



GUEST:

# Seth Kim-Cohen

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ONE REASON TO LIVE:

The Birthday Party—  
“Mutiny in Heaven”  
from the “Mutiny”  
Sessions

Seth Kim-Cohen is a conceptual sonician, writer and musician. He is currently a Lecturer at Yale University School of Art and is the editor of this volume. From February of 2004 to April of 2005, under the alias Julius Nil, he hosted *One Reason To Live* on Resonance FM in London. For one of the last episodes of the program, thinking it only fair that he subject himself to the same scrutiny to which he subjected so many others, he invited Andrew Morgan to host. He has written and produced seven albums of experimental rock music with his bands, *Number One Cup* and *The Fire Show*.

**ANDREW MORGAN:** Now this tune would have hit London in the early-80s, as this Australian band arrives in London right in the middle of a very clean pop scene and starts throwing their noise around. When did you first come into contact with this?

**SETH KIM-COHEN:** Not in the moment. I was aware of the Birthday Party and Nick Cave probably around this time, early-80s—'83 it came out—but I always had an aversion to Nick Cave's voice and sort of steered clear of it. Friends tried to turn me onto the Birthday Party and I was listening to things in the vicinity of this, but not this, in particular. So, probably, it wasn't until the late-80s, maybe even the early-90s, that I started to lis-

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ten to it actively, and then not until the mid-90s that I really became fond of it and it became important music to me.

**AM:** Important in just the personal connection to it or important in how it played into some of your projects in the 90s? I mean, I do hear elements of its attitude and song structure in the *Fire Show*.

**SK-C:** Yeah, definitely. But the two things are not unrelated. In fact, I don't know how you could really separate them. The music that I was making when I first became aware of the Birthday Party wasn't at all like the Birthday Party. It was much poppier and not as repetitive, more formal song structure: verse-chorus-verse kind of stuff. But then, through the course of playing with that band, *Number One Cup*, I started to feel as if pop music was an easy thrill or an easy pleasure. I didn't find it terribly difficult to write pop songs and I got to the point where I started to feel that as

a band we were writing good songs, I guess, but we weren't really getting at anything much deeper than a surface attraction. And when I would hear music like this I would hear layers and depths that I wasn't hearing in the music I was making. And this wasn't the only music I was hearing it in, of course. There was a lot of stuff I had listened to way before this that had those layers and that kind of depth. But it was around the same time that I was getting dissatisfied with the music I was making that I became aware of the Birthday Party and so it started to filter into the kind of stuff I wanted to do.

**AM:** How long was the gap between *Number One Cup* and some of your more experimental projects?

**SK-C:** Not that long, maybe 9 months or so. When *Number One Cup* broke up it was against my will. Even though I was becoming dissatisfied with the music, I was committed to the project and to the idea of three equal partners trying to make music together—which is fraught with problems. But the other two guys decided they wanted to do other things, and one of those two, Michael Lenzi, what he wanted to do

was switch from playing drums to playing guitar. I couldn't hold that against him, he wanted to have more say in what the music finally sounded like, or in the writing process, I suppose, and so he quit the band. He spent, as I say, about 9 months teaching himself to play guitar and then called me up and said "do you want to play together again? I'll play guitar now." And I said "well you've been playing guitar for 9 months, I've been playing 20 years." But, for some reason, I agreed anyway. I showed up at his basement one day and it just worked. I mean we had established enough musical communication by then that even with his rudimentary skills on the guitar, we could do interesting things, lead each other interesting places. So about 9 months, yeah.

**AM:** And so the bass player didn't join in the new project?

**SK-C:** Well, we've always had trouble with bass players. The other main component in that band was the other guitar player, Patrick O'Connell, and what he wanted to do was give up the rock band and devote himself to acoustic, instrumental stuff like John Fahey-type things. And so he was really out of the picture, doing something completely different. And you can tell from what I am describing, that *Number One Cup* had bigger aspirations than to be just a pop band, at least in terms of our listening. We were more adventurous listeners than just a pop band. But when we came together, through the process of democracy, we cut off all the interesting corners and we wound up with something a little more down-the-middle.

