

# Vintage Guitar<sup>®</sup> ONLINE

## The Mermen's Jim Thomas - Towering Inferno

[ VG on the WWW - Online Articles ]

By Dean L. Farley

It's a wild night at San Francisco's Paradise Lounge on a typically chilly August night. The Mermen's main visionary and lead guitarist, Jim Thomas, has his work cut out for him. Unexpectedly, a short time before the gig, Thomas had broken his left thumb at the band's rehearsal studio. Most guitarists would have likely aborted their show in such circumstances. But not Thomas.

He's determined to get through the gig, broken thumb or not. He's certainly a man on a mission with no compromise; and sometimes living within his code requires the ignorance of physical pain. Tonight, Jim Thomas in obvious pain, but he shrugs his shoulders and smiles, stating, "I'm gonna show that it can be done!"

Two bands later, The Mermen are ready to take the stage. Thomas straps on his guitar and flashes his usual gregarious ear-to-ear grin. The audience, unaware of his dilemma, is eager to hear the band rip head on into their set with an approach that can be described as ethereal and reckless.

On this particular night, the group's fans are in for a blazing surprise. Critically-acclaimed locally and nationally, the Mermen are gaining a huge and devoted following, which is almost cult-like in status. Their own brands of instrumental music are excursions into new sonic forays. The Mermen's fierce power is adeptly balanced by a delicate beauty and softness that is equally riveting while leaving no listener unaffected in some way, be it emotional or physical. Twenty minutes into their set, Thomas starts fiddling with the vast array of knobs and controls of his effects rack and floor pedals, creating an immense blast of sound from his amps that can only be likened to a burning high-rise structure collapsing into its own pile of smoldering ash. The volume is deafening as Thomas' whammy-induced shockwaves of feedback leave nothing in their path. Never have I witnessed anything remotely similar. If Jimi Hendrix was in the audience on this occasion, the only thing he could be thinking is: "I just wish that I could of gotten that sound on Electric Ladyland!"

One word of caution: when attending a Mermen concert, please don't leave your emotional baggage at the door, because like it or not, you will be moved!

September 20th...Jim Thomas has a lot on his mind. Between all the calls from booking agents and other business-related interruptions, Jim has caught a moment where he can express his own thoughts on the process of making music and what really is behind it all. Thomas is very reflective, thoughtful and engaging in conversation, and he is highly insightful and observant of the human condition. He is also an interesting clash of the serious and the humorous, a great example of contrast; black and white; yin and yang. In short, the future looks quite exciting for him and all who are exposed to The Mermen's mesmerizing wall of sound.

Recently, a lot has been said about Thomas' band "pushing the envelope." In the eyes of some, they have downright sealed it, hopefully for some future time capsule.

VG: Well, Jim, we would really like to get your take on the definitive Mermen "story." Where do you think we should start?

VG: Where should we start? I think you need to start when I was born (laughs)!

VG: (laughs) Okay. When and where were you born?



VG: I was born in 1953, September 23rd, in all places, Newark, New Jersey. I was born a poor black child (laughs)...no, actually, I was a poor white child in a black town!

VG: Okay, so you're 43.

JT: Yeah!

VG: Rumor has it The Mermen are the only band you've ever been in. Can you state for the record that this is actually true?

JT: That's it (laughs)!

VG: The Mermen have been around for eight years. Why did it take you until you were 35 to get in a band?

JT: I never cared about it enough. It was something I never felt capable of, really, you know? I was the kind of person most of my life...I would never finish a song! Then, when I realized the reason I didn't finish any song was because I didn't care about it. Didn't care! I mean, I liked the song and I liked to listen to it, but there was never any real substantial interest in learning a song and finishing it and playing it.

VG: Meaning your own songs or...

JT: Other people's songs nor my own songs. When I was young, I didn't write any music. The music writing thing sort of happened to me when I was a little older.

VG: What time was that?

JT: About 10 years ago.

VG: So, that puts you around 32...

