

Perfect Sound Forever  
online music magazine presents...

## ROBERT QUINE



### Interview by Jason Gross (November 1997)

Who is Robert Quine? According to him, he 'remains one of the most compelling, appalling and universally hated figures in music history.' If you think that's a little too generous, Kenneth Coleman has written his own [tribute to Quine](#). Let me just say that I don't see how you can just say that Quine is a sideman or collaborator who happened to work with [Richard Hell](#), Lou Reed, Brian Eno, Tom Waits, Matthew Sweet and others- he's been an important part of their music, critically shaping it. Since most of his work has been working with these better-known performers, he hasn't become a household name himself. His guitar playing is certainly distinctive enough to warrant this but the fact is that he technically has only two albums to his name (both collaborations). Even so, anyone familiar with his work is rabid about him as I found out when I asked around to drill up some support for this interview. Any old session man can play the right notes in time but Quine just plain TEARS IT UP and takes no prisoners. You KNOW when he plays a solo. How about calling him a guitarist's guitarist? You get the picture.

Enormous thanks go out to Phillip Bull, Scott Russell, Christopher Hamilton, Michael Piper and ESPECIALLY **JIM DEROGATIS AND ALICE SHERMAN!**

JUNE 2004: Old friend Jim Marshall reports to us that Quine took his own life. Quine changed the guitar vocabulary in rock and should be remembered and honored for that. Thanks Bob.

PSF: Let's talk about your early years.

I'm from Akron (Ohio) and I've always been a music nut. Even by the time I was four or five, I had Gene Autry records. My parents were pretty interested in music, had some pretty interesting Brazilian music with guitars doing a  $G^7/C^7$  over and over again- that was always my favorite sound in the world. I was coerced into taking piano lessons in the early '50s. It was a quite unpleasant experience. Reading music is something that's inherently hateful to me. It makes music like mathematics.

I was 12 in '55 when rock and roll hit. It just completely transformed me. I was getting into Frank Sinatra before that. But when that hit, it was all over. It was raw. The first rock record I bought was Frankie Lyman and the Teenager's 'Why Do Fools Fall In Love?' The sax solo in the middle was completely inappropriate- it almost sounds like Albert Ayler. But it was lyrical. That was my obsession. I really feel fortunate to have been around then because there have been good and bad years in rock but the best years were '55 to early '61. I got to see Buddy Holly and everybody else.

I took guitar lessons in '58. To find someone to teach you to play rock and roll then was rough. I had to figure it out on my own. A friend showed me an E chord and I figured it out from there. I got an electric guitar (Fender Stratocaster) and a Tremolux Amp in 1961 and that was the turning point in my life. I really idolized Ritchie Valens and saw that he had a Stratocaster so I had to have one. The Tremolux had a vibrato built in. I spent the whole summer of '61 teaching myself to play off the first Ventures album.

I played all through college (Indiana in 1961) but by the time I got there, rock and roll was starting to get pretty sad: Bobby Vinton, Fabian. That drove me into blues. I had a radio program where I played heavy blues with John Lee Hooker, Lightning Hopkins and that kind of thing. Generally, my band played Link Wray, the Ventures, some Duane Eddy just because it was easy to play (though I hated him).

After I exhausted the blues thing, I got into jazz. I started off with the really funky stuff like Ramsey Lewis, Milt Jackson, Kenny Burrell. By '65, I worked myself into hearing a little better and I was up to Jimmy Raney. I had a pretty good ear for it but I've never been able to play it. Compared to rock, it takes a lot of intellect and training to hear that kind of stuff. But Bill Evans' 'Portrait In Jazz' has the same effect on me as a John Lee Hooker record. Then I got into the avant-garde stuff that was just happening then. *Ascension* and *Mediations* by Coltrane. I saw him a couple of times around then. I was trying very hard to understand this stuff. A turning point for me was in 1966 when I was in San Francisco. I saw him with Alice Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders, Rashied Ali. I'm trying to analyze this stuff and figure it out. I'm in the front row and all of a sudden, these two horns are right in my face. I said 'yes, I understand this.' I understood it emotionally. I was trying to analyze it too much. It was just like Howlin' Wolf. Once you arrive at the point that you understand it, the emotional factor is darker than some of the saddest blues stuff. Something I'd recommend to everyone is Lester Young *The Alladin Sessions*. There's a ballad he does, 'These Foolish Things.' The feeling is resignation beyond sadness, self-pity. That has affected my playing. But I don't have the discipline to play jazz myself. At the time though, I was stupid enough to think I could be a jazz musician.

