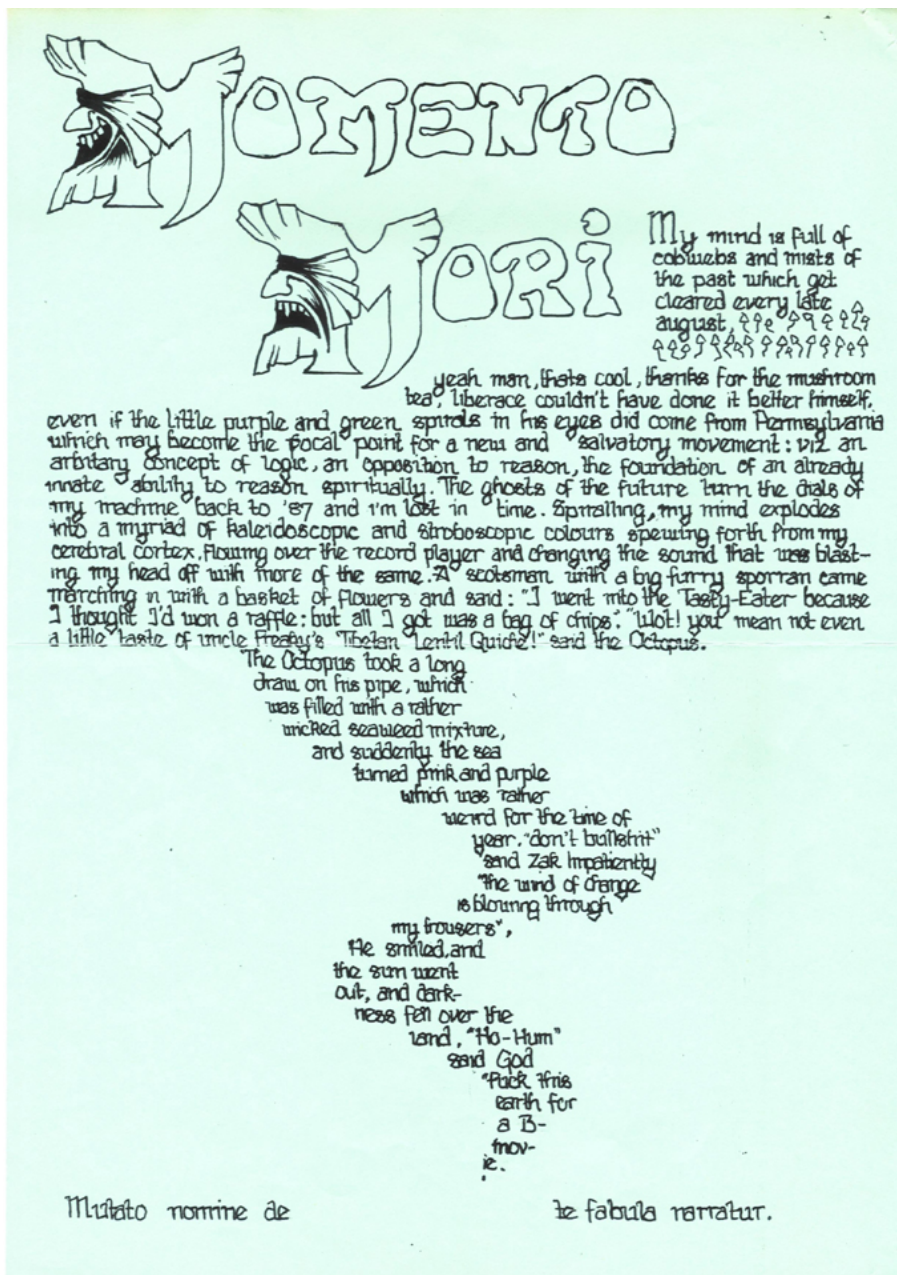


“For this next song we are going to Jam. That means we are going to make it up as we go along”

A Grain Festival Memoir by Mania Rose, singer with Momento Mori



I guess I might have been about 17 when we put on The Grain Festival. Dates, facts are a little hazy, but the fluid of memory washes up on the shores of time yet. I don't recall how it all started - we were a bunch of local alternative and experimental bands, most of us were pretty young, there was the fanzine "The Grain", there was a pretty great scene, and there was this idea for a festival in aid of ecological warrior charity Greenpeace. I was vocalist/lyricist for a punk/hippy outfit called "Momento Mori" at the time. The name of the band appealed to me "Be mindful of decay". Although there was somewhat a floating population in the band, I believe that there are only two members still living. Be mindful of decay. I did not find this an easy time to write about, it is painful, it is funny, it is special and bittersweet to me, and long buried.

