"LET'S HOPE THE HIP PEOPLE CHOOSE LIFE INSTEAD OF DEATH ON THEIR HIP."

AN INTERVIEW WITH CAPTAIN BEEFHEART

BY PHILIP MALTMAN

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An Interview with Don van Vliet, alias Captain Beefheart, March 1972.

In the spring of 1972 when we heard that Captain Beefheart was coming to Britain for the first time in four years, I and two fellow Art student fans decided to try to meet him, or attend his press reception, as well as booking our tickets for the Albert Hall as soon as we could. I telephoned Tony Brainsby who was handling the press side of things and he offered me a telephone interview, (by this time "I" was a fictitious "Art School Magazine" and did not want to speak to my hero on the phone. It was nerve-wracking enough trying to bluff our way, as press, into the Speakeasy. Tony Brainsby consented to 20 minutes with the Captain sandwiched between "Melody Maker" and someone else. He would also send us an invite to the press reception at the Speakeasy. Needless to say I firmly believed from then on that anything was possible! We went to the Press reception, I talked to Don as soon as I spotted him - "I'm very nervous..." - "So am I, you don't know me and I don't know you, know what I mean?" He invited us to sit with him and Jan, next to the Magic Band members arranged around a booth. For the rest of the evening we all stayed put, and only John Peel spent any time with Don and the band. Next night at the Albert Hall we witnessed outer space on stage and even better, inner space, as we went backstage to greet our new found friends and then back to the Speakeasy where Don was constantly drawing in a little notepad (he kindly did a drawing for me when I asked about them). The following day saw the 20 minute interview transform into two and a half hours of conversation with Don holding forth, I think, in a most relaxed and entertaining way. Sadly this interview only saw the light of day once in a fanzine called "Moonlight Drive". I have decided to publish it again privately on the occasion of the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery exhibition "STAND UP TO BE DISCONTINUED".

In 1973 we spent half of the tour with Beefheart and the Magic Band gleefully guzzling from the obligatory bottle of Drambuie supplied at every gig, and laughing through the night in long joke telling sessions. Sad, as always, to say that these days will never come again, but glad to say that I will always celebrate the work of this remarkable man.

Philip Maltman         London 1994

For Don Van Vliet, John Peel, Bob Cook and the "rings" which join us all.
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Interview with Don Van Vliet (Captain Beefheart) March 1972

DVV, Don Van Vliet
PM, Philip Maltman
TR, Terry Ryan
GS, Graham Springett

PM How's the tour gone up to now?
DVV Real good yeah, we've had a lot of nice talks, also I enjoyed the people last night, I really did. (Albert Hall audience) I did have a little trouble with the fact that there was only one microphone on the stage.

PM I'd heard that when everyone asks for "More!" that you'd whistle the tune "More".
DVV I did it yeah...no, I was just teasing.

PM Did you really want to come back on stage?
DVV No cause I really felt that, well, I don't need to come back on but if they wanna be the switchmen for a little while, I'll let 'em do it. I must admit I enjoyed coming back, but I don't believe in making comebacks, I'm always a never was, there aint no never never the same, d'ya know what I mean? I mean I've never seen the sun set, I've seen it moving...I've sat on my ass, a lot, too much in my lifetime, but I know the sun has never had a day off, they try to pretend that its an off day or a day off or something...but every day of my life has been really nice, even though I haven't admitted it sometimes.

PM I read that you'd written about 10 novels...
DVV More than that...
PM And done hundreds of paintings and so on, what's your working day like, or just a day?
DVV I don't work though, I play, I just play as though I...the same thing I did as a child, I'd go out and play and all of a sudden I'd be interrupted in the garden seeing butterflies as big as my eyes...somebody saying "its time to come to dinner" or "come to dinner". When I wasn't hungry I'd stay and play longer, if I was, I'd go eat, that's what my day was like.

PM You've moved to a new place in California, what's the country like?
DVV Eureka... that's where the rabbits go 2 miles an hour and the trees walk right into the ocean, redwoods.

PM Bill (Zoot Horn Rollo) was telling me about the whales...
DVV Oh yeah, the whales cleaning their barnacles out there...and they sing...a fellow named Mike Tierson recorded that and gave me a copy...of the whales singing... but I'd heard that a long time ago...like the other night I got on that horn with Ed Marimba, you know, at the end there, or the end, or whatever it was, well anyway I was playing my horn and with him on that "Spit ball scalped a baby" and I feel that I
was communicating not only with people but...dolphins and whales, I feel that I sound like a whale...but ah...I definitely think that those particular things are definitely very intelligent...they’re not going to find out how intelligent they are by cutting into their brains and all that bullshit that scientists do under the auspices of inserting a ruler into their way of life. You know, I would never allow anyone to insert a ruler into my way of life...that’s all I haven’t done...that’s what an artist does...is rebut, you know, not rebut too much, I mean I don’t give a damn, I think they are all very disconnected or they wouldn’t wanna do things like that...a monkey, you know, is a smart animal, why can’t a man be as smart as a monkey? You’ve never seen a monkey try to operate on a man’s mind, but you’ve seen man try to operate on monkeys minds that’s ridiculous man, I don’t want anybody monkeying with my mind and I don’t wanna be the monkey that monkeys with a monkeys mind.

PM  That’s interesting, what you say about tampering with peoples minds...from what you say I shouldn’t think you have much faith in Art Schools.

DVV  Not much, not much really but I think that some people need these things to get them going after they’ve been stopped by themselves, you see?

PM  But just things like you say your working day is play...I don’t think they take that sort of attitude.

DVV  Then they’re very retarded art schools, if they were the other way it’d be nice man.

PM  I know you didn’t go to art school but are there any in America that you know or have seen.

