

ProjeKcts One to Four

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The dates are confusing on this one. It looks like I started it on June 9th, and jumped right in to a partial first draft of “An Old Person’s Guide to King Crimson, Part 3: The ProjeKcts.” I came back and wrote the dated journal entry for June 12th, then went back to chip away at the expanding main topic for several weeks, taking some breaks now and then to insert film reviews, and then finally wrote the journal entry dated July 5th and sent it out to the e-mail mailing list. I don’t really know how to reconcile my conflicting goals and shifting priorities in writing these newsletters. I’m writing a personal newsletter, book and film reviews, and sometimes, long, down-the-rabbit-hole essays, which I don’t really plan in advance, but which emerge from the journaling.

Monday, June 12th, 2023

Hello dear readers! It’s no doubt going to take me a few days to finish writing this newsletter, as all I really have so far is a collection of short notes and a few paragraphs about King Crimson. But I will attempt to beat it into some kind of coherent shape.

Hot and Dry

I want to give a special shout-out to the weather. It’s been an unusually hot and dry late spring — it isn’t even officially summer yet. And we’ve been dealing with wildfire smoke, with visible haze in the air and air quality numbers that crossed into the red (air quality index 150+), because of the Canadian wildfire smoke that has been drifting slowly around over the United States.

I couldn’t really smell the smoke much, but I could see it, and feel the residue it was leaving on things, and *taste* the grit in the air, even indoors. We wore our masks outside for a couple of days. We didn’t get it nearly as bad as New York City got it, but it’s not a competition anyone should actually want to win.

Bit yesterday we had light rain for much of the day, and it was delightfully cool, for the first time in far too long. Grace and I sat on the front porch and just soaked in the cool air and the beauty of our unkempt kitchen garden, and it was a big relief.

I'm not going to go in-depth into the *political* idiocy surrounding these wildfires and the fallout, except to say that the denial and/or minimizing of cause, effects, and consequences is brought to you by the same people (either literally the same people, or their political descendants) who worked tirelessly to convince you that smoking cigarettes was harmless.

Family News

Veronica (18) has been taking a series of online classes through the University of Michigan's Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design. She reports that these have been going quite well and we've been getting peeks at her artwork for the classes.

Benjamin (9) has been having some trouble with his teeth. He saw the dentist earlier this spring, but then we took him back because he was complaining of discomfort in his teeth. There isn't anything actually wrong, but he is losing at least six baby molars all at once, as his adult teeth push their way in. That's a lot for his little mouth to handle. So, we've just been treating his discomfort.

Benjamin and I have a little tradition — when a tooth is very loose, and bugging him because he can't chew on it properly, he comes to me and asks me to yank it out. It's a bit difficult to grip a baby tooth with my fingers, but I have found that if I grip it with a dry paper towel, I can sometimes just pop it right out. The last couple of times, though, I've tried, and while the teeth have been very wobbly, they aren't quite ready to pull out easily. So, we wait a little longer.

It also looks like he might need orthodontia. Unfortunately the orthodontist who worked with Joshua, who did an amazing job, and charged extremely reasonable prices, has retired. Also unfortunately, I'm still working as a contractor and a huge chunk of my take-home pay is going to pay COBRA, leaving very little discretionary income to pay for orthodontia. But we will do what we can for him, as soon as we can.

Movies

Here's an update on the movies and TV shows we've been watching in our recent Saturday movie nights.

***The Dark Crystal* (1982 Film)** I'm not entirely sure if I've written about *The Dark Crystal* before. I first saw this film in theaters when it came out. My impression of it hasn't really changed much. It's a gorgeous film with some amazing puppeteering and astounding sets, but the story is uneven. It's very slow in places, but then races through the conclusion.

I'm also really not happy with the Gelfling characters — their puppet faces are frustratingly immobile, and so can't really convey much emotion. The Gelfings Jen and Kira are voiced by Stephen Garlick and Lisa Maxwell. They do a decent job, but I feel like the inert faces required the voice performances to be more

exaggerated, with over-the-top emotion, to compensate for their flat appearances. To me, they just appear to be stone-faced and unresponsive to any of the things happening to them and around them, and their faces never appear to match the emotions expressed in their voices.

Instead, the real stars of this film are the Skeksis, hideous bird-like creatures. In particular Barry Dennen as The Chamberlain does a fantastic job, but all the Skeksis are fun to watch. Billie Whitelaw is also great as Aughra. Her puppet's face isn't much more mobile, but she makes up for it with a wild vocal performance.

I still say the film is worth watching for the astounding sets and puppeteering. In particular, watch for the long-legged Landstriders. These were actually puppeted by operators inside the costumes, working on stilts. It's hard to believe. But, set your expectations low, and expect a slightly frustrating and tedious experience, watching a film that takes itself a bit too seriously.

There have been several other Jim Henson Company films that attempted to branch out from the Muppets into other stories. There are Jim Henson puppets in *Labyrinth*. These work better because *Labyrinth* contains more overtly comic elements than *The Dark Crystal*. There was also the 2015 film *MirrorMask*, a beautifully weird but poorly received film. I saw *MirrorMask* in its very limited theatrical release and was both awed and disappointed. Jim Henson Company puppets are also featured in the science fiction TV series *Farscape*. That show was innovative and often fascinating, but the weirdness seemed like a deliberate ploy to hide the relatively poorly-developed characters and weak storytelling. The evidence so far suggests that the creatures of the Jim Henson Company just aren't going to be truly successful in so-called "serious" stories.

“D.P.O.” (The X-Files Season 3, Episode 3) Grace and I have been slowly re-watching *The X-Files*. The quality of the episodes varies hugely. There are some that are terrific. There are some that are so laughably bad that they are fun to mock. And there are many that fall squarely into the middle of the bell curve, not really good enough to truly enjoy, but not really bad enough to have fun making fun of. And I imagine that some people might love specific episodes that everyone else seems to hate, and *vice-versa*, although reading reviews of episodes online suggests that there is a fairly strong consensus on which episodes are the best.

I owned seasons 1 and 2 on DVD, but I've been slowly acquiring used DVD sets of the later season. As best as I can recall, I haven't seen anything past the first two episodes of season 7, so I have more to see for the first time, although seasons 8 and 9 aren't usually considered to be very good.

Anyway, “D.P.O.” stands for Darin Peter Oswald. Oswald is a mildly intellectually challenged young man (I think he's probably about twenty), with a crush on his former Special Education teacher. He likes to play video games at the local arcade. His friend Bart Liquori, played by a very young Jack Black, runs the

arcade and is Oswald's only friend, although he is wary of Oswald's temper, because he knows that Oswald has the unique, inexplicable ability to channel and store electricity through, and in, his body. He can channel lightning. He can store electricity like a battery and discharge it later. He can do other things, like starting cars and changing traffic lights from dozens of feet away. He uses these abilities both for his own amusement and to get revenge on people he believes have wronged him.

I love this episode in particular because while it is scary, it isn't uncanny. It's not really the thing to inspire nightmares, so we didn't hesitate to allow the older kids to watch it with us and talk about it. Also, it is a standalone episode, so didn't require knowledge of the show's multi-season "mythology" story arc to understand the plot. The cinematography is terrific, and so are the performances. It also features a number of banging early nineties alternative rock songs. So, this remains one of my all-time favorite episodes of *The X-Files*.

The Mask (1994 Film) I had not seen this film in decades but I thought the kids might enjoy it, and I was right. It has held up well. The special effects look a bit more fake than I recall, but the whole film is about a man who essentially turns into a cartoon character, so realism is not actually important. I had forgotten that Cameron Diaz was in this film as the *femme fatale*. In fact, it was her first big role. And I had also forgotten how much Cuban swing music was in the film. Apparently, the success of *The Mask* actually contributed to the resurgence of interest in swing music in the 1990s.

I recall liking it less back when I first saw it, and that Carrey's antics grated on me a bit. I didn't have that reaction this time. I guess I've loosened up over the years, although the portrayal of Diaz's character Tina Carlyle, a sort of gun moll who is a bit similar to Jessica Rabbit, still seems a little uncomfortably stereotyped. And the character, "the Mask," has a, shall we say, extremely *forward* approach towards meeting women, although to be fair, she does seem to really enjoy it when the Mask turns her torch song performance into an extremely acrobatic dance number and starts spinning her around at Tasmanian Devil speeds. As the film goes on she becomes interested in Ipkiss himself, whose self-confidence grows after his experience as The Mask, and drops the gun moll persona, and leaves her abusive mobster boyfriend, much to the audience's relief.

Also, a cute dog saves the day. So, this was definitely a fun movie to watch with the kids.

Shazam! Fury of the Gods (2023 Film) I was not optimistic about this film given the reviews — it has only a 49% rating on Rotten Tomatoes. That's the critics' rating, though. The audience rating is 86%. In this case, while the film did poorly at the box office, I agree with the audience. It's not as good as the first one, but it's still an entertaining film. In particular the supporting character Freddy Freeman, played by Jack Dylan Grazer when he's not in superhero form, is great in this. It also features Luci Liu and Helen Mirren, as antagonists, and

they are both really fun to watch. The goddess Anthea, who becomes Freeman's love interest, is played by Rachel Zegler, and she also does a great job.

I do have some gripes about the film. The plot is over-complicated, and meanders. There are too many characters. The ending is not very satisfying, because the threat to Billy Batson/Shazam doesn't feel very convincing. But that's a common problem in this genre — could anyone believe, even for a moment, that the film was going to kill the titular character?

Source Code (2011 Film) Duncan Jones, the director of this film, had a little secret, back in the early nineties when he was a student at my *alma mater*, the College of Wooster, although I don't know how well-kept his secret actually was. Jones was the son of David and Angela Bowie — yes, *that* David Bowie. This led to a surreal moment once, when I saw David Bowie and Iman walking across the Oak Grove. I didn't actually know Jones, although I have chatted briefly with him on Twitter. I had graduated in 1989, but I stayed in Wooster, working as an intern until June 1990; I have forgotten just when or why I was back on campus during, I think, the 1995 graduation ceremonies, but that moment has stuck with me. Why am I telling you this? Because I'm happy to have a bit of a connection, even a tenuous one, with someone whose work I admire. I am happy to see a fellow alumni make good, although in his case I don't think there was ever much doubt that Jones would grow up empowered and supported enough to do *something* interesting.