JT: It really came together when I worked in a music store in San Francisco eight years ago, where I was just writing a lot of music in the store and putting it on various tape decks, four-tracks. I was doing that while I was working...I would write this music and people expressed interest in it and said that it was good. Then, I met Allen (Whitman), our bass player, who really liked it and started playing on my demo tape, and then somebody else came along and said, "Hey, I want to make a record."

VG: That's a different angle. Can you give us a bearing of where your compositional skills were at the time?

JT: I had my own impotentia and an expressive capability that kind of knew its own way, but I never trusted it. When I worked in the music store and other people started liking it, it allowed me to further it and deepen it.

VG: You started to tap into that spiritual aspect of writing and composing music.

JT: There's definitely some spiritual thing.

VG: No doubt!! Let's talk about your feelings about this retro surf thing going on right now. What are your observations?

JT: I guess that "surf music" as per Dick Dale, Laika and the Cosmonauts, Los Straitjackets, you know, the music you hear where you can listen to it and say, "Oh, that's part of that genre." Like a certain form of bluegrass music or a certain form of beebop music.

VG: Where you can tag it?

JT: Yeah, where you can tag it. There's people who seem interested in expressing themselves within the genre, you know what I mean? And for the Mermen, eight years ago, I learned tons of surf tunes and wrote some original surf-type tunes and it had an impact on me, especially Dick Dale and especially John Blakely, who wrote the music to the movie The Endless Summer. Actually, the music to The Endless Summer really laid into my psyche really heavily, as far as a musical influence that didn't hit me until 20 years later. It was like this romantic music that sat with me as some kind of an association with the ocean. I always loved the ocean.

VG: What music were you playing before this?

JT: Nothing...I didn't play music. I had guitars and I fiddled around with them and made noises!

VG: Well, you're real good at that, Jim (laughs)!

JT: You know, when I first came to California, I came with a guitar that somebody gave me. An acoustic guitar and a surfboard...that was it!

VG: Now you have six surfboards?

JT: I have six guitars (laughs)!

VG: Okay, we need to separate the men from the boys to find out why The Mermen are so different from all the other reverb-drenched so-called 'retro surf' bands?

JT: I like that! We're the men and they're the boys (laughs)!

VG: I like to think of The Mermen as being a highly improvisational band, much more than standard surf music of the past. Comment?

JT: We have song structure, but there's a definite sense of...I guess, it's not like if there's improvisation there, it's kind of letting the music, the song, deepen itself, you know and speak something. We're not that strict. We'll do a song and sometimes just drop out of the structure and you know, do something with it. It's kind of focused, I guess.

VG: But then, it goes out of focus and back in!

JT: It's kind of like jazz, but it's not the same kind of thing, I'm not trying to get outside or trying to be clever, technically, or trying to improvise and do a scale and do a clever new melody. I think what happens is I always try to deepen some connection to the music at that moment and that night.

VG: You just go where the music leads you...

JT: Whatever that is, if you want to call that improvisation; call it like hanging on one note for maybe a minute and letting it feed back while I \*\*\*\* around with it! It takes, like listening to a lot of past life stuff, there's a lot of different things there. I definitely see the music as a real solid organic expression of my emotional life inside me. You know, the sweetness of things, the sourness of things, the violence of things...the...

VG: Frustration of things (laughs)?

JT: Yeah, there's some of that there, too, but more likely I think it's like the music is something flipped inside-out; where it's more like a buried treasure kind of thing or the music for me supports my own growth emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. Often times, I'll write a song and the whole point of writing some piece of music is that it sits out there in front of me, it's like a compass pointing me in a certain direction saying 'You need to behave this way,' or 'You need to move in that direction, give me something soft or give me something hard.'

VG: Kind of like a guide...



JT: It is a guide. I look at it like it's a bridge; like I'm building a bridge out into the universe and the music is kind of like a building of that bridge, where I walk out on it, the part that I built, and also other people walk back from the other side. We're building the bridge together, I don't know...something like that!

VG: I think The Mermen really defy genre. Do you?

