

# Weekend

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### Loud and Nasty: The Hound on Radio



Keith Meyers/The New York Times

Jim Marshall, whom radio listeners know as the Hound.

By ERIC ASIMOV

EVERY Saturday afternoon at 3, the world becomes a little less refined. While some people are taking in a matinee at the opera or visiting a quiet art gallery, WFMU-FM (91.1) is awakening with a snarl. It is time for the Hound.

For the next three hours, an anarchic flood of forgotten rhythm-and-blues, rockabilly, country and old rock-and-roll will pour from the radio, engulfing listeners in a sea of jitterbugging juvenile delinquents in search of loud music and fast times.

Fly-by-night musical obscurities, like Jack and the Rippers, Gene Franklin and the House-Rockin' Spacemen, and Tommy Jim Beam and His Four Fifths (who recorded for the 100 Proof label), are brought back to life. Disembodied voices punctuate the spaces between songs, hawking extinct oddities (Lardinsky Sausage Products, Queen Bee Barbecue and King Kong Hair Straightener). Bits of cultural arcana drop in unexpectedly: "Man, that cat comes on like Godzilla," declares one voice. Excerpts from old chitlin'-circuit comedy teams enhance the underbelly-of-society atmosphere.

Interspersed in this juke-joint theater is biting, wise-guy commentary by the Hound and his radio family on current events, popular music and anything else that strikes their fancy. Together, it's a slice of what was once forbidden fruit: a realm of pulp fiction, B-movies and pulsing music that is tremendously funny, especially when it wasn't meant to be that way.

"It's sick, twisted, horrible noise," said John Zorn, the saxophonist and avant-garde composer. "Those are four of my highest compliments."

Robert Quine, the rock-and-roll guitarist, put it this way: "The key factors are brutal and stupid. It must have redeeming value."

Jim Marshall, as the Hound is known off the radio, offered this definition: "It's music of wild abandon and snarling attitude. These are just the records I like, and we present the stuff in the spirit in which it was made."

Mr. Marshall, a fanatical record collector, is a man whose mission is to protect rock-and-roll — music with grease under its fingernails and whiskey on its breath — from those who would exalt it by cleaning it up. He says he particularly resents the approach of many college radio stations that treat blues, rhythm-and-blues and rockabilly as sterile artifacts.

"That's putting it under glass so you can't even touch it," he said. "The last thing you want in rock-and-roll is good taste."

With his pack of fellow East Villagers, Mr. Marshall — who is 31 years old ("born the year rock-and-roll got bad") — treks each Saturday to the WFMU studio in East Orange, N.J. There, he and his cohorts, Bruce (Il Brooché) Bennett, Dennis (Denwah) Uhrinek and Sally (Miss Sally) Showalter, along with the rock guitarist Eric (Roscoe) Ambel, who has phoned in his weekly "Vibe Report"

from as far away as Denmark, re-create the rock-and-roll universe as they see it.

"This is real music, by real musicians, not self-conscious art-school cretins," said Mr. Bennett, 28, who delivers tenacious barbs with unctuous understatement. He oozes benign contempt for most fashions, on one recent show denouncing the currently popular male ponytail as "dweeb knobs."

In a news segment, for which the Hound crew scours newspapers for bizarre can-you-believe-it tales, Mr. Bennett tells listeners of a 6-year-old Pennsylvania girl mauled by a pit bull terrier given to her by her grandmother. "Nothing like a gift that opens you back," he says.

Mr. Ambel says simply: "Everybody on the show hates everything, but is committed to excellence. They do things for themselves and like-minded people."

#### An Archeological Dig

The show came about, Mr. Marshall said, because his displeasure with today's pop music forced him "to invent his own entertainment." He estimates his radio audience at 20,000 to 50,000, and cites fan letters from all over this country, Europe and Japan. He is stationed behind a console adorned by a two-headed dinosaur, one of its mouths biting down on a baby bottle, a nightmare of baby boomers gone awry.

"I like the archeology of digging this stuff up," he said. "I can create something new."

Creation must be satisfaction enough for Mr. Marshall, who like other broadcasters for WFMU, a public station affiliated with Upsala College in East Orange, N.J., is not paid for his work. He ekes out a living with freelance music writing, construction work, bartending and even occasional work as a bicycle messenger.

He recently celebrated the fifth anniversary of the Hound show with the Hound Hangover Hop at Brownie's bar on Avenue A. And though the East Village today seems a mix of artists and the homeless, poised against a continuing yuppie encroachment, the Hound radio show represents a quality of cultural rebellion for which the Village is still known, a rebellion characterized by an uncompromising refusal to abide by mainstream values.

For the Hound, this has meant a refusal to conform to the standards of commercial radio, which would require him to play music he does not like, or to the standards of the music industry as a whole. And this has cost him employment opportunities, he said.

"Everybody in the business thinks he's nuts," Mr. Ambel said. "They're threatened by his knowledge or something. Most people in the business have to work with whatever gets assigned to them."

Mr. Zorn calls this quality a maverick esthetic. "I think this relates to pioneerism," he said. "It's real American."

