



Phishstock

Some don't want to bathe, and some just want to dance, and some are on their last brain cells. But these kids aren't angry rebels. They're the huggable (if you're not worried about ruining your clothes) disciples of Phish

BY PETER RICHMOND

Photographs by Micheal McLaughlin

The overhead view is of more than 70,000 of them, horizon to horizon in the Adirondack dusk, a rolling flotsammed sea of matted dreads and shirtless torsos, redolent of pot and patchouli, of beer and the sweat-scent of days spent baking in the sun and broiling in the tents. They are the ninth-largest city in New York State at this moment, gathered for the largest concert in North America in 1996. And the band is one you've never heard of. Which would be curious enough.

But then thousands of them start to sing, giddily, en masse, to the odd lyrics of the odd songs by this odd band, songs you've never heard but that they've obviously been singing along to for years—the lyrics are mantras by now—and it's not just the sheer volume of the chorus that startles. It's the sudden realization that an entire stealth subculture has slipped past your radar undetected, while *Good Morning America* was telling you over toast that Tom Cruise had saved a stranded yachtsman or *All Things Considered* was reporting on the plight of the Guyana rubber tree while you were taking a bath.

This would have been appropriate, actually, because to some of them the bathtub is a symbol. "Keep recording this," a kid says into my tape recorder one day, "so you can listen to it at home when *you* take your bath." He himself has not bathed in a considerable while, but if truth be told, the ma-



Nation

majority of them are more than clean enough, if you count as typical the girl near my tent who washes her long, brown hair using bottled water, then uses the hair to wash under her arms, which, when you think about it, is not only resourceful but also true to their dogma of recycling.

It only stands to reason that it would be impossible to avoid being hit by a cutting edge this big. Unless you were looking for it in the wrong place, or facing in the wrong direction when it came. And unless it wasn't very sharp.

You thought you knew about the children. You thought you had an idea. You've seen the Gap ads and the Calvin Klein billboards, scanned the magazine covers, watched some Green Day videos. If you're not entirely certain whether it's the Pilots or the Pumpkins who had the overdose or whether Michael Stipe is bisexual or whatsexual, you've still listened to enough Alanis and watched enough VH1 to feel pretty confident in venturing the opinion that their fashions are forged in sex and attitude, that their lives are fashioned on boredom and sneer and spiritual malaise. At the very least, you thought you knew what they were doing for the weekend.

Turns out you haven't a clue. Turns out they're not nihilistic and jaded. They're not even lost. In fact, they're easy to

find. At least in August, anyway, when tens of thousands of them trekked to New York State's northern border for a two-day concert that grossed \$3.5 million, featuring the music of a band that has spawned the most devoted following in modern music, despite the modest sales of every album it's made in the past ten years. It was called the Clifford Ball, and you never heard about it. Which may say more about you than it does about them, if you think about it, although you're probably better off not thinking about it. Thinking about it misses the point entirely.

Imagine an imaginary baseball team from somewhere like Galveston, Texas, called, say, the Land Crabs. Imagine that the Land Crabs are not in an organized league because, while they play a *kind* of baseball, they change the rules every time they play, partly for fun and partly because they know their fans love to be surprised. One night, maybe, they remove second base, and then the next night the outfielders face backward. The Land Crabs have no interest in being recognized or seeking Nike's approval or securing a network contract, even though they're very good athletes, and one of them would be an all-star; they simply like playing their weird version of baseball.

Now imagine that they go from city to city playing exhibitions. They don't publicize their visits by any conventional



means—no interviews, no advertising of any kind—but their fans know they're coming because it says so on their Web site and in their newsletter, which circulates to 150,000. In New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Boston and Indianapolis, they sell out swiftly. They sell out four shows at Red Rocks, in Denver, in less than an hour. They even sell 25,000 tickets in Hershey, Pennsylvania. At a chocolate theme park.

One day the Land Crabs decide to rent a field somewhere that's so big it's designated as the northeastern United States' emergency landing site for the space shuttle, and they sell 135,000 tickets, which doesn't count those who just show up and get in anyway.

Now translate baseball into music and you have Phish, and you have Phishstock.

"It's not just a concert. It's something divine. It's pretty sacred. This is like church for me" is what Paul says Thursday night; he's an earnest-looking, baseball-hatted kid with intense and appraising eyes, way old for his 23 years. My tent is next to Paul's tent. This weekend-long Phish festival, the Clifford Ball, is somewhere between Paul's eightieth and hundredth Phish concert, although technically the Ball is six concerts over two days, and technically it's a little more than a concert. It has its own radio station, for one thing. For another, the band has brought in an entire symphony to play between sets.

