



## Guru Guru

By David Morrison

Dave Read, the Vinyl Record Guru, is a Nanaimo-based music industry veteran providing a one-stop solution to record labels and bands for the manufacture of records and CDs. Specializing in and passionate about vinyl, Dave is as happy to work with a local band on a limited run of their first single as he is on a sophisticated box set project for an internationally distributed record label. From conception to completion, the Vinyl Record Guru guarantees that no project is too big or too complicated for him to broker. The 45-year old Vancouver-born, Toronto-raised Dave is also a musician. His 'heavy-psych' outfit, Moths & Locusts, issued their debut single as the fourth release on his own Noise Agony Mayhem label in October 2011; two more singles have been released since, and a debut album is expected by the end of 2013.

At Christmas a few years back Susan and I received a splendid home-produced card from Dave, his über-creative, former actress wife, Valentina, and their young son, Nico. While, at a push, it could be said there was a passing resemblance to Santa in middle age, the card's otherwise unseasonable image was of a heavily bearded Dave, posing in a bathrobe and grinning like a buffoon. To the casual observer it may have provoked a puzzled scratch of the head, but to a music nerd like me it was a cheeky delight. A spoof on an iconic Annie Leibovitz photograph of Brian Wilson, the card was what one should actually expect of Dave and his alternative family as a matter of routine. This is a man utterly *obsessed* with music, you see: its history, folklore, trivia, statistics, minutiae... *everything*. In my three-plus decades entrenched in the UK and (latterly) Canadian music industries, Dave is as fully engaged an example of that 'special' breed of music person as I've ever met – and I've met a few. It stands to reason, then, that rather than sending out Christmas cards bearing Yule logs, reindeer or snowmen dancing with elves, more likely from Dave's family are designs depicting their interpretation of something like the sleeve of *Their Satanic Majesties Request*.

Dave and I have spent many long hours talking about music, and will undoubtedly spend many more. I enjoy his infectious passion for the subject (and plenty more besides), as well as his humour and similar worldview to my own, so such entertaining confabulations will never be a chore. Yet until 'formally' sitting down with him in pursuit of what you read here, I had never heard the full story of his colourful life in music from beginning to end. Although presented in relative bullet-point form it was

still a long conversation, interspersed with inevitable tangential embellishments as memories came flooding back.

**Dave, tell me about your earliest memories of music, and how it all developed for you from there.**

I've been interested in music as long as I can remember. In our house we had the 45 of a cover of *Island in the Sun* (a song popularized by [Harry Belafonte](#)). It was on the British West Indies Airline label; I guess they gave it out to passengers, as my dad was in the travel business. I enjoyed playing it and also had Superman and Sesame Street® records, and stuff like that, then graduated towards Bay City Rollers records. I was, like, 7-years old or something. From there it was pretty quickly into Beatles records, which I'm still interested in.

**At this juncture I should point out that Dave saying he is "interested in" Beatles records is akin to my stating that the Great Wall of China is a reasonable bit of bricklaying. Make no mistake that Dave is *crazy* for (and, in my opinion, an authority on) The Beatles.**

Then I got into stuff like Cheap Trick and Van Halen. When I was about 10, 11 or 12, I started playing guitar. I'd played other instruments before, but it wasn't really working for me... i.e. I was *terrible* at them. I originally wanted to play bass and my dad took me to a store to look at one, but they were huge on me, so I got a hand-me-down guitar from an older cousin. Over the next couple of years I started putting rudimentary bands together with my friends, at the same time practising by myself and learning songs - very, very basic tunes. Around the time I was 14 I got my third guitar, a Gibson SG, and I put a band together with some neighbours and friends from school and just kept going along that path.