At this time our line-up was me, a somewhat screwy chick in feather boas and huge hats and capes, and my boyfriend Sid Exit - or fat bastard Sid, sweaty, fat, loud, intelligent manipulative charismatic and loyal Sid, - Bobby 'Maximum' Velocity - talented rough charismatic and a just a little scary Bobby, beautiful and clever Kate Twilight with her big eyes and quirky tastes, and Jay Time - her lover, and I kind of remember him being very into art and drugs. Quiet. Dark eyed. Kate was the girl everyone talked about. She wrote letters in blood. She did all kinds of secret things that other 17olds dreamed about. Not really. She did like the Bay City Rollers though. And red ink. She was pretty amazing. I kept in contact with Jay and Kate for many years afterwards in Notting Hill squatting 'Tarzan' MP Michael Heseltine's house and running art shows and notorious raves there. We would go for tea and cake and exchange ideas. Kate was so luminous then, and they seemed both frail and wild. Sid was dead. Bobby had burned his bridges with me. I was playing

in Punk and Metal bands, and working at performance art, painting, all those things I loved. I know Kate has left us, and if Jay hasn't, I am truly amazed, and hi, that's incredible.

IN THE RUN-UP TO THE FESTIVAL;

We often met up for meetings at Mick Magic's house in Frimley - discussing strategies and delegating duties. From my personal heroes "Slack Bladder", Martin Crook knew of "A friendly farmer with a field", so we had a venue. Count Five (aka Chris Carter) had extensive scouting experience and pretty much took care of health and safety issues, medical safety and toilets (I know! The Glamour!), I know that I worked on publicity and sets, costumes for the charity collectors, and doing what I did pretty well - blagging free stuff from local businesses, drawing things, writing releases, Charles Church let me use the photocopier. Mick must have been the primary newspaper contact, as there was a great photo of his band Magic Moments At Twilight Time - some kind of experimental acid trip groove going on, and we got some pretty decent local coverage for what was, for Camberley and the surrounding area, a pretty big deal for "the kids".

I will add, in case it seems confusing to readers, that Kate and Jay were primarily in MMATT, with Mick and Shona - and were part timers with us - We had a floating population, lots of guys grabbed an instrument and grooved with us over time. So if you claimed to have been in Momento Mori, it is probably true, even if I don't remember you.

On the day, I think the sun shone, and we were in our field, with a stage, and sound guy - there was a burger van - I can't imagine he did too well, this was the era of "meat is murder" and a lot of people only ate meat secretly on the alternative scene. It was like a slice of a family outing arrived and parked up on our happening. Every alternative for miles around made the trip to the festival it seemed, and everyone hell-bent on the thing the 80s were about: Having a good hedonistic time of it. I doubt burgers came into it much. Perhaps the burger van guy has a piece up on this site and will correct my perceptions on this whole idea.

We dressed up charity collectors as clowns, so that it was clear who was a genuine collector, and the whole day had been run at our own expense until this point. I put on a clown suit, and for a wealthy area, the collection proved pretty poor - the sound guy got paid, because the sound guy always gets paid, I think someone took out a few pressing expenses, and the charity received very little filthy lucre - most of the bands were out of pocket, and it was a good day. That was the expectation, the whole enterprise was run on good will and dreams and was a really sweet thing to do. The charity did get a little something in the end, but the "peace love and anarchy" crowd are generally a bit tight with the old coinage. Cider might be cheap, but lots of cider costs dear.

I really can't remember everyone who played. The play list was full, some band from London, I can't recall them. Fat Al and Internal Autonomy were there. I really loved their sound, and after I sold my record collection, found a release of all their stuff on CD not too long ago. Al's done a fantastic cleaning up job, and it sounds better than the earlier recordings, whilst keeping all the IA trademark sound. It is really good. I suspect it was a self-release, as they were signed for a while to "Echoes From The Duck Pond" which is no longer going.

MMATT were playing their keyboard grooves, and much as I wanted local love-God (haha) Nik Morgan to sing "The Eddie Irwin" song for us - I think that that was a treat he declined. MMATT has some memorable songs, and presentations "I hate you, you killed my elephant", Shona with message boards like the showgirl holding up the rounds at a boxing match - Kate in her whiteface, Mick in his Doctor's coat. "Takes valium and relaxation, don't indulge in masturbation, thinks John Peel should rule the nation, Irwin you're a pratt" . What a wasted opportunity don't ya think, Nik? The star that never was.