DVV  Mine, I think, I mean like with Zoot Horn Rollo and Rockette Morton, and them teaching me and me teaching them us playing together and...em...well I thought it was awful nice, it should have been filmed, but Frank Zappa...I was on his label at the time, I begged him to film a day’s activity at the house, I couldn’t get the money myself, he didn’t even give us amplifiers till three days before we did Trout Mask Replica. I told him, I said excuse yourself, move aside and allow me to go on to a label which can afford, rather than buying bullets for Vietnam, can afford to let this be seen, because at the time I was willing to conduct that school as well as all of us were, but not now, that’s one time that I was, now I’m putting my art out myself, you see; but I think that its all right on that album, I think that that’s a definite way, a very important contribution to the world, very free and open, I wrote it in eight and a half hours...words and music...and there was no...thought in it other than the playing of it. Come to find out...I come to find out that the damn words aren’t out over here; people paid money for that album and got an incomplete album...I would like to do something about that.

PM  It was the same with “Lick My Decals Off Baby”.

DVV  That’s because of the Straight Label, that’s because he didn’t want those words to be there, he (Zappa) wanted to hold me back

TR  I can’t understand that.
Well he’s not an artist and I am, you can understand it, what are you talking about. I mean they’ve always tried to put artists in a line, there’s no way I can walk a straight line, there’s no such thing as a straight line, all nature is a circle, he’s a jerk in a circle, he’s a circle jerk, he’s a jerk. He said he discovered me, he didn’t discover me man my mother gave birth to me, not that mother, you know Mothers of Invention...

The thing is in this in this country we always receive albums without lyrics.

That’s not right man... I thought they were here I didn’t have enough money to come to find out you see, but me coming to find out has nothing to do with money... IT comes to find out...no I come to find out...no I’m just kidding. I didn’t come to find out, I just came, you know, like you did, you were born and you’re here, I didn’t come to find out, I don’t wanna open up a monkey’s mind or anything like that.

When are your books coming out?

All the time, right now...no...no...no...no, I gotta lotta books and I’ll be sure to send you one, without money or anything like that, because some people are gonna have to pay for it...we have to eat.

What are the books to be published?

“Old Fart At Play” which is a novel, a humorous novel, not a novelty, no ‘T’s or squares or rulers or designs you know its just a ...it’s funny, I hope nobody takes it seriously, too much attention from drugs on it, make it into another pill.

That’s one thing, the drugs thing, I know how you feel about it but does that ever stop you getting into people’s music or writing who’ve been using drugs?

No, no, not at all but, I don’t particularly care to be around people that are on poison, poison pen letters aren’t really that palatable for me because its against my system, but I really don’t think that people need poison to distort or what ever they want to do to their imagination. I don’t think its necessary, as a matter of fact I think its a hindrance...Hendrix certainly, unfortunately proved that...he had so much to give, it was so good, and its too bad that he didn’t get off that...I would like to hear him right now, wouldn’t you? In person, I would, right now, I would, I mean that.

He was very much an entertainer in the same way as you are on stage, he held all that and he had so much and it just...

That’s terrible man, I mean it doesn’t dilute the art for me, but I must admit when I think about it it seems a shame that someone that artistic should have to poison themselves whether he was forced to it by social fads or...

It must be difficult though for you and the band to avoid mixing with people who smoke and take...

Not really, but I don’t mind...I mean Marijuana is a weed, lets face it, its a weed and an excess of anything is harmful, but it doesn’t freeze ones blood like hard narcotics. But myself I smoke occasionally, more occasionally than I should, but I’m beginning to cut down, but its not that good to smoke, I mean it isn’t, I don’t think its that good to put any emphasis...psychologically pot may be harmful because people say “that’s my imagination”, I notice they’re holding up a joint like this as something new and as
I've said so often, I think that now the joint is part of the human anatomy. That may have been written before, I don't know, I don't read that much, but if it has I still say myself that a joint if its gotta be part of the human anatomy...I don't think its possible because your leader that runs out of the back of your leg is your leader, makes you move, not marijuana, you'd be walking anyway so shy put so much emphasis in this day and age on one thing...is it to avoid everything else or what?

PM I suppose its to make it respectable, like they try to make Captain Beefheart 'respectable' by saying your new album (The Spotlight Kid) is a lot simpler and easy to get into than the rest.

DVV I don't think its any different do you? I think its even more raging than the others and the feeling in the group is more strong and warm...than all the others. I don't think it was commercial although its palatable it seems, I don't know why...I thought Trout Mask Replica should have been the most commercial thing that ever happened.

PM You've been "put over" though, a lot better by Warner Reprise?

DVV Well I think I should have been put across a lot better before like we said and you said and I said, I think Trout Mask Replica was very important, you said, "is there a school?" That was a school like a school of fish, you know ah...swallowed by Judas...I'm just kidding.

PM The next album is Brown Star (which became "Clear Spot" instead) can you tell us something about it?

DVV In that album Big Eyed Beans From Venus is one thing and you know...don't let anything get in between us...meaning...like...love people, you know big eyes as opposed to (narrows eyes)... another song is Blue something...

PM Are you still constantly changing the band?

DVV No, no, this is it I'd feel real good if this was it the way it is, I like it, the telepathy.

PM What happened to Antennae Jimmy Semens, The Mascara Snake and Drumbo?

DVV Well my cousin is the Mascara Snake so I'm in contact with him he's painting and thinking about having a group of his own, though I wish he would do it and not think about it, he's always thought too much.

TR What about Drumbo?

DVV That's a good question, what would you say about that Jan? (Don's wife)

Jan I don't really know

DVV That's like really funny, playing with us...three years with Rockette Morton, Zoot Horn Rollo and myself, and a year and a half with Ed Marimba and then just leaving...but who's to walk after a cat, who can question why...all of a sudden you're petting a cat and it just leaves...I mean where does it go?...He wanted to leave. I can't say "You stay here" I don't have contracts with musicians. I really think he made a sad mistake...I mean its sad when people wanted to hear him and now he's not playing.

