

Noise Annays: Guitar Adventures with Robert Quine (continued)

I-94: Were you involved in any other musical projects in the immediate post-Voidoids era?



RQ: When the Voidoids dissolved in late '79, I floundered around for about a year. I did the album "Escape" with Jody Harris, an instrumental thing we're both proud of. In late 1980 I was briefly in a group called Deadline—Phillip Wilson on drums, Fred Maher and myself on guitar, Bill Laswell on bass, and Michael Beinhorn on synth. It was a great group, and we got a lot of good press. But there were some business disagreements, and we only lasted about four gigs. Shortly after that Fred, Bill, and I worked on an Eno record that didn't materialise. It turned out that Eno was heading in a more ambient direction, which resulted in "On Land", a great record—the last record to really influence me.



I-94: What were the circumstances surrounding the "Destiny Street" album?

RQ: Hell got this offer, and we found some great musicians—Fred Maher, drums, and Naux, guitar. We rehearsed for a few days, then went in and did it. Got in, got out, and made a pretty good album. Played a few gigs and it was over.

I-94: How'd you wind up getting pulled into Lou Reed's orbit in the early '80s?

RQ: I'm going to be fairly brief about the Lou Reed stuff; it was covered very thoroughly in the biography of Lou by Victor Bockris. I just don't have much to add at this point. Anyway, Sylvia Reed was responsible for getting us together to have lunch in early '81, and we got along well, and that was that.

I-94: "The Blue Mask" was such an intense record. What was it like recording that?

RQ: "The Blue Mask" is one of the very few records I'm proud of. It was done totally off the cuff—improvised, everyone was intensely listening to each other—and it comes through. It means a lot to me. I went from being just a fan to actually giving something back to him.



I-94: Conversely, Legendary Hearts seems more subdued. What were those sessions like?

RQ: Whereas "The Blue Mask" was intense, "Legendary Hearts" was tense, and you can hear it—as much as is possible in that murky mix. The year before, Lou Reed had gone into "The Blue Mask" with a completely open mind—he was ready for anything. Going into "Legendary Hearts", he had a much more specific idea in mind: what he wanted us to play, what he didn't want us to play. Anyway, the atmosphere was not conducive to bringing out the best in the musicians, to getting a groove.

I-94: How was Lou to work with?

RQ: He was great to work with unless he turned on you. Then it was a nightmare.

I-94: You toured Europe with that band. I believe there are substantially better shows on tape than that "Live in Italy" thing RCA put out from the tour. Any that you know of?

RQ: There were no great shows on the "Live in Italy" tour. But the performances of "Heroin," "Martial Law," and "Some Kinda Love/Sister Ray" from the album are examples of that group at its best. I think the band's best playing might have been a show we did at Studio 54 in 1983. There must be tapes of it.



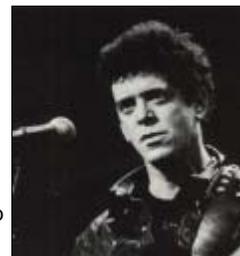
I-94: Just how long did it take for the relationship with Lou to turn sour? Can you put your finger on any particular event that marked the turning point?

RQ: The Lou Reed thing was over for me when I heard the final mix of "Legendary Heart"s. I was in a state of shock, couldn't believe what he'd done. Unfortunately, I spent several painful weeks listening to it before I gave up. That

record was no "Blue Mask", but it was much better than what came out of that final mix. I went on and worked with him a few more years, did some good live stuff occasionally, but it was totally over for me.

I-94: Someone told me that you recently encountered Lou in a guitar store. They said that neither of you spoke to the other, and the atmosphere was "electric." Care to comment?

RQ: Yeah, we ran into each other and didn't speak. If I had to do it over again, I would have approached him, tried to make small talk, etc. He's a difficult person, but he's also a genius and could be fun to talk with. Once in awhile, I listen to "The Blue Mask" and can't help wondering, "Gee, wouldn't it be great to go into the studio for a week or so and make another great record?" It's been 15 years since I quit, and the anger I felt has pretty well dissipated. So there will always be some regret, yeah. He's playing guitar better than ever (listen to the track "Riptide"), and I know I am. But ultimately, we probably wouldn't be able to get along personally. It's just the nature of our respective personalities. Too bad.



I-94: Personality clashes with Lou apart, was it really Fernando Saunders' bass playing that you found objectionable?

