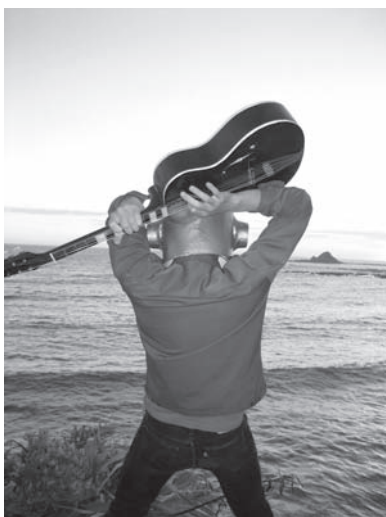


I used to buy fake blood and “kill” myself a lot

Dylan T. ‘Phats’ Herkes interviewed by Luke Wood



From: “Luke Wood” <luke.wood@stinkmagnetic.com>
 To: “Dylan Herkes” <dylan.herkes@stinkmagnetic.com>
 Subject: In the beginning...
 Date: Fri, 09 Dec 2005 16:04:09 +1300

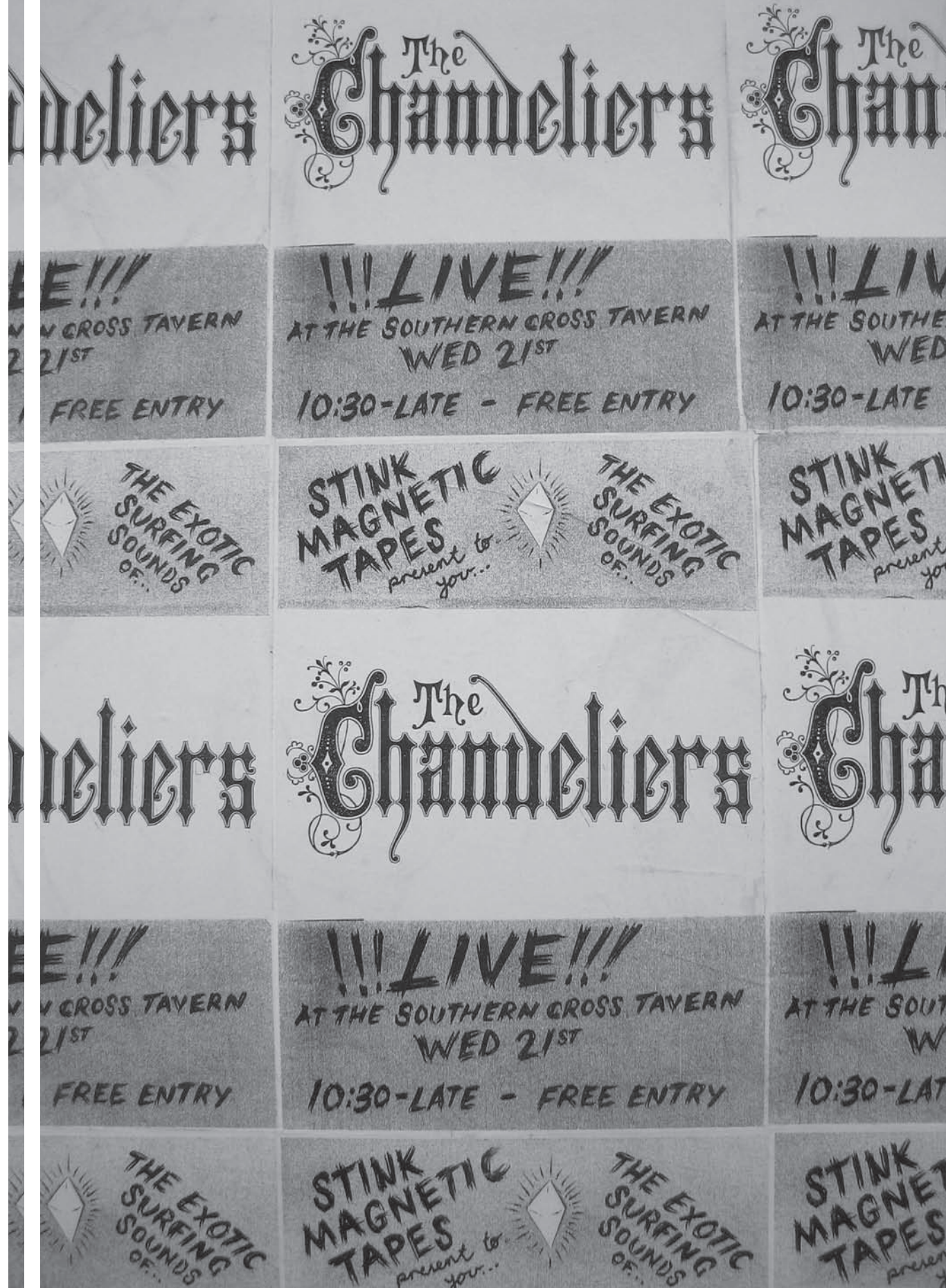
So I thought I'd start with the first time I saw you play (which I've since realised was not the first time I saw you, but I'll come back to that). It was a Pro Drag gig at the Wunderbar a couple of years ago. You'd come down with Cortina and they'd all stayed with us. We'd played the Wunderbar the night before, and Matt Hunt asked if we could leave our PA there for you guys to use the next night, so I ended up helping you set up. When you guys showed up I was immediately smitten with your gear, the old NZ made Jansen guitars and amps you and Moody had. I really enjoyed the gig, and afterwards you gave me a Pro Drag tape. The only tape deck I had at the time was in our car, a crappy old Lada, so I drove around for days listening to really lo-fi recordings of songs like 'Nitro is The Shit' and 'Grave Robbers are Real', interspersed with recordings of revving V8 engines and back-street burn-outs. Your tape acted as a catalyst for me to dig through the cupboards at my dad's and find my old tapes to listen to in the car.

