FEAR AND CONTROL IN A ROCK N' ROLL ARCHIVE

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Like oil and water, rock music and libraries appear insoluble. Libraries are quiet. Rock is loud. Rock seems to stand in opposition to hierarchy and order. Libraries embrace both. In what follows, I describe my attempt to bridge this divide by making an archival rock music collection accessible in an academic library setting. It is a story of born digital collections, born digital fans, rights-related entanglements, and how sublimating discourses regarding libraries, archives, and music commodification collide with fandom and the reality of making such an archival collection available in a library-only setting.

1.   About the Croc

Seattle's Crocodile Café (aka, The Croc) is a legendary rock music venue in the Pacific Northwest (NW) of the United States. Founded by Stephanie Dorgan in 1991 with her husband Peter Buck (of REM fame), the Crocodile Café quickly became a cornerstone of Seattle's rock scene, a place where both up-and-coming and well-established acts performed in what many considered to be the best sounding room in town. During the early 1990s the Crocodile played a key role in fomenting grunge's explosion by showcasing such bands as Mudhoney, Pearl Jam, Alice In Chains, Tad, and Nirvana. As NW music historian Peter Blecha notes,

> Particularly legendary nights there include the ($3) Mudhoney show on October 4, 1992, when attendees expected to see some unknown band promoted under the silly name of "Pen Cap Chew" also perform, only to experience the surprise of their life when the then-most-famous band on planet Earth take the stage. So stunned were they by Nirvana's arrival that the ritual mosh-pit frenzy reportedly gave way to gaga staring and rapturous ovations.[49]

By the mid 1990s grunge fizzled, became post-grunge, and was superseded by Britpop. However even as tastes changed, the Crocodile endured and became a vital steppingstone for a new generation of Pacific NW bands. Many were obscure and unknown, but a few went on to some fame, including Modest Mouse, Decemberists, Built to Spill, Death Cab for Cutie, and Harvey Danger.

Jim Anderson at the Crocodile Café circa 2007 (Photo by Thomas James Hurt)

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49   For a fuller history of the Crocodile Café, see Peter Blecha's article:
     http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=8448

It was in 2002, during this new wave of NW bands, that the Crocodile's sound engineer Jim Anderson began to record each live performance. In addition to mixing live sound he plugged his laptop into the board and captured 16-Bit/44.1 kHz AIFF files from each band's show. He complemented the stage mix with ambient sound from microphones placed over the audience, thus giving the recordings a truer sense of place.[50] Why did Anderson do this? He was mainly inspired by a desire to document the scene as it was happening. He lamented all of the missed opportunities there have been throughout the last century to record key moments in popular music history. He did not want to be a part of that sad legacy. Anderson was also motivated to record out of a sense of technical curiosity. As he told me, "I wondered if I had the tools in-house to make a recording and then burn a CD that I could give to a band immediately after they finish playing."[51]

For five years Anderson methodically recorded and saved every performance. This resulted in a trove of some 3,000 hours of recordings, two terabytes of data, or over 5,000 individual audio files (each file usually representing one band's set). The recordings documented performances by thousands of artists.[52] From indie rock to punk, freak folk to noise, Americana to hip-hop, and (of course) post-grunge to Britpop, the collection reflects a cross current of popular music in the US in the early 21st century. And whatever ones opinion of a particular band or genre, the crystalline and resounding quality of the recordings is a testament to Anderson's audio engineering prowess.

2.   Permission and Restriction

When the Crocodile unexpectedly closed in 2007 Anderson was left holding this phenom-enal cache. It was backed-up on CD-Rs and external hard-drives, tucked away in his closet. However, he wanted the collection to endure and be made accessible in a library where schol-ars could access it for research and study. We made contact with one another and began having conversations about donating the collection to the University of Washington (UW) in Seattle. There was just one catch: he did not have permissions from any of the bands represented in the collection.

