

<p>Interview, live photo's and transcription (C) 1997 Christa Wessel, who has a homepage with more photo's here. Photo's taken during interview(C) 1997 Chris Calloway.</p><p>This interview took place on October 18, 1997, at a club called Ziggy♦s in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The interview took place after an early-evening soundcheck, before David♦s show the same night. The only available space in the bar that was at all conducive to a chat was room that looked like it had been added onto the bar solely to house 2 pool tables. The lighting was entirely fluorescent, as were the Budweiser fixtures hanging over the pool tables. Plain white walls, heavily covered with concert posters (some were advertising his show that evening), a loud ice-maker, a couple of barstools, and a green vinyl couch with extremely sprung springs were the only other adornments to the room. David and I sat on the couch, while my photographer snapped pictures of us throughout the interview.♦

I found David♦s vocal delivery to be somewhat ♦disjointed♦ at times. Generally... a paragraph or... sentence... would be delivered in a manner... similar to this... This transcript attempts to provide more of a ♦flow♦ to the dialog in eliminating all the ellipses (...), though I have indicated them when I felt it was necessary to illustrate David♦s inflection.♦

*Ed. note: In my fluster, I forgot to turn on the tape recorder for the first minute or so of the interview. I told him I had seen his show in Denver a few months earlier. His first reaction was "Oh, that♦s when [opening act] Coolbone was with us..."♦

How did you stumble across Coolbone?♦

I♦d heard about them...just read about them, and I thought "Boy, that sounds great". They were compared a little bit to another New Orleans brass band: the Rebirth Brass Band. And I♦d worked a little bit with the generation before that, the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, and Rebirth were like the new generation. And then I♦d heard that Coolbone was a group that was taking that sound and mixing it with hip-hop, and rap and lots of other kinds of things, and I thought, "Boy, that sounds amazing, I♦ve gotta hear it", so I called up their record company and said "Can I hear the record?", and I asked them if they wanted to go on tour with us.♦

I thought they were great live. I bought their CD after the show, and didn♦t think it was nearly as impressive.♦

Yeah, it didn♦t capture all the wildness and excitement...♦

There are a couple songs that you perform live, that I was really curious as to why you chose them... like "Help Me Somebody"...♦

mmm-hm...♦

That song seems like it could never be performed live, and when you launched into it, I thought "Damn! He♦s never going to be able to pull this off!" What made you decide to perform that one?♦

I just thought it♦d be fun to do! I thought no one would ever expect me to actually *perform* any of those songs... And I thought, "You know, you *can*..." Although they were all created in a studio, some of them can be performed. I mean, we changed it a little bit, but it♦s essentially the same thing.♦

I have a question about all the costumes. Um... "Why?"♦

Why? Well, every once in a while I like to do a show that♦s really obviously a performance, that♦s really a show. Sometimes in the past I♦ve done things with projections, with words on a screen, all kinds of stuff... lighting effects. But, I can♦t afford that at the moment, and it♦s kind of ridiculous to try and travel with that kind of stuff and try to put it in a club like this. But I thought, you know, if you change costumes, you appear as a different person. A costume kind of makes you seem like a different person. If you can do that, then on a different scale that sometimes has as strong an effect as, say, a big screen behind you, or a

lighting effect, or some kind of stage spectacle. The focus becomes much narrower, but it can have just as strong an effect. Because it's just as if a whole other person came out.

Did your wife design any of the costumes? She helped with all of them...most of them I just did as sketches, then I would take them to different people who seemed appropriate. Like, the body suit...the anatomical thing...I took it to a Broadway costume house that does the kinds of things for "Cats" and all that kind of stuff. Of course, they were thrilled to be doing it... they really enjoyed it.

[INTERRUPTION BY TOUR MANAGER]:

Excuse me, normally I wouldn't interrupt an interview, but I have a question... Is this a menu thing? Load out for tonight... after-show food? Would you like a chicken sandwich? Steamed veggies, mashed potatoes, something like that? Hamburger?

Aah... [long pause] chicken sandwich and veggies.

OK.

Thank you.

[TOUR MANAGER LEAVES]

A lot of the questions I have for you come from the Talking Heads Bulletin Board, that Frank in Holland manages... a lot of people wanted to throw in their questions. One person asked, "What happened to the 3 songs that were recorded with Moracheeba that didn't make the album? Are we ever going to hear them?"

