The Other Motown Oral History Project

Detroit, MI

Matthew Smith

Interviewed by

Kimberly Kelly

November 21, 2015

Detroit, Michigan

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Library and Information Science

Kim Schroeder, Instructor

Fall 2015

Brief Biography:

Matthew Smith is a metro Detroit musician. Born and raised in metropolitan Detroit, Smith attended the University of Michigan. While Smith originally intended to be a filmmaker, he found his passion in the music industry. Smith composes, produces, arranges and performs music. Frontman for the band Outrageous Cherry, Smith has been and continues to be involved in numerous bands including The Volebeats, The Witches, Crime & the City Solution and Chatoyant. He has worked with legendary Detroit musicians Nathanial Mayer, Rodriguez, Andrew Williams and many more. His musical interests are varied and wide and span the genres of rock and roll, folk, alternative country and psychedelic pop, to name a few. Smith became involve in the music scene in the 1980s and continues to work in all facets of music with a wide variety of artists.

Interviewer:

Kimberly Kelly, a native of the metro Detroit area. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Madonna University in Livonia, Michigan. Fall 2015 she earned her Master of Library and Information Science degree from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan.

Abstract:

In this oral history Matthew Smith discusses his overall involvement in the music industry. The interview focuses on his work with Outrageous Cherry, The Volebeats, Nathanial Mayer, Rodriguez , Kim Fowley and various other musicians and artists. The timeline of his involvement in the Detroit music scene begins in the 1980s and is current to during the time of the interview in 2015. Smith details his work composing, producing, arranging and performing music. He elaborates on the importance of the Detroit music and art scene in the music industry and the influence the city has had on his career.

Restrictions :

None

Original Format:

Interview recorded on Marantz digital recorder, model PMD660. One 320.96 MB WAV file.

Transcription

Transcribed by Kimberly Kelly.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Audio Recording

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Walter P. Reuther Library

Wayne State University

Detroit, MI

Transcript of interview conducted November 21, 2015 with:

Matthew Smith, Detroit, Michigan

By: Kimberly Kelly

KK: Okay, today is November 21st, 2015 and my name is Kimberly Kelly and I will be interviewing Detroit Musician Matthew Smith for Wayne State University Oral Archives Class. And this interview will be housed at the Reuther. Okay, so Matthew Smith, let's begin with a little background. Were you born in the metro Detroit area?

MS: Born in Ann Arbor, raised in Hamtramck, went to school in Detroit and then moved around all the suburbs and then went back to Ann Arbor to go to college and then came back to Hamtramck and basically lived, since then, in the Detroit area.

KK: Okay, and what kind of a, your household, were you raised in a musical household?

MS: There were records playing all the time, there were a lot of records. There were Polk musicians in the family. But there weren't, beyond that. I was probably the first really obsessive, serious musician. Although, I found out later that my grandfathers were both guitar players. After both of them had died I found out both of them were guitarists. But, I didn't know that when I was growing up.

KK: So, what kind of music was played in your house? I know you mentioned Polk.

MS: Well that wasn't really played in my house. That was just my relatives, we didn't. I probably sat around listening to Polk music a little bit as a kid. But mainly my dad played a lot of jazz records. My mom played classical records and rock and roll stuff. She was a teacher, her students would give her Moody Blues records and the Jim Kweskin Jug Band and Black Sabbath and whatever else. So, I kind of was exposed to that around the house. That and the radio, the radio was a big thing.

KK: Okay, and how do that music influence your music now or do you think it did?

MS: I think there is this sort of omnivorous thing, I guess that's the right word for it, where I have absorbed all of the music I have heard in my whole life and kind of learned how to play in a variety of styles and sort of mix them all up at the same time. So I kind of have absorbed everything I've heard and in the case of, I have been playing more and more improvisational music and stuff that could be termed jazz or avant-garde experimental music and I think that all that is definitely related to the jazz music I heard as a kid and movie soundtracks, hearing Ligeti on the 2001 A Space Odyssey soundtrack. So, my exposure to all these things happened a long time ago. And then my band Outrageous Cherry seems to be based on, it seems to always harken back to this moment in the 60's where The Turtles and The Association were on the radio and that kind of triggered Outrageous Cherry I guess.

KK: So, you play a variety of instruments. What was the first instrument you learned to play and how did that come about?

MS: Trumpet, because of the Polk connection.

KK: Okay.

MS: And then later on I picked up the guitar and once I picked up the guitar I started to eradicate any kind of normalcy or normal human being behavior from my life. Stopped bowling,

stopped playing chess, basically stopped everything except reading and watching Godzilla movies and things like that.

KK: So, what age was that? You start playing guitar?

MS: Oh boy, that must have been, oh God, like 77, I must have been like thirteen or fourteen or something.

KK: Okay, is that when your interest in performing, recording, like sharing your music started?

MS: Not really sure. I think it was just, being a kid in the late 70's in Detroit having moved around a bit and at some point I found myself living in Warren, Michigan which was just like a really, where I just totally didn't fit in there having come from the city. So I basically by the time I was thirteen or fourteen I felt completely adrift from everything. I was cut loose from my juvenile delinquent friends I grew up with. And I didn't really, I felt really at odds with everything. So I guess that I was drawn to music as a sort of from the perspective of being a complete social outcast and kind of pursuing it aggressively as an escape from whatever everybody else was doing.

KK: Hmm, I read that you are a prolific song writer. Do you, is that when your song writing started?