PM Yeah he sounded so distinctive.

DVV Although I'm gonna tell you something, I wrote every drum part he ever played,
PM Are you still doing this?

DVV No, I just wanted to tell you that...

TR It was funny last night though, Ed Marimba was playing so like Drumbo on the songs from Trout Mask Replica.

DVV But not like him now man, this cat is...I really dare say he’s the best there ever was on this planet, I mean when I say best, he feels about it so nice, he doesn’t mean any harm. I have to tell you the truth, Drumbo occasionally meant harm when he played that instrument he had a real hatred, but that’s all right as long as it goes into music its washed clean...not to be religious like holy water...Drumbo...well...I think he left because of the fact that since I created all of that music all of the time, I then wanted them to create something, because I had been up for grabs defending this stuff for so long, now we’re beginning to...everybody’s beginning to...and he didn’t want any part of it, and I always tried to get him to play his own parts and I try to get this group to play their own parts...they’re beginning to. Sometimes though I don’t know what it is Zoot Horn Rollo and Rockette Morton don’t want any part of playing their own parts they just wanna play my music, but I always told them, you know this is my idea, it took me a long time, that’s why we didn’t get that much done, but at least we got something honest done.

PM How’s Winged Eel Fingerling fitting into the band does he still live a long way from you?

DVV He lives in LA but he comes up there whenever we’re...no its all right to have somebody live in LA until he gives up...I would...he lives in Santa Monica straight...and there’s a lot of health food stores, of course we have them up there too.

PM Is it a big community?

DVV I don’t know, well, its varied, you know like one hundred and ten acres overlooking the ocean. Rockette Morton has a goat named Carob, its a big Billy goat, nice thing, smart. As a matter of fact the goat was trained by a woman named Della Mallory. When it was a baby, its four now, that goat was trained on horseback to jump through a hoop, a hoop of fire on to another horse’s back but he never would perform in public, he was too bashful. They say he would have been worth $150,000 in a three or four year period, but he was too bashful to perform, or too smart. But he’s smart and goats are smart, people say they aren’t.

PM Do you think people have to teach goats then?

DVV I don’t think so, I think the goats have to teach people. Did you ever eat any goats milk cheese? You can eat that without spilling blood.

PM Can you tell us about your last manager...Grant Gibbs?

DVV Man I don’t know where he’s at, but all I can tell you is that he tried to pull a funny stunt because we had a corporation God’s Golfball that I started. He was in the corporation with a fella named Mark Green and Al Lieffer and myself...very nice, open, you know and everything and he just blew it...Grant Gibbs blew it, he was
trying to act like Thoreau or something in a day and age when its ridiculous man, he was supposed to be my manager, you know with people like writers you know, people I really like...he didn't ever relay messages they sent me and things like that it was just vulgar. Carl Scott is there now, he's really there, casts a big shadow, casts a real big shadow ah...that's a nice e way of saying it, he weighs 450 pounds you know, American, he casts a beautiful shadow artistically...he's losing weight for his health, but he sure looks good. He's a nice man, that's how I'm over here.

TR

The things that are on the back of the new album (poems), I saw those in an American magazine, Cream, with cross marks on them apparently where Herb Cohen had crossed them out, crumpled them up and thrown them into the dustbin.

DVV

Isn't that enough? You know what's really ironic is that Grant Gibbs used to work for Straight/Bizarre, Frank Zappa and Herb Cohen and evidently they shamed him to such a degree, or something, that he tried to be with me to get that past out which I think is even more vulgar than what they did because he found those biographies in a trashcan and he's the one who saved them and had them put into Cream, and there were the slash marks which he thought was such a degradation to art, but then he did the same thing...when he found out that he could be with Captain Beefheart and get back at Zappa, which I never wanted, to get back at Zappa. I just wanted to get away from him, you know, and the thing is that here he goes and does me worse, I mean just as bad, pretending to be as nice as he was and then being like that, just a complete detumescence of my business, just like that, I mean where is he, gone away again, no man I was just waiting by my phone, you know like not just waiting there, but I had one...I had a line out...over the hills, a lot of people were trying to contact me for work over here, I didn't even hear about it and everywhere then all of a sudden I get on this tour of the US, "Where've you bin!? Its fantastic! This legend!...I said what do you mean, then they said" what about Gibbs?" and all of a sudden the tip-off came, isn't that it though? You know the books, they've delayed me getting the books out, "Old Fart At Play" and "Singing Ink" the book of poetry, but he had nothing to do with a movie with me, even Zappa's been over here saying he's going to do a movie with me. I wouldn't do a movie with Zappa, I'd do it with somebody that'd sit down and look in my eyes and eat with me, breathe with me or hold their breath.

PM

Does Zappa still hold some of your music?

Yeah well he'd better turn it over to Warner Reprise, because they bought my contract, he and Cohen, they sold me in the night like they would an Indian...dancer or something, you know what I mean a sort of Shanghai job, but if you'll listen to the song "Orange Claw Hammer" I think you'll know that I was aware they were going to do that anyway, but there was no way I could get out of the paper at that time. You listen to that and see what you think..."a high hat, Shanghai'd by a, you know? Not only that but the blimp also, but what can you do when they pull business routines on you like that. I mean of course I was free, but I'm not that hole they wanna make me
go through that blows that musical trumpet, you know like man I’m not going to do that for nobody. I blow my own horn, nobody tells me when to blow my horn, that’s what they were trying to do and there’s no way, so it just delayed me, let’s say, and also diluted me and what really worried me is the way this society is, like when I did Trout Mask Replica, that kind of imagination is few and far between and I worry about Zappa putting me off into a category of a freak because I thought maybe that would encourage children and men and women and everything....ah...dogs...are just too unattached... to take hard narcotics and try to be as freaky as Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band when they can see that album and the thing is that I was totally down, always have been, once it was slipped on me but...

