like a throwback to that South Island sound, like we had arrived a bit too late and were in the wrong place anyway.

Wellington had a connection to Dunedin early on via George Henderson and the scene around The Amps and the And Band and The Spies who in their turn had their connections to the Wellington Free Jazz scene which was centred around The Primitive Art Group & Braille Records. Helen and me as youngsters used to spot those Primitive Art Group guys playing their weird acoustic music, dressed like real bohemians with their moustaches and goatee beards and second hand clothes in various arty cafés around town. Much later on we met the main brains behind that scene, Stuart Porter, when The Garbage and The Flowers went to record at Angry Dog Studios in Manners Street downtown, a studio which Stuart ran with Brendon Ryniker – who had been in The Wart, one of the few Wellington bands with a Flying Nun presence – and where Richard Sedger, formerly of The Amps, also lived. That was a real experience meeting those guys, they were like from another world, much cooler than ours. At the time Stuart had turned his back on that sort of jazz music and he and Brendon and Brian Hudson had formed a band called Tongue, heavy industrial gothic punk though again with a free jazz edge. Tongue was uber cool and uber heavy. They spent much of their time perfecting a set of studio recordings of their songs and, as the studio belonged to them so there was no need to pay by the hour and finish up as your money ran out, they never stopped working on them, perfecting Brian’s songs continuously and meticulously, rerecording parts until they were unrecognisable from the original, putting Brian’s vocals through effects until it no longer sounded like him. Brendon spent a lot of time mucking around on his guitar with a little yellow digital delay pedal which was the first time I saw one of those things which today, of course, have become so ubiquitous. Tongue blew a lot of people’s minds as they were one of the first bands in New Zealand to use samples live in their gigs. The Dunedin cognoscenti were, apparently, mightily impressed by Tongue when they went down to play in Alastair Galbraith’s much celebrated Super 8 Club, the second time with Helen on vocals and viola. They were treated like gods by those Flying Nun and Xpressway stars but would have been way too Wellington cool to repay them with any show of respect in return. There was a story that somebody ended up pissing over somebody else’s floor during their stay in Dunedin. It was all meant to have been the result of some kind of sleepwalking disorder but back in Wellington the tale was nevertheless related with glee and a certain amount of pride.

Helen played in Tongue and Stuart played in The Garbage And The Flowers. I felt very special when Stuart agreed to fill in on bass after our original bass player, the inimitable Heath Cozens, decided there was more fortune to be found picking bananas in Bundaberg and flew off across the Tasman. Stuart stuck around in the band until we eventually imploded a few months later. I think he liked how we didn’t seem to give a fuck what we played when we were on stage and he could phase out on whatever chemicals he was on and enjoy improvising without too much pressure to perform in any particular kind of way but just enjoy playing the music. I thought it worked well with him on bass, our sound became tougher and darker. Especially because Tongue actually trained Helen up in that direction, teaching her to really scream out loud and bring out a bit of a violent edge in both her viola and her vocal delivery.

1. Do you think the creative community surrounding you helped refine the improvised, noisy sound that would be synonymous with TGATF, as you enjoyed bringing people on stage to improvise instruments, wail and dance?

Tongue had one quite triumphal concert in Wellington in late 1991 in a warehouse behind Webb Street at the south end of the Te Aro flats. There was a real buzz about them by that stage and everyone from every faction of the underground music scene in Wellington seemed to have turned up to watched them perform with obvious awe and the respect reserved for such elder statesmen of the scene. Maybe we all knew how much musical history was wrapped up in Stuart Porter’s and Brendon Ryniker’s latest band but it was also about Tongue’s cutting edge use of technology and their dark, industrial sound. It was very much a progression of The Gordons and The Skeptics’ sound which was widely loved by everyone at the time and, in fact, Nick Roughan from The Skeptics was the engineer that night.