**When did you first enter the music business?**

I was 16 when I got my first job in the industry. It was at the music store in the local mall, Music World. I loved going up there, man. They had great stuff and took an interest in me when I was a kid. They let me take posters and stuff and said to come back when I was 16 and I'd get a job. It was a dream job because I was into *everything* about records. I'd memorize the names of, like, the engineers, the producers and backing players, run-off groove messages... everything! I'd look at the import section at all the records I just *totally* couldn't afford, and saved up *forever* to get the English *My Generation* record - it was, like, \$20 when records were \$6. I bought stuff like *Cheap Trick at Budokan* there, Black Sabbath, a lot of Beatles records, all kinds of great stuff. So I worked there a little bit and got a couple of discounts, which was definitely *amazing*.

**Tell me about your next step as a musician.**

Starting when I was about 18 my bands started getting pretty serious. I started a metal band called [Death Militia](#) and we did a cassette, just a boom-box recording, that ended up getting dubbed and bootlegged all around the world - like, *literally*! We started getting letters from everywhere in the world - it was *insane*!

Dave says 'insane' a lot, often with amplified enunciation on each syllable. This is particularly thrilling to me, as I also say 'insane' a lot. It's an oft-neglected exaggerative expression that I feel should enjoy wider usage.

All over the States, all over Europe... it wasn't worship stuff, but people saying, 'I love metal and how can I get hold of your tape? Do you have shirts? D'ya have stickers?' That band lasted about three years, I guess. We did a bunch of gigs, played out of town a bit, And all this got me involved in the bookings and publicity, though all on a basic level, and also manufacturing. We were just doing cassettes back then, but you kind of got the gist of what it takes to get your music out there, you know?

**Death Militia has since become a name in underground metal circles. In 2006 the band's entire recorded output appeared on CD for the first time, as [You Can't Kill What's Already Dead: Anthology 1985-1988](#) (Evil Legend Records).**

**Following your short stint in retail, what was your next job in the music industry?**

At the same time as the band, for a day job I worked at a record distributors, starting as an order picker, then a receiver. Again, there was more of the obsessive-compulsive, looking at every cover and every label. Every single product had a bin number and I could tell you *every* bin number, even for the *Cocktail* soundtrack, you know? So this gave me more of an insight into how the music biz worked, who the companies were, and it also introduced me to a lot of new bands.

Once it got into the 90s, Death Militia had broken up and metal was kinda waning. The whole indie-slash-alternative thing was coming around, but I had interests outside of metal and really liked R.E.M., Sinéad O'Connor, The Byrds and stuff like that, so it wasn't *all* Metallica and Slayer! In the early 90s I started another band called Sing Along With Tonto, which was more kinda like Faith No More-type stuff. Then I ended up working at HMV, which was like living in the world's largest record collection. You could just go up to any section and take something out of the bin, take it down to the office, open it up and listen to it. It was awesome. Then I started another band called Sub\*Stack, which was a little heavier. I love heavy stuff, but I also like melodic stuff and psychedelic stuff, so we did some of that and did some cassettes. It was all D.I.Y. everything. Anyway, all this got me thinking about who was doing what and what was working, and feeling the tide change in the industry as well as the musical climate.

**A big life change came for Dave in 1995, when he moved to New York City to be with his then girlfriend, now wife, [Valentina Cardinalli](#). He started work at a film company helmed by the Korean-Brazilian film producer/director [Iara Lee](#), wife of billionaire businessman (and former San Jose Sharks owner), [George Gund III](#). Staunch political activist Lee was involved in the Freedom Flotilla that made world headlines in May 2010, when nine activists died attempting to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza. Back in 1995, however, among other projects Dave's boss was making documentaries about electronic music.**

I worked on this film called [Synthetic Pleasures](#) (Caipirinha Productions, 1996). I just started being a Joe Everything, as she only had one other person working for her at the

time. She finished the film and we were distributing it, so I was really involved in that whole thing. The film had an electronic music soundtrack, with stuff like [Tranquility Bass](#), [Pete Namlook](#) and some local stuff.