PM
It seems a bit strange that nobody, even people I know can’t seem to realise that Trout Mask Replica is so far ahead, and get into it, I just don’t understand it...

DVV
That’s it! You’re an artist and a writer and...

PM
Yeah, but it’s sad...

DVV
It is sad.

PM
Yes, ‘cause how do you find a businessman who’s got a mind like an artist?

DVV
You know I think I’ve done that and its taken me seven years, and a lot of people say, its about time you’re makin’ it, but man I don’t like people tellin’ me its about time you’re makin’ it. I’ve been makin’ it all along and they haven’t been makin’ it, you know I mean the business ‘cause there’s a lot of people would like to hear this group, I know, well, they’re showing it now, but its because of Warner Reprise. But they’ve rooked a lot of people again with the words not being on that album. I don’t know what to do about that, I’ll try and get it published in some magazine over here, but I think they ought to pay the publishing of it, I really do.

TR
Its like that with most records, say...the Grateful Dead or Jefferson Airplane...

DVV
No don’t sat those in comparison with me please.

TR
I’m talking about the businessmen not the musicians.

DVV
But don’t say the Grateful Dead or Jefferson Airplane in the same room or in an interview with me if you will, I mean if I have any control, don’t say that, because it just doesn’t even come near, I’m an artist I’m not a salesman of hard narcotics...ooh!

TR
They have the same problems...

DVV
Problems...don’t they make their own though, they’re phasing themselves...for what? You know its like that isn’t art man, if that’s art its not the way I see it, any of my group or me...

PM
I think what it is, a lot of people get it so mixed up...

DVV
Of course it is, that’s the society.

PM
Have you met any musicians over here?

DVV
Well I’ll tell you who I have met who I thought was very nice, was a group called Jethro Tull, who I went to see Ian Anderson, Jeffrey Hammond-Hammond, Ian’s wife Jenny, they’re really nice people, and I just vaguely met the guitar player, I didn’t meet the drummer but they’re really nice and I think they will continue to be
nice throughout their success. Ornette Coleman is the only person I've met who is that way. He's very popular in certain areas, but he's never like THAT. But I thought Jethro Tull were very good and they really had it worked out. It looked like theatre to me the way you very seldom see theatre in this day and age. I mean that much care in something, certainly isn't that bad. A lot of people say its too worked out or too over rehearsed but what they don't give the credit for is that they're growing. Its knowing that you are a human being and remaining a human being, fighting off that star seat...I mean just I'm a star doesn't mean that I don't know that I'm the one that's shining, that the audience isn't making me shine. You can't really entertain and play to somebody if you think that they've turned you on. I turn myself on, they turn themselves on, then we meet on a nice happy doughnut, something like an almond roll and it rolls and rolls along; that's a good line, you gotta give me a copy of this tape, cause I'll put that on an album right there.

TR
I just hope the tape comes out I'm no good with machines.

DVV
I'm not either, like with the microphones on stage the other night, when they went you feel like an ass, feel like hollering up to the sound man, saying man are you neglecting your art, I'm not you're making me look like I am because you're neglecting your craft...my craft is sinking...why ? That's not proper, you have to be crafty, maybe they wanna see if I'll hold water, see if I'll flip or something, like a fish flopping, maybe they really are jealous of entertainers, could that be possible ?

PM
I'm sure it could be.

DVV
Well that's not right man 'cause I sure enjoy what they do, I mean I respect it if they do it right.

PM
Bill (Zoot Horn Rollo) said that in America the audience didn't receive Trout Mask Replica as well as they did over here.

DVV
Well, maybe they received Captain Beefheart singing, maybe Zoot Horn Rollo wasn't as much himself then, you have to be yourself before you can give out something as far-out as music...that's why blues singers, they are themselves they're talkin' about themselves, about their work, their labour, about the sky the way it looked that morning. If you're yourself you can smile out what you're doing, you know, paint out love rather than complication. If you're doing complicated telepathic music you have to be twice as relaxed as when you would go out and emulate...um...bop bop bop you know, like mother heart, I would like to get away from that, leave my heart alone and play freely. You know, one two three bang bang bang bang two step back and forth is a war like its negative that much emphasis on one point is too intellectual. Rock and roll must move, I mean a rock is stationary, but doesn't a rock roll ? Well they should know that, all that emphasis on one change of life, Rock and roll, I think its disappearing, what with Anderson getting into theatrics. You know I met him before the show, I would like to be able to do that, I'm sure everybody would like to do that with everybody.

PM
It was nice for us the other night to meet yourselves.
I’m glad you did but that Speakeasy thing was really corny, remember we’d to turn the record player down to even talk.

And they wouldn’t even do that...

Well...the people were very frightened, and drinking poison in a dark cavern and everything saying “cunts” about women and stuff like that, I mean why do they always use a woman as derogatory like that, they must not have got over their mothers or something. You have to get over your mother to love a woman, really love a woman.

I can never function in places like the Speakeasy.

You can...too well to be there, don’t ever think that you can’t function well enough, think how it really is when you flip a light switch off and on. The current goes somewhere else. I mean like nobody turns off the light, nobody turns you off, you’re on, if somebody says they’re gonna turn you off, what? Are you gonna take some weird exotic vacation like people did with the Beatles song “I’m gonna turn you on”, nobody’s gonna turn me off or on. As a matter of fact I did a satirical thing, “I’m gonna swallow you whole, lick you everywhere its pink, whole kit ‘n caboodle and the kitchen sink...” I was jivin’ you know what I mean I was acting silly. I don’t think they knew what they were saying when they (the Beatles) said that... I hope. You never know. Certainly I liked the feeling more on their earlier stuff rather than the later complicated...

Do you listen to the Beatles now they’ve split up, as separate people?

I don’t Know, I’ve listened to some. I’ve definitely heard, listened to McCartney’s album RAM...vaguely...I haven’t got that much into it...it’d be a lie...I’ve got too much going myself, I don’t know, he went through a helluva note there, I mean being thrown up into stardom and then in the end throwing rocks at each other its a shame, maybe they wanted everybody to know they were human beings. Maybe that was natural.