It couldn’t have been a more different atmosphere from the audience fare that I had got used to at your average gig by The Garbage & The Flowers where the same kind of people – if they were around at all - would turn their noses up at us. In fact, Nick Roughan was also the sound guy at our first ever gig and when at sound check Paul started up our song *Catnip* with his signature guitar feedback squeal, Nick jumped up on stage to ask where that terrible sound was coming from. That was when we supported This Will Kill That at The New Carpark which became our regular venue over the following year. Jeremy Armitage’s This Will Kill That and David Coventry’s Amazing Broccoli were like the leading edge and doyens of Wellington grunge music at the time which was just before Nirvana exploded and made this particular post-Pixies sound mainstream. These bands emerged out of the Hutt Valley hardcore skinhead punk scene I think but by the early nineties their hair had grown long and Jeremy in particular was swaggering around like a sexy, bottle blonde, leather clad hard rocker making a noise that owed as much to Sabbath as the Pistols and certainly a lot to Sonic Youth who I, incidentally, detested. Amazing Broccoli was the first band I heard after The Pixies to use the soft-loud-soft dynamic. The Garbage & The Flowers I guess fitted in like their slightly annoying, psychedelic cousins. We started bringing people like Amanda Raisin and Sam Penny up on stage to wail and dance partly because it was seen as the wrong thing to do at the time but mainly because it was part of a free kind of aesthetic that we found ourselves growing into.

I remember in the late 1980s thinking about the direction that popular music seemed to be taking, very much under the influence of the kind of experiments with sound and sampling technology that the Shocklee brothers and Carl Ridenhour (aka Chuck D) of The Bomb Squad were doing especially with Public Enemy, something that reached its peak of creativity with the Public Enemy album *It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. They were getting everyone used to the juxtaposition of quite a lot of seemingly random and abstract sounds , stuff that you’d usually only hear on avant-garde records by somebody like John Cage was suddenly on the radio and TV and the dance floor. They kind of ended up going too far with it and then James Brown’s lawsuit against their sampling of his music kind of put an end to that era of experimentation. But I reckon they changed the way everyone heard music and after that noise became part of the pallette of popular music without anybody really noticing it. My friends in Anri Tist Ke were at the time working in a similar vein, under the influence of George Clinton and Parliament as well as a lot of hash, they were throwing everything into the musical pot and stirring it right up.

Perhaps this was why people’s ears were already primed for grunge which kind of finally broke punk rock into the mainstream. This was around the same time as The Garbage and The Flowers originally formed. I was careful to follow the lead of The Velvet Underground, of course. On the one hand there was La Monte Young , the Theatre of Eternal Music and the original Dream Syndicate, just intonation and the idea that John Cale and his friends would drone on the same note for hours and hours. We never heard any of this stuff but it was more the evocation of the music in print that inspired us. And then there was the big influence on Lou Reed’s side which was Ornette Coleman. The night before we were going to go into Angry Dog Studios in September 1991, Helen and I listened to Ornette Coleman’s Double Quartet’s album Free Jazz, the one with the Jackson Pollock painting on the cover and which we had borrowed from good old Wellington Public Library. I don’t think I really understood what was going on in that music particularly well at the time but we decided, nevertheless, that it was going to be our template for when we would recorded our song *Catnip* in the studio the next day. So that was a time when we did consciously decide to go down that road of free improvisation. And it turned out great. That was probably one of my favourite memories of playing music: Paul and I, just the two of us in the studio, adding our free handed guitar solos to the backing tracks of *Catnip*. I remember seeing Brendon’s girlfriend’s face in the little window that looked into the studio, an expression of surprise on her face like we were doing something unexpected and then afterwards Brendon saying that it sounded like free jazz in a rock format which was, after all, the idea.

I read in ‘Noise in my Head’ that you never really bothered practicing and just waiting until you played live. Why was being ‘tight’ never a prerogative for the band? Were you more interested in the emotional expression of improvised and ‘loose’ music, or was it in active defiance to a broader understanding of music?

Tongue were tight. The Garbage and The Flowers were loose as. The early nineties were the era of tight music. It seemed to be the only way a band could be complimented in the local music press in those days. We almost started reacting against that, getting looser and looser, inviting more random people on stage to dance and sing or play with us and knowing that it would annoy the hell out of some people. Someone, in a rare mention of us in a local music mag called Rip It Out said we were like a Christian band which was amusing. To tell you the truth, when I saw that there was a review of us I couldn’t bear looking at it. People were quite disparaging of us and still are, I think.