A lot of people are obviously nostalgic about listening to music on vinyl, but I don't really know anyone anymore who listens to tapes. You obviously love tape. Your label is called Stink Magnetic, and you are also, at times, associated with your brother Tape Man. Why tape? Does it ever worry you that people might not actually have the technology to listen to your stuff? And, did you design that Pro Drag tape cover?

From: “Dylan Herkes” <dylan.herkes@stinkmagnetic.com>
 To: “Luke Wood” <luke.wood@stinkmagnetic.com>
 Subject: RE: In the beginning...
 Date: 15 December 2005 2:21:52 PM

That tour was crazy... it was Pro Drag and Cortina and all our stuff in one Bedford van owned by this Australian band called The Stabs, who left it with Bek after their tour here. The night we played at the Wunderbar the taps in the front bar stopped working and we had to let people into the back bar, where we were playin, so that they could just get a beer but we got a lot more party coverage as a consequence. I thought you were talkin about Moody's amp at soundcheck and I was really surprised when you pointed to my blue Jansen — there aren't many people around who care to talk about old New Zealand made equipment so it was really great to see another enthusiast. For me, it's like playing something that was designed for the New Zealand scene — it's got everything that a good old amp should have; valves, alnico speakers, spring reverb... so heavy that you almost break yourself just carrying the bloody thing... now there's the spirit of Rock'n'Roll in effect before you've even struck a chord!!! By the way, those stairs at the Wunderbar could kill a man.

That Pro Drag tape was the first album we did at home by ourselves. We had made four track stuff before, like our Geraldine 7" *Heavy Duty*, but this was the first time we had made a whole album the way WE wanted. It was recorded at our drummer Willie's house in Masterton, Wairarapa, on his portable 8 track reel-to-reel studio that he named 'Keepin' it Reel' studios.



First page: Dylan Herkes at Houghton Bay, Wellington. Photograph by Anna Dean. 2006

Previous page: The Chandeliers, first show poster. A3 (original artwork A7) black and white photocopy. 2003

This page: Cortina / Side Effects album release poster. A3 (original artwork A4) black and white photocopy. 2002

This page: Keepin It Reel logo. A3 (original artwork A7) black and white photocopy. 2003

That page: Born to Die cassette tape album cover. 210 x 98mm colour digital print. 2005

That page: Surf Night poster / flyer. A3 / A6 (original artwork A8) black and white photocopy. 2004



