

## 10. FEINTS

### *Knocking on Haven's Door*

After moving to Boston, Amy and I got on with pursuing our musical endeavors. For me this meant building the new studio, continuing learning how to produce, and working on old and new instrumental tracks.

For Amy, moving to Boston meant trying to establish herself in a new, and completely unfamiliar music scene. That was daunting, but Amy already had a reputation as a great vocalist in NYC, and that was somewhat known in Boston.

I should backtrack a bit. Aethos, the Rock band she'd had with Joe, folded a few months after I moved to NYC, and no, it had nothing to do with me. Amy and Joe just didn't see eye to eye.

As such, Amy's subsequent moves were away from Rock, and more towards dance music. Amy's big, diva-like voice kept her in demand for session work, and most of that work was for dance-oriented music.

As we didn't have a studio in our tiny apartment, Amy had to go to other people's studios to do session work. That limited her to working locally in NYC. Still, she'd done enough such sessions that she established her reputation as a vocalist and, to a lesser degree at that point, as a songwriter.

Once we moved to Boston and had the studio, Amy could record her vocal sessions from our home and work with anyone in the world. That opened up a lot of opportunities.

That said, Amy still wanted to have a project working at the ground level in Boston. After doing some research, the first people she reached out to were a musical collective called The Haven.

The Haven consisted of guys who were musicians, and producers. They were trying to establish themselves as a place that catered to musicians who wanted to record, and promote their music. For example, you could hire their studio, and record music there, with them producing it. If you needed session players, some of them could play on your sessions. Some of them had some PR background and could help you promote your music. On paper — or rather a webpage, they sounded pretty interesting.

Amy requested a meeting with The Haven. They must have googled her and found out she had some reputation, so they were happy to meet.

We went there together, and found that The Haven were a bunch of grubby, millennial 20-somethings, living a frat-like existence in a filthy house they rented together. They'd all known each other from The Berklee College of Music in Boston.

However good their ideas and intentions were, I saw within five minutes that The Haven was bullshit, and that — *at least as a collective*, they couldn't do anything for Amy.

Still, Amy was intrigued by two of The Haven guys. In the coming weeks, one of them turned out to be worse than useless. The other was a 26 year-old named Rob. He'd graduated from Berklee majoring in bass, and music production. Of all The Haven guys, Rob seemed to be the only true talent.

## *SPF5000*

Amy decided to create an Electronic Dance Music (EDM) project with Rob. They formed a duo called SPF5000. Amy wrote the songs and sang, Rob created the beats, and produced the music. Despite being only 26, Rob was indeed an excellent producer — way further along than I was. They got signed to a small, NYC indy record label, and released a few singles to some acclaim. They performed live a few times around Boston and NYC, Amy out front, and Rob on the laptop and turntables. I got to know Rob a bit, and I occasionally photographed SPF5000, but that was the extent of my involvement.

## *Damn Yankees*

Amy's reputation from NYC preceded her in Boston. Soon word got around Boston that a NYC phenom was now living and making music in Boston. There's still a thriving Boston vs NY rivalry that has its foundation in sports — particularly in Red Sox vs. Yankees. In Boston, they look on *anything* from NY with suspicion (minimally), or open hostility.

The first thing our across-the-street neighbors asked us when they heard we were from NYC was, "Who's ya team?" Once Boston realized Amy wasn't a Yankees (or baseball) fan, everything was fine. As this was the era of Eli beating Brady *twice* in Superbowls, we didn't mention we were big Giants fans. You think I'm kidding? I'm not.

The other thing about Boston is that if you switch (metaphorical) teams, Boston embraces you as one of their own. Boston — and its music scene embraced Amy as if the Sox had poached a star player from the Yankees.

The *Boston Globe* did a full, two page, color feature article on her, and the *Boston Herald* did features too. Members of the Boston music scene soon realized they had a new, next-level talent living among them.

## *You Can't Kill Rock n Roll*

When Amy only has one music project going on, she tends to obsess on that one, and she starts getting antsy. She always does better when she has multiple lines in the water. SPF5000 was doing pretty well, but by 2012, Amy was itching to do something else. Amy can work in any musical style, but at heart, she's most definitely a Rock singer. She'd met a young, local guitarist/songwriter named Evan and she decided to do something with him.

Whenever Amy was working upstairs in our studio, whether she was belting out vocals for a session, or working with Rob on SPF5000 material, I'd always hear whatever she was working on. Most of the time, I wasn't paying much attention and just tuned it out.

However, when Evan showed up, I started hearing Rock guitar riffs and piano coming from upstairs. I raised an eyebrow. *Hmmm*. The next time he came over. I heard more, and it sounded better. By the time Evan left the third time, I'd had the worst idea I've ever had in my life.

## *I Should've Known Better*

I said to Amy, "That stuff you're doing with Evan. It's Rock!" Amy said, "Yeah. So?" I said, "I think you should let me produce it. *I can hear it*, and I know exactly how to produce it." Amy looked nervous. She said, "You don't know how to produce well enough to do that yet." I said, "I know how to record and produce guitars, bass, and drums. We'll bring Rob in to help with what I don't know. I know how this music should sound, and he's definitely a good enough producer to help us get it."

I pressed on, "I take it Evan doesn't play lead guitar?" He didn't. So I suggested I could also play the guitar solos on the recordings. In no time at all, I'd gone from wanting to produce the project, to suggesting *I should play lead*, to suggesting that if I was going to play lead, I might as well just join the project as the second guitarist.

Amy metaphorically shat herself. She forced a nauseous smile onto her face that suggested: *Are you crazy? You and I in a band together? That's the worst idea you've ever had, period!* She was right! What she said — *against every fiber in her being*, was, ". . . OK."

Amy and I are both incredibly steeped in Rock history. We both knew *full well* that this idea was *fraught with peril*. We'd seen all of the *Behind the Music* episodes, most notably those of Fleetwood Mac and Heart — bands where the members were romantically involved with each other. It *always* ended terribly.

The message was loud and clear: *Don't shit where you eat*. The only couple to ever pull it off was Pat Benetar and Neil Gerraldo. They were *by far*, the exception to the rule.

As these pages have shown repeatedly, being in a band is hard enough when you're *not* involved with another bandmate. Yet I had the hubris to suggest that I, a *part-time guitarist*, could somehow coexist in a band with my wife — *the most intimidating musician I'd ever met*.

It's hard enough when you have two, Alpha dog, pack leaders in a band together like Amy and Joe. That was Aethos' demise — and they *weren't* married. My suggestion had BAD IDEA written all over it in big, hundred foot tall, bright neon lights that you couldn't have missed from outer space. And we both knew it!

I saw that Amy was horrified. I knew that against her better judgment, she'd only agreed to it because she didn't want to disappoint me or hurt my feelings. That's the kind of person she is. That's how much she loves me. I was plenty dubious myself, but for some inexplicable reason — *against all reason*, I thought we could make it work.

When Rob heard about the project, he not only wanted in on the production, he also wanted to play bass. I'd never heard Rob play bass, but Amy had. She assured me Rob was terrific. She was right.

Though he never said anything, the other person who wasn't thrilled with my idea was Evan. One day, he'd been working with just Amy. The next thing he knew, he was now working with Rob and me, too. He looked less than thrilled, but he hung around. At first.

### *Tim the Enchanter*

As I've related, I hadn't had a lot of luck with drummers during my years in music. My perception of drummers *as people* — however talented they were as players — was mostly negative. Fortunately, my drummer luck was about to change. You could certainly say *I was due*.

Amy put the word out over her social media network that she needed a drummer for her new Rock project. One of her contacts responded fairly quickly, "I have the perfect drummer for you." And in what's easily *the best piece of musical luck I've ever experienced*, Tim walked into our lives and our band.

6'3" and powerfully built, behind the kit, Tim hit the drums like a beast. Away from his kit, I'd soon learn Tim was far more Neil Peart than Keith Moon. Highly intelligent, *extremely* well-read, and cerebral. He was also a soft-spoken, warm, wonderful person. In short, *Tim was the polar opposite of every drummer I'd ever met*. He was so awesome we gave him the nickname, *Tim the Enchanter*.

I didn't know all that the day we lugged Tim's drums up the three flights of stairs to our studio. All I knew that day was that when me, Amy, Rob, Tim, and Evan started playing, Tim's drum sound exploded like John Bonham thunder. Tim's kick drum, particularly, was thumping away, and every beater smack was like a glorious punch to my sternum. *Pure Dino*, and for me, the ideal drum complement to my huge, stereo, Dino guitar tone. I was in love with Tim's drumming and sound.