I admired his first film, *Moon*. *Source Code*, starring Jake Gyllenhaal as Captain Colter Stevens, is the second major film he directed, and I really should have seen it earlier. It's a crime thriller, with sort of a *Mission: Impossible* plot in which the hero has only a very limited time frame to identify the suspect in a train bombing. But then, when he fails, he *somehow* has to do it again. And that's when the audience has to start wrestling with the real mystery, from the perspective of the hero: *what the hell is going on?* Why, and how, is he having this experience, and who is insisting that he figure out who blew up the train, and that he's going to have to try again until he figures it out?

I'm not going to spoil it all, but I will say that the actual state of our hero, suspended somewhere between life and death, is dark indeed, as are the extreme measures that have been taken to use this man, a soldier, to solve this crime. So not only do we have a crime drama, and a science fiction framework story, but an ethical dilemma. These dilemmas spin off larger questions — what is the nature of the world that our protagonist finds himself in? Does it have an independent existence before and after the few minutes that he experiences and re-experiences? If he changes this world, do the changes persist, and can anything that happens in *that* world affect our world?

There's a lot going on. Despite the very time-limited sequences on (and off) the train, in between, Jones takes a more gradual approach, as the truth is revealed to the audience quite slowly. When the full reality of it is made clear,

it's breathtaking, as well as troubling. The trouble is worth it. *Source Code* is a great piece of storytelling, and about as thoughtful a work of science fiction as we ever get from a big studio production.

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire (2013 Film) This is the sequel to the 2011 film, adapted from the second book of the *Hunger Games* trilogy. Joshua, who has read the trilogy, tells me that the adaptation is a bit loose, as events in the books are divided up a bit differently between the films. We enjoyed the first film. There are two more — the adaptation of the book trilogy concludes in a two-part film as events accelerate, kind of like the way the seventh Harry Potter book was adapted into a two-part film.

This sequel ramps up the stakes and the drama, as the heroine, Katniss, has become a hero to those who would overthrow the government of Panem. A tour through the districts, where she and Peeta, the survivors of the previous Hunger Games who each refused to kill the other, does not really help to calm things down, as she has become a visible symbol of the discontent of the populace, and any dissenters at their public appearances are dragged off and executed, provoking a spiral of outrage and rebellion.

This leads up to a new Hunger Games, in which previous victors from each district — those who survived and thought that they were done with the Hunger Games forever — are chosen to compete.

This round of Hunger Games is grueling and terrifying, although watching it, I had a bit of a sense that it was more of the same, and so found myself losing track of exactly what was going on; there are too many minor characters to really engage with most of them.

I have to admit that overall, while I have been impressed with the films' *technical* achievements, and aesthetics, I didn't really love the first film *or* this film. I just didn't click with the story the way that Joshua has. I'm not sure *why*, exactly; it's a science fiction story, and the hero, Katniss, is portrayed very well by Jennifer Lawrence; the supporting cast is very good as well. The allegory may be a little bit too uncomfortably on-the-nose in 2023, and the violence feels *amped up* to a point where I feel numbed by it.

We'll continue with the two-parter. Maybe I'll find that ultimately I like the way the story winds up better than the way it starts.

Good Will Hunting (1997 Film) I wrote about this film back in 1998. In fact, it was one of the first films I reviewed in my personal blog. The archived review is [here](#). I never had much of an audience for my old blog, although given that I had no good way of tracking the number of page views, and did not allow comments, I'll never really know how many people read this review. I do know that one of them was named Rebekah, and she and I have been married since 2001.

Watching the film 25 years later, I find that there is still a lot to enjoy. The premise feels just a bit unconvincing, but the performances are so good, and everything fits so tightly together, that it's hard to care. The kids really enjoyed this film. For many years I have felt saddened that while I loved films like this one so much, I didn't really have very many people I could discuss them with. It turns out I just had to have children and give them as many opportunities as I could to develop their own love of film, and here we are!

Trouble in Paradise (1932 Film) Grace and I watched this pre-code romantic comedy film via the Criterion Collection a while back, but I'm just now getting around to mentioning it. It's a terrific film. Apparently after the introduction of the Hays Code it was withdrawn from circulation, and not released again until 1968. It didn't get a home video release of any kind until it was released on DVD in 2003.

This is shameful, because it's a delightful movie. The main characters, Gaston Monescu and Lilly, are both cheerfully amoral thieves. They collude to steal a fortune from Madame Mariette Colet, the wealthy owner of a perfume company. Gaston begins to have feelings for Madame, but Madame has two suitors, and a suspicious girlfriend. Things get delightfully complicated. The dialogue in this film just crackles with energy. If you have any interest at all in seeing how funny, romantic, suggestive, and engaging the pre-code films could be, I highly recommend watching this one.

The Grand Budapest Hotel (2014 Film) I've had this film for a while, in the form of the beautiful Criterion Collection Blu-ray package. I watched it myself, and had hoped for a while to share it with Grace and the kids, although I wasn't quite sure when, or whether it would hold the kids' attention. We finally watched it this past Saturday for our second feature.

It's an oddball film to be sure, as are all Wes Anderson's films. His style does not appeal to everyone. It's extremely artificial, with the focus on the artifice of filmmaking. The sets and costumes are carefully designed not to be any particular building, or particular outfit, but amalgams of *types* of places and *types* of costumes. The archetypical characters move through these gorgeous but always slightly un-lived-in environments without ever leaving much of a wake, as if they were puppets being moved around in a puppet show. But, sometimes, not always, stripping away the naturalism allows the actors to convey their emotions and struggles and, yes, ironic detachment and self-awareness in a way that really lands. Glenn Kenny describes Anderson's style like this:

What he does is his own thing, which in terms of achievement is on a similar level of difficulty to what Nabokov kept upping the ante on in his English-language novels: to conjure poignancy and tragedy in the context of realms spun off from but also fancifully, madly removed from dirt-under-your-fingernails "reality."

I think this technique worked the best in *Moonrise Kingdom*, where the artificial world was a world of childhood memory, incomplete and reconstructed, but it also works beautifully at times in this meditation on pre-war Europe. It is inspired by the writings of Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig, although not a direct adaptation of any particular work. I'm aware of Zweig's work as several of his books have been released as part of the New York Review Books Classics series, but I have not read any. This may inspire me to try one.

There's a very light framework story. In the present, we see a young woman paying tribute to the grave of the writer of the novel *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. The book was written in 1985, and describes a meeting between the younger writer and an elderly gentleman, Zero Moustafa, who owns the Grand Budapest Hotel, a once-glorious alpine resort slowly decaying into ruin. The older Zero Moustafa is played by F. Murray Abraham. As the story commences we see his younger self, played by Anthony Revolori in an amazing, understated performance.

Moustafa describes his youth, beginning with his job as a "lobby boy" at the Grand Budapest Hotel 36 years earlier, in 1932, and his adventures with his boss and mentor, Monsieur Gustave, the concierge of the hotel, played beautifully by Ralph Fiennes. The nested framework stories rest very lightly on the film, but are there to convey the understanding that the story we are watching has been filtered and enhanced through both fallible memory and the cherry-picking of novelization. Moustafa's role as "lobby boy" is perfect for this, as the lobby boy is supposed to be a "blank wall" who sees all, understands all in order to anticipate his clients' every wish, and tells nothing. He's in a perfect position to observe every other character at both their public best and private worst.

Gustave is a cheerfully opportunistic bisexual gigolo, who helps enhance the hotel's revenue by encouraging wealthy spinsters to stay for entire summers, where he provides extremely personalized service. As he puts it, "I go to bed with all my friends." Despite his close association with the wealthy guests, he has not managed to set aside much in the way of a personal fortune, as his personal estate contains not much more than a few volumes of romantic poetry. He does not seem to be in it for the money, or, at least, he isn't very good at that part of the business. The ground shifts out from under him a wealthy client, Madame D., abruptly dies. She has left her comically enormous estate to her squabbling extended family, but one thing in it, a priceless Renaissance painting called "Boy with Apple," to Monseieur Gustave, infuriating the family.

There are complications. It turns out that Madame D. was murdered. Oh, and the town is being overrun by fascist troops, as the former nation of Zubrowka is invaded. All of this makes for some glorious tests of character, as Gustave and Zero come to know and understand each other, and help defend their friends, their lives, and their hotel against the monstrous chaos of war.

If I've made it sound like a heavy, wartime drama, I've done this film a grave disservice; if I had to choose one pigeonhole to place the film into, it would be

“comedy.” But really, it crosses many genres, and does so brilliantly. I highly recommend it.

***Silent Running* (1972 Film)** My memory is a little vague, but I’m pretty sure I last saw this film on a black-and-white television. For a time we had a black and white television in our den, so my best guess is that I saw it around 1981 or 1982. In other words, it’s been a minute. I was familiar with the storyline, but had forgotten a few details, like the folk songs in the soundtrack, recorded by Joan Baez.

This film was directed by Douglas Trumbull, the brilliant visual effects designer behind much of what you see onscreen in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, and *Blade Runner*.

The storyline of *Silent Running* is quite simple, and the screenplay leaves the backstory very vague. We’re told that plants and animals on Earth have become extinct. Earth has set up a number of different habitats, like botanical gardens but complete with a variety of animals, in domes (recall that geodesic domes were a trend in architecture, based on the ideas of Buckminster Fuller). These domes are attached to eight spaceships that are sent to spend a year in an orbit beyond Saturn, waiting for their recall order. Instead of being recalled to Earth, the crew are told that they are to jettison the domes and destroy them with small nuclear devices.

Freeman Lowell is the botanist on board the *Valley Forge*, and it’s established that he loves his work deeply, and doesn’t love his fellow crew members, especially the way they have no concern or respect for the living things they’ve been preserving. Lowell makes the shocking decision to kill his 3 fellow crew members and flee with the ship and one remaining forest dome, into an unknown future, rendered with special effects that are not very realistic at all, but quite gorgeous.

Badly injured in a fight, Lowell programs the ship’s three small worker robots to perform surgery to stitch up his leg. As he slowly recovers we see scenes of him trying to care for his remaining forest habitat by himself, with only the robots for company. In the latter half of the film he doesn’t have any people to talk to, and he doesn’t *want* to talk to any other ships who might want to stop him from saving the habitat; hence, the film’s name, a term borrowed from submarine warfare.