We had such a good time making that album. The house was in a quiet back-street suburb of Masterton and while we were makin it all these little punk kids started turnin up and causing trouble. We had a lot of rocks thrown on the roof that weekend! I had to go running after some kids after they managed to find the power box to the house and were switching the mains off while we were trying to get ‘Surf or Die’ down! I ran after them down the street and around the corner to their house where I stood outside for a while until I was sure they could see me there. I wanted them to know that I knew where they lived — we had tried half a dozen times to record it already and I was pretty pissed off by now. I ran back to Willie’s and we recorded the song. We got Nige, our mate who played with Willie and I in The Side Effects and The Chandeliers to do some organ on ‘Ghost of the Woodville Straights’. Man, I could talk about this album all day... We sung all the vocals through a valve amp in the back of Jen’s van that we toured in, which gave just the reverberated shitty quality we were after. Anne sings the first half of the chorus in ‘Pizza Face’ but she is pretty shy and we couldn’t get it loud enough over the rest of our racket — you can just make it out though. Moody plays through a complete Jansen set-up on this album. He’s got a very rare Jansen Commodore guitar played through his Jansen stack. His fuzz is a combination of a pedal called an Overlord and some home-made circuit sellotaped to the side of it! Later on when we mixed it all down I used Hi8 footage I had taken of drag racers at Hood Aerodrome in Masterton a few years earlier, and we mixed burnouts and ambient sounds from the drags into the album. Willie put the very high-level fire crackle from his fireplace into the intro of ‘Pizza Face’. *Hexaphonic Destructosound* is Pro Drag’s third full-length album since we began in 1997.

I started Stink Magnetic when the only way to make a record label when you’re a teenager with no money was to dub tapes in your room. It was the only way I could do it. Little tape labels were more common back then — you could just dub a few tapes and call yourself a record label — anyone can STILL do that.

But few bother with tape at the moment. Now tape has turned into something like a freak show exhibit amongst the modern music industry. Vinyl is super special, CDs are standard and tapes are dead... Tape Man is my brother and ambassador of Stink Magnetic Tapes. He started making records when we were kids, tryin real hard to get good and stuff but it never really worked out for him. I used to watch him play the blues though and he was pretty darn good at that. When we left home he had a brief stint at getting his album heard but it never really worked out so he started making movies instead.

Tape to me, in its current situation compared to other formats, embodies the same kind of spirit as the artists. I don’t worry about people not-owning a tape deck because if they really want to listen to a tape then they will go out and find a tape deck. A lot of people still have tape decks in their cars, or walkmans. Someone in your family has a tape deck. Moody designed the main cover for *Hexaphonic Destructosound*. I made the coffin titles with skull and racing flags and took the photo of the gateway to Pahiatua; where Willie, Moody and I lived and met.

From: “Luke Wood” <luke.wood@stink.com>
To: “Dylan Herkes” <dylan.herkes@stink.com>
Subject: RE: In the beginning...
Date: Fri, 16 Dec 2005 05:57:59 +1300

Oh yeah I remember Moody’s guitar now, and standing at the back of the Wunderbar with a friend arguing over what it was. I can’t believe you fit seven people and all your gear into that van... I seem to recall you all caught the flu from being cooped up altogether like that for so long?

So you started Stink Magnetic as a teenager? Is that when you started making you own tape covers? I think one of the reasons I engage with your work is that when I was at school I used to spend a lot of time cutting up comics and magazines to make covers for mix tapes that I’d give to friends. But then I went to design school, got put in front of a computer, and kind of lost touch with that. Actually, I was quite surprised



to find out that you had a computer. All your different projects appear to embrace analogue processes and imperfect outcomes. The “reverberated shitty quality” you seek in the recording process manifests itself in the visual side of your practice also. Do you ever use the computer to design with, or are you still cutting, pasting, and photocopying mostly?

From: “Dylan Herkes” <dylan.herkes@stink.com>
To: “Luke Wood” <luke.wood@stink.com>
Subject: RE: In the beginning...
Date: 16 January 2006 3:56:08 PM

Yes that shared flu really hammered almost all of us. It was one of those “for one day I’m gonna make you feel like you might as well be dead” kinda flus. When I got it, it all came on in one day and we were playing a show in Wellington at the Southern Cross Tavern. At soundcheck it felt like I was dizzy from not eating but by the time the show started I found it hard to just stand up straight. That was the most sick I have ever been while playing live. I have to sing in Pro Drag and I almost passed out trying to yell and play at the same time. So I wore 3D glasses I got from watching *House of Wax* in 3D earlier to make me feel better and hide the eyes rolling back into my head! It was one of our best shows of the tour!

I started making collage properly while I was studying electronics briefly at a TOPS course in Palmerston North (TOPS courses are for kids that wanted to leave school and get paid to go to the city). I sat next to shelves completely full to the brim of 50s and 60s *Popular Science*, *Electronics Today* and *Popular Mechanics* magazines. When I had a chance I would entertain myself with cutting and pasting juxtaposed imagery onto letters to my friends, and a box that contained my one and only electronics project — a really shit variable signal generator. The images, fonts, colours and textures in these magazines are so cool. As are the articles like ‘Magnetic Sound Reproduction’, or NASA helping paralyzed people with bionic limbs. They really caught my attention in a lot of ways. I ended up leaving the course and

grabbing a whole stack from this HUGE pile.