As soon as Tim left, I announced to the band — as if I was in charge — "That's our drummer! His (kick drum) foot and sound is pure Bonham! I love it." Amy wasn't quite sure. She said his tempo wasn't perfect. I said, "*Who's is? He's not off enough to matter. He's a nice guy and he sounds like Bonham. He's our drummer. I'm positive.*" Rob agreed with me. Tim the Enchanter was in.

## *Trampled Underfoot*

When Evan and Amy started working together, their original idea had been to create music based on a blend of The New York Dolls, Iggy and Stooges, T-Rex, and a bit of Americana, with modern production.

They came up with the band name *Feints*. Feints has two meanings. One is *a maneuver made to deceive an opponent*. The second was more appropriate for us, as we were all whisky lovers: *The fraction (part) of the distilled alcohol from the spirit still which is returned to the spirit still for redistillation*. Sometimes called *the ghosts of whisky*. I liked that.

Unfortunately for Evan, the moment Tim and I came on board, the band was never going to sound like those original influences. Evan stayed for exactly one rehearsal after we found Tim.

Whatever he'd started with Amy had changed overnight. Evan was now competing with a fire-breathing, *T-Rex driving a steam roller* of Dino guitar attitude and tone, a monster-truck engine of a drummer with a bombastic sound, a Berklee trained bassist, and a singer with the pipes of a Robert Plant, Steven Tyler, Freddie Mercury hybrid. Evan was in his early 20s and played that cute, jangly ass, garage band guitar style. I'd been playing guitar longer than he'd been alive. I had concert t-shirts older than him. Musically, Evan couldn't hang with us, and once Tim and I were there, he never stood a chance. To Evan's credit, he realized that quickly, and just never showed up again. The FEINTS lineup was set.



FEINTS: Amy, Rob, Dave, Tim

### *When I Played My Guitar I Made the Canyons Rock*

Initially, I was willing to *try* and fit my guitar style into that Dolls, Stooges, T-Rex box Amy and Evan had envisioned. I was willing to work with Evan as the rhythm guitarist. But at a certain point, regardless of whatever you draw up on a white board, *a band ultimately ends up sounding like it's supposed to sound.*

Once Evan was out, the idea that we'd end up sounding anything like a garage or glam band became comical — even to Amy. With our sonics and our influences, Feints were never going to be *anything but* a big, loud, stadium rock band. With my roaring guitars, Tim's thunderous drums, Amy voice, *and also piano*, we sounded like a cross between Led Zeppelin, Queen, and Elton John's 70s band. Knowing my history, and my love for those bands, ya think I liked that?

I have a Dino brain theory. Whether it's true or not, I have no idea, but I *want* to believe it. My theory is that *if you CAN play big, stadium rock like Zeppelin or Queen, why the fuck would you want to play any other style of music?* Go big or go home! Those *who can, do!*

The reason most bands *don't* take that path is that they don't have a Robert Plant, Steven Tyler, or Freddie Mercury type singer out front. Feints didn't have that problem. In Amy, we had the perfect, *no-limits* singer. No matter how loud and bombastic Rob, Tim, and I got, Amy could always go toe-to-toe with us, and deliver the Rock God thunder.

In my late 40s, I finally found myself in the big, no-limits, stadium rock band of my dreams. There was nothing musically we couldn't attempt, and nothing we couldn't pull off. Because we did *nothing* small, Feints became FEINTS.

## *Fighting My Way Back*

Being in a no-limits Rock band was all well and good — *provided I wasn't the limit*. I'd bitten off an awful lot. Now I had to chew it. As a guitarist, I was not only rusty as hell, I'd also never been the *lead guitarist* in a band before. I had the necessary skills, but I'd never had to put them together in a real world context before.

Since I'd switched to guitar, I'd mostly made *my* music, by myself, on my own terms. It's one thing to sit in a room and practice, go to a jam, or record guitar parts at your own pace. It's quite another to have to write, learn, and practice full songs from beginning to end, including guitar solos.

It had been a *long ass* time since I'd actively played with other musicians on a regular basis. Now I was among musicians who'd been far more active on a regular basis.

Worse, Amy was a *working*, professional, *intimidating-as-fuck*, A-list musician. Rob was a Berklee-trained, multi instrumentalist who was not only a fantastic bassist, but could also play keys and guitar. Even Tim had been in bands recently. I hadn't. The last

serious thing I'd done was Ninja, a *half a lifetime* before, when I was a kid — *and that was on bass*.

Musically, I was punching way above my weight class. I was *clearly* the weakest musician — *and link* in FEINTS. I *knew* I could eventually do the job, but it was a long, uphill climb, and I was constantly playing catch-up to the rest of the band. Fortunately, my bandmates — even Amy, had confidence I'd get there if I put in the work.

And there was *a lot* of work. I had far more work than anyone else had to do. The rest of the band just showed up at rehearsals and played. I had to work on my guitar playing every day just to keep up. Just to be *ready* to play at rehearsal.

I was 48 years old, and my age was now working against me in several ways. The first was just trying to remember all of the new song arrangements and guitar solos. We only rehearsed once a week at first, and frankly, I could have used 2-3 times a week. I needed the work.

Second, the only time we could all meet to rehearse was Monday evenings at 7pm. This was terrible for me. My job had me up at 5AM and at my desk by 7AM. By the time we started rehearsal, I'd been up for 14 hours. I'd also been home for two more hours, unwinding from the day. My energy by 7pm was low. I had to find a way to crank it back up, and find the focus to play demanding guitar parts for a couple more hours.

The only thing that got me through those early rehearsals was the creative buzz and adrenaline rush of playing. Still, by the end of many rehearsals, my focus waned. Thankfully, later we'd be able to adjust our practice schedule to Thursday evenings at 5PM, and every other Sunday afternoon. That change was a godsend for me.

The third place I felt my age was at the end of rehearsals. I now found that if I wore my old Les Paul for a two to three hour rehearsal session, when I took it off, my back and shoulders were *screaming for vengeance*. Les Pauls are wonderful sounding guitars, but they're also heavy, and unbalanced — an ergonomic nightmare. I soon realized I'd need some lighter alternatives.

I needed a lot more work and practice than just band rehearsals. I brought a beater guitar to my office, and every day on my lunch break, I'd practice for an hour. I'd load demos of our songs into a little Tascam guitar trainer device, and then play along with them until they became second nature. I used this same method composing my guitar solos away from band rehearsal.



Beyond just learning all of my guitar parts, Amy and Rob suggested that my *meter* — the musician's *internal sense of timing* — also needed work. Another humbling ego-blow for me from two far more seasoned musicians. Rob sat down with me and gave me some exercises to work on. I worked on that stuff, too. With all the work I put in, my guitar game slowly started coming back.

## *Dancing Days*

There was still more on my plate beyond just playing guitar. When I'd played bass, I'd create or learn a bass line, and play it straight through my amp with basically the same sound all night. However creatively you play bass, your primary job is to hold down the low end. When you're the sole guitarist of a heavy Rock band, you're not only responsible for your guitar parts, you're also responsible for the many different sounds and dynamics each song requires.

FEINTS songs required clean tones, *multiple levels* of distorted tones, lead tones, and a myriad of guitar effects. For example, to play *Loaded Dice* live, I had to start out with a clean electric sound for the intro. For the first verse, I needed a crunchy, Rock guitar sound. By the chorus, I needed to back off the crunch sound so I wouldn't drown out Amy's piano. For the first guitar solo, I needed two separate pedals: a boost/overdrive pedal, *and* a *slow* digital delay. After the solo, it was back to the chorus sound. Then for the outro solo, a boost/overdrive pedal, and a different *fast* digital delay pedal. That's just for *one song*.

Beyond just trying to *play* the songs without screwing up, each song demanded a whole level of *thinking* and pedal *tap dancing*. In addition to *band* practice, and *alone* practice, I found I also needed dedicated *pedal practice*. It quickly became too much to do manually. I got a pedal switcher that let me group multiple effects to individual switches for specific purposes. That reduced the tap dancing enough that I could focus more on playing. By the time I'd sorted it all out, my effects pedalboard weighed 80lbs.



Dave's FEINTS pedalboard circa 2014. Signal chain from bottom right to top left: Fulltone Wah pedal, Dunlop Volume pedal, Boss TU-2 Tuner, Majik Box Rocket Fuel Overdrive 1, Majik Box Rocket Fuel Overdrive 2, T-Rex Octavius octave divider, Earthquaker Hoof fuzz, MXR Phase 90, Boss DD-6 Digital Delay (fast), Boss DD-6 Digital Delay (slow), Boss Dimension C. Each effect fed into the red switcher box at the bottom of the board.