By the time I went to college, the handwriting was on the wall. The Kingston Trio had come out in '58 and you had Hootenanny shows on TV. That's how it stayed until the English invasion hit. Me and my friends still liked rock and roll. The English groups were a phenomenon for 11-year-old girls- it was like a joke. By the mid-60's, I got into the Rolling Stones and saw the Beatles on Ed Sullivan and thought 'they can actually play and sing.' The Stones were nasty and ugly and doing songs I was familiar with.

By '65, I was in law school (St. Louis) just out of inertia. I knew that I didn't want to go to Vietnam. I had a band in St. Louis. By then, things that influenced me were the first Stones albums, the first Byrds albums, later the [Velvet Underground](#). When I first heard the V.U. though, I thought it was the worst thing I ever heard- they couldn't play, the guy was trying to sing like *Highway 61 Revisited*, the drummer had a physical disability. A year later, a friend played me 'Waiting For My Man' over and over and I became a total fanatic. They must have had 20 fans on the face of the earth. The Andy Warhol thing worked for them, otherwise, they would have been on ESP Disk. They were known as a death-rock band.

PSF: So you got to be a real fan after that?

Well, I brought a friend out to see them. I was too terrified to talk to Lou Reed- he was friendly enough though. I was at the Matrix shows in San Francisco where *1969* was recorded. They had shows on some weeknights with two or three people in the club. I was one of the people, so they knew me and got to be friendly with me and I taped them- I have hours of cassettes of them. A lot of their best stuff from those gigs never came out. One night he did 'Waiting For My Man' where he totally improvised new lyrics.

You take that song for instance. The lyrics... I hate to use the word 'poetry' but there's very few poets in rock and roll and Lou Reed has put too much emphasis on the poetry factor. There's Chuck Berry, Lou Reed, Bob Dylan. The lyrics are perfect. The symmetry of the arrangement. The lead over it. The deliberate cretinism of the drums and the bass. The way that the bass walks at the end. In the middle of the song, he says 'work it now' and there's no guitar solo. That's beyond cool.

The second album (*White Light/White Heat*) completely changed my life. 'Sister Ray,' 'I Heard Her Call My Name.' I spent thousands of hours on headphones wearing that out. That was a big influence on me. They were starting to make a big deal about people like Larry Coryell, rock musicians playing jazz, but there was no real fusion going on. What Lou Reed did, he actually listened to Ornette Coleman, and deliberately did off-harmonic feedback and the deliberate monotony of it. This stuff is like Jimmy Reed- it's monotonous or it's hypnotic. For me, it was hypnotic.

PSF: What were doing after that time?

I passed the Missouri bar in '69 and moved to San Francisco to pass the bar there, which I failed several times. I gave up and got out of there. To live there and have short hair and hate the Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane...

Between the Velvet Underground, the Byrds and the jazz I was listening to, I sort of began to come up with my own style. Listening to *Ascension*, taking LSD (don't do this at home, kids). That's when I broke through and started hearing things on a certain level. That was pretty much how I was formed. There's also Elvis' Sun sessions, Fats Domino, Bo Diddley, James Burton, Mickey Baker and Little Richard.

PSF: What about jazz?

The only other stuff that really influenced me early on was the electric [Miles Davis](#) stuff from about '72 to '75. *On the Corner*, *Get Up With It*. 'He Loved Him Madly' is like my favorite track of all time. Again, when I first heard it, I thought it was boring. He dabbled in rock with *Bitches Brew* but by the time of *Jack Johnson*, it was take no prisoners- he was in there all the way. He cut his own throat commercially. The jazz purists couldn't handle it- it was just walls of noise and textures. Columbia promoted *Live At the Fillmore* for the hippies but it's too abstract. They should have waited for *Jack Johnson* which is more heavy rocking. Then he might have gotten over to that audience. But it was too late. That stuff is still fairly unappreciated. Maybe his chops are a little shot on 'He Loved Him Madly' but emotionally, when the smoke has cleared, that will be regarded as one of his most profound statements. You could listen to it when you're depressed, when you're having sex or whatever.