I don’t use the computer very often but it comes in real handy when you wanna duplicate or try things out. I’m more into the textures of real stuff — hand-made stuff. It feels better for me to physically place things in certain ways. I also really love hand written fonts, although there are a couple of computer fonts that I find really cool, all my favourites have to be the hand written kind with the very subtle differences from each individual letter. That stuff to me is just so beautiful. So I love to put images together by hand. I REALLY love to cut and paste — it’s very satisfying.

From: “Luke Wood” <luke.wood@stink.com>
To: “Dylan Herkes” <dylan.herkes@stink.com>
Subject: Nostalgia/Monsters
Date: Tue, 17 Jan 2006 17:41:35 +1300

Seeing you perform wearing those 3D glasses (you obviously held onto them for the tour) made a lot of sense — kinda connects the dots for me. Any of the bands I’ve heard you in sound like they’ve materialised straight out of the drive-in listening post of a 50s/ 60s B-grade Sci-fi / Horror flick. Did that have anything to do with the magazines of that era that you scored from the TOPS course? A lot of your song titles also allude to nostalgic monsters — ‘Ghost of the Woodville Straights’ [Pro Drag], ‘Mummies Tomb’ [The Chandeliers], and ‘Wolfman’ [The Side Effects] just to name a few. Did your parents ever let you watch *The Sunday Horrors* as a kid? Were you ever (or are you still) scared of the dark?

From: “Dylan Herkes” <dylan.herkes@stink.com>
To: “Luke Wood” <luke.wood@stink.com>
Subject: RE: Nostalgia/Monsters
Date: 23 January 2006 1:36:49 PM

I’ve always been interested in the supernatural, unexplained phenomena and that sort of stuff. Films aren’t really that separate from the strange things that can and do happen in reality. There’s a thrill and there’s also a sense of belief that sweeps you away when you watch a good film. That you can slip into these worlds

This page: Weekend Werewolf
advertisement. 122 x 135mm. 2003
That page: Shera: Girlfriend of the
Wolf advertisement. A3 black and white
digital print. 2005



and get lost in there and suddenly feel everything that's going on and believe it for a second, it's the beauty of cinema. Yes, the elements that attracted me to the magazines I found dealt with science and lifestyles of your average dad back in the days when science fiction and science fact overlapped. The articles, images, fonts etc all inferred a feeling that we could live in a futuristic paradise where anything was possible and amazing things were a reality. There's a blurry line between science fact and science fiction. There's still a feeling now but it doesn't seem as pronounced. 'Ghost of the Woodville Straights' is a story I heard from a family member who actually saw it. Many people in the Tararua region have seen it and there are a lot of stories about it—especially of rear-view mirror sightings. I once heard one story in particular where a group of three people were hitchhiking on the Straight when a motorcyclist rode toward them. It was a pitch-black night and the headlight shone down toward them. Just as it came near to them it vanished. There are lyrics I wrote to that song but decided that it was stronger without them. 'Mummies Tomb' is what we called this strange little song that emerged one day. A dark rolling verse with an angular chorus. It was a particular feeling that was gently formed by listening to what you imagine the song must do and remaining true to those little clues that you are given. It's following a feeling that reveals itself. I use this technique of writing as much as I can. 'Wolfman' is one of my favorite songs by The Side Effects. It was written right at the end of our term just before we toured and recorded. Werewolves are one of my personal favourite legends, and at the time I was getting right into them and had begun working on my first werewolf film *Weekend Werewolf*. I think werewolves are really fun people. It's unfortunate that people get hurt but there's usually a reason why they do. A smart person who was confronted by a lycanthrope would offer the beast enough beer and food to make him go to sleep and then drive him back out to the woods. They are great party animals. One of the guitarists in the Side Effects was a werewolf and he's one of my best friends.

One of my favourite shows on TV used to be this sitcom where this kid knew a family of vampires living down the road in a cemetery and every now and then the little boy vampire would come around and they would hang out. That was a great show. Really atmospheric. I had a big thing for vampires as a kid. I used to buy fake blood and “kill” myself a lot. I'm not scared of the dark but I'm terrified of heights!