## *She's the Boss*

As I hinted earlier with *blatant foreshadowing*, the very foundation of FEINTS was *fraught with peril* from day one — *by design*. To expect *smooth sailing* would have been more foolish than starting a band with your spouse to begin with.

When it comes to music, Amy and I are two *extremely driven*, alpha personalities. We're both used to being the leader, and we have completely different styles. Conflict was inevitable.

Democracy very rarely works in Rock bands. Some people lead, and some people follow. A functional band needs both leaders *and* followers. As such, a band's power dynamic typically evolves like this:

The person with the most power in the band usually ends up being the leader. What comprises *the most power* differs from band to band. It's the person you can't afford to lose, and can't replace. If they leave, the band is done. It's often the person who has *the vision* for the band. It might be the main songwriter (or songwriters). It might be a charismatic singer, or a star guitarist. Sometimes a band has co-leaders, like Mick Jagger and Keith Richards.

In Shelter, I was the leader. I was the best musician and I put the band together. In Silent Rage it was Steve<sup>3</sup>. He had the rehearsal space and PA that let the band function. In Ninja, I frequently deferred to Robert's experience, but we mostly co-led that band.

In FEINTS, the person with the most power was obviously Amy. She was the best musician, the main songwriter (at first), the charismatic, irreplaceable singer, and *the face of the band*. If she wasn't happy, she could walk at any time, lift a finger, and be on to her next project in minutes.

These facts were blatantly obvious to me, Rob, and Tim. None of us was in the same league musically, as Amy. Of course, we — and I, would defer to Amy on most things musical.

Amy liked to think of herself as the band's *Musical Director*, rather than the leader, per-se, but she was the de facto leader of FEINTS. She didn't lead with an iron fist. On the contrary, she treated Tim and Rob like family. She certainly listened to people's thoughts and ideas, but she almost always got her way. That was usually fine on the musical side, because her musical instincts were usually right.

### *Nobody's Fault but Mine*

The logistical side of things was far harder. Once we started rehearsals, I found that Amy and I perceived *everything* differently when it came to how to run a band, how to run a practice, what was important and what wasn't. We differed on when, and how we related to the other bandmates — and particularly to *each other* in rehearsals.

It's intellectually easy to tell yourself you are going to defer to a greater talent (or band consensus, for that matter). What I found harder was not rolling my eyes, or having a sarcastic, obsequious expression on my face (or in my tone of voice) when I felt my view — be it musical or not — was being quashed without consideration. Or when I felt Amy was making a big deal out of something trivial. It's just not in my nature to look impassive, sound laid back, and matter-of-fact in those situations.

Every band rehearsal became a relationship minefield. To avoid the explosions, I had to repress my natural leadership tendencies while trying to control *any body language* that projected sarcasm, bluntness, or my frustration over whatever shit I felt I was being forced to eat. If I was successful we'd navigate that minefield without incident. But *roll my eyes* at one of Amy's remarks during band rehearsal, and we'd have a big fight about it later when the guys left.

This was all obviously a two way street. Amy had her own, similar frustrations and complaints with me. I'm sure she thought I was a complete asshole much of the time.

Sadly, rehearsals that should have been fun often became brutal, tension-filled affairs, as Rob and Tim watched two alpha dogs butting heads. After *those* rehearsals, once the guys left, we didn't go back to being *Amy and Dave, married couple*. Instead *the singer* and *the guitarist* had huge arguments that could last a couple of hours, or a couple of days. It was very damaging.

These fights fostered *lingering* anger and resentment in both of us. We'd never had anything like those feelings toward each other in our marriage. *Until the band*. This was *exactly* the kind of peril we'd both *known* was possible from the moment I'd foolishly asked my way into the band. It was unfolding right on schedule.

## *Jigsaw Puzzle*

As bad as rehearsals got, FEINTS obviously wasn't *all* bad or we wouldn't have continued as long as we did. The songwriting partnership between Amy and I was the great triumph of FEINTS. Together, we wrote some of the finest songs I've ever been a part of.

Amy certainly didn't need anyone's help to write great songs. As much as she's known for her voice, her songwriting may be her greatest musical gift. But given that FEINTS were a guitar-driven, heavy rock band, it naturally fell to me to come up with riffs and songs as well.

Before FEINTS, my songwriting skills consisted of coming up with a couple of guitar parts I could fit together over a looping drum groove to create an instrumental guitar track. As I said earlier, I could come up with riffs, and I'd often get inspired by drum beats, but the truth was, before FEINTS, I mostly wrote song *parts*. Not full songs with proper verses, choruses, or lyrics for that matter.

Fortunately, you don't have to be a musical genius or know much theory to write simple songs. Thousands of bands got famous cranking out simple, effective, three-chord pop songs. But writing more sophisticated songs requires more talent and some basic music theory.

Robert was a good songwriter, and I learned bits from him here and there in Ninja. I certainly knew that most songs follow some kind of *pop form*. For example, a common one is: *intro, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge/solo, chorus, chorus*.

Amy's songs have a next-level sophistication that comes from a complete understanding of music theory, and harmony. It's the difference between a Steely Dan song and an AC/DC song.

But it's not enough to just say *this part is a verse*, and *this part is a chorus*. Song *arrangement* is knowing how to *harmonically* fit the parts together, so that one part leads into the next *gracefully*. So that your chord progressions *resolve* in the way the ear expects them to. It's also about economy, and learning how to not bore the listener with unnecessary excess.

Song arrangement was new territory for me. I had just enough basic music theory to learn how to fit the parts together. That's what I had to learn. I'd learn at the feet of a master.

## ***Master! Master!***

Writing songs with Amy was a head trip — and again, intimidating as hell. She's so fast you'd get whiplash. To use a football analogy, giving Amy a good guitar riff was like giving Barry Sanders the ball on your own one yard line, and watching him go 99 yards for a touchdown in a matter of seconds.

In most cases, I'd give her a riff, or a progression, and that musical computer brain of hers knew exactly what to do with it. Before you could say *Bob's your Uncle*, the song was written. On the one hand, that was great, on the other, the chance for me to provide additional input (other than lyrics) had passed. *Shouldn't this be a process?* Doesn't this warrant *some* discussion? Sometimes things took a little longer and there *was* some good back and forth between us. We butted heads far less while writing.

Inevitably, Amy took a song *exactly* where it needed to go. Without the kind of trial-and-error *I'd* need to piece together something less sophisticated.

For the sake of learning, I'd ask Amy questions. *How did you arrive at that chorus progression? Why did you go there for the bridge?* She'd give me the musical explanations, but it was hard to keep up. To the extent I could, I made mental notes.

Songwriting and arranging are like any other skills. The more you do them, the better you get at it. One of the things Amy often said was that *the song will tell you where to go, and what to do*. I couldn't quite hear that at first. I would soon.

FEINTS' first songs were a handful of tight, little pop songs Amy had had kicking around. *Saturday, Invalid, Los Angeles at Last, Berklee Boys*. We reworked them as FEINTS songs, but as the band took shape, it inevitably became the songs Amy and I wrote together that defined FEINTS' sound.

## *Tumblin' Dice*

*Loaded Dice* was the first FEINTS song Amy and I co-wrote. It came about — as many of our songs would — with me just noodling on acoustic guitar one day. I stumbled across a simple riff in A. Amy thought I was going to play Bowie's *Moonage Daydream*, but instead, I went to the E chord. Amy's ears perked up and she said, "What's that?" I said, "I don't know yet. *I just found it.*" But before long, I had the basic verse structure, and Amy had her piano out, and we were working on a chorus. The song came together quickly from there.

We discussed what the lyrics should be. Amy said, "I have this thought for the chorus," She sang, "*Cause they played with loaded dice.*" Loaded dice, implying cheating. That got me thinking, *who's been cheated?* I got the idea to make it about a soldier coming home from war, feeling he had been cheated by his country as a veteran. Once we had that direction, the rest of the lyrics fell into place.

I'm a soldier's son  
Born to serve the corps  
A family legacy  
To serve in times of war  
And they paid me well  
To fight with gun in hand  
To carry on until  
The blood flowed on the sand

Now they've sent me home  
To those who knew me when  
And told me Uncle Sam  
Would help me start again

Where the hell is he?  
I'm barely making ends  
I'm lost and all alone  
And running out of friends

CHORUS:

Cause they played with loaded dice  
And they stripped me to the bone  
I said hey, Daddy, don't you leave me by myself  
To face the enemy alone

The battle rages on  
I try to hide the scars  
One day I'm pumping gas  
The next I'm parking cars  
But still I'm hanging on  
I'm coping with the pain  
The bottle helps to kill  
The voices in my brain

Well they played with loaded dice  
And they stripped me to the bone  
I said hey, Daddy, don't you leave me by myself  
To face the enemy alone

When the band got hold of *Dice*, it became our first sort of big, epic, number. It started off with the original acoustic guitar riff, then became electric, and louder and more rocking with each verse. The big chorus brought in Amy's piano. We added strings and lush backing vocals when we eventually recorded it.

