

LINER NOTES

BY

John Delacourt

Ferrous Skies is the only EP the False Profits recorded. It came out on the Steeltown label in July of 1982, and I believe, in total, we sold eleven hundred copies across Canada. Or “Eleven hundred and change,” to be more exact, as our producer (and briefly our manager) Fin Dupuis reported, explaining why we would be dropped from the label in February of 1983.

Which we took in stride. It wasn't like we were seasoned musicians. Before the gigs we did after the EP's release we'd only played two high school talent contests, the open stage at the Ploughing Match, and the all-ages Punk's-Not-Dead show at the Legion Hall, where Fin had initially approached us. We were still figuring out what live performance required of us just when it seemed we could barely hold the band together.

Fin broke the news to us at the Kelsey's restaurant by the Zebra Palace and the Filth Wheel Truck Stop, the one bar in town where they wouldn't ask for our IDs. He led by stating he was a businessman, and that he had started Steeltown records to turn his hobby into a full-time gig and leave Stelco behind. If the EP had shifted more units, he would have loaned us the cash for an album. But here we were, his underperformers. I remember his mullet and moustache, his Molson muscle drooping over his turquoise belt buckle, the anchor tattoo on his forearm, glimpsed under the cuff of his denim shirt. He wore disappointment badly.

Fin had a strong argument. We were bass-guitars-drums and singer, and by 1982 suddenly everybody had synthesizers and drum machines, wedge haircuts and parachute pants. This new sound was selling. We declared we weren't going to entertain any of those fey, androgynous influences. “No fucking mimsy velveteen pantaloons,” as Mad Mark Lawson put it, the most ambitious of us all. Being authentic meant the homophobia among us was implicit – and sometimes explicitly stated by all of us in the band.

Fin found such chest thumping tedious, it was obvious. He fiddled with the bezel on his digital watch, a not-so-subtle indication that we were wasting his time. Here

we were, trying hard to look like we came out of the tenements in Glasgow (or the Manchester streets where Mark Lawson actually had spent his first fourteen years). Our moment had passed.

And never returned. This is why I'm surprised you're interested, Kai.

Your mother wasn't, sensibly. Not ever. She viewed her father's brief foray into pop music as an embarrassment. I think your grandmother had told her it was one of the reasons I hadn't quite grown up when I committed to parenthood. She told your mother my friends from that era were bad influences. Your mother was saving for college before she was in high school. Always knew she'd be a nurse, drew herself in one line as soon as she paid attention to herself in a mirror. Her sensible white shoes parked neatly on the edge of the front mat when I'd visit. Such a firm grip on destiny wasn't what I had, and if she was honest, your grandmother would admit that wasn't what she had either. I guess I'm just saying an interest in all this ancient history can be risky, if you think you want to draw yourself in one line the way we did. It's a hard figure to erase or draw over, Kai, because the pencil marks from this attempt at character go so deep and black into the paper.

But back to the record. Those who played on *Ferrous Skies* were as follows:

Stevie McGlane: Lead Vocals
Doug Lewis: Guitar
Your grandfather: Rhythm Guitar
(Mad) Mark Lawson: Bass
Gerry Baptiste: Drums

I could be wrong, but I don't think any of us have played in over two decades. Back in the early aughts – 2003, if I remember – Fin Dupuis had emailed me to say that there was a sudden demand for *Ferrous Skies*. Everything lives forever on the bloody internet. He moved about 200 units from taped up boxes in his basement. Much of the interest in that EP was owing to a book on the rise of Canadian independent record labels, written by a Sovietologist out of Montreal who described *The False Profits* as an underappreciated band heavily influenced by *The Head* (we were not but, as you kids say, whatevs). Fin believed there could be “some serious coin” possible if we got back together. The prospect fizzled out quickly. None of us knew what happened to Mad Mark or where he was and I was the only one who could claim the faintest of tangential connections to the music

business (I've got about a grand's worth of old LPs in milk crates, there in the one section of this shop that rarely earns its space in rent money each month). I think a reunion would have been a disaster.