**AM:** So do you think that happened for Nick Cave in leaving the Birthday Party and going on to his solo stuff with many members of the Birthday Party, but not as the Birthday Party?

**SK-C:** I don't know the whole story behind the break up of the Birthday Party and what he was after and why it happened that way. I know that the drummer had either quit or had been kicked out before the last album and then Mick Harvey switched from playing guitar and sometimes bass and sometimes piano to playing drums. And then I think, from what I understand, he quit shortly before the band crumbled, in the midst of their last tour or something like that. And maybe that's what precipitated the end, I don't know. But obviously the first Nick Cave solo album sounds very much like a Birthday Party record, the logical continuation of the Birthday Party. But after that it starts to go in a different direction, much more singer-songwriter, much more ballady, much more conservative, in my opinion, and much less interesting. I can't really listen to anything Nick Cave has done in the last 10 years. I'm not going to psychoanalyze him from a distance, I'll just say—much more generally—artists who try to move away from a collective way of making music to a singular way of making music, in my opinion, tend to wind up making lesser music.

**AM:** I guess there are a lot of examples like that. I am trying to think of examples the other way to prove you wrong. If I was a good host I would have all these things up my sleeve.

**SK-C:** Maybe it will come to us.

**AM:** So, Seth, you are writing a Ph.D. on artistic incompetence, as you described it to me earlier. It seems that a lot of this album displays incompetence, sort of intentionally. It's rough, it's unpolished, it's not always on key. Is this the type of thing that drew you into your current line of study or is this completely unrelated?

**SK-C:** I think there's two ways of thinking how I wound up studying what I am studying: one is that I was drawn to it aesthetically in the stuff I tended to like, which had this sort of errantism—you know, these errant sorts of moments, where things veer off and upset expectations, or dissonance or rhythmic inaccuracy. Or, in literature and art, things that just strike one as either wrong or not-quite-right. Another way of thinking about it is that I, myself, as a practitioner, am not very skilled and am trying to defend myself and make an argument, after the fact, for why my stuff sucks. Again, I'm not going to psychoanalyze Nick Cave from a distance, so I'm not going to psychoanalyze myself from inside my own head. That's up to someone else.

**AM:** So, a few years ago you broke your neck and you were laid up for two weeks in a hospital, you were paralyzed for two days, sitting around listening to music. What do you listen to when you are paralyzed? Are you listening to this? Are you looking for something to release your aggression since you can't kick the wall or are you looking for something to relax you?

**SK-C:** No, and I should point out that I don't hear this—and I know most people hear this and the way it is often defended or championed is as aggressive, dark, angry music—and I just don't hear it that way. I mean I hear that it is in there, I'm not stupid—but again that is for others

to decide—but what I hear is really interesting music, stuff that is put together in a weird way, especially from within the trajectory of rock history. They've boiled it down to the bare essentials. The bass line does not veer from its little pattern—same three notes as “Smoke on the Water” by the way, you know, it's the classic rock intervals—the bass line doesn't change and there is really nothing else that's carrying any kind of melodic content, nothing else really establishes the form of the song. And the drums are hardly there. As far as I can tell he is playing kick drum, occasionally accenting the bass line, but there is none of the typical ride, the metrical ride thing, high hat thing. There are no cymbals in the drum playing. There are cymbals as sort of sonic....

**AM:** Texture, stuff around it....

**SK-C:** Yeah, and that's pretty much it. That's pretty much the song. And Nick Cave isn't really singing, he's telling a story or, you know, some kind of verbal art, but it's not really singing in a conventional sense.