MS: Not really. No, it was more like I just started playing with musicians. I think I just wanted to hang out with people who were interested in stuff that was interesting, that wasn't whatever was going on in the mainstream at the time. But, the songwriting I think I made my first attempt at song writing back then, But I don't think I ever really wrote anything I was truly happy with until I was about near, my late twenties and early thirties. I mean up until that point I had made records and things and played with all these different bands. But it wasn't until my late twenties I guess when I started playing with the Volebeats in the late 80's that I suddenly felt that I was writing music that was as good as my record collection that was as good as the people that influenced me.

KK: All of your music, did you self teach yourself to read music or write? When you learned trumpet was that in school?

MS: Yea, I was in band in school.

KK: Okay

MS: So, the trumpet and then I was in choir and then I took guitars lessons briefly. But I always had a really good ear. So, whenever I was in those situations my ear was always faster than my eye. I never developed my sight reading skills because it wasn't necessary because my ear was so quick. I could follow anything even when I didn't have the technical ability to execute what I was hearing in my head, I could just fake it and that's basically sort of what I still do I guess. I just got to a point in high school playing the trumpet, eventually I stopped playing the trumpet for a long time and it's something I more recently picked up again. I would find myself sitting in

band and I would hear the piece once and remember it and play it. I would try to avoid having to read notes on the page whenever possible.

KK: What would you consider your first success in music?

MS: I never ever thought of it as success. I had other people tell me, 'hey that was successful' and I was like 'it was'? 'Yeah, yeah you've had success with this". And I was like "really? I thought it was just a complicated mess'. 'No, no that was successful'. I never thought of it like that. I just kind of did it, not really knowing exactly what else to do with myself. I went to college I wanted to be a film maker basically because there wasn't really anything else going on at U of M I really wanted to focus on. I mean I studied a lot of different things. I took music courses. I was in an Indonesian Gamelan ensemble, I studied composition with William Bolcom, William Albright, so I had kind of a broad education there. But basically I got out of there thinking I'll be a filmmaker but then I got out of school and realized that making films, at that point, especially if you were using actual film and not going to video which was happening at the time. If you wanted to make films you had to have a lot of money, you had to raise a lot of money. And that was the qualification for being a filmmaker was being able to hustle people out of like hundreds of thousands of dollars or even tens of thousands. And I mean I'm able to hustle people out of a thousand, a few thousand here and there, but not the thousands required to do the kind of things that an obsessive filmmaker requires to do things beyond making little avant-garde films of exploded shoelace factories, and things like that, which was what I was doing. So, making records was more economical to produce albums. And I kind of used, it drew on the same mentality that I would use making a film, making albums. I just basically turned that obsession towards record production.

KK: Yeah, you know I read that when you were in the Volebeats you appeared in the movie Shopgirl.

MS: Yea

KK: What was that like since you went to school for that? Was that the first film you were in? I think you had a couple credits on.

MS: There's a bunch of credits in films. Basically, the guys in Hollywood who are professional guys who placement who place songs in movies. Those guys keep their distance from me. They don't work with me at all. And it probably, and film soundtrack people they keep their distance as well. Because once they realize I'm a multi-instrumentalist, I'm a threat to their job doing the score for the film and that's happened on several occasions. But, there are film directors who are fans of my work and so occasionally a film director will tell the soundtrack people I want this guy either in the movie or I want his song or I want this and it's always the director because if it were up to the culture of song placement in Hollywood I would just be on the outside of that. But, luckily there's a bunch of filmmakers that stumbled across myself stuff or are fans. So, a bunch of things have ended up in movies.

KK: Okay, yeah I think.

MS: And in the case of Shopgirl, the filmmaker liked us so much that he was, I think he was kind of stunned at how few people knew about the Volebeats because at that point we had sort of already embarked on a total descent into compete obscurity I guess. And, so he wanted us in the film on the screen because he wanted people to recognize us. He was really, Anand Tucker was adamant about that. You know as it turned out, the film ended up twice as long as it was supposed to be and he had to cut half of it out. So, a lot of stuff ended up on the cutting room floor. But, we're still, our whole song is in it and you get to see us on screen just long enough, if you don't blink, to see a band that's us. So, it was, didn't sort of all of the sudden bring us an enormous amount of attention or anything but people who know us or see the film on TV late at night think and they just think they are hallucinating when we come on.

KK: Now, I've also read that you've worked with Detroit artists like Rodriguez and Nathanial Mayer. Can you elaborate how that work came about? Either one or both.

MS: You know, old weird dudes seek me out. [laughing]

KK: Okay, I didn't know if you sought them or they sought you, okay.