But were we ever really good? Or if not good, maybe a little more interesting than the other bands coming up around that time? I really don't know, but because you asked and because I couldn't find the original liner notes that Fin decided not to print, I give you this new version.

Vinyl Raincoat

I met Gerry Baptiste at the fairgrounds one freezing autumn night, a few weeks after we both started grade ten. We had both seen the posters on Main Street: a "Noo-Wave Show." The Assassimators, the Droogs and the Sofisticatos. There was a long, hangar-like pavilion that these bands had booked. It was normally used for the bake sale during the fall fair. I can still see those pull-out tables, butter tarts and oatmeal muffins tightly wrapped in cellophane from those days when the subdivisions hadn't been built yet, and there was no old town and new town – just one town we wanted to escape as soon as possible.

Gerry was the second Black kid I went to school with at that point. And he lived out in the country. He was bused in with all the farmers' kids who were, in general, of the large, bullying type. Hockey boys with the team jackets and Greb Kodiak boots. At school Gerry kept his head down, low profile in lumber jacket and 501s - just the black Chuck Taylor basketball shoes subtly marked him apart.

I mention clothes not to be superficial, Kai. It was how we coded ourselves. I see kids your age when they come in and browse the second-hand books on the shelves and nothing seems to have changed about that. The same belief in subtle rebellion, the same dogged determination to quietly stand apart. But I'm probably not looking hard enough. Maybe everything's changed, as it should.

I think Gerry and I bonded in gym class because he was an immigrant's kid like me. Soccer, not hockey for us. His Grenadian dad was an agricultural engineer who studied in England where he met Gerry's mom, a Canadian researcher who'd gone across the ocean to study canola. Gerry spent his first six years in Leeds. In one of our first conversations, he mentioned seeing David Bowie on TV then. "Life on Mars" on Top of the Pops. I think Gerry and his older brother Marcus carried

that notion of Bowie's flamboyance and cool around in their heads like a secret bond of resistance to what living "back here" demanded of them.

Anyway, there Gerry was at the fairgrounds, perched on top of the sandstone gate post, hoping to get into the show. His brother Marcus and Marcus's best friend Ronnie Vague had passed for nineteen, slipped in and left him out there, promising that they'd tried to sneak him in through the back door. I asked him if I could sneak in with him. He shrugged. "Free country." We started talking about bands that night and didn't really stop for the next three years.

But no, we didn't get in. Marcus and Ronnie couldn't risk going near the doors because the bouncers were watching them. And even if they were to try, there was no way we would have made it past the organizers once we got in that night. The pavilion had a liquor licence to serve beer and alcohol, and I had barely made it through puberty and looked it. Dead loss. And even though Gerry had on his brother's peacoat and his new combat boots, he still didn't look old enough either. We watched the bands through the opening in the curtains draped across the windows in the back of the pavilion, smoking Player's Lights and bobbing our heads to the four-four beat.

The lead singer of the Assassimators was Francis – Frankie – Deslauriers. In his undertaker's suit and dark eyes smeared with mascara he looked like the love child of Peter Lorre and a raccoon. At one point Frankie put a clear cellophane bag over his head and hollered out the lyrics to a song called "Sex Offender." It was scary and unhinged, qualities Frankie never revealed during the day working part-time at the pharmacy.

A year later. In Mad Mark's basement, where we first rehearsed, we were working on a broken song (Gerry's words) that took shape as the musical accompaniment to some drunken striptease (though we had never been to see the peelers out by the highway at that point). I like to think that Gerry and I were inspired by that first image of something transgressive and dangerous, Frankie's horror movie scream through cellophane, viewed from that window at the fairgrounds. "Vinyl Raincoat" was the tribute to the character Frankie created for us that night.

