

## **Get Informed: The Songs of *Fun Under the Sun***

A new music project where 95% of the material was recorded thirty years earlier presented some unique challenges, not the least of which was restoration of the multitrack master tapes from Informed Sources' four studio sessions over the period from 1981 to 1983.

One thing we had in common with everyone from Led Zeppelin to The Clash was the fact that we used Ampex tape in the studio – tape that no one realized at the time had a serious flaw. An unstable binder formulation led over time to a serious condition where oxide particles that were supposed to be held on the tape by the binder were no longer bound in place. These reels – and the music contained on them – were all at severe risk.

Eventually, an aural lifeline was discovered by audio engineers: baking the tapes. The carefully-controlled exposure of reels to multiples hours of heat (over 100 degrees Fahrenheit) provides a temporary window in which the tape can be played and the contents archived to a different format.

For Informed Sources, Steve Puntolillo at Sonicraft A2DX Lab was the guy who saved the day with his careful work on our 1-inch reel containing eight-track recordings and our 2-inch reel of 16-track sessions – although his greatest contribution was yet to come.

While Steve worked on the master tapes, I began a lengthy archive project focused on all the cassettes that contained Informed Sources material. This ranged wildly in content: radio concerts, soundboard recordings of concerts, practice sessions, other radio broadcasts, and demos. The tapes were not always labeled, but eventually the investigative effort led to a catalog detailing the contents unearthed on dozens of cassettes.

Soon after this Steve returned the Ampex reels, their contents now digitally archived and ready for mixing. It was at this point that I made a disturbing discovery: our first two recording sessions, which I'd assumed were on the smaller of the two reels, were nowhere to be heard. Instead, the content of that reel was our third session, followed by recordings of a not-particularly-accomplished funk band.

Without the master tape of those missing sessions, a good part of the planned CD would have to come from studio rough mix cassettes given to us after each session by Fresh Tracks Studios owner and engineer Larry Spivack. These ancient cassettes had been played many, many times. Relying on them would provide no opportunity to do a final mix of the contents, and the noise inherent with cassette use would be an undesired addition to the audio.

Drummer Doug Mosko and I were talking about the situation. He said he had a vague recollection that our singer, the late Joe Stack, may have had a reel. Sadly, we couldn't talk to Joe himself, but Doug thought Joe's parents might still be living in the same house where Informed Sources first began to practice decades before. He was right.

Doug was warmly received by Betty and Henry. After some reminiscing about Joe's life and the years he spent singing with us, Henry left the room and returned, the missing reel in his hands.

I was shocked when Doug told me he'd retrieved the tape; I was even more shocked when I saw it.

The reel had obviously spent some time submerged, and who knew what other harsh conditions it had survived? On second thought – *had* it survived?

The damaged reel was dispatched to Steve at Sonicraft, though I had a feeling it would require a lot more attention than just baking. Days later Steve called with a proposal – he wanted to try a new procedure to try to rescue the reel, which involved a painstaking, inch-by-inch restoration to try to save the content. If it worked, he would only charge his normal rate despite the tremendous amount of time Steve planned to dedicate to our humble master tape. If it didn't work... Well, what use was the reel anyway?

Weeks later Steve called with a status report – progress was being made. And then a few weeks after that, Steve called with amazing news: he'd saved every song on the reel, running each track twice just in case one run suffered from any drop outs.

At last, with all the multitrack session material ready for mixing and the cassette sources prepped for digital extraction, it was time to retreat into the dark recesses of Skunkworks Studios for months of aural labor.

*Fun Under the Sun* is the result.



**PART ONE – IN THE STUDIO**

**GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

**FINAL WAR (David Gehman - Frank Blank Moriarty)**

**SITUATION TRAGEDY (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

**DON'T KNOW (Joe Stack)**

**HORROR PASSION (Frank Blank Moriarty – Joe Stack)**

The first five tracks on *Fun Under the Sun* are from early 1982 sessions recorded at the only studio we ever used for recording, Fresh Tracks Studios, a modest operation just outside Philadelphia. It was recommended to us by Jade Starling, singer for Pretty Poison and occasional guest star at Informed Sources gigs.

