

Meet America's Official Resistance Rock Band

ClownStick's Funky Fight against the Cheeto Bitch!

— ANDRE ABARA
STAFF WRITER

It's about three-thirty. I'm sitting up here in the midtown office on a warm Monday afternoon. It's not hot enough to deal with the noise from the funky-ass air conditioner, so I had the window cracked a bit to let some breeze pass by. I was finishing up on something...can't remember what it was. The distraction was a sweet incense smell—similar to spices roasting in an exotic kitchen. I remember leaning back in my chair toward the open window and taking it in...enjoying the sweet mystical puffs that were billowing over the pane, and into the room. Curiosity finally got me, so I went over—pulled the window half way up, and stuck my head out to see what the hell was going on.

Sure enough, there was some guy down there, leaning against the scaffolding—smoking what looked to be a pipe. Intriguing. Who smokes a pipe in an alley on 49th Street just left of Times Square? I watched him for a moment—then went back to my desk to organize my notes before the four o'clock arrived. I had no idea what was coming up. My calendar notes weren't helping much: "ClownStick Interview" was scribbled in. As I wondered what that was supposed to be—One knock, and the door swings open...

"Are you waiting on ClownStick?"

"yeah..."

**"I'm the Underground
Man, and I'm here to
tell you things..."**



The Underground Man
(Tod Rainey)



The bass player from Fiddler: Mike Epperhart

There was something about his energy that made me snap up. He casually invited himself in—sorta laid back in my other chair, and then took a sip of the coffee he arrived with. I gave myself a moment to take him in. “How will I describe this guy?” I was thinking to myself about the article I would write from this meeting...two words popped up: intense swagger. This dude was walking man spread.

“Do you mind if I record this...?”

I pulled out my little Sony—pushing it closer to his side of my desk.

“I’d be a little offended if you didn’t.”

He cracked an authentic Cheshire smile...tilted...then rested his head on his hand—creating a Rodin pose on my high backed, overstuffed chair.

“Great...I have a list of questions here on this legal pad...let’s get started.” I shuffled some pages. “What is your origin story—I mean, how did the band ClownStick get together?”

The Underground Man leaned back again, crossed his legs intellectual style, and began what looked like was going to be a tale...

"It all started at Batman's house..."



"I'M PRETTY MUCH NEW YORK CITY'S GO-TO DEAD BODY."

UNDERGROUND MAN

ClownStick Dumpster Fire Groopie Club President

He let that sink in. I bit.

"What exactly are you referring to? Is that a club or something?"

He responded like a guy who was glad I'd asked.

"I mean, Wayne Manor. There is a mansion somewhere out on Long Island—I'm not sure where exactly... because I crashed on the bus-ride out—but it's the house they use for all the Batman movies...from the Beetlejuice Bitch—all the way up to Gotham...and I was out there making my utilities money...poppin' up in TV and Film. It's my side hustle...more or less...money for nothing. Bit parts...you know what I'm talking 'bout? Yeah, I love those gigs. It isn't because I'm into celeb spotting...I know a lot of celebrities... trust me, they aren't all that interesting. Mostly they are just victims of their own crazy luck. What I especially dig is watching all the professionals. Do you know how many folks it takes to put together a minute of moving digital brain kill shit? Hundreds...and all of them are consummate professionals. A well oiled...finely tuned machine—it is just amazing to watch. It's like an industrial ballet."

By this time all I was thinking was how glad I was that I decided to record this interview. I could tell the Underground Man had a lot to say—and he intended to say most of it. He went on.

"Anyhow, I try to get on a set as much as possible. At this point, I'm mostly known for my dead body work. I'm pretty much New York City's go-to dead body."

I had to ask...so I interrupted,

"Dead body work? Are there a lot of dead body jobs in television and film these days?"

The Underground Man clarified a little.

“Basically it means I can stay motionless a lot longer than most people. You wouldn’t believe how many times I’ve washed up in the East River. Blue Bloods, Gotham, Law and Order—yeah...all that.” But you know what? I am digressing like a mo-fo, so let me get back to your question: origin story. So we are out at Batman’s house, and we were shooting a scene for Madame Secretary. I was in a Swiss Military Band getup because we were supposed to be a celebratory arrival party sorta thing for a bunch of American dignitaries at some make believe Swiss get-down. Madam Secretary was out there...whatever her name is, and some guy playing a fake President. My bit was to stand there in a dorky Swiss military band uniform...and I was supposed to blow some march tune out of an old busted trombone when the limos pulled up. After the blacked out cars rolled in, we were all blown to bits by a bazooka—and that’s how you pay the electric bill in Manhattan. But again, I’m getting way too far off topic...”

