

# The Saga of the Hornless Band

by Sean Arthur Joyce

Once upon a time there was a non-hit band known as The Hornless Band. They were called that because they were a brass band too poor to buy instruments. But despite the handicap, none of the Unfab Four of south Manchester wanted to quit. Actually they were so poor they had to live in the city's ancient sewer system. But never mind. They got together every Saturday night at the pub—after everyone else had left, of course—to practice. The owner of the Hog and Jowls pub, James 'Bruiser' Elbow, let them practice there only because the guys were heavy drinkers who needed to lubricate their lips well with Guinness first. The band's beer fund came from the hundreds of bottles that rolled into the sewers from above every day.

The boys were Larry 'Flubber' Fatson, who'd been expelled from kindergarten for tying up the teacher, putting her in a sack of rocks, and tossing her into the playschool's garden pool. Somehow he could never see the point of school after that. Luckily school administration arrived in time to save a terrified Miss Lilly Liver. Larry, who plays tenor lips for The Hornless Band, later said he did it to see if a witch could float. This at least partially redeemed his schoolmates' estimate of his intelligence.

Then there was poor old Major. He was nicknamed 'Major' not because of any compelling physical presence but because of his uncanny ability to become invisible at any moment. Literally. He has been measured by Ministry of Weights and Measurements computerized sensors and has literally not registered.

Psychologists believe it has to do with Major's complete lack of self-esteem. He does, however, register on the Ministry's new, sophisticated Smell-o-Meter, due entirely to Major's being unacquainted with the practice of bathing. Major plays bass lips for the Hornless Band. Audiences are advised to be seated upwind.

Third but not last was Artie Bedletter. He actually was co-founder of the band with Sid Bennett, who led a failed college band known as the Fantastic Elastics in the mid-60s. This band's schtick—dressed in psychedelic clothing while warbling underwater versions of songs from Top of the Pops—grew old fast. Artie met Sid as the Elastics were realizing their days were numbered. In an ironic twist of fate,

Sid's band had to sell their instruments for food, an eerie foreshadowing of the impoverished Hornless Band.

But I forgot to tell you about Artie Bedletter. Some think his last name is really a nickname cruelly appended to him by vicious kindergarten playmates who discovered his darkest childhood secret. However, Artie's press agent assures me this is false and only slightly misleading. He says it was an unfortunate misspelling of the family name by a drunken Great-great-great grandfather at a baptismal ceremony in the Catholic church. In fact, it was the family's original name, Ledbetter, that led Artie at an early age to a fascination with American folk blues original Huddie Ledbetter. From the age of 7, Artie could be heard in his bedroom blowing Ledbetter tunes through pursed lips. His parents were too disinterested in the poor boy—or comatose—to tell him that most people learned to whistle, not blow, songs. But he was a determined, original young lad, and he persisted in his art. His painful sensitivity made it difficult for him to leave the house, so it took meeting an original like Sid Bennett to draw him out of his shell. Certainly before Sid he would never have considered performing in public.

Sid was a tragic original. You know the type. They never fit in no matter what but always desperately want to. The problem is, they come from a planet far, far away from Earth. They think they come from Earth, but they don't. So their sense of etiquette and humour is completely different. Completely, utterly out of this world. For example, Sid's idea of a joke would be to stop someone in the street, point at the sidewalk, and say, "Excuse me madam, you dropped a hair." To which he would lurch away in fits of apoplectic laughter while the stunned bystander wondered if she'd suddenly slipped the bounds of known reality. Sid was a natural for the psychedelic movement. Already from age 6 he'd drawn exact copies of record covers. His schoolbooks evolved from blank, staid exercise books, to childish versions of the Book of Kells—elaborate, beautiful graffiti and scrollwork filling every available space.

Sid and Artie, Ledbetter and Bennett, will not go down in the history of songwriting alongside the likes of Jagger and Richards, Lennon and McCartney, or even Abbott and Costello. Mostly they performed covers, since they reasoned that this is how all bands pay their dues. The few times they performed at open mic talent nights it seemed fewer glasses were thrown at them than when they tried an

original number. Artie always griped that the audience “just doesn’t get it—no f—king education about avant garde music.” ‘Bruiser’ Elbow justed laughed and said, “Mate, you and Sid BOTH is from another planet.”

