



NORTH AMERICAN TOUR DIARY 2003

by The Wedding Present bass player Terry de Castro

Enterprise Van Hire, Seattle

04-05/06/03

It begins in Seattle. Simon has just flown in from Germany, signalling the gathering of the tribe. The next morning, full of beans, he, David and Jessica go to pick up the van. They see the vehicle, all white and gleaming, in the car park of Enterprise Van Rental (so we can boldly go), but it is not meant to be. The Enterprise associate balks at letting the van go to Los Angeles. They usually don't let the van go beyond the neighbouring states. But he consults his superior and they relent. David says: "So it's okay if we take it to New York, then..." Our Enterprise man laughs and shakes his head. He misses a beat and says, "You ARE joking, aren't you?"

So the three end up renting a minivan somewhere else and driving through Northern California with plans to rent a proper vehicle in L.A. The first snag has occurred even before we hit the road.

And the first surreal adventure takes place on the road to Los Angeles. They stop in Dunsmuir, California for a rest and an opportunity to make purchases. The place they choose is a 24-hour cafe/gas station with a spooky attendant. Jessica asks him where the bathroom is, and he looks at her unblinking, with a backlit stare resembling something out of a student film and says: "Behind the TV." Jessica roots around and eventually comes to a rickety door. Inside the dingy room she stubs her toe on a bathtub with a pair of legs in it. After nearly passing out with fright, she realizes that it's a mannequin. She decides to coax David into going inside, telling him it's really nice in there, and when he comes out, he's a bit cross and white as a sheet.

Off again into the blazing desert sun. The temperature is up to 100 degrees, but when they cross into Southern California and Los Angeles, the fog has rolled in and it's a chilly 65. David and Jessica turn up at my gaff, and Simon ends up staying with his friend Royce and going to see Dismemberment Plan at the venue we'll be playing in two days' time.

Meanwhile, back in the United Kingdom, BBC Radio 1 has just transmitted our latest session for John Peel.

Swinghouse Rehearsal Studio, Los Angeles

06/06/03

This time at Swinghouse, we get bumped up to First Class. The small room that we used before is already booked, so we get to use the "showcase" room, where Linkin Park and the Red Hot Chili Peppers got their start. We find out that Iggy Pop and the Stooges have also used it. During the afternoon we step outside the studio and see about eleven helicopters circling the area. Later on the news that night we learn that a small plane had crashed into an apartment building.

San Diego Casbah Club

07/06/03

Today we've got a session at KXLU college radio. The bloke (one bloke) is excited to have us there, but Jessica has to keep telling him to turn down the vocals and various other pointers. We all get supplied with t-shirts and nifty hooded tops, so we're happy.

On the way down to San Diego we stop at Taco Time for lunch, and Simon and I draw the short straw by ordering a huge gut-bomb that we can only describe as the Cream Crap Burrito. On arriving we practically have to duck to avoid the low-flying aircraft at the Casbah Club. Our first deja vu happens when Pete, our sound engineer comes into the venue before the soundcheck. The second is when David is presented with a bunch of Bizarro figurines by one of his long-time fans, who always seems to have comic book paraphernalia for him.

One of the figurines looks spookily like David. It's been about eight months, but when we see Pete it feels as though the last U.S. tour never ended - it's been a continuum. We haven't met The New Pornographers yet, but it transpires that they will not be arriving until 11pm due to a dental emergency involving their bass player and an abscess. The N.P. will be the headlining band for the first half of our tour. They feature the flame-haired rock/country singer Neko Case.

Our other tour companions are a five-piece outfit called The Organ. There's a rumour floating around that they are an all female group and David, of course, is thrilled when they arrive, proving the rumour true. They turn out to be a fantastic, stylish 80's hotch potch of Joy Division, The Cure and The Smiths. The singer, Katie, looks a bit like Ian Curtis and sings as though she's channelling Morrissey.

During the gig, David asks if his hair looks all right (this will become a repeat performance for the rest of the tour). Later on he gets a big whoop for one of the old songs, and says "thanks for brushing my ego... wait... what's the word?" "Stroke!" Someone yells, "It's stroke. You brush your hair." "Mmmm, topical," David says, getting a raucous laughter (further brushing his ego).

The New Pornographers arrive in the nick of time to do their set, and they power out pop tunes with a Blondie-esque, Cheap Tricky panache. The bass player is pretty out of it on painkillers, but he pulls through.

As we're loading out, a N.P. fan approaches David with a story for him. Apparently he and his mates had never heard of Cinerama and did not know that we were playing that night. When they see David up there, they all get excited because on the way down to San Diego that day, they had put Bizarro on their car stereo. The poor bloke is really animated telling David this story, and David just replies, in his best deadpan, "Yeah, I know... someone told me already." This will turn into a joke that will be milked for months to come.

By the end of the night, Kari is surrounded by hotties. We're all kind of disappointed that he's not single on this tour, because we can't live vicariously through his escapades.