Why not? Wouldn't it have been ethically sound for Anderson to have asked for consent from the artists before recording them? Perhaps, but he thought posing this question before they took to the stage might disrupt their focus on the live performance. Instead he recorded the bands without their knowledge and when they were finished he would let them know, asking if they would like to buy a CD recording of their performance. He did not charge much; just enough cover his CD-R costs and perhaps a bit of gas money. Outrageous? Not according to Anderson. The bands' responses were overwhelmingly positive to his query and, in fact, truly grateful to have one of the most respected live sound engineers in Seattle record them for next to nothing.[53]

Despite these rights related concerns we moved ahead with the donation to UW in October 2008. To allay concerns some had in the UW Libraries about the "no permissions" nature of the collection, Anderson's original files were donated to Dr. Laurel Sercombe at the UW Ethnomusicology Archives. We in the UW Libraries then took on the responsibility of backing up and making the files accessible. With help from Rachel Adams and Cydne Danielle Zabel, two UW library school graduate students, we created MP3 access copies from the original

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50   To make the recordings Jim Anderson ran the board feed into a small Behringer mixer, then into an external A/D converter, and finally into his Apple iBook, 500 mhz G3, running OS 9.2.2. He used direct-to-disc audio recording freeware called Coaster to capture the sound.
51   Personal conversation with Jim Anderson, October 2009.
52   A list of bands and artists represented in the collection can be found here:
     http://guides.lib.washington.edu/content.php?pid=210181&sid=1770394
53   Some artists appreciated Anderson's recordings so much that they released them commercially. See, for example, Camper Van Beethoven's CD "In the Mouth of the Crocodile."

AIFF files and added them to a shared iTunes application. The students then populated the iTunes fields with artist names, performances, and other core information. MARC compliant? No. AACR2 obedient? Definitely not. Did it work? Yes.

Name	Time	Artist	Album
*Media Center - Crocodile Cafe ▶ ⤨			
5134 items, 124.6 days			
Death Cab for Cutie | 2/3 | 2003-09-29	29:37	Death Cab fo...	2003-09-29 | Death Cab for Cutie | 2/3
Death Cab for Cutie | 3/3 | 2003-09-29 ⊙	8:34	Death Cab fo...	2003-09-29 | Death Cab for Cutie | 3/3
The Long Winters | 2003-09-29	53:43	Long Winters...	2003-09-29 | The Long Winters
New American Standard | 2003-10-01	35:40	New America...	2003-10-01 | New American Standard
New American Standard | 2003-10-01	35:40	New America...	2003-10-01 | New American Standard
Amazombies | 2003-10-02	32:09	Amazombies	2003-10-02 | Amazombies
Gina Gershon | 1/2 | 2003-10-02	39:52	Gershon, Gina	2003-10-02 | Gina Gershon | 1/2
Gina Gershon | 1/2 | 2003-10-02	39:52	Gershon, Gina	2003-10-02 | Gina Gershon | 1/2
Gina Gershon | 2/2 | 2003-10-02	13:09	Gershon, Gina	2003-10-02 | Gina Gershon | 2/2
Gina Gershon | 2/2 | 2003-10-02	13:09	Gershon, Gina	2003-10-02 | Gina Gershon | 2/2
Los Halos | 1/2 | 2003-10-03	45:26	Los Halos	2003-10-03 | Los Halos | 1/2
Los Halos | 2/2 | 2003-10-03	7:37	Los Halos	2003-10-03 | Los Halos | 2/2
March Lions | 2003-10-04 ⊙	19:38	March Lions	2003-10-04 | March Lions
The Protocol | 2003-10-04	35:45	Protocol, The	2003-10-04 | The Protocol
Black Nite Crash | 2003-10-05	33:24	Black Nite Cr...	2003-10-05 | Black Nite Crash
Lake Trout | 1/2 | 2003-10-05	1:03:56	Lake Trout	2003-10-05 | Lake Trout | 1/2
Lake Trout | 2/2 | 2003-10-05	9:29	Lake Trout	2003-10-05 | Lake Trout | 2/2
Mellowdrone | 2003-10-05	35:25	Mellowdrone	2003-10-05 | Mellowdrone
Jodi Hates the World | 2003-10-07	30:51	Jodi Hates th...	2003-10-07 | Jodi Hates the World
Slomo Rabbit Kick | 2003-10-07	31:51	Slomo Rabbi...	2003-10-07 | Slomo Rabbit Kick
Electric Kisses | 2003-10-09	21:22	Electric Kisses	2003-10-09 | Electric Kisses
Some Girls | 2003-10-09	1:13:28	Some Girls	2003-10-09 | Some Girls
The Pieces | 2003-10-09	41:43	Pieces, The	2003-10-09 | The Pieces
Brent Arnold and The Spheres | 2003-10-10	41:01	Brent Arnold...	2003-10-10 | Brent Arnold and The Sp...
Hella | 2003-10-10	46:49	Hella	2003-10-10 | Hella
Quasi | 1/2 | 2003-10-10	57:11	Quasi	2003-10-10 | Quasi | 1/2
Quasi | 2/2 | 2003-10-10	27:20	Quasi	2003-10-10 | Quasi | 2/2

Screenshot of the Crocodile Café Collection's iTunes interface.