None of the Unfab Four could keep a regular job for long. This is probably what kept the band going as long as it did: the hopeless delusion that they were destined for Something Greater. That they were unkindly spat upon by a society that refused to see they were ahead of their time. “We can do without instruments what all those wankers wailing on Stratocasters could NEVER do,” Sid would snap back at detractors. “We do it the old-fashioned way—with spit and gristle.” The others in the band would look puzzled, but because none of them could think of a better retort, they’d all agree. And it somehow kept them going. They knew, they all had Something Bigger Inside Them. All they needed was a lucky break.

Well, a lucky break did come, believe it or not. Fate’s a strange thing, mate. One minute she’s rewarding talentless hacks with big dicks and even bigger mouths, then next she’s bending down to bestow her kiss on some poor benighted soul so down on his luck he thinks the ‘golden horseshoe’ is a constellation. And when Fate held her nose long enough to get close to stinky old Major and the rest of the boys, Sid and Artie were ready. They got themselves a manager, straight off. You guessed it: ‘Bruiser’ Elbow. After all, having run a pub, he had business experience. Never mind that creditors were too terrified to set foot in his pub. Bruiser had a certain—knack with people. He could be so oily charming, especially while breaking a kuckle. People would weep for joy, knowing this man had taken a personal interest in them. He was that convincing.

Because of Bruiser’s contacts in the entertainment world, he was able to get them a gig with Diamond Gus, the manager of a seedly little club in East Hollywood, USA called The Buxom Revue. It was the owner’s idea of a classy name for a strip club. “Hey, buddy, never mind,” he’ll tell anyone who questions his definition of ‘class’, “it’s a whole lot classier than the Pussy Parade down the street.” Anyway. Because Bruiser had a wimpy cousin who worked in a travel agency, he was able to intimidate him into getting the Unfab Four tickets in the baggage compartment of a 747.

They were all a little blue by the time they got to LA, but fortunately the airport had an ambulance service, which revived them in time. It created a strange,

helium-like effect on their music. Sid just started up in the airport's emergency room and the others blew in on count. Artie had the presence of mind to get the tape recorder going, but it was erased when they had to pass through the demagnetizing scanner at customs. The band all remembered it as such an improvement, it could have been an instant hit. I mean, if the Chipmunks can have not only a hit but a career, the Hornless Band could have been almost as big as the Stones.

Bruiser promised to find a record producer small enough to intimidate into getting them some studio time to cut a demo. One thing about Bruiser, he almost always delivered on his promises. Like if he said, "Steal from my till and I'll cut your balls off," or "Stop bouncing my billiard cue off the floor or I'll shove it up your ass, mate."

Anyway, before long, the Hornless Band could hardly believe their stars: they were in a tiny studio in a row of crack houses in East LA. Sid had got the idea to contact a dentist for a donation: a tank of helium. "Look, mates," he said. "Fate has given us a cosmic window here, let's go through it." Everyone except Artie shrugged and didn't seem to get it. "We damn near died to get over here and introduce the Hornless Band to the world. That was the Muse, giving us our angle!" So with the help of some good quality cannabis from British Columbia and plenty of experimentation with helium, the boys laid down several tracks.

None but one would ever see the light of day. By now everyone knows the story of *The Girl in the Bubble*, the way it took the co-op radio charts in LA by storm for one week that fateful summer of '69. Mostly because people were so puzzled by it, they had to keep phoning the station to play it again, just to see if they'd really heard what they thought they heard. Not that anyone could figure out exactly WHAT it was they heard. It sounded like a cross between a girl singing underwater and a group of hyenas howling under the moon. Still, it nearly paid for the whole disastrous tour.

Jules Rock, the record studio owner/producer, when confronted with the rest of the tracks, had a severe neurotransmitter failure and had to be revived by a paramedic. "Severe aphasic reality maladjustment," Rock's therapist had diagnosed. It was all very unfortunate, because the Hornless Band were hoping against hope they could make the transition from having a hit single to having an LP, or at least an EP.