*Loaded Dice* is not quite a power ballad, but not a full bore rocker either. Much of its sonic inspiration undoubtedly comes from that 70's Elton John (and his band's) influence that is so prevalent in both Amy and me. The piano and hard rock guitar sound that started with *Loaded Dice* became a cornerstone of our signature sound. The Amy & Dave songwriting partnership had begun.

## *Lay it Down*

Rob and I started the pre-production phase for our first recording sessions in November 2012. We'd been rehearsing as a band in our studio space, and there was a lot of general cleanup and organization required to get the space ready for recording Tim's drums — the foundation for all our tracks.

As I'd learned back in Ninja with Pete2, there's a *ton* of preliminary work involved when you're recording drums. First we had to figure out where the drum kit sounded best in the room to put the kit. Then we did some room treatment.

You want some natural room ambience, but you have to control it so it's not too much. We added moving blankets and bass traps to keep the sound from bouncing around too much.

As would become our practice for all FEINTS recordings, Rob, Tim and I dedicated a whole evening to putting on new drum heads, tuning the drums, and getting all unwanted noise out of the drum kit. We deadened the snare head so it wouldn't make a noticeable ping with every hit that you'd have to EQ out later.



Electric Loompaland, 2012. Tim's drums, all mic'd and ready to record.

The goal for the first recording session was to record great sounding drum tracks for nine songs. Once we had the drums, we'd add our guitar, bass, and vocal tracks on top of them. Because we'd done the dirty work ahead of time, the sessions went very smoothly. We completed drums and most of the bass tracks for nine songs.





Dave, tuning up in the studio

## *Two of Us*

Since we started the band, I got to know Rob more and more. Obviously we all got to know each other very well playing in the band together, but unlike Tim, when Rob wasn't at our place for FEINTS business, he was also around working on SPF5000 stuff with Amy. The two projects existed simultaneously, and when they conflicted, FEINTS *always* took the back seat — but I digress. Rob is also really good with videography, and video editing. He, Amy, and I worked on lots of creative projects together, not all of them musical.

The recording involved all of us, but when it came to producing the FEINTS album, that was just Rob and me. That's when we really bonded much further.

I was still really green as a producer, and certainly not ready to produce an album on my own. Rob was both a producer and an engineer. He was so much faster, more experienced, and efficient than I was using the compressors, EQs, and reverbs. I stood to learn a lot from him, and I was very eager to do so.

That said, Rob had never produced FEINTS' kind of Rock music before. He'd mostly produced electronic dance music. So many things about producing classic Rock, organically — mic'ing amps, acoustic guitars, and treating them in production — he knew that stuff in theory, but he hadn't done much of it. So Rob stood to learn some stuff from me as well.

In essence, I had the production *vision*. I knew exactly what I wanted everything to sound like. I had listened to *thousands* of hours of Rock music. Not just for enjoyment, but also listening with my *producer* ears to the mixes of my favorite producers. Jimmy Page's productions on Zeppelin albums, Jimmy Miller's production on 70s Stones albums, Gus Dudgeon's work with Elton John, just to name a few. Their recordings gave me so many production ideas that I wanted to try out. Rob certainly co-produced the album, but it was largely his *engineering* skills — light years ahead of mine — that helped us achieve the *sonics* of the *vision* I had for the music.

Another big win for me was that when Rob was there, I didn't have to engineer my own guitar tracking sessions. When you engineer your own session, you have to wear both the *engineer* and the *guitarist* hats. Minimally, you have to start and stop recording, and manage each take. You're constantly taking the guitar off, working at the computer, putting the guitar back on, playing some more.

I'd worked that way on my own before and after FEINTS, but with Rob engineering, I had the luxury of *just being the guitarist*. I could just focus on playing. More importantly, Rob also provided an invaluable, second set of critical-listening ears. I told him, "Don't let me get away with anything. If I don't nail the part, make me do it over until I do." With Rob there, I was confident that everything I played would be on-the-money.

The only downside to working with Rob was that he could only give me about four hours a week to work. That made progress maddeningly slow for me. Mixing was a lengthy process for us. Depending on how many instrumental tracks we were dealing with, it usually took us 12 to 16 hours to mix a song. By comparison, it usually only took me three or four hours to track a song's guitar parts.

We'd recorded the drums in November 2012, and spent the next few months tracking the other instruments. We didn't finish producing our first song until April 2013.

## *The Spirit of Radio*

The first song we finished producing was *Saturday*. This was one of Amy's songs that pre-existed the band. Very hooky. Very catchy. Very poppy, but we did a great job of rocking it up.

After mixing, Rob and I spent a few hours mastering *Saturday*. During playbacks, we were grinning from ear-to-ear, really digging how it came out. We'd been at it so long, it felt so good to *finally* have something to show for our work and to play for folks.

Amy sent the track to Anngelle Wood, a local DJ on WZLX, Boston 100.7, who played local music on her weekly show called *Boston Emissions* at 10pm on Sunday nights. We'd finished *Saturday* on a Sunday afternoon, and it was on the radio Sunday evening. For the first time, I heard my own music played on the radio. It wouldn't be the last. The same thing happened with *Loaded Dice*, and our others. Anngelle Wood became a FEINTS fan and she did her part to champion the band wherever she could.

## *Radioactive*

Of all of us, Amy was the most immersed in the Boston music scene. She was also the face, and marketing person for the band. She'd be the one arranging our gigs. The first gig Amy got us was a live performance on WMFO, Tufts College Radio. She also landed us our first proper gig the same week at *TT the Bears* club in Central Square, Cambridge.

Tufts Radio seemed like a great warm-up gig. Just set up in a radio station, play live while they broadcast it live. It would be like a dress rehearsal for the club gig. It *sounded* ideal. It was anything but.

It was one of the most physically grueling nights of my life. It was a *broiling*, late August night over 90 degrees. We struck down the gear at our house and lugged it — multiple trips, down the three flights of stairs out to the street and into our cars. Drove over to the radio station about a mile away.

The unload into the building lobby was worse. Now multiple trips *up* three flights of stairs. The building was not air conditioned. I was sweating like a bitch. We loaded into the room where we're gonna play — also no AC. The *only* room that had AC was the DJ's broadcast room. Fuck *the talent*. We loaded in at 8pm, we're not due to play until 10:30.

The sound guy directed us where to set up to get the correct sound for broadcasting. It was completely unlike playing on stage or in a rehearsal. Everything was baffled off. He had one half of my stereo rig behind me, the other half across the room next to the bass rig. The sound guy tells me that won't matter because we'll be playing with headphones on, and he was mostly right. But this feels *nothing* like a live gig. It was all sterile and clinical.

We had to wait the better part of two hours to play. The temperature in the room was about 90. Heat really takes it out of me, and combined with multiple trips up and down so many flights of stairs, I was just trying to endure. I had a headband on, and a towel around my neck. I was wearing a tank top and shorts, and I was *still* sweating profusely and steaming like a turd in the snow.

I drank bottles of water trying to stay hydrated. I washed my hands repeatedly, because my fingers felt too sweaty and grubby to move smoothly on the guitar neck. Before we played, I squirted some hand sanitizer on my hands, because I thought the alcohol in it might dry them out.

We soundchecked a bit after 10pm, and everything sounded reasonable. At 10:30 we played. Aside from a couple of miscues, we sounded great. I was very conscious that my grubby, sweaty fingers might trip me up at any moment — and they did, a bit. There were points where Amy was playing piano under my solos, I could barely hear what I was playing (which is why *being able to hear you rig in the room* is important). But we got through it.

When it was over, I was drenched, and spent. We were then supposed to go to the nicely AC'd broadcast booth for our interview. That room was like 20 degrees cooler, which felt great, but a change like that makes you worry you're gonna get sick. Fortunately, it was only about 10 minutes. A disinterested, air-head DJ asking only the most superficial questions.

Then the slog back. Down three flights of stairs, load in, drive home, up three flights of stairs. Multiple trips. By the last trip up, I was staggering. I legitimately wondered if my heart might give out. When we were done, I poured myself some ice tea, plopped into a chair and didn't move or even speak for quite a while. I was totally wiped out.