From: "Luke Wood" <lukewood@churchofjeesus.com>
To: "Dylan Herkes" <dylan.herkes@stinkmagnetic.com>
Subject: Wolf Night
Date: Mon, 23 Jan 2006 15:43:33 +1300

Ok so that reminds me, the first time saw you on stage actually wasn't even in a band. It was at a fringe film festival thing in Wellington about five years ago now, and you got up to present your movie *Weekend Werewolf*. You were recently “officially recognised” by the NZ Film Archive for having made this. New Zealand's first werewolf movie! They held a reception for you that you called 'Wolf Night'. Did you ever expect that kind of attention? Was it a good party?

From: "Dylan Herkes" <dylan.herkes@stinkmagnetic.com>
To: "Luke Wood" <lukewood@churchofjeesus.com>
Subject: RE: Wolf Night
Date: 24 January 2006 10:15:42 AM

I didn't expect the amount of attention I got from that film at all! Just before the showing I went to pick my girlfriend Caroline up and when I got back the place was full with people! I sort of imagined several of my friends coming along and that would be it, but the house became full capacity and a lot of people who came to see the films weren't allowed in. Willie McKay, the guy who plays the werewolf, and whom the night is essentially celebrating, along with Bek Coogan, who plays Shera the she-wolf in the sequel, couldn't get into the event! I had to bust them in past staff through a fire exit so they could receive the award and make a speech and stuff! It was crazy! I had been editing a scene for another werewolf film called *Robot Wolf* all day, and also had an interview for television, so I was in a real

STARRING BEK COOGAN - WILLIE MCKAY - VLADIMYR LYMAROV - MARDY PUNE - HARRY HOMAN - ALICA PERRY - FELICITY PERRY - DONNA VALENS - AMY BROOKING - TIM HANDSCOMB - SARAH WOODHOUSE - LIAM BOURKE - NIGEL PATTERSON - LOUISE VAN KULK WRITTEN BY D HERKES EDITED BY D STRUCCO AND ALANA HAWK BOOM BY MOOSE SOUNDTRACK BY THE CHANDELIER
- DIRECTED BY SEGUE LUGOSI -

SHERA GIRLFRIEND OF THE WOLF!



HALF-WOLF!
HALF-VIXEN!
- ALL WOMAN!!



This page: Pro Drag / High Plains Drifters / Bloody Souls poster. A3 (original artwork A5) black and white photocopy. 2003
That page: Voodoo Savage and his Savages / Tape Man poster. A3 (original artwork A5) black and white photocopy. 2003



spaced out frame of mind. It was quite an overwhelming day but it was a real honour to receive that recognition. It was really significant for me.

From: “Luke Wood” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
To: “Dylan Herkes” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
Subject: Possessed!
Date: Tue, 24 Jan 2006 13:24:07 +1300

Your thing with werewolves reminds me that I was quite shocked when you eventually hit the stage at the Wunderbar that night. I'd talked to you a couple of times and you were fairly quiet and reserved, but when Pro Drag finally went on you were transformed. It was like all of a sudden you'd been possessed. You seemed to get taller, you were screaming, and using the lights above the stage as a guitar slide. The 3D glasses certainly did seem to be hiding the fact that your eyes had rolled into the back of your head... because someone/something else had taken control of your body.

I've since realized you often taken on characters by way of a name change and/or disguise; Segue Lugosi [The Chandaliers], Night Fever [The Side Effects], Royal Wolf [Voodoo Savage and His Savages], Phats Punishment Distributor [Pro Drag], and of course you're associated with your brother Tape Man. You talk about how film “sweeps you away”—the suspension of disbelief—and I guess I'm wondering if inhabiting an invented persona frees you up to do things, and behave in ways you might otherwise not?

From: “Dylan Herkes” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
To: “Luke Wood” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
Subject: RE: Possessed!
Date: 24 January 2006 10:37:21 PM

I think it's difficult to say if personalities are invented or not. Identity, to me, is a really complex, changing concept. How do you identify who you really are? Are we just victims of circumstance? A name says a lot. It means a lot. It's a starting point. When your name changes you feel different in some ways and you question things. It can mess with your senses.