That stuff and *Raw Power* by Iggy and the [Stooges](#) were my favorites then. He (Iggy) did try to get me to tour off bad albums like *Zombie Birdhouse*. He's one of the greats but I wonder about what he did to that record with the new remix, which is atrocious. 'With this remix, I think this can stand up with the latest Smashing Pumpkins.' Wow.

Another influence was [Brian Eno](#). He lived in New York from the late 70's to '84/'85. Pretty good friends with him. I actually recorded a lot with him but almost none of it ever came out. He did *On Land*, which made me appreciate the ambient stuff even more. It's sort of a nice back-and-forth influence thing. I got him onto 'He Loved Him Madly.'

PSF: Where you doing gigs at that time?

From '69 til '76, I never played in public. I would play by myself at home. Meanwhile after failing the bar twice, I knew some people in New York and moved here in August '71. An old girlfriend lured me and when I came here, she said 'OK, my curiosity's satisfied.' I can appreciate a prank...

I had no money and I was forced to look for a job. Because I was a lawyer in Missouri, I qualified for a job in New Jersey writing tax law for Prentice Hall Publishing. There's nothing more boring. I did that for three years. Faced with something that dreadful, it forced me to think. I had been brainwashed by my parents and society that to be a musician was unacceptable but by then I finally decided to at least give it a try. My playing started to develop through the Miles Davis stuff I was listening to.

PSF: What led you out to the New York scene?

I started seeing the stirring of things happening here. I saw Suicide in '74 and it was pretty horrifying. I saw one of [Television](#)'s first gigs. They were really ragged and sloppy. They were all playing cheap instruments, which I liked. You could hear there was a Velvet Underground thing there. I quit the tax job then and decided that I was going to play in a band. I answered ads in the Village Voice and went through two days of auditioning for bands. It was the most devastating thing. They were bad, terrible. They hated me because I didn't have long hair. By then I was in Brooklyn and drank my way through that summer. I stopped when I got sick of that and got a job at the Strand bookstore, which was a little better than the tax job.

I got sick of the Strand and applied for a job at a place called Cinemabilia- movie posters and books- around '75. Just by chance, the people working there were Tom Verlaine and [Richard Hell](#). Within a year, I got to be good friends with Hell. We'd talk about music. His biggest influences were Rolling Stones *Now*, Dylan's *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Basement Tapes*, the Stooges, the Velvet Underground. I would bring in tapes to work with old '50s stuff- I know some really surreal things that are wilder than anything that happened in the '60s. He really appreciated that, seeing where my roots were.

PSF: So how did you get to work with him?

After about a year, he'd come over to my house and listen to records. He was quitting the Heartbreakers at that point. He wanted to have his own band. He had an offer from England from Malcolm McLaren. We would have been the [Sex Pistols](#). He wanted us to go there to start a band. I don't know why that didn't happen. The Pistols were stylistically based on Hell. Hell had his problems with my image. 'You look like a professor.' I said 'yeah but nobody else at CBGB's looks like that.' I grew the beard to keep him happy. I wore sunglasses a lot but then I wore them all the time because of him.

Hell really loved Television but Verlaine forced him out of the band- he wouldn't do his songs. Verlaine was too much of an egomaniac. Then with the Heartbreakers, it was a good combination but they were a little too basic for him. It could have been a great band but he missed the Verlaine factor of flirting with atonality and noise. He was at my house listening to tapes of one of my old bands and he realized that I could play anything. We found a drummer, Marc Bell, who was playing with Wayne County. Ivan Julian was the first person who answered an ad. He had a picture of Keith Richards in his guitar case. All of us were into the Stones and he was a better rhythm player than me. The immediate thing was to do that EP for Ork Records. A lot of people think it's the best thing we did. Maybe it's the most punk thing we did- we were out of tune, we played badly and stiffly.