Paul is smoking his pot through something that looks like a building in a Dr. Seuss book, like a four-inch-tall cooling tower at a nuclear power plant: a bowl at one end and no mouthpiece at the other, just a hole for Paul to cup his hands around and breathe in the smoke from the cave of his fingers, so that his lips never touch the pipe.

"No germs," says his friend Jen. Jen is also 23. In real life, Jen works on an organic-vegetable farm in Vero Beach, Florida, but she's been on the road for most of the summer. Jen met Paul selling vegetables at a stand downstate, in Binghamton. Jen is pretty in the way animated Disney characters are pretty. She has hair like fleece. She is given to sudden wide-blue-eyed bursts of laughter at things, as if she's

Tents sprout around us like designer mushrooms, which are also available. At the concession stands, you can buy \$45 handblown pipes, jerk chicken and, of course, cappuccino.

been alive for four days. I came upon Jen earlier Thursday night, in the parking lot, which is really a runway, near the control tower of the decommissioned Plattsburgh Air Force Base—the only place big enough to hold the Phish Nation.

Jen had been sitting with her back to a car as thousands of vehicles with plates from Alaska and Wyoming and Tennessee streamed onto the runway. She was disconsolate. She'd trekked to the tower to try to join the Green Crew—also known as the Care Bears—the team of kids who voluntarily police the grounds of every Phish concert. But she hadn't been able to talk her way past the security guards.

So we walked back into the campground, which was like *Night of the Living Deadheads* filmed in a Civil War prison camp, except that the tents were from catalogs and were colored magenta, teal, gold and black. At the bazaar along the main footpath, a concession stand was selling \$45 handblown pipes and \$3 cantaloupes. There were food booths offering jerk chicken wings and blackened string beans that you could frequent after you used the pipes. And there was a cappuccino booth near where Jen had pitched her tent, which made it a good spot for me to pitch mine.

Now tents sprout around us like a thousand designer mushrooms, which are also available. "Need any 'shrooms? I have one antelope 'shroom left, and I have some atomics, if



you're interested," one kid says. But Paul and Jen are interested only in beer and wine and the Dr. Seuss pipe.

"The music keeps us together," Paul tells me, "but it's so much more than a band, you know. It's history. It's one of the purer things happening on the earth right now, anyway."

Paul's parents are ex-Deadheads. His dad was an addict who is now sober and listens to Christian music. Paul is one of the subset of Phish-heads who go to Phish concerts in order to elevate themselves, and the world, to a place where they can patch up the psychic wounds of their parents' generation, like an updated version of the kids who surrounded the Pentagon to make it levitate, and afterward told you it worked. Being proselytized by Paul is not as annoying as, say, being lobbied by the milk industry, but it is something of a relief to find that Jen is a little less grandiose about it. "It's fun to come and dance and feel free for a little while," she says. "I just want to drink some good beer and smoke some good nugs, you know?"

She means pot. I never ask for the etymology. But it rhymes with *hugs*, which she does a lot. Within the first half hour of my meeting her, Jen hugged me for rescuing her spirits. Within the hour, she hugged me again for being so supportive of her decision to be independent and not rely on her boyfriends, because she is trying to be her own woman. It eventually gets so Jen hugs me for reasons that completely elude me, although I never mind. Hugging seems to be Jen's currency. Then, she needs a currency. Any currency. She and Paul are out of money and have a flat and no spare.

Jen had been to a lot of Dead concerts before she went to her first Phish concert not long ago and found the new, improved version of American Cult-Band Allegiance to be far superior to the old in several respects, not the least of which is that at Phish concerts you don't see the kind of crowd anarchy that marked the Dead's last tour, in 1995—the Tour From Hell, the band called it—when some Deadheads got out of hand and crashed the gates, and Jerry canceled a subsequent show and later died. At the Clifford Ball, when some kids try to vault the fence, the security people come over and tell them to walk over to the gate and come in free.

And then there's Phish's music, which can be as good as the Dead's, sometimes better. Their music has been called improvisational rock and hippie rock. Mostly they jam. Actually, the band is sort of incidental, although without it there'd be no Phish Nation. This part is hard to explain. You know how in ancient Greece the gods weren't part of daily life and most likely didn't exist at all, but without them there would have been no civilization? That's something like Phish and their following: The idea of the band as a guiding force is more important than the band itself.

One day during the Clifford Ball, Jon Fishman, the band's drummer, takes a golf cart out into the campground and wheels around in the middle of the Phish Nation and no one recognizes him.

