

INTERVIEW WITH STEFAN NEVILLE  
FOR THE AUDIO FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
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**Interviewer:**

The important thing I think is just to walk through the timeline, and then I was thinking there were kind of a few strands, obviously the focus is your music but it seems like your comics are pretty, you can't separate those out from your music. And there's your solo work and there's all the millions of things that you've done with other people. And there's your local, you know, your integration by doing all those things with other people, locally, and then there's all the stuff that you've been doing internationally in the last few years. So those seem to me like they're kind of key bits and pieces. But we should start at the beginning of the music I guess. Does it go, where does it start before the official Pumice bio in Whangamata in 1991.

**Stefan:**

When did I start, I don't know. Dad had a really big record collection, with all sorts of things, from folk music to psychedelic stuff to punk, to comedy records. And so I was always listening to things. One of my dad's specialities was mix tapes, where he would put multiple versions of the same song on a tape, so you'd listen to five versions of a particular Bob Dylan song in a row.

**Interviewer:**

By other people?

**Stefan:**

No, all by Bob Dylan, you know, then you can play spot the difference. My mum was a bit musical, she plays the guitar, and she was in some sort of Peter, Paul and Mary type folk band when she was a teenager and stuff. And she, my parents separated when I was five, and my mother Hazel moved to Hamilton and she ran this thing called Art Lines which was like a dole scheme for artists, they were called PEP schemes or something. And you know they'd go and do road works and stuff under these schemes, but this one was for artists. And so they would do street theatre and concerts at schools and all sorts of things. I was still living with my dad in Northland, but in the school holidays we would go and stay with Hazel, and their base was this big old hall in Frankton, and there was always instruments around, synthesisers and double basses and things. So I remember playing around on those in the school holidays a little bit. But I never had music lessons or anything. I always just thought if the time came I would be able to do something. And yeah I got into punk through my dad's records and I started reading things like how people who couldn't play instruments could make records. So I decided that that would be me I think.

**Interviewer:**

Excellent. But you had access to lots of instruments that you would work out how to play your own way, or?

**Stefan:**

Well it was never prolonged access to instruments, it would just be in school holidays, I would have a bit of a tutu, and there'd be a drum kit. Almost could mostly look at it rather than play it.

**Interviewer:**

Did you get to see other people playing them?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, yeah, there was always concerts and stuff going on. My uncle, Paddy, was in a band called the Economic Wizards too, so, I'd see them playing a little bit.

**Interviewer:**

I remember seeing their record on the shelves, like a kind of black and white silhouette with the sort of red writing or something, I used to puzzle over it.

**Stefan:**

Starve The Lizards maybe. Yeah they did two EP's, on Eel Man records, yeah.

**Interviewer:**

That's a good pedigree.

**Stefan:**

Yeah he was my hero and introduced me to stuff too, A talented cartoonist as well. It just showed that you could be in bands and just still be my stupid uncle. And I think my dad would secretly have loved to of been musical. When we were little he would always make up stupid songs and sing them to us. So he was some sort of a composer. I've recorded a few of his tunes at various times.

**Interviewer:**

Did he, in his multiple versions of songs of tapes, was that specifically in order to be able to compare them?

**Stefan:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Kind of a musical fascination.

**Stefan:**

Just weird, needing to know it all. I think Bob Dylan was a good one to do because he always changes his songs around and adds verses in, and cuts out

verses and things like that.

**Interviewer:**

And you can actually spend a long time analysing him because its, there's a lot that's intentional about it.

**Stefan:**

Yeah. I don't think my dad was quite that into it. I think he just wanted to show off that he had five versions of Like a Rolling Stone.

**Interviewer:**

That's a pretty amazing kind of record collection to have access to though.

**Stefan:**

Yeah it is, there's all sorts of obscure things that I know about. That I probably shouldn't. I remember something came up about The Scaffold, talking to Chris Knox once, and I knew all about it. He said you're too young to know about that.

**Interviewer:**

Excellent. So at what point did you start actually finding a way of playing things?

**Stefan:**

Well it wasn't until I met Jon Arcus, and this would have been fifth form, so 15, 16 and he was a guitar player, or really he had a guitar and an amp which I thought was pretty cool. And even better his neighbour had a drum kit. And so we borrowed it. And that was it. That was Pumice. We called that Pumice.

**Interviewer:**

From fifth form?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Awesome. And what did it sound like?

**Stefan:**

Jon was coming up with some riffs and amazingly I got on the drum kit and I could play it. I think I had paid attention to drummers on TV and whenever I had seen a drummer live I paid attention to how it was done. And I did have some drum sticks that I used to bang on things with before that. I mean there's a little bit of tricky coordination to drumming, but I figured it out straight away, and yeah, we were away.

**Interviewer:**

It always seems like a real right brain, left brain merging thing to me, to be able to

coordinate both sides of your body, which I guess all instruments have, but you must have been a bit mentally limber in order to ...

**Stefan:**

There's a separation to it. It's weird. Because you just have to make, you have to send controls to the limbs separately. There is a trick to it.

**Interviewer:**

You do with piano, but then drumming always seems more, yeah I guess I have a sense of how it kind of works.

**Stefan:**

Piano you've got to do it with each finger a bit.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah true. But drumming then you've got to use your feet a bit more as well.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, it was just that thing, you just wanted to do it. We had the drum kit for the weekend, you've got to learn how to play.

**Interviewer:**

So that's Sugar Jon?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, that's Sugar Jon Arcus.

**Interviewer:**

I always thought Sugar Jon Arcus was made up.

**Stefan:**

No, he's real.

**Interviewer:**

He seemed like a mythical figure.

**Stefan:**

Yeah well he is mythical. He is a super hero.

**Interviewer:**

So that's from fifth form.

**Stefan:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

And so you played together through high school?

**Stefan:**

Yeah. Might have been sixth form when we actually got together and played. I think it was sixth form. Yeah because that trip to Whangamata that you mentioned when we got the name yeah that was the New Years before sixth form.

**Interviewer:**

So what year was that?

**Stefan:**

I think it was like 91/92 maybe. It might have been 1991.

**Interviewer:**

And did you take instruments to Whangamata?

**Stefan:**

No we just went there for New Years to live it up. Jon's dad had a Bach there, but at that point his parents weren't getting on, and he couldn't let his mum know that he was going to go and stay with his dad in Whangamata. There was all this complicated lying that we got tangled up in, in order to get there. Which included that we had to concoct this story that we had rides, that our friends uncle was going to drive us there.

**Interviewer:**

I saw that, there were a few versions of that story as the kind of origin story of Pumice. And I thought it was really funny that lying to your parents to say that you were hitchhiking when usually it seemed like people spent all their time lying to parents to say that they weren't hitchhiking.

**Stefan:**

No we were lying to say that we weren't hitchhiking. We told our parents we had a ride, but we were hitchhiking.

**Interviewer:**

Oh that's right, I'm getting confused. And you got caught out?

**Stefan:**

Yeah we got caught out, yeah, I don't know how, I guess our parents talked and figured it out. And I got in trouble, not cause I'd hitchhiked to Whangamata, but because I'd kind of, cause the whole thing rested on Jon's situation with his parents, so I just lied for his sake and I got in trouble because I'd let myself be manipulated into this situation. It's not really important.

**Interviewer:**

Oh it's a good origin though.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, but that's how it happened. We did get picked up in a horse truck by a woman who honestly only stopped because she thought we were girls. And the horse was kicking the side of the truck, which would send her veering across into oncoming traffic.

**Interviewer:**

That's great. And so did you play gigs then at high school?

**Stefan:**

No. Pumice never played live at that period. Yeah we sort of, we met these other guys at school who had a trio, which was bass and keyboard and vocals, and we were just drums and guitar. So we amalgamated into this band called Dribbly Cat Attraction. So that kind of, that actually became quite popular in Hamilton. For a while. So yeah we were out gigging with that band. Going to school hungover. We were entering the Rock Quest and stuff like that.

**Interviewer:**

Did you come anywhere?

**Stefan:**

No. We played at a school assembly once, and they shut the curtain on us to try and stop us playing, and we kept playing anyway, and they eventually pulled the plug on us.

**Interviewer:**

Excellent, I like school assembly band stories. What school was that, for the record?

**Stefan:**

That was Fairfield College.

**Interviewer:**

In Hamilton.

**Stefan:**

Philistines. But you know I think that's the perfect reaction, like, I see kids coming out of high school now and being in a rock band is so encouraged, and they get press kits, and demos and videos, and I think it was better that it wasn't approved. It made us want to do it more.

**Interviewer:**

And do it for ...

**Stefan:**

Do it for our own reasons yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Not to get money for a New Zealand On Air video.

