

**Phoenix Noir April 3, 2013:** Tomorrow I take our cat Mewy to the vet and I'm not sure he's coming back (he didn't, but it was a decent passing). So it seems like a pretty good night to start writing these liner notes. Yes, I'm drinking a dram or two of scotch, including some of Les's (my grandfather, whose last bottle of scotch my father gave me, not that long ago, in a fit of unceremonious ceremony). I'm a lucky fellow in every way but 2012 and early 2013 have not been my day in the sun. Death has been a subject. Not mine, not yet. But my friend the British MP, Robin (whom I had just reconnected with after nearly thirty years), died in 2012. And I'm worried about an aging friend, most of whose family has succumbed to Alzheimer's. And poor Mewy, my dear sweet Mewy, a noble animal, who helped raise our children, is on his last legs. The fundamental starting point of the mix, however, is my sister's lovely husband Thomas. Over the past year, Thomas struggled (again) with lymphoma. His last days, from illness toward the end of 2012 to passing early in 2013, set the mood and inspired the mix. Thomas got an awe-inspiring, astoundingly-loving memorial attended by some 200 people. I look forward to discussing these and other events with Thomas over guacamole but, in the meantime, there's the noir.<sup>1</sup>

Then by coincidence or organic connection, I know not, my short time in Phoenix, Arizona, has been on my mind the last year. I stopped in Phoenix in February, 1975, in the midst of a year of backpacking and bicycling, having dropped out of college with my non-college-going-artist-summer-after-high-school girlfriend. I guess that I can date my maturity (if I possess such a thing) to those six weeks I spent in Phoenix, gathering money for the next, final leg of the year-long trip, six weeks in which I lived in a flop house with a junkie, a pimp, a gang banger, and assorted females, including said hyphenated-one. The junkie was Sam Benson (an alias), a Viet Nam vet and subsequent AWOL (from an ill-advised second hitch) from Detroit with a fairly serious jones (heroin), and a hard-on to punch out the asshole who signed him up as a 17-year-old to be an Army ranger in the year of Tet. Sam and I picked oranges, did phone solicitation (for tickets to the Fireman's Ball at the Westward Ho Hotel in downtown Phoenix - I can still recite the pitch), and I washed dishes at the Romney Motor Lodge (pictured, in what I hope you'll grant me is a noir, even Hopper-nian image which to my amazement I found on the web; stopped me in my tracks). Sam didn't sink so low as to join me swabbing the decks at the Romney. The point is, am I the man those six weeks made me. Isn't that John Donne's point? We are the people we made of each other. Then if we are lucky, as James Joyce's line suggests, out of nihilistic or malevolent nothing comes much jumbled good, although often quite unintentionally so. The devilish culprit is reborn, out of ashes and into flight. If we aren't lucky, if the tale of the phoenix turns out to be a noir, well then we still have this CD.<sup>2</sup>

**side one: nicky low malo: 1. *dumpster world – band of horses:*** a sneaky good band you've heard from me before and a great song. I love how it goes from a worn-out "I hit rock bottom/I'm getting old" to blazing defiance and bile. "Unseasonably warm" sets an underlying theme here of environmental disaster. **2. *how it ends – devotchka:*** I believe the mix started

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<sup>1</sup> My sister's beautiful vision of heaven is of a lush park, with picnic tables festooned with tortilla chips and guacamole, where you can talk with anyone you want to and at any age of theirs you happen to be curious about.