The first concert won't start until the next day, but Phish kids need to dance the way sharks need to move forward, so Jen takes me to the drum circle in the middle of the camp, where hundreds of kids dance in loosely concentric rings around several people pounding on drums.

Jen starts dancing out on the fringe with her eyes closed and her hands pressed in front of her as if in prayer, a blonde Shiva, until a wasted kid with hair like a woven-straw doormat that no one has cleaned in several years interrupts her to offer a hit of his bottle of Jack Daniel's. Blasted-brain hedonists are in a minority in the Phish family, indulged the way other families indulge black-sheep relatives at Christmas. But no one wants his bourbon. On top of which, it isn't sanitary. I decline. But I play his drum for a second, and after I give it back to him, Jen hugs me again.

It's not your fault you've never heard of them. Not if, like everyone you know, your tastes in life are dictated by marketing campaigns that tell you what you're supposed to like. Probably the only way you'd have noticed them is if you were

driving, say, on vacation, on I-70 outside of Lawrence, Kansas, surfing way down the low end of the radio band for NPR and you came across a local college's eleven-watt FM station playing a song that went on too long, but you kept listening because of the odd flashes of remarkable musicianship—as in a Santana-like knife slice or a riffle of Keith Jarrett keyboard—or because of the odder flashes of humor if it was one of their songs praising pavement. A couple of minutes later, a 19-year-old deejay trying to affect a junkie's nonchalance, even though he had a poli-sci exam the next day, said, "And that was Phish."

Fish? Fishbone? Country Joe and the Fish? Then, before long, you'd pass a mid-'80s Corolla with a Dead decal on it, but also a decal with a rainbow cartoon of a fish, or one of those little fish symbols that you had always thought said "Jesus," only now you realized half of them say "Phish." They're something you never noticed before; then once you start looking for them, they're everywhere, like mile markers on the interstate.

Which means that hundreds of thousands of kids are following a band all over the country—even to Europe—that no one has ever told them to follow, that they found on their own: a band that has eluded the musings of cultural pundits who profess to have their fingers on the pulse. Which sort of

proves that the trend makers and the pulse gaugers are missing the point entirely, which is that if you put down this magazine, go outside and ask the first white teenager or college kid you find about Phish (unless they work on Wall Street or Capitol Hill, in which case they don't know anything about anything), he or she will nod and recite the order of all the songs Phish played in Buffalo Tuesday night, the way some people can recite all the at bats of DiMaggio's fifty-six-game hitting streak.

Not that they'll be happy that you asked. Some of the Phish kids have a saying: "Welcome to your first Phish concert. Now go home."

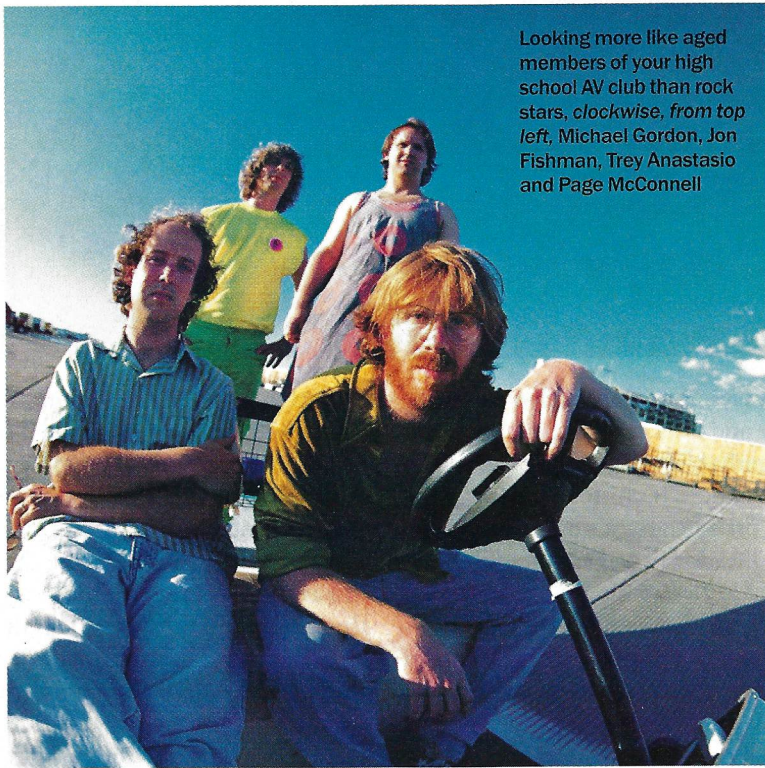
They call it the Clifford Ball because several years ago the band saw a plaque in the Pittsburgh airport honoring some-

