

# backbeat

and other chaotic rhythms



## “Inspired by Dullness”

Just the other day, you were saying that you wanted to hear something different, popwise, that you were well and truly bored with all the merely adequate product bombarding your senses and thus making you feel that everything's just... okay. Well now, here's something new and truly different, and it comes perhaps not surprisingly from L.A.'s own neglected sons Ron and Russell Mael, a.k.a. Sparks. *Lil' Beethoven* (Palm) is the name of the boys' fresh album, which is not just an album but rather an opus or small symphony or a work similarly grand and upwardly striving and not just your average pop/rock high standard of standardness.

**“Inspired by Dullness.  
Sparks' *Jokus Opus*”  
by John Payne.  
(August 8-14, 2003)**

It's because all things pop have in general become so impossibly forking dull that Ron and Russell were forced to take drastic measures, and so with *Lil' Beethoven* they reached, reached, reached for the stars.

“It took a little over a year,” says Ron. “We had a whole album of songs that were going to be the follow-up to the *Balls* album, and then we just got so frustrated, and we sort of scrapped the songs and wanted to start with another approach. We weren't even sure what that approach was. We were sure it'd be song-based, and usually we would just go in the studio and hash it out. But this time around we decided not to work that way.”

“We were finding lack of inspiration in a lot of areas in life,” says Russell.

“It's too limiting to have songs that are just about something specific,” says Ron. “If we do something, it's nice to have a layer of meanings to it.”

## LA Weekly Raves!!

Musically and conceptually, *Lil' Beethoven* is quite an audacious project, and that it succeeds so well is testimony to the sheer boredom that prompted its creation.

The upshot is an album full of that thing you want and need — surprise. The surprises arise from the Mael brothers' unusual way of assembling the pieces, which involved much shifting and editing and filtering of the instrumental and vocal parts with the aid of computer software and other processes that shall remain secret. I hasten to point out that none of this veers off into the realm of the avant-garde; the miraculous thing is how *Lil' Beethoven* seems to give birth to a new musical genre. But what that genre shall be called, um . . .

“It sounds arrogant,” says Ron modestly, “but we wanted to do something very important and ambitious. It doesn't seem like enough people are being pretentious in a good way. Although we know that most bands wouldn't want to go through what we had to go through to come up with this record.”

## What is Branding and Why Do You Want It?

Talking about branding is like talking about leadership. There are coaches and courses which purport to “teach” leadership, but as we all sense — that’s why we want so badly to learn it — leadership comes from character and inner qualities. It’s an extension of beliefs and values the person holds and then acts out in their life, an integral part of their personality. You can’t pick up “character” in a seminar. It comes from years of reading, work on yourself, exposure to great literature, great art and great people, and plain old experience.

Leadership isn’t going to a seminar and coming back saying, “Let’s do a mission statement,” it’s being so devoted to mission yourself others can’t wait to get around you, find out what it is, and partake of it. Leaders lead because other people want to follow them. There’s no other reason.

Leadership isn’t a surface thing, and neither is branding. It’s what you stand for, your personality. It’s your soul and what you’re about.

The way you get your brand across is projecting your personality — who you ARE — in every aspect of your business. What your web page looks like, the wording, the inclusion of quotes or not, graphics, the way you handle your customers, how

well you deliver products, promises and services.

Fiddling around with your logo and business card are superficial things. They make an impression on your consumer, yes, but they don’t have power; they only have “veto” power. No one ever booked your services because of your business card, but someone may have vetoed you because of it. There are some terrible business cards out there, and people DO form immediate and initial impressions. I’m thinking of the therapist I know who — believe it or not — has a neon fuchsia business card. This is not the person I want doing therapy on me or anyone I know. On the other hand, I never looked at an attorney’s business card and said, “This is the man I want to represent me in court.”

We bond with businesses the same way we do with people — through their personalities.

When I think about Dave, God rest his soul in peace, and Wendy’s, I think ‘just a comfortable place to be.’ Actually I knew Dave, our kids played soccer together, and he was just the same way in person as he was on the TV screen. Now THAT’S branding.

*Susan Dunn*



## The Scatter-Shot Theory of HIP Communications

In the English language, we have enormous difficulty with definition. There are entire branches of philosophy and logic devoted to little else but defining terms. Science had all but abandoned English as being too imprecise, preferring the language of numbers.

The language of Hip cleverly sidesteps this problem. Where in English we are concerned with communicating exactly what we want to convey and nothing else, the hipster is satisfied if what he says

manages to “include” what he means. Imagine the difference between shooting a dime at twenty paces with a .22 rifle, and with a 12 gauge shotgun, and you will have a rough approximation of the difference between English and Hip.

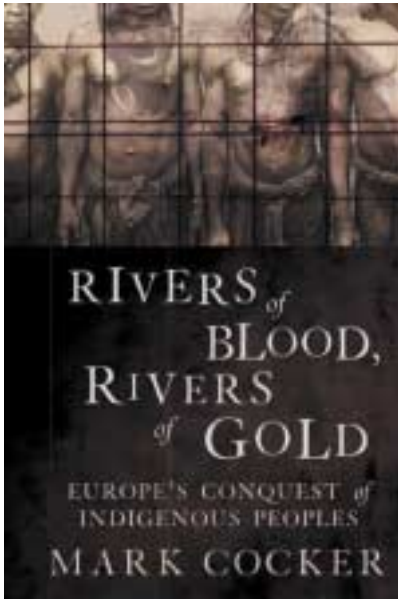
Hip is a language of thundering generalities. It is more concerned with intense emotional states than with specific ideas, and in this respect can be said to be anti-intellectual.