Urban Jungle

Mark was not initially mad (as in crazy when angry) when I first met him in high school. He had just come to Canada from Manchester. His father had landed a pipe fitting job at Frankel Steel and his mother was working at the old folks' home in town. New Canadians. They lived in one of the crumbling townhouses behind the mall. Mark was the eldest of three Lawson kids. He was pale and undernourished looking, with this tightly trimmed crown of ginger curls (his mom cut his hair and got her skills from once dating one of Herman's Hermits, Mark said), pegged jeans and Kickers boots, a Manchester United scarf he wore discreetly under his new green parka. We sat together in biology class and bonded over our shared gallows humour about dissected frogs, the gas taps that fueled the Bunsen burners. We could both do German accents well.

I remember the smell of formaldehyde as we got a rat in a plastic bag to work on. We were both repulsed, and Mark's response was to croon Joy Division's "Atrocity Exhibition" as we began to cut through the yellowed fur on the rat's underbelly. I had never heard the band at that point, which led to an invitation over to his place to listen to his record collection.

All the music Mark had brought over from Manchester was a revelation. Aside from Joy Division there were LPs by the Buzzcocks, Stiff Little Fingers and Sham 69. But there were also records by Burning Spear, King Tubby and Steel Pulse, discoveries that would eventually lead to my dubious Caribbean adventurism, after your grandmother and I split up. And then there were records that were both comedy and poetry. "Jilted John Loves Julie." John Cooper Clarke's "Chickentown," "I Married A Monster From Outer Space." The music was sketching out an elsewhere in my mind, as vividly as my summer vacation memories of my father's Glasgow.

Mark was allowed to drink his father's Molson Exports at home, and that permission extended to Mark's guests. Because we had gym class together and Mark respected Gerry's soccer skills, soon the three of us were regularly in that basement, on the Salvation Army couch and chairs, the velour smelling like a wet sock. We'd get mildly drunk on Friday nights, smoke too many cigarettes as we listened intently, like the novices in a monastery, studying an obscure sect of medieval Ecstasies. But I think both Gerry and I were relieved that we had some place to go besides the arena to watch the Flyers' games, glumly huddled among the other non-hockey players, stealing sips of swamp water from wineskins we smuggled in past the parents in the first and second rows.

The music was the repository of secret code phrases we'd mumble between us at school. *Ba-dum, ba-dum* from the Buzzcocks' "Boredom" summed up history class. The cafeteria food was proof we were citizens of John Cooper Clarke's *evidently-Chickentown*. And the efforts of the yearbook committee to champion individual accomplishments at the monthly assemblies was provocation enough to growl the Stiff Little Fingers' lyric *sus-sus-suspect device*. It was like jailhouse slang passed between inmates. But we needed to expand the circle like a gang. We needed to be a band.

Gerry's brother Marcus told us about Long and McQuade in the city. It's where Ronnie Vague and his new band the Vaguemen had first rented their gear. Real musicians hung out there on Saturdays too because they'd let you play the Strats and Telecasters we'd never be able to afford new. We'd find out about second hand guitars for sale and the guys behind the counters who looked like roadies were actual musicians. They'd played in bands whose time had briefly come and gone, but they had all the knowledge we'd need. This is where we'd get our bearings. If we took a GO bus in on a Saturday, we could find Long and McQuade on the Bloor Line subway, and then jump back on to get to Yonge, where Sam the Record Man had all the best British vinyl. Once we got back into town in the early evening, we'd spend what we had left from our dishwashers' paycheques on Pizza Delight and take a first listen of what we'd purchased that day.

Time moved so slowly then, and it's hard for me to believe now it was only two or three months until I had saved enough to buy an older Fender Mustang with a Marshall amp from a kid named Bobby Arnoni, who went to the Catholic high school. Arnoni had gotten himself a used BC Rich, one that some hair-farming metalhead played, and the Mustang was "like an antique" to him. Which was part of the reason I fell in love with it. Nearly a full school year had passed from those initial trips down to Toronto to when Gerry, Mark and I had bass-drums-guitar in Mark's basement, figuring out what we were doing, piecing together three chord progressions, bridges, and choruses from what little we actually knew. We were in such a hurry to transform.