MS: It's kind of both I guess. I mean, I'm a fan. With both of those guys, I was a fan of their stuff. I met Nathanial Mayer when he started playing again after a forty year hiatus where he was on the streets of Detroit up to nothing good. He sort of came back of a sudden and wanted to make records again. And the minute I found out he was a visible presence again. He played a Sunday afternoon UAW picnic and I got a phone call like, Nathanial's performing at this UAW picnic in an hour. So I just like threw my clothes on ran over there an saw him perform. Like in hundred degree weather wearing this huge, thick, blue tuxedo. He didn't have dentures yet, right when he got a record deal they bought him dentures. He didn't have the dentures so it sounded like he was singing in Japanese. It was like a Japanese James Brown. But, it was like in this hundred degree heat, he was giving it everything he had. He was obviously, obviously a great performer and so I met him there and he was a real nice guy. But we didn't get to know each other until a few years later. After he had already made a comeback record. Then, his record label hooked me up because the band that he was playing with was kind of turning down gigs because they didn't want to leave Detroit and go on tour apparently. So, I ended up getting the call and put a band together and we had a twenty minute rehearsal and then jumped in a van and went on tour with the Black Keys. And that was my introduction to Nathanial Mayer was just thrown right into it. And Rodriguez was kind of similar. I mean I had been a fan of his music through the 90's. I had be touring with an Australian guy, Simon Bonney, early 90s, and we had an English tour manager. He was playing this tape of Cold Fact. Playing the Cold Fact album on cassette in the van and I was like "Man this guy sounds like hes singing about my hometown man", and he was like, "No, it can't be, no, no, he died of a heroin overdose in the 70s man". I'm like wow and then gradually I tracked down the Rodriquez records and then one day a friend of mine comes into the record store I was working at, at the time, because I've worked, worked at record stores. I used to work at Car City Records on the East Side, on and off through all these different things. And I was working at the record store one day and Willy Wilson who was a DET DJ at the time walked in and he was like, "Rodriguez lives in Detroit", I'm like "You're kidding", he's like "No, I'm not kidding". At that point we knew he was alive. Then a week

later I'm playing a gig with Monster Island, with Cary Loren from Destroy All Monsters, and we're doing a show and I think It was Willy that walked up to me and pointed him out and said "That's him". He was there, he was at one of my gigs, a week later after I found out that he's living in Detroit and he's alive and well. I went up and talked to him, chatted with him and all my friends that were there at that point they'd heard his records. So, the musicians in town had started to know about him, this was the late nineties. I would bump into him all the time for years and it took years to get him to really open up and have a conversation with me that wasn't totally guarded and then a few more years after that to actually get him to play some music. And then a few years ago I was at home recovering from a gallbladder surgery operation and just feeling like I'm okay to put a guitar on without the stitches all being ripped up and feeling like I could play guitar. I think I can do this now after a couple of weeks of recovery and then I get a phone call from Rodriguez's daughter like, "Hey Matt are you doing anything tomorrow night?" "Uh, no what's going on? Yea I am, I do have something to do but what's going on?". "Would you play guitar with my dad tomorrow?" I'm like "Well, where's he playing?" The Beacon Theater in New York. I'm like, oh God, so another situation I had to put a band together in five minutes and call her back. I had to say give me ten minutes to think about this and I thought about it for ten minutes and I thought alright I'll do it. Put the band together, no rehearsal. I got on a plane the next morning at 6 a.m., flew out, slept on the couches backstage a little bit. Went out an played and it went well and they kept us after we did a few New York shows. After that they said, Hey can you stay out for another 6 week? So, I recovered from my surgery while I was touring with Rodriguez and it was kind of a good thing, it was good, better than sitting around the house. It was weird because he and I have played around Detroit, just played Vietnam vet bars like the Old Miami and what's that place, the Corktown something or other. Some place across from the Wayne State new sports field. Played at a bunch of odd ball gigs, little weird Detroit gigs. But, all of a sudden that was like we're out playing stadiums and giant halls. It was crazy.

KK: You mentioned earlier Simon Bonney, you were in was it Crime & City Solution? Was that the band?

MS: Yeah, yeah.

KK: How did it, okay so it started in the seventies in Australia.

MS: Right.

KK: And then it became a Detroit band and you're a member, how does that happen?

MS: It's really complicated but the short version is that I saw them in the eighties. I picked up on their records, I saw them live and I thought they were the greatest band I'd ever seen. They played a gig in Ann Arbor in front of twenty or thirty people in eighty-eight. They were brilliant and they were a band, at that time, that was made up of members of the German band, Einstürzende Neubauten and Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, and the guy from DAF. It was just this super star group of people from really strange groups that I really admired. And all together they were just a cross between the Doors and Can, they were just brilliant. So, I kind of made a

point of somehow staying in touch with them. I met them at that gig and they just kind of, we kept, we started crossing paths and I kind of put the word out with a journalist at the time Tom Gerik that, I guess I heard when crime, the first time they broke up in like 1990. I'd heard Simon was doing a solo record and I put the word out through this journalist Tom Gerik that, like yeah if, because he had played me some tapes he had of what Simon was working on and I said, "Hey if he needs a base player, tell him I'll play upright base". He was doing this kind of country-ish stuff that wasn't too far off from what the Volebeats were doing at that point. Anyway he comes through Detroit, plays in Ann Arbor and I get the phone call, Hey why don't you bring your upright base and jam with us. That was, at that time, that was actually an instrument that I would offer if I met someone I wanted to play with I'd say, "Hey, you need an upright base player?'. Because Detroit's so filled with guitarists they're on every street corner. Being a guitar player in Detroit is completely, it's like breathing, nobody cares. So, I didn't really offer myself up as a guitar player even though that's really what I'm best at. I offered myself up as an upright base player, which I don't play at all. I play very minimal. But, that's probably better because people who play it busy on people's records is unnecessary. So, I showed up with my upright bass and played in Ann Arbor, Detroit with them just sat in with them and then the next thing I knew I was getting calls to do sessions. I got a call to do a residency in New York and then we did touring. So I kind of became one of Simons collaborates on his solo career. Then eventually the solo career it looked like it was going to take off, like a lot of things, then it just kind of, the second album we did didn't take off. The third album we did didn't get released it was one of those deals. So, he just drifted out of music. He was living in L.A. at the time but he ended up going to Australia and we didn't talk for a long time. How Crime got back together I think I had a lot to do with that because I went out and saw the movie Wings of Desire which I hadn't seen since the eighties and there's a scene in the movie where Crime & the City Solution is in the movie playing. Where they're on screen longer than the Volebeats in Shopgirl. But, I saw the movie again after all these decades and I watched it and I just thought to myself Crime never finished what they were doing. Its unfinished business they were this band that was great that they didn't connect the way they should have with the world. I started writing the guys in the band and kind of bugging them and then one thing lead to another and the guitar player, the German guitarist, Alexander Hacke happened to be in New York. A friend of mine tipped me off that we was hanging out in New York. So we kind of hooked it up with me and my friend Troy Gregory from Detroit, our friend Jim White, whose an Australian who lives in New York, the German who was in New York, and everybody started making phone calls and sending emails and once Alexander Hacke said yes that he would do it the whole thing fell into place. All of the sudden they were resigned to their old record company Mute and everybody got flown to Detroit and suddenly they were a Detroit band. So, we rehearsed and made an album here. Then we did a bunch of touring, couple tours, Europe, U.S. Australia. But, in Australia everybody started having trouble getting along and the band just sort of fragmented very unexpectedly and we had a European tour set up that we didn't end up doing which was a real drag. But, the band kind of went on a hiatus and that's where it's at right now. We did an album, the record company was like, This did well, let's do another one. And we're all, it's back to where it was in nineteen ninety. So, that's the whole story.