We did want to practice but it just happened to be the case that we ended up being a bunch of people that for one reason or another just couldn’t get it together to all make it to the practice at once. Plus once we made it onto the stage we were all quite shocked that, invariably being one of the support acts of the night, the sound system hadn’t been geared for us and so we all couldn’t hear what we played. I mean you could hardly hear what was coming out of your own instrument let alone anyone else’s and so what exactly *were* you supposed to do then? I suppose the answer to that question that the tight bands came up with was to practice so much that everyone in the band became an automaton within a larger automaton and that meant you could just rock up to the gig and go through the clockwork motions that you had learnt at practice together and that was what everyone called music. In the end we became quite relaxed about it. We’d spend ages before the start of a song just tuning up while the audience watched us and, quite naturally without planning it, the tuning up would slowly turn into the song itself as we, one at a time and then more and more in unison, had a tentative go at the chords and motifs of the song. That’s how *Carousel* developed as we played it live on stage and I remember being aware of how Stuart Porter the first time he played with us seemed to quite calmly join in with what we were doing, I suppose because he had all that background in improvised music anyway. I think our audiences in Wellington must have started to get into what we were doing and the psychedelic edge to our music that had begun to develop. Somebody told me that one time when we were playing at a benefit concert for Greenpeace with a bunch of other bands that it was once we got up on stage that you could see everyone’s spliffs start to light up in the early evening darkness. That was the first time, I think, that we were engineered live by Brent McLachlan - the famous drummer from The Gordons and Bailter Space. I don’t know if he even liked us that much but he was a great sound guy and some of our recordings that have ended up on vinyl owe a lot to the fact that he was behind the mixing desk.

HELEN: Yes, we were considered very unco - uncoordinated (and uncool) for our ramshackle mess. First we weren’t good enough to be ‘tight’ then it randomly became our style. It was pretty much accidental. We did a helluva lot of supports and would aggravatingly play far too long for the headliners. I liked the competitiveness. The others didn’t care. We were also frowned upon a bit for putting up our own posters.

The most extreme example of our unravelling was when I entered us into a Battle of the Bands – again at the Carpark Outer Limits Club. In the spirit of entrepreneurship or gaining some ‘chops’ so I thought. Amazingly, we got placed in our heat and continued on to the semi-final playoff populated by metal bands from the Hutt Valley. We ended up tangled in rolling tumbleweeds of feedback where the songs broke down completely - first time we did that. Paul was on fire, he was our Jimmy Hendrix that night. We got through about two ‘songs’ before the engineer pulled the plug on us as he was receiving death threats. We had beer cans thrown at our heads and incensed the leather-clad heavy metal fans even more by being agonisingly slow to get off stage. Luckily they had short arms. Stoned on codeine milk and so many pedals to dismantle, we got the Fuck Outta Dodge. We had no idea but at the very back of the venue were they who would become drone masters Surface of the Earth (also from the Hutt) and the music critic Nick Cain. Nick Cain later interviewed us for his mag Opprobrium and SOE became our friends. Donald J Smith from them was the Entlang drummer. There wasn’t any category called ‘noise’ then.

In 1991, Yuri’s parents moved to Australia. And at times, Heath, Paul and Torben were all flatting at his place in Taft Street, Brooklyn in the Southern Suburbs. We would sit around eating Mexican Cantina leftovers (where those three worked) playing Ornette Coleman, and the My Favourite Things album by John Coltrane – those cats could really take a tune apart. Public Enemy, It Takes a Nation of Millions. Though we didn’t practice heaps, we listened to a lot of music together. We read interviews with the Shocklee Brothers who spoke of having equally very high and very low tones in a piece. So we tuned the drums low and Paul would play really high anyway. Heath was kind of in that spirit too, he played all over the bass, pitch wise. Or ‘loosey goosey’ as he called it.