**Stefan:**

Not to be the next Opshop.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah. There's no struggle or rebellion if they don't shut the curtain on you. And so that became I guess from then you stayed in Hamilton for a few years from then aye, as part of the, it seems like a really flourishing scene.

**Stefan:**

Hamilton was pretty great at that time, yeah, there was heaps of bands who were older than me and seemed like they knew all the secrets to the universe, because they had put tapes out and stuff. And you'd see them out there playing gigs, you soon got to meet them all. And ...

**Interviewer:**

So who was that around then, was that the Hollow Grinders?

**Stefan:**

No, this was much earlier than that. There was this band Watershed, and this band Frybrain, and Hand of Glory and Grommet and Thundermonkey. Some pretty clever bands. And there was that whole McGillicuddy Serious Party thing, which kind of came out of Art Lines, which was the thing that my mother ran, all those people came through Art Lines.

**Interviewer:**

Just thinking of that, was that unusual as a version of the PEP schemes, cause I remember ...

**Stefan:**

I'm not sure.

**Interviewer:**

I remember lots of DOC tracks and things being built. But I never heard of an art scheme.

**Stefan:**

Yeah I'm not too sure, I mean to me it was just my mum's job, it was just normal.

**Interviewer:**

But it became the kind of crucible of weird Hamilton creativity.

**Stefan:**

Yeah it did. I think it established a lot of things that are still going there to this day. Street theatre and nonsense yeah. Where were we? Bands in Hamilton. So I'd had a pretty good gang of friends, and we actually kind of reacted against the McGillicuddy thing, we didn't want to be McGillicuddy's. And we thought that the McGillicuddy's thought they were shit hot, and they were just all boring and pretentious. And when we were all drunk we thought we were heaps more genius idiots, and so we kind of formed our own gang.

**Interviewer:**

To fight the McGillicuddy's.

**Stefan:**

Well we never fought them and actually I did like some of them really, but that was sort of the idea. And there was this thing called Oats, you know fuckin Oats. It was a big joke, but it was really heavy, we would go to parties and have fights. Which was very strange. And they weren't really serious, they were play fights, but they would get quite heavy too and people got hurt. So yeah that gang was people like Sugar Jon and CJA, Biff Bangle and Glen Frenzy and Doctor Fil. I still do stuff with them, still my best friends. This guy Ugly Dog Davies and Sgt Dion. Brilliant people. So as well as fighting we were drawing comics and self publishing comics, but we were also forming new bands every week, stupid bands with one stupid idea, you'd just form it and you'd put a tape out, and we played heaps, you know, great fun.

**Interviewer:**

So the band would be an idea rather than like lets get together and play music, you'd go lets get together and do this thing, this thing's the band.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, I remember being at the pub and Glen Frenzy saying do you want to be in my band Teen X-ray and I'd say what kind of band is it, and what did he even say, I can't even remember what he said, he would have had some angle but I think it was just a name. So I was like yeah I'll be in that.

**Interviewer:**

You've got to be in a band called Teen X-ray.

**Stefan:**

Oh Yeah. There was the Crowdads who were a rockabilly band but the drunkest rockabilly band you would ever see. And to this day they are the drunkest band I have ever seen. Amazing. They can't even remember recording their first tape. They would end up naked and things like that. Gatecrash parties and play. Early Armpit gigs where they were too drunk to figure out how to plug in their distortion pedal.



**Interviewer:**

What was the venue scene, like did you play in venues or at parties?

**Stefan:**

Mostly at parties and at each others houses. Occasionally at venues. Yeah well that band Dribbly Cat Attraction was playing out in pubs and stuff. And you know, I still figure that was a good band, but even at that level which was slightly popular in Hamilton, the sort of the things we started doing, you know the drunken stupid stuff became, to me was better, it was more exciting, when we were recording on tape decks, whereas Dribbly Cat Attraction went into the proper studio and did some recording, which turned out okay.

**Interviewer:**

Pretty great to get to make that contrast at the time, rather than spend years making stupid albums and only realise that ... was that the same, were the other people in that, were they also playing on other bands?

**Stefan:**

Well Jon was. The other two guys, Dan and Grant, yeah they were part of that scene, they maybe wanted to do things a bit more professionally I guess. So that band kind of petered out, cause Jon went overseas. It was a good thing but I imagine that we could have kept going too.

**Interviewer:**

And was there a dribbly cat?

**Stefan:**

Yeah there was one that used to follow us around.

**Interviewer:**

And so in that, so you were playing music and drawing comics, can we talk about comics. When did you start making comics?

**Stefan:**

Well I always drew. I can't remember a time when I wasn't drawing, and we used to do comics at school and stuff, comics in the school newspaper. And when I met Glen and Clayton and all those guys they were, well Glen was already drawing some proper comics, which was terribly impressive.

**Interviewer:**

How were they proper?

**Stefan:**

Well they were, you know, they were full page scripted stories, science fiction.

And I'm not sure, I don't even remember suddenly deciding, oh lets stop pretending to be a gang and publish comics. But that's pretty much how it was, it became Oats Publications. And we started putting out comics. And they were pretty stupid.

**Interviewer:**

Well it seems pretty amazing to find a bunch of people that are all into playing drunken, stupid but good music and writing drunken, stupid but good comics.

**Stefan:**

I know, I was really lucky. I've met people who grew up in Hamilton and were a bit different and never found anyone like them and were persecuted and had a horrible childhood. And yeah, I mean Hamilton can be a pretty horrible place, its scary and violent, and small minded in a lot of ways, and that never bothered me cause I had this sweet gang.

**Interviewer:**

And in between the kind of scary, the kind of farming red neck culture and on one hand the McGillicuddy wackiness on the other hand, to find a third way.

**Stefan:**

Yeah. Yeah that's funny. But also being Hamilton, if you were doing anything different, you could kind of get noticed for it. Like you know all our stupid bands, we were putting out tapes and we were getting written up in the University newspaper and ...

**Interviewer:**

And were you getting played on the radio?

**Stefan:**

Maybe a little bit. One of the great events we did was an all night, live to air broadcast on Contact FM which I think it was nine or ten hours, they let us just, they let us do whatever we wanted, and all our bands played all night long.

**Interviewer:**

Were you set up in the studio at the radio station?

**Stefan:**

Yeah. And you know new bands were forming on the night to pad it out, you know. Yeah I really vividly remember a guy, being at a party, a guy who obviously had liked Dribbly Cat Attraction and that had finished, and I had been doing this other stuff, Pumice, and this guy at the party sort of cornered me and said when are you going to do some proper music again. I was just laughing at him, and it sort of felt like a victory, that this guy didn't get it, and that I had annoyed him.

**Interviewer:**

Excellent. So I want to know the student radio kind of connection to people, so they were really, in terms of the Hamilton scene at the time, Contact seems to have been pretty central. It was always way less quote unquote professional to the rest of us at the time.

**Stefan:**

Yeah well they were good to us. We were friends with the station manager who was always helping us out.

**Interviewer:**

Was Scott the programme director.

**Stefan:**

This was Adam Hyde, he was always helping us out. And we started to get a few good gigs like, see now Pumice was me and Jon Arcus, and then Jon also had this band called Armpit, which is him and Clayton Noone. Jon went overseas probably about 93, 94 or something, he went overseas for a year, which is kind of where the flexibility of what Pumice is comes from, cause we decided he could be Pumice while he's overseas and I could be Pumice while I'm still at home, which we did. Like he did recordings while he was away and so did I, and I enlisted these guys from Morrinsville to be in a Pumice rock trio for a while. So anyway, me and Clayton from Armpit started playing together as Armice Pumb Pit, while Jon was away. But the cool thing about Armice Pumb Pit was the only reason we formed was cause King Loser were coming to town and they didn't have anyone to open for them, and we said we'll do it. And we formed Armice Pumb Pit and we got this guy Gordon Bassett to be in it as well, and we had our first practice that afternoon and played the gig that night. And King Loser had just played at the Big Day Out and they said that we were better than anything they had seen at the Big Day Out.

**Interviewer:**

That's a victory.

**Stefan:**

Think that was maybe the first Big Day Out too. Something like that.

**Interviewer:**

Like the Breeders and Smashing Pumpkins.

**Stefan:**

I don't know.

**Interviewer:**

I went to that one. You would have been better than the Smashing Pumpkins for sure.

**Stefan:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

And so did Sugar Jon play much as Pumice overseas, like did he play or just record?

**Stefan:**

No he just did some recording, did some recording in his sisters fire escape in New York and stuff like that.

**Interviewer:**

Does he, when did he stop being part of Pumice then?

**Stefan:**

Well officially he's still, he's there forever. If he turned up wanting to play I'd be happy, but um, because its been me solo for so long its pretty established as that now. Which is a shame, we never intended for it to be like that. But the last kind of, the last period where he was playing with Pumice would be the late 90's, 99 in Dunedin.