Yeah, I'm sure they'll come out eventually. You know, I did another song with Devo, I did a song with Carla Bley (you know, the jazz composer), I did a song with a rap group called New Kingdom...I did a lot of different stuff that didn't make the album. And sometimes I would go in and work on it a little bit more, even though I knew that the record was on the pipeline and was going out, I thought "You know, if I go back and work on that a little bit, I can get it to where I want it to be." So some of that stuff is ready to go now.

Good! Get it out there!

[laughs] Some of it is really good, too!

Here are some other wacky questions that people from the Bulletin Board wanted to know the answers to: On tour, do you sleep in the bus, or in motels?...Do you travel with the band on the bus? Can you sleep on a bus at all?

Yeah, last night we slept on the bus, all of us. And we went into a hotel in the morning just to take showers and make phone calls. And I was having computer problems, but I eventually got online and got my email... [laughs] ...after a lot of calls to the help numbers they have, you know...the 800 help numbers?

Are you the kind of person that is really jonesing when you don't get your email fix once a day?

Well, yeah, but if I don't get it after a few days, I start to give up and go "Ok, that's it for this tour", and I just put the computer in the closet and forget it. [laughs]

I could never do that! [laughs]

So have you checked out Frank's website?

I did once, not recently. Um, I'm not obsessive about reading about myself. [slight chuckle]

When you have spare time when you're on the road, what do you like to do? The last time you were in Raleigh, which is the closest I think you've been to here in a while, I remember you said something at the show about getting on your bike and riding through Research Triangle Park...

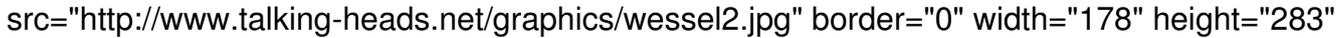
...Well, you know, not today. It's not great weather today. But same thing; I travel with a folding mountain bike, which folds up pretty small, so it just goes in the bus with the luggage. And when I have some spare time, I just open it up, and ride around town... I get to see the place. It's much better than taking taxis, or....

Do you ever stop to talk to people on the road? Or are you afraid of that? Or are you mostly interested in seeing the place, or getting away, or exercising, or...?

A little bit of both. I like to see the place and get a little bit of exercise.

I had this weird dream last night; I've been so anxious about this interview --like I said, I'm a huge fan of yours-- and I had this dream last night. I'm sure all these anxieties were manifesting themselves...I had a dream that I saw your contract rider, and that one of the stipulations was that everywhere you

went, every town you visited, you were to have two teenagers hanging around with you backstage, who were from the area. Just so you can kind of get a feel for what's going on in that town...
That's an interesting idea...! [smiling] No, we don't have that...
I have something here that I cut out of a magazine about 6 years ago.... it's a picture of your refrigerator. And I'm wondering what's changed...

	<p>Content of fridge : Hot Cha Cha All Natural Chunky Taco Sauce; Castle seltzer; 600 feet of Kodak 16mm color film; 1 Fuji disposable camera; Stolichnaya Cristall vodka; homemade iced tea; 2 1/2 lemons wrapped in Scot-Towel; Golden Key New Orleans roast chicory beans; homemade pickles; decaf mocha java blend; Fox's u-bet Chocolate Flavor syrup; Ohsawa organic salt plums; corn relish; dalkon sprouts; half a moldy grapefruit in foil; Acidophilus capsules; Zaru soba and Cha soba noodles; wife Bonnie's placenta awaiting ritual burial; Tofu Nuggets; veggie patties.</p>
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[long pause] Wow...
Isn't that something? It came out of Vanity Fair... they were doing a huge piece on celebrities' refrigerators, and the contents therein. There's one particular item in there that I'm going to ask you about...
[suddenly, interrupting] I don't live there anymore. That's what I'm realizing right away. Now I'm trying to figure out Where is this?
[laughs, amused]
[suddenly] I know where it is!! [pause; to himself]: I know where it is....
Does it bring back fond memories??
Yeah! yeah...
Are you still eating a lot of the same things? When I saw this picture, then heard your track on The Knee Plays... "Social Studies", where you talk about trying to assimilate the culture by eating certain foods, I started thinking about this picture, and what you're eating now and who you are now, versus who you were when you were eating *those* things...
[pause]
What a... mixture of stuff!
And I'm also really curious about the item on there: your wife's placenta, awaiting ritual burial. I'd like to get the story on that!
Well...
[pause, still looking at the contents of his old refrigerator]
What kind of ritual? A strange ritual!?
Well, I didn't have a yard at that time. And I thought it should be buried. In a way, a placenta is the other half of a child. And I think that in a lot of traditional societies people either bury them, or they eat them...or they do something with them... which I haven't done yet.
You haven't eaten one, you mean?
No, I haven't eaten it, no... [grins, giggles] But, yeah, it deserves a home.
So this ritual that was spoken of in this article was your *own* ritual, and not some tribal...
No. No... But I think it seems like a natural instinct, that we've been deprived of... so when our daughter was born, and I saw that they were, you know, taking the placenta, I said, "Hey, can I keep that?"
What do they usually do with them? Do you know?
Toss 'em out. Medical waste. And uh... [giggles] and they said "Sure!" and they gave it to me in this vacuum-sealed container.
Like Tupperware, or something?
Yep. Only, you know... high-tech Tupperware.
Where did you end up burying it?
In the back yard.
Did you do any chants or incantations or anything?
No...no...
...I've been wondering about that for years...
[both laugh]
I'm also curious as to whether you've ever taken voice lessons.
I did at one point. But then... it was a lot of singing scales, like [demonstrates] da-da-da-da-da-da-da, which is kind of boring, and then the woman wanted me to sing Broadway show tunes. And at the time, that was the *last* thing I wanted to do. [laughs]