## *Live and Dangerous*

FEINTS' first *real* gig was only a few days later on September 3, 2013 at *TT the Bears*. TT's was actually a great club, and the gig turned out to be a lot of fun. Compared to Tufts, it was a breeze! TT's was all on one floor, and was well air conditioned. Load-in was easy, and we weren't all exhausted and sweating bullets by the time we had to play. There was a nice, backstage room for all the bands and their gear, where we hung out for the better part of three hours before we went on.

There were three bands on the bill. FEINTS was in the middle slot. The first band was a brutally loud, doom metal act from New Hampshire called Thunderhawk. They were nice, young guys, and they sounded good, but they were ear-splitting. Each guitarist had *two* full, 100-watt Marshall stacks, and the bassist had the large SVT bass rig. *Way too much power for the room.* It brought me back to my Silent Rage days when we'd done exactly the same thing. Thunderhawk were so loud, no one stood in front of the stage when they played. Everyone was off to the sides trying not to get melted.

When they finished, as they lugged all their amps and their huge, 4x12 cabinets off the stage, they watched me walk on stage with two, lunchbox sized 7-watt amps and two 1x12 cabs. I'm sure they were thinking, *look at this jackass, going on stage with his toy amps.* It's what I would have thought at that age, seeing some old geezer do that.

It must have looked ridiculous compared to all the big stacks that had just come off the stage. But I'd learned the joys of playing through a stereo rig back in the Ninja days. I had *stereo*, and 20 years of experience on the Thunderhawk guys.

We didn't get a proper sound check. Just a line-check, but I made sure the sound man mic'd both of my cabs to capture my stereo guitar sound running through the PA.

Although I'd played many jams over the years, and generally have no issues with stage fright or playing in front of people, this was my first gig *as the guitarist* in a band. I was happy to just get my feet wet again after so long. Just as I'd been with Silent Rage at that first Mohawk gig, I wasn't really nervous. Just antsy to get going and get through it.

I launched into the riff of our opening song, and we rocked hard through a 45 minute set. We played *great!* The small crowd went bonkers. Tim's tempo had been inconsistent for the last few weeks in rehearsals, but live, we found Tim always laid down a great pocket all night. We didn't rush through any songs. Rob bounced all over the stage like a Muppet.

Our rehearsals were in a fairly cramped space, so this was the first time I actually had some room to move around. That was fun. My bandmates hadn't seen that from me. It surprised the hell out of Amy! I strutted over to her a few times and we leaned into each other, striking some classic, singer-guitarist poses.

Amy split time between the piano and out-front lead vocals, ala Freddie Mercury. She sang her face off. It wasn't a big crowd — maybe 50 people, but a *lot* of them were music journalists and Amy's fans who were there to see her.

The people of Boston only knew Amy from SPF5000's EDM music. They hadn't seen Amy sing Rock before. They weren't expecting the second coming of Steven Tyler, Elton, and Freddie. They were stunned *and* blown away.

45 minutes later it was over. I'd played really well. I didn't mess up once. I was really pleased about that. As we hauled our gear off the stage to make way for the last band, the two Thunderhawk guitarists were waiting for me. "Dude! *How the fuck did you get that awesome guitar sound?*" You think I told them? It wasn't just them, a friend of Amy's who used to be an AnR guy was in the audience. He, too, said my guitar sound was, "*epicly huge.*"

It was a very successful evening! We hauled all the gear back to our place. We sat around our kitchen table around 2 AM and I poured a round of really good whisky for the band. We were all giddy, and running on adrenaline. I turned to Rob and Tim said, "Guys, I'll let you in on a little secret. *That was my first gig in 27 years.* And my first ever as a guitarist."



FEINTS at *TT the Bears*, 9/3/2013. Dave, Tim, Amy, Rob.



FEINTS (Dave, Tim, Rob, Amy) on the steps of our Somerville duplex. Once you got to the front door, there were two more flights up to the studio where we rehearsed.

### *Too Hot to Handle*

Word got around Boston very fast that Amy's new band was good. Like *amazingly* good. The press did stories on us. The story was always *Amy's band. Amy and the guys sound great.* Amy certainly didn't court the singular attention. But when you have a talented, charismatic, front woman who's the face and the voice of the band, that's always par for the course. Don't believe me? Name someone in No Doubt besides Gwen Stefani. No matter how well we played as a band, Amy was always the star, and she always got the lion's share of the attention. Rob, Tim, and I knew that score, and we were all fine with it.

We had more gig offers coming in than we wanted. We became *extremely* selective about where and when we chose to play. Anyone with any experience knows that gigging is usually a sucker's game. FEINTS quickly adopted a NO STUPID GIGS policy. It was one area Amy and I usually agreed on.

We probably turned down four of every five offers we had. We only played when it was advantageous for us to do so. That said, we played plenty, and had some memorable gigs.



FEINTS live, Davis Square, December 2013. Dave, Tim, Rob, Amy





Dave



Amy



Tim



Rob

## *FEINTS Debut Album*

Our first album became available for streaming and download in March 2014.



FEINTS debut album.

The cover art came from a wonderful photo taken by Amy's friend, Ruth Arnold. Amy and I wanted to do something like the old Hipgnosis album covers of the 70s. Hipgnosis created the album art for very famous albums like Pink *Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon*, Led Zeppelin's *Houses of the Holy* and *Presence*, many of UFO's albums, and more.

I thought Ruth's photo was perfect. At first glance, *a majestic bird taking flight*, symbolizing *the band taking flight* with their first album. When you realize it's just a pigeon stealing a french fry, it knocks it down a peg or two, keeping it from being *too grandiose* or self-important.

Between SPF5000 delays, and Rob only giving me four hours a week, getting the first album finished felt like trying to drag a two-ton block over a marathon finish line. However, we were all really proud of it once it was done. The songs were:

*Los Angeles at Last (Amy)*  
*Saturday (Amy)*  
*Invalid (Amy)*  
*Loaded Dice (Dave/Amy)*  
*Berklee Boys (Amy)*  
*Hudson Valley Stomp (Dave/Amy)*  
*Death Rattle (Amy)*  
*Little America (Amy)*  
*Fighting My Way Back (Lynott) - Bonus Track*

The Appendix discusses the songs in more depth.

A glance at the tracklist shows that six of the nine songs were written by Amy. That said, I contributed lots of new riffs and guitar parts that hadn't originally existed in Amy's songs like *Los Angeles*, *Saturday*, and *Death Rattle*. We were proud of all of the songs, but of the set, only *Loaded Dice* and *Hudson Valley Stomp* pointed to where FEINTS was headed musically. The rest (including the Thin Lizzy cover), show a wide variety of musical moods and feels.

That bothered Amy a lot more than the rest of us. As she and I were now writing songs that defined our sound and future direction, by the time we'd finished the album, Amy felt songs like *Saturday*, *Invalid*, and *Berklee Boys* weren't really *us* anymore. This was one more place where Amy and I fundamentally disagreed.

I agreed that our co-written songs showed where we were going next. But I didn't mind showing where we'd been. Those poppy songs of Amy's were damn good! My feeling was that the great Rock albums of the 70s, like *Zeppelin IV*, *Sticky Fingers*, and *Who's Next* had *loads* of *musical scope*. Those albums all had rockers, ballads, short songs, long songs, electric and acoustic songs. Why couldn't we?

In fact, *we did*. In addition to all my roaring electric guitars, I'd also indulged my inner Jimmy Page. I'd played both 6 and 12-string acoustics, mandolin, and lap steel. Amy had played piano, organ, and had scored some string parts. The music had a lot going on!

Amy also didn't like the idea of putting out *an album*, in principle. She was the one who'd be marketing FEINTS, and her opinion — perhaps based on her experience with modern dance music, was that *nobody bought albums anymore*. She wanted to market FEINTS with four or five-song EPs. I vehemently disagreed, and absolutely hated *that* idea.

I get that it was appropriate for Amy to market dance music to the under 35, club-going demographic as singles or EPs. That's the expected media type for that music genre. Amy very much *wanted* FEINTS' demographic to be *young*, but I felt that was completely unrealistic.

FEINTS was a 70s-inspired, classic, heavy Rock band. Amy knows better than anyone that *the album is the art form* for Classic Rock. Our music was *tailor made* for the 35-65 crowd. Those folks *absolutely still bought albums*, and for Rock, they *expected albums*.

When our social media numbers inevitably showed that our largest demographic was the older demographic, it didn't sit well with Amy. She'd been so used to making music for young people that she probably felt releasing *an album* dated her. But it certainly shouldn't have surprised anyone that the people who liked us most had grown up on Classic Rock back when it was just called *Rock*. If young folks liked us, too, that was *gravy*.