RQ: In the beginning, Fernando and I had to get used to each other's styles, but ultimately we both came to appreciate each other's playing and got along really well together. The last band did a very long tour together: '84-'85. I pretty much didn't like the band. Lou had added a keyboard player who was completely incompatible with his music, and another drummer had replaced Fred Maher. Lou and I weren't getting along personally or musically, so I ended up playing more and more with Fernando. He's a great virtuoso and a very nice, decent person. We became pretty good friends.

I-94: The Dim Stars project...I thought Hell wasn't overly extending himself but the cuts that you played on were by far the best. Were you happy with that album, and are there any prospects of ever working with Hell again in a musical context?

RQ: I worked with Hell on three different projects in the '90s, and the Dim Stars was one of them. The musicians were good, everybody was relaxed, getting along, but somehow the CD stinks. It was nobody's finest moment, that's for sure. Not recommended! But I should be recording a song with Hell in the next month. Might be fun.

I-94: How'd the Matthew Sweet connection come about?

RQ: Fred Maher introduced me to Matthew in '88 when I came in and laid down some tracks on "Earth". Then Matthew and I both worked for Lloyd Cole in '89 and '90, recording and touring, and we became pretty good friends.

I-94: What records/songs of his are you on?

RQ: In addition to "Earth", I'm also on "Girlfriend" (a good one), "Altered Beast" (a great one, though the mix was a little messy—the drums and Matthew's vocals should have been louder), and "100% Fun". I came up with a lot of good stuff on that last one, but my guitar was pretty well obliterated from the record. I played the CD once, never heard it again, and left a pretty brutal message on his answering machine indicating that I wouldn't be talking or working with him again. I was very angry; I felt very betrayed. Too bad. He's very talented, and we were very good friends. Six years later, the anger is gone. It's just too bad things worked out the way they did. I like to think that someday we could maybe be friends again, maybe record together.



I-94: Did you do much touring with Matthew? Was his much-publicised fear of flying a handicap?

RQ: I hate touring and generally get out of it by charging too much. I played in public with Matthew only twice: on the David Letterman and Dennis Miller shows. So I didn't have much experience with his fear of flying.

I-94: What are you doing musically these days?

RQ: Things have been pretty slow the past few years. I did a few albums for artists that never got released, some jingles, and a lot of demos, most of which came out on CD one way or another. Also, a track or two on various albums.

For a few years I worked with several talented singer/songwriters, playing "showcases" in clubs. But I decided I really didn't want to do that anymore. Basically, I belong in the recording studio—that's what I like to do.

The only touring I did in the '90s was in Japan: in '93 with a great singer named Sion, and last year with a very talented singer/songwriter/guitarist named Kazuyoshi Saito. That tour lasted five weeks and was definitely the nicest musical experience I've had in a long time. Great songs and an amazing band. Easily the best group I've ever played with—two guitars, bass, and drums. I recorded some stuff on his latest album, "Cold Tube". My best work on that is on the title song and one called "No Blues." We'll be working together again, maybe in the fall. Recently some albums have come up for me, but I won't "jinx" them by talking about them.

I-94: How would you characterise your approach to the guitar?

RQ: I try to be spontaneous and creative, and generally pull it off. I've had a lot of influences but somehow have managed to come up with my own touch, my own style. This can work for me, sometimes against me. I also make a point of listening to the lyrics. I try to play with them in a way that will move people, musically, emotionally.

I-94: How has your equipment evolved over the years?

RQ: In 1996 I switched from the Stratocaster to the Telecaster and finally mastered it, on my terms, at least. In the late '90s, Chris Cush of Mojo Guitars rewired a lot of Telecasters for me. My favourite right now is a Fender '52 reissue, with Seymour Duncan Antiquities pickups and a four-way switch. Rick Kelly of Carmine Street Guitars has been building some amazing Telecasters lately, and that's probably what I'll get next. The Fender Reissue amps are great; also the Pro Junior and the Custom Vibrolux.

In the last six years, stomp boxes are better than ever. I'm guessing this won't last forever. A lot of great stuff will probably disappear in the next few years, so...a word to the wise. I've been using an Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Memory Man for about 21 years now, and nothing will ever replace it. The Carl Martin Compressor/Limiter is amazing. I love Tube-Screamers—they've made my life a lot easier. The Maxon 808 is the best example right now. Voodoo Lab does a lot of good stuff; I would especially recommend their Analog Chorus.