So I just dropped out. I thought scales and Broadway show tunes... I'll find my own way to shape my voice. But I got some tips, you know. Tips about how not to tear your voice up.
[INTERRUPTION BY GUY AT BAR:]
Did you see how your video did last night on MTV?
No...no.
It came in 2nd... they have that new little show called 12 Angry Viewers...
Oh, that's very nice!
On Tuesday, it won against a bunch of other videos, maybe the winners from about 4 days...
Wow! Does that mean they're playing it??
Uh, actually, if you would have won last night, it would have been put into heavy rotation, but they'll definitely be playing it...
That's great! Cause I thought they weren't playing it at all...
[BYSTANDER LEAVES]
...And what a nice segue. Do you still approach video-making as an art form, a means of expression? Or is it just one of those things you have to do to get your record played?
It depends. If I have an idea for it then I'm really happy to do it. If I don't, then it seems like "Oh, they want a video for this song, and I hope it comes out well, and I hope they play it after all of that."
How often does that situation come about... that you don't really want to make one?
Not very often.

Have you ever taken any other kinds of lessons, other than the voice lessons? I'm particularly curious as to how you picked up your Spanish. Or Portuguese.
Oh, yeah... I'm still taking Spanish lessons; not on the road, but I did bring a textbook with me on the road. I never had it in school, and I wanted to learn it, so when I can I take some lessons. Myself and another woman at the office...there's a guy at a place called the Spanish Institute...he will just come down to the office for about an hour-and-a-half, and we just talk Spanish... read the newspaper, talk about music... and then if we were stumbling over a particular kind of grammatical thing, then he'd explain it to us and tell us how it works.
Do you find you learn better aurally like that? Or by reading?
Um, I think it has to be a little bit of all of the above. And then finally, the kind of capping thing is that you have to go somewhere, and hear all of these people talking at you, and be able to decipher what they're saying. [chuckles]
Are there any songs you've written that you feel like you'd like to rewrite? Or you wish you'd never wrote at all?
There's plenty that didn't come out sounding the way I thought they should sound, both new and old...both stuff from Talking Heads, stuff that I thought "That's not the way that should have sounded." It should have sounded...my vision of the song was somewhere else. And there's plenty of new ones, relatively, that the same kind of thing happened. Thankfully, it's not *that* many...
I wasn't sure whether some of the songs you're remixing on this tour, like Psycho Killer and I Zimbra with the funky beats, was your way of rewriting something you thought wasn't right to begin with, or whether you were just playing around.
Most of the time I'm just playing around. I don't have the urge to go back and fix stuff. Once it's done, if I'm not 100% happy with it, I feel like "OK. Next time I'll make a note of that," and learn a lesson from it.
A general question: What do you think attracts people to your music? What do you think makes you have such die-hard fans?
[long pause]
I don't know. I can't answer that...
[long pause]
I can't answer that. The only thing I can think is that I've never tried to bullshit people, I've never tried to *obviously* go for commercial success. Now, I want commercial success as much as the next person, but I don't think I'm *able* to go out and get it. I don't think I could just sit down and write a hit song... I don't think I could do that. But I think occasionally some of them just happen to click, and are popular.
How do you