one named Clifford Ball, the pioneer of airmail: A BEACON OF LIGHT IN THE WORLD OF FLIGHT. They hired a local artist to build a thirty-foot statue of Clifford Ball in the middle of the festival site and then flew Mr. Ball's grandson up from Miami, which is pretty indicative of the band's sense of humor. During the festival, they also hired a plane to tow banners saying, A DIME FROM HERE WOULD PENETRATE and RUNNING LOW ON FUEL—NO JOKE. You may like

that kind of thing. Maybe not. Maybe you're beyond bands that do things like sail over the crowd in a giant hot dog suspended from the ceiling. But no matter what you think of them, you have to agree that they are definitely not arch, not hip, not cynical and, above all, not cool, which effectively distances Phish from every band you've ever seen on MTV or read interviewed in *Rolling Stone*.

You could call them the first meaningful post-ironic rock band, I guess, but you're better off if you don't call them anything at all and just shut up and enjoy the show. That's what everyone else does. On Friday afternoon, as soon as the band launches into the first song of the first set of the day—"Chalk-Dust Torture," a lively rock ramble with lyrics that make little sense mostly because the band likes it that way—the entire crowd is suddenly danc-

ing, even when they're so smooshed together that all they can do is sort of wriggle and contort as if they're mummified. Those who feel the need to dance more demonstratively find their way to the fringes of the crowd, where there are spaces reserved for dervishing. They are even dancing on the platforms up in the scaffolding that holds up the stage, which is where Sam, the halter-topped girl who dances nonstop at most Phish concerts, until everything she's wearing is completely drenched and her hair hangs like seaweed, will dance nonstop to every song at this one. The only place they aren't dancing is behind the light tower, where the tapers are cordoned off to do their taping undisturbed. Part of the reason Phish albums don't sell is that the band encourages its fans to tape the concerts,



Looking more like aged members of your high school AV club than rock stars, clockwise, from top left, Michael Gordon, Jon Fishman, Trey Anastasio and Page McConnell

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which they then trade on the Internet; the average Phish fanatic owns a library of 200 tapes.

During Friday afternoon's set, no one rushes the stage or dives off it or needs to touch a musician, because the kids don't think of the band that way. The band doesn't think of itself that way, either. Jon Fishman plays his drums wearing a shapeless housedress, or sometimes he plays naked, and while he's a nice guy, you wouldn't want to jump him. Page McConnell, the piano player, who prefers to play with his back to the crowd, favors button-down shirts and looks like the kid who won the science fair by proving that mice are omnisequential. Bass player Mike Gordon stands still, never smiling, beneath a shag haircut that looks like something from a Yes album cover circa 1974. And Trey Anastasio, red haired and red bearded, likes to play his guitar wearing a yellow-green shirt made out of fabric that belongs on a couch in the lobby of an \$18-a-night motel.

A

kid named Roy has set up his tent next to me and Paul and Jen. He's having a between-set repast of George Dickel Tennessee sipping whiskey and Dr. Pepper. Roy took a couple of weeks off his job making pizza in Alabama and drove fourteen hours straight.

"The people I work with said, 'You're going all the way to New York to see a band?'" Roy has long black hair and impenetrable shades. "I said, 'It's not just any band. You wouldn't understand.'"

All around Roy, in the tents, his friends nod, like bobble-head dolls. "It's like an underground," Roy says. "But it's aboveground."

Around us kids are trucking their empties to the metal Dumpsters, where, instead of tossing the bottles in and breaking them, they line the bottles up on the lip of the container, so they look like votive candles. "We've learned," Paul says, "how not to let things get out of hand." And, in fact, the Phishgrounds are ridiculously well behaved; there's a tangible absence of subversion, of subversive impulses of any kind. They seem to know innately how to govern themselves, which may be proof that Jean-Jacques Rousseau was right when he said 235 years ago that the children will do fine if you just leave them to raise themselves. Or maybe it's just easy to regulate your society when all you need are nugs, major-chord progressions and vegetarian burritos. And Dad lends you the Taurus for the weekend. At the first-aid tent, next to the coffee concession, several bored paramedics sit around sipping *latte* while ten beds sit empty.

"In the middle of the night, I went through the campground," John Langenstein tells me. Langenstein is the head of Phish security. He left Jackson Browne to work for "the boys," as he calls them. He is wearing a Phillies jersey with his name on it. "I've never been called sir so many times in my life. They kept saying, 'Sir, could you turn out the light so we can sleep?'"