<sup>2</sup> The quotations from Donne's *An Anatomy of the World* and Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* are discussed in R. W. B. Lewis's *The American Adam: Tragedy, Innocence, and Tradition in the Nineteen Century*, published in the year of my birth (1955) but which I read in the fall of 1976 in Christopher Lasch's *American Cultural History I*. The idea of the fortunate fall, one of Lewis's themes, has stuck with me ever since.

with this song. I liked the noir idea of “you already know how this will end.” And, of course, you do. 3. **santé fe – beirut**: I rocked out Christmas day to this song, first while on a snowy walk through Oakley (both bourgeois square and industrial back lots) and then in my back yard firing up the chiminea for the relations. In 1975, we’d been in Sante Fe (and, more gloriously, the Gila Wilderness area, the most exhilarating backpacking I’ve ever done) right before we arrived in Phoenix. Yes, this one is modestly affirmative. “Whatever comes through the door I’ll see it face to face all by your place.” So I’ve mickle-massed up the good with the bad here. 4. **I was a lover – t v on the radio**: No one can tell me this song is not about George W. Bush. Look up the lyrics. “I’m locked in my bedroom, so send back the clowns/My clone wears a brown shirt,...” What a disaster those years were. 5. **crosses – jose fernandez**: some of these songs come embarrassingly late, in a process of having three or four signature songs that help me imagine a mix and then trying to fill without being too obvious about it. This one made it onto the mix on April 3<sup>rd</sup> (tonight). I usually think of myself as someone who hasn’t had to carry a lot of crosses. That attitude might come in handy. 6. **the men who live upstairs – the most serene republic**: faithful listeners might remember “content was my favorite color” from these guys on *The Summer of My Discontent* (a mix from fall 2006). It combines a rant against corporate advertising with a vision of environmental disaster. “Behavior lies in the food we eat, insipid sedatives./Much of all those cloy chemicals are building up to give.../uncontrolled division of cells from the men who live upstairs./Drowning us in saturation, for all minds to hum the same.” An unjustly neglected song and band. 7. **let the devil in – t v on the radio**: “Beg the bee’s forgiveness as it’s falling from your sleeve/Watch it’s guts pump poison into sting/Watch it reach completeness, see it fall asleep/Legs above fold in eternal dream” – if the bees go, we’re next, people! **Intermission**: 8. **L-O-V-E (Love) – Al Green**: the intermission features two songs from late winter/early spring 1975 when I was in Phoenix. The song I remember most from that time is How Long by Ace, which appears on an earlier mix. But I think I remember this Al Green song. 9. **tangled up in blue – bob dylan**: I know I remember this one. If I did begin to attain maturity in those few weeks in Phoenix, this song provides one data point. I wondered the other day, when and where did I listen to music in Phoenix? When I saw tangled up in blue on the web’s top ten chart from 1975, it suddenly came back. There was top forty radio on, constantly, at the Romney (racer, as I came to think of it). I recall vividly one night washing dishes at the Romney when tangled up in blue came on. I began to think of myself as a (potentially) interesting person with a story. Peeling onions, shredding lettuce, washing dishes, and thinking. **Side Two: mickle-massed bonum** 10. **Are You Lightening – nada surf**: I find this song wonderfully affirmative. Longing ... “The sweet things,/When do they come?” ... and infatuation. “Just look at the size of you.” 11. **master of the clouds – the high dials**: These guys need a break. Probably won’t get it from being on my mix. An earlier high dials song called “fields of glass” appeared on *It Doesn’t Have to Be This Way* (a mix from 2005). This song is about being abjectly in love with a woman and I just like the jangly sound. But, look, from what I understand of Derrida, you listeners need to bring something to the song too. 12. **girl – the fanatics**: A band from New Zealand. “I was alone in the end.” So this is supposedly the mickle-massed-bonum half of the cd, but this is noir all the way. What did you think, a free lunch? 13. **what we all want - gang of four**: Another late addition. “Could I be happy with something else? I need someone to fill my time.” Ty gave me this cynical song, on tape, years and years ago. Who’s darker? 14. **autumn sweater – yo la tengo**: ok, so I’m not that good at this affirmative thing. Though the pro-choice/pro-life angst fits the general theme. 15. **sunshine – devotchka**: I got it! I can be affirmative as long as there are no words. 16. **the rip**

***tide – beirut:*** well, I did say that you already knew how this will end. This song is achingly beautiful. 17. ***stay a while – creep out:*** Hey, the tide hasn't taken me out yet.