These five songs were recorded on eight tracks, usually with the guitars double-tracked, a track dedicated to the bass drum, and another single track dedicated to the rest of the drum kit! Not a lot of mixing options there. But we felt this session had a good energy as we had growing confidence in the band as an entity.

Based lyrically on George Orwell's vision and the looming presence of the year 1984, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" was a live favorite of ours that translated well in the studio. Doug's rolling drum charges are a highlight.

Informed Sources didn't shy away from slower material, and "Final War" is a prime example. Later re-recorded late in 1982 with guitar solo and extended outro, this earlier version just has a better feel.

My trusty black Telecaster just loves open "D" chords, and the Hammond B-3-like bed of sound that flows through "Situation Tragedy" is a result of that characteristic. There's also an occasional synth drum strike floating around in the mix – Informed Sources using the latest in studio technology, circa '82!

Next, "Don't Know," Joe Stack's greatest composition. It's simple, to-the-point, and a brilliantly catchy application of just three chords. And I sweat my way through my first studio guitar solo...

What Joe and I were writing about in "Horror Passion" lyric-wise I have no idea, but musically this song has more in common with The Cure's hypnotic, dark *Pornography* era than with most people's idea of punk rock. Which is probably why we wrote it... Dave's bass is especially propulsive, and I brought it up in the mix as a lead instrument.

### **WHY SHOULD I (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

### **IMAGINED FEARS (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

### **SUNTAN/DESPERATION/ZOO (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

Late in 1982 we were back in Fresh Tracks, soon after playing high-profile gigs with X and Black Flag. Again recording on eight tracks, mixing options were pretty much bound by the same constraints as the earlier material.

Having committed my first guitar solo to tape a few months earlier, it was time to push my luck with some vocalizing. In the first of these three tracks, Joe and I trade off the verse lines of "Why Should I." By this time that song was a medley with "This was the 1980s," so I'm not sure why we didn't do the same in the studio. The medley version, from a City Gardens gig with Black Flag, follows a bit later on *Fun Under the Sun*.

When we played “Imagined Fears” for the first time, we realized there was the influence of Los Angeles band X, so we embraced it. We started thinking: X has Exene... So we borrowed Jade Starling from Pretty Poison, who really gave this studio version of the song an upgrade compared to an early take with Joe singing both parts. Jade graced our stage to sing “Imagined Fears” with Joe several times over the years; they really sounded great together.

We were done with the other songs, and Larry announced we had a few minutes left in session time. So it was back to the instruments for an unplanned excursion through our flat-out medley of high-speed songs that all start and stop on “G,” being “Suntan,” “Desperation,” and “Zoo.” One take, no mistakes! “Desperation” and “Zoo” had originally been mated together, but once we realized that “Suntan” could be shoved in to lead the charge... Right on!

### **RIGHT AND WRONG (David Gehman – Frank Blank Moriarty)**

#### **DENSE PACK (David Gehman – Frank Blank Moriarty)**

It’s mid-1983, and Doug has departed. Sky Kishlo now mans the drums, an explosive contrast to Doug’s earthier rock ‘n’ roll approach. Think going from John Bonham to Billy Cobham... Upon entering Fresh Tracks for these final sessions, we bought a 16-track reel of tape to double the sonic palette. Of course, that presented mixing challenges of its own – where before Doug’s drums had been confined to two audio tracks, Sky alone now consumed nine! And with the density and velocity of these songs, crafting an effective mix presented me with an entertaining challenge.

The first of the two songs from these final sessions, “Right and Wrong” features a brief, slo-mo intro that we improvised on the spot. That’s followed by a careening minute of high-speed musical chaos, broken only by the downshift sections at the tail end of the track.

In hindsight, on “Dense Pack” Dave and I gave Joe far more words than could be comfortably smushed into the chords flying by. After all, attempting to depict lyrically the state of the U.S. nuclear arsenal would be difficult enough in a ballad let alone the insane pace of “Dense Pack.” We could be cruel lyricists, indeed. Musically, I wanted to use as many changes as you’d hear on *Tales from Topographic Oceans* compressed into 2:19. Success! Sky’s performance is remarkable...