Hollywood Knitting Factory

08/06/03

Just outside of Carlsbad, where we stayed last night, we stop at a gas station that also has fresh produce. All of us buy bags of apples, oranges, peaches and nuts, and Jessica also buys a packet of wet wipes. David says that this is the most un-rock-and-roll thing he has ever witnessed.

Once again, the security is aggressive in L.A.: the security guard knocks over my guitar and when I, very non-accusingly, look his way, he says, "That was YOU!" "Sorry," I say, and he snorts, "I don't care, it's your gear." On top of that, The Knitting Factory is also a fairly posh restaurant with decent food, but we are served a big pile of plain pasta with some boiled onions on top. Carl, the N.P. singer says, "Have some promoter pasta!" Some of us opt for dinner elsewhere.

When we start the gig David comments on my sparkly top, saying that it's nice to see I've made the effort... for once. He's got an ardent admirer in the front row tonight. Her blouse is decidedly undone, and her eyelashes flutter the entire gig. She sniffs at Jessica and, when I catch her eye, does the same to me! Another attractive female in the audience says "David you're Greeeaaaat!" and David says, "I love my job."

We have to say goodbye to Pete tonight, but he'll be rejoining us in Chicago.

When David and Simon check into the Beverly Laurel hotel that night, Simon asks if they need the booking reference number, and the concierge says, "No, no. It's all right. We know Mr Gedge very well here," like David was James Bond or something. This immediately goes to David's head.

San Francisco Bimbo's 365 Club

09-10/06/03

As we load the gear out of my apartment that morning, David turns to Kari on the stairs and says, "Did you just touch my bottom?" Kari says, "I touched your lower back..." David says, "Call it what you want."

We all engage in a long, analytical conversation about cleavage in the van that morning, signifying that our combined mental acuity is now appropriate for being on the road.

When we arrive at Bimbos, the N.P. drummer, Gary, comes out to our van and tells us what a wonderful place it is. It's like an old gangster supper club. Like the place in Goodfellas where Friday was for the wives and Saturday was for the girlfriends. The kitchen is a bizarre extravaganza with hams and chickens dangling from the ceiling and weird, bulbous equipment hanging on the walls like something from 'The Cook, The Thief, His Wife And Her Lover'. Gary says the ladies' room is particularly elaborate, and that he tried to take some photos of it. David says, dubiously, "Taking photos in the ladies room, were you?"

Just after the soundcheck, The Organ show up with their van behind a tow truck. Van trouble. Apparently it's not their day because they've also been turned away from their hotel. The manager, assuming that they're lesbians says that he doesn't want 'their kind' in his hotel.

Before we start the gig David pauses and someone shouts, "Play something!" He said, "I would, but I'm waiting for this lot to stop fanning about," pointing to a little crowd of people talking and bringing drinks to each other. Later on, someone asks if they can get a cd of David's jokes, and he says, "So you think the music's rubbish, do you?"

I'm staying with friends tonight and am sad that I'll miss the Phoenix pop star hotel and the party room, but Simon tells me not to worry... it's never the same without "every swinging dick." We play Bimbo's on the following night as well, and have some fracas with the stage manager who seems to be under the influence of something chemical or supernatural. We have some trouble making head or tail of what he's on about.

Grant's Pass Oregon

11/06/03

Today we drive. We stop at restaurant called the Black Oak Inn, chosen by our own Cafe King, Kari Paavola. Our tables are separated; David, Jessica and I sit at one, with Kari and Simon at the other. Simon asks, "What are we doing today?" And David answers, "Well, Jessica wants to go to a little resort town called Ashland, in Oregon. They've got a little river and lots of shops and a Shakespeare festival... can't you hear my heart beating with excitement from all the way over there?"

When we stop at the first gas station we run into the N.P. Neko slinks out of their van in her pyjamas and talks to us for a while. She highly recommends the chocolate cake in Ashland and does a little go-go dance in the parking lot, which David enjoys.

During the sunset, we wind through the mountains, and Simon provides the soundtrack out of his moody, eclectic cd collection: Low, Jon Spencer, Rachel's and Woven Hand.

When we arrive in Grant's Pass (known as "Grass Pants" to natives), we meet up with Jessica's friend Sarah and go for a whopping Mexican meal. She shows us all around town that night, which entails basically one bar with a pool table. We shoot pool and shoot the breeze well into the night and probably encounter every resident of Grant's Pass at one point or other inside the bar. We learn all about the dubious dealings of the small town residents' shady careers.

Portland Aladdin Theatre

12/06/03

We go for a little morning swim at the Grant's Pass Motel 6. David does a bit of filming and Jessica gets him to show me the "Gedgestroke" - a demented, twisting freestyle crawl that David has invented. Afterwards he asks me in the hotel room, "Have you seen men enjoying your body?" I think he's talking about an obscure film or something, but no, he means it literally - he has just witnessed a man eyeing Jessica on her way up from the swimming pool.

This morning Kari chooses a golf-themed cafe called the Tee Time Cafe. David and Jessica both order 'threesomes', and this so amuses David that he wants me to film him ordering it, but I refuse because I think it's stupid.