JT: Well, thank you. I think the taste in music that Martyn (Jones, Mermen drummer) and Allen have ñ Allen in particular, he never even liked surf music, he plays all different kinds of music ñ he loves all kinds of music and so does Martyn. They're pretty deep musical characters. And I love all different kinds of music. So, I really feel that if you look at the overall Mermen repertoire over six or seven records, it's like things are always changing. The first two albums were ocean-oriented, where the newer stuff is referring to other, more purely musical ideas. I don't have a need to identify with anybody or anything.

VG: Your sound proves that, most definitely.

JT: When I was young maybe I did, you know? I think there's a lot of young bands out there and young musicians who have a need to identify with something, and playing surf music and having people like it gives people a reason to go out and have something to do. It's like there's people who drive busses and there's people who drive race cars. I feel like I'm on a track with music that is definitely reckless, definitely vulnerable, definitely, ah, not...I don't seek to be in control of what I'm doing, I don't seek to do it for entertainment, I don't seek it to give a message to anybody, I don't do it to be a guitar player, I don't do it to...it's just really funny. It's just this thing!  
The thing that gets me is the emotional effect it has on people. There are people up there who are nuts about the Mermen, you know? It blows my mind! I really think that my music is not for me, it's for other people. I honestly feel that at the bottom line, it's just not for me at all!

VG: At the Paradise gig, we saw such a diversity of people in the audience. That proves it, they're from all different walks of life, huh?

JT: Yeah, there is. There are all different kinds of people and I think that's because we have a wide emotional vocabulary. I think this all might have something to do with my own personal experience. There's nothing to prove, man. You know what I mean? And I'm not trying to prove anything, my life is ññññ over! I'm 43 years old in a sense. It's not over, but it's over in a sense of like, competition, that kind of thing.

VG: In other words, your music comes from a very ego-less place!

JT: Oh, totally, it really does. I'm not saying that I don't have an ego as a person. I do. But I do believe the music has its own requirements and those requirements seem to override my ego, override other people's egos and I have to think, ñWell, I have to play this musicî and there was a time in my mini-career here where I had to make a commitment toward going forward with it or just pulling back from it and doing something else seven years ago. A thought that came to me about it was ñYou know, if I'm going to do this, I have to do this whether I like it or not and whether other people like it or not!î So, it really has nothing to even do with me liking doing it. There's this pressure in me to create music, I just don't know! I was in Big Sur last night and I drove back along the coast listening to three hours of demo tapes that I made for the new record that we're going to make and I was thinking, ñMan, this music, where is this ññññ music coming from,î you know what I mean? All this great new music! I would really like to make a double-album for our next record.

VG: That would be quite a blast, can you imagine?

JT: I'm really doing it all by myself and I say, ñWhere's all this music coming from and who's it for?î And, for me, for some reason I just love nature and I love things, you know? I think that my love for things comes out through the music, things people can identify with.

VG: Oh, I know your music has brought tears to many people, including myself. It has broken a lot of emotional barriers, I can tell you that straight up! You are one of the few really interesting players out there now, period. What about your use of effects? What new players do you listen to currently that are into using them?



JT: I don't listen to anybody, I mean I honestly don't. I just got two David Torn records ñ I bought one and the other somebody gave me, but I haven't listened to them yet. I don't listen to guitar players. I don't find a lot of guitar playing all that interesting to myself, and a lot of music I don't find interesting either. I hear a lot of music that I really like. For example, this year there are two albums that might really influence me; Twisted Willie (Willie Nelson) and Emmy Lou Harris' Wrecking Ball. I must've listened to both of those records 150 ññññ times! They're not guitar-oriented records, they're song-oriented records.

I listen to a lot of Bob Dylan, Willie Nelson, Bruce Springsteen. I like songs, but I like instrumental music, too. Let's have a look at my music collection and see what we have to give you an idea of what I like to listen to...we have Stereo Lab Emperor Tomato Ketchup, the three last Lush albums, Uncle Tupelo, Jesus Lizard's Shot The Melvin's Slag album, The Butthole Surfers, Electric Larryland I have a Curve record, a Marty Robbins record, an Orbital record, two Angel with Heavy Syrup records, Patti Smith's new record, Monster Magnet, I love Monster Magnet! I have a Gillian Welch album, a Smashing Pumpkins record and two Bruce Springsteen records.