**AM:** It's kind of preaching.

**SK-C:** Yeah, a little preachy, a little confessional. And then the rest of the band is just there to throw stuff at it, to litter the song with sonic garbage. And to me, I find it a really exciting way to make music. I'll get a little weird ethno-musical here, but there is a Korean song form known as Pansori which is usually very long songs, 40 minutes or more, and they basically tell a story, often traditional folk tales. And the singer sings a melody which is fairly repetitive, and then the band's job, it's not a very big band, just a drummer and sometimes a string player or a wind player, just usually one or sometimes two accompanists, and their job is just to accent certain points in the story, not to carry it, not to accompany, in any traditional sense. But when it gets to the tense moment to provide some tension, when he gets to the lulling moment to add some lull. But, it's not quite so illustrative. I'm making it sound a little simpler than it is. But they do something, that in some ways within their medium, is similar to what the Birthday Party is doing here, the coloring of the song, or, I don't know, filling in the spaces, and I think, in very interesting ways, in this music. So I don't really listen to this for Nick Cave's gothic-cartoon-Roman-Catholic-heroin-addict-stuff, I mean that's all kind of funny, and he does turn a phrase well—I'll give him that—but that's not what I get from it. I'm interested in the way the band is working, and I think they are an amazing band, one of the two best working

ensembles within rock music. The other one that I always mention is the Band. The way those two bands work for me is the best example of rock ensemble playing that I know. Did I answer your question at all?

**AM:** I don't know what I asked.

**SK-C:** You asked about what I listened to in the hospital.

**AM:** Oh yeah, let's get back to that because I am curious. What do you listen to when you are paralyzed?

**SK-C:** Really anything you can get your hands on, or your ears on, because, well I couldn't get my hands on it, literally. I couldn't raise my hand so I couldn't hold a book, read a book. The T.V. in this hospital room was conveniently 45 degrees away from the angle of my bed and I couldn't turn my head, obviously, so I couldn't watch the T.V. All I could do was to ask someone to put some headphones on my head and hit play. I asked my family and friends and whoever would visit me to bring CDs and I had piles of CDs. Anything I had heard about that had recently come out that I was mildly curious about. That was the time to just sit there and listen. So I did listen to hours and hours of music with the very beneficial lubricant of morphine running through my veins, which takes listening to a whole different level.

**AM:** I think of you as primarily a words guy. A lot of the art work you do is connected to words and speech and language and things like that but you mentioned that you are really not that interested in what Nick Cave has to say in this tune at all. Is that totally true? I mean, what do you think of the lyrics?

**SK-C:** I did print them out from one of those online lyric sites. What I am not really interested in is the whole arc of this story. Essentially it is a very simple story, if you can call it a story, a very simple sort of scene. It's mixing Catholic, religious imagery—confession and penance—with heroin addiction. I find both of these subjects a bit boring as subjects for art and subjects for black, dark, rock music, especially. Which is probably a little bit unfair to him, as he was probably one of the first ones to do it to this extent. But I've always found his lyrics a little self-aggrandizing, in a way. You know, that sort of "I'm the beautiful hobo," William Faulkner-meets-William Burroughs or something like that. But there are some great lines in the song, a level of verbal virtuosity that you don't often get in song lyrics. The way it starts out is amazing. The very beginning goes "Well I turned and fled this fucking heap on doctored wings, my flaming pinions, with splints and rags and crutches." That's pretty beautifully put. And I couldn't make out the words at first and I had to look up this word "pinions," not knowing if I was hearing it correctly. I looked it up and it is, in fact, the bone structure of a bird's wings. I guess that

is where rack and pinion in car steering comes from, a certain kind of joint. But he has obviously got a mastery of language and he is using it in very evocative ways and I find that beginning very compelling, especially when he does that classic, "Well I turned," and there is a pause, and then he comes in. It's a good narrative device. What I like in a song lyric, especially something as rambling as this, is just occasionally to entertain my ears with an interesting turn of phrase, so that the words occasionally rise up through the music and you go "oh that's good." But I'm not really interested in the whole arc of it, so to speak. But there is another thing in the way the vocals work in this song that I am really fond of....

**AM:** Do tell.

**SK-C:** Sorry, I did say to you, when I asked you if you wanted to come in and host and make me the guest, that if you wanted me to, I could just talk the whole time.