It makes you feel less secure about what you thought was previously true. You get a better perspective because you step outside and see from a different angle. It helps you to understand more about what's going on in there and you discover stuff that you never knew existed. Yep, I think it's useful to have an understanding that's beyond what you already consider to be your personality. Oh yeah, other names I've had: Juan Metrez, Ferron, Juan Palmer, Long Valiant, Fingron, Phats Valiant, Regal Valentino, Bongo, Donna Valens, D.Thomas Herkes, Magnetron, Ray Gunn.
I enjoy participating in that area of belief where things aren't absolutely clear yet. There's a great power in interpretation. You can believe it and then it becomes real.

From: “Luke Wood” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
To: “Dylan Herkes” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
Subject: Big cars and burn-outs?
Date: Tue, 24 Jan 2006 15:13:05 +1300

Big cars—V8s, hot rods, American muscle cars—are common images in your work, especially your posters. I can't help but imagine you as a black-jeaned teenager doing burn-outs and terrorising the streets of Pahiataua in a big old Holden or Ford? Has growing up in small-town NZ—being miles away from ‘the action’—anything to do with your love of big cars?

From: “Dylan Herkes” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
To: “Luke Wood” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
Subject: RE: Big cars and burn-outs?
Date: 25 January 2006 11:21:28 AM

I was 15 when I learnt to drive. My uncle Peter taught me in an orange mini. Not a very glamorous vehicle but something to learn in none the less. If only it had been a black Charger with red and silver flames, then I think I would have learned a whole lot of other useful stuff too! I like old cars, especially from the 1950's/60's/70's. They look like they are one step away from being space explorers. That floating feeling you get when you're in them, the weight, the bench seat, the rich coloured vinyl... it's a special experience.



I got to borrow a Regal Valiant from my uncle after my grandma died so I could get to the funeral. It was amazing. It was a long white station wagon with blue interior, a Hemisphere. When I drove it on the open road the weight would swell up and lock it to the road with acceleration which emphasised its power. It had a button for the electric window at the back of the car and an arm-rest for the drivers left arm. It felt more like a moving lounge than a car. I drove from Woodville, where my uncle lives, to Wanganui, Palmerston North, Wellington and Pahiataua. I got a lot of inspiration out of those few days driving that vehicle and I wished that my uncle would sell it to me. He refused because he knew that I couldn't afford it. But I was thankful just to have experienced the feeling that car could give you.

From: “Luke Wood” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
To: “Dylan Herkes” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
Subject: Home-made
Date: Wed, 25 Jan 2006 14:33:36 +1300

Hey I bought a Billy Childish record today. I got it mainly because you told me that The Chandeliers played a support gig for him in Auckland just before xmas, and I hadn't really ever listened to much of his stuff. Anyway in the liner notes he says “I believe in home made music, home made art...”, and of course I thought of you. Home-made music, home-made posters, home-made movies... I thought this would be a good note to end this on because it kind of sums up what I like about your work. It's ‘DIY’. Your brother, Tape Man, literally does it ALL himself. But it's not DIY in the naive sense. It might sound or look that way, but it's all very considered. Your decision-making is informed and intelligent. You mentioned something recently about going to art school and I have to admit I was kind of surprised. Billy Childish wasn't initially accepted into art school, and then when he was he dropped out. Why art school? Why now?

From: “Dylan Herkes” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
To: “Luke Wood” <[redacted]@[redacted]>
Subject: RE: Home-made
Date: 30 January 2006 12:20:35 PM

Nah, I went to an interview there and thought “Fuck that”. I was just kinda desperate for sometin to do if Caroline ended up leaving town. But she's not and I'm not bothered about that idea anymore!
Billy Childish is the shit! He is so great at playing honestly and with a raw, straight-from-the-soul style of playing. I got to speak with him and it was a real thrill for me. He likes a lot of the same music as I do. He thinks Link Wray is one of the worlds' best guitarists.

One of my favourite bands, The Mummies, were really into Billy's old band The Mighty Ceasers, so it was really exciting and kinda surreal to be talking to him about these bands that I have admired for so long. He told me stories about these people that are legendary to me and made it real. He is a scary man in a lot of ways. Very intense, with a depth of thinking and way of expressing like a true artist. I'm a big fan of his music. There is definitely a mode of thought there that he uses. His home-made aesthetic really does give a lot of character to his art and it's one of the aspects I enjoy about it. It sort-of voluntarily leaves gaps for the mediums and extraneous influences to get involved. It says a lot about time and placement, company and honesty, and it helps to reveal more of the essence of the artist in his natural setting. It's not riddled with contrived bullshit—it's plain and simple and uniquely himself, which re-enforces his ideas. It's bold and honest and it links up with the idea that any-one could make this stuff, but then it sets him aside as unique.