We listen to The Pixies through the pine-covered Oregon mountains, and Kari is perplexed and unimpressed (by the music). David is revising something on the computer, and he shows me the list of words that he has added to his spellchecker over the years. The list reads like a peculiar cultural/historical document with words from the Cinerama/Wedding Present lexicon like: Albiniland, Ampeg, Bassman, BV's, Cineramaland, EQ, Eurovision, Fisk, Flight-case, Gedge-esque, Grrrrreat, KEXP, Leadmill, Merch, Morricone, Outro, Probs (as in 'no probs'), Rockin', Scopitones, Soundcheck, TBC, Tracklisting, Twat, Whingeing, and all the album titles, just to name a few.

David has begun a little habit at Jessica's expense that is bound to get out of control on this tour. He thinks that she has more ailments than anyone he's ever met, and, to prove it, every time she mentions a scratchy throat, sore knee, tickly nose or tummy ache, he gives me a long, knowing look. This annoys Jessica, but David pleads innocence and says he's not being judgemental - he's merely pointing out fact and is, therefore "just a conduit."

The Aladdin Theatre is one of the only venues on the whole tour that supplies us with a dog (it's on our rider: one dog). Right next to the Aladdin Theatre there's a tiny, cramped bookstore with a rather stocked pornography section. You can't get back there without proof of age, and all the books are encased in plastic. David checks it out, but is quickly deterred by the atmosphere in there, and Jessica, with no I.D. on her, is not even allowed to look.

Jessica saves the day at the merchandise stall because the venue management want to charge a twenty percent commission on t-shirts. She refers them to the contract, which agrees to no such clause. A tour manager in training.

We leave directly after the gig because we're driving up to Seattle and staying at David and Jessica's place. We arrive there at about 4AM, and Kari has been asleep the entire time and thinks that he's been teleported. That always happens with him - he conks out like a robot being unplugged. Although we're all incredibly sleepy, as soon as we're all settled in we get a second wind and have a party room at the apartment on Queen Anne Hill until the sun comes up.

Vancouver Commodore Ballroom

13/06/03

We have breakfast at David and Jessica's. Simon and I get an enormous kick out of reading Viz, particularly Roger's Profanosaurus - in fact, it makes us all laugh. We tell Kari that it's a real dictionary and that he should use these words as often as possible. Especially oomlaters.

We're driving across the Canadian border today, and as we're discussing the logistics, I realise that I don't have my passport with me. This could be a disaster. In my day, we didn't need passports, but times have changed. David playfully accuses me of being an arrogant American who thinks they can just swan around the world without heed because America is the most important country on Earth. Kari says, "She thinks she's on the guest list for Canada." I take all of this ribbing in my stride, but meanwhile I'm sweating bullets all the way to the border, hoping that I don't ruin the night and the gig by getting us all sent back to Seattle! On the way, we pick up Jessica's friend Melinda who will be coming with us today.

When we arrive at the border the official is very nice and says, "Soooooooooooo.... we've got two Americans, two British, one Finn and one unknown... " That's right. "Why doesn't Terry have proof of citizenship?" "She forgot her passport." "Not a good idea when you're crossing a border. How disappointed is Terry going to be if I send her back?" "Well," I say, "We're playing a concert tonight." "Uh huh, so the band will be playing a little short-handed then!" But, after a brief chat at immigration, we are thankfully allowed to proceed. My name isn't Mud!

We get a proper pop star dressing room at the Commodore Ballroom, with our own phone, showbiz mirrors and 24 beers. Kari remarks that we may not be able to take the beers back to America with us, and Simon says, "Best get drinking, then." We never should have worried though, because throughout the night, the Organ girls will make free with our drinks anyway.

Kari asks David if he's brought Canadian dollars with him, and David says, "Of course - unlike SOME people, I knew we were crossing a border today..."

Back at the ranch in Seattle, we once again stay up drinking wine and enjoying vegetarian delights in Queen Anne.

Seattle Showbox

14/06/03

What a luxury to wake up in the same town as the night's gig. We've got an in-store at Sonic Boom on Capitol Hill today. Before we play, David announces that he hates doing in-stores, but he ends up enjoying this one. When he breaks a string and realises that our roadie is fraternising, he entertains the crowd with a question/answer session. When Jessica FINALLY fixes his guitar, we continue to play another few songs and even some requests. The store is packed, and Jessica is impressed by David's popularity in her home town.

The Showbox is the perfect venue, striking a great balance between professional club and casual rock concert hall. This is the last gig with our mates the New Pornographers and The Organ. As always, we're a bit sad to see the end. Neko gives all of the boys very fond farewell hugs.

We go back to the Queen Anne Avenue party room for more wine, and David finds a pair of my knickers on the sofa. He accuses me of having twirled them around my finger and tossed them into the front room (where Kari and Simon sleep). But no, they were actually there from my having folded the laundry earlier in the day.