**AM:** That's completely fine.

**SK-C:** What I like is the multiplicity. It's a multi-tracked vocal performance. It starts off with Nick Cave in the middle of the stereo field and you hear it as just the voice of the song in a fairly—well it's not

that typical—but you are used to hearing just one voice telling you the song, telling you the story or whatever. And then other voices start coming in and they're panned left and right. So the first one comes in from the right side and sort of interrupts the first voice. You don't know what to make of this, whether the second voice is...I want say that it is the conscience of the first voice, or it's the little devil-on-the-shoulder kind of thing. And you're not sure if they are debating or agreeing with each other or backing each other up because it's poetic enough that it is not clearly a conversation or clearly an argument. So I am interested in how all these voices are swirling into the mix and at certain points it gets very busy with voices and then in the end it's just cacophonous with voices, all these voices doing all these different things. And I am interested in what that means in terms of who the narrator of the song is. Who is the "I" when he says "I?" There is more than one I in there. True of all of us, I suppose.

**AM:** And the refrain of "rats in paradise" sounds like the whole band is screaming, although it is probably multi-tracked.

**SK-C:** I think it is, yes.

**AM:** But just that element of making it sound like you had a whole crowd of people egging each other on, I mean it does have a religious quality to it in the way that you have a guy preaching and people yelling and responding. I appreciate that quality to it. It's hard to think of music like this, about the

actual production of it, the process of recording it, because it seems so raw and natural. But there is so much production in it. I don't want to say that it's doctored in an unnatural way but this is obviously layers and layers of multi-tracking: of his vocals, of hitting large iron objects, of screaming, of distorting things, of sounds that we can't even figure out quite what they are. Did you ever see this band live?

**SK-C:** No, I wish I had.

**AM:** I would be very interested to know how they pulled this together. Because there is always that problem of bands who are very well-produced and have very great sounds in the studios. And the creative catch of this band, being it's crazy, dirty collection of chaotic concoctions that mix together very cohesively. I would be interested to know how that works live and what makes a band a band when you take it on the road, when so much of what is done on record is a product of the studio.

**SK-C:** Yeah, they do have a live record and this isn't on it. I don't know if they could have pulled this one off live. It was the last recording they did and I don't know if they ever did perform it live, they were sort of whittled down as a band at this point. I believe Blixa Bargeld—who is in *Einstürzende Neubauten*—I believe he played on this and then went on to

play with Nick Cave in the Bad Seeds. So they were kind of whittled down as a band, losing members and I don't know if they ever did go out and play this stuff live. But on the live record you do hear them play other things that are, maybe not equally chaotic, but similarly chaotic. They were a band who had a formula, and I appreciate that too. The formula was the bass player and the drummer just play that thing over and over again. It's the same thing that James Brown's bands did, but obviously in a quite different aesthetic context. And then the other guys just did this weird sonic stuff. I mean at the beginning it was a little more attached to a song form but by the end it got like this. And I think that the genius of this band, in terms of this really working for them, was mainly these two other guys: Mick Harvey and Rowland Howard. They were really talented noise-makers, Mick Harvey particularly being a multi-instrumentalist, playing guitar, piano and drums. He wrote string parts, wrote horn parts. Whatever you need he could figure out a way to do it and always do it in an interesting way, in a cockeyed way. And I am sure this is one of the reasons that Nick Cave kept him when he formed the Bad Seeds. You can

put him anywhere and he is going to do something good. And he continued to do that, not only with Nick Cave but with PJ Harvey and on some solo records that he has done. In some ways he is my favorite thing about the Birthday Party. I've got to the point that I can hear his contributions in particular, and they are usually my favorite things. There is a song on the first Nick Cave solo record called, "From Her To Eternity," and Mick Harvey plays this amazing piano figure, just at certain points in the song. There is a sort of head and it's this really oblique, cubist piano thing that just sets the whole thing off and it's really beautiful.

**AM:** Now when you were doing the Fire Show and some of your more experimental music, the studio process of that might have been similar in some ways to the Birthday Party's work, yet you did take those songs out and you did perform them with less of the band then you started off with. Can you tell us a little bit about that process? I mean, the recording process of that is pretty obvious, but when you are left with two players to tour those shows, how did you manage that and capture the spirit and the energy of how those tunes were done?