The other aspect regarding the marketing of FEINTS was that as the only *professional* musician in the band, Amy was using the band as another vehicle to further her musical career. Amy had *skin* in the marketing of the music. The rest of us didn't have music careers. We had the comparative luxury of making music for the pure creative aspect of it.

I got my way for the initial release — it was an album. I wouldn't get my way again. The marketing of FEINTS became another huge bone of contention between Amy and me. It would drag on for another decade, long after we'd disbanded.

## *Getting Better All the Time*

The more Amy and I worked together on songs, the more I learned. The more I learned, the better the riffs and songs I wrote became. I learned another thing about myself as a musician. *The more immersed and engaged I am in a project, the more my creative juices start flowing*. Once I get in that groove, the riffs and songs start pouring out of me. Ultimately, most of FEINTS' best songs began with my guitar riffs.

Amy and I began challenging each other. Amy would say, “We’re writing too many songs in the keys of A and D (common guitar keys). Try to write something in a different key.” So . . . *something not in A or D. How about F?* I found an ass-nasty riff that was half Black Sabbath and half Hendrix. It became *The Finest Line*. I wrote the whole song in 15 minutes. The vocal parts Amy wrote herself all but shredded her vocal chords — *because they were F. Be careful what you ask for.*

## *Dogs*

Another time Amy said, “We could use some more uptempo songs.” The next day, on my lunch break at work, I dialed up an uptempo beat, and within 10 minutes, I found the catchiest, uptempo, poppiest riff I’ll probably ever write. A few minutes later I had the chorus. The song came together that fast, and I knew it was a good one.

When I showed it to Amy she agreed. We banged out a bridge together in five minutes. Some of the best songs come together quickly and feel like they almost wrote themselves. That was definitely the case here.

Amy asked, “What do you want this song to be about?” I said that the riff was so upbeat and bouncy, we ought to make it about dogs — a subject we both love! I was quite pleased with the lyrics we wrote together for *Dogs*. They’re about relationships. The literal one between dog and human, and the metaphorical one of one human telling another what they need from the relationship. I like the duality. It gives the song more substance.

Give me food  
Feed me well  
I’ll curl up with you at night  
Give me room  
For when I run  
I’ll keep your house locked down tight  
Give me fun  
And adventure  
Take me out for a ride  
I’ll make you laugh  
I’ll make you crazy  
But I will stay by your side

CHORUS

So give me some water  
And throw me a bone  
Make me feel safe at night  
I'll forever be yours  
Just don't leave me all alone

When I'm in heat  
In need of love  
Please be my favorite toy  
When you are down  
And feeling low  
I'll be your good little boy

Dogs bark  
And dogs bite  
But dog is man's best friend  
I'll be your dog  
You'll be my master  
And we'll have fun till the end

CHORUS

So give me some water  
And throw me a bone  
Make me feel safe at night  
I'll forever be yours  
Just don't leave me all alone

BRIDGE

I said oh  
Don't you leave me  
Alone  
I want you please  
Give me  
Please  
Won't you give this dog  
A home

Of course, Amy still came up with wonderful songs by herself. One day, I challenged Amy. I said, "We should write a stadium rock anthem! A *We Are the Champions* for a new generation. The kind of song a whole stadium might sing during a big team win." Amy went off and wrote exactly that.

The song, *Win it All*, is a brilliant anthem. When we went to record it, we knew we had to kick it up to another level. If you have the audacity to attempt a stadium anthem, the Queen influence is going to be unavoidable. We figured there was no point in running from it. We might as well embrace it, and try to pay homage to it. I like to think we pulled it off — hopefully with grace, while retaining enough of ourselves.

## *Rumble*

After the TT's gig, and having *Saturday* and *Dice* played on the radio, Anngelle Wood invited FEINTS to play the 35th annual (2014) Boston Rock n Roll Rumble — yes, another fucking battle of the bands. The Rumble was a fairly prestigious, big deal in Boston Rock history. Most of the bands asked to play the Rumble with us had been slogging it out in the Boston club scene for a long time. We were asked to play it after only *two* gigs!

There were 30 bands playing the Rumble, and every other one of them had a jangly garage-rock sound (or worse). They all sounded *small*. We were nothing like *any* of them. FEINTS were the only band unabashedly playing *big*, loud, bombastic, stadium rock. It was the classic, *one of these things is not like the others. One of these things doesn't belong.*

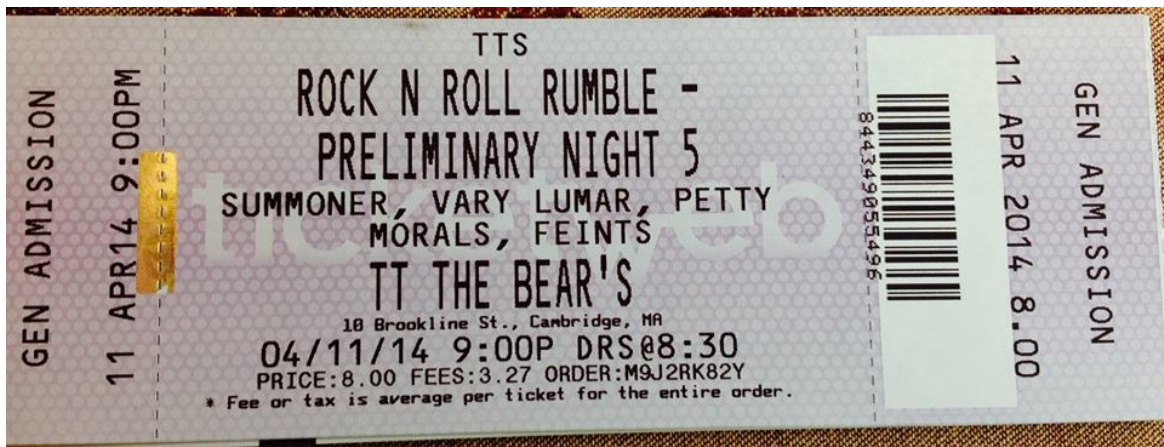
We played our preliminary night of the Rumble on a Friday night to a packed house at TT's and tore the place up. No one in the crowd was expecting anything like us. Despite what's being played in clubs at any given time, at its heart, Boston is still a Rock town that grew up on Aerosmith and Boston (the band). When the TT's crowd realized they were in for a set of real-deal, song-oriented, face-melting Rock, they went nuts. FEINTS left the stage to a roaring crowd. Once we got our gear off the stage, we were able to mingle among the crowd.

Amy was mobbed immediately. That was nothing new. In the 10 years we'd been together, I'd seen most of her gigs. There were *always* throngs of people mobbing Amy after a live performance. Mostly it was fans rightfully praising her amazing performances, but there were always plenty of guys *and girls* responding to her incredible sex-appeal, and trying to get into her pants.

The Rumble, though, was the first time I ever had people coming up to *me* and praising my guitar playing. I'd barely gotten off the stage when one guy came up to me and said, "Oh my God! That was awesome! You guys are *real* Rock! I haven't seen anything like that since the last time I went to a Rush concert!" I went to the Men's room to pee, and three guitarists cornered me. They kept me in there for 10 minutes, asking questions about my gear, and praising my performance.

As 99% of everything said or written about FEINTS was *always* about Amy, I have to say, it was nice to finally get some organic, personal validation.

Later in the evening, outside the club as we were loading up our cars to leave, someone yelled, "FEINTS! You guys were awesome! Wait up." A man came over and introduced himself. His name was Ryan Spaulding. Ryan was a local music journalist and blogger. He also had a local, underground music radio show. Soon Ryan was writing stories about us, having us on his radio show as guests, and generally doing all he could to champion us around town. Ryan became very good friends with Amy and me. We spent many a night together bonding over good whiskey.



Boston 35th Rock n Roll Rumble, April 2014



Dave and Amy



Amy and Rob



FEINTS and a Go Gos-ish girl-group called Petty Morals advanced to the next round of the Rumble. Unfortunately, for us it wasn't meant to be. Amy damn near blew her vocal chords out singing *The Finest Line* (in F) in the preliminary round. Beyond that, the tree pollen in our neighborhood was giving Amy terrible allergies beyond anything she'd ever experienced in NYC. By the time we were supposed to play in the Rumble finals, Amy's head was clogged, and her voice was shot. She needed vocal rest. We'd been heavy favorites, but we had to bow out of the Rumble. *They would have never let a Hard Rock band like us win anyway.*

History has shown that the Rumble was never really about winning the event itself. Most of the famous bands that played it did *not* win. For anyone left with any doubt, FEINTS had *announced its presence with authority.* Amy's band at the Rumble was the talk of the Boston Music scene. FEINTS now had considerable mystique.