Drive

15-16/06/03

Kari has decided to miss out on the three-day drive from Seattle to Minneapolis and fly instead, like a real prima-donna pop star drummer. He gets to spend the next two days in Seattle, drinking coffee, going to the cinema and enjoying the panoramic view of Seattle from David and Jessica's apartment. We don't care - all the more room for us (and a bit of quiet, as well). The only thing is, who will decide where we have breakfast?

Today, that's not a problem, because we have breakfast at the apartment, lovingly prepared by David and Jessica (David's pretty good at poached eggs). After an extremely leisurely morning we set off on our drive with plans to enjoy some Washington State attractions along the way. Since Jessica is a native she knows where to take us. We stop first at Snoqualmie Falls, where David is itching to hop the fence and scabble down the steep incline to film the waterfall. He dares me to dare him, but I pretty much ignore him.

Next, it's the Twin Peaks Cafe for lunch, where they have the damn fine coffee and cherry pie. It's very ordinary food, but extremely overpriced because it's the Twin Peaks Diner. David keeps asking if everything is the "actual" thing from Twin Peaks. For example, "Is this the actual mug from Twin Peaks? Is this the actual booth from Twin Peaks?" The waitress looks at him as if he's a little bit touched.

The rest of the day is just simply a long drive to Bozeman, Montana, which is a lot of nothing. We stop for a midnight snack at a little gas station after a pretty complicated search for toilets. We end up having wine in the party room. I leave the door on the latch, and when David and Jessica walk in, I say, "Come on in," and David thinks I'm being sarcastic. As if I'm saying "Oh, sure, walk right in without knocking and make yourself at home in MY room. Have some wine, while you're at it!" So, this is going to become the tour joke for the next two weeks or so.

Not too much happens over the next day. After having driven across the Idaho Panhandle yesterday and into Montana, we continue on towards North Dakota. We stop to visit the world's largest Holstein cow and make use of a great photo opportunity. It's incredibly humid in this midwestern state, and, at one point, we think it's raining really hard, but it's actually a bug storm that we've hit. Thousands of insects are getting massacred by the grill and windscreen of our van. Big ones, small ones, and ones that go splat, are all coming at us at 75 MPH. This is actually the most exciting thing that happens all day.

Minneapolis 400 Bar

17/06/03

We're at a bit of a loss as to where to have breakfast this morning. We half consider ringing Kari up in Seattle, telling him our options and having him choose one for us. In the end we opt for Kenny's Diner. David tells us not to put him down as Mr. Kenny's, but they serve extraordinarily weak coffee, to his great delight. After breakfast we stop at a gas station and try to wash the reeking bugs off the van. We really only manage to get through the first layer, and the sludge smells like a combination of pond water and cow's blood. David discovers that he's covered in them all down his front. When he looks down and sees the damage, he comes towards me, menacingly, and says, "Give us a kiss, love!"

At the 400 Bar we are reunited with our pop star drummer. The opening band, With Friends Like These, tuck into our beer, and after the show we drive to Menomonie, Wisconsin. All together again, we congregate in the party room, and Kari realises how much he's missed us: we're having an incredibly circular argument about violence in America that never ends and never shows a possibility of resolving. Kari, half asleep, says, "This conversation has been going on for over half an hour and it's getting stupider and stupider." We all start to leave, and he says, "You don't have to go, just please change the subject!"

Electrical Audio

18-20/06/03

We defer to the Diner King (thank God he's back, if for no other reason), who leads us to the Kernel Cafe for breakfast. We sit at a circular table and talk about Wisconsin cheese. You may not think that's a very expansive topic, but Wisconsin is the cheese capital of America. The gas station signs read, "Gas, Food, Cigarettes, Cheese." They really do. We end up stopping at a little cheese shop on the Illinois border where David buys us a bag of cheese curds to share. They're the stuff they skim off the top of the cheese batch, and they squeak when you chew them. Not much happens in Wisconsin.

For some reason, whenever we arrive in Chicago we always have trouble finding Steve Albini's Electrical Audio Studio. We basically know where it is, but this time we're approaching from a different exit and the cross street we need is just off the map. We know it's near a radio control tower, but we go to the wrong one at first. We actually end up arriving in the late afternoon, and it's familiar like home. There's a new cat in the family, and the old fluffy, grey, 25-year-old Fluss the cat is still hanging in there, asleep on the heated billiard table.

We order a pizza for dinner, and David makes a crack about my chain-smoking and voracious meat eating. Of course, I still smoke cigarettes a bit (only on tour). And although I'm principally vegetarian, ONE TIME I ordered a salad with roast chicken on top, so David now thinks that I should order a "meat lover's pizza" with beef, ham, pepperoni and bacon, with a sausage on the side encasing a cigarette. This will become a refrain, unfortunately. He thinks I love meat and fags so much that I want to smoke a sausage.

We watch Spinal Tap on video, and I'm a bit worried, because it's supposedly bad luck to watch it on the road.