**SK-C:** Well the story, to tell it very briefly, was that we were about to go on tour for the last record that we put out in 2002, the record called *Saint the Fire Show*. And we knew we were ending the band. I was coming here to London and the band was just dissolving. We always had temporary help on the bass and the drums but the guys that were with us at that point had been in it for a while and when they knew that the band was

breaking up and there was this tour coming up—this 6 week tour of North America—and they had to take time off from their jobs and potentially lose their jobs, they decided that it wasn't worth it for a band that wasn't going to continue beyond the tour so they just bolted. We tried to find other people, but nothing seemed solid enough for us to feel comfortable going back out on the road with relative strangers. So we, Michael Lenzi and I, thought about a way to do it with just the two of us, which was a bit of a crap shoot. We put it all together in about two weeks. We didn't want to just play to pre-recorded stuff, which we could have done. We could have just gotten the basic Pro Tools tracks of the rhythm sections from the recordings and just played along, but in both our opinions that would have been pretty lame. So we got a couple of these Akai Headrush pedals, which are these very long digital delay looping pedals and you can sample and hold a loop—they will hold up to 30 seconds. And we each took a couple of these. And, as I mentioned before, Michael conveniently used to be the drummer in *Number One Cup*, so he could play all the drum parts from the records—although he didn't play most of

them on the recordings—and I can fake it on bass. We would start most of the songs as the rhythm section and get the loops going with drums and bass, run those through the PA, jump out to the guitars. And we would then accompany ourselves. Luckily the songs were built in this sort of Birthday Party-type way: the rhythm section does stay static through most of the song and when there is a change, it's a major change, and usually stays the second way, doesn't go back to the first way. So we were able to pull this off by setting up the loop, heading to the guitars, performing that part of the song. When a change needed to be made we tried to work it out so that one of us would go back to the original instrument and initiate the change so we wouldn't both be moving as some sort of two-bobbing-headed monster. So while one was switching instruments the other would try to do something to draw the musical attention that way, so the switching wasn't really the main focus but the playing was. Everything was played live and the audience would see every single sound they were hearing was created live. It was fraught with all the inconsistencies that playing live has, with tempo shifts: a little slow tonight or a little fast tonight. Or "oh, there's a little hitch in that loop so we'll have to deal with it." Those kinds of things. So we did this tour and for the most part, it worked pretty well. When it didn't work it was because the sound system in a room wouldn't be good enough to

handle it. They wouldn't be able to boost the initial loop loud enough to match the stuff that was playing live or vice versa, but generally it worked.

**AM:** Now you left that environment of touring rock and went into a very academic setting and recently you curated a concert at Tate Modern in January. So the musical work you are doing now is much different in genre. How has that translated? How did this jump happen, from working with these art-punk bands, and then moving into a more conceptual form of music? Why were you attracted to this different world of art?

**SK-C:** I think there are a lot of reasons, one is that I can't imagine getting back into a van with four other sweaty guys and going out on to the road for 6 weeks. You know, it's not easy. As Levon Helm says in the *Last Waltz*, the *Band* movie, he says "it's a goddamn impossible way of life." And it is. It's a goddamn impossible way of life. So that's one reason. Another reason is that my listening in-

terests have always been broader than what I could play in any given moment. So when I finished one thing I didn't see any reason just to find new people to do the same thing I had been doing, I'd try something, try to explore some other avenue of my tastes. That's all the idealistic reasons. The less idealistic reasons are that if I am going to have something of an academic life it is a little more practical to do work like this, where I can do my work at home in terms of composition or conceptualizing and then go to the auditorium on the night of the thing and make it happen and then go back home and I don't have to have a rehearsal room and I don't have to pay that landlord in addition to my home landlord and I don't have to co-ordinate my schedule with four unreliable guys who drink too much. So it's a combination of things. I'd like to believe that the most important and the most pressing motivation is just that I am interested in making good stuff happen in this kind of context as I hope I have done in other contexts.