*Down and out in the urban jungle / All alone my words a struggle /
Gone from home and I'm in the jungle ALONE ... I'm all alone ...*

It was the first song we pieced together from Mark's droning bass line, the stark, metronomic thump and snare tap from Gerry, and then the warm, Ventures-like surf guitar sound I had discovered with the Mustang. On top of it I crooned those lyrics in a pained baritone, trying to imitate Joy Division's Ian Curtis.

I think our original version was probably unlistenable, but by the time we were at Dundas Sound, this old pine shed that Fin Dupuis had rented for two weekends, "Urban Jungle" had become one of our strongest compositions with the addition of Stevie McGlane and Doug Lewis. Stevie's voice actually could go that low, and Doug could play guitar. I don't know how he did it, but he made his Gibson SG-5 sound something like a sitar, and that initial drone became a kind of raga I strummed behind, with an old Yamaha acoustic, cursing its bent neck and wonky pickup. Fin had what he justifiably called a "brainwave" and brought in his Farfisa organ from his wedding band days, and when he layered a simple three chord pattern over top of the track, I remember Mad Mark's eyes lighting up, Gerry nodding. Fooking brilliant.

Even when I listen to it now, if I close my eyes, I'm in the Yorkdale bus station, the heavy winter sundown darkening the light filtering in, the sodium lights flickering. The salt stains on my Doc Martens like chalky cartoon frowns across the toecaps. I'm furtively smoking, stomach growling from eating nothing but two Jamaican patties hours before. Everything out the fogging window looks cold, hard, and concrete, the alien city that a suburban kid still feared and yet was attracted to, determined to conquer it in some barbarian way. I guess it was our first real song.

82 Fade

On one of those weekend trips down to Toronto, we discovered Kops Records on Queen Street. Ronnie Vague told us that, as great as the selection of British vinyl was at Sam's on Yonge, Kops was "where the punk chicks hung out." It was also close to the MuchMusic street corner studio and the Pages Bookstore, where our chances of meeting interesting girls only increased substantially.

Maybe I should qualify that by defining it as girls who would have found us interesting. I was growing out an ill-advised crew cut so I needed better odds for potential compatibility than I was going to find in high school. The Loris and Debbies in my home room all seemed so well adjusted, conventionally pretty, competitive for the attentions of the hockey players and the boys who already had

cars of their own. Most of these unattainable girls did not know what to make of the pale, freckled Mark, or Gerry's loitering along the back windows of the school

cafeteria, silent and wide-eyed, as if he was awaiting a tragic event. By the eleventh grade I had crossed over to the weirdo cohort as well, taking my place beside Gerry on the ledge at the back of the caf, wearing my Sony Walkman on my belt, and slowly transforming my wardrobe so I could resemble the Christmas Polaroids of my Scottish cousins back in Glasgow, whom Mad Mark said looked "hardcore."

It was on a Saturday just after the Christmas break at school, when January seemed the longest month of the year, that I got another Saturday off from washing dishes at the Riviera (which we all suspected was a Mafia front, there was never much business). I was alternating weekend shifts with Gerry. Mark, who'd just quit his part-time job assembling cardboard boxes for German industrial fans, suggested we take a bus down to Kops and blow the sixty bucks he had made on records. He had also discovered a bar in the Eaton Centre where we could split a ploughman's lunch and drink Lager and Limes without anyone asking for ID.

After our lunch and Mark's passionate argument with the bartender about Arthur Scargill versus Maggie Thatcher (the bartender was Norris the homesick Mancunian, the reason we were getting served), we headed down Queen to Kops. With the puddles of grey slush in the streets, the skating rink at City Hall shut down because the ice had melted, Toronto looked like springtime in East Germany.

Two things happened that afternoon: we heard Wire's Pink Flag and met Christina and Lola (real name Laura, but she hated it). Both were significant developments, the former for me and the latter for Mark.