**Interviewer:**

A very beautiful career.

**Stefan:**

He has a new band now The Claudelands Weasels. Even when we lived in Dunedin together, and we both had four tracks, there's recordings that are just him and recordings that are just me. And Jon's stuff is fantastic, it's so good.

**Interviewer:**

So Dunedin then, when did you move there?

**Stefan:**

I moved there about 94.

**Interviewer:**

How come?

**Stefan:**

I don't know, I had spent, I was 20 years old and spent two years after high school just dicking around in Hamilton, on the dole and not really doing anything.

**Interviewer:**

Apart playing in a band and making comics.

**Stefan:**

Apart from playing in all those bands. I guess it had changed a little bit, like Glen Frenzy moved to Upper Hutt, and Jon came back from overseas, and he wanted to move, he didn't want to live in Hamilton again after living overseas, so we just decided we would, we never decided to move to Dunedin either, we just packed our bags and headed south by hitchhiking. And its about then that I bought my small guitar.

**Interviewer:**

The one that you still use?

**Stefan:**

Yeah which has become the backbone of what Pumice became, I bought it just before we left for like fifty bucks. As a travelling guitar. It was untunable.

**Interviewer:**

That's great, which it stayed. So you just kept heading, kept going south?

**Stefan:**

Yeah. I think we kind of knew we wanted to go to Dunedin, but we just didn't say it out loud. And we got there and we found flats and stuff.

**Interviewer:**

Was there a kind of, Dunedin because of the music, without saying it out loud.

**Stefan:**

Well yeah. I had been there the year before just to visit, and it was just you know far away and exotic. And we weren't going to University or anything we just moved there, and, what happened in those early years. It seemed really hard to get gigs and stuff when we got there, no one was interested in what we, yeah, in what we were doing. But slowly you know, slowly we got some gigs and things like that.

**Interviewer:**

Where did you play at?

**Stefan:**

The Empire was pretty much the place we played in the early Dunedin days. I did get a four track in those day, so that was the first recordings with the four track. Hamilton had just been tape decks. So that was good, a good development. I started, I started to play with some other people there. The thing called Casagrante Apparatus, which was with this guy called Justin Bull and this other guy Les, and that was embarrassingly trying to be a free jazz band.

**Interviewer:**

And were you drumming mostly?

**Stefan:**

For that band I was yeah. Mostly when I play with other people I end up being the drummer. And then I joined the Aesthetics, was probably an important step.

**Interviewer:**

Matt Middleton?

**Stefan:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Was that the first version?

**Stefan:**

No they had been around for a while. I think Matt didn't initially think that I knew how to rock out, but I showed him.

**Interviewer:**

Matt has quite a high standard.

**Stefan:**

Yeah I think he was probably assuming based on Pumice stuff that he had seen or something, I'm not sure.

**Interviewer:**

So how did you end up in the Aesthetics then?

**Stefan:**

I don't know, I just knew them, I knew they were looking for a drummer, I loved them & just offered. The weekend I joined the Aesthetics, both Shaun and Matt got arrested for different things that weekend, so that was pretty exciting, yeah.

**Interviewer:**

And so did, so you were still playing with Sugar Jon as Pumice, and recording as well?

**Stefan:**

Yep, well Jon actually came and went from Dunedin a few times, he went back to Hamilton and he went and lived in Canvas Town.

**Interviewer:**

Where's that?

**Stefan:**

Its sort of in between Blenheim and Nelson. So yeah one of those periods when he was away I did my first solo Pumice gig. Cause there was this whole, you know, Alastair Galbraith and Peter Jefferies were the big success stories, and there were all these terrible solo artists in Dunedin, there were all these terrible solo songwriter nights, and I got asked to play at one. And I said yes mainly cause I thought that I could do something better than a lot of the stuff I'd been seeing. And yeah and I knew about Hasil Adkins records, where he plays guitar and drums at the same time. So I thought I'd do that, it would be a one off or something.

**Interviewer:**

15 years later.

**Stefan:**

And it was just bass drum and high hat, and that small guitar and yeah I kept adding to it.

**Interviewer:**

So was that the first time that you played two instruments at once?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, yeah it was.

**Interviewer:**

And had you been writing songs before then, like ...

**Stefan:**

Yeah, I had been recording these songs on the four track, and so for that gig I just figured out a way to play a version of them, with this bass drum, high hat set up.

**Interviewer:**

And the guitar.

**Stefan:**

And the guitar, yeah.

**Interviewer:**

And how did it go?

**Stefan:**

It was terrifying. It was the scariest thing I had ever done, and it went really well, and I recorded it and the next night a friend of mine had organised this dance party, for some teenage cause, and he got me to DJ at it, and I got a hundred bucks as a DJ, and so I thought, wow a hundred bucks, which was big money, I'd never been paid a hundred bucks, and I wanted to do something special with it,

so I put out an eight inch lathe cut record of the solo gig from the night before.

**Interviewer:**

Awesome, Peter King?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, Geraldine eight inch, which um there's probably 20 of them. Might be worth a bit of money those now.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, that's a great investment. So had you, with cassettes and things before that, had you released them and distributed them? So you have kind of like a label and distribution network of some kind.

**Stefan:**

Yeah in theory yeah Stabbies and The Rocket recordings, but nah. The reality was just dubbing off copies and giving them away to friends and sending, probably started sending some overseas in that time. You very rarely would sell.

**Interviewer:**

But with sending stuff overseas was that just to get it out there, or for swaps?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, just for whatever. Yeah I mean one of the first things I sent overseas was, I heard through Andy Dickson about this Norwegian compilation album that was being put together, and they were looking for music, so I sent something to them, and they put it out on this record, which would have been about 98, something like that. So it was just things like that, you would just get a little sniff of something, and send it away. Exciting getting international mail.

**Interviewer:**

So what did you do with the lathe cut ones?

**Stefan:**

The lathe cut ones, again just ended up just giving them to your friends pretty much. My friends were putting out lathes as well, so you'd just swap them. As far as I can remember. I started to get, you know there's those American collectors who want anything that's a Geraldine lathe cut.

**Interviewer:**

Like Dan Vallor.

**Stefan:**

Dan Vallor, you're getting orders from him, he'd get two copies of everything, which was great because you knew that if you put something out as a lathe you'd definitely sell a few.



**Interviewer:**

You can always count on him to cover the cost.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, and you know Byron Coley was kind of pursuing lathes at that time too. There was maybe a couple of others that you could almost guarantee, if you were just pressing 20 you could almost guarantee your money back from these Americans.

**Interviewer:**

So how did they hear, I guess the networks, people they would just follow all the networks until they found who was doing things, by, through who you were doing things with?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, there was this guy Simon in Rotorua, called Insample, did you ever come across him?

**Interviewer:**

No.

**Stefan:**

It was a zine, but he also distributed stuff. And he was actually from Hamilton but he moved to Rotorua, but he was one of the first people to support us, encourage us and review us in the zine and stuff, so I think probably internationally people were reading his zine. So it was just these little steps, yeah, I haven't really thought about how those people heard of us before, but, possibly through him, selling stuff through shops like Crawlspace in Auckland, because Thurston Moore would come to town and go into Crawlspace and buy anything that was obscure, and sure enough he bought some tapes of mine that way. And I got a postcard from him, this was about 97, 98, wanting to trade for some stuff.

**Interviewer:**

That's cool. So he'd not only buy stuff, but listen to it and send people post cards if he liked it. That's awesome.

**Stefan:**

I know. I remember getting that postcard and it just, it had a stamp on it, saying T. Moore, and looking at it and thinking, that's Thurston Moore. New York address.

**Interviewer:**

That's so great. And they're kind of the cultural cache of New Zealandness for a lot of those collectors, it was useful I guess you know to be coming from here, there was already a ready audience of people who will be attuned to what you're doing, as well as the music itself.

**Stefan:**

And sort of attach coolness to things, you get that.

**Interviewer:**

It helps when you are. So did that get increasingly busy that time in Dunedin?

**Stefan:**

Not really. It still, you know, I still felt like, with Pumice anyway, it felt like there wasn't much interest in it. Not that I expected it.

**Interviewer:**

Just in Dunedin or in general?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, in Dunedin. I was pretty uncool, it was really clean twangy guitars and stupid little songs, which was the original stupid Hamilton days idea for what Pumice would be, clean & twangy.

**Interviewer:**

I'm trying to think what else was going on in Dunedin at the time.

**Stefan:**

Lots of Cloud Boy and Mink, and all that was going on.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah Demarnia Lloyd.

**Stefan:**

Same thing for the Aesthetics, we would often get ten people to our gigs, until we started playing with the Ho Dogs a lot, they were really popular.

**Interviewer:**

That was Richard Francis was it?