react when you hear someone call you "quirky"?
I don't know. I don't know what they mean by it. I assume they mean...
[pause] You know, I'm not sure exactly what they mean.
I'm not entirely sure either... I don't know whether it's a combination of the motions which you've become known for, you know those jerky motions. Or...when you first started out, the things that you sang about weren't necessarily what audiences were used to listening to at the time... Which leads me to my next question, about what appears to be your affinity for words. You have a way of putting words together that are sometimes just so ironically beautiful ...or beautifully ironic... where do you think that came from, your grasp of the English language?
[pause] I suppose I feel like pop songs, although they're kind of restricted in certain ways... in other ways there's an awful lot you can do. So I suppose I feel like... here's this format where you can actually talk about and express a wide variety of things within this really narrow formula. It's a kind of platform that can really support a lot of different thoughts and passions and ideas. I guess I've always thought that it's a pretty wide open area to work in.
As is your photography. I bought a copy of [your book] "Strange Ritual", and was immediately struck by the fact that there were no people in the pictures... it was just things. I tried to look at those photos and see what it was about those images that made you want to take a picture of them. For instance, sitting in this room right now, I'm curious as to whether there's something, in your eye, that's just needing to have a picture taken of it.
In this room??
Uh-huh [laughs] You know, sometimes I don't know until I take a picture of it whether it's going to work as a picture. Sometimes you see something and go, "Oh, that's an interesting juxtaposition of things that you can put in one picture, that will fit in the frame." But then somehow, sometimes when it's printed up and developed and you look at it, that simultaneity of things existing at the same place at the same time just doesn't look good. I think it has to, as well as being a good idea, sometimes it has to look good, too. And some of that is a little bit of trial and error. Probably no matter how much technique you have, you don't know *exactly* how it's going to turn out.
This may be pushing things, but I have a Polaroid camera in my bag... that's why I asked if there was anything here that would be interesting to take a photo of. If I put this in your hands...?
[eager] I could try...I could try some stuff... See if anything happens...
[handing him the camera] ...It's one of these brand new ones that I'm not entirely sure how to operate...
Can you turn off the flash??
I think it might be an auto-flash...
Well, I can always just cover it up. [trying to find the flash's off-switch]: That might be the... that seems to be exposure.
[pause, still trying to figure it out] Well, let's see what happens...
So you're an anti-flash man?
No... sometimes I think it looks great. but sometimes it changes things so they always look like a flash bulb. [laughs] You know, you don't get the weird light from the room...
[stands up, and pulls barstool towards a what appears to be a semi-boarded-up emergency door, sets the camera on the barstool and takes a shot, with his hand covering the flash] Have you been taking photos on the road?
[distracted, lining up the next shot] Uh, yeah... Yep.
Plans for another book?
[still lining up the shot] Well, I don't know. Some of them are not book-type-things. They're, uh... [taking another photo] ... Managed to kill the flash on that one, too...
[looking around] In this room...??
Well, you can experiment. Far be it from me to limit you!
[wandering around room...takes another photo. walks back to the pool table where he's placing the photos to develop.] Anything coming out on any of these?
Starting to...
Is this still your preferred

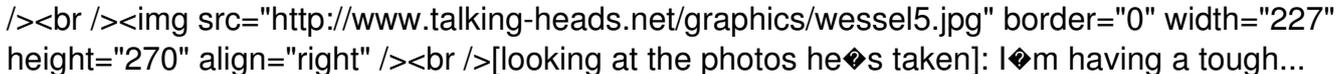
which you have dialed. When you hear the tone, speak into the mouthpiece." That's what it says... [last sentence trails off into an amused giggle]

If you were to compile any 3 songs onto a CD to wake up to each morning, which songs would you select?

Wow, I don't know. It's something that you, you know a song gets stuck in your head... it changes from day to day.

[long pause]

Probably one of those Brazilian songs like I have on the compilations that I've done... probably one of those.



[looking at the photos he's taken]: I'm having a tough... I...