KK: You're the founding member of Outrageous Cherry and I read that it started as a solo project, is that not true or true?

MS: It's not exactly true. Well, I've read that. What it was. Maybe it is true. What it was is I just had reached a point at that point, I was playing with the Volebeats and the Volebeats at that point were making some good music and having a lot of trouble finding people to put our records out. Eventually we signed with a label that was really problematic in the early nineties. We did a few records that are impossible to find. But at that point I was really feeling like I wasn't really writing the kind of songs I wanted to be writing. I felt like I was more interested in just playing on other people's records. I started to see myself as I should focus on being the session guy playing on other people's records. I played with this Japanese guy Yuji Oniki, Japanese American, he grew up in both countries. In the late eighties I worked with him and that was the first record I every produced for another artist where he just liked what I was doing and said, "Hey, you know, I heard these recordings you've been doing. Will you produce my record?" Then suddenly I'm a record producer working for other artists other than myself. So, I was starting to see myself as more of a behind the scenes guy working with other people. Then this whole Outrageous Cherry thing my friend Troy, who I've played with on and off, Troy Gregory. We've crossed paths over and over throughout the years playing in different projects. I was in his band The Witches for a while and some other things. But he was, he at that time was playing with a heavy metal band Prong in New York and they were managed by the guy who managed The Replacements. Troy played him a little acoustic tape of him recording me playing one of my songs and the guy was like, "I want to hear this guy with a band". So Troy was like, "The Replacements manager wants to hear you with a band. Go make a tape". So, I'm like okay, and I went and made a tape I jammed with different musicians and I was very unhappy with everything with how it was sounding and I really wasn't entirely confidant about the songs either and then at some point I just sat down and thought well who are some musicians who are just an unlikely combination of people? And I picked three musicians that didn't know each other, that were all different ages that were coming from different background Suzanna Mroz was my ex-girlfriend at the time and she wasn't a drummer but she was a dancer. I figured she had good rhythm, so I put her on a real simple kit like The Goreys or The Velvet Underground without anything but a snare and a tom and tried her out and she was able to play, lay down great rhythms and I thought well okay well that's good. And then I had, there was a guitar play I'd seen around town, Chad Gilchrist in Ann Arbor and he just looked like a living Doonesbury comic. He just did not look like a normal human being and he would play guitar solos and half way through it throw his guitar on the floor. I thought, well this guy has something. So, I thought of him as the bass player. I could tell that he had a good ear, by watching him. I jammed with him one time and I could tell. And then Larry Ray was this guitar player that had played with a lot of bands going back through the seventies in Detroit. He was older than me. He came over to sell me some records once and he turned out to have a really good ear as well. So all these people had really good listening abilities which is at that time I felt was missing from most of the rock and roll. The whole Grunge revolution was all people who- All of music in the eighties and nineties to me seemed to be guys that had really worked out their parts, rehearsed it all, and they were just kind of going through the motions. I felt like people turned their apps up

louder. Clubs had gotten louder, everything had gotten very loud and all the music that you would hear just seemed to be put together as a product and it was based on people knowing their parts and just going through the drill. I felt like the energy of rock and roll for me, just really was feeling less and less of it from the music I was hearing. So it was important to me to try and jam with some people that could actually play by ear really. The first rehearsal I had with these guys it was just intended to make a tape but the minute we were tuning our guitars and just making sound in the room, before we were even playing my songs, I could hear the energy. I could hear these people are listening to one another. It became a band out of the blue. And the Outrageous Cherry concept was a friend of mines concept. My friend Collen Laverty wanted to have a group where she would be the singer and wanted me to write some sort of bubble gum songs with completely demented, sick lyrics. Had this idea and then she just kind of lost interest and dropped out of it. So, the songs I was writing were kind of connected to her concept. They were these kind of bubble gum songs. Bubble gum songs are subversive anyway. To me the whole bubble gum thing is a sinister and kind of twisted undercurrent all the bubble gum music. Which I thought was sort of, in a way, empathetic to what Lou Reed and Velvets were doing and Leonard Cohen even. All these things kind of came together and suddenly the girl, the project of the girl sort of being kind of a twenty first century subterranean Petula Clark, with all kinds of psychological issues, I became that. I became the stand in for the female front person of it. I kind of got pushed into being the front man in a band that wasn't really what I intended to do. But the music sounded good so we just were like, Lets go make a tape. We made the tape and the guy, the manager guy in New York, heard the tape, and of course didn't like it. He probably wanted something that sounded like Grunge. I was happy with the tape. I was excited about it so I pursued it and we ended up doing more recordings and-

KK: What is the song Pretty Girls go Insane?