**Stefan:**

Yeah. And so then we became the Ho Dogs, weird brother band for a while.

**Interviewer:**

The Ho Dogs were dirty rock and roll, I always remember, cause I was at ADU by then, a programme director and I remember getting stuff from them, and it was always quite exciting.

**Stefan:**

They were such an exciting band in the late 90's. They would just tear it up and places would just explode. All kinds of weird stuff would happen, and yeah it was

just thrilling.

**Interviewer:**

I don't remember getting Pumice stuff though at ADU.

**Stefan:**

I probably didn't send it to you.

**Interviewer:**

No. I would have sought it out, I remember definitely playing Pumice on the radio.

**Stefan:**

You know, looking back I do remember I was pretty insecure about the stuff I was doing. And I only really was sending stuff to places where I kind of knew it would be received. That's weird I haven't thought about that for a long time, but yeah, I think that was definitely going on.

**Interviewer:**

And also I'm just trying to think what of the musical context at the time, and you know, in Christchurch at least it was that point in student radio when you were having to cater for a lot of people who were really seriously into electronic music, and like, and the non-electronic music.

**Stefan:**

The more traditional student radio.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, and a point where other kinds of music were getting more hi-fi in balancing things in the overall sound, and trying to cater for all of these different communities as well as your own kind of musical tastes. It strikes me that that would be quite an awkward, kind of Pumice was much more out of synch then than it is now.

**Stefan:**

Yeah I think it was. Yeah I ended up drumming in Mink and Cloud Boy on occasions. I had a good rep as a good drummer, so I was always doing that. And the Aesthetics was doing quite well really. We opened for Sonic Youth and had Ecstatic Peace, put out our album and things like that.

**Interviewer:**

That's pretty, doing well. Where was that Sonic Youth at?

**Stefan:**

That was in Auckland.

**Interviewer:**

What year was that? 96, the Diamond Sea tour?

**Stefan:**

No, this was about 98 maybe 99. It was, I think it was ...

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, 99 was the one that I didn't go to.

**Stefan:**

A Thousand Leaves maybe, came out. It was us and Pit Viper and Sonic Youth and you know Thurston asked us to come up and play, and we just said yeah, fuck yeah, jumped in the car, got to Auckland the promoter said who are you? no you're not playing, and we were like yeah, Thurston asked us to play. It was like oh, and then, well there's no money to pay you. Are you kidding, we drove up from Dunedin. You know, just kind of that, pretty stupid. I remember Celia Mancini went in to bat for us, and bullied the promoter into letting us play and giving us two hundred bucks.

**Interviewer:**

To cover a fraction of your petrol. Awesome though, to get to play with Sonic Youth.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, yeah it was good. I remember my bass drum was massive in the Auckland Town Hall. I remember, and I met Rosy Parlane, cause Pit Viper played.

**Interviewer:**

So that was with the Aesthetics?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, and we did a Pumice Crude gig in Auckland. And Thurston Moore and Steve Shelley came out to that. And I remember Thurston goin, gee I didn't know PooHmiss was playing.

**Interviewer:**

So how long did you stay in Dunedin?

**Stefan:**

I left in 99, end of 99. What was that about, I made some money, I was working for Fink, the weekly gig guide.

**Interviewer:**

That was Martin and Caro?

**Stefan:**

Yep. And that was pretty sweet, it was kind of a dole scheme thing where the dole would pay your wage if somebody would employ you, one of those things. I went to work for them and I was doing the comics and sourcing other comics and stuff, and getting paid, possibly my first decent wage in my life, and I saved it, cause I was used to living on nothing, and carried on living on nothing and saved the rest. Yeah and I had been through a pretty big depression too in 98/99, and just felt like time to go, so I bought a plane ticket overseas, a one way ticket, to Amsterdam. Which I don't quite know what I was thinking, which is exactly what I was thinking actually. I remember thinking about getting a return ticket, and just thinking, yeah but I don't know what I'm going to do, so I'll just get a one way one, and then I'll have some money to live off.

**Interviewer:**

And did you go?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, I left, end of 99, went to Australia first, and played a gig in Melbourne, maybe two gigs in Melbourne, yeah I think it was two gigs in Melbourne. And then went to Amsterdam, and I was supposed to be staying with Adam Hyde, who was living there, and sort of a week before I left New Zealand, he e-mailed me to say oh I'm not going to be here. And I was like oh neat. So I arrived and stayed in a backpackers for a while, and met up with these Australians, and one of them had a job in a bar, which had an empty room, upstairs, and this was New Year's 2000 so all the hostels were pretty booked up, so I was lucky to get a room for the first little while. So we got this room above the pub and I did some work in the pub, laying down cement for the landlord. But my money ran out pretty quick and I had to go to England to get a job.

**Interviewer:**

What did you do?

**Stefan:**

Oh I had some office temping in London for a while. And then, and London was swarming with Hamiltonians at the time, which was great in that I could go and stay with them and play music with them, but also did my head in a bit that I was in London hanging out with Hamiltonians.

**Interviewer:**

And a long time after you had left Hamilton.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, so I kind of, I went and did this farming and got these farming jobs in Wales, and kind of planting seedlings, and loading up trucks for farms with seedlings. And this was in the middle of winter, so I would be out in the fields with

mud up to my knees. And one day it snowed and I was out in the field, oh it's brutal. But it was real sink or swim, which was pretty terrifying and miserable, but it was pretty good for me too I think. And I did one gig in London, and then basically all that farm work I had been doing I was just saving that to get a ticket home as soon as I could. About a year later I went home.

**Interviewer:**

A good way to, it means that you actually got to do England, not just London.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, yeah, and I went and spent a lot of time in Scotland too, which was excellent. My mum's from there, so I met some family, yeah that was cool.

**Interviewer:**

And were you playing, I mean did you have your travelling guitar?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, I had the little guitar, but that was all. Yeah I just did that one gig in London cause I didn't quite have the confidence, and England was also impenetrable for that kind of music, I just didn't know where to start. Towards the end of my stay I found this flyer for The Klinker, which is a night club in the back of a pub and just one glance at it and I knew that it was my people. And so I went and played.

**Interviewer:**

And so that's where you played?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer:**

England is, I mean its kind of harder to break into, I guess being a New Zealander has less cultural cache there than it does in the States or somewhere else in terms of music.

**Stefan:**

Yep, I haven't played in London since actually, that was 2000.

**Interviewer:**

Right. And just finding a way in to, so that, the first time that you sort of turned up somewhere and realised that you had no way into a scene.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Which is quite a shock, even as a consumer, as an audience member that's a shock.

**Stefan:**

I don't remember being shocked, I remember just accepting it. I mean I didn't think, it's not like I thought I was owed something or I deserved anything, that's how it is, I just thought that's how it is. You know I was playing music with Glen Frenzy and Doctor Fil in Brixton in their house and stuff, that was just as important as anything.

**Interviewer:**

And were you doing comics through all that time?

**Stefan:**

Yeah I was, probably late 90's I started doing City of Tales comics with Clayton Noon, where he writes them and I draw them. And pretty much since the first time we did that I've always got a pile of stories, if I feel like drawing a comic, I can just draw one.

**Interviewer:**

So he writes stories and then gives them to you?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, he kind of pencils in this squiggle and shapes on a sheet of A4 and I sort of flesh it out. Yeah so yeah I was doing that and publishing little books. I was still putting out tapes and they became good sort of travel currency, you meet someone you give them a comic, give them a tape.

**Interviewer:**

Did the connections that you made through the comics and tapes kind of overlap, like was that much, did one get you into the other scene?

**Stefan:**

Not really actually. I mean comics is the most miserable business in the world, it's really bottom of the barrel. Some great people but it's dreadful. But that comics even exist is a miracle. Even you know, even Americans that are hailed as genius's of the art I think struggle to make a living you know. I pretty much given up on the comics world except I'm lucky in that I had the music world, so you know, I might sell comics at gigs, and someone who likes my music may like a comic, so that's just a little bonus.

**Interviewer:**

And people who wouldn't specifically seek out comics, but will see it as kind of part of the same package.

**Stefan:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

So you came back to New Zealand in 2000 sometime?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, the end of 2000. My grandfather died as well so that's another reason I came back. I don't remember choosing to live in Auckland, but I started living in Auckland, I guess all my family was around there. And I sort of came home from that trip a bit defeated, and I thought that I needed to get a proper job or do some study. So I went to Teachers College 2001 and I lasted one semester, cause I fucking hated it. And I don't think my reasons for going were the right reasons. All my family are teachers, and I can see that they lead rewarding lives through being teachers. But its not me.

**Interviewer:**

Its quite an intensive thing to do, on a whim.

