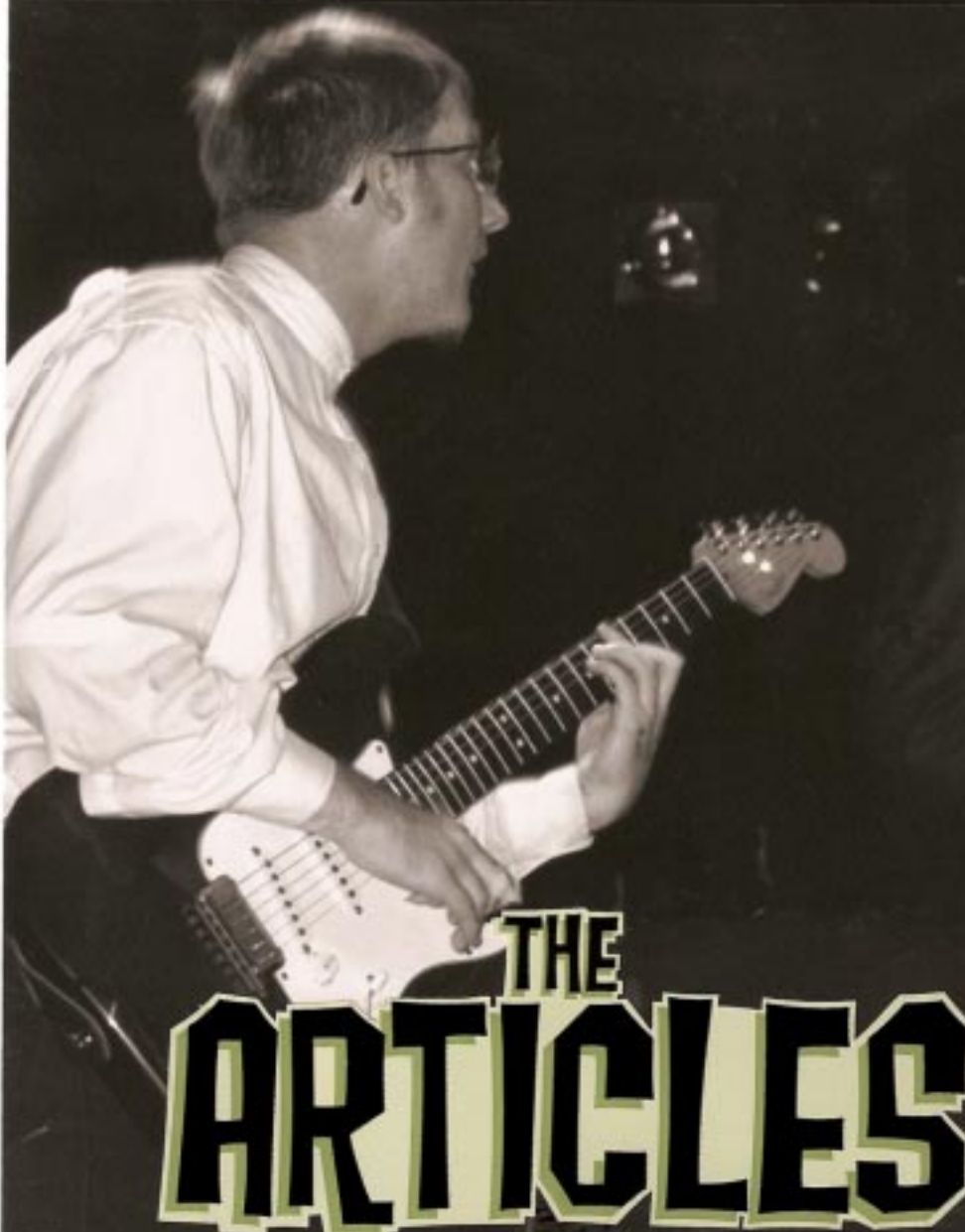


# interview with paul phelps of



# THE ARTICLES

09.28.97 at the water street music hall, rochester ny. photo by eugene bechle

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## How's the tour been so far?

Cool. I went to Coxone's Music City yesterday.

## In New York?

Coney Island. Yeah, we spent the day in New York. We were staying on Long Island and Coxone walked right behind me.