**Not long after I first met Dave he gave me a CD of deep electronic music entitled *Objectively, Dude*, by [Carlito Verde](#). He'd recorded this with friends in NYC, and after knowing Dave for years it was interesting to hear for the first time how the shift from a rock-based background into this musical sphere came about.**

I'd been dabbling in electronic stuff when I left Toronto, like Autechre, [Aphex Twin](#), that kind of stuff, and through that I met all these electronic musicians. In 1995, as you'll remember, while there weren't a whole lot of records out there, there *were* things coming out on record, but by and large most things were coming out strictly on CD. But electronic music and dance music was *all* records, because the artists were all DJ-ing and making umpteen records a year and had this distribution network, which was just amazing. Anyway, another documentary we did was [Modulations](#) ([Caipirinha Productions](#), 1998), which was also about electronic music.

**Another Iara Lee project, *Modulations* featured a diverse cast of interviewees: Moby, Genesis P. Orridge (Throbbing Gristle/Psychic TV); avant garde electronic music composer Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007); hip-hop pioneer, Afrika Bambaata; Georgio Moroder, and techno legend, Derrick May, all appeared. Some of this acclaimed documentary was filmed in Brighton, England - my stomping ground of some twenty years, and a consistent hotbed of innovative electronic dance music and club culture.**

I licensed all the music for the film. Then we started manufacturing and releasing our own CDs, and the label just kinda took off. I remember the discussion; we were in the kitchen and she said, 'Let's start a label,' and we did it on a whim, basically. So we were working with these guys who were doing a lot of vinyl, and then I eventually started playing with some of them. I was still playing guitar, but doing more soundscape-y type stuff, like Tangerine Dream meets Autechre, or something like that. I also used to play with a band called Droid, which was all live improvised stuff, doing drum 'n' bass.

**You worked for various record labels in New York, didn't you? How did that all begin for you?**

After I worked for the film company I worked for a label doing electronic music and also Acid Jazz, which I wasn't really into (*you and me both, brother!*). Here I got to do sales and international sales. So over the years I was amassing this wealth of experience of being in bands, working in retail, to working in distribution and administration, and at the film-slash-record label I did just about everything... publicity, management, sales, literally everything.

So I worked at that label, and started getting to know everybody, like the guys at [Ninja Tune](#) and other labels. I then got the job of label manager at a drum 'n' bass label called [Jungle Sky](#). It was *total chaos!* It was *insanity!* It was founded by this nutbar Brazilian guy, [DJ \(Carlos\) Soulslinger](#), who would smoke more weed *in a morning* than most

people smoke in a lifetime. In-sane! He would roll joints as big as the cat (*Dave points at one of his three cats, Maggie, who lives Dave's office*), and I'm not kidding! He would call everybody "bruddy," a cross between brother and buddy. He was a great guy who *loved* his music and was a fantastic DJ, but was nuts, high out of his mind. The music on the label was *amazing*, but it really was a *total* gong show!

But being an electronic and dance music label we were doing a lot of vinyl, a lot of 12"s, so I got a real one-on-one on making records there, like what you need to do for the artwork, what's the timeline, what's lacquer and plating and test pressings and all that stuff. So all this happened up until about 2000, I guess. Jungle Sky had been having some political problems, which led to financial problems, and everybody got laid off.

**So you were gaining valuable experience in the manufacturing side of the music industry at Jungle Sky, but what happened after you were laid off?**

I had a brief period of limbo, then saw an ad in Billboard online saying that this company called Europadisk, a manufacturing facility that did CDs and vinyl, was looking for a sales person to try bring in some new clients. So, I worked for them, and they primarily wanted me to focus on their CDs, but they had these record presses in there, which I was pretty stoked about. I was only working on commission and they offered a certain amount of commission for CDs, but said if you can bring in vinyl orders we'll give you double commission on the vinyl. So I'm bringing in all these electronic acts who were there in the city, and orders were coming in like crazy. The bosses were like, 'Man, we were going to shut this down!' I was made manager of the vinyl department, so in charge of ordering all the raw materials and doing tons of sales, finally earning crazy money for the first time in my life! It hasn't happened since, but worked out pretty good for a year!