[drags barstool over to the door of the men's restroom, and props open the door with it. he sets the camera on the barstool and aims the shot at the urinal.]

That's going to be attractive...

[lines up the shot, snaps the photo, and returns to me at the pool table]

Do you enjoy cooking? It doesn't seem like you have much opportunity to do so...

Nah, I don't have much opportunity. I usually end up just mixing together different kinds of leftovers... that's my specialty. [grins]

Me too! [laughing] What are you reading right now?

An old Philip K. Dick book. Science Fiction writer...

Really? That seems like a step in a different direction; all these interviews I've read about you, you've always said something about other cultures, or art or something ...this seems like an unusual response...

Well, somebody suggested one, and I liked it, so I'm reading another one.

Where do you find that you do your best creative thinking?

Usually when I'm doing something else, when I'm riding a bike, when I'm driving a car...when my conscious mind is engaged in some other routine, mundane activity.... then stuff can kind of well up. You get moments of "Hey! Yeah! What if I do *this*??"

[showing him my micro-sized tape recorder he's been eyeing throughout the interview] Do you utilize tools like this to help you catch ideas....?

Yeah, sometimes. [taking the recorder out of my hand]: That's a nifty little item! It's got one of those little tapes in, I guess? [examining the tape recorder] It's a cutie! Is it still rolling? I can't tell... it's got a counter... yes, the counter is moving!

Good! It is handy... a couple more questions...

[looking at photos again, pointing to the one he took of the urinal]: This one looks like the only one so far that seems anywhere close to being properly exposed... [laughs as he realizes his pun]...I blocked the flash out of that as best I could...

Are you a connoisseur of Indian film?

No... but I've seen quite a few of them.

Somebody from the website wanted to know who your favorite Indian film star was.

Oh, these I don't know. I don't know...

[TOUR MANAGER ENTERS]

How are we doing? [checking his watch for the time...I was only supposed to have 20 minutes with David; it's now been about 30.]

Just a couple more...questions?



[facetiously] Couple more *hours*?

[laughing] Yeah... I'm going to take him home with me...

[TOUR MANAGER EXITS]

I've seen that you've been quoted before as saying that you're afraid of repeating yourself, that you don't want to get into a rut; so, what's next?

What's next?!? I have no idea.

Really?

I really have no idea. I'm really just thinking about how far I can take this tour, if we can take it to South America, bring it back to Europe...that kind of thing. The logistics of it, the practical aspects of it, the financial angles, all that stuff...that's consuming me at the moment. And then long-range I have some more photo installations; there's one that just opened in Madrid, and it

looks like I might do one next spring in Oaxaca Mexico, and one in Trieste, right on the border of Italy and Croatia....
[interjection from the photographer]:
That's where James Joyce...
[quickly] Yeah...it's a beautiful town.
Are you ever planning on doing any photo exhibits that travel? I can't get to any of these places...!
I know! ... You know, it's not me... I kinda go where I get the offers. If they make an offer and I respond and go, "Here's what I'd like to do, do you still want to do it?" and if they say "Yes", then I just say "OK". I'd like it if it was sometimes a little closer to home, too... I only had one in New York, really, which seems a little strange.
Do you have any more plans for films? I watched True Stories again last night, and I just love that...
Thank you. Uh, no, but that's something I'd really like to get back to at some point. Although the last time I tried, I got into an endless cycle of meetings...
Was that for The Forest, or something more recent?
It was something more recent. So, I thought "OK, I'll do it the way I did True Stories"... kind of take my time and develop it myself until I've got it where I want, and then let it go.
Final question: What are you dressing up as for Halloween?
We haven't settled on that yet... we're going to be in Miami for Halloween... we don't know what yet. The whole band, we're thinking about what we're going to do. I don't know...
Do you generally do something?
Yeah.
How often are you home for Halloween? Do you take [your daughter] Malu out trick-or-treating?
Sometimes. She's going to... [slight pause, while he thinks] ... to Sleepy Hollow...
Sounds spooky.
Yeah! That's what I thought. [laughs] ...What's the name of that town?? The Legend of Sleepy Hollow...it's in upstate New York.
[pause]
Well, great... I don't want to take up any more of your time. Thank you!
Thank you...
[I snag a autograph from him before he leaves, and he's on his way out to the central part of the club to go eat dinner with his band. And I stand there, amazed that I got through this event --highlight of my life!-- unscathed.]