

# MOWING THE BROCCOLI: HOW DOG FOOD CURATED THE MOST ICONIC SOUNDWORLDS YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF /

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As I may've mentioned elsewhere, Glorious Din broke up in part because Eric Cope insisted that performances and recordings had to establish an unbroken and unbreakable mood. His songs increasingly aimed at some kind of meditative stasis upon which his bandmates couldn't help but intrude, and his post-GD ensembles accordingly featured a bare minimum of moving parts.

In the first month or so after the split, he briefly toyed with idea of reforming Glorious Din with Michael Franti and yours truly but was met with an a priori nope from at least one of us. He then suggested we continue working on the stripped-down material we'd performed in Wednesday Morning 3 AM with Dave Katz and Barbara Manning, but as a duo and with me playing guitar instead of clarinet. Having ended up in the ER with a case of pneumothorax the last time I played with WM3AM (as the fans called us), that was fine by me.

Eric's prime directive was that my guitar had to be violent. He would strum his acoustic guitar, and I would make some sort of corroded-sheet-metal racket with my electric one. He'd talked a lot about "industrial folk" over the years, and I think Dog Food (along with its sister act Beetle Leg, starring original GD bassist Matt Hall) was meant to pin the tail on that donkey once and for all.

At about the same time, Eric and I had interviewed Big Black, and Steve Albini had kindly showed me his fancy metal guitar pick; I made a very sad replica out of — I think? — a flattened cigar tube before moving on to using quarters. Apart from that, my secret weapon was the "Black Box" — an oscilloscope-themed guitar pedal from Soviet Russia that sounded something like simultaneous-but-intermittent flange, chorus, phase and wah. I liked it because it felt like the effect-board equivalent of my own playing: unreliable, unreasonable and, above all, limited in scope and utility.

We got together once or maybe even twice a week to rehearse. Eric had a lot of songs, a few chords, a couple of tempos. He was, as always, open to just about anything; he would say where he wanted some sort of noise and where he wanted some sort of melody. But other than that, the only specific direction I remember getting was to imitate the horns on Abbey Lincoln's "Afro-Blue," which I'd been playing on the stereo one day when he arrived.

We ended up recording an album's worth of material engineered by William Davenport of Problemist. It sounded like us, for whatever that's worth, and we all had a good laugh when William misheard the phrase "moving abruptly" as "mowing the broccoli."

Not much later, Eric booked a few days at Matt Wallace's studio. This time, he had me record each song twice — once with distortion and once without. It turned out he preferred the quieter material; a couple of those songs wound up on the Insight compilation To Sell Kerosene Door to Door, and the rest were mixed and sequenced for an Insight LP that never came out. (The tapes went missing, I believe.)

**Glorious Din**

It's fair to say that our audience, on stage or off, was modest – possibly even limited to our respective then-partners. I've very occasionally met people who praise the recordings, and once the surprise wears off, I always think of it as an endearing quirk, like having memorized the periodic table or learned how to play pinochle.

At the same time, I do recognize that Dog Food is a very pure dose of Eric's very compelling vision. The lyrics are always fascinating; I used to think of them as a row of vivid little snow globes showing market days, crime scenes and trainyards – always with something hidden just out of view. As with all his lyrics, I have to echo Christopher Smart's praise of his cat, Geoffrey: "He is good to think on, if a man would express himself neatly."

Beyond the pleasure and privilege of working so closely with Eric, Dog Food did me a lot of good as a ~~guitarist~~ as someone ~~who plays~~ who sometimes appears in public with a guitar. I had endless freedom and encouragement to develop, if not a style, then at least a set of tactics that have remained useful and present across 40 years of projects. I would even say that Dog Food made me whatever I am, musically. And I say this not because I am somebody – or anybody! – but because it's an example of Eric's ability to see things in people they don't necessarily see in themselves and to transform them, lovingly, on that basis.