When sufficiently recovered to return to the studio for a meeting with the band, Rock kept an oxygen mask close at hand. With his therapist at his elbow steadying him, the poor man explained why he could never, never release the other tracks. “First of all, your song *Reality Clash* is like death metal done with flatulence. *Girl I Dig Your Elderberry Bush* almost had a chance, but jazz is hard enough to sell without crossing it with psychedelia. *Down in the Sewer Blues* is like the soundtrack to a constipation commercial and too dangerous for hemorrhoid sufferers to be released upon an unsuspecting public. Artie in particular argued this one vociferously, pointing out that its earthy integrity owed to the fact that it was based on their actual experience living in the sewers of Manchester. “Fucking Black Sabbath can’t boast that kind of street cred,” Sid added. But talking about the last track, *Nightmare Rambler*, a 17-minute opus recorded one night after too much helium and booze, made Rock actually shiver. “It’s like the Stones on caffeine, coke AND speed,” the producer half-jibbered. “I want to tear at my cheeks with nails the way that guy in the Dutch painting does.” Sid tried to tell him that what Rock was really telling the band was that the tune worked: that was the intended emotional effect. Rock insisted the only result of releasing *Nightmare Rambler* would be mass panic and the possible breakdown of modern civilization. “I may be sleazy, but I do have some scruples. Sometimes even money isn’t worth the risk.” Sid and Artie decided there was only one thing to be done: break into the studio and steal the master tape. This they did, and managed to talk Bruiser into footing the bill to have 100 copies pressed of a 5-song EP, *The Girl in the Bubble*—the only known recordings of The Hornless Band and now worth a fortune on EBay. But within a week of the EP release party in the Pink Lady motel in East Hollywood, Larry fell asleep with the master in his arms and a cigarette burning, setting his bed on fire and destroying the tape. The others considered chopping Larry up and dumping him in the ocean but Major pleaded on his behalf. “He can’t help it. He’s simple. Besides, what would The Hornless Band be without Larry. It’s like the Beatles without Ringo. Forget it.”

Things went downhill from there. The Buxom Revue was so old, decrepit and pissy smelling, it was practically a billboard screaming “Bad sign, bad sign.” Signs over the bar warned patrons: “Wear a Condom or Die.” and “Management not responsible for missing body parts.” The club’s bouncers were brutal, if anyone

even dared touch one of the dancing girls. Without paying, that is. The screams of welfare bums and cheapskates could be heard in the back alley. The urinals had black hair growing out of them. On the few days it rained, buckets created an obstacle course, collecting water. Poor Artie had to take up the habit of placing a towel from the dressing room over the barstools in between sets. The bartender chuckled that only soaked up the slime faster.

The Buxom Revue was a kind of End of the Universe for Show Biz. Every freak and nut case with delusions of talent paraded across its glitzy pole-dancer's stage. Compared to most of them, The Hornless Band were normal as apple pie. Guys who played the *Star Spangled Banner* with elastic bands. Big-breasted women who whistled *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* with Coke bottles. Dwarfs playing hopelessly out of tune accordions. And once, a guy who played Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on the Jew's Harp. Poor old Major. He found the whole thing depressing, although he judged by Sid and Artie's reaction that they would soon become The Horny Band. Larry just sat and drooled and had to be prodded out of his erotic daydreams in time for performances. But it wasn't all bleak—the silver lining to the lead cloud was about to shine through.