We go to sleep in our little rooms and wake up in what feels like a bona-fide sweatbox. We begin our first day's recording with our engineer, Greg Norman. Simon is in guitar heaven with all of Steve Albini's axes and gadgets to play with. He chooses a customised, generic brand guitar - it's got no make or date on it anywhere. And David chooses Steve's \$3,000 Fender hollow body and keeps pretending to drop it. Kari out-drums himself, getting all six drum tracks done so he is free to party with some 21 year old Finnish girls that live in Chicago.

The next day, Jessica and I make sandwiches for the guys, who still have some guitar work to do. Jessica refuses to touch David's meat, so she has me do it (I am the meat lover, after all). She touches Simon's (vegetarian) meat instead.

Kari is off somewhere in ChicagoLand, and Jessica and I do a little exploring around Lake Michigan. When we get back, since our drummer is absent, I get to do some piano and tambourine overdubs. David buys us a celebratory Thai meal, and we contemplate taking a photo of it for Kari: me sat at the piano with a tambourine (doing his job), and a luxurious take-away meal spread all round. We just tell him about it instead.

We stay up watching Crank Yankers and Trigger Happy T.V. Greg is a bit stone faced during Trigger Happy, but those who live or have lived in Europe are howling with laughter. I accidentally buy non-alcoholic beer and put it in the studio fridge. Greg says that if I leave it in there, it will probably sit there longer than anything else in Electrical's history. David and Jessica go to buy more wine, but the cashier won't sell it to David because although he's got his I.D., Jessica hasn't got hers. What evil, minor corrupting plan could he have had with one bottle of wine?

Chicago Abbey Pub

21/06/03

We all wake up at about 5 AM in the little cubicles at Electrical. They are super-heated by now, with the sun beating and magnifying through the massive windows. Fluss the cat salutes our departure by peeing in mine and Kari's room, just missing Kari's clothes - possibly revenge because he senses that Kari is no cat lover.

We have a greasy, \$3 breakfast at our regular local caff, Clara's Diner, and undertake an ill-fated trip to the lake which involves two hours in the car and fifteen minutes by the water.

We drive around aimlessly looking for the venue, do a U-turn and accidentally stumble upon the Abbey Pub while we're on the bat-phone trying to find out what street it's on. Our new tour mates, Parker and Lily are there, rehearsing. They look great with two foxy women on keyboards (now begins the pressure David will put on me to tart it up on stage) and an eccentric Texan with an Irish accent on guitar.

We're reunited with Pete, and, after the soundcheck, we all have dinner at the Irish pub next door. David is extremely impressed that they have real malt vinegar on the tables, because this is usually unheard of in the U.S. Simon and I stuff ourselves silly with the blackened catfish sandwiches we order. They were so good that we still talk about them wistfully to this day.

The first band on tonight is called Head of Femur. They are an arty university music student band, and could almost be good if they weren't so irritating. The p.a. at the venue is also amazingly loud, adding to the annoyance.

This is a late gig - we're not on until 1AM. On the late night drive, we see a police car rumbling around the corner, and Pete says, in a T.V. voice, "COPS! In Chicago." This is one of the comedy bits he introduced us to on the last tour, and no matter how many times he says it, he always gets a laugh.

Detroit Magic Stick

22/06/03

We're back on the road. Our hotel last night was a rather noisy Super 8. The Cafe King chooses another winner with McDuffy's Diner. It's a family run place and we all leave satisfied. I think Kari always looks for smiling, fat customers leaving the restaurant.

Jessica started the tour with a six-pound bag of pretzels, which is now down to just a little ziplock. I ate most of them. I actually think by now I've eaten about our pounds of pretzels, which is just over quarter of a stone.

The Magic Stick is not our favourite venue. We drive through the familiar boarded-up territory on the way. When we get there, I try to make a phone call across the street but am too terrified to continue. I scuttle back to the venue trying to shake the drunk who has decided to befriend me.

At the merchandise desk a couple of fans approach David with a picture of their cat, David Gedge. He will take it home to add to the pile of photos of similarly named pets and children.

There is an opening band on before Parker and Lily called Summersault. They are your standard piano-based Coldplay-esque affair with good-lookingish lads. They have come straight from a residential studio where they have been recording for three days. Apparently the studio had no shower, and when the lead singer leans down from the stage to shake my hand, I can honestly say that I believe it.

The house engineer is from the north of Dallas, Texas. He's quite a talker and apparently he is the ex-bass player of American hard/soft rock band Ratt. He repeatedly hocks loogies (spits) on the stage whilst recalling his rock 'n' roll heyday. At the end of the concert he tries to sell dope to Kari and asks the rest of us to "smell his fingers" because he's just been rolling some killer skunk. "Sage," I ask? No.

Tonight we drive to Toledo, Ohio. We have quite an eventful drive through an industrial landscape of refineries, natural gas fires and a giant baseball. When we drive past a 50-foot high tyre Simon says, "Now I've seen everything." Someone is being pulled over for speeding. Pete says: "COPS! In Detroit."

Pittsburgh Club Cafe

23/06/03

This morning we go back to Nick's Cafe. We were here approximately seven months ago. We inevitably decide to sit in the same booth and we actually get the same waitress. She is very pretty and very impressed with David and Simon's accents: "Oh my GOD. Have you guys gotta' AC-CENT??" "Yes," David says. "Oh my GOD, that is SO cute!"