I was hesitant to screen this film for the kids, because I knew how it ended, and I knew that it progresses a bit slowly at times, without much action, or even dialogue. But I was surprised: the older kids were quite fascinated by Trumbull’s low-budget vision of an industrial space mission combined with the beautiful, strange site of the habitats under starlight. The three robots, actually costumes containing double-amputee actors, convey a great deal of personality, and their designs were an obvious influence on *Star Wars*. The story details are a bit weak and the science is more than a little unconvincing, but Bruce Dern’s performance is great, it’s a visually fascinating film, and a historic and influential one as well.

Mission: Impossible 2 (2002 Film) A direct sequel to the 1996 film, this installment was directed by John Woo, an experienced Hong Kong action director, who had recently directed *Broken Arrow* and *Face/Off*. This film certainly has a lot of amazing action, including wild motorcycle and car chases, a complicated plot involving a genetically engineered virus and the only drug that can counteract the virus, and (of course) many disguises. I don't like this one quite as much as I did the last one, though. The disguise gags are cool, but the story goes back to that well one too many times, and it becomes a bit over-complicated in parts. The stunts are in many cases so extreme as to be unconvincing, and veer into ridiculous self-parody.

I do appreciate the way the film is filled with wonderful little details. Here's an example: in one scene, the *femme fatale* snuffs out a candle, not by blowing it out, or quickly pinching it out with her fingertips, but with her palm. While her face betrays no pain, she rubs her hand, because it clearly hurt. She does this while talking with Ethan about her ex-boyfriend, the villain. It is so quick that it goes by almost unnoticed, but the viewer's subconscious picks up on this wordless action to indicate that the relationship with this "old flame" has been snuffed out, and ending it hurt. There are other terrific little tricks of visual storytelling that tell me the director and screenwriter collaborated very closely. So it gets a lot of points for visual storytelling, but it's a shame that story isn't more convincing.

Star Trek: Strange New Worlds, Season 2 Finally, we've been watching *Strange New Worlds*. We've seen the first three episodes of season 2.

The first episode, called "The Broken Circle," was a pretty good action episode, although the liberties the showrunners take with the established characters continues to annoy us (a Vulcan drinking Klingon blood wine?) The episode is improved considerably by the introduction of a new character, Pelia, played by Carol Kane. She's both comic relief and wild card, kind of like Guinan was in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, but with a less of the vague sense of mystery, also known as "extremely lazy screenwriting," and flat affect, also known as "extremely poor directing," that made Guinan so dishwater-dull in most of the episodes she was part of.

The second episode, called "Ad Astra per Aspera," is largely a courtroom drama, as Una Chin-Riley (*aka* "Number One") is tried for the crime of hiding her identity as a genetically-modified Illyrian, which violates Star Fleet's strict regulations against GMOs. The entire arc is just a bit too contrived and too absolute. Rather than use any existing persecuted identities, the showrunners have invented an entirely new group. This persecution of a Star Fleet officer for hiding their identity to avoid discriminatory regulations was done so much better in the episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* called "The Drumhead." I wrote about this in a blog post.

That episode is in all respects a better and more convincingly complex and

nuanced story. In this story, Pike recruits famed Illyrian civil rights attorney Neera Ketoul, who essentially shames the panel of judges and also convinces them that they should treat Chin-Riley's history as if it had been a request for asylum from persecution. The idea that the various haughty and highly-placed persons within an institution, even a supposedly enlightened institution, would accept this argument, and also accept the shaming, entirely ignores how bureaucracies work and also entirely ignores the Iron Law of Institution. Its implausibility really harms this episode.

The third episode, "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow," may be the single worst episode of any *Star Trek* show that I've ever seen. Many of the old shows are bad; often they were bad for reasons of budget and schedule. But we've waited 18 months for this season of *Strange New Worlds*. There's no excuse for this one.

In the episode, La'an is abruptly recruited into a time travel escapade. A wounded man appears, hands her a time travel device, and disappears. She uses the device and is transported to an alternate timeline where she meets a young James T. Kirk. They transport together to present-day Toronto. The plot is weak, clearly sketched out rapidly to squeeze in an episode that didn't require much shooting on the main sets or with the main cast. The romantic element is ridiculous. Grace actually stomped out of the room. But it doesn't matter; the storyline is such that nothing that happens in this episode has any effect on the present timeline, except that La'an is sad.

This review highlights some of the episode's many weaknesses. Keith R. A. DeCandido points out that "we had enough of this nonsense in Picard season two," and I absolutely agree, but I think his overall evaluation is far too positive. Reviewer Jamahl Epsicokhan gets it right when he points out that "his would perhaps work better if there were some sort of chemistry between La'an and Kirk." Epsicokhan also points out, correctly in my view, that this episode was inspired by a stone-cold classic from the original series: "The City on the Edge of Forever,"

...in which history must be preserved by taking counterintuitive actions and making personal sacrifices — in this case allowing a future despot to grow up to be himself and cause untold destruction in order for the long game of history to work out for the best.

But also:

...it seems strange that this wasn't a better episode.

Amen. This is cynical screenwriting at its worst, reminding me of just how bad *Picard* got, and I am still wrestly with PTSD (post-traumatic *Star Trek* disorder) from that experience. *Strange New Worlds* owes us that hour back.

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 1 (2014 Film) I earlier reported that I did not enjoy the second film, *The Hunger Games: Catching*

Fire very much. I am pleased to report that despite the same viewing challenges — noisy kids distracting us, diapers to change during the film, etc. — I found this one much more engaging and I am looking forward to, rather than dreading, watching part 2.

Wednesday, July 5th, 2023

Getting Into the ProjeKcts

Well, this newsletter has really gone long. Part three of *An Old Person's Guide to King Crimson* expanded and expanded more, as I listened to more shows, and went fairly deep into the history of the ProjeKcts. I have long been curious about them, but this was a good excuse to explore the music.

I am tempted to read one or more of the several available non-fiction books that attempt to chronicle the history of Robert Fripp and the incarnations of King Crimson, although in the past when I've read this sort of biography, such as biographies of Steve Jobs, I've almost always been disappointed, as they tend to be either hit pieces or hagiography, and I'm not really interested in either.

I'd like to read a fairly straightforward account from the insiders, with detail about the process of developing the music itself, and their recollections of the process, and not just more praise or more complaint about Fripp. I am, perhaps, biased to be sympathetic to Fripp, because I see him as as obviously a neurodivergent outlier, focused on his special interest to a degree that most people would find not only alarming, but nearly incomprehensible. I think that his reputation as a seminal figure in the history of music will only grow with time. There's a phrase attributed to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, which is ironic in context: "Talent does what it can; genius does what it must."

I don't believe that "genius" exists in the usual senses that the word is used. Or, rather, I believe that genius is far more common than we think, and can pop up anywhere. It also goes unrecognized almost everywhere. This is because I also agree with Edison: "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration." Putting in that 99% requires both the drive and the circumstances that allow a person to meet their basic needs to allow this effort; see Maslow's heirarchy of needs.

Life in the relentless destructive wake of late capitalism not only does not support the development of genius, but beats it out of almost everyone, by stealing that required perspiration. See also: Fripp's criticism of the music industry, informed by decades of bad experiences.

For Me, It Was a Tuesday

Anyway, I do need to finish this one up and let it go. We made it through another Independence Day. For me, it was a Tuesday. We did not do anything at all to celebrate. I worked all day, because I do not have any paid time off,

and between the cost of COBRA, the costs of trying to replace the rest of our fried appliances, and the inflating cost of food and energy, we are doing only a little better than breaking even each week, so I can't really afford to lose a day's wages. So, forgive me if I'm not feeling very independent this week.

This is not really sustainable long term; to maintain our home properly I will need to do much better than just break even each week. Getting rid of the COBRA payment, which costs us \$550 a week, would hugely improve our cash flow. There is some good news though; we have finally removed the last of the things we had in storage, and so we can finally stop paying for the storage unit. Also, we are nearly done paying the large loan we had to take out in order to cover the huge loss we took when we sold the house in Saginaw. We've got less than \$5,000 to go. If I just continue making the scheduled payments, it will be done next spring. Sometimes, as I'm able, I make additional payments to accelerate it, but I'm not sure if that will be possible.

When that is paid off, our only debt, other than the mortgage of course, will be one credit card, which I would like to keep paid down, but not close, because sometimes you need a credit card.

Hot and Smoky

It's been hot. And, I hate to say it but I must: it's going to be hotter every single year, for the rest of our lives. It's time to give the kids their annual lecture about heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and hydration. We need to print out some guidelines, laminate them, and put them on the refrigerator for easy reference.

It's also been smoky. As the smoke from the enormous, uncontained Canadian wildfires drifts around, driven by the jet stream, it's been drifting over Michigan. For a while, Detroit had the worst air quality in the world. Today Air Now reports that the air quality is "moderate," in the yellow zone, with an Air Quality Index of 70. Last week, I saw it reach 260, blowing past the orange "unhealthy for sensitive groups" and red "unhealthy" zones, into the purple "very unhealthy" zone, almost reaching maroon, "hazardous."

This scale makes it sound like if it's in the yellow, most people will be fine, but that's not really the way it works. Like lead, there's not really a safe dose of these particulates. They can settle deep in the lungs. They can be absorbed right into the blood stream and travel around the body. Most people who do not already have a condition like asthma will not need immediate medical treatment, but there's really no telling what it will do to a person's body in the long term. How many people will develop COPD or other issues who would have not developed them otherwise.

On the worst days, we kept the kids inside. On less-bad days, we allowed them to go out, but asked them to wear N95 masks. Most complied although Elanor gets impatient with her mask.

Even in the yellow zone, with the house closed up, the AC running, and a Corsi-

Rosenthal box running, the kids are coughing, my eyes are dry and burning, and we are seeing other weird health effects; some of the kids report nausea. The air tastes and smells nasty and there's a fine layer of dust landing on everything, indoors and out. There's a visible orange haze in the air. I don't really want to know what it's like in the maroon zone.

I do not have asthma but I do have a genetic disorder called alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency. I have the PiMZ genotype. People with this genotype *absolutely* should not smoke, but here I am, nervously eyeing the air quality report. Elanor also has a pre-existing condition, a successfully repaired congenital heart defect.