That's when they met the Deaf Mute Lip Synch All-Girl Choir one week, and One Note Bob the Piano Man the next. With the girls, it was pure lust, at first. But Sid quickly realized they added a vital visual element to the Hornless Band's show. Artie said, "Yeah, and a weird kind of harmony." Major just looked at them both like they were nuts. "WHAT fucking harmony? You can't hear 'em, for Chrissakes!" "Fuck off, Major," Sid snapped. "It's poetry in motion, that's what. Too bad if you don't get it." Bruiser was more diplomatic, for once. "I never saw a group of gals with such rhythm before. Hearing girls ain't got rhythm like that." One Note Bob was a local legend. For a 10-block radius, anyway. Once you passed that he was a total non-entity. But at the Buxom Revue he was a legend. The story was he'd crossed a local gang leader a long time back and had lost all but his thumbs and index fingers. Yet somehow he managed to teach himself piano. He was the epitome of Cool: whether midnight or daylight, Bob wore his trademark black sunglasses. And always a three-day beard with a cigarette half-smoked in his mouth. Hair a combination of a rooster and an electrically shocked '50s greaser. He rarely spoke, and when he did, it had a spellbinding effect. Pronouncements of

the utmost gravity, sunk in a deep baritone shredded by booze and smokes, like a guru. Things like, “Your underground is my overground, baby” and “No matter where you go, you leave a shadow.” Otherwise he mostly just muttered “Cosmic, man,” to anything the boys said. Sid and Artie became obsessed with him. Larry and Major felt left out, and got strung out snorting pepper from the salt and pepper shakers on the club tables. What Sid and Artie thought was the band’s heyday was in fact a meteoric plummet.

Still, they managed to bully the band into making One Note Bob a regular. Old Major protested, as usual. “Even I can tell the jerk only knows one note.” Sid yelled back “That’s the point, you idiot! No one—and I mean no one else in the world—does this. It’s like Pete Townshend’s windmill guitar, man.” Artie pointed out the harmonic impact of having one deep-throated piano note anchoring the band’s sound and resonating like a bell tower. Larry, as usual, had no opinion. But the Hornless Band was to have one great Swan Song before its final dive. Diamond Gus the club owner gave the Bruiser an ultimatum. (Of course he did it while wearing a bulletproof vest, a kevlar-lined codpiece, hockey goalie pads, an Army surplus helmet, and speaking from inside the iron-reinforced box office.) The ultimatum was: “I’ve let you and your band live here for months. I want a sellout show or it’s over.” Bruiser was turning red but calmed by the warning he’d received from Diamond Gus’s lawyer about the consequence of any physical injury. The sight of the box office’s iron bars was a helpful reminder too. The Bruiser, after all, still had a pub back in Old Blighty he wanted to get back to. And besides, he owed it to the boys not to screw it all up. They could do that well enough on their own.

So they started rehearsing for the Big Show. The Hornless Band, One Note Bob the Piano Man, and naturally the Deaf Mute Lip Synch All Girls Band. By now the band had given up the conceit of the helium. “Besides,” Artie protested, “it’s a gimmick. That schtick was alright for the early days, but we’ve matured as a band since then.” “That was last month, you twit,” the Major reminded him. Sid had taken to kicking the Major when he made comments like that. The first time he did it they were jamming, and the pained sound the Major made added an interesting high note to the proceedings. So Sid argued that, far from cruelty, it was an artistic technique he’d adopted to further the band’s development. “Like the Beatles with

Sergeant Pepper, man.” Poor old Major would complain that his shins were permanently black and blue. “Besides, you mean John and Yoko on the *Wedding Album*, not Sergeant Pepper,” he snarled. To which, Sid would add another carefully modulated kick, and Major would scream. “See what I mean,” Sid would gloat. “Perfect pitch.”

It was a strange sight: The four girls, swaying and grinding wordlessly, mouths sensuously forming the lyrics to the songs. One Note Bob, crashing down on the keyboard with his index finger. And the Unfab Four, more grizzled and worldly now, like bourbon-soaked Jagger and Richards recording *Exile on Main Street*, the songs fuller now, blown through lips seasoned by endless hours onstage. Artie started demanding to be called ‘Mick’. The Major threatened to shove a bottle down his throat. Sid aimed a little higher up the shin and got an entirely new note out of the old man. Larry complained that the arrangements for the songs were getting too weird. “We’re losing touch with our Manchester roots, man.” When Sid and Artie jibed him about making more sense as a mute, Larry threatened to go solo. Sid reminded him that his one stint busking on the streets of Manchester had got him a ticket for Insanity without a License under the Public Nuisance statutes. Worse yet, Sid and Artie were starting to bicker. Sid wanted to do a big, glitzy show, with the boys all dressed in silver suits and platform shoes and neon glasses. “We could hire that midget with the accordion for the intermission,” he enthused. “Yeah, right, Sid,” Artie grumbled. “What’s next? A monkey flushing a toilet for an instrumental break?” To which Sid accused Artie of stealing his ideas. And on and on, late into the night, bickering until Larry and Major both quit the band several times and had to be coaxed back with empty bribes of future glory. Larry used his exit to exert some influence over the band’s developing sound.