## Really? Tell more...

...I've had experiences when we've played with The Skatalites a number of times. I've had experiences trying to hold a conversation, but their Jamaican accents are so thick and so impossible to understand, I wasn't going to even try talking to him. I figure if anybody's accent is gonna be thick, it's gonna be Coxone's, so I didn't even try. Still, it was cool, I bought a Maytals LP. There were a bunch of tracks on it I hadn't seen before. I thought I had everything, and a Jackie Opel LP, and three 45's, including this Michigan & Smiley "Nice Up The Dance" 45; I hadn't been able to find that track on vinyl anywhere, so I was like wow. The lady at Coxone's was sitting behind the counter saying "You know, we have lots of records back here. You want to look through?" (*deep patois*) I do an awful Jamaican accent. I said "No thank you, it's cool." I didn't want to spend all day. Course, I hadn't eaten in like 27 hours for some ridiculous reason. It wasn't the greatest area of the city, and there was a neat little pizza restaurant nearby so we're like "We parked the van, we practically have our lives there. We have a lot of stuff in the van. Shouldn't we go get the food, then go to Coxone's, and then go to the van and see what's left of it? Let's just run into Coxone's, grab what we need, soak up some atmosphere, and run back to the van." It was just me and Shawn, so that's what we did. The rest of the guys went and hung out in the city elsewhere.

## Did you play a show there too?

No, we played on Long Island the night before at a place called Da Funky Phish, for a 21+ show. It was okay. I don't know, I missed Magadog's set 'cause we spent all day on Long Island. We figure it's so hard to find time to practice and write new material on the road, that we're trying to get into the habit of showing up at the clubs as many hours early as we possibly can. Sometimes they're open, not doing anything. We can jam on the stage, soundcheck for awhile. This club in particular, the Funky Fish, was not open, so instead we hung out in what little of the city there was, and didn't do much of anything really, but ah well.

## I have some pre-formed questions. How has the audience response been for The Articles, being you play all instrumental ska?

Really good. Awesome. The crowd responses have been great. When we first considered touring, one of the things we had said was about how one of

the best bands we want to go on the road with is Isaac Green and the Skalars. We're really glad we had a chance to do it, we're learning a lot from them, and Magadog as well. They rock the house each and every night. It's great to be playing with them, they're the greatest guys. Um, responses have been really good. Sometimes we get worried because, as you said, it's instrumental ska. We get kind of worried wondering if it'll happen. I mean we've been around for a couple of years now playing' out and it's never really been a problem in any other city than Detroit, (*laughs*) so we're pretty happy. It's going really, really well. The only thing that has dampened the tour is just today, we realized our trailer is beginning to pull the frame off our van.

## Bad news, that sounds like it might be a problem.

Yeah, so I guess we're gonna decide tomorrow morning what we're gonna do as far as the rest of the tour. We'll probably find a cheap hotel and wake up in the morning and go to a Firestone or Chevy dealership, see if we can weld that thing together just long enough to get us home in the middle of October. It probably ain't gonna happen. Sounds like we're buying a van, so buy our stuff 'cause we ain't got the money. Other than that...

## As briefly as possible, how and when did The Articles come together? I misplaced a form letter mailer from you one time. This weekend I was digging for it in the hopes for some background...

Well, it wasn't a spontaneous birth. It was more like a long, sticky, sweaty, kind of messy surgical procedure. It took a long time. My brother and I had another band, we left it 93-94, spent a year, might've been October '93? (don't quote me on that, I have no idea) We left and we were writing other music and they couldn't keep up with what we wanted to do. Spent about a year just writing music, jammin' with some other guys, and then we ran into Dan in '94 and (maybe I'm one year ahead, maybe it was 94-95). Anyway, we spent about three months jamming with the majority of this lineup, everybody but the bassist, and recorded a 7" after a few months; stuff we'd been working on.