I think it was "Reuters" playing when we first entered Kops. Hearing it, I realized that the sound in my head, what I only hoped to make with my new guitar, was the sound that Wire had already perfected. A moment of inspiration and defeat. I attempted to browse but there was only one album I needed to buy. The first side of Pink Flag played, and each song was both surprising, perfectly brief, and yet structured with a sense of inevitability and a geometric precision I yearned for – not just to play, but as some approach to living and growing up. Yet to go up and ask for the album while it was playing would have been, as Mark said, hopelessly naf.

He was barely listening anyway. Over near E for Brian Eno (Lola's interest) he'd begun to chat up Christina, and his accent was the music she found the most appealing in the record store. She and Lola were in college, three years older than

us. They had matching, peacock blue eye shadow. Lola, in graphic design at OCAD, sized me up quickly and politely but firmly demurred from any further conversation about ambient music. She would barely look up from the albums she was perusing, patiently waiting for Christina to cut Mark loose. But Christina had no intention of doing so. Her flirtatiousness was grating on Lola, and I realized what we had interrupted. Lola's crush was on Christina, and we had derailed what she thought would be a romantic afternoon. The desolation was there in how she was chewing her nails, twining her finger around her dyed blonde curls. But Mark was oblivious as well. He had discovered he could be considered charming and raffish for once.

I wonder how different things might have been if Christina and Mark hadn't met. She seemed an actual adult woman, and she had crafted her look like no other girl I'd ever seen, with Marlon Brando's biker jacket, Keith Richard's hair, and in a certain light, Bowie's icy, angular profile. And yet she still had a curvy silhouette, a girlish way of laughing, those warm, chocolate-coloured eyes. She barely looked at me, realizing, with just a glance, what kind of suburban boy-man I was. Mark had the Englishness, the authenticity she was looking for, and I saw, in Lola's disappointment, something like a premonition of the False Profits' fate. As Gerry would put it, just days before he headed off to the University of Waterloo to study mathematics, "we were doomed when Mark met that chick, despite all the access it gave us in Toronto."

What Gerry meant by access was our first exposure to living like a grown-up. Christina's family was still living in Little Portugal downtown, but she already had her own apartment near Rye-High, where she was in the radio and television arts program. She was working the front desk at nights for CITY news and was already producing promo clips, helping out in the studio. Lola disclosed that the "big boss" there wanted to sleep with Christina.

This intimation would lead to one of Mad Mark's drunken fits of incandescent rage. But that was near the end of their relationship ... and the end of the False Profits' viability.

When I look down, I see my shade ... when I look up 82 Fade ... spinning hands, a broken clock ... an open door that never knocks ...

For the life of me, I still don't know what I was trying to write with that song. A collage of phrases? Almost images? On a page of foolscap in physics class I had written down the first snatches of lyrics I could think of, and then I cut the page up, threw each snippet into a Crown Royal bag in rehearsal, pulled them out one by one and scribbled them down in some rudimentary verse-chorus-verse form. Gerry had mentioned David Bowie did this, and then Lola corrected him, saying it was William Burroughs' invention (this was a back table debate at the Black Bull, I recall, over Bowie's status as a genius). All I know to this day is that I wanted to title the song with numbers rather than words, like Wire's "106 Beats That" and "12 X U."

Was I being pretentious? Deliberately obscure? Of course. I think my lyrical experiment was a form of protest about Mark's and Gerry's decision to bring in Doug Lewis, who could actually play guitar, and Stevie McGlane who, after a couple of years of membership in the KISS army, had grown four inches, spiked his hair and resembled Stiv Bators of the Dead Boys. For "82 Fade" it was Doug's riff, very Carl Perkins, that we built the song around, and Stevie was already working on this snake-hipped strut in practice that betrayed his heavy metal inclinations. I had to throw a stick in the spokes of such rawk-ishness.

If you listen to the track now, you probably ask yourself: could Stevie actually sing? A little. He could do a low vibrato like Ian Curtis and he had leather pants. That was all that seemed to matter. But he just wailed through "82 Fade," barely concealing his anger at having his glamour sabotaged. I guess there's an approach to anger in his performance that almost works for 3 minutes.

