

FRUITS OF THE RECYCLER

“It says it right there in the ad: FEMALE musicians wanted. What’s wrong with these guys?!” I was exasperated. For weeks we’d been trying to find a drummer and rhythm guitarist for our band by putting ads in the *Recycler*, a free ad weekly publication widely used by Angelenos before the birth of Craigslist. We’d had success early on, finding a few female musicians in our incarnation as Masque Era, but now that Patricia and I really wanted a punk band, our search was coming up empty. For some strange reason, men kept responding to our ads. The latest guy, named Geza X, seemed to have all the same musical interests as us. He was sweet on the phone and really wanted to be in a band with girls, but Patricia and I were having trouble letting go of the original plan. Geza X was persistent and talked us into jamming with him and a drummer he knew named Joe Nanini.

Patricia’s finger was still not fully healed, but she could play with a pick, and we had abandoned all hope of resurrecting Masque Era, instead focusing on Patricia’s brilliant new plan. She had told me a story about going out joy-riding with some of our friends. They were all bored and decided to put paper bags on their heads. They’d torn out eyes, nose and mouth holes, effectively constructing makeshift masks out of the bags. As they drove along the streets wearing these paper-bag masks, they’d slow down for approaching pedestrians and shout out to them. Patricia laughed as she retold the story of people’s extreme reactions to them. She said people either burst out laughing or ran away in fear. As she was telling me this, she suddenly tossed an outrageous proposal at me: What if we wore bags on our heads when our band played? It sounded like a great idea, and we were excited and focused again.

Marlene’s new home life was cutting into our original plan, and though we remained friends, she apologetically bowed out of the band. It happened that Patricia’s school friend, Janet Koontz, played guitar. Patricia immediately drafted her for the Bags, and pretty soon the three of us were practicing in Patricia’s garage. We started writing songs together. It’s hard to say whose songs were worse. Janet wrote a song called “Fantasexing,” Patricia and I collaborated on “Bag Bondage” and “Survive,” humming parts to Janet when our limited musical knowledge got in the way of communicating an idea. We didn’t know what we were doing, but we weren’t about to let that stop us.

It was the idea of playing with bags on our heads that really appealed to Geza X. Geza was quite a salesman. He talked us into the audition. Patricia,

Janet and I went to his house in Hollywood and played in the living room. We knew after the first attempt at “Bag Bondage” that Geza and Joe made us sound good, so we would probably have to allow them to force their way into the band.

Joe was quiet and gentlemanly and immediately likeable. I didn’t know what to make of Geza. Near the end of the audition, I asked him if I could use the bathroom. He offered to show me where it was, speaking to me in the same sweet, soft-spoken voice he had used on the telephone. Along the way he joked that he might not be able to find it because he hardly ever used the bathroom. He confided in me that he didn’t poop anymore. I immediately scoffed at this but he insisted. “I don’t eat regular food,” he told me. “I only drink herbal teas and juices, so I don’t ever poop anymore.”

He was fucking with me...or was he? For the rest of the night, the thought of Geza never having another bowel movement kept creeping back into my head; no matter how I tried to suppress it and assure myself that it was bullshit, there was a nagging doubt. My mind wouldn’t let it go. Could you get all your nutrients through juices? And, if so, would you really not have another bowel movement? I was still thinking about it on the drive home, when Patricia interrupted me.

“So what do you think, Alice?” Patricia asked.

“About what?” I replied.

“About what? About Geza and Joe!” Patricia and Janet had already said they liked them, and I thought it wasn’t even worth discussing. It seemed obvious to me that they should be in the band, but I was still nervous about Geza. The guy was funny and nice, but even by my standards he was a little quirky. He was a weirdo to a weirdo, and he didn’t eat food and didn’t poop. Could I trust someone who didn’t poop? What if all the shit was building up inside of him, ready to explode?

“Yes, I think they sounded good,” I replied, somewhat distractedly.

“What are you thinking about?” Patricia asked me later that night. When I told her, she laughed at me. “You’re too gullible! He was just messing with you.” I felt stupid and decided on the spot I couldn’t trust that Geza X, no matter how sweet he sounded.

THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE

In the spirit of the times, we hadn't been practicing for more than a couple of weeks when we put the cart before the horse. Our few rehearsals had taken place in the living rooms of Geza and Joe, and it was at one of these rehearsals that we met Joe's roommate or perhaps, girlfriend. I don't quite remember the details of their relationship, other than the fact that they lived in the same place. Her name was Charlotte Caffey, and she was a fellow musician who played bass in a band called the Eyes.

Charlotte was a shy girl with straight, long blonde hair, who smiled a lot but always seemed to be holding something back, like she was humoring Joe and Geza. I remember seeing her in a nursing-style uniform and assumed she was a nurse, but she never stuck around long enough for me to ask her. I don't know if it was the sound of our practicing that drove her out in such a hurry, or if she really was late for work every time the band was rehearsing, but our meetings were always warm, friendly and brief. During one of the short conversations we had as the Bags' members set up our equipment and Charlotte gathered up her keys and purse, she casually mentioned something about a rehearsal place opening up off of Hollywood Boulevard and Cherokee. The remark went unnoticed by me and Patricia; we were quite content to continue practicing in living rooms for free, but Geza seemed especially interested and suggested that our band check out this new place at the first opportunity.

It was near the end of August 1977, and a few days later — following the Screamers' example — we decided it was time to start promoting our band, even if we were nowhere near ready to play. We decided to do a combined photo session and bag parade to spark curiosity about the band. The first time we decorated our bags was so exciting. Each person infused their personality onto the brown paper using markers, crayons and assorted trinkets. I was so involved with my own cat-eyed bag mask that I didn't notice what Geza was up to. After 20 years of working as a schoolteacher, I can see now that Geza was like a little kid, deliberately trying to push Mommy's buttons. Geza had created the most offensive mask I could imagine. It had one long, horizontal slit opened up for the eyes to peek through, with no mouth or nose apertures. Bloody tampons dangled from the corners of the bag like graduation tassels. The effect was utterly disturbing. Patricia and Janet didn't like it either, but I think I was the most bothered by it. I tried to protest, but my objections went unheard, and, in the name of tolerance, I decided to let it go.

The rest of Geza's outfit was equally disgusting. He decided to accessorize his foil-covered legs with a pair of urine-stained white men's briefs. Joe Nanini wasn't much more tasteful. He went the minimalist route, wearing only a jockstrap stuffed with a brown-skinned, black-haired doll whose head peeked out from the top like a long-haired erection. By comparison, Janet in a purple mini-skirt and Patricia in a black vinyl dress were dressed much more tastefully.

Having suffered some permanent damage in the aesthetic department after fashioning many a Weirdos show outfit, I sported a red T-shirt with buttons and toys pinned on it, black dance pants, bright green textured stockings with the reinforced crotch seams showing at my inner thighs, and my trusty Frederick's of Hollywood slip-on heels. Decked out in our gloriously tacky band ensembles, we gleefully placed the bags over our heads and marched out into the street. We turned the neighbors' heads from the moment we walked out the door, but the evening was just getting started.



The Bags' first public appearance: Joe Nanini in his doll-head jockstrap, Patricia in black miniskirt, Geza X in urine-stained men's briefs, aluminum foil and bloody-tampon mask, Alice in green tights and Janet in purple with shades.