"It costs a lot of money to follow Phish around—hippies with gourmet eyeglasses, you know, running around in their

Saabs and shit," Ben Halloway-Jones says. "You walk through the parking lot, it's a pretty affluent crowd." Walking through the parking lot this day, I see a Lexus, several mid-sized vans from Detroit and a Suburban backed up against a Cherokee, with their rear doors open and a canvas roof spread between the two, like an Ivy League tailgate, only Hendrix is on the CD player, although I also glimpse a backgammon board.

This is Ben's thirty-eighth concert. He is 20. Ben is wearing a Lawrenceville T-shirt because that's where he went to prep school before Oberlin, where he's a politics major with a minor in philosophy. Ben has an imperial beard made up of two hairs. It is hard not to stare at the two of them on an otherwise porcelain face. Ben's father is an architect. His mother was a voice major at the Peabody Conservatory. Ben took her to the New Year's Eve show last year in a skybox at Madison Square Garden.

"People come for different reasons," Ben says. "You got throwback hippies, retro New Wave hippies, agro frat boys, Deadheads. A lot of people are out on tour because they have nowhere else to go; a lot of kids live off groundscore"—anything scored from the ground, pavement or Dumpster—"but everyone comes for the music."

"The music is good," a young woman named Kathy tells me, reclining on the grass next to the whimsically painted plywood fences surrounding the concert ground. A crown of clover, thistles and dandelions adorns her head, and spangly things sparkle on her cheeks and bare shoulders. "You can chill out, and they play one song for a long time, and they're really good musicians, and everybody's here to, like, share, like, I guess, dreams of, like, a place where everybody's happy all the time."

Kathy says she's a freshman at Stanford, although my guess is either she paid someone to take her verbal SATs for her or her dad has a library named after him. Her friend Melanie is a freshman at the University of Virginia. This is a fairly typical Phish pedigree, and not surprising: They're just following their leaders—four upper-middle-class guys with values your mother always wished the kids you brought home had. Gordon, 31, from Sudbury, Massachusetts, is the son of the man who founded the Store 24 chain of convenience stores in New England. Fishman is the son of an orthodontist from Syracuse, New York. McConnell is the son of a research scientist from Jersey who helped develop Tylenol. Anastasio's dad is a vice president at the Educational Testing Service, in Princeton, New Jersey.

Trey Anastasio, Phish's John Lennon, himself went to prep school for God's sake—Taft, to be exact. Trey's dad is in Plattsburgh for the shows this weekend. And his mother. And his stepmother. And his 88-year-old grandfather, who sometimes falls asleep in his chair off to the side of the stage during his grandson's solos.

"We like to be with them because we love them," says Trey's father, Ernie Anastasio, backstage, beneath the large tent pitched in the courtyard framed by the band's trailers. "There's a kind of family component to this operation that's, I think, real. I think Len would agree."

Len Fishman, the orthodontist from Syracuse, has shown



up wearing a “Parent” credential, looking for his son. Jon Fishman isn’t awake yet. A few minutes later, his trailer door opens. But he doesn’t come out. A girl does.

“Maybe it’s room service,” Len says.

Which may be why the Clash never toured with their parents.

Phish kids don’t come only in regular, affluent, educated, family-friendly versions. There are extra-crusty Phish kids, the ranks of whom have grown since the death of the Dead.

“You should talk to one of the really dirty kids,” says Jen, who says she’s never gone longer than two weeks without showering. “I’d love to know what they say. I used to get kind of dirty on Dead tour. But I never got *that* dirty. I wonder what they think. I wonder what their parents think when they come home.”

I don’t have to look very hard. I find Glen in the runway parking lot between two cars. He is 18. He’s gone to high

school. Now he is on Phish tour, which can be a full-time vocation. Glen looks like an extra in a biblical epic, dirt-wise. Forty days in the desert, that sort of thing. The kind of tan you cultivate sleeping in highway culverts. Cutoffs that haven’t been cut off because it’s fashionable but because they rotted off at the knee. If he ever wants to clean his hair, chances are you’d recommend using a blowtorch and then starting over.

Glen isn’t here for the music as much as he’s here because this is the next step on his odyssey. Glen read Kerouac in high school.

“We’re a community,” he says. “It’s been out there for thirty years, somewhere, somehow. It’s just about the road, man.”