## Editor's note: That's Romanov's Bones 7"

That's right, Romanov's Bones, produced by Dave Kirchgessner of Mustard Plug fame on his label Dashiki Clout. It went really, really well. We sold a good amount of them and did a couple back to back shows with The Scofflaws in Cleveland and Detroit. Those went really well, we met Victor Rice, who was The Scofflaws' road manager at the time, and he became a fan of the band. We brought him in to record our CD, to produce it. We recorded the disc, had almost 90 minutes of music, tethered it down to 72, which was a stretch. The next thing we

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know, Moon offers us a deal and we went with them. Since then, we've been very, very happy, because it's generated our opportunities to tour and do all we're doing now.

**What was it like working with Victor Rice? (pointing to question sheet) It's a pre-formed question, so I have to ask it.**

Ha ha, Victor is a god. He's so cool. In fact, he came out to see us when we played at The Wetlands last Sunday. We went and hung out with him and his new band Orange Street at the Version City Studios in downtown NY. It was good. It was a very cool experience. There's some really great music coming out of Version City right now even though it's just this rinky-dink basement. It's totally cool. Victor was awesome... In the studio, sometimes our mood wasn't fitting the song that we were recording, and Victor knew how to get us in the zone basically. For instance, when we did "Ska's the Limit" we were kinda hyper, kinda anxious. It was the last track. We recorded 8 or 9 full songs on the second or third day, and it was the last song we were gonna record. We thought we'd be tired, shagged out. It'd be a perfect time for recording that. But we weren't, we were just so giddy, couldn't wait to get out and listen to the stuff we had recorded. Victor said, "All right everybody, get a cool-out." He turned all the lights down low and we just jammed it out. It went really, really well. He's got an incredible ear. There's nobody in ska, unlike just about any other genre of music, you go to any other style of music, there is one producer or a number of producers that have a sound. An artist will go to that producer...

**To get that sound.**

Right. And ska, in ska, nobody has really had it. I think Mr. Beautiful / Steve Barry came close in Boston. But Victor's got it. If you listen to the first Slackers, the new Skavoovie, Pietasters' *Ooo Loo Loo*, and I think if you listen to our record, there is a common thread. It's Victor Rice.

It's unmistakable. He's the man and we love him.

**Are you in school at all, and if so, how do you manage that with touring?**

My brother and I are still in college. Jim Hohner, our bassist, just graduated right before we left for our first tour. Derek and I are still in school. I have 13 credit hours left which is frustrating the hell out of my parents. My brother Derek, he's got a full ride at Wayne State University and we're stalling it. He was able to stall it for a semester, this semester we're touring. Winter semester we go back home, we get new material together, maybe record, we don't know. I'm gonna finish up, Derek's gonna get some done, we're gonna do the summer semester and if we've made some progress, as much as we've made in the past 8 months, if we make the same progress in those 8

months then... Derek's gonna have to figure out what he's doing forever and after school. For the time being yeah we're taking a semester off, but we're planning on going back. You have to finish school ya know? Especially when you're thirteen credit hours away! The rest of the band are career guys.

**Is the album title, "Flip F' Real" Fenster from The Usual Suspects? I observe other references to movies, such as the song "Mr. Pink" from a Tarantino film.**

Yes, after the album came out, somebody brought that up, and we were surprised. Yes, I guess that does make sense. Mr. Pink is definitely a *Reservoir Dogs* influence. It's not like we're totally nuts about those movies really, it's just kind of one of those things that happened. I'd rather quote "Ultimate Fighting Championships," but the rest of the guys won't let me. The title of our disc is actually from a documentary on Thelonius Monk, one of our favorite jazz musicians. There's a scene in the documentary where he's signing an autograph for a woman and after he hands it back to her he turns to the camera and says "When she reads that, she's gonna flip. She's gonna flip f'real" and we thought it kind of made sense. When you hear this record of ours, hopefully you're gonna flip, you're gonna flip f'real. Something like that. It was cool and it was better than "A Soundtrack to a Saturday Night" which was the working title, so we went with that.

**Why bread and butter pickles?**

**Why not dill?**

I don't know. You have to ask my brother Derek. He's a hopeless romantic.

**Derek, if you choose not to comment, you could just make something up.**

DEREK PHELPS: It's funny. It's actually a touching story. A friend of mine died and I went to the funeral, and the family had these pickles at the buffet. I didn't want to eat at all, but the only thing that I could eat were these bread and butter pickles. If you've ever had bread and butter pickles, you go out to the grocery store and you buy them because they're the best thing in the world. I used to have them Christmas brunch, snacking at the grandparent's place, stuff like that. So, it sort of brought me down into place, that type of thing. So to say "You are bread and butter pickles baby," means you bring me back, know what I'm sayin'?