**It was while working at Europadisk that Dave earned the nickname that was to name his own company years later. A hip-hop client said, "You're the record guru, man!" and the name stuck.**

**From Europadisk Dave moved onto Masterdisk, a company so well known in its field that even the most leisurely of rock music fans is likely to have heard or seen the same somewhere.**

The guy that ran Masterdisk, (*former owner*) Doug (*Levine*), just left me alone. He didn't tell me what to do and I didn't have to report to him. He saw what the figures were doing and it was okay. Big name bands were coming in, like Jack White, some hip-hop guys... we did all kind of projects up there, amazing stuff, all the big bands you can imagine. There were gold and platinum records lining the walls, big plush sofas and antique tables where the bands would hang out. They had a coffee table which was a fish tank, including little sharks and stuff! The bands'd come in and pay ten or fifteen grand for a mastering job and, if they wanted, party all night. Nothing was too much trouble, 24-7. It was old school industry and very interesting to see. These days mastering is done by some guy in his basement, so there's nothing sexy about it at all.



After a while working at Masterdisk, Dave and Valentina made the decision to move the family from New York City back to Canada. Dave felt he now possessed the skills to set up shop on his own, so even though the music industry was experiencing seismic changes on an almost weekly basis, the intention was to continue as was, on Vancouver Island, in a self-employed capacity. Vinyl Record Guru was consequently founded in 2005. Recent projects have seen Dave work with such as Mogwai's [Rock Action](#) label and on records for bands and artists as sonically diverse as Hank Williams III, Sloan, The Black Crowes, Das Racist and, as seen above, The Misfits.

I enjoyed working at Masterdisk but wanted to branch out and do it myself, so when I set up here that was the big leap of faith into dealing with collecting money and paying bills. On my Masterdisk business cards I had 'Vinyl Guru,' so I just added 'Record' for the name of my company. I've now been doing it six years, and it's growing and growing. Amazingly, vinyl has made this huge comeback, and I'd like to think I've had a small part to play in that. Just before and after we moved here, several plants went out of business, so there aren't too many guys doing this. Dust was kicked up and the whole landscape was changing, so I really had to be on my toes. Since then things have settled and there are still some of the old players still in there, but being a broker the best thing about what I do is never having to say no. We can do literally *anything*, and I know all the people that do it and will get it done. That's why I can sit here in a basement in Nanaimo and people can call up from wherever.

### **Why vinyl, Dave?**

It's the sound I grew up loving and understanding, and everything else has paled in comparison. They said CDs were the great saviour, and how amazing they were, but they just don't sound the same. Then there's the packaging; I *love* the packaging. The pictures, all the extra stuff, the way a gatefold goes *crrrkkk* when you open it. Do you remember when CDs first came out and every single CD had the definition of what a CD was? You know, ADD or DDD or... it was totally *lame*. You open it up and the lyrics are printed on four panels in *tiny* print. Alice Cooper records used to come with *panties* around them, you know? The Kiss *Love Gun* record came with a little pop-up gun, and records have posters you can put on your wall, or trading cards or have - oh! - scratch 'n' sniff sleeves!

### **What is your favourite album of all time?**

The first Rush album. I've been thinking about it for a while and only in the last few months have I come to that decision. I go *wild* every time I'm listening to it, especially if it's cranked when I'm in a vehicle or it's on the turntable.

Also, of course, I'm a record collector, and for the last 25 years I've had an original pressing of that that they put together on their own label, Moon Records. I've heard there were only 3,500 copies. When you hear this fucking thing - and I've had it on CD, probably twice; I've had it on cassette, and even on 8-track - this pressing is *fucking insane*. It's like, so crisp, so loud, and just an incredibly well mixed, tight rock record. It's my favourite Rush record and it's my favourite record. The guy that owned Europadisk when I worked there used to work at a mastering studio called Sterling in New York,

and *he mastered the fucking record!* I'd be sitting there talking to him and Rush fans used to call, because they knew Jim Shelton (*the album's Mastering Consultant*) worked at this place, and ask questions about Rush. He wouldn't talk to them but I'd talk to these fans for 45 minutes about Rush; it was a dream job! And at Masterdisk, fans would call and say, 'Er, yes, I heard that in 1975 Gilbert Kong at Masterdisk mastered (*the second Rush album*) *Fly by Night...*' and I actually knew all the lore of this shit. But the first Rush record? *Totally insane!* On all the other copies the logo is in pink, but the original is orangey-red. (*Dave is now very animated.*) It has different credits, the pictures are great, Moon Records... totally amazing! And I bought it for six bucks and every time I hear it I *literally go absolutely wild.* I know, I know... this makes me sound like an anal a-hole! (*Guffaws*).