The filters on the Corsi-Rosenthal box are pretty much shot, so we are in the process of acquiring the materials to build two more Corsi-Rosenthal filters, and replace the filters on the one we have. These fires are expected to burn all summer and into the fall. We've got the fans, but we had to mail-order the filters, our first attempt to buy large rolls of duct tape didn't work out because Meijer had run out.

Grace points out that little kids don't really perceive these things as crises. The youngest may remember this as the summer that there were a lot of extra boxes to play with, due to our curbside food pickups, and some days they got to stay inside and watch extra cartoons. This heat and this smoke are unprecedented for Michigan, but for the kids, it was a Tuesday.

The Hose Mystery, Solved

Back in May I wrote about the "mystery hose" that was confounding our plan to remove the old, fried refrigerator.

We finally got a plumber to come out and examine the situation. The outcome I was hoping for was that the plumber could identify just where the hose ran and where it was plumbed in, and put a proper mounting point in the wall behind the refrigerator, with a shutoff valve, and a hose neatly hung there for possible future use.

What actually happened was the plumber could not easily find the place that the hose, which simply ran through a gap in the floorboards, connected to the plumbing. He had to cut three different holes in the basement ceiling to trace it. But he found it eventually, inside the basement ceiling, not directly under the upstairs sink, but a few feet away. There was no valve anywhere; the hose was plumbed directly into a copper cold water pipe from the water softening system. In short, yes, this was a leak waiting to happen, right above one of our library bookcases. He disconnected the hose and capped the water pipe with a brass fitting.

Once again we're having to spend a lot of time and money to make up for the previous owner's shoddy, not-up-to-code renovation work on the house. We haven't even managed to close up the ceilings in the basement and main floor,

which we had to have torn out when the folks who installed our clothes washer failed to properly clamp the outlet hose into place.

In software development, the general name for all these accumulated issues, things we work around, “TODO” items, and undocumented changes, is “technical debt.” At some point one has to put in the time and money to clean up these issues, or the codebase just gets worse and worse. When we fix up all this drywall, I plan to put a little access panel where this hose was connected, so that if we want to properly plumb in a connection for a refrigerator water supply in the future, we’ll know where to look. We’ll also have at least one place to peer into the ceiling, if there is ever a leak. I wish the previous owner had bothered to do the same.

Anyway, on the positive side, despite the extra holes in our ceilings, we were then able to hire a hauling service, so we are back down to a single refrigerator in our kitchen. I’m reminded of a Jewish folk tale. I’ve heard many versions of this tale. I’ll skip the beginning, but quote the ending of this version:

The rabbi frowned. He closed his eyes and thought for a long time. Finally he said, “This is what you do. Take the sheep back to the barn. Take the goats back to the barn. Take the chickens back to their coop.”

The farmer ran home and did exactly as the rabbi had told him. As he took the animals out of the house, his child and wife and in-laws began to tidy up the rooms. By the time the last chicken was settled in her coop, the house looked quite nice. And, it was quiet. All the family agreed their home was the most spacious, peaceful, and comfortable home anywhere.

An Old Person’s Guide to King Crimson, Part Three: ProjeKcts One to Four, 1997-1999

I’ve been thinking about which phase of King Crimson’s storied musical arc I want to write about next. I could go back to the 1969 lineup, and cover the years before the short-lived *Islands* band. Or I could proceed forward from the *Discipline* era and cover King Crimson in the nineties, the *THRAK* band. But instead I’m going to focus on a relatively short-lived post-*THRAK* configuration of the band, the “double duo,” consisting of Robert Fripp, Adrian Belew, Trey Gunn and Pat Mastelotto.

Bass and Stick player Tony Levin was not part of this lineup, and neither was long-time drummer Bill Bruford, but this short-lived incarnation created some of the most innovative and unusual music in the whole history of King Crimson.

The story of this group is much more complicated than it seems at first, because to understand how it came to be, one must understand the history of the “ProjeKcts,” spin-off bands, whom Fripp created to tour and generate material and inspiration for the full band. He called this effort “fraKctalisation.”

There are some albums available on CD from the first four ProjeKcts, but only *Space Groove* (ProjeKct Two, 1998) is a studio album; the rest are all live recordings. Live recordings are, in my view, the best way to experience the first four ProjeKcts. So, I will be focusing on recordings of live shows that I did not acquire on CD, but purchased for download from Digital Global Mobile.

We already know by now who Fripp, Belew, and Levin are. So, who are Gunn and Mastelotto?

Trey Gunn

Trey Gunn wasn't new to King Crimson, as he had played with the band since 1994 (the "VROOOM" era). Gunn played "touch guitar," an instrument similar to the Chapman Stick, as well as Chapman Stick. He had earlier been a student in Robert Fripp's "Guitar Craft" workshops.

Pat Mastelotto

Mastelotto wasn't new to King Crimson either, as he had also played with the band since 1994. He is a percussionist, who specialized in mixing acoustic and electronic drums, a style of drumming he called "traps and buttons." In the eighties, Mastelotto had been one of the founding members of Mr. Mister. In that video, you can see a young Mastelotto's epic mullet! He was also a successful session musician.

The ProjeKcts

To understand how the ProjeKcts fit into the history of King Crimson, we need to consider what happened in the late nineties when the six-piece band (Fripp, Belew, Levin, Gunn, Mastelotto, and Bruford) ended. Levin left, I think, without acrimony, to work on other things, and he was later to return and tour with two of the ProjeKct bands, and also with the "big band" King Crimson. But things were more difficult with Bruford. According to Wikipedia, tensions were high and the band could easily have broken up completely, putting King Crimson on hiatus for an indeterminate length of time, which, if past history was any indicator, could have lasted for years. But:

Instead, the six members opted to work in four smaller groups (or "fraKctalisations", as Fripp called them) known as ProjeKcts. This enabled the group to continue developing ideas and searching for a new direction without the practical difficulty (and expense) of convening all six musicians at once. From 1997 to 1999, the first four ProjeKcts played live in the United States and the United Kingdom, and released recordings that showed a high degree of free improvisation, with influences ranging from jazz, industrial, techno and drum'n'bass.

ProjeKct One ProjeKct One was short-lived, and only performed four live shows. ProjeKct One consisted of Fripp, Gunn, Levin, and Bruford. These shows represent the last times that Bruford worked with King Crimson in any form.

What does ProjeKct One sound like? First off, they don't sound a whole lot like King Crimson, except for the instrumental sounds; Fripp uses many familiar guitar and synthesizer tones. The pieces were, I think, entirely improvised. There's a lot of trading off of solos. Sometimes Fripp and Gunn will fall into a call-and-response pattern. Sometimes Bruford and Levin will launch into something dark and percussive, and Fripp or Gunn will start adding washes of synthesizer sounds. None of it is really what I'd call rock music *per se*, even stretching that term to cover the wide range of styles under the umbrella of progressive rock. Some of it could be considered drums-and-bass, or ambient, or at times even industrial. Recordings of all four shows, performed on consecutive nights at the Jazz Cafe in London, are available to purchase for download, and I've got them. Why did I buy all four? Honestly, after listening to 30-second previews of multiple tracks across the four nights, I could not choose between them, so got impatient and just bought all four.

Would I recommend them? I would, but be sure to understand what is in these shows. You know better than I do whether you are likely to enjoy this sort of thing. These are entirely improvised pieces of music. The pieces are moody; you might call the melodies and harmonies rather dark and ominous, although there are some beautiful, uplifting moments as well. Some of the pieces take off and go somewhere, as the musicians find inspiration and begin playing off of one another. Some of the pieces don't. But when a piece starts flying, it can really fly. This is especially true on the pieces from the fourth night. If you would like to buy a single show, I'd recommend the fourth night.

There is also a "best-of" CD release, *Live at the Jazz Cafe*, which contains nine pieces selected from all four nights on a single CD. I've made a playlist out of pieces from the four shows, so that I can hear them in this order. It isn't the order I would have chosen, since it starts with a wild jam rather than building up to it, but it does definitely contain some of the best pieces. The pieces don't have real names; they are identified by night, set, and number. So, for example "4 ii 2" is the second piece recorded in the second set of the fourth and final night.

Speaking of the recordings, the shows are quite well recorded. There is some sound from the audience present, but there must have been soundboard recordings involved, too, in order to capture the huge amount of low bass energy — enough to tax a typical home stereo setup. I've been listening to them on headphones with the volume set fairly low, and the bass tones at times almost make my teeth vibrate, as Warr Guitar and Chapman Stick can play notes that are lower than a conventional bass.

It must have been an amazing to see and hear these stellar musicians jamming

together. In future decades these shows might be regarded as having the same kind of historic significance as, say, John Coltrane's 1961 residency at New York's Village Gate. I'm glad we have the remarkable documentary evidence from these four shows. But these jam sessions didn't really generate music that King Crimson could perform later. They are, perhaps, best thought of as a warmup to the later ProjeKcts, and also, because Bruford plays so much more like a jazz drummer than like a rock drummer at these shows, an attempt to indulge his desires to try a different style.

I would like to better understand why this was the last time that Bill Bruford, who played so wonderfully on these four nights, worked with King Crimson in any capacity. Don't get me wrong; I like the lineup of percussionists we had in later incarnations of King Crimson, but I will always wonder what King Crimson might have sounded like, had Bruford remained part of the band. I think ProjeKct One's recordings are evidence that Bruford could, in fact, do some innovative work, but maybe he and Fripp just couldn't reach agreement on which direction his percussion work should go next.

ProjeKct Two ProjeKct Two consisted of Fripp, Gunn, and Belew, but interestingly, Belew played electronic drums (Roland V-Drums) rather than guitar. I learned that Belew was originally a drummer, before he ever picked up a guitar, so he wasn't starting from scratch. This configuration recorded a single studio album, *Space Groove*. You can hear a track from this album on YouTube here, introduced by David Singleton.

I might acquire *Space Groove* at some point, but for now I opted to listen to ProjeKct Two's live recordings, because I think the whole point of these ProjeKct bands was really not to make studio albums, but to improvise live. There are roughly three dozen recordings of ProjeKct Two available for download, recorded between February 18th, 1998 (the group's first rehearsal at Adrian Belew's Studio Belewbeloid in Nashville) and July 8th, 1998 (the group's last show in Montreal). To explore their work I chose four shows. I didn't have any really good way of determining which shows were best, other than reading the show notes and comments posted on the site. Four shows — one from early May, one from early June, one from early July, and the last show of the tour as a bonus, seemed to be sufficient to explore the way the group's music evolved over the course of the tour.