The Underground Man took another sip of his coffee and then went back to grinding it out.

“So, In showbiz, there is a lot of waiting around. At one point, where we were all sitting there in holding, I started talking to the tuba guy in the fake Swiss band. We kinda stuck together in the waiting room because we were all dressed up like ice cream men in gay hell. While we were chatting, I found out that my new friend’s main gig was as a pit musician for various Broadway shows. Then I find out that we know all of the same people from the Fiddler tour—because, guess what? He is the bass player from Fiddler...so, you know...whatever.”

I reluctantly interrupted. I was interested in his story, but also aware of the clock...

“I am not following how meeting the bass player from Fiddler has anything to do with the ClownStick origin story...”

"Keep it in your pants scarecrow--we're almost to the yellow brick..."



The Dirty Drummer T-Bone Motta

The Underground Man leaned over on the arm of the chair and savored his quick wit. He seemed to really love his jokes.

“Here is the whole Hoo-Haw on the Dealio, the night before my conversation with the bass player from Fiddler, I had been at an anti-Trump rally over at Columbus Circle. I kinda had a backstage pass because I knew someone who knew someone. At the event, I got to hang out with a lot of folks like Michael Moore, Alec Baldwin, De Niro, and other leaders and activists from the #Resist and #Indivisible movements—and I had mentioned to them that the only thing missing at the rally was a band. Michael Moore said many times that the way to beat down Trump is to make fun of him. Trump can’t handle criticism, humor, sarcasm...all that stuff triggers his tiny mushroom...you follow? So, fast forward back to Wayne Mannon—when I mentioned all that to the bass player from Fiddler, he says: “You know...we can start a band.” So we did.” That’s it: the ClownStick origin story. Now we are the official #Resist Rock Band...more or less.”

"Now we are the Official #Resist Rock Band...more or less."



I decided to dig in a bit deeper.

“So, why are you going by the moniker of the Underground Man? I did some quick research before you arrived, and honestly, it didn’t take more than a couple of seconds of Google to figure out your actual name is Tod Rainey. If you are trying to be anonymous, you are really failing. Tod Rainey brings up about three hundred pages of hits on any search engine.”

The Underground Man pondered that for a moment, and then through cracked a satisfied looking smile.

“I suppose sneaky ‘taint my strong suit. Generally, I’m about as discrete as a bulldozer. Every time we release a song, I immediately send it to the President, Pence, and all the other Deplorables,...on Twitter, Insta, Facebook, and directly to the White House, and coincidentally, every time I start posting and emailing, I get a few death threats. I decided I needed a bit of a showbiz #resistance #indivisible sorta name, so I came up with the Underground Man. I’m also hella’ deep into Dostoyevsky, so there’s that... but yeah, I am actually the Tod from the Book of Tod.”

“What is the Book of Tod?” I was really not following...

“The Book of Tod is my semi-spiritual, mostly hilarious, owners manual to life. Basically, it’s a blog that I started as a joke, and it kinda took off on it’s own. I am actually getting a Book of Tod Bible published, and starting a webcast under the same name. Really, it’s just notes and advice to myself, but I guess something resonated with others, so now I actually have some cult followers— less followers than Baby J, but who knows—there’s still time.”

I wanted to know more, but I needed to get back to the band, so I redirected...

“So, where are you from?”

“I live somewhere on the Upper West Side.”

“Your whole Life?”

“As long as I can remember. I am actively not remembering anywhere before that. New York is the city of Super Heroes and Super Villains. As far as I’m concerned, either’s good company. For now, this town seems to be the only place I can fit in. I guess we’ll all find out later where.”

**"NEW YORK IS THE CITY
OF SUPER HEROES AND
SUPER VILLAINS. AS FAR
AS I'M CONCERNED,
EITHER'S GOOD
COMPANY."**

UNDERGROUND MAN

I threw out my next stock question.

“What got you into music?”

“Well, before I was a singer...I was a musician.”

He’s laughing to himself again.