## PART TWO – ON STAGE AND ON THE AIRWAVES

**NEVER LISTEN (Joe Stack)**

**CORPORATE (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

**UGLY AMERICANS (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

All the recordings from this Part Two of *Fun Under the Sun* come from cassettes, so what you hear is what there was. I've tried to make them sound as good as possible but obviously options were limited beyond some EQ tweaking. With that said...

After a late-November promo from DJ Lee Paris announcing the event, we time travel directly to these three selections from our debut radio concert on Philadelphia's WXPB, which took place December 4, 1981. It was broadcast from a small studio up on the third floor of the cramped building located on the University of Pennsylvania campus; load in/out was an adventure on the twisting stairs. French DJ Michel Polizzi was host of the event, and he makes a sonic appearance to close out this segment of *Fun*

*Under the Sun.*

“Never Listen” was a staple of early Informed Sources set lists. Particularly amusing is “Corporate,” its loping verse weariness contrasting with a galloping chorus as we peruse a variety of corporate images of the time. “Get your truth from the Shell Answer Man,” indeed... “Ugly Americans” was built on a martial pounding foundation, broken up by a double-time middle break before wrapping up with a thumping resolution.

### **LANDSCAPE OF FEAR/SITUATION TRAGEDY (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

### **PAYCHECK (David Gehman)**

### **IN GOD WE TRUST (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

### **SUNTAN/DESPERATION/ZOO (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

Informed Sources traveled north to beautiful Trenton NJ on March 13, 1982. The gig at the rather inappropriately-named City Gardens was with the influential California band Flipper, who we’d met some months earlier.

From our set that night comes “Landscape of Fear” (a nod to Carla Bley’s avant jazz masterpiece *Escalator Over the Hill*) teamed in a medley with the equally un-punk “Situation Tragedy.” Dave’s “Paycheck” put the punk back in the rock, and opens with one of my all-time favorite song lines: “It seems my paycheck’s here to visit, I’m not sure why I take it home...”

“In God We Trust” mines darker turf, with Joe enhancing the mood via a Johnny Rotten-ish ad lib over the rushing closing chords, “...and you’ll die waiting for Him.”

“Suntan,” “Desperation,” and “Zoo” make their second *Fun Under the Sun* appearance, the medley closing the evening’s set. While the first showing of these three songs is powerful and driven as a live, one-and-done studio performance, this rendition definitely has that end-of-set, live-chaos vibe where excitement counts more than precision. We almost fall off the cliff, but keep hanging on to the end, exiting the stage to assorted bangs and thumps. “Flipper’ll be up at midnight,” promises “Randy Now” Alexander...

## **PRETENDERS (Joe Stack)**

### **WHY SHOULD I/THIS WAS THE 1980s (David Gehman - Frank Blank Moriarty)**

It sounds like a seamless concert transition, but we've changed gigs, if not venues. On June 6, 1982, it was back to Trenton for a Black Flag gig. The night started great, but ended with Flag bassist and overseer-of-the-finances Chuck Dukowski trying to stiff us on our (not particularly large) fee while Henry Rollins stood by glaring. Well, maybe it wasn't a glare – that was pretty much Henry's expression all the time. Anyway, we'd agreed to play at a discount just for the fun of playing with Black Flag. Lesson learned! The glamorous punk rock lifestyle...

"Pretenders" is one of the First Four songs in the Informed Sources catalog, and the first song ever unleashed upon the world via radio airplay – more on that later.

The medley of "Why Should I" and "This was the 1980s" has a great, surging feel, but its inclusion here was doubtful. The recording had a bizarre phasing that appeared at mid-point, and on top of that the entire stereo balance shifted about 20 degrees left for the second half of the tracks. After a ridiculous amount of time spent huddled over the digital audio workstation, victory was (mostly) mine with a resuscitated recording that captures the feel of this aggressive section of that night's set.