It took me a little while to really get into ProjeKct Two's music. Some of the pieces just sounded too structured and chaotic to my ear at first. But as I have listened to them a few times, I've come to realize that there is more structure to these pieces than is initially apparent. The fast pieces actually evolve very slowly. There is sometimes an amazing contrast between the fast tempo of a piece and the slow, almost ambient way in which the piece evolves. A piece like "Heavy ConstruKction" or "Live Groove" might have an absolutely frenetic drum beat to it, and Fripp and Gunn soloing at a blistering pace, playing rivers of notes. But somehow the piece is actually moving slowly. Fripp and Gunn might switch

to a different kind of soloing where they are playing sustained notes together, reminding me a bit of a punk band I once saw live called Thin White Rope. Or, Gunn might hold down a bass riff with a very raw, growling tone that sounds a lot like something Chris Squire of Yes might play, while Fripp plays bits and pieces of other King Crimson riffs, or starts playing synthetic sounds.

Alternatively, one of the slow Frippertronics-style pieces might lull you into thinking it has a placid New Age sound, but then blow back your hair (think: the Memorex commercial guy) with rapid-fire changes in timbre, playing style, or rhythm. I found that off-putting at first, but after listening to a few shows, I “get” it a little bit more — they’re trying to keep themselves, and their audience, on their toes, and avoid falling into the normal conventions of a rock band playing an instrumental jam. It’s all about a relentless drive to express something new; in fact, they’re even trying to avoid sounding like King Crimson most of the time. They may borrow these conventions briefly, as they do when Fripp whips out a few bars of “VROOOM,” but they are always attempting to burst beyond them into uncharted territory.

May 2nd, 1998: Baltimore Despite the fact that this band did not call itself King Crimson, they opened and closed shows like the previous incarnation of King Crimson did, opening most shows with a slow “soundscape,” and closing most shows by playing “VROOOM.” There is no audience sound evident at all in this recording, so it is a sort of “live studio” recording. To be honest, I like the live recordings that do include audience reaction better, because I can more easily imagine being in the audience.

After the opening soundscape, we have “House 1,” and it fits squarely into the EDM (Electronic Dance Music) genre. Belew lays down a fast dance groove, with some nice little sycopated finger-snap samples dropped in to jazz it up. Gunn plays some very heavy, deep growling bass tones on top, and Robert contributes some soaring, wavering, sustained “Frippertronics” style soloing, switching into guitar synth pads. I think Gunn might be looping bass parts on the fly and then soloing over them. At times I’m hearing electronic, rhythm guitar, a bass part, a guitar-ish part, and synth pads. With three people performing, it’s a bit difficult to figure out exactly who is contributing what. The rhythm guitar sounds may be samples that Belew is triggering. However the band is making all this noise, there’s a lot of sound going on in this track.

Next up is “Heavy ConstruKction,” a ferocious and exciting industrial jam with some strange percussion sounds that include the sound of breaking glass, splats, bleeps, and voices. This piece did not find its way onto a studio releases as-is, although the title was re-used for a live King Crimson album, and this piece seems like it was a test bed for some melodic lines that became parts of “The ConstruKction of Light.” In particular, we have a nice melodic line where Gunn and Fripp play the same sequence of notes, first in unison, and then again with one lagging slightly behind the other. This sort of melodic figure is reminiscent of the way many of the instrumental lines in *Discipline* are assembled out of

repeating figures, but in this case it operates more like a fugue, where a figure is played half-speed, double-speed, against itself, etc. But these figures are only present in the first two minutes or so, and after that this rendition of “Heavy ConstruKction” becomes a heavy jam.

To transition from “Heavy ConstruKction” to “Light ConstruKction,” we have a spacey soundscape piece, “Vector Drift,” which combines slowly evolving synthesizer pads and tinkling bell sounds with some very active soloing, then settles down into a meditative piece, until some electric piano tones join in and Belew’s drumming comes back in, and we find ourselves in “Light ConstruKction,” a more upbeat, jam which keeps changing to incorporate different sounds including squealing electric guitar. “Light ConstruKction” winds up with some nice call-and-response playing, but does not seem to bring back any of the melodic figures I mentioned in “Heavy ConstruKction.”

“Light ConstruKction” is followed by “Live Groove,” and the drums get much more syncopated. I think the bass sounds might be triggered by Belew’s drumming, because clearly both Gunn and Fripp have their hands full, playing parallel solos over the rhythm section. Now I feel that we’re getting somewhere — their interplay here is just so damned cool. The piece slows, stutters, and speeds up again several times, but Gunn and Fripp continue a wild jam all the while.

Next up is “X chayn jiZ” which sounds a bit like “exchanges.” The piece starts out kind of indecisively as Belew starts and stops, seemingly listening to what his bandmates are doing to decide how to proceed. But then he gets going again, and holds down an EDGM groove with very artificial echoey percussion sounds including finger-snaps, and possibly that rhythm guitar sample I mentioned earlier. Gunn and Fripp then trade riffs. Fripp (at least, I think it’s Fripp?) is triggering piano sounds, bending them in a way that makes them do things a real piano can’t do. Gunn is all over the place with funky bass tones and wah-wah sounds. Fripp changes between piano and organ sounds. About eight minutes in, he starts playing bits of the riffs from “VROOOM.” This is the longest piece in the show, almost 12 minutes long, and must have been especially fun to experience live, with so much noise being created by so few players!

“Sector Patrol” is another soundscape-like piece; the musicians bring in all the crazy sounds they can, including breaking glass, sitar, bells, and reversed percussion sounds. I imagine they were grinning at each other as each kept pulling out wilder and wilder sounds, challenging the others to play along.

After they wind this one up, we have the brief, pretty bell-like sounds of “Vector Shift to Planet Belewbeloid” as a sort of palate cleaner, and then we’re into “Contrary ConstruKction.” In this piece I definitely hear some of the slow melody ideas that were later to become part of the King Crimson song “Frying Pan.” This is more evidence that this ProjeKct band did in fact generate usable material, although in total, maybe not that *much* usable material. It’s another great jam, too, with some very strange percussion and bass going on. Words fail me a bit here as I try to describe the battle royale between Fripp and Gunn.

The winner, as they try to out-play each other, is the listeners.

Next up is one of the most interesting songs to come out of the ProjeKcts — a piece that became a King Crimson song, often played live by the “double duo” configuration, but which never made it onto a King Crimson studio album. This piece is “The Deception of the Thrush.” The first part consists of samples of T. S. Eliot reading lines from his poem “The Waste Land,” filtered through a vocoder, and played over slowly changing soundscape tones and samples. After the dark, sparse, industrial portion of the piece goes on for a few minutes, a remarkable transition happens. The instrumental tones become sweet and gorgeous, and the song becomes beautiful and uplifting. I initially thought it must be Fripp who was playing this solo part, but there is unofficial concert footage on YouTube that shows him in some shows playing the solo on a touch guitar set up horizontally, like a slide guitar. But in other shows, he can be seen wearing the instrument with a strap in the usual way.

Describing this piece in words makes it sound like it does not contain very much to hang an eight-minute song on. In this early show they were clearly still workshopping what “The Deception of the Thrush” would become, but it’s still quite a beautiful piece of music, and it improved as they polished it over the course of the tour. Here’s a recording that shows how the song was performed later by King Crimson.

I mentioned that the band ended with “VROOOM,” because “VROOOM” was a staple encore piece. The version of “VROOOM” they performed at this show is hilarious, because it does not have any heavy guitar, touch guitar, or Stick sounds in it at all. All the sounds are heavily synthetic. It sounds kind of like we are listening to a MIDI file played through an old Amiga computer, or maybe a demo track on an old Casio keyboard. And then the show’s over.

In order to avoid repeating myself, as I review the next three shows, I will discuss them mostly in terms of what has changed. ProjeKct Two’s setlist grew as the tour went on, and the group generally added or rearranged pieces instead of deleting them.

June 5th, 1998: Chicago This recording contains audience sounds, which makes it sound a little more “live.” The first set starts with an very short soundscape called “Vector Shift to Planet Chicago I,” which goes right into “Live Groove.” Belew’s drumming is immediately on display as he throws in a lot of interesting fills and syncopation. Fripp and Gunn quickly get into sync and start jamming over bass loops.

The band pauses for a moment after “Live Groove.” “Heavy ConstruKction has a false start, but it gets heavy after they try again. Even though it is ten minutes long, this piece feels both wild and tight, with ferociously yelping and growling instrumental tones. After the long improvised middle section, the band brings back the introductory figure to finish the piece, and the audience clearly appreciates it.

In the Baltimore show, “Vector Shift to Planet Belewbeloid” was very brief. This time it’s longer, and it uses very different instrumental tones for the first few minutes, finally ending with the sweet bell tones.

This show’s rendition of “Light ConstruKction” is considerably different than the one in the Baltimore show. The introduction contains more recognizable parts that eventually became “The ConstruKction of Light.” After a relatively short and quite weird middle section, these figures makes a comeback to close the piece.

Next up, we have a ten-minute version of “Sus tayn Z,” and does it ever sustain. I’m reminded just a bit of bagpipe music, as Gunn and Fripp try to anticipate each other’s moves. Some of Gunn’s soloing sounds a bit like “The Deception of the Thrush,” but just for a moment or two. How can I describe the tone they are getting out of their instruments? Velvety buzzsaw tones? Like my ears are being pummeled by a muppet? After about four minutes of this duet playing, Belew gets a groove going with bass loops, and the trio takes it from there. As the piece accelerates I think it is Fripp who plays with some caliope tones, before falling back into signature Frippertronics tones, while Gunn takes on the low end. Belew’s playing gradually accelerates, and the song really takes off, to come to an energetic conclusion. Wow! I think this was likely the end of the first set.

When the gentlemen return to the stage, they open the second set with a long, dark, intense rendition of “The Deception of the Thrush.” The solos in this piece really break free of the familiar scales and soar, until the end of the piece, where everything resolves into peaceful, sweet harmonies. Gorgeous!