Unfortunately for Kari, she does not seem to fancy him anymore because she isn't flirting with him like she did the last time. After our meal he notices the new wedding ring on her finger.

Simon gets a mountain of Nick's coleslaw and a 'heap-o-fries' in which he hardly makes a dent. Kari gets a truckload of lamb salad - seriously - his plate is the size of a manhole cover and it looks like a semi truck (lorry) unloaded lamb and lettuce onto it.

Tonight's venue is a tiny, intimate club with a starry backdrop. Pittsburgh is pretty, mountainous and green. We get served a lovely meal in the dressing room, and I make sure that the waitress gets an acceptable tip. David is always accusing me of padding the tip.

The Parker and Lily girls look very lovely tonight. They always do, but they've been shopping in the vintage clothing shops in Pittsburgh today, and have found some lovely frocks. David says to me in a hangdog manner, "at least THEY make the effort..." "I must say, they do look pretty hot. After the gig, they subtly urge me to dress up more on stage. I think David has been prompting them.

Washington DC Black Cat

25/06/03

Jessica's at the wheel today so Simon can have a break. She notices a funk coming from the back seat and says, "Who's got their shoes off?" Just then Kari slides his feet out of his sandals, brandishing his bare foot, much to all of our horror. This leads to an extremely mature discussion forum on what we would rather do: lick between Kari's toes, or (fill in the blank here). No matter what disgusting proposition came up, it was always, unanimously preferable to the former.

We meet our old friends Caleb, Eric and Dani at the Black Cat. There is a great slowcore band called The Race opening up tonight. We have the usual fantastic hospitality tonight a la Dante and Co., and Eric's friend Greg gives David a load of comics. Dante is probably the best promoter on the circuit. He's always glad to see you, he runs the venue brilliantly and he lays out a great spread. He doesn't disappoint on the character front either with his waist-length hair and 40-a-day voice. He's kind of an institution and has been the promoter there for as long as David can remember.

We are fascinated at the end of the evening watching Parker and Lily jam all of their gear into the back of their pickup, with the bass drum strapped to the top like some travelling minstrel circus. A strange woman backs Jessica into the car park and tells her how HOT she looks, staring at her chest the whole time. We are staying with Eric and Dani tonight. They are kind enough to offer their hospitality to us whenever we play D.C., and it's a nice break from the motel cycle. Eric is a long-time Wedding Present fan and the front man for the band The Hurricane Lamps, and Dani is his extraordinarily beautiful partner who is by now about six months pregnant. Simon and I enjoy a cigarette on their back porch, where it is about 40 degrees Celsius and 500 percent humidity. I'm surprised our cigarettes stay lit. We listen to the crickets and get a free sauna.

The following day we attempt to record in Eric's home studio, but the session turns out to be a bit ill-fated. Eric's got a spectacular set-up, but I think we were a bit optimistic thinking we could bang out a proper recording in the late morning with a 5-hour drive ahead and a concert in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia North Star Bar

25/06/03

We enjoy (if you can call it that) a Bob Evans Family Breakfast. The Diner King has cashed in on the free continental breakfast at the hotel and so he can't be arsed to find a decent restaurant for us. We have a ridiculous conversation in the van sparked by Jessica mentioning some people who were killed in Seattle. Simon says, "I thought nothing bad ever happened in Seattle?" Referring to how she had explained (patiently) that Seattle had very little gun crime, she says, "HEL-lo? They were STABBED." We turn, somehow, to the subject of ice hockey, and Simon maintains that it is a sport for 'pansies' even though it's got the highest rate of injury of any sport. Nothing I can say will deter him from his opinion, even stories about players getting their teeth knocked out and their brains damaged on a regular basis by hockey pucks. "Pansies!" he cries, "It's only a bit of rubber." We're trying to find our way back to the venue after dropping David off for a radio interview, and I think everyone is a little bit prickly.

We hear a police siren from somewhere - "COPS.... in Philadelphia."

At the venue Kari and I play pool, and Caleb films us. Later Caleb tells me that he will edit the film and make it look as though I kicked Kari's Finnish ass.

Tonight our opening act is a truly dreadful band called Talking With Teens. Our dressing room is down a very short staircase, and we can see the band from our vantage point. It's our dream to be able to, very visibly and slowly, pull down an opaque, soundproof screen when they start playing. While we're on stage, they get extremely drunk and heckle David for the entire gig.

There is also a German girl there who stares at David unblinkingly for the duration, which prompts David to suggest, "I am eye candy after all." Another woman asks him after the show whether his lyrics are fact or fiction - genuine experience or just repressed British sexuality? Unfortunately I can't remember how David responds, but apparently very wittily, because we hear from a friend that she ends up bragging about it on the Cinerama website.

Jessica is miffed because David kicked her up the bum (not hard!) in order to get her to change a string. "You're only the roadie! Sorry to put you out," is his heartfelt apology.