After that, we rehearsed intensely for four or five months. We were being bank-rolled by Richard Gottherer and Marty Thau. We were getting a weekly salary so I could quit my job. We were working in a small studio. It was weird because I'd always been the leader in my bands so it was hard to take direction from anybody. Still have remnants of that. It was a clash of personalities. It was like a root canal trip to the dentist, those rehearsals. But something worthwhile did come out of that. We did listen to each other and argue about EVERYTHING.

I think *Blank Generation* holds up pretty well. You listen to that with headphones and there's a lot going on there with the

guitars- it's the product of a lot of fighting. It was worthwhile. We did that album twice. We did it in the Spring of '77 at Electric Lady and it had a better sound. The release was held up because Sire was signing a distribution deal with Warner Brothers so they told us to wait for that. Hell's answer was 'let's do the album again.' We went up to Plaza Sound Studio and the sound isn't as good.

People didn't know what to make of it at the time when they could listen to the Sex Pistols or the Ramones. I put my own work down as much as anyone but it holds up. I can play it for somebody and say 'I'm proud of this.' I've been on many albums but there's only a few albums I'm really proud of.

PSF: How do you think the band fit in at the time?

From my own selfish point of view, it was perfect for me. I happened to have all these influences that were suddenly hip and fit into what was going on. By many peoples' standards, my playing is very primitive but by punk standards, I'm a virtuoso. People on the local rock scene in the early '70s treated me very condescendingly. After we played CBGB's in October '76 for the first time, these people respected me. To me, the positive thing about it was we were pulling out these old influences like the Velvet Underground and the Stooges that were gone.

As for a scene, to be thrown in the same category... Blondie? Talking Heads? The Heartbreakers? The Shirts? It was just a catch-all thing. If you happened to be a band in the town, you were in the right place at the right time. Blondie had the biggest hit and that was a disco song. They're nice people though. There was a social scene but I couldn't really say there was music scene. It did give people alternatives to disco, the Eagles, Carole King, James Taylor. That's the one thing we all had in common. It gave people a place to play. People could come to New York, play CBGB's and have a contract, like the B-52's who were great.

What came of it? Nothing. What was going on in the '80s? Nothing. It was even worse than the '70s. I never really followed grunge. When I'm at a record store, I walk past all the recent releases and look for an obscure Eddie Cochran or Link Wray release. There are a few people that are really good now. The Pretenders are really great- I think she's really talented. She's from Akron too. I'd like to be on one track with them but I hear she's a perfectionist. J.J. Cale is a real idol of mine. His interviews are the greatest. He had a hit and his manager says 'you got a hit, you gotta tour.' He says 'well, if I got me a hit, why do I have to go out on the road?' I turned Lou Reed onto him and that's all you'd hear from his hotel room- they both had that two chord thing down too.

PSF: What happened with the Voidoids then?

We were playing out a lot. There are some bootlegs out of that stuff that are horrible. We were pretty tight then and had a lot of ferocious energy. We did a set at CBGB's and I said 'that sounded great, we actually sounded like a band tonight' and they all looked at me like they were horrified. When we toured England, things were really bad. We opened for the Clash in the fall of '77 and got spit on, hit with cans of beer. Sire didn't even bother to release the record there until the

tour was over. They put up posters for the tour on the last night after we'd played for a month. It was dreadful. It was my first real tour. Ivan had toured with the Foundations ('Build Me Up Buttercup'). Hell was physically ill, speaking tactfully. It was just a horrible experience.

When we got back, we were basically through. We just limped on for two years. We weren't very interested. We knew we hated Sire and Seymour Stein- he's the Roy Cohn of record executives. They treated us like garbage. They wouldn't give me a free copy when it came out- they told me to ask Richard and wouldn't let me into their offices. Hell was difficult and they had no use for us. They only signed Hell and that created all kinds of legal problems. I never got any royalties from that record. The band was kind of pressuring Hell at the time that if he didn't get off Sire, we would quit.