**Stefan:**

Yeah. I was all over the place. So dropping out of Teachers College was pretty scary, cause I had failed again, well it was scary but it was also liberating, and I did, at that point I decided to kind of stand up for my music a bit more. And so what was I doing? I had a job working for the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Call Centre. So I was doing that. And then I got this job, this temp job in this insurance office through Ed Gains, which was only meant to be for a month, and it sort of probably lasted two or three years off and on, like, I sort of became friends with the boss, and I guess did a good job, knew my alphabet pretty good. And he kind of off and on would, you know, give me work, and it was \$17 an hour, which was the most amazing money I'd ever known. And you know, if I needed a week off it was no problem. And so I think with some of that money I put out my first CD.

**Interviewer:**

Wow, an actual CD.

**Stefan:**

Yeah. But lets see, oh but I also went to Audio Engineering School for a year, about 2002 maybe.

**Interviewer:**

Is that like MAINZ?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, I went to MAINZ. And I pretty much solely went cause my friend Gerald



was going, and he talked me into it, and because it would mean a years student allowance, and I thought I could get some studio time and that some of it would be useful. And its pretty much exactly what it was, some of it was really useful, some of it was completely irrelevant. But also I got to use some technology which before had been completely alien to me, just because I had never had a chance to use it. Like computers and stuff. Even just compressors or mixing desks. Even the mixing desk I had no idea what that was. Yeah, my four track was a little two channel four track. And that was as advanced as I had ever been before that. And so I got to mix down, yeah the recordings that I was doing at that time I got to mix down at MAINZ in the flash studio, so I did a better job than I ever had before, which kind of gave me some confidence, and I also decided that I would just take this huge leap and put out a CD, which was about \$800 or something to put out five hundred CD's.

**Interviewer:**

Where did you get them pressed?

**Stefan:**

At Dual Plover in Sydney. Actually just before I came down on this trip South I've looked in my stock box and I've got maybe ten copies left of that CD.

**Interviewer:**

Which CD was that?

**Stefan:**

That was called White.

**Interviewer:**

Oh its one of the ones you sent me last year.

**Stefan:**

So that's an important album in that I felt like it was worthy of being a CD, and I also sent it out to more people, I sent it out to magazines, things like that. Decided I was going to give it a go.

**Interviewer:**

It's a really nice album.

**Stefan:**

Thank you.

**Interviewer:**

And you sent it overseas?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, I sent it overseas. Yeah I guess the music had matured a little bit or

something. Certainly it was a new something. I don't know. I just felt good about it. I felt proud about it.

**Interviewer:**

And did you have to make decisions while getting to use this fancy gear? Like was there a process there of working out how to still be you in relation to that or was that just inherent in the music itself?

**Stefan:**

Yeah that was just inherent, because I was still recording at home.

**Interviewer:**

Oh yeah, you weren't going full 24 track digital?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, I knew I didn't want to do that. I mean we did some recording like that on the course, and it was pretty quickly clear that it wasn't what I wanted to do. I was lucky on that course cause Rachel Shearer was a tutor that year, and quite often at various points if there was something that was bugging me I would just go to her and say, do you think I need to worry about this, or is this true what they're saying, and she would put me straight.

**Interviewer:**

Did you know Rachel before that?

**Stefan:**

I don't think I did. I knew who she was, I knew her music. I don't think I'd met her before that.

**Interviewer:**

That's really amazing in that environment.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, I was stoked that she was there.

**Interviewer:**

So what kind of response did you get from this?

**Stefan:**

A pretty good response I think. It was interesting, I wrote up a press release for it and stuff and sent it out. I remember being kind of amazed that magazines pretty much just wrote what you told them to write, you know, I was a bit disgusted by that, but excited that they had reviewed it. And it was interesting you know, I was fairly new to Auckland and again I felt like no one was interested. Took a while ...

**Interviewer:**

Was that sort of 2002/2003?

**Stefan:**

Yeah. I mean it's hard to move to a new city, it takes a long time to ...

**Interviewer:**

What was going on in Auckland at the time, it was just before we got there. I can't think. I guess there was like the Coolies, were the Coolies still playing?

**Stefan:**

Yeah the Coolies and stuff, Fake Purr and White Saucer and, I think it was possibly Garage Rock Revival Days wasn't it? I think it was. Lots of rock and roll. The Rock and Roll Machine, Slave Trader, D4 and all that stuff.

**Interviewer:**

So were you playing drums with people then as well?

**Stefan:**

There was a little period when The Aesthetics sort of got back together in Auckland, cause Matt moved up, and that would have been 2002 I think, so I was doing that, and then I was in the last versions of the Ho Dogs, which was a good band to play in, but they maybe shouldn't have called it the Ho Dogs, it was sort of clinging to the dream a bit too long sort of thing with new lines ups and stuff. But that was fun to play in. It was pretty frantic, almost speed metal. I did make a trip to Australia around that time, when White had come out. Just went to visit some friends in Melbourne, and booked a few shows, and quite extraordinarily one of the shows got double booked with another event, which happened to be What Is Music Festival. And the booker at the venue had the savvy to say oh we've double booked, but maybe these two things are compatible. And I found myself on the bill for What Is Music. And none of them knew anything about me, they needed a venue, so they said okay.

**Interviewer:**

Was that 2005, no?

**Stefan:**

No, it was 2003 or something or 4. And so I turned up there and there was this international bill, all over the world, quite sophisticated. Hello, thanks for letting me play. And I played a blinder to this huge audience. And you know, What Is Music people were really enthusiastic and excited. And I came back to Auckland from that trip with my mind blown.

**Interviewer:**

That's a great break.

**Stefan:**

And they invited me back the next year for the festival, and I've played it three times. And each time these extraordinary international line-ups and the people I've met and the contacts I've made through that festival are staggering.

**Interviewer:**

This Wire review from 2005 says Neville's three sets are amongst the festivals highlights. That's a really great content. And so that must have really kicked off with how you felt about, you know, escalated about how you felt about it, in terms of playing back in New Zealand as well as starting to make things happen overseas.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, and I think the act was developing as well. It was heading into some interesting areas, getting a bit, well I don't know, its always been much the same. Maybe I was getting better at it. It was interesting at What Is Music, because everything else was abstract and improvised or conceptual you know, and it was kind of nerve racking because I would be playing these songs, but I guess, and that's always what I've done, and I always end up in these experimental contexts, but I'm still just playing songs, but there's something about the out of tuneness and the, I mean they're open ended songs, things happen, and they fall apart and things like that.

**Interviewer:**

And they're kind of improvised and abstract anyway, sounding, I mean over the whole set. A set might be made up of individual songs, but as a whole it still works as an improvised abstract thing, I think.

**Stefan:**

I guess so. Look I've just played in Brisbane and the blurb for that called me a song deconstructivist. Well no I just play songs, but I just play them in my own way. Which was really, coming away from those festivals, it always kind of reinforced what I was doing, that it was worthy and ...

**Interviewer:**

And it had a place in the world.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, and as I've travelled the world, you know, you see people doing similar things, but I've never seen anyone doing what I do, you know, there's similarities with lots of things, so I've been proud of, well, I just stumbled into it.

**Interviewer:**

And its quite hard to describe but it is completely, you. At some point, cause you did a residency in Vienna, when was that 2004?

**Stefan:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

Was that your first beyond Australia trip specifically as a musician?

**Stefan:**

Yeah it was.

**Interviewer:**

And how did that come about?

**Stefan:**

Let me think. I'd done Australia a couple of times, with What Is Music, so one of those times, Werner Dafeldecker from Vienna was there. And he caught me on a good night. And was taken with Pumice enough to recommend me to this Institution in Vienna who have residencies. And to get these residencies you have to be recommended by a local artist. So he could pretty much guarantee me getting it, he had this relationship with the Quartier 21, who were the organisation. So he said to me would you be interested if I could set this up. I was like yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Just thinking whatever, never happen. Sure enough it happened, and I went over at the end of 2004, and I had two months. My own apartment in the museum's quartier of Vienna. So you know all the galleries and concert halls and sort of living amongst that, and statues of Beethoven and Freud and all the pinnacles of human endeavour. And I'm there to contribute to the culture of the place, which I thought was funny.

**Interviewer:**

And was that all paid for?

**Stefan:**

I had to pay for my flight over, and then they gave me a sort of, what do they call it, a stipend, which they kept saying how little it was, and how sorry, and it was thousands of Euros or something.

**Interviewer:**

A lot more than \$17 and hour.

**Stefan:**

It was enough to live like a king while I was there. And also do a little bit of travel, use that as a base and played some shows in other parts of Europe. And I recorded in Amman Studios which is Christian Fennesz and Werner Dafeldecker's studio, cause they were out of town for a few weeks, and they gave me the key. It was extraordinary. And so, because I had been given all this stuff and this position, I was so determined to make the most of it, and I wanted

to earn my keep, and I threw myself into it. I remember getting up every day and trying to write a song, play some guitar. And it was sort of Christmas time as well. And the people in charge kept saying to me, don't worry, just relax, enjoy your time here. But I had those two weeks, and I recorded two albums.

