

It Ain't Berklee College Of Music

by Dennis Mahagin

Aaron Lukin's dorm room at the prestigious Aberdeen Songwriters' Hot Spring and Feedback Retreat was nothing if not bohemian. Beanbag chairs, bongos and accordion file folders made up the majority of his furniture. A doghouse fiddle leaned against the doorframe like a big-bellied Samoan sentry, and moth-eaten tapestries of Jimi Hendrix and Joan Armatrading were hung haphazardly on all the nicotine-stained walls. Aaron was forever trying to explain away the gaping tapestry holes to his guests—by claiming they were part of the manufacturer's design.

Lily Chanson, who sat in a tight lotus curl underneath a huge onyx bust of Meat Loaf—the singer—shortly cleared her throat, and said to Aaron: “You really ought go Art Deco with a space like this. Think about it. Eh, A?”

Lily glanced at her good pal Gram Young, who was squatting and rocking on one of Aaron's jumbo cymbals, in the corner. Gram's and Lily's eyes locked, and they began nodding, solemnly, in unison.

Aaron sighed. He had a crush on Lily, but she'd told him previously that he took his work way too seriously for her taste—and now it appeared she was hooked up with Gram. Or maybe they were just hanging out. It was so very hard to tell—yet reticent Lily certainly wasn't about to give him any hints.

But she was right. Aaron lived for his art. Earlier, when Gram and Lily had shown up unannounced with the big spliff of Sticky Green Bud, he'd welcomed the intrusion. Now the weed was making him paranoid, and irritable—the tricky half-finished song bridge from

morning meditation misting over in his mind with images of Gram and Lily fucking their brains out in some righteous bubbling hot spring. If only he could harness that volcanic emotion—and write a hit song around it. He'd show them both, then.

As Aaron strummed the half-diminished D barre chord—with the thumb-tickle octave harmonic effect he'd worked out all on his own—Gram Young took a huge drag off the joint, then passed it over to Lily.

Through smoke-filled lungs Gram squeaked: “Neil Peart. What an awesome drummer, eh, A? As a rock n' roll lyricist, however? Highly overrated. Whatever you do, Lukin, never try to write a song with some damn Rush lyrics already in your head. It'll fuck up your shit.”

Lily Chanson took an endearing, lady-like hit off the joint, then passed it back to Gram. She held the smoke for as long as she possibly could, then blew it out in a razor-thin, ice-blue jet stream.

“Red Barchetta is good,” Lily hissed. “I really like Red Barchetta.”

She began to sing:

*My uncle has a country place...
that no one knows about. He sez it
used to be a farm, before the—*

“C'mon, man!” Aaron snapped. “I'm tryin to fucking concentrate here, eh? You mind?”

“You know who Neil Peart looks like?” Gram said, ignoring Aaron's outburst.

Aaron laid down his Ovation guitar on the linoleum. The E string rang out like a jew's harp as the guitar neck brushed against a

warped-tile hillock in the streaked floor. "Huh?" Aaron whined, getting scattered now. "What the fuck, Gram!"

Gram Young grinned, whipping out his gold-plated roach clip. He blew on it a few times, as if warming up a kazoo. Gram said: "Neil Peart looks like that guy on Star Trek, the leader of those freaks who force Kirk into taking them to the planet Eden. You know?"

Lily clapped her hands. "Oh, I love that episode!" she said. "The ending is so sad!"

Lily Chanson sang:

*Headin out to Eden...Yay brother...
Gonna eat all the fruit and
throw away the rind...Yah.*

Gram took another hit off the joint. "Yah is right!" he said. "Those Star Trek screenwriters were all fucking poets. Yah, boy... And you know what else? Geddy Lee looks like a damned Romulan. He looks like that guy Ston, who was trying to make it with Spock's wife at the Slam Down on Vulcan, with the old hag as referee."

Aaron nodded wearily. "When Spock thinks he killed Kirk. Yeah yeah yeah."

"I believe you will find, Ston," Gram Young recited faux-gravely, "that the HAVING is not so pleasing a thing as the WANTING. Ooooh. Tell it, Spockman."

Aaron took the joint away from Gram, and stubbed it out, deep in the golden belly of a Buddha humidior on the floor. He didn't want to be rude, but he really needed his friends to be gone, or he was certain to get nothing done all afternoon.

“What about Alex Lifeson?” Gram said. “Who do you think he looks like, Lukin?”

Now Aaron saw his opportunity. Or maybe it had been headed this way, the whole time.

He stared at his friends, wrinkling his nose. Aaron thought: So much of existence was like pulling frigging teeth.

Aaron said: “Now that you mention it, I think Alex Lifeson looks a lot like you, Gram. And if you and Lily were to make a good long beer run—like really take your time?—I'd be inclined to compare your guitar playing with his. As well I should.”

Lily looped her arm around Gram's elbow, as they both rose to their feet. “Oh,” she said, “a leisurely walk in the fresh breeze sounds so good.”

“Say it then,” Gram told Aaron.

Aaron sighed, and closed his eyes.

“All right, all right all right, Gram. I find your tone on the custom Les Paul to be remarkably similar to Lifeson's. It's 2112 all over again. So uncanny, it's eerie. So eerily uncanny, it's painful.”

“Cool,” Gram said. “Now do the name thing.”

“THAT WASN'T PART OF THE DEAL, MAN!”

“ C'mon, Lukin. You get to have lots of fun with yer funny name after the founder of the classic grunge band called Mudhoney! Now... you gotta do mine...”

“You fucking fucking fucker,” Aaron hissed.

“Say it.”

Aaron glanced at Lily, and saw that she in turn was looking at him strangely. In the Aberdeen Hot Springs of his mind he saw her slick brunette head bobbing above the steam with Gram Young. He saw them as squealing baby otters straining to lick some figure eight fireflies off the nightscape like electrons in a bell jar. Aaron thought: Maybe by saying the thing Young wants, it will somehow make the vexing images go away. It was certainly worth a try.

“Alright,” he grumbled sarcastically, “You win... . Grammy.”

“WHOO HOO! Excellent, dude! OK, we're off to the store. We'll be back—but not so very fast, just as you prescribed.”

The couple headed for the door. “Rock on, dude,” Lily cooed, winking over her shoulder just as Gram Young's long thumb disappeared into the cleft of her beautiful ass. Aaron picked up the Ovation, and began tuning it—not thinking about the schematics of his new song at all now. He listened instead for that familiar yogi tongue trill between the babble of overtones at the fifth fret, as he struck the notes and tenderly tweaked the head stock pegs: one long moan-like mantra “ooooohm” meant you were in—so simple like a secret you could keep all to yourself, but only for a limited time.