“ Don’t worry...only instrumentalists actually get that joke. I started out wanting to be a jazz bass player —and even though I was able to play some clubs, and tour a bit with a circus band a long time ago—when I finally got to study with a famous bass player...he pointed out that I sucked too hard to make a career out of it. Essentially he said he was one of the best bassists in the world, and he was having a hard time making a career out of playing jazz.” That revelation broke my heart back then, but it turned out to be the kindest thing any mentor has ever done for me. We need a lot more honest gatekeepers out there—especially in the colleges. The whole music degree scam is the worst pay to play ripoff out there. I’m ramblin’ again...next question.”

I referred to my legal pad.

“In my research, I read that you were on track to becoming a pretty reputable opera singer. Why did you stop singing dramatic roles around the world?” Or...did you?

“I guess that’s about right—I was quite the aspiring heroic screamer for awhile...but yeah, I’ve pretty much hung up the testies at this point. When I started singing, I was a bass. After a year or two of study, I was told I was a baritone. When I got my scholarship to go to Indiana University, they decided I was a tenor...so you see, I had to give it up. We all know what comes after tenor...am I right?—I was just too scarred of where this opera singing shit was headed.”



Alec Bart of ClownStick as Trump

**"I've pretty much hung up
the testies at this point."**

UNDERGROUND MAN

I swallowed my laugh, and tried to get back on task.

“Let’s get to the story of the band...who are they and where did you find them?”

“Bout time we get to that...they are the interesting part of this story.”

The Underground Man looked like he was arranging his notes in his head.

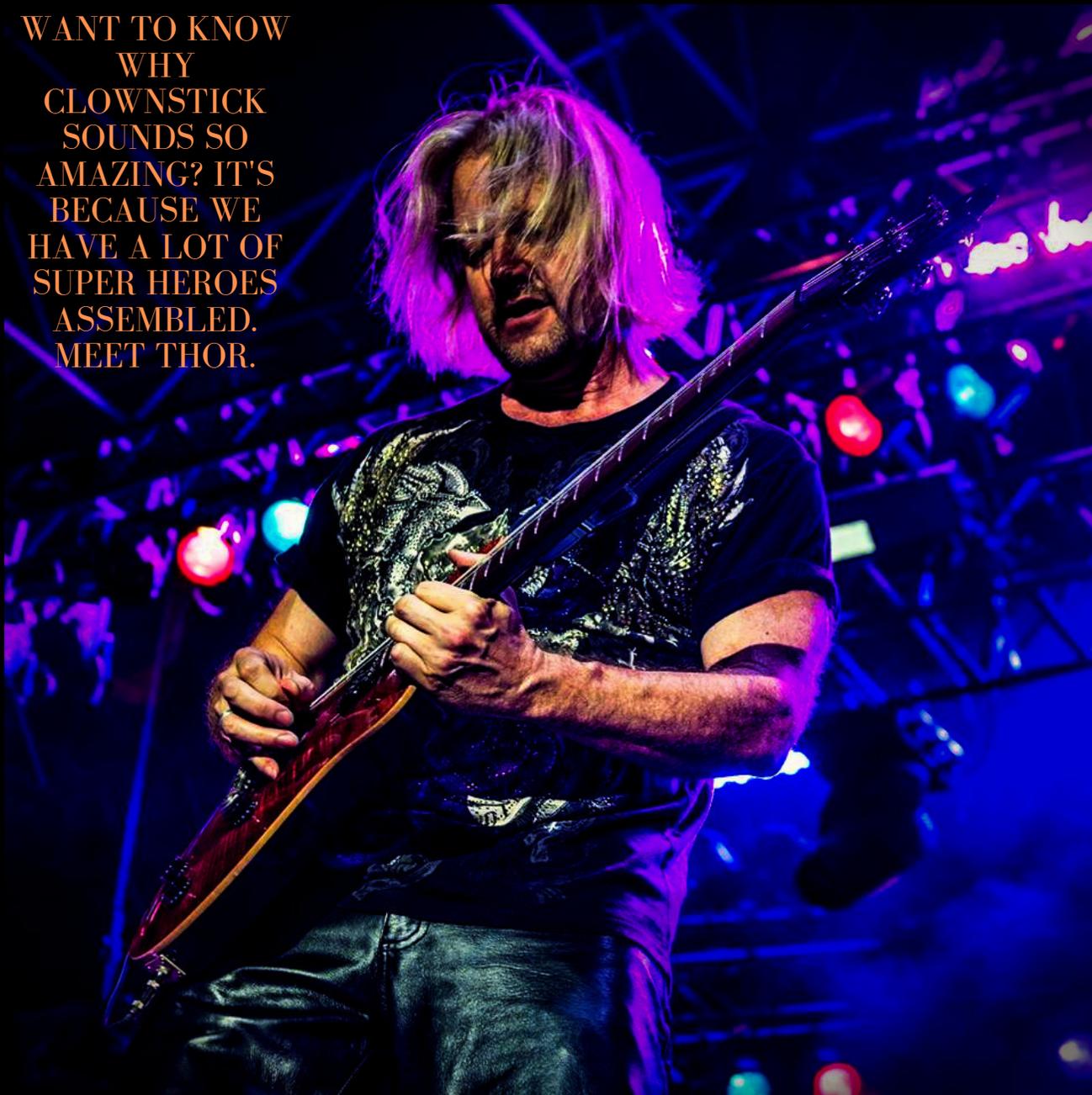
So—let’s start with the bass player from Fiddler since he is the co-founder of the project. His name is Mike Epperheart, and he is an absolute bad ass musician. He is constantly playing in Broadway pits, on tour, in the studio...the guy is on top of everyone’s call list, and he is seriously reliable with the time and feel of any type of chart. He is pretty much the ass saver in whatever group he is in...and he’s cool with that. Next there’s Alec Bart playing Accordion and Keyboards. This guy is also a major monster. He does all the Broadway pit stuff like the bass player from Fiddler, and right now he is usually conducting the Book of Mormon on Broadway. How’s that grab ya? Yeah—he’s fucking incredible. When you hear his Hip Hop Accordion Chops—you’re going to need new pants...that’s all I’m sayin’ about that. And...speaking of Broadway conductors and music directors...the cat playing the piano is Jonathan Ivie—known around town as Jivie. He was the music director for Rock of Ages, A Wall Apart, and he’s also constantly on tour, or in the studio somewhere. When it comes to piano, Jivie is a one man—two handed—gang-bang of felt hammers. It’s hard to look away from his virtuosity...and I’m sharing that from personal experience.”