Like Yuri said, Hip Hop in the early ‘90s had a huge effect on rock and grunge. It’s all there in the unorthodox chord changes and Led Zeppelin and James Brown drum sampling. Everything loose and loping with slight off beats. We were right into A Tribe called Quest, and De La Soul. People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm and ***3*** Feet High and Rising were completely entrancing. They would Just throw anything into the soup, really light-heartedly. Schoolly D was our main man for beats , courtesy of Code Money, his DJ. We had two copies of his first record. When I was our first drummer, I’d just play his beats till it came together. See Rosicrucian Lovers. And most of the internal engine on ERAIB comes from Torben’s adapted Hip Hop beats. We dressed a bit like A Tribe Called Quest, all our peers did. Me and Torben had some funny fashions, old man’s raincoats, with Kangol hats.

“Beats that are hard, beats that are funky.

Beats that get you hooked like a crackhead junkie”.

A Tribe Called Quest, Excursions.

 An equivalent now would be Aboriginal art in the culture, the hip hop then was on another level. And we could go out and hear this music in it most massive form at nightclubs around town like Clares.

Once we saw a man weeping at Ali Baba’s on Cuba Street where we got our kebabs. You sat inside in carpeted tent booths to eat. It was very late and it was closed. Arabic music blared from the speakers. He was bent over the food trays, utterly desolate. Had we ever such a public show of emotion? That was an influence too, to see emotion flowing like that. We were pretty young, just kids. That kind of thing makes an impact. It was the opposite of macho, I guess. The tones of the music and the whole atmosphere reminded us of Ayler and Coltrane transmuting some kind of pain. That’s just where our imaginations went.

1. How do you find ‘Eyes Rind as if Beggar’s’ differs from ‘Deep Niche?’ As they were albums of demos from the same era of the band, how did you choose the songs that would fit into those separate LPs?

*The Deep Niche* was originally one of the mix tapes Helen put together very early on when the band was essentially just me and her and Paul so when we worked on a version to release on Grapefruit Record Club we tried to stick to that very early era even though some of the songs from the cassette we couldn’t use as they had already been released elsewhere. Eyes Rind As If Beggars was the end result of a protracted attempt to release an album that began as an idea to follow up our first single on Twisted Village, then through the mid 1990s when a deal was being brokered by Nick Cain to release it on Stefan Jaworzyn’s Shock label in the UK which had already released a couple of our tracks on their *Deep Funnels of Entry* compilation CD of Twisted Village bands and finally when Jeremy Steckler picked it up for its eventual release as a double album on The Now Sound in 1997. The songs on Eyes Rind As If Beggars reflect how we developed through 1991 and early 1992 into a band much more conscious of improvisation and noise, though to be honest, I didn’t come across anyone label anything we did as noise until a couple of years later when me and Helen were in a band called Dress with Kristen Wineera.

1. The Garbage and the Flowers has always seemed to have you two (Helen and Yuri) as the two core members, with revolving members coming in and out. Was this a conscious decision to always make the music new and exciting, or did it just kind of turn out that way? Did other members have much involvement in the songwriting process? Who is in your current line-up for the new album/touring?

The Garbage and the Flowers originally coalesced into a trio of Helen, Paul Yates and me. Later when we were lined up to play live for the very first time and we thought we had better get some bass and drums we enlisted Heath Cozens and Torben Tilly. Stuart Porter took over on bass and then Kristen Wineera when we reformed for gigs in Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland in 1997.

We would never have reformed The Garbage and the Flowers if I hadn’t convinced Paul Yates to come and join Helen and me in Sydney in 2004. The name of that band belongs to Paul just as much as it does to me and Helen. Just a little less to Torben also as he became such an important part of our original sound. Through 2004 and 2005 in Sydney we played with Jasmine Guffond from Alternahunk and Alien Christ, (around 1999 to about 2002 Jasmine, Helen, Torben Tilly and I were in a band called Flaberge that performed a few old TGATF numbers before also introducing some new songs like *Chinese Bangles* and *On The Radio* into our live set), Simon Lear from Lushburger and Grit Salute and Stuart Olsen who is a legend in his own right, also of Alien Christ, but who earlier had helped create the whole grunge sound back in the late 1980s when he produced his sister Zeb’s band, Matrimony, in Sydney and then when he and Zeb introduced big Matrimony fan Kathleen Hanna to what a riot it was to be a grrrl in a band and they formed Viva Knievel with her in Olympia and played around the US in the very early ‘90s.