Again, due to rights related concerns, none of the recordings were originally made available online. Instead they were only made available via a pair of dedicated computers within the environs of the UW's media library. In order to reduce the ability of users to make unauthorized copies of the recordings, we set the monitors and the computers behind glass and funneled headphones, keyboards, mice, through a hole in the wall. All programs on the computer other than iTunes were disabled. No Internet browsers were made available and the files were streamed to the computers so they could not be easily downloaded or saved to an external device. In other words, fans and researchers who wanted to listen to the recordings could do so (the library is open to the pubic), but they needed to do so in the library and via one of these listening stations.

3.   Reaction and Resentment

When Jim donated the collection to UW, one or two local press outlets wrote short, positive stories about the gift.[54] Therefore, when we made it accessible to the public ten months later, I expected more positive reactions. After all, we were making these recordings freely available to anyone who came in to the library. In order to collect what I thought would be an effusion of library accolades, I set up a Google Alert for "crocodile café collection" so that every time that phrase was posted online I would receive an email notification with a link back to the source.

The Google Alert worked as planned, but the tone of the netted posts caught me off guard. Despite a few positive blog posts about UW Libraries making the collection available, the over-whelming reaction from readers who commented on the posts, and from fans communicating in online music forums, was *negative*. Yes, people loved the collection, but the fact that it was offline and only available in a library made many so frustrated that they openly outlined how they planned to steal the recordings. For example, despite an upbeat post about the donation at Seattle's Metroblogging website, "Josh" comments:

> Searching through the near-encyclopedic list of the thousands of hours of footage induces feelings of joy and dread at the pros-pect of being able to re-listen to some of my favorite shows I saw at the Crocodile at the expense of listening while being strapped to a pair of headphones under fluorescent lights.[55]

Other sites were peppered with similar grumblings, but by far the most productive site for disgruntled commentary about the donation was harveydanger.com, the band Harvey Danger's discussion list and fan website.[56] While "joedecarolis" offers a (somewhat salty) expression of excitement about the collection ("HOLY FUCKING SHIT, it would make my life if I had a copy of [those recordings]"[57]), most of the commentary is rooted in displeasure with the archival and in-library-use-only nature of the collection. Many fans even go so far as to propose ways in which to hack into the collection and steal it.

> According to the website, they're all loaded onto iTunes…. I'll bet somebody could burn them to disc … or e-mail them to themselves, and work out the hacking-into-them bit later. Clearly it would be most-awesome if somebody in Seattle could give that a go. ;-) But if not, then when we're all in Seattle for the last shows. Sunday. If somebody can get me into the UW library and logged into one of the media center computers, I can see what sort of tricks I can pull…. I'm not an old pro at this sort of stuff, but I definitely have enough amateur experience to give it a try.[58]

Someone else offers to pay for the files if they are successfully stolen:

> If anyone is actually going to try to go steal some of these shows, please let me/us know – id have a few small requests outside of the obvious Harvey Danger and related shows.. and id (*sic*) gladly pay you for your troubles.[59]

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54   See, for example, this short piece in the Seattle Post Intelligencer:
     http://seattletimes.com/html/matsononmusic/2009641098_crocodile_engineer_jim_anderso.html
55   http://seattle.metblogs.com/2009/08/07/live-from-the-croc-listen-on-aug-11/
56   See the following harveydnager.com thread about the Crocodile Café Collection:
     http://harveydanger.com/bb/showthread.php?tid=2288
57   ibid.
58   ibid.
59   ibid.