“Fine, You want me to come back, I get a say in creative development. I’m tired of being the backup band, along with the Major, while you two get all the credit.” Sid swallowed hard, but managed a smile. “Okay, Larry. Okay. What do you want?” Larry’s face lit up with a crosseyed grin. “You remember that Shepherd we saw onstage the other week?” Artie and Sid looked puzzled at one another. “Lassie’s been dead for decades, Larry,” Artie reminded him. “No, no, no!” Larry insisted. “Seamus the Dog. Seamus!” Artie and Sid exchanged glances again, and finally the light went on. “You mean Seamus from Pink Floyd’s *Meddle*? When did we

see him?” Old Major reminded Larry that Artie and Sid had been AWOL that evening after a particularly heavy night of drinking and partying with the Deaf Mute girls. Larry was feeling good now. For the first time in his life, he had an idea.

Diamond Gus managed to track down Seamus’ manager and bring the aged Shepherd back to the club. The dancing girls, bouncers and Gus himself watched with horror at what unfolded. The bizarre pantomime of the Deaf Mute girls, One Note Bob pounding like a railroad worker on a spike, the Unfab Four blurting and blatting blue in the face, and now, Seamus howling as if he knew this might be his last chance at the limelight after years in the shadow of his One Great Moment with Floyd. Sid and Artie were ecstatic. “It works! It works!” Sid kept yelling while slapping the boys on the back.

Diamond Gus watched in dismay, but knew he’d backed himself into a corner he couldn’t get out of. Bruiser watched him watching, rubbing his hands gleefully. This—this would be the boys’ Big Moment. Gus sent out a call to as many business associates as possible to invite them for the week-long show, headlined by the Hornless Band, and backed by the East Hollywood Revue, as Bob, Seamus and the girls were calling themselves. Attendance was assured by a reminder on the invitations that any money owed them would be paid back if they showed up. Sid had a brainstorm: the show would be a total experience, like Floyd’s *The Wall*. Except Sid and Artie’s rock opera would be *The Wind*. “Think of the poetic possibilities in THAT!” Sid chortled. Artie could see it too: all the glory and chaos of human existence in the passing of air. Whether the usual way, across a field of barley, or in and out of one’s lungs through finely articulated lips. The girls would wear filmy, gauzy veils blown constantly over their heads by fans while they made wavy motions with their arms. “The wind as Muse,” Sid explained. “Aw, blow it out your arse,” the Major muttered. “Next you’ll be tellin’ us ‘bout your sad childhood, and the Wind Demons who made you piss your bed ‘til the third grade.” Artie glares at the wizened old man. Sid lunged at the Major, sweeping him up in a jolly dance. “You’re brilliant, you cranky old crust! Artie and me will paint our faces with red flames and be the Wind Demons! We can work it up to a crescendo just like Wagner, all thunder and blatting brilliant glory!” “That oughta sound ‘bout like a fart contest in a pork ‘n beans factory,” the Major chortled. “Fuck off,

Major,” Artie barks. “This is art, capital ‘A’.” “And what am I in this extravaganza, Sid?” the Major snapped. “The Wind Wart on your ass? Haven’t you guys seen *Spinal Tap*? Or U2’s *Pop* tour? You might as well fly a plane into the ground right now. You’ll ruin us all.” “I object to that,” yelps Sid. “After *Rattle and Hum*, Bono and the boys could do what they damn well please, far as I’m concerned.” Larry lets out a windy sigh. “Not like we got much to ruin.”