MS: Pretty Girls go Insane, yeah that one came a few years later. The first one was Pale, Frail Lovely One. That was our first single and everyone tells me that hears it, Oh that should have been a hit and it should have. Actually they started to play it on the radio in Detroit but because it was a local record at the time it was a local forty-five and it didn't have major label intimidation and payola behind it, so we didn't go further than getting played a little bit. But they played it a little bit and people responded to it to the point where I got a surprising about of feedback about just the couple of times it got played on commercial radio. So, I saw where this could go. This was a different type of song and it was out there. And then the album came out and things proceeded slowly. We just didn't have the energy behind us to push it out there. We had people helping us. Once our album came out the first band who asked us to tour with them was Wilco. Wilco had just formed. I didn't even know who they were and they just called, contacted one of our label guys and the next thing you know we're touring with them.

KK: Yeah, I've seen videos of you performing on stage with Wilco and that they are huge fans of you.

MS: Yeah, they were big fans and they just became really good friends. When they started off their thing was a little more in the alternative country realm and then as time went on they became a lot weirder and more experimental and moody and strange. Just have gotten

consistently, continued to always keep it interesting so I've always been following what they are doing. We have remained really good friends. Musically, we are, what's the word for it, kindred spirits.

KK: You also, you mentioned producing, so I read that you produced for the band The Go in the late nineties.

MS: Yeah.

KK: Can you talk about either producing that album was it their debut album? Or producing compared to writing.

MS: It was well in addition to my writing and singing in bands and all that kind of stuff I found myself dragged into doing people continued to occasionally asked me to produce their records. Not based on any track record of hits but just liking the sound of what I'm doing. And The Go was a situation like that where I saw them and immediately felt I had discovered the best band I had ever heard. I felt they were at least as good as The Stooges and MC5. Like a Rolling Stones level band. And they from the very first time a saw them I felt they were unbelievable and they asked me to produce them and I said, "I can produce you guys but you really are so good you need somebody to sell you". I didn't really want to reenact what I did with Outrageous Cherry records which is up to that point had been great records with nothing behind it to push them. So I sent them to my friend Kim Fowley who I had worked with. Became a real pivotal figure in my whole musical thing. And Kim was a producer but also a guy who had been in the industry for years and really kind of knew the game and was an international presence. A controversial guy but somebody who knew things that a lot of us were still learning. And I said, "You should do it with Kim. I think he would be able to sell this thing". So, they got with Kim and send him the stuff and Kim, there was something about the music that just didn't seem commercial enough for him. Even though Kim was a weird guy, made weird very noncommercial records in my opinion, he just said, "Ah there's something, these drums, the guys, there's too many cymbals all over the place and if I show up and I say I want to hear the drum beat to Psychotic Reaction and they don't know what I'm talking about I'm on the next plane man". So he just kind of didn't, he didn't see dollar signs with these guys. So, he didn't do it. So, I thought alright well I'll do it. And then right about that time Kim didn't want to produce them but still called me up and said, "Hey they're making this movie called Detroit Rock City, they're Hollywood people who don't know anything about Detroit. Send me a tape of The Go, I'll try to get them in the movie". I ended up doing a demo with them and at that point Jack White had just joined the group and he was just getting started with The White Stripes. He had only a small group of people who knew who he was but the people who knew who he was were already kind of pushing him. He had a support group of people who were already envisioning him as a star I think. So he ended up joining The Go and we did a demo in his living room. And the Hollywood people of course didn't know what to make of it and didn't want it and they ended up using one of Kim's Runaways songs instead but he tried. But that tape basically got them signed to Subpop and so Subpop signed them and we made the record. I produced it, Jim Diamond engineered it but, the recording musically went very, very smoothly but the peripheral stuff that went on made it complicated because at the time the whole quote 'garage rock' scene was coming up in Detroit at

that time. And just a lot of bands that were part of this little scene that were kind of ambitious but not very forthcoming in their ambitions trying to play the bars and be cool and all that so when The Go got their record deal, it just created a situation where they all these different people giving them their two cents on the record. Some people being encouraging but most people being discouraging about the fact that that they were making a record that was going to be produced by somebody with totally weird musical taste. People were trying to tell them, You know you guys are blowing your chance, and all this kind of stuff. Anyway, we made the record we wanted to make, but the band was really- They were young guys and I think there was a lot of peer pressure from their garage scene and so it just created a lot of tension and that may have had something to do with the fact that Jack was really uneasy about the whole thing. He just seemed really tense through the whole process. Played real well, but by the end of it he wanted to redo all his guitars and I wouldn't let him because we didn't have the money for it really. Subpop gave us a shoestring budget. We were treated by Subpop like, okay well these guys are from Detroit they are these idiot savants who just happened to come up with some good rock and roll tunes, so we'll give them a shoestring budget and maybe they'll make something that people will be able to listen to. But they didn't indulge us as artists they treated us like some guys they found in the gutter. And that basically that was my perception of the situation but I was okay with that. I was like, we don't need money to make a rock and roll record. We can do- Anyway so that's what happened there was we made a record that really was influential and really important and all that. I think Jack has kind of disowned the record because he didn't like that he didn't have control over it. But the rest of the band, as far as I know, was pretty happy with it. The singer Bobby was very- Basically told me after we made it, he said, "Man, I want to thank you for making a record that makes people angry. I didn't think rock and roll was capable of doing that anymore. You did it. People either love this record or it makes them tense and angry and that's what rock and roll is supposed to do". I was like thanks, I agree rock and roll is supposed to do that. So anyway that's -