And we were really spoilt for choice at the Grain. Andy Bullock (now known as Andy Bolus) and Martin Crook were the instigators behind subversive noise terror "Slack Bladder" and they were just light years ahead of anyone else there as far as creating discordant sound and resonance. Andy is working as Evil Moisture, and his work continues to awe me - total Genius. I love Andy, and I write about him all the time as a character - he is so inspirational. You ever see the name "Frank Fuck Performance Artist" - that's one of my pieces, and Frank is based on Andy, he pops up all the time in my writing. Evil Moisture evolved from Slack Bladder, they were these skinny guys in trenchcoats being snarky. Cool.

MMATT had made their mark, and local heroes The Charles remain the band that forgot to get famous as they were so busy partaking of delicious teas in my estimation. The Charles are lovely chaps, gentlemen to the core. The music was commercial, and the image of psychedelic Victorian time-travelling gents was über-cool in a way that we just weren't. They were all so good looking, and the songs were fun, catchy, and Count Five was a terrific frontman, as well as one of my best friends. They were all fantastically wonderful chaps, and remain so. The trouble was, they were just too romantic and laid back - and I saw some very successful bands steal their work wholesale, barely repackage it, and make money and commercial glory from their innovative and media friendly ideas, so The Charles remained local legends, and faces who get recognised from the sheer number of gigs played, rather than because of the commercial success I think they could have found.

White Hawk said to me very recently that she thought that Count Five was a genius, and I smiled at that - but truthfully, I think she is right. I was not the only person to underestimate how clever he really is - it is easy to overlook as darling Chris will always be laid back, whimsical and full of charm, but he is not as wispy in his ideas as he appears, and time and time again I have overlooked this aspect of him. Many years before "Forrest Gump", Count Five read to me a play he had written. I distinctly remember a passage "Life is like a tin of biscuits", and I teased him so much over it. I have since apologised, but I just cannot shake the feeling that maybe I teased him out of a gigantic fortune there; but the joy of the man is that he really has never held this against me - and he is a darling. And the 'Whirlygig' stuff was always great to be involved in. I don't think by this point I was mystic dancer for The Charles, or onstage with them particularly; from time to time, I will read whatever they send in and find out what I really did on this occasion! (This happens fairly often)

So I think this is how things ran, more or less. We had written our contribution to The Grain zine by writing bits of a story, folding it up passing it along and generating general silliness. I remember this ended with Sid's line "And the wind of change blew contentedly through Zak's Trousers". Slack Bladder took works out of a recipe for marmalade or jam and it just sounded sick and obscene and I loved that they did that (Fangirl). MMATT I think was about LSD babies and elephants, and there was information about The Grain, and The Charles wrote and drew up The Strawman, and cartoons. This was a free souvenir edition for the festival I believe. I think I personally might have hand-painted posters to put up around town, and went fly-posting. I think I drew posters with a multi-armed goddess - but you may be able to correct me on that one. I guess we may have liberated some shopping trolleys to transport all the things we would need for the day - clown suits from Auntie Bet's fancy dress hire, and flowers donated by the local florist.

ON THE DAY OF THE GRAIN FESTIVAL;

Truthfully, I would have started the day with a delicious and healthy mix of Special Brew and Whiskey, and washed it down with some sedatives. The squat would have been chaos - with the guys screaming out "buckets for breakfast!" And "hot-knives", and I would have just tried to ignore all the singing and getting stoned whilst I went through my lists of things to do. Then I would have bossed everyone about a bit as I got stressed I guess. Apparently my list of "things to do" involved more sedative measures, and a really long vampire cape, feather boa which I felt passionately attached to, and a really big hat I traded with the Count - just like the one "Preacher" now wears in the comics.

The day continued this way - I oversaw stuff for my lot, because it might not happen otherwise. As at odds as it might sound with the picture I have painted, I was the more focussed and driven person in the squat. I pretty much ran things there and kept order, and my nerves were shot - what with that and dealing with the police, the gangs, the violence and trying to keep order and study, I was really addicted to anything that helped keep some semblance of calm because my nerves were shot anyway. Resolve came in pretty packages. Misery in a feather boa a cape and a preacher hat. I was an intense kid, and I never slept at all. Without doing what I did, I think I might just have combusted from the stress of it all. I loved my band though, I was passionate about it, and I found a lot of acceptance and friendships through doing it that have lasted.