Glen’s dad is a retired welder back in Chicago who listens to bluegrass. Glen says his parents were a little worried at first, that he was out following a band all the time and sleeping in cars and living on scavenged grilled-cheese sandwiches, but they’ve gotten used to it.

Glen is not only barefoot but his feet look as if they haven't been shod in a century, which explains why he is walking so blithely down the runway, which is littered with broken glass.

He is followed by three or four other kids without shoes. They are all finely crusted. Glen and his friends fall into a small but significant subphylum of Phish kids who seem to be drawn to Phish tours in the absence of any strong bonds to anything else; they're caught in a loose sort of limbo, as if, in a halfhearted attempt at breaking away, they split to join the circus but would prefer to watch it from the stands—with their parents.

Elaine, a high school senior from the Midwest, tells me she's tried to get her dad to understand the music, but he's into Willie Nelson. She is sitting in a lawn chair, surrounded by friends in various states of dress, mind and body, writing in her journal. "I'm writing about my dad," she says. "I was just picturing what my dad would think if he walked by right now and saw me sitting right here and what he would be thinking about me right now."

Phish kids also come in extra crispy: Brian has traveled from Washington State. His tongue is pierced, and his eyes are the color of not yet fully cooked egg whites bathed in runny tomato salsa. Brian tells me, with some difficulty, that he's driven cross-country because this is the biggest thing going on on the earth at the moment.

"And beautiful women everywhere," Brian says, his eyelids at half-mast. "And the best drugs anywhere. The best drugs anywhere."

He doesn't repeat himself for emphasis. He repeats himself because he's forgotten he said it the first time.

There are women everywhere, it is true, but in the dancing and the hugging and the toplessness, there is little salaciousness. There's a distinct absence of heat and sexuality to Phish's music. It's too goofy to be sensual. It drives you to no whippy, spiky highs or bluesy lows. Whatever it was that people perceived as carnal in Elvis's rhythms, whatever it is that Bowie used to sell and Chrissie Hynde still tries to and Courtney Love wants to, Phish music connotes the opposite. That hundreds of thousands of adolescents are drawn to a band that sells no sex at all may have something to do with the average kid's wholesale rejection of society's exploitation of his or her sexuality. Then, it may just be that they like it because they can dance to it.

If you were strapped into a chair and someone was threatening to torture you unless you described what Phish's music sounds like, you might say that it sounds like Zappa, Santana, They Might Be Giants, Weather Report, Pink Floyd, Paul Simon, Bill Monroe, Spinal Tap, Jacques Brel, Bowie, Little Feat and the Dead. Phish music has a lot of major-chord changes and a lot of odd chord changes that sound as if the band made them up on the spot. It has no angry chord changes. "It's a non-angst-ridden vibe," Mike Gordon, the bass player, tells me. It never whines. It often wanders off into oddly rhythmed corri-

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dors, like a small child with no attention span. You'd be better off describing what it isn't. It isn't earnest. It isn't Seattle three-chord slackpop spewed out of the alternative-music meat grinder. It hardly ever stops laughing. If Pearl Jam performs every song as meaningfully as a Puccini aria, Phish is doing Gilbert & Sullivan.

You might also say that Phish kids are drawn to a band whose music defies labeling because they want to rebuff all our efforts to compartmentalize them and sell to them; that they feel the reflex to rebel against the previous generation, but they have so little to rebel against in the late 1990s—other than the fact that their parents never got around to cleaning up the toxic-waste sites as promised—that they choose a gentle band to ally themselves with.

Then, maybe not. Maybe they have come for the fireworks after Friday's last set, which are great. So is the set. Beneath *Close Encounters* light shows, on a stage bare of adornment save the band itself, Phish plays loud and rockably, driven by Anastasio's guitar. The rest of Phish are no slouches, but Anastasio is a hall-of-fame guitarist: part Roy Buchanan, part Carlos Santana, a little Duane Allman, a little Robin Trower. Anastasio plays the guitar the way William S. Burroughs writes books.

Friday night's final set features an ample dose of typical Phish jams, in which Anastasio orchestrates his ten-minute guitar soliloquies so that the energy builds, then wanes, then surges again, then abates again; it's exactly what most of them have come for, to let the guitarist tease them into a swaying nirvana with his tidal flow of notes. There is also a lot of silly, nonsensical stuff, more performance art than music, although "art" is stretching it. But even at its most artless, Phish never sees its audience grow impatient at the band's indulgences. Instead, fans opt to dance in place during the dead spots, like a car at high idle at a stoplight. It is one of the talents of Phish followers that they can dance to any tempo or any tune, which is necessary when your band veers off into polkas, then settles back into discordant jams.