KK: Is there one aspect of music you prefer? Writing producing performing? Because you do all of them and on that, in that case you were just producing you weren't writing or performing.

MS: I didn't write because some of these groups I work with. I'll write if it's necessary of if someone asks me to but in most of my production situations I tend to work with people who don't need writing help, people that already have something going on that's- I don't have to fix. I like all the different parts of the process. I kind of like to do them all. I think if I just did one of them I would get unhappy with it really fast. I'm too, I'm pretty much, I mean there are so many things that I'm able to do that if I focused on one maybe - It just isn't, it just doesn't interest me really. I'm more interested in just kind of always stumbling upon something new. I guess that's what it is. But, I mean it wasn't really- I didn't know when I got started in playing in music that I was going to be, I may have, I don't know what I thought I was going to do. But I may have thought oh I'll just get in a band, get a record deal and make some records and people will buy our records. I didn't know that I was going to play in a thousand bands and produce over fifty albums. I didn't know I was going to do that. It's just when you do this kind of thing you just keep crossing paths with people and walking in different situations.

KK: Yea that was going to be my next questions. You collaborate with a lot of different bands. What is it about these bands that draws you to them? Is it a common theme musically or the ability to work with different artists?

It's more like if I hear something that's really extraordinary. I kind of feel, and especially I think it's kind of the way, the direction music's gone in. It's sort of I feel sometimes that a lot of the really, really talented people that are kind of more in line with my musical taste have a tendency to get overlooked because they are more preoccupied with their artistic thing than the self-promotion aspect or the ego aspect. It just seems like- I mean I'm sure there are some good singer, songwriters and musicians out there that have huge egos. It's getting cold in here. I'm sure there are some guys out that with huge egos nowadays that are great songwriters, that are fantastic but I find that the better musicians they are they are not as ego driven. They're not out there necessarily pushing themselves as much or they're more likely to walk in and make a record with somebody else who doesn't get it. So I feel like, I like to work with people where I feel like, okay if I don't do this record someone else is going to do it and screw it up and I've seen that happen with a lot of people where talented people come out and great bands and you think, oh they're the next big thing, and then they go in and make a record with somebody who is just not sympathetic to their eccentricities and their individuality and then they crank out something that misses capturing what it was and then the band thinks it's their fault and internalizes it and they get a complex about it and give up. I've seen so many musicians-I've seen more musicians give up than stick with it and it's usually for little things like that. Just being in there with an engineer, producer that's not sympathetic to it. Just stuff like that.

KK: Is there any bands currently that you are working with that you would like to speak about?

MS: I just went to Vancouver and produced an album for a really good songwriter named Marisa Johnston and she's someone who's been on the Vancouver scene for a bit. I just produced her first solo record. That's really the only group- I mean I haven't, the last group I worked with I mean there are bands I like but the last bands that I worked with where I just thought I must make a record here and do this because if I don't do it no one else is going to get it right was a band called The Crooks and I did one recorded with them and they were this little band from the suburbs of these kids that were still in high school that sounded like Led Zeppelin. I mean they looked like the Osmond's but they played like Led Zeppelin. And it was, they were frighteningly good and I recorded an album with them on an eight track in my living room and couldn't get any labels to put it out because they were just, "Oh these guys are too young, we don't want to deal with their parents". So I ended up putting it out myself and the band has since broken up but that record- That's a record that's likely to be rediscovered. I think it's already being rediscovered by the weird record collecting cognoscenti. The other band that I worked with is a band that is still together called the Deadbeat Beat and I made a record with them that came out only on cassette, why it's not out on vinyl, why people aren't jumping all over that record, I have no idea. But that's a band that can write songs just real good. My current drummer in Outrageous Cherry, Maria, actually plays in that band as well.

KK: So, you have chosen to stay in Michigan and where there might be more opportunities in the music industry outside of Michigan. What is it about staying in the metro Detroit area? What do you think it is about Detroit that's made your music flourish?

MS: Well I've been able to get it around the world from here. Somehow, I don't know how it came about really. Because there is obviously no industry here since Motown left. Other than like little labels out of peoples garages basically. But I just, you know I had people advising me to leave and go to L.A. or New York for years but by the late nineties I had a record deal. I got discovered by Alan McGee from Creation Records and he was starting a new label called Poptones and Alan sighed me for my fourth album with Outrageous Cherry which had actually been released previously by an L.A. label Delphi 2000. It was an old label that was restarted and had some hip young guys working at the label and they put our record on this legendary label but that was a domestic thing. And then Joe Foster and Alan McGee ended up releasing our stuff all over the world with Poptone. Then at some point Little Steven became a big fan of it too from Springsteen's band and he just suddenly after he was doing the Sopranos show he suddenly had his own radio show that got syndicated. So, all of a sudden Outrageous Cherry got on the radio through an unlikely way because before we would just get a little airplay on it would drop off. But all of the sudden were getting airplay on a large level, but through a different system it wasn't like the top 40 or something it was through this different thing. So all of those things were kind of- To go back to your very first questions those were what the people referred to as success with this stuff.