VG: Which Smashing Pumpkins album is it, the new one?

JT: No, this is Siamese Dream.

VG: God, I love that record!

JT: Here are the rest of them; Donovan's Hurdy Gurdy Man, Peter Gabriel's Passion, The Cranberries record, Tori Amos' new record, Neil Young's Dead Man soundtrack, Ali Akbar Khan's Legacy record, I have the Chemical Brothers record and the Beck record.

VG: We've been listening to The Cranberries a lot, heavily!

JT: These are my real influences, and they're not guitar players, you know? I haven't found honestly, too many guitar players that answer my own questions in a poetic manner. Steve Earle does, Emmy Lou Harris does, and all the records I've mentioned do. All of us go down our own musical paths, and there are guitar players who like to listen to guitar players! My classical section of my stuff is a whole other ballgame, too...I love a lot of classical music, too. Currently, I have seven albums by John Tavener, a modern English composer whose music I love. So, that kind of stuff adds. There's so much music out there and you know when it speaks to you or not, ya know?

VG: You won't get any flak from me about that! I think that now you're just channeling all your thoughts, feelings, emotions wherever they are at the moment. They're just all coming out very spontaneously, don't you agree?

JT: Well, they're coming out in the music. I think that we can agree on that (laughs)!

VG: That's exactly what I'm driving at, it's affecting you in a compositional aspect. The "channeling" ñ I mean, that gig at the Paradise...your guitar just sounded like the "Towering Inferno"! It was so incredible, here you are with a broken thumb and you still level the place! If Hendrix was there, he would've been smiling!

The second half of our interview with Thomas reveals the deeper side of this extraordinary musician. This is where Jim really lays it out, reflecting on a myriad of artistic and spiritual references as analogies for driving his points home. Whether it's about music or about the realities of being human, we can learn from Thomas. The most enjoyable aspect of our conversation was that we were not at all interested in "talking shop," i.e. rapping about his equipment. In fact, the equipment list printed in Part I was compiled from my own observations after seeing The Mermen many times, and it has since changed noticeably.

To Thomas, equipment is secondary; the music takes priority. If he played through a sole Fender Twin Reverb amplifier (as he did for quite a while) he would still sound as ethereal. Once you listen to The Mermen, you will know what I discovered the first time I heard them. They are, hands down, my favorite current non-vocal American group. Last month, we were discussing Thomas' abilities to channel his energy through his music, a trait shared by Jimi Hendrix.

JT: (laughs) That's the thing I loved about Hendrix, when you talk about guitarists who were influences. Out of my four or five influences there, Jimi Hendrix, like his playing, he really took what he did the full length with what he was doing. He didn't candy-ass \*\*\*\*, he didn't want any guarantees on anything, he sacrificed his \*\*\*\*ing life for music, basically, you know, in a sense, and he did! He gave it everything he had.



I have a CD interview with him, and the interviewer goes (puts on British accent); 'So, what about your career?' And Hendrix goes; 'Well, \*\*\*\* my career, who cares about my career? What I care about is right now, in this present moment, and this music that I'm making right now, today!'

That spoke volumes of truth to me, and it's like this: Bill Moyers did this thing on KQED (San Francisco's PBS station) about poetry, called 'The Language of Life,' and he showed this really famous poet giving a workshop on poetry, and the woman said to all the student poets, 'You know, you shouldn't want to be a poet more than you want to write poetry.' I think that in our world now, there's more people who want to be poets than want to write poetry, and Jimi Hendrix was one of those people. He was somebody who just wanted to write music. He wasn't striving to be a musician, he was just striving to play music.

VG: I kinda feel something deep coming on here...(laughs). The guitar was his tool of expression more than just an instrument.

JT: Yeah, it's like he had something to say and he \*\*\*\*'n' said it! It wasn't like he wanted to be identified as being a guitar player, 'cause that's the whole thing when you talk about genre; a lot of people have a need to be identified with something and say, 'Well, I'm doing that and I can do that and I'm a jazz player' or 'I'm a Bluegrass (or whatever) player and I'm good at it.' That's great, you do that for your own entertainment, but it might not be as moving. I saw Michael Hedges the other night, and there's a guy who has basically done his own \*\*\*\*'n'g thing, right?