*The Hip Manual — RookNet*



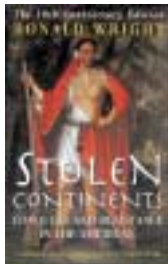
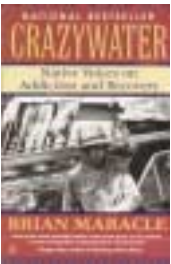
## BOOK REVIEW:

## Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold

**Other Recommended Readings:**

*Crazywater: Native Voices on Addiction and Recovery*, Brian Maracle

*Stolen Continents: Conquest and Resistance in the Americas*, Ronald Wright



Have I mentioned that I love books? In fact, my main reason for becoming a designer was to design books. I'm the guy that reads crossing the street, going up the elevator — pretty much anywhere that I think I encounter dead time. My books act as my briefcase — I keep a few business cards in the book I'm reading, keep notes and draw thumbnails on the inside covers. Suffice it to say that I'm a bit of a book nut.

What do I read? — anything that comes to hand — history, philosophy, mysticism, physics, novels.

Recently, as I was scouring the shelves, I came across "Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold". It's cover reminded me of Peter Gabriel's "Biko" album. Despite a name that might grace a Quentin Tarantino film, I was intrigued.

Revisionist history has existed for about fifty years and is still not mainstream. For the most part history has been written by the adage "he who is in power, controls the history." This means that we have a very biased perspective of world history. In fact, the viewpoint is so slanted that some people rightly say, "what's the point of studying history if it's really just a one sided story?"

While most revisionists have revisited historical events based on a sociological points of

view, there is an ever growing element revisiting the view of aboriginal peoples. The first popular book that I read about history from an aboriginal point of view was "Stolen Continents" by Canadian writer Ronald Wright.

"Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold" by Mark Cocker is a gripping, very readable history of four aboriginal cultures — Mexico, Tasman, Apache, and Herero — and their encounters and subsequent collapse with European invaders (Spanish, English, American, and German respectively).

The book consists of four chapters. Each chapter is a powerful snapshot of amazingly gut-wrenching collapse and brutality. In fact, while I highly recommend the book and feel that it will provide much needed insight into current aboriginal social crises, I suggest that you read a chapter and then take a break before continuing to the next. Some elements of the book are absolutely mind-numbing. Cocker tries to present the histories with fairness as he explains the outlooks of both sides of the conflicts. It's not just another apologist book.

In the end, you are left thinking about issues of intolerance and respect in the modern world and wondering if we have learned anything at all. Right, Mr. Bush?

*Robert Hoselton*

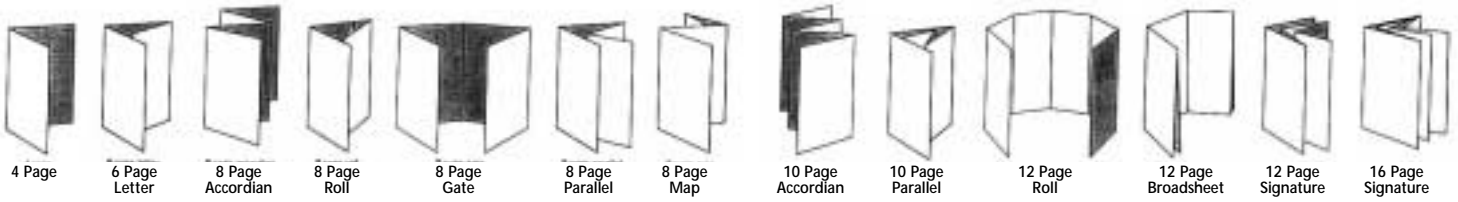
## Who Knew?

NEW YORK (AP) — Former teen idol Tab Hunter is writing his memoirs, in which he acknowledges he's gay and discusses co-stars including Natalie Wood, Lana Turner and Gary Cooper.

"For anyone curious to know my story, I wanted to be sure that they're getting it from the horse's mouth," the 72-year-old Hunter, star of such 1950s films as "Battle Cry" and "Damn Yankees!" said in a recent statement issued by his publisher, Simon & Schuster.

The book, currently untitled, is scheduled for release in 2005.

The tall, blond actor was a favorite among young filmgoers in the 1950s. He also had a No. 1 song, the ballad "Young Love." His career faded in the 1960s, although he later starred in John Waters' 1981 cult classic "Polyester."



## You gotta know when to fold them!

For every designer, there's a particular element of the job that is the most outstanding. For some, it's content, for others it's concept or colour. For many, it's paper — the tactile element of the designer's world. Even if it is white and coated, each paper has a quality all its own and you'll hear designers speak of paper the way some people speak of wine.

For designers who love paper, a project's success or failure can often be measured by the paper and how it is being used. It's the "touch appeal" of paper and the folding pattern that make it so attractive. (Ok, settle down, I'm not a perv. I'm

just trying to convey how some designers feel. Let's just say, I know this designer...)

Part of knowing your papers is understanding how folds work. Paper has a grain like wood, which means that you can fold with and against a grain. Folding against the grain is sometimes a necessity but usually means cracking the paper. (One of the reason why scores are needed to ensure an even fold line.) Some folds work better with different thicknesses of paper. Obviously the more folds there are, the more difficult it is to control the paper. The industry has a number of standards (shown

above). Each fold is designed to show off your collateral to its best.

For designers, understanding folds is an important aspect of delivering an impact product.

Sooner or later, if you hang around designers, you'll see a group of them passing a brochure or other product around the office squealing with excitement. It usually means that they've discovered a new fold!

Robert Hoselton

## ...a little folding exercise