Meanwhile, Hell had this thing going for a movie around early '78 and we were starving to death. Marc Bell bolted. The movie (BLANK GENERATION) was horrible. There was some live stuff from CBGB's but they overdubbed applause. It was so pretentious and pompous. Hell was good in it. By then, he was ready to desert rock and roll. He's a talented person but he had no interest in playing bass.

He wanted to put more energy in the stage act so he stopped playing. It worked out for the worst because he was a pretty good bass player. He was brutal with all the sloppiness and he was better on stage with it. When he didn't have the bass, he would just hang on to the mike. He would get lazier and lazier until the end where he'd just sit down on the stage. He would like to goad me. When he tried to sing, I played guitar solos over his vocals or play wrong chords, but he dug it. He'd say 'Bob, why do I have to do this to you to make you play well?'

We limped on with various personnel. Jake Riveria picked us up and Nick Lowe produced us- he was too poppy for what we were doing. By then, in late '78, we realized that no one was interested in us. So the deal was that we'd tour with Elvis Costello for two months, stay in England and Nick Lowe would produce an album for us. It was a grim tour. Costello was getting more and more popular, less punk. The audience had no interest in us- when we hit the stage, the applause would stop. We played in some dire villages that looked like they didn't even have electricity. Jake and everyone saw the state of the band where everyone hated each others' guts and Hell didn't have much new material. When the tour ended, we went back home. They did give us some money to make demos but not a lot of the money got to the recording studio. They sent it to Hell. We were left with a day and a half to do demos. That was sort of the end of the band for me. We did a little Midwest tour and we were making good money. We could have gone on for years. We just saw there was no future in it by October '79. I told Ivan I was quitting so Ivan called Hell and he quit. There was no more creativity, there was nothing left.

After a year and a half lapse, Hell got an offer from Marty Thau. I said 'OK, let's make it quick and painless.' We got a really good band together- Fred Maher, who I had played with in Material, Naux, this really great guitar player, Hell on bass (thank god). We rehearsed about a week, did the basic tracks and it was pretty good. It was done in early '81. There were some financial problems so the studio kept the tapes captive for about a year. Hell disappeared for about a week and a half (due to personal problems) after we did the basic tracks and had the studio booked. We had a week and a half for me and Naux to do overdubs- I did backwards guitar, feedback guitar, speeded-up guitar. I got that out of my system

for once and for all. After it got held up, I didn't want anything to do with the mix. There was just this morass of guitars. Considering what they were dealing with, the record isn't that bad. Not nearly as good as the first one. 'Time' was really good. We did a couple of gigs, made some good money but there was no enthusiasm for it. It was weird then to play 'Blank Generation' in '81- it was like Sha Na Na at an oldies show. I was pretty fed up with him by then. We always had minor falling-outs but we always wound up being friends.

PSF: You had some involvement with the 'No Wave' scene here in New York, right?

Yeah, it was a nice scene for a minute. I produced Teenage Jesus (with [Lydia Lunch](#)) and DNA (with [Arto Lindsay](#) and [Ikue Mori](#)). With DNA, I mixed the guitar up really loud and had fight with Robin (Crutchfield) about his keyboard. I wanted to push us (Voidoids) in that direction with that horrible noise. Hell was writing more commercial songs though by then. My personality isn't really suited for being a producer. Groups need hand-holding and counseling and I can't do that.

PSF: After that, what would you say about the time you played with Lou Reed?

Musically, the first week and a half was really great, out of the four years. We did *The Blue Mask*. It's a record that I'm really proud of. There was no rehearsing, no overdubs, no punch-in's for mistakes. The exact opposite of the Voidoids. I inspired and encouraged him to play guitar again. I didn't have a lot of fun with him but at least it's out there and I'm proud of that. With that record, Fernando Saunders and Doane Perry were taken aback by this primitive playing. There was an intensity there and we reacted to each other as musicians. It isn't a jazz record but there's that kind of sensitivity. He listened to some wild ideas I brought in like with 'Waves of Fear'- he had nothing to lose at that point as he'd just done *Growing Up In Public*.