### *You Keep on Movin'*

A big change came in 2014 when Amy and I moved from our duplex condo to a single-family house, one town over. The move impacted the band in several ways. We were able to convert our whole lower floor to a rehearsal space and an *awesome* recording studio, complete with a separate control room. Aside from some dodgy 1950s wiring, it was a wonderful place to rehearse and record.

With the music space all on the ground floor, when we gigged, we no longer had to deal with stairs on load in/out. Just straight out the door to our cars. Rob and I had a blast building and working in the studio.



Electric Loompland II studio, 2014. Control room left, live/rehearsal room right.



Rob, wiring up the patch bay from the control room to the live room. Ya think we're having fun?

## *Listen Local*

We were asked to play a festival called Listen Local in Boston's Faneuil Hall. Every band asked to play had been sponsored by a local music radio personality or journalist. Ryan Spaulding sponsored FEINTS.

The problem was Listen Local had a dozen bands on the bill. Any time you have more than three bands playing, it's trouble. Festival type gigs with lots of bands are *always* a cluster fuck. Worse, Faneuil Hall was a logistical nightmare. You can't park or unload anywhere near the building. We'd have to unload blocks away, and cart all of our gear over, multiple trips. Then wheel all the gear through a *very crowded* Quincy Market — a cramped, mall food court packed with tourists.



Quincy Market, Faneuil Hall

Amy wanted to play the show. I didn't. I pointed out the problems. She still thought we should play it. We were still arguing about it when we heard that the bands playing the show were expected to *backline* — meaning we were supposed to share amps, drums, etc. with the other bands. I finally put my foot down and said *no way*.

By this time, Amy and I were fighting over just about everything band-related, and we fought about this, too. I finally said, "Look, this gig is a *colossal* pain in the ass. 12 bands. We're not getting paid. The *only thing we control is our sound*, and if we backline, we lose even that. Imagine Tim on someone else's kit. Me without my guitar sound? We won't even *sound like us*. Are you fucking kidding me? This is a shit gig if there ever was one. What happened to our *no shit gigs policy*?"

Amy finally saw my point. I said, "Tell them we'll play it, but we won't backline. We play with *our gear*, or we don't play. And *no one else uses our gear*. If they agree to that, I'll play it. If they don't, fuck 'em." Amy was very dubious about making that phone call, but I suspected they wouldn't care. They didn't. Amy called — *sure, bring your own gear. No problem*.

Even so, Rob volunteered to let other bands use his bass amp. Stupid idea. *Nothing good ever happens when you lend out your gear. How come I was the only one who knew this?* Tim had let the opening band's drummer use his kit at our Davis Square gig, and their drummer broke one of Tim's tom heads. Raise your hand if you think Tim had a spare drum head. I love Tim, but he was still a drummer. Tim had to play the gig without that tom. He learned his lesson.

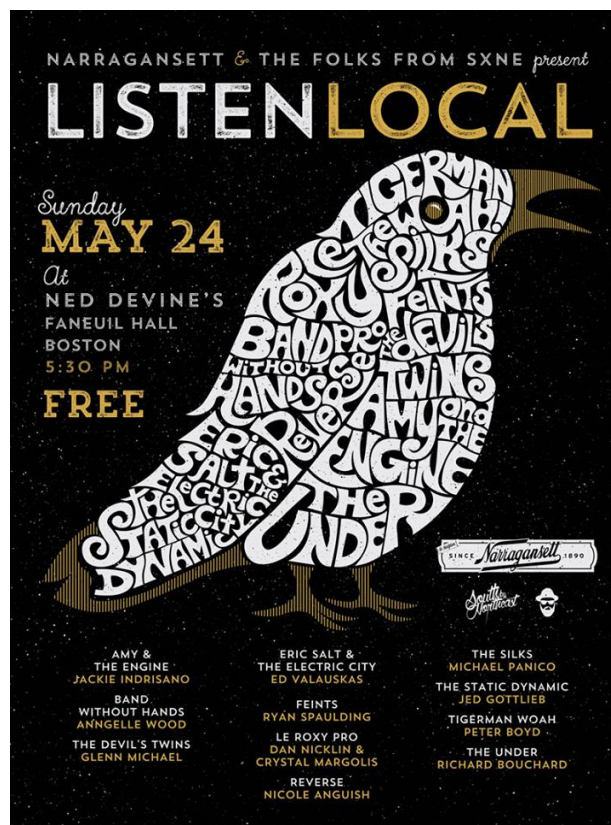
Even though Listen Local was *exactly* the logistical nightmare I envisioned, it was a good thing we brought our own gear. The backline drum kit other bands were using looked like a toy kit compared to Tim's kit. He would have sounded ridiculous on it.

We were one of the first bands on, and fortunately *we had our full sound*. Rob broke his low E string on the first song, and while Rob isn't a drummer, he had neither a spare bass, nor spare strings. Fortunately, Amy knew a girl in another band also playing the show, and she lent Rob her bass so he could finish the set. *Yes*, I see the irony there, and *no*, I probably wouldn't have been as charitable with the shoe on the other foot.

We rocked the hell out of the place, and for the first time, we played Led Zeppelin's *Black Dog* in our set as a closer. We started doing that as sort of a thank you to the audience. After sitting through our originals set, we gave them something they knew. People went nuts when we played it, and we killed it. When we came off the stage,

people were coming up to us saying Oh my god! You guys sound like Zeppelin and Queen!

We finished playing early in the evening, but because Rob had agreed to let the other bands use his bass amp, *someone* had to stay and watch his amp till the very end of the evening. That duty fell to Amy. She could either stand around for hours waiting for the very last band's last note, or help lug the gear home. Pick your poison. Tim, Rob, and I dropped the gear at our place and went for Indian food. We picked up a very bored, annoyed Amy (and Rob's amp) at the end of evening.



Poster for Listen Local, May 2015

## Red Star Union

In December, we headlined at a place called Red Star Union in Cambridge. It was a recording and video studio that also had a performance room. We were told our live performance would be filmed and recorded.

The show was a Thursday night, so I had already worked all day. We arrived at the venue around 6pm, but we weren't playing until 10pm. So once again, it was a matter of trying to keep my energy up for four hours, sitting around doing nothing. We all had a

little whiskey while we waited, but in that situation, you have to be careful not to have too much.

Unfortunately, this was my worst gig with FEINTS. I was now 50, and I just couldn't overcome a 14 hour day, and expect to play *well* at 10pm after sitting around for four hours. *That's why god invented cocaine*, but I wasn't doing *that*. I botched two solos. The audience didn't notice or care, but, when I saw the video footage later, I rejected it. At least we looked good in the photos!



Dec 14, 2014, Red Star Union, Dave, Amy. Tim and Rob





## Other Gigs

We played a gritty club in Providence RI called Firehouse 13. At one time it had been a working firehouse. Providence was always a largely blue collar, Rock/Metal town. I knew they'd be a great audience. Though the weeknight crowd was small, we played a great show, and went over well. The thing I remember most was the venue told us, "This is a rough neighborhood. Don't park out back, and don't go back there to smoke. We found body parts in the dumpster back there a couple of months ago." Lovely.

We also played a local, cable access TV show called *The Steve Katsos Show*. None of us had ever heard of it, but hey, it was a chance to be seen by the eight people who might be watching it.

One of the more fun things we did was a live *unplugged* show at WZLX on Anngelle Wood's Boston Emissions show. I played acoustic guitar and lap steel, Amy played piano, Tim brought his kick, snare, one cymbal, and played with brushes. Rob played bass at low volume. We barely all fit in the control room.

Scaling down the FEINTS sound wasn't easy, so we played our newest single, *Pearl DeVere* acoustically, and two covers: Elton John's *Rocket Man*, and, because Anngelle was a huge Stones fan, we played *Moonlight Mile*. Our performance was broadcast live, *and* recorded. The recording wasn't the most balanced mix, but, listening back, we sounded quite good.

## *FEINTS II*

Our second album, FEINTS II, came out in March 2015. We figured we'd be in good company with Led Zeppelin, Van Halen, and Queen who'd used the same naming convention for their second albums.



FEINTS II

Once again, we went for the Hipgnosis feel, this time, a bit inspired by Zep's *Presence*. We took the photo ourselves. Can you tell what's for dinner?

Amy and I had hit our writing groove well before the first album came out. A glance at these album tracks shows how much more of the songwriting I'd become. Every one of the Dave/Amy tracks started with my guitar riffs or progressions.