Many Hound fans are united by their passionate love for the music,

and their equally passionate refusal to compromise.

"This area is still known for the Bohemian thing," said Chris Kush, the owner of Mojo Guitar Shop on East 12th Street, where many in the Hound crowd hang out.

As they would at a country general store, listeners, friends and neighbors stop in at Mojo to shoot the breeze, finding seats among bits and pieces of old guitars and amplifiers, taking their own coffee and slices of pizza. Mr. Bennett drops a guitar off for repair one Saturday morning before heading off to East Orange for the show.

"The Hound's music is a lot of swinging r-and-b and crazy blues," Mr. Kush said. "I try to sell only the instruments that those guys would have played."

Robert Cohen, 40, a co-owner of Finyl Vinyl, on Second Avenue and Sixth Street, sells the records made by the guys playing those instruments. "We're covering the underbelly of the 50's and 60's," he said. "These are not for people who need to read the reviews first in Rolling Stone."

It's a trash-camp esthetic whose wide appeal can be seen at Finyl Vinyl, at See/Hear (an East Seventh Street store carrying music and books as well as catalogues of scandal magazines, posters, exploitation movies and pinup models showing how collectible the paraphernalia of juvenile delinquency has become), and at many other East Village spots.

"There's an international mafia whose roots are 50's and 60's trash culture," Mr. Cohen said.

#### Cracked Plaster and Posters

Mr. Marshall himself lives in a small three-room fourth-floor walkup in the East Village. Lurid posters of B-movies like "Hot-Blooded Woman" cover cracked plaster, and a bedroom wall is lined with more than 10,000 LP's. Another set of shelves holds upward of 3,000 45-r.p.m. records. A desk holds a collection of skulls and photos of Brigitte Bardot.

"The trashier, more desperate these low-level exponents of pop culture were, the more realistic," Mr. Marshall said. "Some of these blues singers more accurately portrayed the way life was than Nat (King) Cole songs."

Then, he pulls out some of his more esoteric 45's of the late 50's: "Gonna Snatch Me a Satellite," by the Rockin' R's; "Gonna Get Me a Satellite," by Little Ernest Tucker; "Satellite Rock," by the Rebelaires; "My Satellite," by Jesse Belvin, and "Rockin' Satellite," by Ray Sawyer. These songs have more in common with Cadillac tail fins than with Chuck Berry.

"Stupidity is one of the unifying features of all these records," he said, pulling out a copy of "Betty Lou Got a New Tattoo," by the Creep. "I think stupidity is great. These guys aren't Stravinsky."

#### Bottom Line: Simplicity

Ultimately, though, the appeal of the music is simple: "It's all gut-level, very direct," Mr. Marshall said. "It's very easy to act profound, but to take a really complex emotion and make it simple, to me that's beautiful."

The economics of today's centralized record industry have made it almost impossible to make music with real guts to it, he said, and have led record companies to play it safe in their search for polished hits. The records he treasures, he said, were made before rock became a formula, when people had the freedom to make mistakes, when accidents became hits.

"A big part of the CD thing is keeping independent companies out of the business," he said. "In the 50's, any kid with \$100 could make a record. Elvis started on a tiny label. Anything was possible."

In contrast, putting together a weekly radio program that does not fit a recognized format in the 90's seems impossible, and Mr. Marshall worries about the future of the Hound show. WFMU is involved in a legal battle that may result in having its radio signal weakened, and Mr. Marshall is trying to have his show syndicated to capitalize on the music's popularity abroad. "Aside from him, you're going to hear the same oldies over and over," Mr. Quine said. "Unless it was a Top 20 hit, you're not going to hear it on the radio. A lot of his stuff, he's dug up himself."

For himself, Mr. Marshall doesn't want much: "It'd be nice to have a place where it's always dark and the music's always good."

### Where to Find Vintage Records

A few outposts remain dedicated to the proposition that vintage rock-and-roll sounds best on vinyl. In Manhattan, these four stand out:

¶Downstairs Records, 35 West 43d Street, second floor (212) 354-4684.

This midtown enclave is the place to look for old 45-r.p.m. singles, especially unfamiliar country, rhythm-and-blues, doo-wop and oldies hits. Customers may even play records in the store, as in the old days, to check condition or simply to browse for palatability. There are a few compact disks behind the counter.

¶Finyl Vinyl, 89 Second Avenue, south of Sixth Street (212) 533-8007. This store keeps a melted compact disk hanging on its wall. "Vinyl's in my blood," said Rob Cohen, a co-owner. And vinyl's about all you will find in his store, which carries a wide array of the latest reissues of old blues, rhythm-and-blues, soul and rockabilly.

¶Hideout, 5 Cornelia Street (near West Fourth Street) (212) 463-8900. Hideout buys, sells and trades records as well as compact disks. It has many out-of-print, vintage rock-and-roll records that are difficult to find elsewhere.

¶Midnight Records, 255 West 23d Street, (212) 675-2768. This store is full of "everything we think is worth having," said J. D. Martignon, the owner. That means an excellent selection of rock-and-roll from the earliest blues to the hardest core. Midnight operates a large mail-order operation that also includes compact disks.

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