It's just a shame- I'd still be with him now and put up with whatever personal problems I had with him. But he's not a nice guy. In one way, he respected me. If he yelled at me, I'd yell back. I'm outspoken and don't take crap from people. His problem is that he likes to be surrounded by 'yes' men that flatter him but he's smart enough to know what's going on and he hates them for it and he ends up with a lot of hack musicians.

*The Blue Mask* was a very big critical success but it didn't sell well. It built up his confidence though. By the time we did *Legendary Hearts* in late '82, he was much more of a control freak. He was rejecting ideas that I brought in. He was feeling pretty precious about his career. His biggest weakness is that he wants to be regarded as a poet. The more conscious he is of this, the worse songs he writes. It could have been a pretty good record. It wasn't going to be as good as the last one: the songs weren't as good. The atmosphere was really uptight- it's impossible to be friends with him. When I got the final mix, I was really freaked out. He pretty much mixed me off the record. I was in Ohio and took it out in the driveway and smashed the tape into pieces. I didn't talk to him for a month but he knew what he'd done. I have cassettes of the rough mix of the record and it was a really good record but he made it all muddy and murky.

He approached me about playing live and I said 'what the hell.' It was a pretty good band- Fred Maher was there. Lou was

very erratic with his rhythm playing but I dug that. It was impossible for the drummer to follow it. Me and Fred had to play around him. Fernando was great but I prefer a Duck Dunn-type player who can hold down the bottom. If Fernando doesn't dig a drummer, he wouldn't play with him- he didn't dig Fred. He's a great player when he plays with someone he likes. We did some more touring. He just happened to record bad concerts like *Live In Italy*. The band was sensitive enough that we were capable of improvising, like on 'Sister Ray' and 'Heroin' which we only did once. He had to teach it to the others but I knew it already.

But there was more and more of a strain between us. About a day before *New Sensations* was going to be recorded, he fired me and did the guitar himself. I did do the tour with him afterwards- that was a long tour. I came to him and said 'forget whatever happened, I just want to play with you.' By this time, we had an awful band. The new drummer would only play well in rehearsals and the keyboard player (Peter Woods) worked with Al Stewart and Cyndi Lauper. There wasn't much room to improvise. At the end of 'Kill Your Sons,' I'd do a drone and Lou would do a guitar solo- we'd get pretty far out there. This keyboard player thought it was joke and play with his feet- Lou would have to come over and tell him to stop. Because I wasn't on *New Sensations*, I didn't have a lot to add live. I'd be doing a song, playing D and G for six minutes like 'Doing the Things that We Want To,' which I didn't really like, with no variation and the keyboard guy playing accordin. I thought, 'this is not why I got a guitar and wanted to play in a rock and roll band.' We hated each other's guts, me and the keyboard player. Lou got really abusive at the end- he'd hog all the guitar solos and made sure I got mixed out- even live. I got back from the tour and decided that was it. I assumed he knew it. He'd put me down to the rest of the band, knowing that they'd tell me about it later.

From the greedy professional angle, I've had three things that have made people interested in who I am. The Voidoids things, the Lou Reed thing and Matthew Sweet. On a personal level, Reed was a guy who really influenced me and I had a chance to give something back to him. Encouraging him to play guitar again was digging my own grave. But I would have done it again because I owed it to him. This guy changed my life. If I did something to put him back in the right direction... I wish that it would have gone on with the level of something like *The Blue Mask*. Everything else after is pretty lousy. He never found anyone else to replace me except the Velvet Underground and he had to ruin that. I hate him because if I had my way, we'd still be playing. It was good steady work. He didn't tour often. I hate his guts because he made it impossible to play with him. There was nothing in it for me. He was not going to give me any space for any creativity.

PSF: What were you doing after that?

Since then, I've drifted into session work with Tom Waits, Marianne Faithful and other people. Some of the things were great. Some of them were terrible. I was finally on an Eno record with *Nerve Net* but I'm also on two weeks of tapes from 1980 from an album that never came out. When I first heard his ambient stuff, I thought it was sham. I thought that he and Robert Fripp would turn these machines on, have lunch and they'd come back and people would call them geniuses. I couldn't hear it. After *On Land*, that ambient thing stuck with me. I actually encouraged him to put out *On Land*- he was going to dump parts of it. He's a great person to sit around and talk about music with. I was sort of put off by his diary. I

don't care what he made for dinner or what Bono has to say. I lost touch with him, which is unfortunate.