KK: Yeah.

MS: That kind of thing as opposed to just like riding around in limousines with sunglasses on acting weird, you know?

KK: You can do that in Detroit.

MS: Yeah, yeah we can I guess. I guess we could.

MS: But the thing is that it's like if I had moved somewhere else there is just no way I could have met the kind of people I worked with here. You know all the musicians that I have worked with out of Detroit they really are the best musicians in the world. This city, for whatever reason, produces these kind of individuals that have a really different way of working, just a different vibe than people from other places. And the people I've worked with from other places, a lot of times they have come to me. They come here rather than- Whether they are Australians or whether it's Paul "Wine" Jones, the late Paul "Wine" Jones of Mississippi was the last of the great Mississippi bluesmen and his label sent him to Detroit to record with me. So, I found these people coming to me in Detroit. So, I'm really glad I didn't move to New York or L.A. because New York or L.A., you're just surrounded by industry and you're surrounded by hype and buzz and all these other things that you know, which are really good if you're into a kind of capitalistic outlook, that is more focused on success in those terms. As opposed to just getting involved in unpredictable things which is more where I'm at. But I just don't, I just think that it would have been really- I couldn't have done that in any other city. And I've traveled around enough that I have met the musicians in other cities like I've made a point of meeting all the

musicians as many as possible of the people I would like to meet in other cities and the ones I would like to work with. So, I feel like somehow Detroit, even though I came up in a post Motown really bleak musical landscape in the eighties and it was bleak. In the late seventies and eighties there was just no way you could, no way you could get your record, anybody to pay attention to your record in those days. I mean there were a couple guys that maybe had some mafia connections out in New Jersey that got something going.

But aside from not naming names, but aside from that, the occasional record that would creep out of Detroit- Detroit was left behind after Motown. I don't think anybody wanted to hear about it. So, I think the fact that I've been able to have an international career with Detroit as a base is something that is a good thing.

KK: Is there an artist or a venue in Detroit that you feel is important or was influential in the Detroit music scene that people haven't listened to or should visit a venue if it's a place they should visit?

MS: Yeah, well in the eighties it was just a bunch of people scrapping away in bars. The Goreys, the Viva Cauldron, all the bands were just playing bars. In the nineties it was a place called Zoots. Zoots was a little coffee house in the middle of the Cass Corridor, down at second it was an ex whore house that had been turned into a little Wayne State student coffee house. They started having bands and the key to it was the guys who ran the place said no to everybody. All the bands who would ask to play they would just be like, "No, no, no, no, no. We don't want to hear that". And they would only say yes, to bands that the guys who worked there really wanted to hear and deal with the trouble of people loading amps in and all that. So they would only say yes to certain people and that became the key to a venue that reflected this very esoteric musical taste of these guys that ran it. And the next thing they knew they were booking bands from out of town and after a while I would go there on any night of the week and there would be people from Japan and New Zealand and Australia. I mean just people from everywhere playing this weird little place and it was- And then the local bands that played there kind of flourished and the people that hung out in the audience all got into the arts and formed bands later. So it was a place that had this sort of, I guess it was an equivalent, like some place in New York like Maxs Kansas City or CBGB or the Warhol Factory. That was a really interesting moment. That had a lot to do with the development I think of Detroit breaking out. I think that place, and that was around the time Kim Fowley came in to town too. Kim Fowley had a lot to do with the outside world finally noticing Detroit. I brought him here to make a weird record in the mid to late nineties he was another part of it. But, Zoots was never covered in the papers. It was completely underground and it closed down before it got to be written about in any of the papers. So, it really was truly underground. I mean if you weren't in on it, if you didn't know someone who hung out there you just would never have found out about it. After it closed down the scene kind of moved the Magic Stick and the Gold Dollar and it became more of a bar scene again. Which was great but it was little more like the way it was in the eighties. It was like, Okay this is a rock and roll bar scene, this is a little more familiar. Whereas the Zoots scene was something very different for Detroit. Just a whole different vibe. There is a place now called Trinosophes. Trinosophes over on Gratiot and Russel, is sort of like, it's not a little house like Zoots, it looks

like a giant gutted department store and that place is an art gallery and music space and that's the center of all experimental music. A lot of interesting ideas that are kind of outside the rock and roll thing. But, also connected to that. That's the center of all that right now.

KK: What do you think your overall contribution to music is? What would you say it was?

MS: You know I think I'm trying to do stuff- Like when I am producing a rock and roll band or making a rock and roll record, I'm trying to just make something that won't sound ridiculous when you play it next to a Little Richard record. I just want to capture the mysteriousness that fuels rock and roll and all music. I want it to be something where it sort of, no matter what I am doing, some kind of avant-garde experimental thing like the band I am in now Chatoyant, I'm playing with some strange guys from around town and we're working on some really bizarre stuff. So, throughout all my rock and roll travels I have also done a lot of experimental things on the side a lot of other stuff. But whether I am doing that type of music more improvisational or if I'm doing a rock and roll record, it's sort of all the same to me because I just want it to be taken to another level where when you're experiencing it you are hearing something that is the way it was back in the sixties or seventies when you would hear the new Rolling Stones record or T-Rex record or Bowie record. I mean you were hearing something that you couldn't quite figure out. There was something that was filled with mystery there. It had a power where you didn't understand necessarily where it came from. It was just something powerful that couldn't be explained and that's what I'm after. I'm not after records that fulfill other people expectations or somebody says I want you to do it this way or that way or we want it to be this style or that style or we want it to conform to this. I want to make music that only conforms to the highest standards of the past that other people are trying to wipe out.