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Another fan openly wonders if it is normal for him "to scope out the media building at night or put on camouflage while reading blueprints and schematics of the building."[60] His motivation seems to be uncontrollable, flowing viscerally from the music itself: "That list of delicious soundboard recordings by a master technician... It's just something I can't quite get out of my mind… I'm a normal guy that just happens to have some weird notion stuck in my head. Like an earworm, you know?"[61]

At this point I joined the discussion and explained why the recordings were not online. I also made sure the fans knew that anyone could come into the library, for free, and listen to the recordings without any hassles. Nonetheless, there were more calls to hack and, in the words of one fan make "library-free HD [Harvey Danger] music" a reality.[62]

Hacking into the collection was tried but failed, at least according to this fan:

> I never told you guys about the kind of crazy Fort Knox lock-down these are under.... I couldn't get to Safari/Firefox/Explorer, or to an IM or e-mail program, or ...as I said, anything other than iTunes…. I don't know much about Apple computers, or how to play little back-end tricks on them, but even if I did, I'm pretty sure they've thought of everything. Lock. And. Key."[63]

Finally, a lengthy rant from a particularly frustrated fan:

> I'm going [to the library] today. I'm taking a few days off from work and I'm going to check out the sound and the high security setup. I'm not happy about it though. Music was never supposed to be locked up like some kind of caged animal. Harvey Danger is part of Seattle's history and the music should be available, even if for a fee, to anyone that wants to hear it. People think UW should be congratulated for preserving these recordings and I would agree but for the fact that I can walk into UW or any other library and check out books and recordings at will. Never do I have to rock out tethered to a plexiglass window like some sort of prisoner. And I freaking live in Emerald City. Can you begin to comprehend how pissed I would be if I lived three time zones away? Enough of this RIAA BS. I've bought the albums, I paid the entrance fees, I turned on other listeners. Get your bloody locked down server off my music.[64]

Is this person misinformed, dramatic, and suffering from grandiose notions of entitlement? Perhaps, but I believe he and many of his comrades hit upon on something significant when making comparisons between libraries/archives and prisons, and as sites of control. These fans have uncovered an often unspoken stratum of social discourse about archives and libraries.

4.   Archival Prisons, Librarian Dread, Commodity Fetish

Archival scholar Erik Ketelaar argues that archives ought to be understood not so much as sacrosanct cathedrals that provide access to knowledge, but rather as controlling institutions, like prisons, that restrict access and obscure transparency. He writes that "the panoptical archive

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60   ibid.
61   ibid.
62   http://www.harveydanger.com/bb/showthread.php?tid=2288&page=5
63   http://www.harveydanger.com/bb/showthread.php?tid=2288&page=3
64   http://www.harveydanger.com/bb/showthread.php?tid=2288&page=4

disciplines and controls through knowledge-power,"[65] displaying it "behind the closed doors of the prison-like repository" of the archive."[66] Ketelaar may sound like a Harvey Danger fan, but he's not (at least to the best of my knowledge) and is instead analyzing the archive and its practices through a Foucauldian lens, a lens that brings behavioral and discourse-related power differentials into focus. Could it be that the severity of the fans' frustrations are in some sense underpinned and amplified by these power differentials? Could it be that these fans are expressing something more than their conscious frustration with Crocodile Café Collection's offline status? Are they also expressing a deep-rooted sense of dread and fear of archives and archivists, libraries and librarians?

In a 2001 article for Library Quarterly, authors Gary Radford and Marie Radford examine the nature of the discourse surrounding libraries and librarians in popular, contemporary culture. Like Ketelaar, Radford and Radford contextualize their arguments within Michel Foucault's work, particularly as expressed in Discipline and Punish (*Surveiller et punir*). They write,

> fear is the fundamental organizing principle, or code, through which representations of libraries and librarians are manifest in modern popular cultural forms such as novels, movies, and television shows. Fear is the means by which the presence of the library setting, and the librarian characters within them, are to be understood. It is the horizon against which such representations make sense. This horizon of understanding is more fundamental than the representations found in any particular example, because it is what makes such images possible.[67]

Radford and Radford flesh out this theoretical framework with references to specific representations of librarians in popular culture (e.g., films such as Sophie's Choice and Party Girl).[68] As they state, "all of the representations depicted in these examples are made possible by underlying discourses of fear and control."[69] In highlighting such depictions, the authors substantiate that a discourse of fear shapes a meta-understanding of the librarians and the profession at large.