You’ve had a lot of interviews, do you think everybody’s trying to fathom the legend?

Maybe they think I’m Bacon and Shakespeare, maybe they think its a Shakespeare Bacon routine or something, I’m just kidding, but I’m not putting myself up there with Shakespeare cause he’s gone an’ I’m better an’ he’s gone an’ I’m here, but at the same time I know that he did some awful nice stuff, and I mean its not comparing but it almost seems that Zappa tried to make something like that out.... (Here the tape is rather inaudible, but Don suggests that Frank Zappa claimed he pulled the strings behind his “puppet” Beefheart.)....

But people don’t understand simple things like that. I don’t want to be paid tribute to or pay tribute salute to the note standing still, I couldn’t do it, my note’s moving, you know what I mean, like, I’d never want to be a guru or anything, like I did a satirical thing Ella Guru, that’s obvious, but people don’t seem to understand that like there’s too much freak stuff attached around it. They’ve got the wrong guy. I don’t want them to take the needle or be a porcupine to dig Captain Beefheart when here he is,
PM
Well, it even clouds me, when you tell me about various bits and pieces they become clear, because they've been under Zappa's command.

DVV
Isn't that awful? Well its happened to every artist, Artist, I say. You know its too cheap today the word, "artist".

PM
You need a helluva lot of strength though.

DVV
I got it! I was built for it...Ha! Ha! But I'm a soft person, I don't like violence, I can't stand it. I think its the ultimate of stupidity, the ultimate of disconnection, like there are varying degrees of disconnection I interpret to be insanity. But I don't mind a football game, not to be confused with Jethro Tull's reference to soccer (on the back of "Thick as a Brick") though that's really nice, but...ah...Hammond-Hammond has my hat off Trout Mask Replica. Now I must admit that I thought it was nice that he could dig that hat, I didn't know that many people dug that hat, because I made that hat, I guess that he should've had it. What about Leon Russell didn't he get my hat, I mean, but the thing is that he got my hat. I mean Hammond-Hammond would've given him my hat anyway, if he'd said.

PM
Marc Bolan got your hat too.

DVV
Is that right...the little devils! But with Hammond-Hammond its nice to see that, sharing the same business on the stage...I've very seldom seen that with musicians, I've seen it a lot with writers...like I get along very well with writers because I know, well...they have an awful hard axe because once that stuff is in print it can't be retracted. Now musicians can just blow notes into the wind. Maybe that's why musicians are sometimes frightened of writers. You know I just remembered I have a song on this new album "Brown Star" (Clear Spot....but the song never appeared as this...) called "Love Over Gold" which I think is a nice idea. I was talking to a fella here a little while ago...I think all cars should be built as good as a Daimler or a Rolls or a Bentley or a Jaguar or a BMW that's really a high preference to me, I think they're really together and I think that riding in a limousine...I don't consider it as a limousine, I consider it as a very nice piece of workmanship, artistically you see, and there's been a lot of emphasis against limousines and things like that, and that's silly man, you know that is silly. If somebody wants to pay twenty dollars to have a fella drive, give a guy a job, if he wants to pay enough money to have that thing sit outside when he goes in to eat a hamburger, so he doesn't have to get a taxi, like I think that's their business. I had this rally nice man drive me the other day, all over...what is it the London Tower, Tower of London. I saw this ship, The Discovery...a lot of people would think, Captain Beefheart...that's lame, that is the postcard, Kodachrome tour of the loom, the artist's conception of the banana traditionally. Well, that isn't the way I looked at it. I don't have that, I don't weigh enough to have that, I guess, but I'm enjoying that. I don't know whether it makes me look like a has-been a what is it...naive imbecile baby inside of a man, I mean I don't care, that's what Zappa was able to pull that shit of saying yes there's a baby
inside of this man, and sometimes the man, sometimes the baby...they're friends? And I think that's an artist...and a woman in me and enough of a woman in me that I can accept the opposite sex and not call them cunts and think that underground buildings are really scary and think that dark is a shadow that's going to form a point and stab me...I could go on and get theatrical, but you know what I'm saying...Oh...I will anyway...Shakespeare, If a man doesn't know where to put his spear, well he doesn't know where to put his sphere, you see if a man knows where to put his spear, which is in a woman then he doesn't have to be afraid of his sphere, and therefore, knows the circle is not holding him in, he can escape, you know, like sexually and that a woman really doesn't have a grip on a man all these things that in France are implicated as a very good...fuck...you know. I mean but here they are implicated as a frightening attachment. I don't know its all mixed up...like succotash...that mixed vegetable that they have over dere (there), but not that all of its over dere, Frigidaire is over dere,...(looks out of window)...Oh a maroon taxi, oh, that's very different, looks like a ruby on a black man's hand doesn't it? You know, competition and things like that are very worry, but I've seen these people diving, I've seen young sperm diving into ancient warlike holes. D'ya know what I mean, I see a disconnection of the neuron junction, of man and woman, it doesn't complete up here (taps head) because it doesn't go sexually, it doesn't complete up here mentally, it doesn't carry over, like men they put women over to graze on the green grass and twist the udders, don't want them to utter anything back...those things are sick, those things have to come out with the women's liberation, I've always accepted a woman mentally and physically as much as a man...the thing is, I prefer the receptacle that is offered there, with less resistance, d'ya know what I mean.

Well, like all these revolutionaries, a revolution is a circle, but their circle is spiralling down...

PM

Drain like...like old drainpipe hats.

PM

Can you tell us a bit about your painting...