The Underground Man took a pregnant pause as if to savor the thought of all those hammers. Then, a satisfied sigh, and we were back.



ClownStick's Steinway Tickler Jivie

WANT TO KNOW
WHY
CLOWNSTICK
SOUNDS SO
AMAZING? IT'S
BECAUSE WE
HAVE A LOT OF
SUPER HEROES
ASSEMBLED.
MEET THOR.



ClownStick's Guitar God Chad Quist

“The next two genius musicians require special attention because they are actual real-life Rock Stars! Chad Quist, who takes complete care of the guitar department for the band is currently the lead guitarist in Heart...well, the re-boot of Heart. They are now called: Heart by Heart—I’m guessing so they don’t have to sue themselves for copywriter stuff. Nobody asked me, but I think they should have gone with Broken Heart. Anyhow...whatever. Despite all that, Chad has played and recorded with basically everyone you have heard of, and the most amazing thing about his work is he can instantly invent licks and riffs in pretty much any style you want. He might switch axes between charts, but he has something perfect ready at the drop of a downbeat. Chad Quist is the tits of ClownStick, and believe me...his guitar rack is spectacular.

Now we get to Mr. T-Bone. T-Bone Motta is truly a wonderful person. He is also an absolutely incredible drummer. He is a famous Rock Star from his work with Public Enemy, and honestly...I can't believe I'm lucky enough to actually know him. What he brings to the band is more or less everything, and all of us who get to work with him a little bit are completely honored and in awe of his feel, deep pocket, and vibe in general. If I say much more, I will start tearing, so I will say just this about Mr. T-Bone and the rest of the musicians that are contributing their exceptional skills and precious time to ClownStick: I have basically one mentor. Chuck (he's the mentor) told me if I want to get good—the only way is to surround yourself with folks who are better than you, and try to rise up. Everyone in ClownStick is so far above my skill level that I am pissing myself whenever I'm around them. I'll never rise up to their level, but it's the thrill of my life to keep trying.

I had a burning question that wasn't in my notes.

“So...I have to know...How on Earth did you get one of the most accomplished drummers in New York...the drummer for the world renowned band Public Enemy...to play for ClownStick?”

“I asked him very nicely.”

The Underground Man leaned back in his chair and let out a sinister chuckle. At first I imagined that the devil might chuckle like that—then I looked at the source, and decided it sounded more like the guy who kicked the devil's ass.