The night of the show, Diamond Gus splurged and had all the burnt-out bulbs in his sign replaced, so that instead of reading ‘The Bum Vue’ or ‘Bux U’, it actually spelled out The Buxom Revue with a pulsing electricity that made it shine for miles in the seedy East LA night. The gangs heard of it when they learned club owners and other ‘businessmen’ were converging on the club. They sniffed money in the air. Who knows? Maybe even discover a rock ‘n roll legend! Sid and Artie were pumped—and had been pumping the Deaf Mute girls for days before the show week. “See,” Sid told the band at rehearsals, “I told your our Big Moment would come. Think how far we’ve come from the sewers of Manchester.” “I’d rather be the Hornless Band FROM the sewers of Manchester,” growled the Major, “than a sphincter in the toilet of Hollywood!”

The newly brilliant bulbs of the Buxom Revue’s sign might as well have been spelling out, ‘Disaster Unfolding’. Larry and the Major had been snorting pepper all day. Artie kept trying to talk them out of it, but the Major just told him to fuck off and blamed the Beatles. You could see their edginess going up a notch an hour. Artie was worried. Sid was behaving like a prima donna, bossing everyone around, taking control. Artie felt vaguely sick, but distinctly excited.

They’d been practicing for weeks, had the show down, Artie reminded himself. No need to worry. He’d sent Larry after Diamond Gus to make sure the wiring was fixed, just to make sure there were no electrical shorts onstage. Sid had been obsessed about the fans and spotlights not working. *The Wind* was going to be the show that would make them. Or break them. If this didn’t get them a major record deal, nothing would. Artie started drinking five hours before the show. Sid was in that odd zone he got into when he was in creative mode, his eyes staring out at some reality, but not the one in the room. The poor deaf-mute sisters just looked anxiously from band member to band member, like children fretting. One Note Bob could only smoke heavily and mutter, “Cosmic, man.”

Larry kept complaining about the costumes, day-glo tights that showed every pubic hair and wrinkle. “The make-up is bad enough,” he whined. “I look like an explosion in a watermelon farm. Sid looks like he fell asleep in the sun beneath a grid. And Artie? ‘Moon Wind’? Poor Artie’s face looks like a pancake with anemia.” “How ’bout me?” the Major barked. “‘Earth Wind’? I look like fuckin’ moldy cheese!” Sid kept reassuring everyone, speaking to them as though from a great height. Not condescending exactly, but oddly displaced, not all there. Strangely enough, the show went smoothly. At least, until one of the Deaf Mute girls got tangled in her electric fan and writhed like a marten in a leg-hold trap. The lights shone from below the band’s faces gave the whole show a Bela Lugosi look that actually helped distract attention from the gaudy make-up. Sid still looked like a half-baked lobster, his lips blowing a low Bowie-like rumble to the ominous clanging of Bob’s single note, and the sad, soft moaning of Seamus the Dog. The rest of the band blew harmonies discreetly, with only the occasional bum note. *Nightmare Rambler* was an experience to rival LSD, Disneyland, and a David Lynch film. Sid decided to crank up the tempo, turning it into a fast-paced stomp of blubbery lips desperate to keep up while Seamus went into overdrive, a canine masterpiece of improvisation worthy of Liza Strike in *Dark Side of the Moon*. One Note Bob stayed in the high register on the keyboard, giving the jam a Hitchcockian, *Psycho*-like effect. The Major played bass lips as usual, Larry his usual tenor, while Sid and Artie took the lead parts. Sid took the suave approach, going for the smooth low tones. Artie preferred to experiment with odd time signatures and off-kilter rhythms. It was what the Major called ‘Asshole Jazz’. Diamond Gus was forced to watch the Hornless Band turn night after night of perfectly well-adjusted—if mostly criminal—audiences into stumbling, shell-shocked husks of themselves. Many seemed to be hallucinating, and swore the room around them was melting. Some were panicked by the hallucinations, hopping from foot to foot trying to escape. Others were crying uncontrollably, still others repeating nonsense phrases over and over again. A few women sprawled, mewling in orgiastic ecstasy. A well-groomed pocket poodle escaped from the over-perfumed arms of one overpainted hussy and ran through the crowd lifting its leg to piss on peoples’ pant legs before leaping onstage to jam with Seamus. The

poodle's trademark "Yip, Yip!" added a hip-hop edge to the proceedings that went down well. Sid even did a solo with Jew's Harp.