**As we often do, a few days before meeting up for this chat Dave and I had discussed what we were listening to at the current time. Like me, Dave thoroughly enjoys rediscovering a band or artist's back catalogue when triggered, and nothing else will do. Or else he'll simply immerse himself in it, possessed of a greater knowledge of the music as both fan and musician than the last time he visited it. He'll also dive deeply into entire scenes or musical movement. For example, since I've known him Dave has been on big [Krautrock](#) and [Japanese rock](#) trips. In respect of the latter I recall a telephone conversation during which Dave told me his current favourite band was [Speed, Glue & Shinki](#). Who the fuck is that? said I, yet his passion for this "fucking insane" psychedelic power trio was such that I could not help but independently investigate. At the time of our chat, however, Dave was heavily back into The Rolling Stones.**

Everything in the computer age is so compartmentalized, like, *This is the Good Period.* I'm going through a big Stones thing right now. *Beggar's Banquet to Exile on Main Street is the golden period and everything after is shit,* 'they' say! Well, no! I've been listening, purposely, to only 70s Stones, which includes *Sticky Fingers* and *Exile* - but fucking *Goat's Head Soup* is awesome; I've always loved *Black and Blue* since, like, I was fucking *ten*. It's funky - no, it's not *Exile* - but it's as funky as hell. *Some Girls* is incredible...and I just got *It's Only Rock 'n' Roll* for the first time in my life. (*Dave is becoming increasingly excited as he speaks.*) Of course I knew the tune and some of the other tunes, but there were tunes I'd only heard in passing, like *Fingerprint File*, which is a funky, groovy, muthafuckin' crazy disco song... I love it! You know, everybody who tries to say that the Keith Stones is good and the Mick Stones is wack... no, no, no, no, *no!* Keith was in there playing his ass off, loving it, loving it. What were they when they started? An R 'n' B band - *rhythm* and blues - and rhythm in the 70s was fucking disco! And there's fucking great disco too, so just because there was bad disco doesn't mean that there wasn't *great* disco! There's fucking *killer* disco, played by real bands, real musicians... *amazing* stuff! How can you be a millionaire rock star in 1976, jet-setting from Paris to London to New York to Rio de Janeiro, and not get into fucking disco? *Of course it's going to influence your music!*

**OK, thank you, Dave! Finally, why is Vancouver Island TOTALLY AWESOME for you?**

It's like living on holiday... *it's like living on holiday!* When we moved out here we thought, 'Why don't we live where people go on holiday?' We live in the second biggest town on the Island and you can get out in a second. As someone who has lived in New York and Toronto, you *cannot* get out of those cities! Long weekend? Forget it! Regular weekend? *Forget it!* We camped, I think, three times when we were living in New York. You're all relaxed and then on the Sunday or Monday night when you have to head home it all comes crashing down when you spend six hours trying to get 45 miles! We'd be just stuck on a bridge, sitting there trying to get back in the city, where we can see Shea Stadium - we were big Mets fans - and we'd listen to the whole fucking game... *on a bridge!* Here you get in the car and there might be a tiny traffic jam because of the lights at Northfield Road, then off you go!

**During a brief pause in our chat I said to Dave that I felt he could likely talk about music solidly for forty days and forty nights, without sleep or taking a sip of water. As if I'd made the most normal comment he'd ever heard, his response was: "Oh yeah, easy." I guess it was what one should expect from Dave, the Vinyl Record Guru, as a matter of routine.**

<http://vinylrecordguru.com>

<http://noiseagonymayhem.com>

<http://mothsandlocusts.bandcamp.com>