

EDITORIAL

Nicholas Gebhardt and Asya Draganova

Introduction: *we swear* this happened.

(Nick) Countdown to 4 o'clock. Pens, keyboards, notepads all set. Breathe. Some of us are online, others in the room. We sort of all know each other, but there's still some awkwardness, some silences to navigate. Ready with the task (should we choose to accept): "In not more than 500 words, recount a musical event or encounter you have had or know about that might be described as untoward, unforeseen, mysterious, or inexplicable – and that might invite disbelief from someone when they hear you talk about it later. Start your piece with the phrase *'I swear I heard this...'* Think about who your audience is and why they might NOT believe you. Try to convince them." GO. WRITE. THE CLOCK IS TICKING. The idea is to write non-stop, for 60 minutes, not worrying too much about worry about mistakes, or tripping over words or whether you're repeating stuff. Not too much anyway... But it's also about this problem of belief. Who believes whom? You're an ear/eyewitness, yet there's no certainty you were there; or not that much anyway. A few photos maybe, some old friends to testify, a poster with a date and time and price of entry. And how do you convince someone anyway? Elegant phrases, surefire truths, a passionate outburst of adverbs and adjectives.

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(Asya) *I swear* we put this journal together that day, then and there and here it is – raw, short and personal. And we call ourselves academics?! Where's the research value in our 500-word little explosions of fantastical music stories?

I swear that music research comes from passion – its roots deeply set in our experience and memory, reaching out to imagine the future. These are pieces of the magical feeling that keeps us going, a collection of moments to capture in time and to share so we can provoke more to think "what can I swear I heard that others may not have?" And could this be the grain of something bigger?

The Write Club returns with this symbolic gathering – members old and new but for me, the point is always the same: not to lose the fun of writing. The Write Club saved me once from forgetting that creativity and research writing can and should belong together. The Write Club became a bridge between two worlds: one of the wild and free travels of writing as an expressive tool for word art, and another – of research as means for exploring the meanings music makes for people.



The last time I sat with Nick at a Write Club gathering was years ago. So much has changed since then: a global pandemic, motherhood, new responsibilities, projects, colleagues leaving and new ones joining. As I was about to open the door a couple of minutes before 4:00pm on that warm spring day, my years of music research flashed before my eyes, speeding forward from the beginning. *I swear I head this* – us, the members of the Write Club – read, laugh and chat together; *I swear* I even saw fragments of our faces, our smiles all coming together into a big mosaic of the Write Club past... As I “dust off” the old Write Club folder in preparation for opening a new file in it for the first time in so long, I discover this “cheesy” piece with references to Soft Machine’s “Certain Kind” from their debut album (1968) and Robert Wyatt’s *Rock Bottom* (1974) album: a Manifesto in response to yet another Nick Gebhardt challenge. And *I swear* I still believe in it.

A Certain Kind
Of Love, We’d Say,
Exists for Us
and Every Time
The Journey to New-Know
Sets Us Alight
For We Know it’s Real: It’s What We Feel
A Certain Kind
Of Curiosity
The Substance of Life
We Believe In
Always We Are Beginners
Always We Are Unfinished
Conclusions Are Only Shining White Bridges
Pathways to Future -
There is More to Reveal
More Meaning
and Nuance
More Darkness and Light
In the Sound of the World that Surrounds Us
A Certain Kind
Of Being, Listening, Becoming
Of Scribbling, And Drawing and Playing
With All the Expression We Have -
The Means to Embody
Discovery
For All Who Live With the Music
And Die With The Silence
A Certain Kind
Of Dreamers
Dive Into Oceans Unspoken
To Get to The Bottom Of Questions
We Ask Everyday:
We Hit the Rock Bottom To Find
The Webs That Encompass
Self, Us, Them, and All People
Dancing the Steps of A Song

Verse-Chorus-Verse
 Sometimes Variation
 And Between -
 All The Purpose
 Of That...
 Certain (Human) Kind
 That Once Started With Rhythm and Voice
 The Myth Of Creation
 The Truth Is Unbound
 For Us to Find
 The Secrets of the Music Mind.

Nicholas Gebhardt is Professor of Jazz and Popular Music Studies at Birmingham City University. His research focuses on the histories, theories, cultures and practices of jazz and popular music, with particular emphasis on themes of the everyday, improvisation, collective practice, sonic experience, experimental writing and modernity.

Asya Draganova is a Senior Lecturer in Popular Music Culture and co-director of BA (Hons) Music Business at Birmingham City University. Some of the prominent themes in her research and publications include popular music and post-communist transitions in Bulgaria, subcultural music scenes, cultural alternativity, and the lived and metaphorical relationships between music and place in the Canterbury Sound and beyond.

Editorial Note

Riffs Volume 8 Issue 2 – the cover shoot star for this issue is the Crown pub, shot by our excellent photographer, Ian Davies (<https://www.iandaviesphoto.com/>) weeks after the death of Ozzy Osbourne. The original photos of the Black Sabbath artists displayed on The Crown pub were taken by band manager Jim Simpson.

The historic Crown pub in Birmingham (UK) witnessed Black Sabbath's first gig and is known as "the birthplace of heavy metal". Like many music venues and historic pubs, the Crown is currently under threat – along with other buildings on Station Street (Birmingham), such as the UK's oldest working cinema, The Electric – by inner-city redevelopment. The continued support of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Historic England, Birmingham City Council, and individuals (through submitting objections to planning applications and raising public awareness) is essential for the survival of the Crown and other heritage music sites within which it has been and will be possible to claim "I swear I heard this, I swear this happened".

To find out more about Station Street and to join the Save Station Street campaign, follow @stationstreet.bsky.social or @oldstationst (on Twitter).

Sarah Raine, *Riffs* Co-Managing Editor