**Interviewer:**

Wow.

**Stefan:**

And that was the end of the first month, so the second month I pretty much just dicked around.

**Interviewer:**

Did being in Vienna change, like did you make different music in that environment?

**Stefan:**

I did cause I was in that studio and they had really amazing equipment, incredible microphones. And pretty much straight away I realised that suddenly the possibilities of what was possible in that studio were so vast, and there was a very real chance I wouldn't achieve anything. So I limited myself to just recording live. I thought I can do the multi instruments at once, and just do it live. And then I'll be sure to achieve something. And that was a really smart idea, cause I think that's how I got so much done. But those albums do sound different. They don't have the saturated distortion and murk that I'm best known for. They're a bit naked. Which I think is cool. There's a few things on them that are a bit embarrassing, but on the whole that's what happened when I was there. It's weird, everyone says how lo-fi they sound. That's exactly what it sounded like in the room. That's exactly what it sounded like.

**Interviewer:**

There's no way you can do that low fi with no interference from the recording equipment.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, just tell them that's your ears man, if it sounds low fi that's your ears.

**Interviewer:**

There are so many classic stories of you know bands going into the big studio for the first time and it being a complete sprawling expensive ridiculous disaster on so many levels. That it's a really nice story to counter balance that.

**Stefan:**

It did take me a while to, it took a few days before I got anything that I thought was good music. Just yeah, just trying to layer things up. Cause my records every stuff gets obscured, like I like layers and murk. And it was really hard to get

anything like that.

**Interviewer:**

Anything murky.

**Stefan:**

It was all so clear.

**Interviewer:**

So then did you see anyone play in Vienna?

**Stefan:**

Oh yeah I was going out lots, I saw lots of stuff. Yeah it was wonderful. And things like the residency programme was sponsored by a big Austrian Bank. And the Bank even employed a couple of people who pretty much manage the Bank's funding of the arts. And so these bankers would come and take me out for dinner, and, you know, cause they wanted to talk about what I was doing, they were interested that I was there, and a New Zealander. And they would also take me out to concerts. And they took me out to some grand classical modern composition concerts. And they took me out to the Melvins. Yeah it was pretty amazing. There was lots of cool stuff. And after that residency I had organised a European tour as well, so the start of 2005 I toured Europe for about six weeks.

**Interviewer:**

Right. And was that through networks that you already knew, or that you had built up while you were in Vienna?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, mostly it was pen pals that I had been writing to. Just contacts of friends of friends. Those Apartment Records people in Norway, the first people I sent stuff to. You know, I went and met them. And you know, this is after five or six years of correspondence, they were just like family those guys. So where did I go? I went to Berlin. I went to Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Oslo, Scotland, Ireland, did I go to Italy, I think I went to Italy. Oh no, I didn't play I just had a friend there. So it was pretty small.

**Interviewer:**

It must have been especially back in Amsterdam, not really that long after that first trip, to be able to go back there on the back of this amazing residency and be doing it.

**Stefan:**

Yeah it was really amazing. And you know that residency gave me lots of money so I sort of stayed pretty comfortable throughout it. And by that stage I had had the Raft album out on Last Visible Dog, so it was the first record I had done that really got distributed properly.

**Interviewer:**

How did you get hooked up with Last Visible Dog then?

**Stefan:**

There was this amazing e-mail chat list called Roots For War and Travel, which Glenn Donaldson from San Francisco set up. And he was smart enough to realise there were lots of people who knew of each other, but maybe we didn't all know each other. So we were suddenly all on this list, and it was people from San Francisco like him that, the Jewelled Antler people, and people like Chris Moon from Last Visible Dog, so labels who had been putting out this kind of music. Lots of us New Zealanders and some Finnish people and, it was a really amazing e-mail list. You know in the blink of an eye it connected lots of people up that should have been connected.

**Interviewer:**

Wow, did he just one day sent you all an e-mail saying hey you're on this mailing list.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, he sent an e-mail out saying do you want to be in on this. And I said sure. I didn't even know what e-mail lists were in those days. Okay whatever. So I was sort of talking to Chris Moon over that, and I asked if he wanted to hear a record I had made. He had put out an Ohm record which was me and Campbell Kneale, so he at least knew who I was, and I sent him the record, and he loved it, and put it out. And Raft is an important record too because after doing the audio engineering course, I was a bit more technically savvy, I bought Campbell Kneale's second hand eight track off him. So I had an eight track and I recorded Raft on this eight track. So it was a better sound and bigger scope. And it came out of, there was another really big depression that I was in, that spawned that album too. So the album was kind of pulling myself out of a hole. Yeah, I'm all a bit confused with the timeline here. So Raft was recorded 2002 2003 maybe.

**Interviewer:**

Oh really, that long ago. This one aye, recorded June 2003 at Luke's House. Except one in December.

**Stefan:**

So I recorded Raft, I was really depressed. I recorded it and pretty much my flat fell apart and I was sick of it. Again kind of like in Dunedin. So I put everything in storage and went to Australia. Sort of just to get away from things. And then I got invited to play at What Is Music in the New Year of 2004, that's when I met Werner Dafeldecker. I came back to New Zealand, got Raft put out, and then I went to Vienna at the end of 04.



**Interviewer:**

That's a good sequence.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, and Raft was really well received. And so yeah that Roots For War and Travel e-mail list, a lot of people on that were hearing Raft, which was the first Pumice they had heard, so I was making friends pretty easily.

**Interviewer:**

And being connected to someone like Chris Moon, is a double credibility.

**Stefan:**

And that all lead to offers for that European tour, as well as contacts that I met on that list. And that list only lasted a year and a half. While it was good but all these other, all these record collector dicks turned up, cause initially it was kind of about people just making it and putting stuff out. All these record collectors got involved and it just became swamped in people listing their obscure favourite records. And then there was email feuds and stuff, and it was just gross. And Glenn just pulled the plug on it, he just stopped it, to his credit. And some people tried to start up an imitation to carry on that list. I never subscribed to that one. I guess it is still possibly going to this day, people talking about records.

**Interviewer:**

Talking about comparing the size of their collection rather than making ...

**Stefan:**

Yeah, I mean, I like talking about records, but it's a sick part of what I do, its the obsessive train spotting part of it.

**Interviewer:**

Just by how useful they are in buying your lathe cuts.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, I mean that's right, a lot of those people make up the audience. But when you go on tour and every other person you stay with is like that, which isn't always the case, but you know sometimes can be a bit hard. You can feel like you're being ticked off a list rather than listened to.

**Interviewer:**

Totally. What order do you do records, on which day of the week kind of conversations. Which would be a mild version of some of that.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer:**

So, I guess, how are we doing for time, ten to six. Shall we bring the time line up till now and we can fill in any other little bits later.

**Stefan:**

Sure.

**Interviewer:**

So that's, Vienna is 2004 into 2005, and then you came back to Auckland. You were playing a lot. I knew you by then, and the Wine Cellar was going.

**Stefan:**

Yeah right. So I came home and by now there was that sense of Pumice has played overseas. So there was some of that. I can't remember what I was doing.

**Interviewer:**

Were you drumming with the Coolies then?

**Stefan:**

Possibly started with them somewhere around then. I love that band. What a weird grey area, my memory. I think I was living in Kingsland. Yeah okay, so I got on the dole, it was one of those golden periods where you seem to fall through the cracks in the system and they didn't bother me. So I was living in Kingsland, and had a nice big room in Kingsland. And I maybe started playing with Chris Knox about then too. At first that was just an ad hoc, turn up with your sticks and play drums for him instead of him having to switch his drum machine on.

**Interviewer:**

Did he approach you and ask you?

**Stefan:**

I remember talking to him after a, I think The Aesthetics had played in Auckland one time, when The Aesthetics were living in Auckland. And he had really enjoyed my drumming. And I had said if you ever need a drummer just let me know. And he said oh I'd love to but I can't be bothered with all that practicing. And I said well I refuse to practice. And his eyes lit up. And I think he stored that one away. And it was probably six months later. We did a Pumice Chris Knox gig, and he asked me to drum, and it went really well. No practice. So that was probably around that time. And I recorded the Pebbles album in that time in Kingsland. I maybe started doing New Zealand tours as well, tracking up and down the country.

**Interviewer:**

Would you not have done that before?

**Stefan:**

I did do it once in the late 90's, we did this Pumice Sola Monday Slate Tour, national tour, it was my first national tour. I guess I had friends in all the main centres, except Christchurch. I never knew anyone in Christchurch. So I would do Auckland, Wellington, and Hamilton, Palmerston North, and maybe Dunedin.