Next up, we have “X chayn Jiz,” a chaotic version that bounces back and forth rapidly as the players reach for their weirder MIDI instrument sounds. Although it’s fun, eight minutes of this feels like a bit much. This is followed by “Vector Shift to Planet Chicago II,” another bit of space music, and “House II,” chaotic but danceable piece that brings back the finger-snap sounds of “House I,” which the group performed in the Baltimore show, but adds a lot of chirpy noises. Maybe those are the deceptive little thrushes?

The last of the “ConstruKction Suite,” “Contrary ConstruKction,” is up next. In this rendition, the melodic figure that became part of “Frying Pan” is on full display, played slowly. The middle section cycles through more free-form jamming, with Gunn playing some unusually deep and growly bass tones and Fripp soloing in full-on berserker mode. The piece closes with the slow melodic figure again.

After several minutes of enthusiastic applause, Belew comes back out and plays his “current favorite Crimson song,” “Dinosaur,” accompanying himself on acoustic guitar. It’s a great song and he does a wonderful job with it. And then we’re treated to that very silly version of VROOOM.

July 1st: Northampton, Massachusetts, Pearl Street Nightclub The recording of this show also features audience sounds. “House 1” is back, but it feels a bit more polished and confident. We’ve got some deep, crunchy bass tones, and the “conversation” between Gunn and Fripp is tighter and faster. To my ear, they are going a better job not just hearing what the other has played, but anticipating what they are *going* to play, so their parts are often moving in remarkably parallel grooves, but still improvised. It’s nice to hear a positive audience reaction.

“X chayn jiZ” is *much* shorter, which improves it. The “ConstruKction Suite” sounds similar to the way it did a month earlier, although it is more polished.

After the break, things change considerably: Belew steps out from behind his electronic drum kit and sings three songs, accompanying himself on acoustic guitar. The first two “Young Lions” and “Men in Helicopters,” both taken from his solo album of the same name. It’s cool to hear Belew, who is so associated with wild electric guitar noises, absolutely killing it on acoustic. He follows these two songs with a very nice rendition of “Three of a Perfect Pair,” where he sings over the challenging cross-picking part that he normally plays along with Fripp. It’s a real show of his virtuosity. Belew jokes about the difficulty with the audience: “[playing] this requires this part of my mind to think one thing, and this part of my mind to think the other thing, leaving the middle part empty.”

I can certainly identify with this, as I’ve been recording videos of myself singing and finger-picking “Solsbury Hill,” which requires me to have both the accompaniment part and the vocal part in “muscle memory.” So, I have learned to do this sort of thing with strummed songs and finger-picked songs, but never with a complex, high-speed flat-picking part like this. I have tried to play this flat-picked part, and it’s very difficult. It seems unlikely that I’ll ever be able to play it.

After Belew’s acoustic songs, we get an improved version of “The Deception of the Thrush.” In this rendition, the transition between the dark, propulsive portion of the song and the uplifting, lyrical portion is a quicker a U-turn, as the percussion sounds slow and fade. It’s still improvised, but it feels like it has more structure now. It’s a beautiful piece.

Following “Deception,” we get “Sus tayn Z,” a high point in this recording and one of ProjeKct Two’s more engaging pieces — the audience can be heard whistling and shouting encouragement.

Next up we have one of the short, spacey “Vector Shift” transition pieces, and then a jam called simply “Slow House.” I’m sorry to say that “Slow House” is a bit of a letdown after the excitement of “Sus tayn Z.” But things pick up with “Contrary ConstruKction.” The improvisation in the middle part goes completely off the chain, eliciting more enthusiastic noise from the audience, before a reprise of the riffs that wound up in “Frying Pan,” and the piece slams to its conclusion.

That's the end of the main show, but the audience demands an encore, and gets three more songs. Belew sings "Dinosaur," again accompanying himself on acoustic guitar, and it's a terrific rendition of the song, complete with a long instrumental breakdown and buildup in the middle. This recording really shows off Belew's singing ability, which I think is often overlooked because with King Crimson, the wild complexity of the music itself tends to take center stage even when Belew is acting as "front-man."

The show ends with two more instrumental pieces played by the full trio. There's that funny version of "VROOOM," and then the band closes with an even stranger version of "Twenty-First Century Schizoid Man," containing just the instrumental riffs without the verses, shortened to about three minutes, over a dance beat. It's extremely silly, but the audience is into it, it's fun to see the band not taking themselves so seriously, and it brings the show to an amusing but satisfying conclusion.

July 8th: Montreal, Metropolis This recording also includes audience sounds. Again, we open with a soundscape, and continue right into not "House 1," but "Live Groove." Right off the we've got Fripp and Gunn trading riffs over Belew's enthusiastic thrashing on the electronic drum kit. It's a bit surprising to hear them going at it so hard so early in the show, but it's fun, although this "Live Groove" is a little long and un-structured. Then we're right into "Heavy ConstruKction," a really banging version of this song, full of all kinds of clattering percussion sounds.

Unfortunately, the recording of "Heavy ConstruKction" contains some bursts of broad-band digital distortion that really damage the song. It's too bad. I posted a question on the DGM web site asking if it was possible this was just due to a bad conversion to FLAC, but they replied that the distortion is present on the original DAT tape. My audio engineer friend Rich tells me that this can happen with DAT tapes. Opening up the file the Izotope RX audio editor reveals bursts of full-spectrum digital noise throughout the track, all the way up into the highest frequencies that can be encoded. That goes beyond the range that I can actually hear, but when I listen to it, even at low volume, the distortion gives me an immediate headache. It's a shame, but fortunately the distortion seems to only occur on this particular song. The rest of the show sounds fine, and there are dozens of other shows that contain excellent performances of "Heavy ConstruKction."

Anyway, next up we have the "Sector Drift" and "Vector Shift" tracks much as in the July 1st show. This is followed by a similar "Light ConstruKction," then "Slow House to House 1," a piece that combines the previously separate "House" pieces.

After a break, Belew does his acoustic set, starting with "Young Lions," but he changes things up — we get an acoustic version of "Lone Rhinoceros," another song from one of his solo albums. The original was accompanied by his trademark

animal noises generated by his guitar and some effects pedals, but this acoustic version isn't bad at all. Then, something I've never heard before — an all-acoustic rendition of one of King Crimson's prettiest ballads, "Matte Kudesai," from *Discipline*. This song is truly gorgeous and a very welcome surprise in the setlist. Belew then plays "Men in Helicopters" and "Three of a Perfect Pair."

After Belew's acoustic set, we get a wonderfully dark and weird nine-minute version of "The Deception of the Thrush," featuring some uplifting soloing. This is followed by excellent versions of "Sus tayn Z" and "X chayn jiZ." Then, we're launched into "Contrary ConstruKction." We get the same encore as on July first — "Dinosaur," "VROOOM," and "21st Century Schizoid Man."

So, this last show of the tour was probably the best ProjeKct Two show. The damaged audio in "Heavy ConstruKction" is unfortunate. I'd recommend that listeners skip that particular track. To get a good recording of "Heavy ConstruKction," I would recommend picking up another show as well. You could put the July 1st version of "Heavy ConstruKction" in the third spot in a playlist, with all the other tracks from July 8th, and then you'd have a great ProjeKct Two mixtape!

ProjeKct Four ProjeKct Four consisted of Fripp, Gunn, Levin, and Mastelotto. It's listed here out of order because the group *toured* out of order. ProjeKct Four's first live show was just a few months after the last ProjeKct Two show, on October 23rd, 1998, and they only played seven shows. I was tempted to just purchase the whole tour, but decided instead to select three. With only 7 shows, it didn't seem like the group would really evolve the material significantly the way that ProjeKct Three did. So, let's dive in and figure out what made ProjeKct Four interesting.

October 23rd, 1998: Boulder, Fox Theater The opening piece is called "Ghost Pt. I," and it is over 11 minutes long. Beginning as a soundscape of sweeping string and organ sounds, after a few minutes we get a variety of different vocal samples and Mastelotto starts a slow drumbeat. This piece goes on and on, but it's constantly evolving, and I don't find it boring. Also, the recording quality is immaculate, which my aged but somehow hyper-sensitive ears appreciate.

The transition into the next piece, "Seizure," is entirely seamless, as Levin begins an insistent rhythm on Stick (I think). "Seizure" as played this night was over 17 minutes long! But, again, a slowly evolving piece, never standing still long enough to become dull, quite heavy at times but also, light on its feet, like a buffalo dancing. I won't spoil it completely, but the players pull out all the stops to bring in all their favorite sounds. In fact, it's one of the best ambient pieces I've ever heard, if you want to call it ambient; I don't think it can be stuffed into any particular pigeonhole very easily. Together these pieces truly comprised one *epic* jam, to open up this remarkable show. Is this the longest

jam ever performed in a King Crimson (or ProjeKct show?) I don't know, but it must be right up there!

Up next is "Ghost." That's what it is called, apparently; not "Ghost Pt. II," even though there's a "Ghost Pt. III" later in the same show. An accident? Who knows? But it's a cool soundscape, with some of Levin's deepest, throbbing bass tones under fast percussion, piano, and fuzz guitar tones. Was Levin playing the legendary Ashbory bass, which uses silicone rubber strings and is so tiny that it looks like a children's toy, but when plugged in sounds very much like a massive upright bass? I'm not sure, but it could be. This tune burbles along straight into "Heavy ConstuKction," with the best rendition of this song I've heard to date, with a very short and sweet middle improv section.

Next up is "The Deception of the Thrush," an 11-minute version, dark, intense, and dramatic. Audience commentary can be heard during in the form of shouts and yelps during the piece. There are long rests during the slow opening part of this piece. The band really was putting a lot of trust in their audience at this point, believing that they would absorb the spaces between the notes as well as the notes, and feel the importance of those moments. Robert Fripp has an aphorism: "music is the cup that holds the wine of silence." It is often misquoted backwards, "music is the wine that fills the cup of silence," but no — in the original, *silence* is the wine, that we can only appreciate when it is properly presented to the drinker. The original continues with "Sound is that cup, but empty," and "Noise is that cup, but broken." I'll let you mull (hahaha) that over for a while. But, in this version of "The Deception of the Thrush," there are enough moments of silence to gloriously enhance the bouquet (see what I did there?) and flavor of the music.