Stu saw The Garbage & The Flowers as neo-primitivist and I was happy to go along with that.

I was extremely excited to be playing music with Jasmine and Stu as I got the impression when we played at and around the What Is Music? Festival in 1997 that these people – along with Lucas Abela - were the coolest musicians in the Australian punk rock scene at the time.

Unfortunately, Paul didn’t stick around long in Sydney with us as old tensions resurfaced and he left to play with his own band while The Garbage and the Flowers turned into a trio again with me and Helen and Stu manning the fort, ably assisted by my girlfriend Sara Shera providing the bucket bongs, controlling our two dogs Lilly and Lucy and acting as stand-in and let’s not forget Helen’s BFF Boris Johnstone, who’s still doing the rounds to this day.

So, no, it hasn’t been a conscious decision, I wish no one ever left the band.

Song writing is always a common labour when you’re in a band, I find. I always like everyone bringing their own ideas into songs. Everyone is involved to a lesser or a greater degree in the composition, arrangement and orchestration of songs though I guess there’s always one or two people who tend to play the role of impresario which is exactly why tensions may consequently arise.

HELEN: That wasn’t planned, the revolving door either. People went overseas or had other interests. Heath went to teach English in Japan to pay back his student loan. It wasn’t like there was any industry in New Zealand for so-called experimental music, not like Ride or My Bloody Valentine with Creation. I guess because me and Yuri are close, like family, we’ve always been in the same country to keep going with the song writing.

 HelWe actually reformed to play at Test Strip Gallery in 1996 with Stuart Porter on bass. Torben was back from art school in Sydney to play drums. It was a small room upstairs on Karangahape Road in Auckland. What a din we made, I had forgotten how wild we could sound after the genteel sounds of Dress. The music made me see my fingering arm turning into a branch, the origin of my viola! The wood spirit! Rad. We played in bare feet and none of the snooty Aucklanders would talk to us except our hosts. The next band Spacedust wore cowboy suits.

We can be a bit slack as Yuri said. Sometimes I’ll be working with other people and catch myself saying “It doesn’t have to be perfect”. And they’ll go “What?”. And I go “um…

Stoned Rehearsal is probably a product of that kind of approach. That might keep it exciting, I’m not sure. Is it a play? Is it a rehearsal? Ask the bucket bongs. We had had such horrific experiences with recording in the year or two prior to that – expensive Flaberge sessions where the sound came out dead, recording with an engineer at Torben’s who later wiped our tapes, DIY was the only way to go. Stu and Yuri used Zooms to record it.

The song writing always changes around who or how many are playing. And where. Just before Stu joined, around about Flaberge times, I put my foot down and refused to play viola, it was broken anyway, the bridge had slid down and concentrated on keys and then bass. Liberation! Looking back, we took a more ‘classic rock’ approach to song writing then, a la the Strokes. To me it was like string quartet writing, as there were only 3 of us. That was the era of ‘Henry Where is Lyon’. The streets of Surry Hills were full of throw outs around Hibernia House - books, furniture, clothes galore. As usual Yuri bought most of the songs, and he didn’t have far to go as him and Sara were living in the next-door warehouse apartment. But that one was a collab. We pulled Valley of the Dolls by Jacqueline Susan out of my bookcases, one of my latest finds, and adapted the melodic prose. I felt like the book audience approved of our labours, hundreds of minds and eyes.

Stu was also like a songwriter with his drum patterns too, I gotta say. Pretty inspiring. Have you heard his drumming on The Alien Christ record? It threads everything together, kind of like real-time mixing.

It was a literary time, and ‘Elizabeth’ features words from Herman Hesse’ poem of the same name. The bridge refrain is inspired by an Isaac Bashevis Singer short story. We lived right near the News Corp building on Kippax Street and for a while you could hear the printing presses at night shuffling. News was in the air! One unreleased song ‘Donald Trump AKA Bottle and Cans’ was constructed from a Daily Telegraph article about the new President’s diet I bought back from a nearby cafe. I love that way of working.

# Monday I had nothing to eat.

Tuesday I had ham and eggs.

Thursday was low quality meats.