**Interviewer:**

You played at the Wine Cellar a few times, cause I remember seeing you in the alley way in the back, before the Back Room.

**Stefan:**

Yeah I played in there a few times. I went to the States in 2006 for the first time.

**Interviewer:**

So how did that, was that the year that you did the residency in Rhode Island?

**Stefan:**

Yeah it was, in Rhode Island. Well initially Chris Knox and The Nothing were going to go to the States, and Chris' mum got sick, and it got cancelled. And I had started organising a little Pumice tour for after The Nothing tour. And then The Nothing tour got cancelled and I just decided to go anyway. Maybe I had to borrow some money for that. So the same as Europe just I had these contacts and pen pals and set up a bunch of shows and went. And one of the first shows was in Providence, Rhode Island at this place AS220. And a pen pal Jeffrey Alexander was in charge of booking events there, and I knew that they had residencies there. And I was in the States on a three month tourist visa, but the tour was for two months. So I was dropping some hints about if something came up for that last month that I could possibly do, then I could stay in the States for three months instead of two. So Jeffrey set it up, and I had a residency for the last month. And you know that was the end of the tour so I was pretty exhausted, so I didn't do much. I recorded a seven inch and played a couple of gigs. Otherwise just hung out in Providence, which is a pretty exciting place to hang out, at that time.

**Interviewer:**

Who was there at that time?

**Stefan:**

Oh there was just gigs you know, four or five nights a week there was something worth going to. A weird circus at someone's house, or hard core shows or you know, exhibitions with bands playing. And you know touring bands coming through Providence as well. Lots of warehouses and things like that. And you know being a musician that does comics, you were right at home in Providence. There's a lot of cross over there.

**Interviewer:**

There's a big art school there isn't there?

**Stefan:**

Yeah there is. The American tour was pretty choice. Met, you know, lots of pen pals. Had some hard times with equipment failure.

**Interviewer:**

That was the era where you got busted by the Police.

**Stefan:**

Oh yeah, got shut down by the Police in Berkeley, playing in a greenhouse in someone's back yard. Played in a bomb shelter, in Davis, California, this concrete cylinder under ground.

**Interviewer:**

So is that kind of up to August 2006?

**Stefan:**

Dunno.

**Interviewer:**

September.

**Stefan:**

Came home again. But it was always this terrible coming home to no home, a complete wreck, exhausted, sick and scrambled.

**Interviewer:**

Having packed up your whole life here before going away.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, much as where I am right now. After swearing I wouldn't do it again, last year.

**Interviewer:**

At what point did Chris Knox and The Nothing become a thing then? Cause there's been a whole album hasn't there?

**Stefan:**

There's been two albums. We probably done the first album before I went to America. Yeah, if we were looking at touring we must have recorded that. We put that first album out in 2005. It seems a long time ago, but yeah, so that was happening, and we did a New Zealand tour. That was never a really intensive project, like everyone in the band was busy with other things, it was always a whenever we could kind of thing. So I was playing in the Coolies at that time too.

**Interviewer:**

What about with Antony Milton?

**Stefan:**

I guess Antony and I always meant to play together, it took a lot longer than it should for it to happen. I went and spent a week in Wellington. Yeah we both really liked, Ah we really liked the music of Leighton Craig and Eugene Carchesio, and in particular some keyboard duets that they did. These guys were in Brisbane. And we both had Reed organs or chord organs or whatever you call them. And we decided using our organs we would be a Leighton Craig Eugene Carchesio tribute band. Which we did and we are. And after our first recording session we opened a HP Lovecraft book, and randomly pointed at a word, and it was Sunken.

**Interviewer:**

Perfect.

**Stefan:**

Yeah I know, we were stoked, Sunken.

**Interviewer:**

Any idea when that was?

**Stefan:**

Well that CD's the second album. So I've got no idea when we did that, the first time, it would have been I guess 2003 or 4, something like that. I mean all through all this time I'm still playing with Clayton Noone and Glen Frenzy you know my old Hamilton cronies in various forms, I never stopped playing with them, Thee Ideal Gus, Armpit, Teen X-ray, G. Frenzy and the Sugar Kiwis, G. Frenzy and the Nanas. Also collaborated with Pat Kraus, we're called Olympus. We do that in the post, even though he lives in Devonport, we did it in the post. But yeah Pumice kind of took over as the main thing at some point. I guess cause it was easiest, and it was getting, I guess just the opportunities would come in that way, and it was feasible to tour, and not starve.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, with a small guitar. And so you ended up, so since 2006 you've been back to the States and Europe as well?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, so I came back from the States, eventually found another flat. I think I went back to filing again, for the insurance office again, yeah, I was filing again. There was the filing clerk concept album I did too.

**Interviewer:**

I was going to mention that.

**Stefan:**

Do Not Destroy, which was a solo album but not a Pumice album, a Stefan Neville album.

**Interviewer:**

How come, cause of the concept?

**Stefan:**

It just didn't feel like a Pumice album, even though Pumice can be anything. I don't know, I think I was just dicking around. I mean the thing is I came home from work every day for two weeks and recorded something straight away, as spontaneously as possible.

**Interviewer:**

So you wouldn't plan it during the day?

**Stefan:**

Well that was the nice thing about it was, I had been working part time, filing, I actually did that in 2002 when I was doing the audio engineering school, but it was the holidays and so I was working full time, through the holidays. And I did not look forward to it, so I invented this idea to help me get through it, cause it would give me some purpose and something to think about while I was at work, even though, I just would think of combinations of instruments I could use. So I would get home and I'd be really tired, and force myself to press record. I quite like that, I've done it a few times, you've got this shit job and you kind of find a way, you find an angle to use it. When I was telemarketing for the Rescue Helicopter, I used to draw all the time, an almost completely unconscious drawing, and I published three little zines of these drawings. So I used to pretend that actually that's why I was there, to do these drawings.

**Interviewer:**

And they were paying you for that, and you just happened to answer the phone.

**Stefan:**

Okay so I was back in Auckland, back filing. When I was in America the first time, I met Regina Green, who's a booking agent. And I just happened to be in a bar in Manhattan and a friend of mine was there, and she was with Regina. And we were drinking and Regina knew some bar where there were two dollar beers. And we went and got two dollar beers and drank the night away and got on famously, and it turned out she was a booking agent. And that night I gave her some CD's and we had mutual friends. And then a little bit after that she offered to work for me, book shows. Which was pretty, you know, like the Vienna thing, just an amazing piece of luck, like the double booking with What Is Music. So she offered to help with the European tour. Cause, she will help me with the States,

but its actually not worth her while, the sort of fees someone like me can get in America, but in Europe she can get guarantees and stuff.

**Interviewer:**

How come?

**Stefan:**

Just because music is a respected art form in Europe.

**Interviewer:**

Is that from specific kinds of venues, like festivals and things?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, and that's just her work. She's got connections. She works with a whole bunch of different artists and has a good name for herself. She was working with the Table The Elements label, so some quite prestigious names, which no doubt gave people an impression that I was classy. And did me no harm. So she offered to book me this tour, and I said yeah great. So we started booking it, and I had a couple of months left in my flat, so I quickly recorded an album, you know while all my stuff was in one place because increasingly it was rare that I had all my stuff in one place, so make the most of it. So I recorded The Quo album, and then went off to Europe. No I went to Japan first. Yeah, I went to Europe via Japan.

**Interviewer:**

For a show?

**Stefan:**

Yeah I played about four shows in Japan.

**Interviewer:**

And did she book those?

**Stefan:**

No, I did that myself through friends.

**Interviewer:**

Was that Mark Sadgrove?

**Stefan:**

Yes, also Toshihiro Koike and Takefumi Naoshima. Contacts that I'd made through What is Music, Tetuzi Akiyama, people like that. So that was really exciting. And then for some reason that I'll never know, I was on tour in Europe for five months, I don't know why I decided to do it like that.

**Interviewer:**

Was that playing constantly for five months?

**Stefan:**

It wasn't playing every night. I mean I hate playing every night, so when I tour I do try to have a few nights in each place, and you know a week off here and there, so it was like that.

**Interviewer:**

But it wasn't a month or two off in the middle?

**Stefan:**

No, it was basically ....

**Interviewer:**

Weekly for five months.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, something like that. There was a couple of periods where I had two weeks off, things like that.

**Interviewer:**

That five months in Europe, that must have been exhausting?

**Stefan:**

Yes, yes it was, yes it was. I'm trying to remember what on earth I was thinking.