ClownStick's Drummer Mr. T-Bone

“Is there anything else our readers should know about the band members?”

“Yeah...the singers who have contributed to ClownStick are also amazing people. Because I have been working bi-coastal, I’ve been recording in NYC and Seattle. I really wanted to find a fairly diverse group to sing with us, and I did. Despite the diversity, these artists all have something in common: they’re all great vocalists. In Seattle we had Anasofia Gallegos, Sam I Am, Laura McLeod, and Miranda Troutt. On the New York tracks you will hear Marina Mazzamuto, Kaitlyn Lunardi, Taylor Marsh, and Tori Sasso. All of the ClownStick singers are major killers.

“So, what’s next for the band? Where are you guys gigging?”

The Underground Man cracked a half smile.

“The only interest at this point in America have been the folks who are sending me death threats. There are a couple of producers in Sweden and Paris who are very interested—so our plan is to conquer the World—via Stockholm. I’m headed over there at some point to negotiate a contract, and then we’ll make sure everyone knows where to catch us.”



ClownStick's Hip Hop accordion player Alec Bart

I went to my next question.

“What would you say that the music of ClownStick sounds like?”

“I would say we sound like a melting pot burning in a fire. We are the official #Resistance Rock Band, so we’re representing the folks out there who are ready to rumble out a revolution. Essentially, our sound is what you want on your playlist when you’re storming the Bastille. We’re also tryin’ to fuck with mushroom dick’s head—so we’re representing every style we can—that isn’t Alt-White. White culture is polka. It’s no wonder the cracker clan had to steal everything cool.”

I started to wonder how far underground the Underground Man actually was. My inner voice is suggesting this dude is in the shit pretty deep. I made the decision to plunge into the rabbit hole.

“Using words like revolution make me think you are buying into the slow moving coup conspiracy that the extreme left is pitching.”

The Underground Man got real intense. He looked at me like it was getting personal. After a few beats, he gave me this answer.

“Well, here’s the whole
Hoo-Haw on the
Dealio...I’m not one of
those tin foil hat
types...well, sorta...I
guess more like tin foil
 earmuffs more or less...”

UNDERGROUND MAN

...but I absolutely believe in conspiracies. Want an example? Here’s an absolute conspiracy for you: Did you know that white people make up only about ten percent of all the folks in the world...and yet, somehow the rest of everybody else has been convinced they are the minority. There’s some wicked shit going on there. It’s no wonder that those Tiki-Torch Bitches are runin’ scared after Trump. It’s gonna get seriously ugly, but when we finally get that piece of shit mother fucker out of the White House—I think we will finally be at the beginning of the end of it. The most amazing thing about this whole shit-show is how eager the trailer box crispy crackers keep pokin’ their little heads in the bug zapper. If there’s anything I’ve learned in this life...“fuck me harder” isn’t the best safe word—and yet the trailer trash class can stop screaming it. To quote Mary McFucking Poppins: It’s a puzzlement. Meanwhile—as all those tools are running around their sheds—our country...made by immigrants...for immigrants... seeking the pursuit of happiness, and all that good stuff...well, let’s face it...we’ve turned into the Death Star. And now Darth Cheddar has started kidnapping helpless kids and putting them in cages! It’s like Erlking shit. We have to find the courage to stop what these bitches are doing at the border before the rest of the world is forced to stop it for us. The concentration camps and kidnapping policies are crimes against humanity. I’m supposin’ on top of all the money laundering, obstruction, tyranny, and treason—at some point, Trump’s gonna start feeling the tap on the shoulder from the Hague. Whatever—I could rant for hours—that’s why we had to start the band...it’s how we’re protesting—it’s how we’re resisting. How we feel about this horror is in our music...listen to it...it’s all in there.”

It was time to wrap it up, so I decided to ask the Underground Man one last question. Here was my closer.

“What if one of those death threats is successful? How would the Underground Man want to be remembered?”

The Underground Man folded upon himself for a moment—his elbows found his knees, and his chin rested on his clasped hands. He almost looked like he was going to start a prayer. Then the dark sinister chuckle came back. It was reverberating the room as he resurrected himself to the back of the chair. Through a storm-cloud of zen, and an almost full grin, the Underground Man answered.

“I’m guessin’ my obit would be a short haiku...more or less. You want to hear it? Here it is:

**HERE LIES A
PHILOSOPHER,
A POET,
AND A
MUTHA FUCKIN' PIMP."**