Finally Diamond Gus had had enough. He phoned the LAPD. When the cop answering the phone asked him the nature of the complaint, Gus fairly sputtered. "Psychedlic flatulence! Talent Night at the Funny Farm! Mentally Deficient Aliens Among Us!" (All of which, ironically, came to be actual tabloid headlines reporting the event.) When the patient sergeant on the night desk protested that none of the above was a crime, much less a cause for sending out squad cars, Gus blurted, "Fine—Mass hysteria! Disturbing the Collective Peace!" The sergeant reluctantly dispatched two cars. But when the patrolmen arrived and saw the pandemonium, they called out the staff psychologist and phoned the special phenomena unit of the FBI. When the FBI were told what was going on, they said: "It's too localized for us. 'Mass' hysteria becomes our jurisdiction once it leaves, say East LA to another city or two." The chief detective's pronouncement was, "LSD Koolaid. Has to be. No other explanation fits." One of the men thought it might be a chemical reaction created by the stench emanating from the Major. The psychologist stroked her chin diligently and purred: "There's a dissertation in this." One thing was clear, she said: "The Hornless Band's *The Wind* must never see the light of day again, ever. It's simply too dangerous, too risky."

Sid was beside himself. He was seeing the moment he'd dreamt and fought for crumbling before his eyes. Artie was mostly just stunned. Sid kept ranting about state control, Orwellian politics, and mumbling, "Smile. It's the fuckin' Beach Boys' *Smile*, all over again." Larry looked like a scolded puppy, or a child chastised and about to weep. The Major surprised everyone by muttering, "Fascists. Goddam fascists in the good ole US of A, pissing on creative freedom." Bruiser tried to get a sympathetic lawyer from Legal Aid to take their case, but when estimated how much money they'd need to prosecute the case, the band had no choice but to back down. "It's fucking true," Artie concluded. "Justice is for those with money."

But the folks stumbling out of the Buxom Revue were changed forever. Hornless Band fans, or 'Lipheads' as they came to be called, were never fit for a regular job again, aimless drifters following Hornless Band fan club conventions from town to town, decades after they disbanded. Many would come to say in bestselling

memoirs of the little-known underground event that it was the defining moment of their lives. “Fuck Woodstock,” Lipheads were fond of saying. “The Hornless Band’s legendary performance of *The Wind* at the Buxom Revue—now THAT was life altering. Consciousness raising. Because of Bedletter and Bennett, reality will never be the same.” Every memoir of the Hornless Band’s classic performance of *The Wind* reads differently. It’s as if the rock opera had somehow opened an infinite number of alternate realities within the same room.

Lipheads would argue in chat rooms endlessly about what led to Sid’s tragic death in a motel in south Wales. “It was the herring,” some said. “Once he got heavy into the herring,” that was the end. “Naw, it was the political cartooning that did him in,” others insisted. “It was the gas leak,” the coroner pronounced in the local rag. Artie faded into the woodwork, doing mostly odd jobs and designing toilet paper patterns. The Major just disappeared. Literally. Permanently, this time. Artie sometimes fancied he heard the Major practicing on the lonely hillsides at dusk, blowing out *Down in the Sewer Blues* or the killer riff from *Midnight Rambler*. Larry kept the fan club torch blazing, and was probably the only member of the Hornless Band to earn a steady living from their legendary brush with fame all those years ago. But he never blew another Hornless Band song again. Larry may not have been thick as a brick, but he was loyal. The last he heard from Sid and Artie, they said: “Without the Major, there can be no Hornless Band.” And Larry stuck to it. No wind would pass his lips in song again.

*Dedicated to the groundbreakers: The Beatles, Captain Beefheart & Pink Floyd.*

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