### **CONDITION RED (David Gehman - Frank Blank Moriarty)**

Late in the summer of 1982, my parents went away for a couple of weeks. Somehow, I decided it would be a grand idea to move Informed Sources to their house so we could spend day after day in the large semi-finished attic woodshedding new material and really honing the older stuff. It worked, as we got a ton of musical work done. But we were not alone. Fleets of cars arrived directly from the East Side Club or Love Club just about every night, and eventually the nearly-inevitable police interest brought a few panicked moments as the fun... errr... hard work drew to a close.

Much of the new material was recorded for further scrutiny, "Condition Red" being one of those efforts, a song that soon became a regular inhabitant of our evolving set list. Considering this version was recorded on a cassette deck of nowhere near audiophile quality with el-cheapo plastic microphones, it sounds surprisingly good.



**GOING OUT (Doug Mosko – Joe Stack)**

**THE PURGE (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

**GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

**DON'T KNOW (Joe Stack)**

The last four songs of this section document both our second WXPN radio concert and the live Sky Kishlo experience. For this May 15, 1983 broadcast we migrated to a different – but no less cramped – studio on the south side of the building, with Jazz Connor ably handling the compere duties.

Listening to these tracks it's obvious the pace of everything has picked up, both via Sky's drumming style and the fact that everyone involved with hardcore punk had fallen into a serious velocity funk. "Going Out" lopes along on a deceptively tranquil inception, but after a pause and a shouted count-in it's full speed ahead at a pace even quicker than the count-in. "The Purge" is next, another of the earliest Informed Sources songs, followed by a revved-up "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner." This subset of the full set closes with the actual last song, Joe's great "Don't Know," given a chaotic conclusion hot on the heels of a bizarre avant garde guitar solo. Where the inspiration for that came from I have no idea...



### **PART THREE – FROM THE END BACK TO THE BEGINNING**

#### **GHOSTS (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

#### **BURNING IN FIRE (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

When it became apparent that *Fun Under the Sun* was going to become a reality, and that we were asked to play a set at the special Punx Go Marching In show for 2012 in Philadelphia, we obviously had to find a singer. There was no way anyone could replace Joe's approach and style, and it would be unfair to expect someone to do that. Instead, we just wanted a singer who could breathe his own life into these songs that had been dormant for thirty years. Enter Matt Mulhall, singer for the pride of Schwenksville, Pennsylvania's the Cutoffs.

By the end of the first practice in May, 2012, it was apparent that Informed Sources with Matt at the mic was going to work. I began to think that it would be cool to record a song with Matt, so he'd have

something to show for doing a lot of hard work with us, and so we could document this closing chapter of the Informed Sources story. Eventually, plans for one song became two.

“Ghosts” was a set staple from its first appearance in the spring of 1982, while “Burning in Fire” emerged later that year during the attic songwriting sessions. Thirty years later both songs were recorded by Rick Farnkopf in my Skunkworks Studios secret location, “Ghosts” live and “Burning in Fire” with minimal overdubbing. We think they offer a fitting conclusion to a body of work that makes us proud to have been a band.

### **CHANGE (Joe Stack)**

### **UGLY AMERICANS (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

### **ZOO (Frank Blank Moriarty)**

### **ALL ALONE (Joe Stack)**

And so, from the end, back to the beginning... In the hopes that it will sound charmingly naïve, as opposed to shockingly amateur, or at least some combination of the two, we present the first foray by Informed Sources into the studio. A steady diet of practices and live shows soon left us feeling a bit embarrassed about these four songs committed to tape so soon after our formation, but – here they are anyway! Fresh Tracks Studios, August 24, 1981. Blank, Mosco, Stack, and Brian Lee on bass. Thanks, Brian!

### **PRETENDERS (Joe Stack)**

We say goodbye with the first time anyone outside the confines of Joe’s basement heard Informed Sources. Lloyd Force of WKDU invited me to the studio located on the Drexel University campus to publicize the just-announced First Philadelphia Punk Festival and the presence of Informed Sources in the lineup for that seminal event.

Lloyd’s show was named *Raw Sounds*. No truer description exists for this primitive run through “Pretenders,” recorded in Joe’s basement during an early August 1981 practice session, with Brian Lee on bass and Bruce Silcox on drums – the earliest and shortest lived Informed Sources lineup.

We hope you’ve enjoyed the ride...

Frank Blank Moriarty

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