Prescription Electronics has done a lot of amazing things in the last six years. Their Yardbox is my all-time favourite fuzz, a sound I'd been searching for for about 30 years. I'm a big fan of the Beck/Page Yardbirds sound, and this does it exactly! The Experience is a unique invention; I always bring it with me when I record. It's not an instant gratification thing—if a store allows you only five minutes to mess with it, you'll get discouraged. It does too many things to mention here but some examples are a massive '60s fuzz, fuzz with an endless sustain and beautiful octave effect, backwards-sounding solos, and broken speaker and amp sounds for the more demented. Just recently, Prescription Electronics came out with the Germ. It does two things: the best-sounding clean boost I've ever heard and an Eric Clapton Bluesbreakers sound.

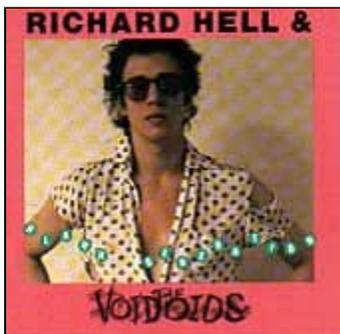
I-94: What music are you listening to for enjoyment/inspiration these days?

RQ: I've been listening to a lot of Roy Buchanan. I'd like to recommend two albums because they're great and won't be in print forever: "Buch and the Snakestretchers" (the Burlap Bag album)—just a bar band recorded live in '71, but probably his best playing on record; and "Malegüeña" — a lot of obscure stuff, mainly of interest because it contains his last session. Despite those atrocious *Alligator* records, this CD proves he was still creative, still developing.

I've also been listening to bass player Joe Osborn a lot, playing bass and stealing what I can. Some of his best playing is on Art Garfunkel's "Breakaway" and America's "Homecoming". A lot of friends of mine can't get past the songs to hear what he's playing, so be warned!

I listen to a lot of jazz. I can't play it, but it's still a big influence on me. Lee Konitz's masterpiece "Motion" was re-released in a limited edition 3-CD set. But if you don't really like jazz, avoid this because it's pretty "abstract."

I also like the Sonny Clark Trio album (on *Time Records*). I bought it in 1964 and never get tired of playing it. He plays with Max Roach and George Duvivier on this one. There's a Japanese CD with four alternate takes, but it's hard to find. It was out on Bainbridge for awhile with excellent sound. Most recently I've seen it under the title of "Blues Mambo"—bad sound, taken off a scratchy mono LP.

**I-94: What recordings of yours are you proudest of?**

RQ: I'm proudest of "Blank Generation" (Richard Hell & the Voidoids), "The Blue Mask" (Lou Reed), "Escape" (Jody Harris/Quine), "Basic" (Fred Maher/Quine), and "Valdun—Voices of Romantsch" (Corin Curchellas). Mark Ribot and I played on five tracks of the Valdun album in 1996—it really is a masterpiece. Hard to find in the U.S., though. [Subterranean Records](#) in New York tries to keep it in stock.

There's a 1998 album by Reiss—"Vibe of Life". I barely play on it, but I'm proud of my solo on "Pale Blue Eyes." It's an example of my "new, improved" Telecaster concept. Also, in 1995, Jody Harris and I did one track on "Come Together: Guitar Tribute" to the Beatles, Vol. 2. We did the song "Yes It Is," and I really like what we did on it.

I-94: If this is not asking for too many trade secrets, what sort of rig and FX set ups have you used down the years? What did you and Lou use to get those guitar sounds on "The Blue Mask"?

RQ: As far as equipment goes, what I use depends on the nature of the music I'm working on. Performing live onstage, my rule is to keep things as simple as possible! The chain is: (1) guitar, (2) tuner (Boss TU-2), (3) Tube Screamer and/or Yardbox, (4) Deluxe Memory Man, (5) amp.

As I said before, I like the Fender reissue amps:

Ö59 Bassman: A great amp. If you own one of these, replacing the solid-state rectifier with the proper tube rectifier really improves the sound; makes it less "brittle"-sounding.

Ö63 Vibroverb: They only made this from '90 to '96. If you own one of these and want to drastically improve the sound, replace the ceramic magnet speakers with alnico ones. I used two Eminence 10-inch ALPs that used to be marketed by New Sensor. Everyone I know who owns the Vibroverb has done this, and agrees with me. But ultimately, these things are a matter of personal taste, and not everyone will agree.

Ö65 Deluxe Reverb: This is the amp I've used the most in the last five years. It's a great amp to record with and doesn't weigh a ton. It's also loud enough to use in a club. I replaced the ceramic magnet speaker with an alnico oneÑan Eminence 12-inch ALK that New Sensor distributed. With the alnico speaker, the distortion is much smoother when you overdrive the amp.