VG: Without question.

JT: His own \*\*\*\*'n'g thing, and it's very individualized. There were moments in his show the other night, where there was some soul coming out through what he was doing, it was so powerful I can't even describe what it was. He was doing these really quiet notes and the way he was doing it was unbelievable, you know. And I don't hear that very often.

VG: How did that affect you?

JT: I caught it, you know, and I was there to see it. I don't know how it affected me, I was just there to see it. That was it! He was on for over an hour and yet there were certain moments in that performance that were other...there was something in there that was very deep, very real, very honest and very out-of-this-world, and nothing...you can't really describe what it was, you can't put your finger on it, and if you try to talk about it, it's still not what it sounded like!

VG: You were really in true observation at that point, but it's all still up to personal interpretation, correct?

JT: Maybe it is...

VG: This is probably why The Mermen have such a diverse audience, because your songs can speak to everyone, regardless of the music they like. I have to say, in my mind, you're probably the most exciting instrumental group I've ever heard.

JT: Wow, that's a compliment, Dean! Thank you very much.

VG: You were the one who taught me how to 'live for the moment' in my musical life.

JT: That's what I think it is. Me, I often understand my playing as a severe pressure to bring something into the music in the very moment. I notice this in myself when I play with other people and they're not keeping up with me, I get really impatient and I say, 'This thing that we're doing is urgent and it's going to go away, it's not gonna be here and we gotta find it and catch it at this moment, right, and if you're not ready for it, it's gonna slip us...he's gonna slip us, bye!' A lot of times, I'll be with the band, and Allen and Martyn aren't in a heavy groove, I start screaming and hollering and cursing and throwing stuff, you know? It doesn't have to do with anything but realizing that if they're not somehow really attentive to the process, it ain't gonna work. A lot of times, if they're in a nicey nice, self-satisfied 'Wow, man, I'm really a cool guy, I'm a great guitarist, I'm a great drummer, I'm a great bass player, I'm really cool!' You know, I don't like that stuff...(long pause) it doesn't entertain, it has nothing to do with me (laughs)!

VG: What's the latest scoop about working with a keyboard player?



JT: We've rehearsed with him about three times, me and Allen. We heard from him the other night and I see great potential for making the music, doing the harmonic underpinning. I find a lot of times I hear harmonic textures that I can't do by myself. It's physically impossible, Allen can't do them, either. If we worked really hard, if he played the bass a lot more and said, 'I'm going to play more chordally,' he'd play the eight-string bass and it might work, but he's not doing that. He's staying within the realm that he is, so I'm just gonna use a keyboard player to create another thing in the soup to deepen what I'm doing, so it's gotta be done right. Obviously, I'm the conductor of this affair, so I'm being careful to do this.

VG: Having a keyboard player will also take you further out from the stigma of being a 'surf band.'

JT: Oh, yeah but we're not a 'surf band,' you know, that's real obvious to people with a brain, like you and all the intelligent guitar players out there realize. There are a lot of surf bands out there and now all the other surf bands don't want to be identified as a surf band unless they're a little different. And everybody's trying to one-up everybody else on the equation, you know, no matter if it's Laika, Los Straitjackets or whoever's doing it. Everybody's gotta have their own way to 'one-up' the other thing, and I really think in the end, that all this bull\*\*\*\* or the other people that need to compete and get more attention, you know?

There needs to be a real knowledge that true musical identities, like the ones that really have an impact on people, are very individual and very different, and to develop your own musical identity takes a tremendous involvement of work and practice, and just openness. Also, on top of that, it has to be your destiny in some way, and if it's not, well, then it's gonna be some sort of game you're playing.

So there's some complicated issues there. I, for myself, would like to get away from all this discussion of this and that, while the bottom line is: listen to the music! If it does something for you and you get something out of it, that is the reality. All your \*\*\*\*ing criticism, all your pantywaste words, I mean there's a lot of people out there; critics who get a sense of, ah, they think that their words are the thing, and that their words are telling and defining a thing. Well, that's not really true!