DVV

Painting, its like taking a rag off a bush, I've gotten a lot of rags off of bushes, like I can see a tree and if I wanted to as an artist in music, I'm sure that I could sketch that in music if I wanted to. But, you know, a lot of things I do have nothing to do with nature, but all to do with nature. If you can escape nature for a second I think that you're really doing something and I mean I have definitely at times gotten off things that had nothing to do with this planet, so I've been able to really see this planet, and I think everybody should try to do that, which is not to poison yourselves you know because that sure doesn't do any good to poison yourself. In...ah...what's that country where they have the Cobra, the Cobra will spit venom into the eye of a native and they will urinate into the eye, you see, all right...if that happens to me, I want a girl to do it you know, whatever that means...that's really funny...that's just one of those things. (Turning to his wife, Jan) Are you all right babe, you bin sittin' there all day not sayin' a word, all this stuff goin' to you...do you wanna go to the toilet?
There's a toilet through the kitchen...

JAN  Too much work...

DVV  Too much work!...getting high on your own urine, they're liable to think you're a yogi...a yogi is a policeman with a paper gun. You can get high on your own urine. You know as a child you hold your own urine...that's one form of poison, I mean it isn't that hard to graduate to harder poison...but I ah...when somebody says they're doing lysergic music, I really think that a human being did it...I don't think that an aspirin on one particular day, that wonderful day an aspirin all of a sudden turned into a human being and painted the world or anything like that...no I don't think God is a modern tablet...I have a song called "Ussen's Bible" that you might like, I wrote it over here and I wrote it very freely there was no fear of guns and I like that. I could come over here and really write I'm sure, cause that's a drag man thinking that they're having life and death on their hip, lets hope the hip people don't have life and death...lets hope they choose life instead of death on their hip. That's significant what I just said...is that (cassette recorder) on there? That would be good in an article or a...but I hope people don't interpret it as an article of clothing. I hope they interpret it as a mental article. I wrote a song called "Holster" with that on it, that wasn't spontaneous. I've done that before, although it sounded spontaneous...it was because I did it, who's to say I didn't do it the way I did it before. I don't think I have as much nerve as some of the people who do other people's music at times. You know I've met some commercial artists that kind of rattled me at times until I thought, well man you're crazy, what are you doing...I've met them and they've really rattled me at times. The fella that designed the dollar bill, good lord, just scared me to death...I'm just kidding on...do I sound like a Barker? If I do sound like a Barker its not nearly as nice as a dog. But if I went off on a fireplug and was given a card as an exposé...you know what I mean...

TR  Don't so many people though leave so many things up to other people, they believe they can't do it themselves...

DVV  That's not good, but if they wish to be under the employment of somebody else, I think that's all right, you know, but they should first shake hands and find out where the ship is sailing to...it looks funny to be shipwrecked, and artist like me by some ridiculous tawdry little record company, as if I didn't know the dance. But how do you halt the momentum of something like that, with your record, your name, your tongue...pulled out like that and hammered to some crucifix, or whatever their hangup is, some cross up somewhere do you know what I mean. Did that sound like too beatnik a poetry? The tongue, impolite? All of a sudden, in the fifties the tongue was a very...you know...I'm just kidding...I'm a poet you know, more than a musician, I think...

PM  Which is strange, I mean on Trout Mask Replica the images in the writing are so full and flowing, there's so many of them...I mean whatever you say about the Spotlight Kid the images are so much simpler and repetitive.
Yeah, they are, but when you go into it, I wrote a thing called “Frownland” you remember that, not the words mainly of Frownland that’s important, but take one word out of it, I don’t like to see people frown, you see, and I feel that my feeling will come across no matter what word or music I’m doing... I mean I had a hit with “Diddy Wah Diddy” but that was the first time I ever did anybody else’s music... uh... Bo Diddley. I didn’t pretend that was my music, like I said this is Diddy Wah Diddy, Bo Diddley, but I did that years ago. I tried to put my feeling on it as much as I could... She’s in a weird position (Talking about Jan) I mean... married to someone with all that attention placed upon them, its very far out, but she knows, she’s a painter, wrote “Blabber and Smoke” that was pretty significant.

PM  Was that you, do you blabber and smoke?

DVV  Well I do yeah, but the thing is that, not only that, but she was referring to people who... ah... (draws on cigarette like a joint, mimics being stoned)... “Everything’s groovy man”... that’s all right that they’re over there poaching, you know antelopes hanging and people walk up and say” isn’t that a great coat!” You know... like “Hi spotty!” Spotty the human it’d look better on a leopard...

PM  I hear you’re going to Glasgow, Scotland...

DVV  Well they’ll like me over there ‘cause I’m as wild as they are, well, you’re Scottish?

PM  Yes

DVV  Yeah, I know that, I can tell... Anderson has a tartan you know.

PM  I don’t know where my name comes from.

GS  Possibly to do with distilleries... whisky.

DVV  Oh you devil!

GS  It appears that my distant ancestors were poachers.

DVV  What kind of poachers?

PM  Springers, Kangaroo poachers...?

GS  “Cause of the dog that poachers use which is a specially bred mongrel type of dog called Springer.

DVV  But what do you mean poachers... like... uh... Peter the Rabbit, you know, like when the farmer comes running out and the rabbit ate the carrots... little devil... but that was natural. But you don’t look like a poacher to me... too forthwith...

GS  No I’ve never poached, but I find it surprising how they ever survived considering how dangerous it was.

DVV  It’s surprising these people who paint the white lines survive with all those cars going back and forth.

PM  Is your first name Don or Donald?

DVV  Don.

PM  Oh... well, in Celtic Don-ald means world chief.

DVV  Is that right, what’s a Don, one without its mother?

(Don’s tour Manager enters says - “Its quarter to eight...”)

DVV  Is that right, you know I feel like getting your watch and taking the quarter and
throwing it right at the eight, hoping it will go through the zero...watch is a clock with a boomerang on the end. You know, I have a sculpture, it's a boomerang with a working clock inserted into the plastic you'll like that, I'll exhibit it over here...what were we into there...names, mine is "of the brook" Van Vliet is Dutch...Holland, Dutch y'know. At least they could have given me a river or somethin'...I don't know, a brook is a river depending on the eyes.