Then I met you on the Strand……

1. Just as TGATF was seeming to get notoriety, getting attention from Alastair Galbraith and getting onto the legendary underground psych label Twisted Village you broke up. Was there a particular reason for the band breaking up?

Helen and I had a falling out. A year or two later she and Kristen Wineera invited me to join Dress as a replacement on guitar for Brian Hudson who had left three weeks shy of their first gig for the first Wellington Festival Fringe. Paul Yates moved to Auckland to become Paul Ling and bring his noise guitar skills to Pit Viper and RST. Torben moved to Sydney for art school and hooked up with Oren Ambarchi and Robbie Avenaim to help them with a couple of their What Is Music? Festivals.

1. Why did you make the decision to start playing lots of shows again in 2019? Have you been enjoying performing material from the new album?

Yes, definitely. My partner Sara Shera found us an old courthouse in Fryerstown - a gold mining town not far from Castlemaine which now has more giant kangaroos on the streets than people - for a recording session presided over by Ben Wright Smith. And then since we were so close, we did a mini-tour of Melbourne afterwards.

1. Are there any live recordings, 4 track demo, rehearsals, unreleased tracks etc that aren’t featured in your various compilation records.

YURI: Lots. Unfortunately a lot of it resides on unlabelled cassettes which in the early days I used to listen to a lot, so I kind of knew exactly where everything was based on the look of the stickers on the cassette or whatever. Now I don’t think I’ll ever have the time to go through them all. Stu has a good library of live and practice recordings from the Sydney trio days. If we were more famous, there’d be plenty of resources for heaps of bootlegs. There are a few good recordings from our more recent shows floating around too.

HELEN: So many cassettes, I tried to organise them all once back in the ‘90s, I had these big stickers for each one – with reviews of each song. Got snowed under, gave up. We need a minion to help us there. The aim now is to protect them from Global Warming.

1. What can we expect from the new album? What inspired you to get together and make music again and who do you have playing on it, any of the old Garbage and the Flowers members? Are you going to tour off the back of the release?

I really have to credit Helen for getting the new band together. I have been enjoying the freedom to improvise a bit more as now there are always one or two other guitarists who can hold down the chords of the songs. Although the last time we played in Brisbane I think I overdid it a bit.

I’m really looking forward to getting the new recordings out there. They are hi fi, not lo fi this time so I’m interested in people’s reaction to our music when it’s not thickly covered by a layer of dusty noise. We will definitely be going down to play in Melbourne again if we can, hopefully for our record release party.

The latest version of the band AKA Pigeon Ears AKA TGATF Mk III has been handpicked by Helen: Ben Wright Smith who’s a singer-songwriter of great stature in his own right on guitar and harmonica, Paul Williams from Panel of Judges coming out of retirement on the skins, Dan *The Man* Lewis, the creator of Sleep Music, on guitar and keys, and Stu is back this time on bass guitar.

HELEN: Well, we can expect the new album Cinnamon Sea to be released by Fire Records of London before the end of the year. It’ll be on 12” vinyl as it’s five songs. I have no idea how it will be received. The songs sound shiny not dusty but we like the shine.

Fire are also reissuing Eyes Rind As If Beggars with a new cover by Torben Tilly.

Incidentally, we have almost got a TGATF website up with old interviews, photos and posters.

TGATF gets played in China, courtesy of the internet, specifically ‘Love Comes Slowly Now’. Personally, I was inspired to record again as it’s pretty addictive, but I’d also like to reach a wider audience. Maybe we already have and don’t know it. I have extravagant dreams of songs inserted into Broadway productions, like ‘Yellow Beast’ – our Broadway banger. Fire have a publishing arm (Third Side Music), you can find us there. I know it’s not cool to spruik but I’d like to be able to afford new insulation for my roof etc…It’s like Venus here in summer! SEQ, gotta love it.

We did also start working on a rock opera called ‘Valhalla’, it’s beginning to see the light.

# I’m sitting in the back of a big black car

I’m going to Nashville to be a star…

You say some call it heaven some call it… Valhalla

 (Valhalla)

We till our fields with the bones of the dead

They shot my brother right through his head

Now his blood flows like wine and his bones break like bread

Under the wheels of Valhalla

(Valhalla)….