

Loose

by Oliver Hunt

I made a record of pretty music- now I'm giving it to you straight from hell

September 1979- Lymon Spex, little notebook in hand, jotted down notes about remembering Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons hanging out at Dolls shows. They looked like fucking narcs, he said, taking little notes of their own. That was when he lived in New York, and lived the seedy downtown dream of keeping company with people like The Ramones and Patti Smith, before the fog he couldn't quite name took over, before moving back to Ohio to regroup and get his head back together. He jotted down notes about how it didn't matter what he said, KISS may very well be the world's most critic-proof band. It's like sending a food critic to say a few words about McDonald's, he wrote, what did it matter? He swigged from a bottle he kept in his inner jacket pocket- Robitussin mixed with Boone's Farm- then ghosted out of Riverfront Coliseum's press stable.

Outside of the concert a woman seemed to come out of nowhere. She said Oh my God! Lymon Spex! The writer! She was a pale little figure with spindly white arms in a Coca-Cola t-shirt. Usually, Spex was recognized by musicians, agents, A&R people, other writers, friends and fans of bands and other hangers-on who'd wanted to kick his ass, and they all did at some point or another. Before his breakdown he wrote in his funny asshole voice, which courted some confrontation and conflict. He thrived off of it. He was just starting to find his footing again, which meant reclaiming that voice. He was a bit flattered but taken aback that this girl called him The Writer, instead of The Critic, or The Asshole Critic, or just The Asshole.

The girl had frizzy black hair around a cherubic face with dark eyes, a turned up nose and painted red rosebud lips. She handed him a copy of an album. She told him it was her boyfriend's band and said He loves your writing. Please just say a few words. You can even hate it, he'd even love being hated by you! The band was called The Shards and the album was called Black Mosaic.

He looked the record over at his home. The cover was stupid- a bunch of interlocking black triangles on an offwhite cover. Black Mosaic by The Shards. Fucking Duh, guys. Okay, he thought, I get it. At least one of you has a cute girlfriend who drums up whatever lame publicity for you. I'll write a couple of words about how shitty your shitty album is. If I actually see you out somewhere she'll sneer at me while you grin smugly, thinking That's why you're the critic and we're the Fucking Stars.

Spex considered basing the review on how jaded and tired he'd become, how he was gonna start writing reviews based on album art and band photos. He started jotting down his review saying But actually, here and now, I'm gonna start writing reviews based on the album's weakest track, which is traditionally the second. These bozos get your attention- make their statement of intent- with the first cut, then immediately start slacking off before figuring shit, we need to get your attention again. If the band puts any thought into the second track, I'll give it a listen. And that's what Spex did. He set the needle on the second track. It crackled and popped and then more sounds came out. It felt like some bug, some sickness, hit him. It wasn't the harsh abrasion of some sounds, or how they were juxtaposed against more fluid harmonic ones. It wasn't the vague, miserably intoned lyrics hinting at darker and creepier things. He was used to all of it. He couldn't put his finger on it, but he took the needle off the record before the song ended and just looked at the record a beat. He felt like he was hyperventilating for a second.

He tried typing his KISS review the next day. His fingers were numb. He'd been awake all night, simultaneously jittery and lethargic, like he wanted to tear out of his own body. He went to record and book stores and a couple of museums, looking for comfort in art, music, literature, but none was forthcoming. His brief listen to that fucking record left such a strange array of aesthetic tastes in his mouth-- from sickly-sweet to penny-copper bloody-- that as he flipped through all the records and books and gazed at all the paintings and sculptures they all felt like bullshit to him. Like anybody could put this shit together and who was full of shit and

who was sincere and why did it matter? His guts swirled around and he felt salty bile rising in his throat. He went outside, ducked into an alley and puked his guts out.

When his stomach calmed down he went to the library. Amid the quiet stacks he was able to calm down a bit. The leering and jabbing of questionable artistic notions seemed to subside. But even in the library he felt overwhelmed- so many ideas, so much information, so many possibilities, some good and some bad. He knew, then, he had to go back and weather the record. He'd have to listen to it over and over again. The document won't change but his mind about it might. He didn't feel elated about it so much as relieved. At least his stomach felt calmer.