I know that I decorated the stage, and that I supported some sweet guy that did some spoken word poetry - it has always been my thing to support performers and help warm up an audience - my personal mission. We liked the poet - was it Gav Parker? I have an image of Gav in his jeans dancing in the field. Hopefully the day hosted an interactive event and a multi-level experience - we were a really creative bunch, and we were good, all of us. I hope everyone there felt that. I think a whole bunch of creative really gifted people met up around this time period. I remember lots of faces who attended, and I know many of you have gone on to great success, and that's a really great thing to think on. My feeling is that we put a lot of work into making a happening, and that it was run pretty well, and offered a lot at no charge. It was a gift to ourselves, to everyone who came along and joined in and got into the strange spirit of it all. I really look forward to reading all the different opinions and exchanges on the website. I am trying to be honest with what I remember, without causing harm or upset. It would hurt me to cause either of those. There is a difficulty both emotionally, and sometimes with the content of what I am writing, so all I ask is agree or disagree, that you refer to me only as "Mania Rose" - I don't want to be too publicly identifiable please. "Momento Mori".

The Grain Festival presented one of my earliest glimpses into understanding that there is a relationship between performers and audience that continues on for a lifetime. It is why Mick contacted me to write this, and why I agreed to it. The interaction between performer and audience creates a strange hybrid baby. Live performance can be so hit and miss. Every fucked up novice performer feeds from audience energy, and gives out to that audience in a form of creative osmosis and it is something that can stay with and mark your audience permanently. Strange beasts we make, even in little events when we don't really know what we are doing.

I was very young at the time of the Grain; I still perform in different fields, and that I take these responsibilities seriously now. I don't take drugs, I don't over-drink, but I did then. I could have done a lot worse, but baby, I am still standing, and I can't apologise for a damn thing. I put too much into everything I ever did not to care. I always cared about my work, I

still create, I just learnt some self-control, but my passion and ideologies have never lessened or dimmed. At the time a whole new world was opened up, most of it was bad, but what was good was precious and I hold it all dear. I just lost so many dear friends who died at their brightest - that it becomes unbearable at times; so I try not to think too much about the past, and I try to remember the happy times. Usually those happy memories lead to darker places, and memories of lost loved ones truthfully.

Okay, apart from the spoken word burlesque poet, I know that I must have run about sorting things quite a bit, in between collapsing on the field and socialising and completely overdoing anything and everything that came my way. As I was writing this, I took a call from Eugene, who was in the audience, and asked for his memories. He helpfully told me that myself and Bobby kept shouting at The Charles; "Have you seen the view from Eugene's boiler? It's so exciting!" So in exchange for that piece of immortality, Eugene also agreed that I could write that he ran around the field shouting "Careful with that axe, Eugene, be sure to get the lot!" And pretty as he was in his eyeliner and ragamuffin Byronic clothes, that he looked like a great Jessie, and would have been off his face. Eugene felt that this must have been close enough to the truth.

I know that by the time I had to go up on stage, I was pretty much walking on air, and listening to the recordings from the PA, I am definitely slurring slightly. I was a girl with a lot of stamina. I arrived on stage hooded and covered in my cloak. I opened up with the old nursery rhyme

*"Hark Hark the Dogs do bark
The Beggars are coming to town
Some in Rags
And Some in Tags
And One in a velvet gown"*

We had a decent set. A lot of what we did was just one giant jamming session, as I helpfully decided to explain to the audience at some point in the proceedings. We had a few fans and friends dancing, it was a crowd who were enjoying the day, all dressed up and no place to go other than this happening. Truthfully I don't know how we got through it all, but we did and for the most part it made sense. I was listening to a lot of Gong, RDF, Hawkwind, as well as my punk stuff, and the lyrics were sometimes a little reminiscent.

*"Where has the real world gone?
I can't see cause of all this light.
I can't see the church for the steeples
And where are all the people,
They're Nylon.
And the Path of Life is a Motorway!"*

Heartfelt stuff. It didn't always work that well - there was a fantastic little number we did, Sid and Bobby and I - really bluesy and relaxed - but on stage it did not work the way we expected at all.