**Paul, your thoughts on ska zines?**

Oh, I love ska zines. This is the worst: I collect ska zines as much as I possibly can, I used to have boxes filled with ska zines. God, I love to read them. Umm, however... I had them all in the basement when we had a flood and because most of them are paper based, all of them had to be tossed. So if any other zines happen to read this, I, Paul Phelps, need to replace all of your



back issues. Some of my favorites are *Skatastrofpe* from Florida. Jamie's the man. In fact, check out the article I wrote for the last one (#5). I just fell in love with *Cosmic Haystack* from Kansas City. Kansas City is a big hotbed for great zines for some reason. Another one from that area is *Carry Go Bring Come*; everybody's gotta check out that zine, it's so great. *Denver Ska Beat*, I don't know what happened to them but they were great in their heyday. Um, what else is really, really good? I guess if I were to not mention anybody...

**That's OK. Just as someone who's seen a lot, enjoy that and pass it around.**

Yes, I certainly will. Oh, *People's Ska Annual*, or else Noah will get upset. (laughs)

**The Articles are the fourth band of 20, in 5 issues to actually have your interview conducted within city limits for this Rochester zine. Most ska acts pass us by opting more towards Buffalo, Ithaca. How does it feel to be #4?**

Ahhh...

**Insert whatever answer here.**

Yeah, if we were in baseball, it'd be a good spot because we'd be cleaning up for the other three. Maybe I am. Who were the other three?

**Siren Six....**

Awesome! They're my favorite, favorite 3rd wave ska band.

**Pietasters, Bosstones.**

Umm ...Siren Six! (laughter)

**Where can our readers get a copy of the aforementioned "Romanov's Bones 7"?**

Um, the only way you can get it now is we do a little bit of mail-order. We're not sending promos anymore cause I threw out a billion of them, and a lot went to ska zines, and it didn't get reviewed so...

**Yeah, that actually happens. Not here though.**

Well, what can you do? You can order it from the Articles 1270 Hampshire, Canton, MI 48188 or check out our official website thearticles.com, or e-mail me, Paul at fanmail@thearticles.com and we'll find some way to get it to those interested. It's also available at Mustard Plug shows, or at our shows.

**Tell a little bit more about Motor City ska.**

(Long pause) ...Detroit has a great punk scene.

**But you're hoping to change that.**

You know, we have some great bands. Telegraph are the best. In fact, that's what the aforementioned *Skatastrofpe* article is about; 'cause I'm such a big fan of them. Telegraph are absolutely the best post-punk ska band out there. Their home is Detroit. The Exceptions have been great for a long, long time. We got some really great new bands, Aks Mamma from Lansing, and Mad Butchers from up in Grand Rapids.

**I have the 7" from them.**

Wait though. Both Aks Mamma and Mad Butchers their 7 inches are negotiable, or whatnot, but look out for them. Both really great bands. What's cool about our situation in Detroit is that our sound goes beyond the ska scene.

We got our CD reviewed...

**You do a lot of jazz numbers.**

Yeah, and plus the swing sect has kind of adopted us to a certain extent, as well. They don't totally know what we're doing and they're kind of clueless but... Unfortunately, at the same time there's no skinhead community in Detroit that really supports ska there. There's no rudie action anymore. The Scofflaws played in town with us just recently for a really, really small crowd, and you know it was the diehard fans only. People who knew their stuff. The people who've been into ska for a long time, since Gangster Fun have been doin' it for almost over a decade now, it's tough to get the old standbys to come out to the shows. I think they might be tired of it or something. But it's comin' back. We're going to rock it.

**Thank you for your time, I appreciate what you're doing. Magadog's about to go on, that's why we'll cut it here. Hope you get home okay.**

That'd be nice. Thanks a lot John. Magadog are awesome. Readers if you can, please contact us and continue to read *Hoi Polloi skazine!*

**THE END.**

TAKEN 9/28/97 MOONSTOMP TOUR

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