As we drive into New Jersey the breakfast king spies a couple of promising venues for tomorrow morning. Pete chimes in with, "DINERS... in New Jersey." "Now that's just silly," says David.

Hoboken Maxwell's

26/06/03

Wow, is it ever a hot day in Jersey. It's that sticky, thousand-percent humidity that makes you want to stay as still as possible. When we drive through a toll booth, Jessica pays the toll but forgets to get a receipt. David has to leap out of the speeding vehicle (injuring his leg terribly) and run to get it, risking his life in the speeding traffic. He limps back to the van, barely making it. This is the guilt-trip spiel he gives Jessica, anyway.

Later in the day Jessica swallows an ENTIRE lettuce leaf whole because she is so hungry. We are a bit of a whingey bunch today -I think everyone has some kind of complaint or other. And to make things worse, on this, the hottest day of the year on the muggy east coast, we have the one and only opportunity to relax in the hotel before the gig, and the air conditioning is broken. They say it will be up and running soon. Oh good, in a few hours or something? No... two weeks.

I'm sharing a hotel room with Pete, and I'm sitting like a stone on one of the beds, managing to survive, when Pete asks me if I've got a stamp. "Certainly, I'll get one for you," and the exertion of looking through my bag to find one makes me break into a profuse, coursing sweat with rivulets running into my eyes.

Hoboken is always good. A singer/songwriter called Diana Darby is the support act. She is a kind of quiet-core, velvet underground-ish electric guitar player with a very quiet, breathy voice. She is very friendly, but when she and her manager join our dinner table, David is mortally terrified that he is going to have to speak to them. I decide to cover for him and he then insists, even to this day, that Diana is still my "best mate."

During the gig someone shouts "Coldplay!" and David says, "What's wrong? This not boring enough for you?"

We sit perfectly still in the stifling party room. Simon has bought some whiskey for us to sip, and I go to the ice machine with the hotel ice bucket. Pete refuses the ice because I'd neglected to put on gloves and line the bucket with a plastic bag before I filled it. But the rest of us blow into our ice-filled glasses and get a makeshift air-conditioning effect. After our little party Pete tells me he's got a little surprise for me. But, before I start to get nervous, he opens the hotel room door and reveals an enormous high-powered fan, whirring away in the room. I'm more delighted by this than anything else that has happened the entire tour. Pete had snagged the very last fan from reception, and neglected to tell anyone else. He was going to bring it into the party room, but thought better of it and kept schtum.

Meanwhile, David and Jessica drag their mattress out onto the balcony and get about four hours of semi-comfortable sleep until construction workers start tearing up the road at about 6AM.

The next morning I try to keep my mouth shut about the fan, but it's just too good a story to keep to myself. It may not sound that interesting, but that indicates just how hot it really was. David won't forgive me for a long time for not sharing the fan.

Boston TT The Bears

27/06/03

Another party room. Simon and I strike again with the wine. "Go ahead. Feel free. Have some wine - everyone else is."

Parker and Lily have invited all of us to stay with them in New York at their inherited, luxury loft apartment in central Manhattan. Apparently they've got about 6 bedrooms and they're located across the street from the venue. Simon accepts. Now, this is an offer that Kari would literally wet his pants over, so Simon begs them not to tell him about it so he can gloat to Kari about his exclusive invitation. Later in the day, Kari is wondering aloud where he's going to stay, and Simon pipes up about the multi-million dollar apartment and the massive room that's got his name all over it. Kari is satisfactorily green, and Simon keeps it to himself that Kari is actually invited as well. I'm pretty sure he keeps quiet until the last possible moment, like when Kari is looking up youth hostels in the yellow pages.

New York Knitting Factory

28/06/03

We have a great show tonight. Mark Burgess from the Chameleons is also playing, and he gives David a big hug when he sees him. Gosh, this tour ends so abruptly. Tonight we go our separate ways. Normally we would all head west again together, but this tour is one-way. David and Jessica have to drive to Allentown, Pennsylvania. Simon and Kari get to rage into the Manhattan night with Parker and Lily, and Pete and I fly back to L.A.

But it isn't quite over... David and Jessica now have to drive from New York to Seattle... via Los Angeles! That's another four thousand miles.

Drive

29/06/03 – 03/07/03

They drive well into the morning. By the time they get there, the hotel has given up on them and has cancelled their reservation. They have to re-book, and really only get to stay for about four hours. Jessica walks out to the van to check that they'd locked it up properly, and a passer-by says, "Nice morning, huh?" Jessica says, "I don't know! It's still night to me - I haven't gone to bed yet."

The cross-country drive is old-hat to all of us now, but it's different doing it with no gig stops. Neither one of them has ever been to the Grand Canyon before... it seems like every Cinerama or Wedding Present tour has somehow always just missed that area... so they decide to visit it this time. They see a few other sights on the way as well. On the drive from St. Louis to Elk City, Texas, they come across a cheap motel, and the car park is carpeted with gigantic, bird-sized insects. Spending about half an hour crouched down examining the specimens, they are interrupted by the receptionist who wonders what's wrong. The motel is dank, dingy and smells of leaking gas with creaking, decrepit light fixtures and drippy taps. Perhaps next time they'll opt for one notch above this level.