**AM:** So as you have grown into different and more conceptual and more art-based musics—if you want to say that, and I really feel bad that I just said that, I totally disagree with what I just said—but for the sake of conversation, you didn't outgrow any of your earlier tastes, when you get into more cerebral musics. Do you find that you

go back to the Birthday Party with that mindset or do you leave that mindset and just enjoy the Birthday Party just for its rock energy and its fun. Because you can look at this music very analytically which is sometimes really boring and really kills music like this, like when people try to dissect Sonic Youth in a classical composition context. It is very interesting but who the hell cares? Because what is really fun about it is that he is standing on his guitar and shaking his hips and it's making this really great noise. When you come back to the Birthday Party with your different brain, has your perspective on it really changed or do you just turn it on and it takes you back to the reason that you liked it in the first place?

**SK-C:** Well the two things are synonymous really. The reason I liked it in the first place had something to do with its engagement with my brain. To me this music is as conceptually interesting and as intellectually interesting as Xenakis or Ligeti or Anthony Braxton or whoever else you think of as intellectually interesting. And in some ways I feel like there is something in the aesthetic

of the rock band that's unequalled in these other kinds of music. I think that the idea of four people who have maybe a less-schooled grasp of the material with which they are working—you know, music in terms of the way it is defined in the Western Academy: harmonies and pitch relations and rhythms. And these people, well, at least the people I have played with, can't read music, have a very limited grasp of theory, maybe they have heard of the circle of fifths, but probably can't explain it and so on—and I'm one of them, I can tell you there is something called the circle of fifths, but I definitely don't understand how it works. Anyway, you take these people and you put them in a room and you say, "let's try to come up with a song or something" and they, hopefully with a sort of curious listening practice and a general curiosity of the world put together their ways of dealing with music and make something. But there is no way that they can agree as to what that thing is. They can't look at a score and say "oh, look, that's where

it goes from that note" or "look at that tonal cluster," they don't have the vocabulary. They don't have the skills. So they have to just rely on the experience of playing it and then the experience of listening back to it. And they have to agree on that very ambiguous kind of experience in terms of trying to define what it is they do. And often they don't agree. You know I've been with band mates of mine, who have explained a song to someone else in a way that makes no sense to me. That's not the song I play. And I love that. I think that's an incredible, weird sort of democracy and it puts the listener in this position of having to be the mediator of this disagreement between the members of the group. I love being the one who has to sort out the Birthday Party for the Birthday Party. Goodness knows they couldn't do it for themselves, or so it sounds. And I think that's really interesting in a way that you don't quite get in traditional classical music. Maybe you get it in ways in certain kind of compositional techniques, like aleatory techniques which try to take some of the control out of the composer's hands, and maybe even the players' hands and let events just happen and then the player and the composer are in no more privileged position than the listener. But I think that happens in rock anyway. Rock is aleatory by design or by the nature of its....

#### **AM:** Inability?

**SK-C:** Yeah, and to me that's really fascinating. So, obviously I can make arguments that are somewhat intellectual about rock music that I think are totally credible. I don't think that I am forcing it. Like if someone tries to do a harmonic analysis of Sonic Youth, yeah, they are probably missing the point somehow. But I didn't invent these kinds of arguments. Great writers like Greil Marcus and people, think like this and make great arguments about the importance of Bob Dylan or whoever, and not along poetic lines or conventional musicological lines. This kind of thinking about music is really important to me, really important to me.

**AM:** It's interesting that one thing that excites you about this is the collaboration, the so-called democracy between three or four players getting it together and creating something. But this piece with the Birthday Party seems very heavy on Nick Cave and at the end of the band—and who knows, he was probably thinking about his own stuff at this time—it's obviously very heavy on Nick. You know, it sounds like he spent ten more days working on this tune than anyone else did.

**SK-C:** Yeah, and I think probably a lot of people would hear it that way and maybe that is the reality that he did spend more time on it. But if you took the band out, it would suck. And what I get excited about is the band. If, over time, the vocal tracks had to be separated from the music tracks, I would definitely take the

music tracks. I want to hear that guitar that is scraping above the nut or below the bridge—I don't know which it is—but getting those weird chimey bits that guitar-makers never wanted you to play, that wasn't the design of that instrument, you know. And that's all he does, whoever is playing that. I don't know if it is Blixa Bargeld or Rowland Howard or whoever. But whoever is doing it, that is all they play throughout the whole song, just making these completely uncontrollable tones that are just there on the guitar and you can't manipulate them, you can't change them by fretting differently. You can maybe bend the neck a little to get a little weird wobble out of it. "And that's just going to be my contribution." "I'm just going to make that, and it's cool." At one point the vocal goes away and all the other noises go away and that's all you hear, is that, against the bass line, you hear that weird little chiming, and that's really interesting to me. I mean maybe you could do an interesting harmonic analysis of what those tones are, relative to the tonal center the bass is making and maybe from a musicological standpoint that would be interesting.