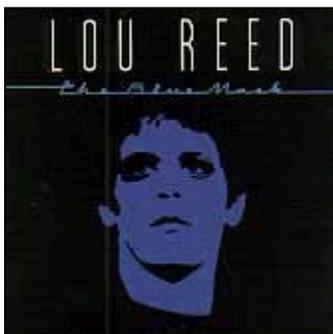
Ö65 Twin Reverb: Loud and clean; a classic sound, but it does weigh 65 poundsÑthis can be a drawback.

Pro Junior: A small amp (10-inch speaker) with just an on/off switch and a volume and tone control. Not a reissue. I've heard it used on a lot of recordings in the last eight yearsÑan amazingly great, large-sounding amp.

Custom Vibrolux: Not a reissue, but very "vintage"-sounding. A lot of people share my opinion that it's the best amp Fender has come out with in 35 years.

One other gadget I use a lot is the Electro Harmonix 16-second Digital Delay. I like to make atmospheric loops on recordings with it. They haven't made it for about 16 years, but there are other machines that do the same thing. The "Boomerang" is probably the best at the moment.

Back in 1981, when I played on The Blue Mask album, I used a Fernandes Strat, the Deluxe Memory Man, and a Peavey "Bandit" amp. On the song "The Blue Mask," I added an MXR Distortion+, an MXR Envelope Filter, and an MXR Dynacomp. Lou Reed used a plexiglass Strat-type guitar with a Legend amplifier.



I-94: Have you heard the re-mastered version of The Blue Mask? Is it radically different in your opinion?

RQ: The Blue Mask CD sounds great; it's just the original two-track mix, digitally remastered.

I-94: What work plans do you have in the immediate future? Any thoughts of guitar teaching or are you actively seeking work on other fronts?

RQ: As I said, there are several albums coming up this year that I should be playing onÑI'd prefer not to mention them until they actually happen. I just played bass (!) on a few tracks for Judah Bauer (of Blues Explosion). He's recording a solo album. The bass has always intrigued me, I love playing it. As far as teaching guitar goes, I've tried to do it a few times, but I'm no good at it. I'll continue to make a living

playing the guitar. Sooner or later, the calls come in.

I-94: What's the talk about a Robert Quine web site?

RQ: People have suggested a web site. I thought about it, but somehow can't bring myself to do it. Doing interviews now and then is enough "publicity" for me.

I-94: You mentioned Kenny Paulsen among early guys who influenced you. I remember reading an interview w/him in Jazz & Pop ca. Ö70 where he talked about being a junkie; he was in a band called Dirty John's Hot Dog Stand that made a record for Polydor (?) around that time. Wasn't he Canadian? Prior to his Freddie Cannon stint, didn't he play with Ronnie Hawkins (after Robbie Robertson left)? It seems like a lot of crucial guys came out of that Ronnie-Dale axis.

RQ: Well, you obviously know a lot more about Kenny Paulsen than I do. I spent a lot of time listening to the "Tallahassee Lassie" 45 on 331/3. I'd love to see the *Jazz & Pop* article.

I-94: As a non-jazz player, what specifically do you get from listening to jazz guys (whether "straight-ahead" like Sonny Clark or super-"out" like seventies Miles)?

RQ: It's osmosisÑplay a jazz CD over and over and hopefully something will sink in. It's about learning how to structure a solo, about chord substitutions (for me, Cecil Taylor and Bill Evans). The best way to introduce yourself to Cecil Taylor's chord concept is an album he made in 1958 with John Coltrane and Kenny Dorham. The last version I saw of it was called Coltrane Time, on *Blue Note*. They play standards, so it's easier to hear Taylor's ideas on chord substitutions.

I-94: This only just came to notice [message about Hell recording a new song for www.MusicBlitz.com with all the original Voidoids as musicians, Robert Quine, Ivan Julian, and Marc Bell]. Any truth to it, or anything else you could tell us?

RQ: Yes, it's trueÑIvan, Marc, and I will be doing a song with Hell.

I-94: Looking back over your career...any regrets?

RQ: No! I've burned a lot of bridges, personally and musically, and this has led to some pretty bleak times. But it's necessary—at the very least you create a vacuum which can lead to new experiences you wouldn't have otherwise. When a situation is musically stagnant, I get out. I can't tell the people I work for how to mix their records. If things are bad, the only civilised option I have is to extricate myself from the situation.

I-94: Since this is for the I-94 Bar, we always ask—what do you like to drink?

RQ: Jim Beam Black Label.

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