"Ghost Part III" sounds a bit like "Sus tayn Z," but Levin is chugging away, adding a very deep low end, while Mastelotto is playing tabla sounds. It's pretty wonderful, and again, the band doesn't hold back — a nine-minute jam, again with nary a dull moment.

The last piece is "Light ConstruKction," which has the melodic lines that became the introduction to "The ConstruKction of Light," played on electric piano tones, but the percussion on this one is absolutely ridiculous. Mastelotto (I think it may be him, triggering the samples) is playing a variety of slowed-down vocal samples and other strange creaking, froggy sounds while Fripp and/or Gunn play filtered guitar sounds over the wild percussion and, I think, Stick. It's way out there, but pure creativity.

Is this the best ProjeKct Four show? The first one? Really? Well, I'm not sure yet, and reviewers strongly disagree, but there's something very stubborn and pure about this whole show. The players sound like they are giving everything they've got to the audience, un-mediated by any hesitation or concern about what they imagine the audience will accept. According to Fripp's diary, some members of the audience walked out in disgust. But I think those that stayed really heard the band channel the real spirit of music, the "good fairy" that

occasionally allows herself to be channeled straight through the minds and bodies of our boys in ProjEKct Four, and it's a beautiful thing.

October 28th, Seattle, The Fenix This show opens with a 13-minute version of "Seizure." This one is full of all kinds of groaning, grating, burbling, hissing, and chugging, all carried by Levin's deep, chugging Stick playing. It's another fantastic live track. This track is a collaborative effort, to be sure, but it really highlights Levin's abilities to propel a whole song along, and work together wonderfully well with Mastelotto. I think this also reveals why the "double duo" King Crimson didn't do "Seizure" live; it would be missing Tony, and Gunn, despite his amazing gifts, just wouldn't sound the same.

After "Seizure" we get "Light ConstruKction." This "Light ConstruKction" has some of the "ConstruKction of Light" themes in the opening bars. The rhythm section is quite different in this version. Is Levin pummeling his tiny Ashbory bass on this track? It sounds both deliciously low and also "grungy," like the bass line is stomping through the mud. This one would probably sound better with a subwoofer.

We have a smooth transition into "Ghost Pt. I," and this piece is a monster. We get the beautiful, soaring parallel playing of Fripp and Gunn, using sustained tones as in "Sus tayn Z," over racing percussion and bass. Then we plow right into "Heavy ConstuKction," a six-minute version with some wonderful extended jamming between the percussion and bass. The first set of the evening slams to a close.

In the second set, we get a rendition of "The Deception of the Thrush" that, it seems to me, is even better than the one from the first night. In particular, the washes of synthesizer pads under Gunn's plaintive solo sounds are just so sweet-sounding. We get an "X chayn jiZ" which involves battling piano sounds and battling guitar tones over a ridiculously burbly, splashy rhythm section that sounds a bit like "Seizure." Five minutes in, Levin jumps into the fray with some wobbly soloing that sounds like he is playing snakes for strings. Gunn (I think) takes a moment to admire the spectacle, and then, seeing an opportunity, leaps in, landing on Levin like a dropbear, pouring out his own river of notes. Meanwhie, Fripp, sizing things up from stage right, calmly floods the venue with Frippertronics sounds. I really wish there was live video of this show, but unfortunately I could not find any. Then, the stomping piano sounds bring the whole thing to a close.

Someone from the audience yells out "Papa Bear!" as Levin takes a solo over some swishing percussion and beeping sounds from Mastelotto. Then, someone starts making their instrument sound like a 300-pound talking frog with strep throat. It's truly one of the weirdest moments I've ever heard in a live recording. There's a tiny cameo from Belew as someone (likely Mastelotto) triggers samples from what I think is the recording that became his spoken-word part in "Thela Hun Ginjeet." This is "Ghost, Part II."

Next, we've got "ProjeKction," *aka* "Frying Pan" but cooler, and wordless, and twelve minutes long. I think Levin may be bowing an upright bass. But I'm not entirely sure. And then, we're at the end of the second set. Our encore is "VROOOM."

November 2nd, 1998, San Francisco, 7th Note DGM live calls this one "the best show of the P4 tour." If you want to try a ProjeKct Four show, I'd encourage you to buy either this show, or the October 28th show. That show has more entertaining soloing by Levin. This show has simply fantastic sound quality, and a better version of "Seizure." But really, you can't make a bad choice.

We open with "Heavy ConstuKction," and the audience is already fired up. This one starts out as an electronic dance groove, with wordless vocal sound loops, in the subgenre I might call "chill-out, at least for a while. It's 25 minutes long, and only recognizably becomes "Heavy ConstruKction" towards the end. Much of the percussion and some of the tonality sounds like an alternate arrangement of "Hindu Fizz." The audience is cheering on the band as they improvise over the percussion groove. And at the end we do get the expected melody.

After that, we deserve a breather, and we get one. "Improv I" is a dark, slow soundscape that gradually turns into something rougher, more chaotic, and even darker. I think this piece may later have evolved into ProjeKct Three's "Super Slow." Then we've got "ProjeKction." "ProjeKction" is more-or-less an instrumental version of "Frying Pan," and in my head I hear Belew singing the verses. In the ProjeKct Two shows I discussed above, these figures were part of "Contrary ConstruKction." Is this confusing? You bet!

After a break, we've got another great rendition of "The Deception of the Thrush." This one has a long session of low-key jamming in the middle section. The concluding solo feels a little bit shortened. Today I think I prefer the one they recorded on October 23rd, but I might change my mind later. And then we have the real "Hindu Fizz," which also gets some riffs from "Heavy ConstruKction." So what is "Hindu Fizz" aside from an odd bit of cultural appropriation? Well, it's a long jam with some percussion sounding vaguely Eastern, although to my ear more Indonesian and African than Indian, with some sinuous soloing over it, with distorted guitar tones, flute-like tones (think stereotypical "snake charmer" tonality). What's interesting about it, to me, is the way in which the rhythm and instrumental parts go on for over nine minutes, but the band doesn't run out of ideas; the piece changes constantly.

After "Hindu Fizz," we have "Improv II," which I think would be more correctly called "Stick Fight," because it's a call-and-response instrumental by Levin and Gunn on Stick. It's quite short, and then we launch into an 18-minute version of "Seizure," considered the best one ever captured on tape. The crowd applauds for a long time. A woman yells out "we love you, Pat!" Fripp tells an appreciative story about his sister, who brought her own t-shirts to sell at the

show since the band hadn't had any ProjeKct Three shirts made up to sell, and then we close with a very energetic "VROOOM." For some reason, "VROOOM" is much louder than all the previous music, so I had to turn down my headphone amplifier. I'm not sure if it sounded that way in the venue. To me this is a flaw in the mastering; in the mastering stage of producing an album, the engineer is supposed to adjust volumes and equalization as needed so that there aren't any unpleasantly dramatic changes in volume level.

I may reconsider my decision to buy only three of the seven live recordings of ProjeKct Four and just go ahead and pick up the other four. We'll see. They are so good! And I think I'm going to have to come right out and admit it — this is my favorite ProjeKct. I love Belew's work with ProjeKct Two, and although his acoustic sets in some of the shows really elevate the shows, he just isn't the percussionist that Mastelotto is, and by comparison his work isn't as sensitive, dynamic, and wide-ranging. This may have something to do with the kit itself; there are good reasons that Mastelotto uses a mix of acoustic and electronic drums. Similarly, Gunn can't entirely do what Levin does, but Mastelotto and Gunn together are *formidable*. That's not to say that the "double duo" configuration of King Crimson, *sans* Levin, wasn't great in its own way — I'll get to the "double duo" material in a future installment — but I was very happy to have Levin back, for the Crimson "big band" years.

ProjeKct Three ProjeKct Three consisted of a trio again: Fripp, Gunn, and Mastelotto. ProjeKct Three did only *five* live shows, from March 21st, 1999 to March 25th, 1999. Well, that's mostly true. There's also a rather odd show, from March 3rd, 2003. This was a show in the middle of a King Crimson "double duo" tour. Belew was unexpectedly ill, and the band had to go on without him. So, they offered their audience a choice — they could give either get a refund, or they could come see a very special, one-night-only engagement of ProjeKct Three! So, I will dive into shows from March 22nd and March 25th, and also that one-of-a-kind show from 2006.

March 22: Austin, Cactus Café We've got a short soundscape, and then a ten-minute piece "Hindu Fizz." After "Hindu Fizz," we have a much shorter version of "Sus tayn Z," under three minutes, which has been refined down to the point where it sounds like it is a composed duet rather than an improvised piece. It's quite gorgeous, especially as bass and drums kick in, in the last part of the song, and it really takes off.

"Sus tayn Z" moves smoothly into "Cactus Masque," an improv — the name suggests it was made up specifically for this show — that is part drum solo, part soundscape. There's some tabla drumming in here that to my ear does in fact sound Indian, and the whole thing is quite lovely, with either Fripp or Gunn — I can't tell which, bringing some twangy, American Southwest-style guitar tones into the mix for a while.

We then get "Super Slow," which is... well, you get the idea. I think "Super Slow"

originated as a ProjeKct Four improv. There's a very slow subtle beat, with some sustained low-end instrumental sounds dropped on it; think acoustic piano and punchy bass. We get some oddball chirps and squeals from Mastelotto's "buttons," and some soloing on top, which I think is probably Fripp, playing both guitar sounds and wobbly electric piano sounds.

Up next we hear "ProjeKction," aka "Frying Pan." After "ProjeKction," we get "Heavy ConstruKction," with those riffs that became part of "The ConstruKction of Light," and this rendition is heavy indeed, as well as short and sweet.

"Heavy ConstruKction" is followed by an 8-minute rendition of "The Deception of the Thrush." This one opens very slowly.

Overall, this show is a bit short — it would fit on one CD rather than two. But it's a good introduction to what ProjeKct Four was doing. They were continuing to polish up material by trial and error, in front of live audiences. I think, also, that Fripp may have been narrowing down the choice of who was eventually going to be in the next King Crimson, and what they were going to do, as ProjeKct Three is really the "double duo" minus Belew.

March 25th, 1999: Austin, Antone's This show starts right up with a piece called "Beatbox 160." I guess that's the speed in beats-per-minute. It's a quiet thing that starts entirely in the right channel, played, I think, entirely by an actual drum machine or "beat box." Then, soundscape tones come in slowly, and Mastelotto starts playing along on real drums. This is a combination I haven't quite heard before. It's quite long, at over 19 minutes.