**AM:** But probably not. Just like Pender-ecki music. We rarely do any analysis on the tones that are created when the strings bow between the tail piece and the bridge. It's a very common technique in all of his music. But, luckily, people have realized that there is just no point to it, because it's not the point of the gesture. The gesture is completely different. Why don't we actually take this piece apart a little bit. I think there are probably a number of interesting sections. It might just be good to look at a couple of those in isolation. Let's look at the beginning.

**SK-C:** Right at the beginning, there's this blood-curdling scream by Nick Cave and it sounds like the bass guitar is dropped on the floor. And then that first chime of the guitar either above the nut on the headstock or below the bridge of the guitar.

**AM:** I mean it's exactly like Stockhausen. Giving all his material in the first five minutes and then making a piece out of it. Like everything is there.

**SK-C:** Yeah, that's pretty much true.

**AM:** It's just like Stockhausen! (Laughs)

**SK-C:** I especially like those first two notes that he plays on the guitar there. The rest of it, he's kind of strumming in a way. But on those, it's just two distinct notes. They sound to me like a fissure, like cracks splattering through a pane of glass or through a bone or something. The whole thing is going kzzzzzz like a crack through ice. I love it.

**AM:** That's awesome.

**SK-C:** That's where the show should end. That's where the show should always end, with someone just going "man, that's awesome." Another awesome section is the one leading into one of the verses where this cacophony of voices kicks in, and one of the voices sort of counts in, "one, two, three, four..." and nobody pays any attention to it. And then he screams and there is all this other stuff going on, but the band comes in of their own volition.

**AM:** Of course we have to wonder there if he overdubbed the "one, two, three, four..." later or if he was doing it live with the band and they just kind of gave him the bird and kept rocking.

**SK-C:** And I love that, that he counts "one, two, three, four..." and then does this scream like "yeah, let's go, man" and nobody goes and he's left hanging. There is a sense of humor with this music too. I mean, there is an obvious sense of humor with the sort of cartoonyness of some of his themes, but there is also a sense of humor, where there are certain expectations of things, like that: counting in and no one comes in with him. And I find that a kind of dark humor and a humor that is self-referential in a way. I like that.

**AM:** Yeah, it's self-aware of the attitude that is being presented, which must have been made painfully obvious when he took this group from Australia to London in the early 80s.

**SK-C:** Well, I think they thought they were going to arrive in a like-minded scene, because there were a few bands that were doing things in this vein. But I think they were disappointed to find out that the few weren't just the tip of the iceberg, they were the iceberg.

**AM:** It's great hearing what they did with the percussion: the bass and snare drum, nothing else. The cymbals either mic'd up independently or recorded later and distorted, big chunks of metal being hit, resonating. And there is a piano brought in there at one point, that's doubling the bass line for a while, almost like a really aggressive blues line. It's just this constant mixing pot of these jaggedy

edges of sound that all come together. Very elegantly put together, I think, in many ways. The way that the voice is completely on it's own for so long and then is doubling itself. And he is obviously very aware of how he has organized the language and how he has organized the arc of it, if you will, to be able to put all these things together, to go in disparate ways, to have the voices yelling at each other and egg-ing each other on and then suddenly congealed together, singing the same refrain. It is fantastically put together to sound un-put together, you know. It takes a lot of effort to put together that sort of chaos.

**SK-C:** And I think it says something, it's like a commentary, probably on the music they were experiencing around them and just a commentary on the human need for organization and tightness and order. They are probably just saying something like "it's just all a big mess out there, don't you guys recognize that?!"