This song was probably the last time I was given any artistic leverage. I felt my position as rhythm guitarist and potato shaped snarler was precarious. What did I really have to offer, given these new additions to the band? My sudden belief in higher aesthetic standards for us, and this was insincere at best. All I knew about aesthetics was in Mark's record collection, not even mine.

My destiny as a dealer in second hand records and books was probably all but confirmed back then.

We've Gotta Get Outta This Place

Yes, this was a cover of the Animals' song, which Mark, in league with Fin, insisted we select as the second cut on the B-side. I lost the battle for going with one of our originals. Mark argued we weren't coming up with anything as strong as our playing on this track. He found allies in Doug Lewis, who had promised he could "shred" if given a solo, and Stevie, who could manage a somewhat respectable Eric Burdon imitation. Gerry and I stood down, bored but compliant in the studio, and we played capably enough, so Fin did not have to bring in any of his wedding band friends for overdubbing.

*Booking out to Nicaragua / Yanqui dollars bringing guns for hire / People tell me
there ain't no use in dying ...*

My sole contributions of note on this track were the changes in the lyrics I provided. I had read in a music magazine that "We've Gotta Get Outta This Place" was an anthem for those who were conscripted to fight in Vietnam. So, with all the earnestness of some of the tracks on The Clash's *Sandinista*, I figured our cover would be our statement on American imperialism in Latin America.

Recording this marked what Gerry, a few years later, called the fatal Stalinist phase of the False Profits. Mark had now fully transformed into Mad Mark, drinking heavily, getting into bar fights. He was constantly jealous about any conversations Christina was having with other men. Talking politics was a way to assert his authenticity and his intellect, and to inject some discipline and rigor in the band to counter Stevie's and Doug's derivative, mannered, heavy metal leanings. I went along with it because I knew I could barely play and that my capital in the band was diminishing by the hour in rehearsals.

The band had become too important to Mark, and ambition, oddly enough, can be a killer when you're too young. I think he realized Christina was ambitious too – but in the right way - and maybe not as dismissive of her boss's advances as she had insisted she was. Mark's going to college in a tool and die program, which was his declared intention, would not bode well for their relationship. Ruefully he told me Lola had called him "a boring socialist autodidact," because he was reading up on political theory, and he got a subscription to *The New Statesman* magazine. Most nights during and after our rehearsals he'd get off his head on beer and cheap

whisky and say he missed Manchester, that he loved the city more than anything else in his life.

He eventually went back there and ghosted from our lives.

After we released *Ferrous Skies* (named for the black and white photograph of the long line of hydro towers that Lola took for the album's cover), we did a number of gigs to promote the EP. Fin had booked us in bars in Hamilton, Oakville and one on the farthest stretch of Bloor West, opening for bands he was hoping to bring over to his label. But I think Gerry and I realized, over that summer, that Mark was the nucleus keeping the band together and his gradual descent into alcohol dependency made him unpredictable and increasingly enraged at everything. And the three of us had little in common with Doug Lewis and Stevie McGlane, who'd go off by themselves to smoke dope before the gigs – like “hippies,” as Mark put it, and were becoming increasingly heavy metal, dating twin hairdressers from Streetsville. Whatever chemistry we once thought we had was gone.

I remember our last gig, when we opened for Ronnie Vague and the Vaguemen at a field party gig in Oakville. The makeshift stage was in front of a rocky patch of topsoil, and, by torchlight, I watched Ronnie, looking more and more like Iggy Pop after his bout of mono, hurl himself off the stage and onto the rocks, to the cheers of the small crowd in front. Soon he was bleeding, bruised, glaring with a madman's smile.

Mark turned to Gerry and I and said, “now that's fucking hardcore.” Gerry and I nodded in agreement. It didn't have to be said. We all knew we'd never be so. We didn't have it in us. The music had given us everything it could, and now the arc had begun to bend down. It was only going to take from us from there on in.

Author Biography

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