*Dogs (Dave/Amy)*  
*The Finest Line (Dave/Amy)*  
*Pearl DeVere (Dave/Amy)*  
*Contact High (Tim)*  
*Dirty Whisky (Dave/Amy)*  
*Win it All (Amy)*  
*Summer Clothes (Dave/Amy)*  
*Moonage Daydream (Bowie) - Bonus Track*  
*Black Dog (Jones, Page, Plant) - Bonus Track*

FEINTS II was a really strong album, and because my fingerprints were all over the songwriting, it was more focussed, and indicative of what we'd become as a band. Most of our best songs were here.

Amy *insisted* on releasing these songs as two separate EPs. I'll always think of it as FEINTS II — *the album*. That's how it lives on *my* phone. And that's how I'll refer to it in *my* book.

## *Pearl DeVere*

The song *Pearl DeVere* became the second album's *Loaded Dice*. I don't quite recall why Amy and I decided to go to *the old west* for a theme. Perhaps the chord progression led us there. Regardless, when we came across the compelling story of Pearl DeVere — who was a very real, 19th century Madame, we knew we'd found a muse for a great tale.

I remember the first time we played *Pearl* as a band in rehearsal. I showed Rob and Tim and the progression, and they both instinctively *knew* exactly what to play. It was one of those all-too-rare, magic moments a musician has when everything comes together perfectly the first time you play it. We knew we had a great song on our hands.

Recording *Pearl* was another adventure. The song has a Beatle-esque bridge — complete with honky-tonk piano and brothel background noises. That was something I had envisioned from the day we wrote it. It came out great.



Gather round and hear the tale of Pearl DeVere  
Godless woman, notorious career  
From Chicago, or at least that's how I hear  
The story goes  
Who knows?

Tawdry temptress  
Fair of face, and hair of fire  
High class madame with a bosom of desire  
Rules The Homestead where the rich men all retire

#### CHORUS

Dust your boots off  
Pay the fee  
You can have your fun  
But no one rides for free  
We all pay eventually  
Pick your poison  
Make a bet with history

Now Pearl DeVere  
She wore her dresses low and tight  
And she turned the heads  
Of every man in sight  
On the streets of Cripple Creek  
The tempers would ignite  
She caused a scene  
The girls were green

And every night  
The men of power came to play  
She'd take their money  
And she'd send them on their way  
Just a little morphine  
Makes the ghosts all go away

#### CHORUS

Dust your boots off  
Pay the fee  
You can have your fun  
But no one rides for free  
We all pay eventually  
Pick your poison  
Make a bet with history

#### BRIDGE

In a velvet curtained room  
Dressed in garter belts and plumes  
Girls would sachet round the floor  
In sweet perfumes  
Pearl would sachet through the door, say  
Your welcome to what's on the showroom floor  
But if you want to lie with me, it costs you more

#### CHORUS

Dust your boots off  
Pay the fee  
You can have your fun  
But no one rides for free  
We all pay eventually  
Pick your poison  
Make a bet with history  
Oh, Pearl DeVere

## *Black Dog*

As covers go, no band really has any business going near a classic like *Black Dog*. You're never going to better the original, or make it your own. But we'd been closing our live sets with it, and every time we played it, people lost their ever-lovin' fucking minds. So we already had it down tight when we began recording FEINTS II. We figured we'd record it and release it as a bonus track and as a thank you.

We didn't go for an exact copy of the original. My idea was to take the version we were playing live — which had some nods to how Zep sometimes played it live, but to produce it so that it paid respect and homage to the most important sonics and characteristic hallmarks of the classic, Zep IV studio version. Capture the things that were *most characteristic* of the original recording, while retaining a bit of us as well.

The most fun I ever had in the studio was trying to duplicate Jimmy Page's guitar tone on *Black Dog*. Jimmy didn't use an amp. That day, for whatever reason, he played his guitar through two 1176 studio compressors wired in sequence. Doing so produced a *very different*, rattier, distorted sound than he usually got from his Marshall amps.

Rob and I didn't know if we could get that sound, but I wanted to try. We ran my guitar through two 1176 *software plugins* compressed the hell out of it, and boom — *there it was*. The *Black Dog* guitar sound, coming right out of our studio monitors! We literally giggled with glee. Getting that sound made the finished track sound incredibly authentic.

The writer/player/producer in me is extremely proud of every song we wrote and recorded as a band. But there's something about having *Black Dog* turn out as well as it did that makes that Zep-struck seventeen year-old in me smile.



## *Summer Clothes*

The album closer, *Summer Clothes*, still kills me. It is *such* an overwhelmingly powerful vocal and lyrical statement from Amy that I often forget that I wrote the main chord progression on acoustic. When I first played the song for Amy, she loved it, but said she needed time to think about what to do with it. Well, a *lot* of time went by, and frankly, I forgot all about the song.

Fortunately, Amy didn't. She worked out another part and the lyrics on her own. When she finally recorded them, the raw emotion Amy put into vocals on this track — particularly in the last lines, was positively devastating.

It's a sparse track. Just Amy — piano and voice for the first 1:30 — and that alone sounds *fucking glorious*. Then I come in and play a quick lead line on Tim's Telecaster. Then we all come in on acoustic guitar, bass, and drums. Tim recorded his drums — largely unrehearsed, and after hearing the basic sketch of the tune, laid down a spectacular foundation in about two takes.

The track's sonics owe a lot to my heavy Rolling Stones influence. I even used a Nashville tuning on one of the acoustic guitar tracks. When I listen back to the finished song, I hear my Keith Richards influence on the composition, and my (producer) Jimmy Miller influence on the production — on tracks like *Wild Horses* and *Angie*. I'm truly pleased and proud of this song. And while it's a lovely, lush backing track, when Amy's vocals (and lyrics) come in, they just rip your heart out and kick it across the floor.

Packing up my  
Summer clothes  
Guess the bloom is finally  
Off the rose

Take a hit and smile  
You don't let it show  
You watch the sun go down  
Ten million miles to go

All the soundchecks  
And packs of smokes  
Decks of cards and  
Dirty inside jokes

It's hard to say when it all  
Started feeling wrong  
You knock one back and laugh  
And try to get along

But alarms are going off inside  
Girl, when you gonna  
Get off this ride  
Don't it feel like you've been  
Holding on too long

You won't go back this time  
You won't go back this time

Greasy food  
Cheap motels  
A postcard home  
To say you're  
Doing well

Some nights the stars align  
You go out there and own  
Some nights you're faded  
And your aching to the bone

Another morning  
In another place  
You wake up shattered  
With last night's tears  
On your face

Don't it feel like you've been  
Holding on too long

You won't go back this time  
You won't go back this time

Packing up my  
Summer clothes  
I guess the bloom is finally  
Off the rose

It was a poignant, bittersweet end to the album, and to FEINTS.

## CODA

FEINTS was both my most rewarding, and my most painful musical experience. I'd grown *miles* as a guitarist, musician, songwriter, and producer. I co-produced two albums that I remain incredibly proud of. The highs were fantastic, but the lows were terrible.

*Nobody's fault but mine*, indeed! Against my better judgment, I'd *asked* my way into a band with my wife, *knowing full well* the minefield lay ahead. Amy knew it, too. She probably should have just said *no*, but I'd put her in a difficult position.

FEINTS seriously dented our marriage. The *singer* and the *guitarist* butted heads over everything from rehearsals, to gigging, to marketing. The more the *singer* and the *guitarist* fought, the harder it became to change hats back to *Amy and Dave, married couple*. Rob and Tim were caught in the middle of it like two deer in the headlights.

Soon, an unrelated factor started piling on to the already stressful situation. My elderly parents both started showing signs of dementia. They became increasingly incapable of running their own lives as functioning adults. As their only child, their care fell squarely in my lap. Amy and I began fighting over how I should handle that situation as well.

For a couple who'd rarely fought *until the band*, it was all too much. Despite both of our best efforts, I eventually realized that Amy and I were incapable of changing the dynamic between us *in the band*. Once that sunk in, there was really no choice. As much as I enjoyed the *music* we made together, the band wasn't worth my marriage. Amy agreed.

We were a little more than halfway through producing *FEINTS II* when we agreed to stop. There would be no more rehearsals or gigs. My only condition was that *we finish the album*. Amy agreed to that. So while Rob and I worked on the album, Amy resumed her solo career.

Knowing that we were doing the right thing didn't make the pill any less bitter to swallow. As I said earlier, *I'd finally had the big, no-limits, stadium rock band of my dreams* and it was now over. FEINTS was an impossible act to follow. I knew I'd never have that kind of band again — nor would I ever top it. I didn't know what the hell I'd do next.