PM Well it ties in both ways, 'cause if you're Don Van Vliet, your Don is part of the "World Chief" and your Van Vliet is part of the river.

DVV Is that it?...well if I'm lucky...I can go down to the ocean and drown.

GS You're going to Liverpool aren't you, that's where I hail from originally...the river, like whenever I go up to see my parents the first thing ever I do before I see them is I go over on the ferry-boat.

DVV No connection? I'm just kidding, I'm being Freudian.

GS And I just walk along the beach and watch the boats.

DVV Is that the Mersey river? I heard about that with somebody called the pacemakers.

GS Oh...Ferry Cross the Mersey.

DVV That fella was pretty good wasn't he? The way he played that guitar as if he didn't really wanna do it, that was far out. He sure had an artist approach, I mean good grief! He was really into it. I must admit he impressed me, you know not enough to dent me or leave a spot, but impress me, that he was very honest...I think we've already eaten today, we're starting on the night, no tooth to the moon...I'm just teasing, I'm acting like one of those heavy duty indian poets...(at this point a dog pokes its nose around the door)

GS OH...you know when I got home last night, I went upstairs into the room where everyone was sitting and I opened the door and I saw this flash of tannish hair and I looked round the door...

DVV Flash of tannish hair?

GS Yeah...

DVV That's nice man, poetry, what are you talkin' about keep goin'...

GS and I saw this girl who was there leaning against the door...

DVV I wish you hadn't told me that, I'm surrealistic enough to have really dug that flash of tannish hair...that's a hit man, you better get that together and start writing, go ahead describe more things like that, no, I mean like when you're around me, feel free no, tell me more I'm sorry to have stopped you.

GS As I opened the door fully 'cause the obstacle removed itself I was totally expecting to say sorry to someone as I'd pushed the door rather hard and instead of this person there was this incredible looking long haired collie dog. Someone had just visited and they'd found this dog which was a stray.

DVV No they were the stray and the dog really knew or if it was a stray, people had influenced it...you saw what seemed to be a woman and it was a dog...If you say that in New Jersey they'll put you in jail forever, sodomy is life, you get life. Like Picasso
got life, in LIFE Magazine along with the Beatles...you mean you had expectations about that tawny hair?

GS It was odd because it’s the first dog to have come into the house since we’ve had it...

DVV Better house now, but that’s far out, that’s very nice, that’s a nice bit of story you have down there you ought to clip that out and put it out man, do it as a song. I would rather hear that than somebody telling me how to roll over the world in a joint shaped bulb or something.

TR How are you travelling from concert to concert on the tour?

DVV Sometimes by BMW, sometimes by Daimler, sometimes by bus, well they haven’t got me on the thumb yet, plane...although the plainest is the plane that’s the plainest way to travel, very plain, a blue roll by your window outside and neon on the inside, the olives with the cute legs and the whole thing. I actually got through to a stewardess the other night, up there., a sky nurse, she actually appeared as a human being, well she was doing it before that, I had no concepts. She didn’t have to have one either I guess. First thing I did was try to sell her her drink back, that was really far out, she was from Persia, on an Indian flight.

PM That was coming over here?

DVV Yeah seems like it was backwards now, I don’t even know where I am really by a map, I never read a map. so therefore, when I started out on my art it wasn’t that monumental of an explore, because of the fact that I never conceived the dragon coming down and grabbing me, either that or just falling off a square...but its beautiful to me, the world, you know a clump of grass looks real nice.

PM Then its nice in a BMW, you can travel and see the grass.

DVV Yeah...that’s a nice machine I may get one, or a corvette.

PM Its strange, I don’t think of you driving a car...

DVV I don’t. I have a fifties Hudson Hornet at home, Commander six is what it is and its barbecue brown you know like the old 1958 barbeeketers 53...futuristic tan, almost like they’ve taken a syringe and taken the colour off a buffalo and put it on the metal and it didn’t quite make it, that’s the colour I’m talking about. Animal colours look very very far out on metal. You know like the colour of an animal emulated in metal...ah...embossed.

PM I have a friend who sells clothes in London and he’s got a Ford Mustang...

DVV Oh brother that’s a tyrant...

PM ...and he’s got it painted yellow and black flocked to look like a tiger.

DVV Oh lord that’s really far out, where’s he at man. Doesn’t he know that some chick’s liable to dig the material and have it put on a coat, very dangerous. Very dangerous thing to emulate, anything beautiful...that’s really weird...a tiger...I wish they would quit poaching all those animals over there, you ought to scream back to your ancestors...I’m just kidding, but that wasn’t in Africa, that was here, poaching here, like rabbits and sheep...

PM And salmon.
DVV  You mean I may have eaten a poached Lox. Do you like creamcheese and Lox. Its like salmon, Nova Scotia Lox are salmon with creamcheese on a bagel, its a Jewish dish.

TR  Its a bit of a shame that so many people still come and see you and think of you as a freak.

DVV  Well I think that they're beginning to get over that now. I guess its better that they get over it now than to prolong it an get embarrassed to even come and hear me after that.

PM  You are going to make this regular now, coming over here?

DVV  Yeah, oh yeah...no more milk of magnesia...gonna be regular.

GS  Can you record your own things at home?

DVV  I can, I did for instance, "The Dust Blows Forward and the Dust Blows Back" and "Orange Claw Hammer" and "China Pig" on the Trout Mask Replica album on a cassette.

PM  It said something on the Lyric sheet about the condition of the players on China Pig...what was the condition?

DVV  Oh that, yes, well I'll tell you about that...completely sober as a matter of fact...in the background over there there was a fella typing out some words to another song...it was strictly spontaneous...music's good for you, makes you let go of things without getting anything back. You know, like, how are you gonna trap a note?