Next, we have a "Super Slow." The bass tones are very nice, but I find myself missing Levin. I have similar feelings about "X chayn jiZ," a nine-minute version. And then we get an extremely short "Hindu Fizz," at under two minutes. I am not sure exactly why it was cut so short, but the band essentially merged "Hindu Fizz" with "Heavy ConstruKction" by starting the "Heavy ConstruKction" figure right over top of the "Hindu Fizz" rhythm part. After the first repetition Mastelotto changed the rhythm part to something more "Heavy ConstruKction"-ish, and we have a pretty good version of "Heavy ConstruKction." That seems to end the set.

To start the next set, we have an "Introductory Soundscape." Pieces with this name are usually at the starts of shows, not sets, but whatever; it's a very nice bit of Frippertronics, although the recording is oddly compromised here and there by crackling noises. This flows into a piece whose name I haven't seen before "Seven Teas." I guess this is intended to be a pun on "the seventies" and "the seven seas?" It has some more-or-less Eastern, Gamelan-ish tonality going on, with noisy synth splats and bloop. Mastelotto seems to be playing around with some crunchy, noisy samples in a way that reminds me not so much of the seventies, but of the early nineties, particularly the African drumming, by several different percussionists, featured on Peter Gabriel's album *Us*, particularly the opening track *Come Talk to Me*. "Seven Teas" is quite an unusual track.

We then get an extremely short “Light ConstruKction” — under a minute long — with just the melodies and no improvised middle section at all. This short track then continues the “Light ConstruKction” figures into an improvised piece called “Four Over Five.” In this piece, the bass riff is in five, mostly — after a while, it starts playing longer cyclic phrases, and here I get confused as to who is playing what, and whether loopers are involved — while the drumming pattern remains in four. Over top of this, the rest of the band solos. The effect is quite dizzying, but fascinating. From there, we have a decent “Seizure.” Without Levin, it sounds just a little lackluster by comparison, but it’s OK. Gunn keeps it moving along and adds his own touches. The “Frying Pan” riffs make a guest appearance in “Seizure,” which then becomes kind of half-“Seizure,” half-“ProjeKction” for a while — this part is just fantastic — then after some synth swells from Fripp.

These “merged” pieces are quite interesting. It sounds like, on the last show, the band was trying to see how far they could go, connecting up pieces into continuous jams, and changing things up as they went. For the most part it works very well.

Finally, we get “ProjeKction,” with some of the most chaotic soloing I’ve ever heard, followed by “The Deception of the Thrush.” And that’s the end of ProjeKct Four. Almost.

March 3rd, 2003: Alexandria, Birchmere This is the special “double duo” *sans* Belew show I mentioned above, where the band morphed back into ProjeKct Three for one short night. It’s quite an odd show. The setlist ran like so:

- “Introductory Soundscape”
- “Improv I”
- “Level Five” (*aka* “Larks’ Tongues in Aspic, Part V”)
- “Improv II”
- “The Power to Believe II”
- “The Facts of Life”
- “Sus tayn Z”
- “The Deception of the Thrush”
- “VROOOM”

“Level Five,” “The Power to Believe II,” “The Facts of Life” are King Crimson songs; perhaps not surprising as the band was in the middle of a tour as King Crimson. So they played some Crimson songs that they could do reasonably well without Belew. Let’s run through them.

“Introductory Soundscape” is an unusually long and beautiful one. Fripp was in the middle of a King Crimson tour in which he performed a soundscape like this at the start of every show, so he had his soundscape chops sharpened up.

There is no precise boundary between “Introductory Soundscape” and “Improv I,” as Mastelotto and Gunn gradually add a groove to the soundscape. Gunn

picks out bass notes that fit into the chord tones that Fripp is sculpting. Fripp gradually morphs his tones into something resembling a “Vector Shift,” then drops out, and we have Mastelotto solo for a while — a bold move so early in the show. Fripp then comes back in, with reverberating waves of dark sounds, and then we get some wild and rough guitar tones from both Fripp and Mastelotto, heating things up.

“Level Five” is something I haven’t really discussed yet, because from the perspective of the rest of the ProjeKct Three recordings, it’s in the distant future. But it is quite a wild piece, furious and containing some of Fripp’s fast fuzz guitar riffs. It isn’t quite as difficult a technical achievement as “FraKctured,” but there are some very fast figures, as well as opportunities for furious but melodic soloing.

“Improv II” opens with some very noisy percussion from Mastelotto, as Fripp layers bell sounds all over it and Gunn plays stick bass riffs that seem completely untethered from any chord progressions I’m accustomed to, but somehow it never falls into dissonance. The improv becomes very “free” indeed as the tempo dramatically slows and we hear all manner of intriguing tones.

“The Power to Believe II” is an lovely, soothing instrumental taken from the 2003 King Crimson album *The Power to Believe*, their final studio album. This rendition is not identical to the studio track but it is wonderfully crisp-sounding. Unlike many of the other instrumentals, this one does not have a particularly “dark” or “grim” feel. Portions are almost happy-sounding, although the reverb in the final section makes it sound like the music is coming from a *huge* empty building. If I had to compare it to anything, I’d say it is reminiscent of Lucia Hwong’s New Age album *House of Sleeping Beauties*. It extends on the original considerably, as it is almost twice as long as the album track. Another performance of this track is included on the live album *EleKtriK: Live in Japan*. I’ll review that live album when I write more about King Crimson’s “double duo” years.

Next up we have “Facts of Life,” which is also from *The Power to Believe*, and also included on *EleKtriK*. This rendition is a bit odd since the song normally has a vocal part, but instead Fripp lays down an intense solo, using his “flaming banjo from hell” strumming technique, which he originally came up with for “Sailor’s Tale.” This version of “Facts of Life” is very short, probably because it didn’t make sense to repeat the verse parts without vocals.

Then, we’ve got “Sus tain Z,” and this is a real *tour de force*, highlighting what Fripp and Gunn can do when improvising together. About two minutes into the piece Mastelotto gets into the game with some very decidedly artificial sounding metallic percussion sounds, right along with his acoustic drums, using his customize “traps and buttons” drum kit to maximum advantage. This piece, at over ten minutes, is two or three minutes too long, in my opinion, although it gets better as it nears the end.

Next, we’ve got “The Deception of the Thrush.” King Crimson did not often play

“The Deception of the Thrush” on that tour, and the band seemed a little rusty initially, which might explain why Mastelotto, brings out some “rusted metal” percussion sounds. But things pick up and this ultimately is a very pensive, very emotional, and very long (twelve-minute) version of “Deception.” I don’t feel that it is the best one I’ve heard, because it doesn’t conclude quite as beautifully as some of the others, but it’s definitely a good one.

And, finally, we get “VROOOM,” a song that ProjeKct Three often closed with. Oddly, the band has a false start, and restarts the song completely, but on the second try, they bring the thunder! And so, this unusual ProjeKct Three show comes to an end.

The set is followed by a long Q&A. Highlights of this include the moment when Fripp feigns great offense at the question “why are you shy?” He points out that the word “shy” is not normally applicable to someone who spends their career traveling all over the world to perform in front of audiences, and suggests some better words. At another point, Fripp is asked to play “FraKctured,” and as he is always responds politely to polite requests, he does give the fans part of “FraKctured” on guitar, while Mastelotto and Gunn sit on their hands. Well, until they start to clap some of the off-beat percussion. This is likely the oddest version of “FraKctured” that King Crimson (sort of) performed!

In Conclusion, the ProjeKcts are Bands of Contrasts

The ProjeKcts allowed a handful of highly skilled and, let’s face it, highly demanding musicians to not only continue to work together and eventually settle down into a stable configuration for a few years, but also to push themselves repeatedly out of their comfort zones, practice improvising together in various combinations in front of a wide variety of audiences, and generate a lot of intriguing material. The musicians that participated in the ProjeKcts, including Fripp himself, weren’t people who ever wanted to settle for learning some songs and playing those songs indefinitely. They all demonstrated a desire to expand the boundaries of what their instruments could do, to switch instruments, to cross genres, and break out of genres into no-man’s lands of music.

Do you need to hear the ProjeKct shows? This is a matter of taste. Personally, my favorite group is ProjeKct Four, followed by One and Three. As I’ve mentioned, I’ve purchased some live shows to listen to, but I have not bothered with the studio albums. I think many of the live improvisations were simply more fun to experience live.

Much of the ProjeKct material is included in the huge Heaven & Earth boxed set, not to be confused with the ProjeKct X album Heaven and Earth.

I have considered buying the huge boxed set, but it is quite expensive, and I have heard that some of the tracks were put on disc at the wrong speed, because of a failure to do sample-rate conversion between 44.1 and 48kHz file formats. I have ways of getting audio tracks off of all this physical media, but it is quite

tedious, and some of these discs contain, literally, hundreds of tracks. I have found it much more convenient to purchasing shows in the form of downloadable FLAC files available for sale from DGM, as described above.

FLAC is not my preferred archival format; most of my library is in ALAC (Apple Lossless) form, so that iTunes and Apple Music will play it easily on any of my devices. However, I am in the process of phasing out my iTunes library. I now mainly use it for importing CDs and editing metadata before transferring files to the music library on my Synology NAS, which will stream to an app or to any web browser on our network, and play with no special configuration necessary. If I really wanted to, I could easily transcode the FLAC files to ALAC, but as both are open source formats and well-supported by open source command-line tools, I don't feel that this is really important; the ALAC format should be supported indefinitely.

Whether you listen to these shows or not, ultimately it doesn't really matter if the material was all great. For better or worse, the *process* was the important thing, and as I will discuss in the future, the re-inspired King Crimson that emerged from this "frakctalisation" was quite remarkable in its own right.

This one took me far, far longer than I expected. I was planning to listen to the ProjeKct shows in order, and write the reviews of each show as I went. But in reality, I found myself going back and re-listening to earlier ProjeKct shows in light of the later ones, and I also realized that since ProjeKct Four actually toured before ProjeKct Three, it would make more sense to listen to those shows first. And so I had to completely rewrite the ProjeKct Three reviews to consider the music in light of ProjeKct Four. Anyway, I know this one is quite long, but I hope you found it enjoyable, as I enjoyed writing it.

Have a great week!

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