VG: I have to add that in real truth, you're really immune to criticism and judgement by anyone, including yourself!

JT: On the subject of your own integrity, I think that some critical faculty has to be there. Like for me, like writing music, I have a tremendous critical faculty that says 'This is the not the right thing and this is not the right thing and this is not the right thing!' It's like what the sculptor does - he keeps cutting the stuff away that's not supposed to be there, until you find out what's there and you don't do that without having some sense of where you're going and what you're doing. I just sense that this is not an easy process. It's one thing to be a classical or a jazz musician, where the parameters are pretty sharply-defined. Or, even to be a surf guitar player where people will say; 'Well, he plays like Dick Dale, but he could be better than Dick Dale but no, he's not as good as Dick Dale or he's not as good as Hank Marvin of The Shadows but he doesn't play like the guy from Laika, and they're not as good as the guys in The Straitjackets and dada dada dada. The fact is that there's some people who'll respond to your music and other people who won't. In fact, the more troublesome your music is emotionally, the less certain people will like it, and for The Mermen, I would say the music is filled with all kinds of emotional weirdness, you know, a lot of people don't want to get close to, in a sense, because it complicates their lives! They listen to it and they say, 'Oh, this is bringing up something that I'm scared of.' There's some violence in it, you know what I mean? The way that it says it..it doesn't say it in a thick, industrial, Mr. Bungle-type sense, but it will be hinted at and revealed in certain songs.

VG: It's kind of like peeling an onion. There's layers and layers of different emotions to shed away, but to shed them away, you have to get very close to it in order to finally and honestly really have acceptance of any situation, emotional, musical, whatever. The reality for me is that your music will bring up all these hidden corners of emotion, but again accepting it is getting real close. Commentary?

JT: I find I have no idea! You know for The Songs of The Cows record, I have a \*\*\*\*ing thousand reviews here...no \*\*\*\*, a thousand, probably. Most of them are great, some of them are stupid, some are really sophisticated from really intelligent writers, you know? But it's funny to hear some people, like with Songs of The Cows. There's people who love it, and there's some people who just...write it off, it's amazing (laughs) and I laugh. I just laugh, because it's like, who's right (intense laughter)?!

VG: What do you think it was about Songs of The Cows that maybe irritated some of the faint at heart? Maybe the extremely violent sounds you achieved on 'Brain Wash'?



JT: No, no, no. I think they look at it...I find that reviewers and people who are involved with music who like to give opinions, they like to believe in their own thoughts! I honestly don't have any thoughts about my own music and I can criticize it real heavy and I can be nice to it, you know, I can do what I want with it.

I don't know what to think about, ah, I have no...(pause)...when people come to their own opinions about music, I really think that what they're saying has so much more to do with them than it has to do with me, unless they're so good at knowing human nature, which very few of these people are. I think some of the great psychologists and great doctors know something about human nature, and they can read a person's body language and see where they're coming from, as a person. But, these are people who spend their lives doing this kind of thing. I guess many critics hold themselves up to be, in a certain sense, they're the doctors who are gonna tell people what is a healthy music to listen to and what is the unhealthy. You know, in a sense, even though they don't say it that way, that's what they're doing!

VG: That's the subliminal message they really put across, huh?

JT: Yeah! Which music is 'good'? The more clever they are with words, the more they can give you. Obviously, it reflects the depth of the person, too. There are obviously writers who are thoughtful, and are deep, and are good, and love certain things and that's a certain kind of human being, too. That is the kind of human being I like relating to. I don't mind reading a review by somebody who might trash us. In fact, I don't mind reading a review by anyone, even if they're stupid or if they're smart. It's nicer to have it coming from somebody who is more...you learn something when you read it. I look at a negative review as a reality check! I say, 'Yeah, criticize me all you want and if you can make me stop playing, then you did something, and God, more power to you, because you had the power to cause something and cause me to do something inside myself, and it wasn't you who did it, but you allowed something inside me to happen!'

VG: That's precisely what I meant about being immune to your critics. Do you think you can take a negative review and turn it into a positive experience?