When the band comes back for just one encore, an a cappella version of "Amazing Grace," (continued on page 146)

(continued from page 109)

How would you describe your relationship with your mother?

Enduring, strong, loving, occasionally irresponsible on my part. She's ridiculously supportive and nurturing. She is also an absolute force to be reckoned with.

What's the key to your acting?

Have you read Martin Buber's *I and Thou*? You know, the part where he says something like, "This is the essence of art. A thing presents itself to the soul and demands it to be shown through the soul"? You have to abandon every contrivance and just listen and hear and let that other thing completely dominate.

Most frustrating part of your job?

The whole idealization of the female form. It gets so redundant.

Do you ever wish, looking at your mother and sister, that you had a singing career?

My sister gets out there every night. If I ever get the urge, all I have to do is go out on the road for a couple of weeks as a

voyeur. It's grueling.

How did you feel watching that recent TV movie about your family?

None of us were pleased with how I was written. The producer chose to give a B-minus *Sophie's Choice* kind of twist to the story by emphasizing something that never existed, the dilemma between my sister and me and who my mom was going to move to Nashville with. That gave me fits.

What's the longest you've gone without food?

Eight days. I fasted last summer. I'm preparing for another fast. That's why I can only have one glass of Champagne. There's a ten-day pre-cleanse.

And you're allowed one glass of Champagne?

Actually, I'm not. That's my set of rules.

Champagne is your drink of choice?

Basically, I'm a Budweiser and Cristal kind of girl.

Do some men find your Phi Beta Kappa mind a little intimidating?

That's the rumor. We're all very spirited

horses. When men married to Judd women get together, it's just a head-shaking fest.

How does a man impress you?

The ideal man would be someone who was an equal. Period. He'd be best to show up with a bottle of Blanton's—that's a Kentucky bourbon whiskey. Believe me, I get weak-kneed when I see it.

I'm trying to picture you and Matthew McConaughey [with whom Judd had an on-set romance during *A Time to Kill*] at dinner.

From the start, we had a lot of things in common: drinking beer, chewing tobacco and whatnot. Probably the greatest source of appeal for me is his searching. He has such an endearing desire to know things. I don't date very much. I've had some nice alliances with people.

Describe your ideal date.

Well, I think I'm fixin' to have it if I can ever get done with this interview.

You're going out on a date after this?

No, I'm wearing red cashmere for you, James. —JAMES RYAN

PHISHSTOCK NATION

(continued from page 117) no one seems disgruntled. They head back to the campground and play tapes all night. Of the concert they just heard. So that the campground is like the buzzing of innumerable bees. All Phish, all the time.

Saturday morning two heads stick out of Jen's tent. One is Jen's. The other belongs to Brian, the kid from Washington with the pierced tongue. He's found himself his beautiful woman. He crawls out of the tent and casts a squinty couple of eyes at the day.

"Why would you want to go back to society?" Brian says. "There are so many people here!"

Down in her sleeping bag, propped on her elbows, Jen is looking at me a little sheepishly. After Brian wanders away, Jen says, "I don't usually do this."

She explains that she met him the night before, and he seemed nice. "But," she says, "I didn't do anything with him." He is only 18, Jen tells me, and really, he is kind of sweet.

Over in Ball Square, at the pizza concession, whose oven was built the day before from Vermont hay and river clay, people are eating organic flatbread pizza topped with free-range organic chicken, green peppers and Walla Walla onions, "and our friend Umberto's light Mexican salsa."

Backstage, Jon Fishman is eating ice cream. Fishman, a diminutive man, doesn't have to worry about his figure, because his shape is hidden by the

housedress. He also doesn't have to worry because no magazine has ever put the band on its cover and probably never will until Phish has a giant hit, which it won't, because the band doesn't want to make music videos. This automatically opens them up to suspicion from the mainstream star makers. "The music industry," Mike Gordon says, "doesn't like us. It's because we're very untrendy."

"We're never going to make some ultimate song," Fishman says. "The goals of the band aren't commercial. We are as intent as intent can be on staying together. We realize that the only thing standing between us and the record for the band with the exact same lineup staying together the longest in rock history is our getting along."

Then, Fishman has something of an ulterior motive in wanting the band to continue; this is the only job he's ever had that he wasn't fired from. He's lost jobs shoveling snow for the city of Burlington, Vermont; driving a taxi for two different Burlington taxi companies; washing dishes at Howard Johnson's; and making maternity bathing suits.

"I've had this job thirteen years," he says. "I couldn't think of a better job. Although there's astronaut, but for that you have to be in amazing shape."