*"Paint me high,
I said paint me high.
If you want to colour me, then paint me paint me high!
"Have you ever seen a woman fly; oh my!
If you want to colour me, then paint.
Paint me High!"*

Through the PA this translated to the onlookers as

*"Paint me high,
I said paint me high,
If you want to come up me,
If you want to come up me
If you want to come up me
Then paint, paint me high!
Have you ever seen a woman fly; oh my!
If you want to come up me, then paint, paint me high!"*

Just such a cool cat. And in amongst this dishevelled shambolic mayhem, I ironically gave myself the rather wonderful stage name of - *MANIA ROSE*

Now, remember I was the straightest person on stage, and there was Bobby's mighty ego taking up more room than anyone else. Bobby might have looked like Genghis Khan, but the boy could play. It was often a friendly battle of wills between us, and Bobby was still one of my best friends at this point - but when he wanted to take over - set lists and plans be damned - Bobby would take over. His favourite trick was to get everyone shouting "Give it MAX! Give it MAX!" Then Bobby would step into the fore and run long solos whilst gurning and sticking out his tongue and shouting sexual obscenities. He was really a natural about it all, and the crowds always loved him.

Some of our improvs would go on for hours at the squat, and people would muck in on homemade drums, mikes, new lyrics, clapping, and it was really fun. On this occasion however, we worked around a rough framework for a song "I'm like an egg from Clacton by the Sea", and I ran out of ideas for a while. The whole piece was really a stream of consciousness - and I was barely conscious by this point. I wish I had been savvy enough to plan this, but I wasn't. Like pretty much everything I did then, it was spontaneous. I ran out of lyrics, I got fed up with dancing and the jamming was growing and getting into the groove. I had nothing in particular to do, so I decided to undo the stage set, and wander about the audience chatting, kissing them and giving them our lovely flowers.

Once I got my steam back and finished enjoying my little escapade, I re-joined the stage and carried on with the song until its natural conclusion. What was lovely was that this got talked about so much, and people thought it was great and darling and cool as fuck. Truthfully it wasn't - I just misdirected you all because I felt like a goose up there, and my natural 'how-off and out-manoeuvre Bobby' genes kicked in and I won back my audience. It was sweet, and genuine, and I met our audience and that was really one of the highlights for me, I learnt to work the audience into the show.

Our gig went fine, we went down very well, and at the end I eventually made my way back to Ian and Nick. I really hope I don't upset the guys with this story - they were no different to most of us in that field - just insecure, trying out things, and exploring our environment. Ian and Nick and I had a good friendship - they were a bit younger, and loved the band, and they used to give me presents and tell me I was great. I accepted that I was actually great and probably made them cups of tea. I did not do anything naughty with them at all, as I was very conscious that I might like to become a politician one day, or lead a pressure group, so I did not want to do anything that might compromise that in the future - so I was a bit of a puritan with the lads, to be on the safe side. (I can't call myself a role model, as Ian would call my bluff there - I was all over the place really. But I could see a different future if I didn't mess up too badly).

Ian and Nick it turned out had recorded our set - and very nicely allowed us to take the machine into a quieter corner so that we could play it back and listen to our show and learn from the experience. As we listened, it became apparent that the boys had forgotten that as the songs recorded, so was their conversation, loudly and clearly. It was actually very sweet - the guys were singing our praises, and we were delighted and amused by the find. The recording ended with a lovely comment about me, and then a miserable adolescent cry of "She hates me!" It was sad, bad, embarrassing and sweet, and no I didn't, not at all. You lads were lovely, and I liked you, you were just living at home, and things were not as rosy living in a squat as you must have fantasised. We were not any kind of lost boys. But I guess back then it might have seemed really fun from the outside. Sid and I were embarrassed though and recorded over the whole thing, this being on a cassette recorder; we did not have digital back then. We worked really hard to record over it all so the boys would not realise the mistake and get upset. (I think that is the truth).

This is about as real as my personal recollections get - I suppose we may have all sung "We are going against the Grain"- I know I did at some gigs, and that would have been an apt end to the day. The Bends were recorded by the PA, and things came to an unpleasant head between Mick Magic and I over the release of the Grain Cassette tape. It's a dark unpleasant behind-the-scenes tale. That tape was pulled from sale because I had a list of complaints about the release and things got very nasty between Mick and I. I was surprised to be asked to write about The Grain Festival, and it took me a bit of soul searching to do so. I have tried to play fair, and if anyone has any complaints, I will listen and consider amendments. I just felt that there ought to be some semblance of truth there, for good and for ill. It is as Eugene said "I don't think anyone who was interested in reading it, is going to remember that we all drank tea and listened to music in a field for a day. Write what you like."

For all the ups and downs, it was a good day, a good learning experience, and I hope an enjoyable day for everyone there. We all put a lot of work into it, and if you remember it fondly, then we did a good job, and it was worth it. It is hard when so many fantastic people from our past didn't make it this far, so I hope there are a few names here that might make the reader smile a little smile of fondness and remembrance for all we were.

*So from the past,
Blessed be
Mania-Rose*