KK: Alright finally is there anything from this interview you would like to expand on or something we didn't cover that you would like to talk about? You mentioned the band you are working with now we didn't' talk about them. Or anything.

MS: I'm, trying to think. I think we covered a lot. I mean there is a lot of people I didn't mention, Scott Morgan from The Rationals, I made a record with him. I've done a lot of work with Andre Williams, who is one of the pre-Motown architects of Detroit music. Doesn't live in Detroit but came back here to make some records and I've done a lot of music with him. And, the Destroy All Monsters guys, I've worked with them particularly Cary Loren. We've collaborated with John Sinclair too. A lot of the things I've done are connected to other histories. Andre and Nathanial go back to the Fortune Records thing and Destroy All Monsters is of extreme importance in the art world because of things they did in Ann Arbor in the early seventies. They were doing things that seemed insane but were revolutionary to the art world. So, I've managed to sort of cross paths with some people that are connected to something that is a whole history there unto itself. I'm sure there is others that I'm forgetting right now. Prague rock band THTX. Singer, songwriter named Denise James made three great records that ought to be reissued. I produced Slumber Party.

KK: Do you do most of these things in a studio somewhere or do you have a home studio?

MS: Most of these records were done in recording studios. But, ten years ago I set up a studio in the house basically to do the Paul "Wine" Jones record. When the blues guy was coming up here that was when I setup my own studio. I had been working on an eight track in the house doing these THTX records which were kind of these wigged out psychedelic progressive rock. Really strange records. When Paul "Wine" Jones came up from Mississippi I set up an 8 track in my house and I really intended it to just- I was more concerned about that project but after that, that projected turned out so well that people started asking me to do more records in the house. So for the last ten years I've done a whole lot of records in the house, in the living room so it sort of became more of a studio set up like that. But, after ten years of making records in the house I am a little more inclined to seek out other rooms and just to keep it interesting. The house works, it sounds good, it always sounds good but after a while you start to wonder what it will sound like in a different kind of room. With Chatoyant we have been recording everything live. Doing these stereo recordings of our improvisations in Trinasophes, so it's a gigantic space with a huge reverberating sound. That's a whole other recording type situation; I try to do it all over the place.

KK: I don't know if you mentioned. Did you mention how you met Kim Fowley?

MS: It was the Cream writer Ben Edmonds was back in Detroit and I had gotten to know him. I stopped by his plaice one night and he was doing an article on record producers. He was talking to all these great record producers and he said, "Oh, I've got to call Kim Fowley later". And I said, "Kim Fowley that's somebody I would like to work with someday", because I always loved Kim's lyrics and his solo albums were really weird records. He was doing really strange stuff in the sixties. I think he was even an influence on The Stooges. He was really doing weird stuff. Produced records that were a little more commercial but his solo stuff, he was a poet and just a very intense and bizarre performer. I was always intrigued by him and I mentioned that to Ben and couple days later I pick up my phone and it's Kim barking at me on the phone, "What do you want to do" and the next thing I know I made arrangements for him to come to Detroit and we made a record. So, that's how it happened. It was just this, we got on the phone we talked for a few minutes and then the next thing I knew I was recording with him and then after making the record Michigan Babylon which I released in Detroit with the help of some record stores that financed the manufacturing of it. Kim turned out to just be a really good friend and became a real ally in the music business. At a time when a lot of people were afraid of him because he was one of those guys like Phil Spector, Ike Turner where people were scared because of his demeanor and his personality. I became friends with him and I just thought he was a very brilliant guy with some real insights, real talents. And then after we had known each other for a few years eventually he even became a DJ on Little Stevens radio network and started to do that. He passed away a few years ago but when Kim started to have health problems, it was a couple years before he died, he was having an operation and he called me up and he said that he was going in for this surgery and he was real worried about it. So he wanted me to set up two Detroit shows the week after his surgery and he's in his seventies at this point and I'm like, "Okay, you know". So, I set up an electric show and an acoustic show at the Hamtramck Blow Out. So he came to town. He literally got off the operating table, hopped on a plane with his girlfriend came over and we did this acoustic show that went wonderfully and then we recorded a bunch of stuff

in my house. Then we did this electric show with The Dirt Bombs on the bill and the show was packed and it was kind of like he came to say goodbye to Detroit really, I think. Because the city had always been a real big thing for him in his whole musical cosmology. He did this show and it was great and he went back to L.A. and his health kind of took a turn for the worst after that. So it was really like the last really- It was like this very major performance for him. He was kind of received by the audience the way The Stooges were. People like got it. When he came here the first time people really didn't get it, thought wow this music is horrible and frightening and negative. Of course the worlds changed since then so now it doesn't seem so much, it seems normal now. But, I ended up going through the tapes in my house and I mixed and edited and constructed what ended up being Kim's last album. I did it with him over the phone so he basically got to see the final product before he passed away. But, we had an- Worked together over a period of nearly twenty years.

KK: Well if there isn't anything else you would like to mention-

MS: I think that covers a lot. [laughing]

KK: Well thank you very much.

MS: Okay alright.