Libraries and librarians are then understood within an overarching discourse of fear and control. Does this help explain why so many Harvey Danger fans have visceral reactions against the library-confined nature of the Collection? Is their anger prompted by an ingrained fear of libraries and librarians? Are their calls to hack a way of fighting against the prison-like oppression of the library and archive? Yes, discourse about librarians may be steeped in power differentials, but is there not something additional at play here, something compounding the fans' rage, something about the nature of music itself that adds further tension to their expressions about the collection?

In an attempt to unpack this tension, let us visit Theodor Adorno and his essay "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening." In it Adorno argues that musical life in modern society has been completely and utterly overtaken by the commodity fetish. Where there was once musical creativity there is now only musical passive consumerism. In his typically impenetrable style, Adorno writes:

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65 Eric Ketelaar, "Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection," (Archival Science, 2002): 221.
66 Ibid., 234.
67 Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford, "Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear," (Library Quarterly, 2001): 299.
68 In support of Radford and Radford's arguments, see this montage of film clips from Citizen Kane, Sophie's Choice, and Party Girl: http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/vallier/clips/librarians
69 Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford, "Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear," (Library Quarterly, 2001): 301.

> In Capitalist times, the traditional anti-mythological ferments of music conspire against freedom, as whose allies they were once proscribed. The representatives of the opposition to the authoritarian schema become witnesses to the authority of commercial success. The delight in the moment and the gay facade becomes an excuse for absolving the listener from the thought of the whole, whose claim is comprised in proper listening. The listener is converted, along his line of least resistance, into the acquiescent purchaser.

Stated another way, music's inherent sublimity and power to oppose authoritarianism has been displaced in contemporary society by the supremacy of commercialism. Music, in short, has merely become a vessel for commercial content, a jingle to sell goods, and a commodity in itself. As musicologist David Huron notes in relation to Adorno's approach,

> In modern capitalist society, the only legitimate pleasure to be got from music is to appreciate its exchange value. The consumer is really worshipping the money that he himself has paid for the ticket to the Toscanini concert. Pleasure is derived from the idea that the music is valuable rather than taking pleasure in the music itself.[70]

What does this mean for Crocodile Café Collection? Does the fans' rabid desire to own and possess the recordings signify a subliminal addiction to music as commodity, a fetishism of music's monetary worth and exchange value above and beyond the music's pre-capitalist efficacy? For Adorno this answer would be a *yes*. Consumerism has reduced artistic expression to a product for sale. It is merely a consumable, a commodity. It is not a work that is meant to endure. Recordings do not exist to make music available. Instead, music in mass society exists in order to sell recordings, concert tickets, and t-shirts. The end goal of having sound recordings, like those in the Crocodile Café Collection, is not to enter into the sublime or to expand ones horizons of understanding and creative output. Rather, the end goal is to download, possess, and consume them. Consumers regressively listen to and fetishize music as a commodity, and therefore only know one way of experiencing it: by owning it. Non-circulating archival collections made available in non-commercial library spaces frustrate them to no end. Add to this the discourse of prison-like fear that cocoons popular perceptions of libraries, librarians, archives, and archivists and we layer anxiety, angst, and dread to the fans' experience. It is no surprise then that these fans reacted to the unveiling of the Crocodile Café Collection with irritation.

5.   Onward

If this cocktail of criticisms is even partially accurate, where does that leave the collection, the fans, researchers, donor, artists, and—yes—the archivists who are involved with the collection's care? Should we resign ourselves to remain at odds? No! I like to think of archivists and librarians as being open to conversation, masters of engagement and mutually beneficial compromise, even if heavy weight discourse is pushing against us. In that spirit I have worked with Anderson and Harvey Danger to stream all their recordings online.[71] And beyond fandom, I have worked with scholars to make more recordings available for online access. While intentions are good, many of these scholarly interactions tend to subtly parallel those exhibited by Harvey Danger fans, interactions and expressions that are inevitably steeped in a discourse of fear, control, and a web of commodity fetishism.

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70   http://www.music-cog.ohio-state.edu/Music839B/Approaches/Adorno.html
71   You can find the Harvey Danger recordings, along with samples from other recordings, on the UW Libraries SoundCloud site: https://soundcloud.com/uwlibraries/sets/crocodile-cafe-collection

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