The drive through Texas and New Mexico is pretty uneventful, but it does mean that Jessica has now been in 43 states, only three less than David, who has been in more than all of us. Somewhere in the Texas they stop at a restaurant that advertises a great deal: If you can eat an entire 72-ounce steak meal in one sixty minute sitting, you can have it for free. Now, that's about a third of a stone of food. There's a hotel there as well, and it has an enormous Texas-shaped pool.

They drive across the flat New Mexico desert for what seems like an eternity of emptiness and stop at Flagstaff to fuel up for the G.C. They cross into Navajo Nation and find out that it costs 20 bucks to get into the Grand Canyon National park.

After all of these years of talk about seeing the Grand Canyon, David finally claps eyes on it. And he's not too impressed - "Just a big valley, really." He is actually more excited by the original London Bridge, which stands rebuilt in Lake Havasu, Arizona. Apparently a rich American bought the bridge and had it shipped over, but, after it had been put back together, brick by brick, the American public was a bit disappointed because they thought they were getting Tower Bridge. David, however, thought it was a great and bizarre thing to behold on the edge of the desert.

The highlight of this side trip though, is, without a doubt, the Exotic World Museum of Burlesque, which is located in the middle of the Mojave Desert. They had found out about it en route in Jessica's book of Peculiar America. When they pull into the driveway, they see a sign which says, "Honk three times." David thinks this is too weird and thinks about turning back when an old man appears out of nowhere and says, "Blow your horn! She's cool." So they do.

"She" turns out to be Dixie Evans, a 75-year-old Burlesque star. Back then it was her act to impersonate Marilyn Monroe, but in her own words she "showed a little bit more than Marilyn... heck, a LOT more!" She gives them the whole guided tour with peacock feathers, sequined brassieres and feather boas. After they're completely surrealed-out and armed with a video of the history of Burlesque, they get back in the car and head up my way into Los Angeles.

When they arrive we celebrate our reunion by going to an old established Mexican restaurant called the Gardens of Taxco. As soon as they seat you, a peculiar spectacle begins. There's a set menu, and the waiter describes the options in an exaggerated, Hollywood Mexican accent: "Dees Deesh ees verrrrrrrrrrry spiiiiiiiiiiiiicy. Not hot. Spiiiiiiiiiiiiicy. Dee Cheeken tastes like eet was boooooorrrrrrrrrnnnn in dee sauce." He says exactly the same thing at every table. The food is mediocre and the prices extortionate, but it's kind of worth it.

We continue in the sightseeing vein, and I take them to see the La Brea Tar Pits - a prehistoric site right in the middle of Hollywood. David has seen it before (and thought it was rubbish) but Jessica wants to go. We walk down there, and I not only miscalculate the distance but also overshoot the correct street by about a mile. We're walking in the blazing heat down exhaust-fumed street after street, and after about three quarters of an hour of backtracking in the relentless sun, we finally find the place and spend about seven minutes there. David still thinks it's rubbish. In fact, David thinks that all of the outings I've taken him on are rubbish, and concludes that all of his L.A. visits with me are rubbish. The only outing he's enjoyed was driving to the Hollywood sign, and that was HIS idea. He says he won't be coming back any time soon. I have yet to live down the Tar Pits fiasco.

Conclusion

On the way back to Seattle, David and Jessica head up Interstate 5, stopping at Carmel, where Clint Eastwood was mayor, and Grant's Pass again. Two days after they get home, Sally arrives to do some singing on 'Don't Touch That Dial', which is being recorded by producer Steve Fisk, and I am to join them in a few days' time.

When Sally arrives in Seattle, she is carrying a mail order merchandise package for a fan, Kitty Ireland, who ordered a t-shirt from the website. She lives near David and Jessica, so Sally figures she might as well deliver it in person. She and David pop round to Kitty's house unexpectedly and get invited in, discovering that not only is Kitty very nice, but she also runs a record label called Go Metric! with her husband Matthew. They will subsequently release the Cinerama single 'It's Not You It's Me' the following year.

After a couple of impromptu, acoustic practice sessions in David and Jessica's apartment Sally and I are almost all set to do the backing vocals on 'Don't Touch That Dial' and the B-sides. It's always a bit nerve-wracking singing in front of people that you've never worked with before, and initially we're all a bit nervous when we get to Steve's studio, but he is so nice that we're immediately put at ease and have a great time.

It's summer in Seattle and, when we're not recording, we're lounging on the rocky beaches. David photographs all three of us in our bikinis* (perhaps whimsically dreaming about an alternative career?!) and he and Sally also go rollerblading around Seattle's Green Lake. And we all watch Mars sparkle down.

Eventually, it's time to disperse, but in a matter of months, we'll be back in Seattle recording our new album.

** Editor's note: this photograph appears in Issue 8 of Orange Slices.*

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