The rest of the band echoes Fishman's basic indifference to commercial success. McConnell's take on it—"If a million people bought our albums, I wouldn't be

sad about that, [but] I don't care, you know? Why do I care?"—is probably the most representative.

"People get on this cycle," Trey Anastasio says, sitting at a table beneath the band's tent. He is wearing a WELCOME TO WHO-VILLE T-shirt. "They want a hit. They try and write a hit. They get a hit. Then they think, How do we recreate this? and their whole career becomes chasing this elusive commercial dream, and it's a complete dead end. Whereas we've always experimented with something different."

Anastasio is now too well-known to walk down the streets of his hometown of Princeton without being recognized. Which is not what he's in this for. With an infant daughter, a new Land Rover, an old Trooper, a '68 Camaro Rally Sport Convertible and a house four miles down a dirt road outside of Burlington (they all live in Vermont), he has all he needs to ensure that he can do what he wants to do, which, he says, is keep playing music that surprises. Last year, for instance, he released an album of avant sounds with some musicians from Sun Ra's Arkestra. It wasn't very good, but he's glad he did it.

"People want risk and adventure and excitement and emotion in live music," he says, "and maybe they're getting some of it from us which they weren't getting in the '80s, when everything was sequenced and programmed and the show was supposed to go off perfectly. Here, even I don't know what's next.

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Without risk, it's boring to me." To watch him play is to know that, so far, it's never boring. Even in the middle of the most adventurous and convoluted solos, he can never quite stop grinning.

At one point on Saturday, I stop at Ball Square, at the far end of the concert area, where ragtime bands and stilt walkers and clowns perform nonstop. There is a human mural, which is a kid taped to a wall whom you can paint. Next to the flatbread pizza stand, a fire is being tended by a tanned, bare-torsoed man who says it is a spirit fire, a medicine fire, a fire you can wish into, but mostly people are using it to light whatever they need to light.

I am standing on a knoll taking notes, watching everyone stream into the concert area, when I glance to my side and see a wild-eyed, fully baked guy with skin like old leather and hair like Medusa's gazing at me with a terrified look on his face.

"Sorry!" he says, and frantically bends down and picks up a cigarette butt he's just ground out beneath his bare heel. With his seven remaining brain cells, he has divined that I am writing up a ticket.

I join the trek into the concert area for Saturday night's show. A man with a braided ponytail approaches me.

"Excuse me," he says. "Can I bring an orange in, do you know?"

I have never been to a rock concert where a fan was worried about declaring anything citrus.

Saturday night in the final set, the boys play for hours. A cool wind tries to glide

down from the distant mountains, but when it meets the Phish Nation, aswirm in teen spirit, dancing and singing in unison to a half-hour version of a song whose chorus is "Won't you step into the freezer, squeeze her with a tweezer," the north wind doesn't stand a chance. At some point, two arms near the front of the stage thrust a carefully hand-lettered sign into the air, a sign in strong and sure block capital letters for the band to see.

The sign reads, THANK YOU.

After the final set, back at the tent at 2 A.M., Brian is asleep. Jen has bandages on her feet—"Broken glass," she says, a little embarrassed—but insists on walking me to my car after I tell her I am getting an early start out. She is wearing the same blouse and the same skirt that she'd been wearing three days earlier. Somehow her hair is still clean, and her eyes are still blue. She is smiling. She and Paul found someone with tire sealant and someone to tow them to a Mobil station in town. On Monday Paul will drive her to the airport in Syracuse.

"It'll be great to see my mom," she says. "And my grandmom. And my dad."

I tell her to be careful. About Brian. Jen says she understands my concern.

"But he likes his family," she says. "And that's nice."

Then she hugs me for a final time and turns around, and the last I see of her is the mud-hemmed skirt swirling around her ankles as the refugee camp swallows her whole.

Peter Richmond is a GQ special correspondent.

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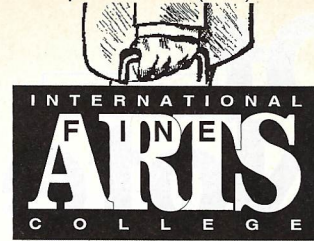
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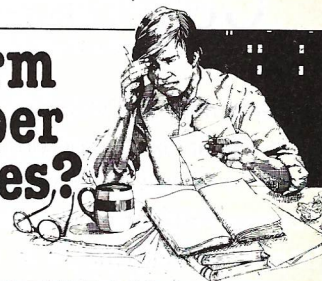
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