PSF: What about your solo work?

The only reason that I haven't done 'solo' records under my own name is because there's no money in it. There's no point in me trying to do anything commercial. If I'm going to do a record, it's going to be self-indulgent, it's going to be a record for me. I want to do it on my own terms. I did one with Jody Harris on my own four-track and we took it to a studio to mix it (*Infidelity*). The same thing in '84 with EG Records. I met someone at the company through Eno and she said 'I want you to do a record' but I said 'someone's got to come over and pressure me to do it.' People say 'you should put five or six records a year.' Just ask them 'What's your favorite track off *Basic*?' and they just look at me. There's very few people who like those records.

On *Basic*, the drums are too loud and this and that but that's the way I wanted it. It had the Miles influence, the Velvet Underground influence, the Stooges influence, the ambient thing. By then, there were digital loop machines available and I was using 16-second delays. Just to have that stuff filtered through my brain, my own way. The reason I did both those records in my house, if someone comes over and you have a fruitless day, you haven't wasted any money. That happened plenty of times. One day, something'll happen and I'll go into a trance. One of the best things I've ever done in my life is '65' (from *Basic*)- it reflects how I feel about music with that Lester Young thing with the sadness. If people don't appreciate the damn thing, I have no interest in banging my head against the wall.

I've had opportunities to do records. The *Painted Desert* ([Ikue Mori](#)) CD is kind of my own work but it wasn't officially under my name because of legalities. I still owe E.G. one record. Virgin owns them now. I'll send them what I'm working on now and they can take it or leave it. I'm making a completely solo record- I have various fancy loop machines and a sound proof studio at home where I can experiment with loops until I get a good one. The whole purpose of this is to amuse myself.

PSF: How would you judge the session work you've done?

I'll work for other people and sometimes I'll get a good record and sometimes not- that's the price I pay. I've had a lot of falling-outs with people. If someone mixes me off a record, I won't come back and work with them. I did a couple of records with Matthew Sweet and then he worked with Brendan O'Brien. They had me on for three days and when I listened back to it, I was pretty much mixed off the record. I left a message with him, saying I wasn't going to work with him anymore. A lot of musicians say 'take the money, he'll use you again.' But I put a lot of time into it and I'm very primitive, I'll spend many hours coming up with parts. Basically, they wanted to make his CD sound like the demos. But that's been the story of my life since the early '80s.

PSF: How do you approach your work for sessions?

I play with singers/songwriters and one thing that's crucial is that I LISTEN TO THE LYRICS. Like with Lou Reed's 'Waves of Fear,' if it had been about making an egg cream, my solo would be different than a guy having a nervous breakdown. It's really obvious to do this but it's important.

Recently, I worked on Corin Curschella's album with Marc Ribot, who's a really good player that I've worked with a lot and we play well together. I think it's a great record, best one I've done in many years. We also worked with this guy Sion, who's sort of like Tom Waits or Dylan- very soulful.

I AM an egomaniac and I will quit people if they mix me off their records and won't work with them anymore. But I put my ego beneath a song and what a person is intending. That's why I get really hurt. I've been on some OK records that could have been masterpieces. Sometimes I've ironed things out, like with Lloyd Cole who I disagree with a lot but I still work with. He was sort of new-wavish when he started but now he'd just as soon get played on MOR stations. His music is actually better now and we do get along.

I try to keep my friendships in music to a minimum. That way, you can be a better friend to the friends you have. The people I hang out with like Ribot and Zorn, we have conceptual differences but they appreciate what I do. There's Jody Harris who's TRAGICALLY UNDER-RATED- he's so far advanced, way past me and people can't hear it. He's paid the price for it.

PSF: You've talked about how you hate doing shows.