JT: Well, I don't know if you can do that (laughing)! If you want to kid yourself, I think you can. If you're really clever and you have really good self-esteem, and you know who you are, then you can take the critique. I always look at it and say, 'Is this really true?' As I take it sentence by sentence.

When you get to a place where everyone is reviewing you, you hear so many opposing points of view, like 'yes' and 'no,' 'yes' and 'no,' you're like, 'It doesn't matter!'

VG: Exactly...it really doesn't matter. We're exploring some very deep territory here. I have a strange feeling we're going to hit the ocean floor by the time this interview is over!!

JT: Yeah, and I think you can be affected by other people and I think it has to be recognized that in this community of living people, when you do something to somebody, about somebody, near somebody, if you're any kind of human being, and are not a psychopath, it can have an effect, people understand this, and words have power! If you call somebody a name, they might get mad. Somebody might not get mad who was a more enlightened person, but you can't walk down the street and if you walk up to somebody and say, 'Hey, man, you know, I don't like the way you look, I don't like the way you walk, I don't like the way you dress, and you know what else, you look really stupid!,' and that's what reviews/reviewers are like (laughs all around).

VG: What the hell do critics know, anyway?

JT: No, you know. But in certain sense, there's some of us who, if somebody said that to you enough times, you're gonna be going like, 'Do I really belong here?,' 'Is this where I belong?' And yet they always think they're the ultimate thermometer for art (laughs)!

A good example is Van Gogh...when you see the movie Vincent and Theo, right, the movie opens up with an auction at Christie's, a live, videotaped auction, it shows one of his paintings going from \$500,000 to about \$25 or \$30 million, and as that scene is going, they morph it into a scene of Vincent and Theo, his brother, and Vincent is arguing and hollering at his brother and asking him for money and where can he get money from to live. So, here he is, (years later) and his teeth are falling out and he's a wreck, he's a psychomaniac, like his brother works in an art gallery and still can't sell any of his paintings.

So he dies, pretty much penniless, you know, depressed, despairing, whatever, but here his art stands over a period of time and people are responding to it now. My take on doing all of this stuff is like, if you see something and you



document it artistically, musically, and you really believe in it, it may have some meaning somewhere, but you cannot depend on your culture to tell you that you're doing something valuable or not...and that is a tremendous thing to deal with! I don't find there's any answer there at all. The only thing I find is if you're an authentic person...there's a line by the famous...(pauses) have you ever read anything by Krishnamurti?

VG: Yeah, come to think of it, I have.

JT: Well, he talked about this one thing I always loved by him, where he talked about how when you go out and do what you want to do, do what you love to do, life has a way of taking care of you, but you know what he said? He said "You'll do what you want to do, life will find a way to take care of you, but you may be miserable, you might be poor, you might have no friends, but you'll be an authentic human being." That's the scariest \*\*\*\*ing thing in the world!

VG: I'd say so!

JT: That one paragraph right there says, do what you want to do, life will take care of you, but you might be miserable! You might be unhappy, you might have no money, you might have no friends! So, what does that mean, "Life will take care of you," then? I think it means you will know and be in touch with what is alive. It's like what Jesus said in the Bible; "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven," you know?

I don't think that only applies to money, I think that applies to recognition, I think that applies to any kind of riches, you know, intellectual riches. Those are some of my strongest feelings in those few things that I've just told you are there about music and what is authentic in music.

VG: I really like this, Jim! You're getting down to the real mechanics here. All this stuff is about how music is really made on the deeper levels.

JT: It's like Van Gogh...there's a film by Akira Kurosawa, called Dreams. There's a scene where somebody is in a museum and walks up to Van Gogh as he's painting, and asks him something. Van Gogh says, "Don't bother me now, I gotta get this right, I gotta get this, I gotta get this, don't bother me, don't bother me!" That's exactly what I was talking about. Like there's this urgency, you know, in the music. You have to get it, catch it and capture it and you are so concerned with that. Van Gogh was...his art was his religion, his art was truth, his way of telling the truth!

VG: Any final comments?

JT: Yeah, I think everyone should go out and see the film, Dead Man (laughs)!