GS  Do you ever write things for piano, do you play lots of piano?

DVV  Yeah, a lot.

GS  I find pianos are incredibly timeless...

DVV  Yeah, I do too. I played for five days once without stopping, my back was...uh...for the times that I did find the time my back and muscles was hurt on every one of them. You know its silly, but I'm not that...there...yet. I mean I don't know all about it yet.

PM  What about guitar, do you play that?

DVV  Oh yeah, I like to fool around with the guitar, pretty far out man a piano turned up like this and you're being accused of being an angel every minute like catching a harp string on a curved field.

GS  How long have you been playing the soprano?

DVV  Let's put it this way, I played it the first time I came over to Middle Earth, Antennae Jimmy Semens and Drumbo, they gave me a soprano...that night at Middle Earth for two and a half hours and I'd never played it before and its the same now. I never played it before, every time I play it. I never rehearse, Drombo was keeping track of the times that I played that horn, now probably 240 times and I never rehearsed in between them and I won't. I don't rehearse the voice either, like Trout Mask Replica, I just sang that thing when I went in to do it. I had no idea, how it was going to sound. I just read the paper and sung it...occasionally I'll just sing it out of memory, but I usually read it which is funny, it is funny isn't it?

TR  Do you still have a bass clarinet?

DVV  Oh yeah, I love it, I did that on "Dachau Blues" and also "Flash Gordon's Ape", had three of them going, it was really weird, and man, the guy left the studio, thought I
was kidding, well I was, you know, I always am, but...why more significance on that than on any other thing that I do, they just left the studio and left the thing running, they thought I was “goofing off”, well I’ve changed engineers now. I’m gonna be with a fella named Ted Templeman, does a lot of things for Van Morrison, I think this guy is good. The other guy was good but just doesn’t have enough time for somebody like me. By the way, he told me one thing that was really funny, he told me that this album that I’d done...now listen to this, this is really hilarious, he told me, he said, “you’re sure feeling a lot better, a lot more down to earth, a lot more this and a lot more that...and...ah...you were really crazy when you did “Lick my Decals off Baby”...like that and I was half way through the album...man, and I went...oh boy, that scared me.

PM
I notice you are not playing any colleges or universities this time, are you going to next time?

DVV
I don’t know, but I’d like to. I’d like to play everywhere over here. I’m looking forward to playing up in “Newcaussle” or Newcastle or however they say it, they say it better than I can, they make it sound like its really there, very musical to me. No wonder they like blues up there in the north. They really go after a word in all kinds of ways.

PM
Could you tell me a little about the song - “When it Blows its Stacks” ?

DVV
You mean the fella that takes the girl out on an iceberg hands her a Ronson and says I’ll see you around. Well I think that’s sort of what’s been done to women, you know kinda left floating when they’re on the ground as it is. They have that blood clock, you know, the period. If you really wanna find out what’s happening ask a woman, right ? I mean men are very far out...women have been considered to be far out, but I think women are in...a lot of men would really disagree with what I just said...(women) they certainly know what’s good for men.

TR
I think that more people should be aware of this...the farther you are from nature, the more insane you are.

DVV
Yeah, I do but I also think that a person is capable of being in a city and being quite sane. I mean a man has control over his own destiny, like for instance, I drink distilled water and then I add my own minerals because I don’t wish to get my guts cut up by all the iron that’s in water naturally. There are a lot of flaws on the planet to begin with. As far as a man goes, I guess man is the biggest flaw on the planet, but since you have to survive I think its important to take into consideration the natural flaws that already exist. I’m trying to find out if I’ve arrived or not...

TR
There’s not that many people have control over their own destiny.

DVV
Why ?...I mean, you can get your own distillery, people have been making their own whisky for years. Just take the fire out of it and you’ve got nice water, or put the fire into it and you’ve got, in some cases, nice water too. But in my case I get allergic when I drink. I break out in a horrid rash, I look like the Beatles record of Strawberry Fields Forever...fields...not feels... (Here there is along gap where Don’s manager
Don’t you think that it’s a bit fascist nowadays, don’t you think that this (peace sign) when this closes, the fingers of the two closes it could be like this (Nazi salute) because of the T.V. type of thought pattern that would make somebody do that...it replaces hello...now, when the monkey reaches into the jar for the raisins with his hand open and grabs the raisins, he then, if he can’t let go of the raisins, can’t get his hand out of the jar, you go round with a glass jar on your hand all of your life...then the monkey, being that his claws have worn down, as referred to in When it Blows its Stacks...has got a glass jar on one hand and is holding on to the tree with the other, you know, like, afraid to break the jar because he’ll get cut. (to Jan) Do you want to write the ‘B’ side to Blabber and Smoke?

PM Have you got a single out?

DVV There’s one out right now - “Click Clack”.

PM That’s interesting, they may want you on Top of the Pops!

DVV Good I’d love to man, but I wouldn’t wanna be on top of anything because if I couldn’t hold up, then I’d topple.

A Girl That’s a really plastic show though...

DVV Not with me on it though, imagine that plastic, it’d be almost like an artificial hand compared to a real one when I went on...if you wanna know what that is, it’s a man running over a STOP sign, I know it was a man ‘cause if it had been a woman she would have had to pay for the tyres...Don’t I have a deep voice...they had to bury me pretty deep to keep my voice off the air. They had to dig real deep to to find a way to keep me from being around. I mean like Zappa was just diggin’ until his shovel wore out and his shovel’s worn out now, poor little thing...probably had a bent sand bucket when he went to the beach as a child. I find more and more that Zappa is less and less. I always thought that he was a nice fella till he made me think that he wasn’t. I mean he forced it on me...you know like - “I’m not nice!” . I never got paid for “Willie the Pimp” or Trout Mask Replica...that’s business? Don’t keep all your eggs in one basket........
This is a reproduction of the drawing by Don referred to in the Introduction.
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