To me, recording beats live shows. With live shows, between the noise and the sound system, and the tours, it's the most horrible thing in the world. You're just waiting at the hotel, the airport, customs. Stuck in the dressing room with people who you may or may not like. If it is good, the only good part is going out and playing. It runs me down. It destroys what health I have. Travelling that much and the stress of doing it ages you prematurely. Last tour was in '90 with Lloyd Cole where you bounce around in these little coffins on a bus and you get no sleep. My solution is to raise my price so high- that's basically how I've gotten out of touring. It's one thing if you go out for a week. Most tours are seven or eight months. You can put yourself on automatic- pack your suitcase and go into the lobby, but it's just not for me.

PSF: What do you think about the scene in New York now?

Well, in my limited experience from talking to people and gigging with Michael Maxwell, the scene is worse than ever. Like playing in clubs for no money and thinking it's cool. I'm no capitalist pig but I'd like to at least get cab fare from a gig. The club scene seems to have disintegrated. I like [Yo La Tengo](#) and Stereolab. It was hip to talk about a group like the Velvet Underground but people really didn't understand it and they'd listen to groups like Cowboy Junkies, worthless crap. When I met Ira (Kaplan), I knew he was tired of hearing it but I told him 'you actually UNDERSTAND the Velvet Underground. You have to see- it's one thing to do the surface but YOU understand the ESSENCE of what they were doing.' It's the reason that Lou Reed has never been able to replace me. It has to do with soul. It's a really simple thing. It's that

difference between being boring or hypnotic, like I was saying about a Jimmy Reed record. I like to think that I can tell the difference.

PSF: Where do you think you are now with your music and your career?

I'm in situation where I've accomplished something. Half the time, I can't believe that people care about me. I know that I'm known on some level and I've influenced people. On the other hand, there's some brutal years financially, like now. Creatively, this was a good year. A Telecaster is the first solid body guitar ever sold. It's an uncompromising thing. In the last year, I finally conquered it. It's unforgiving- if you mess up, you can hear it. It has so much harmonic presence and it actually translates to tape. I know I've improved. I've arrived at a certain level where I know more than ever how to structure a solo. I've come to terms with what I can and can't do and I accept it. But I'm at a point now where I'm a little frustrated.

I'm working with a guy now named Michael Maxwell who will be famous someday. The record companies say 'come back when you're famous.' He will get a deal and hopefully I'll be on it. He's the first guy since *The Blue Mask* where we have a telepathic thing. Most people know me for my soloing stuff but what's really important to me is coming up with cool parts, voicing a chord differently. I'm not going to play the same chord as Michael, like the Ramones. He appreciates it. It's weird playing clubs after I did theatres with Lou Reed and Lloyd Cole. It was sort of scary because it's more nerve racking. When you play festivals, 70,000 people look like ants, you can't see them. In a club, you can have people in your face. It's good for me to get out though.

I've done Coke and Nike commercials with John Zorn. I could do a lot of those and just triple my income in an hour and a half. I'm not through though. On the Stratocaster, you have the wang bar and I have my tricks but those were becoming cliches. You don't have that with a Telecaster. You're forced to think musically. I am playing better than ever, despite the fact that it's me saying it. I am getting less and less stubborn about going out like opening for Yo La Tengo with Jody Harris. We just wanted to go up there and improvise. It went pretty well though I was drunk. It was pretty savage. I would do it again, hopefully sober.

PSF: That must have been pretty wild.

Yeah, it was! I did another thing like that with Zorn and Bill Frissell. We jammed together a lot. It was a concert at Harvard in '87 at a chapel. We cleared the place. There was no discussion as we walked out to the stage. Bill and I had loop machines so we had four guitars and a sax playing. They made a recording of it and it'd be nice to come out. I have dabbled in the jazz thing but nothing's come of it. I'm a musical illiterate but by groping for Bill Evans or Cecil Taylor, I have a damn good ear for it and somehow it filters through a little.

[See Robert Quine's favorite music](#)

Also see our [Robert Quine tribute site](#)

Check out the rest of PERFECT SOUND FOREVER

[MAIN PAGE](#)

[ARTICLES](#)

[STAFF/FAVORITE MUSIC](#)

[LINKS](#)

[WRITE US](#)