**Interviewer:**

The shows must have just kept coming up, if someone else was booking them.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, well it was a bit like that. But Regina you know, only does what you ask her to do. I think it was just the opportunity was there, and it was sort of earning a living. That's right, my Dad died in late 2006, and I think I had by then, he didn't leave a will so it took about a year, he left a little bit of money and it took about a year to get it, cause you have to allow time for people to come forward and contest the inheritance. So I think what had happened was I inherited some money, so I thought I'll plan a trip, I may as well do a tour, cause I've got money, I can just go. Something like that. So it was like a round the world ticket to, that's right, it was a round the world ticket, Japan, Europe, America, home. So I was touring in each place. But I guess I decided to take my time doing it. I'm not really thinking about what it feels like to be homeless and travelling for that long. But anyway, Regina set up some really great gigs, and I got some guarantees and played at some classy joints. And I got to go way up into the North of Norway, to this town called Tromso, where the sun came up at 4.00am and this weird light and thick snow. I got to go to Portugal and Finland and Sweden. And I guess having Regina helped also, just my profile increased. Toured over



France, Switzerland, Italy. It was epic, it was epic. And then I went to America. And the American leg was only going to be a couple of weeks. The first week on the East Coast and then my Gran got sick, and I decided to cut the West Coast short, cause she was really sick. And she died while I was still there. And I just got home the morning of her funeral, after five months. And yeah so the same old scrambled exhausted thing, but with a death and you know, my Dad had died two weeks after my first American tour, so it was kind of this horrible repeat feeling. And I basically never recovered from that trip. And for months and months, I got another flat in Auckland, and I took a big chunk of time off Pumice, I just didn't want to do it, and I just didn't recover. I was run down and sick all the time. And it wasn't until the start of this year, when my sister found out she had Coeliac disease, and we already knew my Mum had it, and I went and got the test, and I tested positive to Coeliac disease. So what that means is if you eat wheat and gluten, and you have Coeliac disease, the gluten kills off or stops your body absorbing nutrients so nothing works properly. And finding that out, and thinking about the touring Europe and living on baguettes and beer, I just shudder. I just can't believe it, and you know its only in hindsight I can truly see what a sorry state I was in, just exhausted all the time, grumpy, and not thinking clearly and navigating strange cities. And I mean its amazing too, there would be the odd melt down on tour, but I still coped. That tour of Europe I made a profit on that tour, that five month tour, covered all my expenses, paid Regina her percentage of my earnings, which is her fee, and still took money home.

**Interviewer:**

Wow. Is that the first time you were really pro?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, pretty much. I mean I only just made profit. I was astounded with that. So I spent, after that tour, probably six months just feeling like shit. But I started working for the Audio Foundation too, got that audio librarian job to create an MP3 library of innovative New Zealand audio, which was just data entry basically, but it was stuff that I lived and breathed anyway. So its like a really good job.

**Interviewer:**

And Zoe's nurturing house.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, so I was really happy to just do that job, and take it easy. And of course I did start making music again. A few things came up, some tours, recordings, touring New Zealand. And then, I decided to go to America again. I don't know if I want to talk about that.

**Interviewer:**

Can you talk about bits of it.

**Stefan:**

There was a good reason to go, a personal reason, and seeing as I'm there, I may as well do some shows. And so it wasn't an extensive tour, but I did about 16 shows. I was there on the West Coast and a little bit in the middle of the States. And seemed to be reaching a new younger audience to some extent. I guess people who have found me on blog sites and downloaded it. Stuff like that. But also people coming up to me and saying how they've been trying to replicate my guitar sound in their band. Things like this were happening enough times for it to be noticeable. And people saying this new band sounds like you. I guess it shows how long I've been doing it, that it comes around to being, I guess time gives it some body and some weight. And new people discover it. I don't know.

**Interviewer:**

I mean its also the moment musically. Your work fits well with the current aesthetic.

**Stefan:**

Right.

**Interviewer:**

And is a really good version of it and kind of exotic. And so that's the tour that you just did?

**Stefan:**

Yeah, that's just finished.

**Interviewer:**

Those shows in LA that I saw, well particularly the LA shows, where people knew the songs.

**Stefan:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Young people in the audience, really knew the songs. I realised that they had been seeing you play for a few years and they knew the songs way better than me. I mean you know, they'd really been paying attention.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, its extraordinary. That so many people had been listening to it. That its really gone so far and lasted so long, like when I got back from tour, I played in Hamilton, just a month ago, and it was the 30<sup>th</sup> birthday of Contact FM, the student radio station. So it was a bit of a nostalgic night, and a few of the old bands reformed. And so I was thinking about trying to play some really old songs. Me and Sugar Jon sat around and tried to remember some of our earliest songs. Which we did, it was hilarious and mind boggling, and mind bending. Trying to

relate to our 16 year old selves again. But then realising that you know some of these songs are almost 20 years old, which freaked me out, really did.

**Interviewer:**

But they've developed. Like to have been playing for 20 years, but still be playing new songs.

**Stefan:**

Well as it turned out I didn't play any old songs. Although there's a couple, well actually, this little New Zealand tour I'm on now, which I just did Wellington and Dunedin and I do Christchurch this week, I've been playing this one song that's 18 years old. And I've been saying that when I play it. Oh this song is 18 years old.

**Interviewer:**

Almost as old as you, you small child.

**Stefan:**

And my dear old friend Motty was there in Dunedin, I was talking to him afterwards and he said when I said that, he said his first reaction was what, did you write it when you were four. And then he thought hang on, we're 35 year old men, somehow.

**Interviewer:**

Songs have grown into teenagers.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, that 18 year old song King Korny Remains, it's a good song, well if I say so myself. I mean if I'm still willing to play it. Some of those old songs I'd never play. But I am quite keen when I get all my stuff out of storage to go through the old tapes and see how the original recordings sound, I might try and compile something out of them. Because I mean, again its just post touring and I've been playing too much. I feel like I need a big break again. There's not really any new songs, but you know, that comes from having a home and somewhere stable to be. So when I get that again that will probably happen.

**Interviewer:**

That must be nice though, especially after that European tour and being so over it, but then the point when you realise that its just there.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, that's right, its just there. Yeah, the worst times of recent years I've been tempted to say that's it, that's the end of that. But I don't think I'll do that.

**Interviewer:**

There's a few big, like when big musicians do that, like Jim Anderton resigning from parliament. You know when people make a big claim, that's it, that's my last tour, and then they come back a few years later.

**Stefan:**

Well that's the thing, its actually meaningless if you say that's the last, because you can just change your mind and come back, so its better not to make the statement aye?

**Interviewer:**

No. So just to finish, I mean we're here because you're playing with The Renderers this week.

**Stefan:**

Yeah, joining the Renderers.

**Interviewer:**

How did that come about?

**Stefan:**

Well when I lived in Dunedin, the week I left to go for that first overseas trip, I ran into Brian and Mary Rose in the street and they said we were wondering if you would like to play with us. And I said I would love to but I'm leaving the country next week. So it just never happened. And they were off touring last year and they were coming home through Auckland and they seemed to hit upon the recipe where they can just enlist pretty random band mates to be The Renderers with them, so they asked me to play with them in Auckland. And it went really well, so much so that we're doing it again. And recording an album. Hopefully. Playing a few gigs, which you know, which meant I suppose I'll do some Pumice gigs.

**Interviewer:**

On the road.

**Stefan:**

And I've got a few more weeks of travelling, Going to Tasmania in the start of December to play.

**Interviewer:**

And you just played What Is Music again didn't you?

**Stefan:**

No, I just played Sound Summit in Australia. Just had this glorious tour of Australia in October, where everything was paid for, everything was organised by other people. And I was picked up at the airport and I had a hotel room in Newcastle, which has never happened before. And I had guarantees. Yeah it

was almost too easy.

**Interviewer:**

Don't say that.

**Stefan:**

And also since I've cut wheat and gluten out touring has been easier too, because my body is getting nutrients. I have energy and clarity. Catching a bus across Sydney is a piece of cake, where it used to be an ordeal.

**Interviewer:**

Wow, that must have been, especially to not know that that was, that that wasn't just normal, that that wasn't just you being normal.

**Stefan:**

Well I thought that was normal, I just thought that was normal. And next year is a blank slate again, I've got nothing planned.

**Interviewer:**

Is that exciting?

**Stefan:**

It is a bit scary, it is exciting. I don't know what I'm going to do. I quite like the idea of doing something new, but I don't know what it is.

**Interviewer:**

Excellent.

**Stefan:**

And then he went and did that other thing. Or he just carried on doing more of the same of this bullshit.

**Interviewer:**

Is there anything else you want to squeeze in, or should we try and have a catch up later in the week of anything else comes up.

**Stefan:**

Yeah lets do that. I have I think we're going to be finished here on Wednesday, so I could possibly come in on Wednesday night, come and do something, or Thursday day.

**Interviewer:**

Thursday day.

**END.**